THE LAST ŞAFAVIDS, 1722-1773

By J. R. Perry

In 1722 the 220-year-old Şafavid empire had been on the decline for the best part of a century, ever since the death of Şâh ʻAbbâs the Great. For the last half-century of this period it had indeed been little more than a hollow corpse, devoured underneath its rich and prestigious exterior by contrasting excesses—the cruelty and caprice of Şâh Sulâimân and the piety and pacifism of Şâh Sultân ʻHusain. Both monarchs were distinguished by an extreme lack of interest in affairs of state, yet somehow the sagging edifice remained propped up by the monumental achievements of its founders, until the invasion of the Ghalzâ’î Afghans under Mir Maḥmûd within the space of eight months demolished it forever as a political reality.

The history of the next three-quarters of a century is conventionally divided into the Afshârid, Zand and early Qâjâr periods, reflecting the three islands of strong and comparatively rational government created from successive morasses of anarchy by Nâdîr Shâh, Karîm Khân and Ağhâ Mûhammad. The convention is justified, for this tragic period of Iranian history more than any other produced from a welter of conflicting interests a series of forceful individuals who took it upon themselves to remould their battered country on their own terms. As a result, Iran might appear in the space of some seventy-five years, and with the services of a variety of brokers, to have contracted out of the dynasty that rescued her from her Dark Ages and entered into partnership with the dynasty that introduced her to the twentieth century. The convention thus tends to obscure certain features common to the period between late Şafavid and early Qâjâr times and to distort the process by which this undoubtedly considerable change was brought about.

The best vantage-point from which to restore a just perspective would appear to be an appreciation of the survival of Şafavid concepts of the Iranian state as these were acknowledged, promoted, opposed or eliminated by those who directed political forces after 1722. A cursory study of almost any Persian chronicle of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century will show how impossible it is to appreciate the Afshârid, Zand and early Qâjâr periods without a basic familiarity with, and constant appeal to, Şafavid concepts and institutions: political reality changes at too swift a pace for traditional historiography, which in deference to popular convention, and at the risk of anachronism, perpetuates the same terminology for territorial divisions, military organisation, government officials and political processes. How far these surviving conventions corresponded to new realities must often remain in doubt; but it can in general be maintained that the geographical, religious and political lines laid down by the first three Şafavid shâhs defined and directed the national ethos in theory until increasing contact with the West in Qâjâr times forced certain substantial revisions of thought—i.e. for a century after the Afghan invasion. More specifically, so great was the prestige of the Şafavid state itself that it survived its political demise in spirit, and intermittently even in name, despite the trauma of Afghan, Russian and Turkish invasion, and despite the fact that first Nâdîr Shâh deliberately, then Karîm Khân incidentally, created states which were in many ways fundamentally at odds with Şafavid tradition. In this narrower sense, the Şafavid state may be said to have survived for half a century—until the death of Ismâ’îl III, the last Şafavid puppet shâh, in 1773.

This survival was manifested in two principal ways: in the rash of unsuccessful pretenders to the usurped throne, almost all of them spurious, who appeared at different times and places from the onset of the Afghan occupation through Nâdîr Shâh’s reign and into that of Karîm Khân Zand; and in the evident difficulties which not only historians but also contemporary leaders found both in adjusting their subjects’ Şafavid-centred preconceptions to the changing political situation and in themselves making due allowances for surviving Şafavid prejudices. The process by which the Şafavid ghost was gradually exorcised may be seen in the abrupt and premature reaction of Nâdîr Shâh’s period and the
more subtly realistic reforms of Karím Khán. The details of this transition as reflected in actual government and administration must await further research; it is hoped that the following survey of the period as a whole, seen from the standpoint of the various Šāfavid pretenders—the spurious and the genuine, those who failed and those who ruled—in their relationships with the changing political scene, will help to illuminate a terrain still pitted with obscure patches.

I: Šafavid pretenders during the Afghan occupation

It would be tedious to describe in more than summary form the known cases of Šafavid pretenders who, claiming to have escaped from beleaguered Isfahán in 1722 or from Mír Mahmúd’s massacre of the surviving princes of the line in February 1725, obtained credence and support against the de facto government. Ḥázín claims that there were eighteen in all during the period of the Afghan occupation alone, and a round dozen can be culled from the various histories of Nádir Sháh and the Afsáríds from biographies like the Fawā’id al-Šafawýiya of Abu’l-Ḥasan Qazvíní and from Kühmarra’í’s summary, to cover the whole period up to 1776; this excludes the four genuine Šafavid scions who at various times attained the throne, and who will be treated in sections IV and V as part of a different phenomenon.

Three of the first pretenders to appear after the fall of Isfahán all claimed to be Šáfí Mírzá, second son of the deposed Sháh Sultán Husain. One raised a force from among the Lurs of Kirmánsáh in 1134/1722 and succeeded in driving out the occupying Ottoman Turks from Hamadán; but five years later his allies the Lur chiefs turned against him and bribed a barber to despatch him in his bath. Yet another claimant, a man from the village of Garrá’í near Shúshtár, enlisted the support of the Bakhtyári at Khalílábád, near Burújírd, in 1137/late 1724; he was accorded a royal litter and the dignity of “Šáfí Sháh” by a gullible local chieftain, and with an army of 20,000 secured much of the Khághílí country between Shúshtár and Khurramábád. However, Sháh Táhmasp and Nádir, then in Mashhad, sent a letter to the Bakhtyári chiefs denouncing him as an impostor and ordering his death, with which they complied in Muharram 1140/Autumn 1727. A third “Šáfí Mírzá”, whose real name was Muḥammad ‘Ali Rafísjáñí, likewise took Shúshtár as his centre of operations, appearing there in dervish garb in August 1729; but he was soon forced by the governor to flee over the frontier, where the Ottoman authorities in 1730 sent him to Istanbul in case he should prove useful in negotiations with whoever would replace the departing Afghans as ruler of Iran. As will be seen below, they were in fact able to use him in 1743 to foment discord on the northern frontier during Nádir’s siege of Mosul.

