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ʿABBĀS I

ʿABBĀS I, styled “the Great,” king of Iran (996-1038/1588-1629) of the Safavid dynasty, third son and successor of Solṭān Moḥammad Shah. He was born on 1 Ramażān 978/27 January 1571, and died in Māzandarān on Jomādā I 1038/19 January 1629, after reigning for forty-two lunar and forty-one solar years.

For ʿAbbās, the path to the throne was anything but smooth; indeed, the experiences of his early years accounted in large part for the morbidly suspicious side of his nature, which poisoned his relationships with his own sons. Only a historical accident saved ʿAbbās from sharing the fate of his uncles and other relatives, at least nine of whom had been murdered or blinded by his reigning uncle, Esmāʿīl II. The latter had actually ordered the murder of ʿAbbās, who was at Herat, when Esmāʿīl himself was assassinated by a group of Qezelbāš amirs on 13 Ramażān 985/24 November 1577. A second courier was dispatched to countermand the original order; he would, however, have arrived too late to save ʿAbbās, had not the governor of Herat, ʿAlī-qolī Khan Šāmlū, who subsequently became his lālā or guardian, delayed putting the order into effect as long as he dared. Esmāʿīl II was succeeded by Solṭān Moḥammad Shah, ʿAbbās’s father. An unworldly, retiring man who suffered from poor eyesight, he was dominated first by his wife, Mahd-e ʿOlyā, and then by a junta of chiefs of the Torkmān and Takkalū Qezelbāš tribes. In Rabīʿ I, 989/April-May, 1581, when ʿAbbās was only ten years old, a group of rival Qezelbāš amirs of the Ostājlū and Šāmlū tribes swore allegiance to the young prince and raised the standard of revolt in Khorasan. Coins were minted in the name of ʿAbbās, and his name was mentioned in the ḵoṭba. The

rebel coalition disintegrated when a royal army appeared in Khorasan, and ʿAlī-qolī Khan Šāmlū reaffirmed his allegiance to the shah and the heir apparent, Ḥamza Mīrzā, a brother of ʿAbbās.

In 993/1585, the ambitious Qezelbāš chief, Moršed-qolī Khan Ostāǰlū, governor of Ḵᵛāf and Bāḵarz, seized possession of Mašhad. When ʿAlī-qolī Khan Šāmlū moved against him, he gave battle and, in the course of the action, abducted the young prince ʿAbbās. At the capital, Qazvīn, an attempted coup by the Torkmān-Takkalū faction on behalf of Ṭahmāsp, another brother of ʿAbbās, had been suppressed by Ḥamza Mīrzā. Following the assassination of Ḥamza Mīrzā while on campaign against the Ottomans (994/1586), the Ostāǰlū faction at Qazvīn supported the claims of Abū Ṭāleb, another brother of ʿAbbās, as heir apparent, but an attempt to put Abū Ṭāleb on the throne also proved abortive.

At this point, Moršed-qolī Khan Ostāǰlū sounded out the Qezelbāš amirs at Qazvīn to determine the probable degree of their support for ʿAbbās as a candidate for the throne. The amirs ware favorable to the idea, but hesitated to commit themselves. While Moršed-qolī Khan Ostāǰlū debated whether to take the risk of marching to Qazvīn to install ʿAbbās Mīrzā on the throne, a major invasion of Khorasan by the Uzbeks in Moḥarram, 996/December, 1587, decided the issue. Fearing that, if the Uzbeks overran Khorasan, he might lose his pawn, ʿAbbās, Moršed-qolī Khan marched slowly westward, securing en route the support of the Torkmāns of Semnān, Kāšān, and Hamadān, the Afšārs of Yazd, Abarqūh, and Kermān, and the Ḏu'l-qadars of Fārs. When he reached Qazvīn, a popular demonstration in favor of ʿAbbās won over the remaining waverers, and on 10 Ḏu'l-qaʿda 996/1 October 1588, Solṭān Moḥammad Shah handed the insignia of royalty to his son, who, at the age of seventeen, was crowned Shah ʿAbbās I. Moršed-qolī Khan Ostāǰlū, to whom he owned the throne, was rewarded with the office of vakīl-e dīvān-e ʿālī (deputy of the court), which made him the most powerful man in the kingdom.

The formative years of Shah ʿAbbās had thus been marked by the factionalism of the Qezelbāš tribes. The young shah had seen the way in which rival amirs had used him and his three brothers as pawns in the furtherance of their own ambitions. He could have no illusions about their ruthlessness. He had seen them murder his guardian, leaving him defenseless at the age of six; he had

seen them murder his own mother in 987/1579 and the vizier Mīrzā Salmān, at Ḡūrīān in 991/1583, when the latter challenged their power. The fact that on this occasion the shah and the heir apparent, ʿAbbās's father and his own brother Ḥamza Mīrzā, had been powerless to protect the vizier from the vengeance of the Qezelbāš must have made an indelible impression upon the prince.