None of these claimants is regarded as genuine by any historian. The real Šáfí Mírzá, then aged 23, had for a few days been designated wa’dí' ‘ahd during the siege of Isfahán, but as a result of opposition by ambitious court officials was passed over in favour of the weaker Táhmasp. In this capacity Táhmasp escaped to Qazvín in June 1722, and Šáfí was presumably among the other Šafavid princes in the palace when his father surrendered to Mír Mahmúd on 21st October, and most likely shared their fate when the Afghan ruler on 7th February 1725 massacred all the surviving Šafavids with the exception of the deposed king and two young princes. Ironically, it may well have been a report of the activities of one of these pretenders, touching off a rumour that Šáfí Mírzá had escaped from captivity, that provoked the nervous Mír Mahmúd to commit this atrocity.

The only genuine pretender to raise the flag of resistance, apart from Táhmasp, was Mírzá Sayyid Aḥmad. He was also the sole serious rival to Táhmasp and for three years the biggest threat to the Afghan invaders. His wide-ranging and action-packed adventures exemplify one of the archetypes of Iranian history, the dispossessed monarch as a heroic guerrilla leader fighting a forlorn rearguard action against invaders—the type of the Khwārazmsháh, Jalál al-Dín Mangubírdí, and the last Zand, Luṭf ‘Ali Khán.

2 MS. in the Cambridge University Library, Oo.6.41 (cf. Rieu, ii, pp. 133-4).
3 Ḥall wa Ḥawáštíyá, printed in Gulístána’s Muntál al-Tawádrikh, ed. Mudarris Ra’jawi (Tehran, 1344), pp. 478-85.
4 Kühmarra’í, p. 478.
7 Lockhart, Safáví Dynasty, pp. 148, 155-6.
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He was descended from Shāh Sulaimān's eldest daughter, Shahrbānū Bīgum, who had married his paternal grandfather Mīrzā Dā'ūd Mar'āshī, mutawalli (superintendent) of the shrine of the Imām 'Alī Rıḍā at Mashhad. He had escaped from beleaguered Isfahān with Ťahmāsp but, convinced that such a frivolous drunkard as was the crown prince could never be a rallying-point for serious insurrection, he fled southwards to Fārs and with the aid of forged orders from Ťahmāsp gained the allegiance of the local amirs and their troops. In 1137/1724-5 he was besieged for six months in the fortress of Jārum, and personally led many daring sorties. The siege was raised when news arrived of the murder of Mīr Maḥmūd, and the Sayyid moved on to the Fasā region, his army now grown to 6000 men. He surprised and defeated an army sent against him by Ťahmāsp, capturing the commander and baggage, then marched on Kirmān, defeated the governor and took over the town. Here early in 1139/November 1726 he assumed the title of Aḥmad Shāh Šafawī. Marching in force on Shīrāz, he was met by an Afghan army at Pul-i Fasā and, deserted by the governor of Kirmān whom he had pardoned and made his wuzîr, suffered a heavy defeat. He fought his way out to Nairīz and with a small force headed back to Kirmān, only to learn that his former Kirmānī officers were now pledged to capture him for the Afghans. He then had to evade a further force sent by Ťahmāsp, and with few supporters left fled through Sistān and Balāchistān down via Bam and Narmāshir to Bandar 'Abbās, where he captured Ashraf's governor and took the town.

With a relatively small force he again took the field against an army from Lār reinforced from Isfahān, and was forced to flee to Dārāb. For eight months he was besieged in the fortress of Ḥasanābād. Despite daily sorties, shortage of supplies and treachery from within brought about his downfall; his brother Mīrzā 'Abd al-A'imma was captured by the Afghans while attempting to escape from the fortress through a tunnel, and Sayyid Aḥmad surrendered. The leader of the Afghan force, Timūr Khān Kurd, guaranteed his safety and he was taken before Ashraf at Isfahān. Ashraf, who had justifiably been more apprehensive of the Sayyid than of Ťahmāsp, at first treated him with respect, but later beheaded both the Sayyid and his brother on the banks of the Zāyanda Rūd, near the Pul-i Khwājū, towards the end of 1140/July–August 1728.

None of the remaining pretenders of the Afghan period can boast such a stirring, albeit brief and tragic career. A certain Sayyid Ḥusain of Farāh is said to have accompanied the Afghan army, as a wandering dervish, on its march to Isfahān; soon after the fall of the capital, his appetite whetted by tales of the second "Ṣafī Mīrzā", he set up in Jānākī (south of Shahr-i Kurd) as the brother of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusain. The townsman had a reputation for addiction to tobacco and bhang, and a considerable number of these dubious supporters pledged themselves to this latest would-be monarch on an Afghan force from Isfahān scattered them and killed Sayyid Ḥusain.

Then there were at least three claimants to be Ismā'īl Mīrzā, another younger brother of Ťahmāsp: the most active of these, said to have been named Zainal, appeared in Lāhijān, captured several towns and with a motley rabble armed, it seems, chiefly with sticks and trumpets, even routed the governor on his first attempt to quell the rising. The latter recovered, however, and in a second clash forced the pretender to flee to the Daršt-i Mūghān and Khalkhān, between the rival zones of influence of the Ottomans and the Russians. Raising a force of 5000, the rebel marched on Ardabil; in a pitched battle with the Turks, 3000 Qızılbash troops in Ottoman pay deserted to the Iranians, and the defeated Turks fled to Tabrīz. In Ardabil "Ismā'īl Mīrzā" paid his respects to the tomb of his supposed forebear, Shaikh Ṣafī al-Dīn, and soon collected an army of 12,000. With this he drove the remaining Ottoman forces from Mūghān back on Ganja, but soon afterwards was killed in camp by his local allies, allegedly on the instigation of the Russians.

The last claimant to this title—and whose claim may have been genuine—appeared in Isfahān about 1732, after its liberation from the Afghans. He had allegedly escaped the invaders through the loyalty of a devoted servant, and had later been captured and mutilated by one of the pretenders to take the name of Ṣafī Mīrzā. Ťahmāsp had his claims investigated and apparently accepted him, since he

9 For this and other Šafavid relationships, see the genealogical table at the back of Dr. Lockhart's Fall of the Šafavi Dynasty.
11 ibid., pp. 23–4; Kūmarra'ī, p. 478.
12 Astarābādī, pp. 24–5; Kūmarra'ī, pp. 483–4; Lockhart, Šafavi Dynasty, p. 301.
felt his own position to be secure; but this Ismāʿīl was later alleged to have become the focus of a court intrigue to kill and replace Ṭahmāsp, who had him and his supporters executed.¹³

One further pretender, from the earlier period of the Afghan occupation, is perhaps the best example of the opportunist mountebank who saw the anarchy and consequent credulity into which his countrymen had fallen as an excellent chance to acquire power and wealth, a type probably more numerous than appears from such recorded information as we have. He was known as “Shāhzāda Muhammad Kharsavār” because he habitually rode a saddled donkey in his travels as a salesman in the Banādir region of Shamīl and Mīnāb. Here he advertised his claim to be a son (or according to other accounts a brother) of the last Ṣafavid monarch; and though he was apparently a familiar figure in the area, such was his eloquence and courage that people were ready to convince themselves at least that here was a leader worth following. Having subdued the Banādir, he collected further allies from Bālūchistān, and gave battle at Shamīl to an Afghan force of 20,000 sent by Ashraf to quell this rising. The rebels were routed, and the “Ṣāḥīḥ” himself fell off his ass in the mêlée and, disguised as a dervish, fled on foot to India.¹⁴

The pretenders of the Afghan period thus played a double rôle in promoting the survival of the Ṣafavid spirit through this critical stage. All of them, including the legitimate and generally accepted Ṭahmāsp, were first and foremost symbols and rallying-points for the resistance to and final overthrow, after eight years, of the Afghan invaders and the Turkish and Russian opportunists who had followed them. Secondly, they represented—particularly in Sayyid Aḥmad—an alternative to the ineffectual Ṭahmāsp, dominated as he was by an ambitious warlord who was soon openly to show his hostility to the Ṣafavid cause.

II: Pretenders in the Afšārid and Zand periods

Those pretenders who rose during the period of Nādir Shāh and his successors and of Karīm Khān Zand, though naturally less frequent in appearance, were yet important manifestations of the barely diminished prestige of the Ṣafavid house, and acted in different ways as brakes on the absolutism of successors to Ṣafavid rule: they contributed to the provincial insurrections that heralded the overthrow of Nādir Shāh, and to the territorial limitation of his Afšārid successors, and forced Karīm Khān initially to make use of the unsteady platform of Ṣafavid legitimacy in setting up a new experiment in government.

One such rebel, who claimed to be one of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusain’s numerous progeny named Sām Mīrzā (though it seems doubtful whether a son of this name existed) attempted in about 1740 to secure support at Ardabil; his revolt was speedily frustrated by Nādir’s nephew, Ibrāhīm, who captured the pretender, cut off his nose, and contumeliously set him free. Three years later, when the executions of Nādir’s tax-collectors had provoked widespread disaffection in the north-western provinces, Sām emerged from his hideout in Dāghistān for a second attempt. His growing forces were joined by a Lazī army under one Muḥammad son of Surkhāy. Challenged by Ḥaydar Khān, the governor of Shirvān, they captured and killed him and secured Aq Sū, his administrative headquarters. The rising spread to Qubba, where the Mūḥānālī troops in the garrison mutinied and handed over the town to Sām and Muḥammad. These dangerous developments were reported to Nādir in Shābān 1156/October 1743, while he was besieging Mosul; he at once sent orders for the concentration of a strong army under his son Naṣrullāh, his brother-in-law Fath ‘Alī Khān, the commander of the Ādharbājījān forces and the governors of Urmīya and Ganja. This army met and smashed the rebel forces near Shamākhī on 4th Dhu’l Qa‘da 1146/20th December 1743; Muḥammad, wounded, fled to Dāghistān, and Sām to Georgia.¹⁵

Almost at the same time, Nādir received news that Muḥammad ‘Alī Rafāsīnānī, the supposed “Ṣafi Mīrzā” who had fled after his abortive coup at Shūštār in 1729 to take shelter with the Turks, had now been encouraged by his hosts to march through Erzurum and Qarṣ towards the Persian frontier. Early in 1744, when Nādir’s peace negotiations with the Porte seemed about to collapse, the Pāshā of Qarṣ was instructed to give further support to this pretender, and sent messages to the chiefs and other notables on the Persian side of the frontier urging them to rise in support. That same spring, Nādir

¹⁴ Astarābādī, p. 44; Kūhmārā’i, pp. 484–5.
himself marched from Hamadān to quell the rising; and on the way was informed that the Georgian monarchs Tāmirāz and Herakli had captured the other pretender, Sām. With grim humour he ordered the already-multilated Sām Mirzā to be deprived of one eye and sent to the Pāshā of Qarṣ, with the message that “as Ṣafī Mirzā is also there, the unknown brothers may look upon one another.”

Nādir’s gibe did nothing to weaken the amazing resilience of this mysterious Sām Mirzā. Shortly before Nādir’s assassination he reappeared in Tabrīz, where the discontented populace proclaimed him Shāh. ‘Ali Quli Khān, on establishing his own rule as ‘Ādil Shāh in the summer of 1747, sent a force which successfully crushed this revolt and finally killed the pretender.

The last serious bid for political power by a ʿṢafavī pretender—or more accurately his promoters—came in 1752, only a year after Karīm Khān had inaugurated his rule as wakil of his own ʿṢafavī puppet shāh, and two years after the abortive ʿṢafavī restoration at Mashḥad under Sulaimān. One “Ḥusain Mirzā”, claiming to be a son of Shāh Tāhmāsp II,18 appeared in Baghdaḍ some time in 1751. His cause was promptly espoused by Sulaimān Pāshā, ever ready to fish in Iran’s troubled waters,19 and by Muṣṭafā Khān Bigdīl Shaʿmlū. This notable, together with the historian Mirzā Mahdī Astarābādī, had been Nādir’s ambassador to Istanbul and on news of his master’s death had elected to remain in Baghdaḍ until it became clear which way the political wind would blow. The pretender’s story was in the best traditions of its kind: he had been snatched from Maḥmūd’s massacre of the ʿṢafavī princes when only eight months old and spirited away to Georgia and thence to Russia by loyal retainers; he was brought up at the Russian court by the Empress, who told him his story when he reached his majority and reluctantly granted him leave to sail back and regain his crown. Whether or not Muṣṭafā Khān believed his tale and his genealogy, he evidently regarded him as a useful emblem under which he might return to Iran as a man of consequence. To ‘Ali Mardān Khān Bakhtyārī and his ally, Ismāʿīl Khān Fālī, hovering on the frontier in Lurīstān after a defeat at the hands of Karīm Khān, this was likewise a heaven-sent chance to turn the tables on their Zand rival, particularly as the latter had just lost his own ʿṢafavī protégé, Ismāʿīl III, to the Qājārs, and was still involved in an obstinate siege of the fortress at Kirmānshāh.

The newcomer was accordingly invested as Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusain II, an escort was begged from the Pāshā, and with Lurī and Bakhtyārī reinforcements flooding in and more of them expected, the royal column set off to relieve Kirmānshāh. Word was also sent to another rival of the Zand chief, ʿAzād Khān Aḥfān, who mustered a force to join this army at the beleaguered fortress. At this point the whole venture was undermined by a factor which, surprisingly, had hitherto been neglected: Sulṭān Ḥusain II revealed himself as “unsuitable” (whether faint-hearted, feeble-minded or otherwise is not specified) and his mentors despaired of passing him off as a king. They furthermore made secret investigations into his background in ʿĀdharbājān, and discovered that his mother was an Armenian and his father had been an ʿĀdharī Turk. Disillusioned, they attempted to continue the deception, but the army slowed to an indecisive crawl as the tribal reinforcements, denied access to the “Shāh”, returned to the hills. In about September 1752 the garrison of the Kirmānshāh fortress, despairing of relief, capitulated to the Zands; and Karīm Khān promptly marched against the dwindling relief column and routed it, capturing Muṣṭafā Khān. ‘Ali Mardān fled to the hills, taking the pretender with him; he subsequently blinded his now useless burden and turned him loose to make his way to the Shiʿī shrines of Iraq, where he lived out his life until 1189/1774–5 as a religious recluse.20

17 ibid., p. 259; Gulistān, Muhājilat al-Tawārīkh, pp. 8–9; Kühn-Guβäumi, p. 485.
18 Marʿashī (pp. 82–4) maintains that Tāhmāsp II had only two sons, one of whom died during his father’s lifetime and the other, Abūḥāṣab (who was at first raised to the throne by Nādir on his deposing Tāhmāsp) was killed together with his father by Muhammad Ḥusain Khān Qājār in 1152/1739–40; according to Muhammad Kāzīm (Kāzīm-I Nādirī, pp. 482–3, cited in Lockhart, Nādir Shah, p. 177) a younger son, Ibrāhīm, was killed on the same occasion.
19 Gulistān, p. 243; Gombrich Diary, vi, 12th July 1751, reports rumours that the Sulṭān (evidently Sulaimān Pāshā is meant) has notified the Persian leaders that he has a son of Shāh Tāhmāsp with him and is ready to install him on the throne of Iran by force.
20 Qazvinī, Fawāʿid al-Ṣafawīya, fol. 73b–75b; Gulistān, pp. 243–69. Shaikh ʿAbdulhāl al-Ḳartī, Tuhfat al-ʿĀlam (Bombay, 1263 lunar), p. 164, confirms that the blind “Sulṭān Ḥusain II” passed through Shūstār on his way to Najaf in 1167/1753–4. His son Sulṭān Muḥammad, patron of Qazvinī, was kept in chivalrous attendance and warned by his father against ever dabbling in politics. On his father’s death he travelled widely in Iran, being kindly received by Shāhrūkh at Mashḥad, and ended his days in India as a pensioner of the East India Company.
Peyssonnel states under his description of events in northern Iran during 1752–53 that "le prince de la race des Séphis que les Moscovites ont mis entre les mains des Géorgiens, est toujours en dépôt à Caket"; the Georgian king Herakli was allegedly preparing to invade Iran on the pretext of installing this pretender on the throne, but unless by some slip of chronology this refers to the "Sultân Ḫusain" mentioned above, there is no further evidence of this pretender's having been put in play.

The last recorded case of a spurious pretender ends the world of the Šafavid succession not with a bang but with something approaching a snigger. A certain Ḥasan Šabzavârī went on pilgrimage in 1190/1776 to the shrines of Iraq, calling himself a son of Shâh Ţahmâsp II. Just as he reached Karbalâ it happened that one of Nâdir Shâh's widows who was resident there—Râdiyya Bûgum, a daughter of Sultân Ḫusain and thus a genuine sister of Ťahmâsp—died without leaving an heir. With the connivance of Sulaimân Pâshâ the newcomer obtained a faţûwâ declaring him her heir, and despite the protests of other members of the family in exile at Baghdad, made off with her jewels and other riches. As no political sequel is mentioned, this would seem to have been purely a commercial venture; by acknowledging his limitations, this adventurer apparently succeeded better than his predecessors.

Thus the Šafavid insurgents between 1736 and 1776, whether opposing Nâdir Shâh and his successors as usurpers or a rival Šafavid princeling legitimised by the Zand Wakil, helped to keep alive a Šafavid myth that had plainly lost its substance. In this they were aided by Iran's hostile neighbours, Turkey and Russia, and more especially by their vassals or allies in the frontier provinces, Sulaimân Pâshâ of Baghdad and Herakli of Georgia, in whose interests it lay to perpetuate the strife and anarchy in their once powerful neighbour. Those Šafavid refugees and their retainers who gathered in and around Baghdad, and emigrated over the rest of the eighteenth century to the hospitable court of Bengal, preserved the fame of the ill-fated dynasty for even longer; and several of them—Qazvînî, Mar'âshî, Gûlistâna—set down the histories of their less fortunate relatives. Of these by far the least fortunate were those who in some way succeeded to the sickle throne.

III: Ťahunsp II, 'Abbâs III and Sulaimân II

The escape of Ťahunsp Mîrzâ from besieged Iṣfahân inaugurated the universal belief in a Šafavid restoration to which for the next fifty years even those in power had in part to pay lip service. Ťahunsp's first protector and viceroy of the empire (wâkîl al-dawla) was the Qâjjâr sheikhtain, Fâth 'Alî Khân, but he was soon replaced by the energetic and realistic Nâdir Quli. Until his final expulsion of the Afghans in 1730, Nâdir remained ostensibly the Shâh's loyal commander-in-chief, though it was never in doubt that he wielded the real political control; only in 1732 did he find justification in Ťahunsp's mismanagement of a campaign against the Turks to put his authority to the test and have his master deposed. Even then a Šafavid substitute had to be found in Ťahunsp's infant son, who was acclaimed as 'Abbâs III. But by 1736 Nâdir judged correctly that there was no Šafavid contender of sufficient standing to prevent his pushing through his own election to the throne, on condition that it should be hereditary in his family, that there should be no further support for the Šafavids, and even that religious innovations were to be instituted which effectively meant the abolition of the official Shi'î faith. The deposed Ťahunsp was, furthermore, brutally done to death together with his young sons early in 1740 by Muḥammad Ḥusain Khân Qâjjâr, on the orders of Nâdir's son Riḍâ Quli Mîrzâ, to forestall a possible pro-Šafavid coup when persistent rumours of Nâdir's death were arriving from India.

It seemed that the last hopes of a Šafavid restoration had been destroyed with these unfortunate princes at Mashhad. Nâdir's whole policy conspired to confirm this: his personal usurpation of the monarchy was followed immediately by a series of military conquests aimed not only at recovering the occupied territories but at surpassing the glories of the essentially conservative Šafavid state by the creation of an extensive Asiatic empire modelled on that of Timûr; the Šafavid capital, Iṣfahân, was abandoned for the strategically more convenient Mashhad; and—likewise for secular reasons—the sect of the Ithnâ-‘ashâriyya Shî‘â, the original cement of the Šafavid edifice, was earmarked for radical modification on

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\(^{22}\) Kûhmarra‘î, p. 485, from Qazvînî.

\(^{23}\) Lockhart, *Nâdir Shah*, p. 177.
Sunnī lines or even replacement by a syncretic faith to be drawn up by the new Akbar in his leisure moments.\textsuperscript{84} But much of this was foredoomed to failure even before the usurper’s death. His authority and that of his successors was challenged repeatedly by appeals to the not yet defunct Şafavi cause; not only were his new conquests nullified by his death, but the Iranian heartland of his empire was split in two and forced into a drastic reorientation, in which neglected Işafān initially played a leading rôle; and the traditional Şii’ite faith not only reasserted itself in both the Iranian states created as a result of this split, but also reinforced existing ethnic rivalries to drive the Afghans under Aḥmad Shāh into a definitive assertion of national identity—as indeed it had contributed to the hatred and distrust between Nādir’s Iranian and Afghan-Uzbek officers and led directly to his assassination in July 1747.

All this was not so much a revolution as a reassertion of deeply-rooted conventions which Nādir’s brash interruption had merely obscured. His immediate successors were no less superficial in their influence, and the history of the vestigial Afšārīd state as it existed from 1747 to 1796, chiefly as a vassal state of Ahmad Shāh’s Durrānī empire, may be regarded as a compromise between Afšārīd and neo-Şafavi loyalties, manipulated by predatory war-lords. Nādir’s grandson Shāhrūkh Shāh, who ruled nominally during most of this period, could himself claim Şafavi as well as Afšārīd blood, his mother Fāṭima Bīgum having been a daughter of Shāh Ṣultān Ḥusain: it was this which allegedly saved him from ‘Ali Qulī Khān’s massacre of the rest of Nādir’s progeny, the new ruler considering that he might be useful as a puppet should there be violent pro-Şafavi agitation before he established his authority.\textsuperscript{85}

The half-expected Şafavi coup came at the end of 1749, when the faction of Shāhrūkh Shāh had triumphed over the mutually destructive rivalry of Aḏīl Shāh and Ibrāhīm Mīrzā. Mīr Sayyīd Muḥammad—as mutawallī of the Mashhad shrine and grandson of the Şafavi Shāh Sulaimān\textsuperscript{86} an influential figure in both Mashhad and Qum—had been recognised as a potential danger by Aḏīl Shāh, whose succession he had helped to secure. Aḏīl had taken the Sayyīd with him on his march against Ibrāhīm as a precaution against sedition in Mashhad; Ibrāhīm on his victory had appointed the mutawallī to guard his baggage and prisoners at Qum while he himself marched against Shāhrūkh in Spring 1749. On the mutiny of Ibrāhīm’s army at Surkha, near Sannān, the Sayyīd had barred Qum against the fugitive Afšārīd and expelled his Afghan-Uzbek garrison; he then declared his loyalty to Shāhrūkh and accepted the latter’s urgent invitation under promise of safe conduct to take the whole paraphernalia of the preceding Afšārīds to Mashhad.

Mīr Sayyīd Muḥammad had, his biographers claim, already resisted the urgings of his supporters to proclaim himself shāh at Iṣafān. At Mashhad, however, it became obvious that he enjoyed considerable support and that the apprehensive Shāhrūkh was attempting to engineer his death. At the end of 1749 Shāhrūkh’s principal officers, led by Mīr Ṭāhir Khān Khuzaima, mutinied and led the protesting Sayyīd in triumph from the shrine to the palace. Shāhrūkh was deposed and imprisoned, though not before he had strangled the five younger brothers of Aḏīl and Ibrāhīm who still lived; and in January 1750 the mutawallī was crowned with all pomp as Shāh Sulaimān II Şafawī.

But this belated restoration was from the outset an obvious anachronism. Nādir’s unwieldy empire had already broken up and there could evidently be no further question of the Shāh’s proceeding to the former capital of Iṣafān, soon to be the centre of a different puppet Şafavi régime under Aḥmad Mardān and Karīm Khān. In the east, Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī had now occupied Herat. Shāh Sulaimān sent envoys to Qandahār with a patronising and peremptory message which attempted to invoke the long-lost relationship of the Şafavi monarch and his Afghan vassal, addressed as “Aḥmad Khān Ṣadūzā’ī”; the Durrānī king was naturally outraged, and prepared for war.\textsuperscript{87} At home, Aḥmad Khān sought to insure against a counter-revolution by blindling Shāhrūkh while the new Shāh was absent hunting, which led to tension between the partners in government; and within weeks the opposing faction—the

\textsuperscript{85} Astarābādī, p. 477.
\textsuperscript{86} His father, the previous mutawallī (superintendent) Mīrzā Dā’ūd, had married Shahrbānū Bīgum, daughter of Shāh Sulaimān. One of his sons was Muḥammad Ḥāshim, author of the \textit{Tadkhīra-yi Aḥ-ḵud}, and a grandson through another son was Mīrāž Aḥmad Khālī Mar’āshī, author of the \textit{Majma’ al-Tawārīkh}.
\textsuperscript{87} Gulistānā, pp. 47–48.
Nādirite freebooters, dismayed at the Sayyid’s disbursement of the last of Nādir’s treasury, his protection of vaqaf property formerly confiscated by Nādir for the army, and his refusal to sanction their requisitions and extortions during the customary tax amnesty—engineered an Afsāhārid counter-coup. Led by Yūsuf ‘Ali Khān Jalāyir, these conspirators were convinced by a subterfuge of Shāhrukh’s wife that the royal prisoner had not been blinded after all; in February 1750 they and their men took over the palace precinct, deposed and blinded Shāh Sulaimān, and rescued Shāhrukh from his haram prison—only to find that their protégé was indeed as blind as their recent victim.88

Yūsuf ‘Ali Khān and his henchmen realised that with an almost empty treasury, a restless populace and an unreliable army, political power in Khurasan was a thankless chore to be escaped as best it might. Accordingly they absconded with the remainder of the treasury, but were captured and killed by the vigilant ‘Alam Khān. He continued to rule Khurasan by means of an uneasy compromise with Shāhrukh and alliances with the local Kurds until Aḥmad Shāh’s invasion of 1754; ‘Alam Khān was killed, Mashhad was starved into surrender and the blind Shāhrukh retained his throne for most of the rest of his reign as a vassal of the Afghan monarch.89 His impoverished kingdom remained a semi-independent no-man’s-land between the Durrānī and the Zand realms until 1796, when Aḥghā Muḥammad Khān recovered the territory for Iran and tortured to death the blind and ageing Afsāhārid who—though of Šafāvid blood himself—had in an indirect and pathetic manner completed his grandfather’s destruction of Šafāvid opposition within his truncated empire.

IV: Ismā‘īl III and the Zand regency

In the western portion of Nādir’s empire the Šafāvid revival was immediate, instinctive and superficial; its rejection was gradual, pragmatic and complete. The conditions conducive to this process may be summarised as follows.

When Ibrāhīm Mīrzā left Iṣfahān with his army early in 1749, the last vestige of the Mashhad-centred Afsāhārid control was removed from the old Šafāvid capital and its dependencies. At the height of Nādir’s empire, all of Iran’s western provinces could be viewed as a series of segments radiating from Mashhad at their geographical and political apex: from Ādharbājān through Kūrdistān, Luristān, Fārs, Lūr and Sīstān the peripheral mountain provinces and their dependencies on the adjacent plains were linked by the Caspian littoral, the Tehran-Sabzavār road, the desert route through Yazd and Tābās, and the Qīhīstān massif, to Nādir’s capital, the qibla of their religious and national consciousness. The foundations of this alignment had already been laid by the Šafāvid shāhīs themselves in their promotion of Mashhad as an alternative centre of Shi‘ī pilgrimage to the ‘abābī of Ottoman-ruled Iraq. Nādir’s choice of Mashhad as his capital, coupled with his personal magnetism, strengthened these bonds to such an extent that for a few years after his death the western provinces remained Mashhad-oriented in their involvement with the vacillating fortunes of his successors. Yet throughout these struggles there remained, as a natural concomitant of the tenacious Šafāvid ethos, an undercurrent of resistance to this, as to others of Nādir’s innovations; and as gradually it became obvious that none of Nādir’s would-be successors possessed the same imperative magnetism, the western provinces sullenly shifted back into a circumscribed version of the old alignment—that of an axis running along the Zagros foothills from Tabrīz (the first Šafāvid capital) to Bandar ‘Abbās (the port promoted by the greatest Šafāvid Shāh), with its initial centre of gravity at Iṣfahān, but already subject to the clockwise torque imparted by the future capitals of Shīrāz and Tehran.

The disintegration on Nādir’s death of his heterogeneous military machine—the Afghan-Uzbek element returning to Afghanistan, the rival Turkish Qızılbaş tribes, notably Afsāhārs and Qājārs, to the northern provinces of Māzandarān and Ādharbājān—left a power vacuum in the Šafāvid heartland. This was filled by a confederation of the Iranian Zagros tribes variously classifiable as Lurs, Lakks, Kurds and Bakhtyārī, who now assumed the mantle of the Qızılbaş (which had by this time become a general designation for Shi‘ī Iranian or Turco-Iranian troops) in their opposition to the Sunni Afghan marauders of Nādir’s forces, all of which were subsequently expelled or massacred. At first dominated by the Haft-Lang Bakhtyārī under All Mardān, then by the Zands under Karīm Khān, the

88 Mar’ashi, pp. 103–58; Gulistāna, pp. 37–49.
89 Ibid., pp. 67–74.
Zagros tribes established their rule over the central western provinces ('Irāq-i 'Ajam) and the metropolis from 1570, legitimising their de facto domination by the timeworn expedient of raising a Şafavid figurehead to the throne. In Isfahān itself there were at least two, possibly three minor princes of this house, the sons of a former court official, Mīrzā Murtaḍā, by a daughter of Shāh Sulṭān Hūsain. The younger or youngest of these, a youth of seventeen named Abū Turāb, was selected as the most suitable (presumably as the most tractable) for kingship, and despite his own reluctance and his mother's tearful protests was crowned in the summer of 1163/1750 under the name of 'Ismā'īl.30

It is at this stage, under an apparently peaceful and generally popular "restoration", that the goldmine of Şafavid tradition is revealed to have been worked out and is quietly and gradually abandoned. The treatment of the nonentity 'Ismā'īl III by his promoters—as that of the unsuccessful pretender Sulṭān Hūsain II—was hardly even superficially respectful. They cared nothing for his protests that he never wished to be king;31 'Ali Mardān immediately took him along as a mascot on his pillage of Fārs; before losing him and his authority to Karīm Khān; Karīm in turn lost him for several years to his Qājār rival, Muhammad Ḥasan Khān, but this in no way inhibited his determination to subdue his rivals or impaired his authority—the Şafavid prince was revealed as an empty mascot, an acquired superstitious habit no longer necessary to a government that could justify itself through efficiency and justice. On settling in Shīrāz in 1765 as effective ruler of all western Iran, the Zand chieftain was therefore content to shut Ismā'īl in the fortress of Ābādā, between Shīrāz and Isfahān, with adequate provisions, an allowance of one tūmān per day, and a present every Nawrūz from his Regent, who signed himself "the meanest of your servants" (kamtarīn-i bandāgan). Here the captive king spent the last eight years of his life, making knives as a pastime, until he died in 1187/1773, all but unnoticed, when still under middle age.32

The title borne by Karīm Khān as regent is especially significant. The wakil al-dawla under the early Şafavids was the chief officer of state, the Shāh's vice-regent in all matters temporal and spiritual; as such he took precedence over the chief military officers (the amīr al-umārā' and the qūrchi-bāšī), the head of the bureaucracy (the wazīr) and the head of the religious institution (the sādār).33 By late Şafavid times both the metropolitan wakil and the counterparts in the provinces had undergone various transformations, but he would seem to have gained even greater power at the expense of his fellow-officers, with the exception perhaps of the qūrchi-bāšī. Tāḥmāsp II conferred the title of wakil on his first protector, Fath 'Ali Khān Qājār, and when this rank was subsequently assumed by Nādir as regent for 'Abbās III, together with the synonymous nā'īb al-saltana,34 there was no doubt that it now implied supreme military as well as political authority under the nominal Shāh. It was thus closely analogous with the title of amīr al-umārā' in tenth- and eleventh-century Baghdād, which formalised the assumption of supreme secular authority by a viceregent of the powerless caliph. The title wakil al-dawla was assumed in 1750 by 'Ali Mardān Khān, as the senior partner in the junta ruling Isfahān for Ismā'īl III, and was inherited by Karīm Khān when he ousted the Bakhtyārī chieftain a year later.35 However, soon after establishing himself at Shīrāz in 1765, Karīm changed this title to wakil al-ra'ā'yā (or sometimes wakil al-khāla'īq)—"viceroy of the people"—and insisted on this appellation to the end of his days.36 If anyone addressed him by the title of shāh, "wrote 'Abd al-Razzāq Beg, "he would immediately reproach him, saying in all humility that the Shāh was in Ābādā and he himself was merely his steward (kadkhudā)".37 This subtle shift in jargon is not without significance, though it would

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be an exaggeration to read into it either a formal deposition of Ismāʿīl III and the substitution of a Cromwellian "Lord Protector" or, in a different political context, a "withering-away of the state" as the result of a "dictatorship of the proletariat." Karīm had to dispense with the personal divine right of the Šāfavid monarch, theoretically vested in his puppet king, and was too shrewd to risk the opprobrium and rebellion that could well follow if he explicitly usurped the throne as had Nādir. Certainly there was no further need to promote actively a Šāfavid ideology it had once been convenient to invoke, but to oppose it with another would be dangerous as well as unnecessary. In order therefore to respect both the surviving Šāfavid prejudice and the distrust of the long-oppressed masses of any new despot, he became a man of the people, a primus inter pares—remained, in fact, a tribal chief writ large.

This change is evident enough with the help of historical hindsight—or foresight, in the case of 'Abd al-Razzāq, whose observations that Karīm Khān was both in theory and by nature a large-scale kadkhudā rather than a king were prompted at least as much by deference to his new Qājār patrons as by affection for his former host; but it was not always appreciated at the time by people innured to a succession of tyrannical usurpers. The Carmelite Bishop of Isfahān could still write of the Wakil at the end of 1764 "Up to now he has not been able to assume the title of 'king'". The secret of his success lies in the fact that he never did. Contemporary Persian writers occasionally make the slip of referring to him as shāh, and certainly it was obvious when Shāh Ismāʿīl III died in 1773, six years before Karīm, that with its raison d'être removed his title of wakil was in effect a personal honorific and his real status was that of king. Instructive in this respect is the rubā'i chased in gold on the blade of Karīm Khān's sword in the Pārs Museum at Shūrāz:

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\begin{align*}
\text{شمشیر وکیل آن شه کشکورگیراست} \\
\text{آن دست که بر قیضه این شمشیر است} \\
\text{پهلوسته کلید فقط دارد در دست} \\
\text{این تیغ که شیر فلکن تخچیراست}
\end{align*}
\]

("This blade, that takes for prey the lion of the Zodiac, is the sword of the Wakil, that conquering king; the key of victory is ever in that hand which holds the haft of this sword."). The exigencies of the metre will not permit us to read an idāfa between wakil and ān shāh in the second hemistich to give, as we might at first expect, wakil-i ān shah-i kishvar-gir, "the viceroy of that conquering king." The nouns can only be in apposition—wakil, ān shah-i kishvar-gir, "the Wakil, that conquering king." Though arguably no more than a poetical metaphor, the phrase indicates at least that the question of the Šāfavid succession was no longer a live issue.

It became even more obvious on the death of the Wakil himself that his gradual exorcism of the Šāfavid ghost had created a unique situation. To have nominated a wali 'ahd would have been tantamount to admitting explicitly that he was the king; either out of such considerations or, more likely, out of short-sighted confidence in the good sense of his kinsmen, he made no definite arrangement to secure his succession, and thus unleashed on his death some sixteen years of fratricidal strife that culminated in the ruin of his dynasty. But the puppet rulers manipulated in this chaos were the Wakil's own sons, the real rulers were his own kinsmen, and neither class seems to have assumed any title, whether shāh or wakil, apart from the mundane honorific of khān. So far had the idea of the Šāfavid monarch faded into the background and finally out of the picture that it was left to the Qājārs, the last of the Qizilbash, to claim the Šāfavid legacy of despotic royalty under a new name.

To sum up: with more than two centuries of prestige as the political and religious creator of eighteenth-century Iran, the Šāfavid system could not be expected to perish overnight. Nevertheless, in view of the corrupt and helpless state in which it succumbed to the Afghan invasion, it is not surprising that it arose from the flames a somewhat confused and bedraggled phoenix. The early pretenders were either spurious and localised or, like Ţahmāsp, were too weak to assert themselves against their patrons. Sayyid Ahmad alone could with luck have salvaged his family's fortunes, but he was resolutely opposed not only by the Afghans but by Ţahmāsp. Nādir Shāh successfully rode the diminishing momentum of

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the Šafavid cause, but his brusque attempt to supersede it by force of personality and arms was premature, and only provoked a reaction that to a great extent revived the flagging Šafavid spirit. The pretenders who rose in the post-NDIR period were puppets chosen for their tractability by ambitious tribal chiefs; the one possible exception, Sulaimān II, survived for little more than a month because of his own ambition and independence of spirit. Finally, almost fifty years after the fall of IṢFĀHĀN and the abdication of ŠAḤ SULTĀN ḤUSAIN, the time was ripe for a strong but patient ruler, who could appeal to tribal, peasant and urban loyalties alike by a just and humane policy, to nudge the Šafavid incubus gently into oblivion without issuing a word of warning or receiving any intimation of regret.