From the moment of his accession, Shah ʿAbbās realized that he must impose his authority on the Qezelbāš or remain their tool. But the Qezelbāš were still the backbone of the military strength of that Safavid state; if he weakened them, he undermined the state. He could ill afford this luxury at a time when the Ottomans were in possession of large areas of Persian territory in the northwest—areas which they had seized during the reign of his two predecessors. His solution was to form a new, standing army composed of recruits from the ranks of the ḡolāmān-e ḵāṣṣa-ye šarīfa (crown servants). These ḡolāms ("youth, servant, slave") were Georgian, Armenian, and Circassian Christians who had been taken prisoner during the Safavid campaigns in the Caucasus (a small number of Georgian nobles had joined the Safavid army voluntarily), converted to Islam and trained for service in the royal household or the administration. Except that the ḡolāms were not levied by regular recruitment, they were in many ways analogous to the Ottoman qapi-qollari. The loyalty of the ḡolāms was to person of the shah, not to a tribe, and they consequently constituted a valuable support to the shah in his disputes with the Qezelbāš. For example, the Georgian ḡolām Allāhverdī Khan agreed to be party to the assassination of Moršed-qolī Khan Ostāǰlū, now grown too strong; and in doing so, the ḡolām took the first step toward eventually becoming the most powerful man in the Safavid state after the shah. In the short term, the creation of the ḡolām corps was an effective solution in the shah's dilemma. In the long term, it proved a source of weakness to the state, because the ḡolāms, in the final analysis, did not possess the fighting qualities of the Qezelbāš.

The creation of a standing army gave rise to a problem of a different nature—a financial one. The old-style tribal forces had been levied at need by their tribal chiefs, who were at the same time the provincial governors and authorized to use the provincial revenues to defray the cost of equipping and mounting the required number of men. Only a small proportion of the taxes levied in the provinces found its way into the royal treasury. Once again, Shah ʿAbbās found

a solution which was effective in the short term, but in the long run it constituted one of the principal causes of Safavid decline. In order to provide the necessary funds for the new corps, the shah increased the number of provinces converted from the mamālek (“state”) to the ḵāṣṣa (“crown”) lands; in the latter, he appointed intendants who collected the taxes and remitted them directly to the royal treasury. This policy, as extended by his successors, upset the balance between Qezelbāš and ḡolām troops and thus seriously weakened the military strength of the kingdom.

The introduction of the ḡolāms as a third force increased the shah’s opportunity to maneuver between the rival Qezelbāš and Tāǰīk (Persian) elements in the state and led to a considerable reorganization of the Safavid administrative system. By the end of the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I, ḡolāms filled about one fifth of the high administrative posts, and this proportion grew under his successors. New offices reflected the growing importance of ḡolāms. The holders of two of these offices, the qollar-āqāsī (commander of the regiments of qollar or ḡolāms) and tofanġčī-āqāsī (commander of the regiment of musketeers), ranked among the six principal officers of state. As a corollary, the office of amīr-al-omarā, or commander-in-chief of the Qezelbāš tribal forces (and, by implication, of all Safavid armed forces), fell into desuetude; and the qūṛčī-bāšī, the commander of what remained of the Qezelbāš units, was the best primus inter pares. In place of the office of amīr-al-omarā, Shah ʿAbbās created the office of sardār-e laškar, or commander-in-chief of the army; the name suggests the triumph of the Persian elements in the Safavid state, but, ironically, the office went initially to the Georgian ḡolām Allāhverdī Khan. Later, Shah ʿAbbās revived the ancient Iranian title sepahsālār to denote the office of commander-in-chief of the armed forces; once again, it was a ḡolām who was appointed to the office—the Armenian Qaṛčaqāy Khan. By this policy, Shah ʿAbbās managed to weld the armed forces once more into a cohesive body and avoided the dissension which would inevitably have resulted from the appointment of either a Turk or a Persian to the office of supreme commander.

Other changes in the relative importance of the principal officer of state under Shah ʿAbbās resulted either from the increased centralization of the administration or from greater separation of the religious and political establishments. For example, the status of the vizier (vazīr), the head of the bureaucracy and the chief spokesman for the Persian elements in the central

administration, was enhanced; this change was marked by a tendency to apply to the vizier the honorific titles eʿtemād-al-dawla or ṣadr-e aʿẓam. By contrast, the title vakīl (“deputy”—originally vakīl-e nafs-e nafīs-e homāyūn), which harked back to the theocratic origins of the early Safavid state and conferred on its possessor a special, and indeed unique, position as the alter ego of the shah, was allowed to lapse after the assassination of Moršed-qolī Khan Ostājlū. The office of ṣadr, originally designed by Shah Esmāʿīl I to keep the religious classes subordinate to the political authority, declined in importance; as a result, there were a corresponding increase in the power of the clerical doctors (moǰtaheds).

From the inception of the Safavid state in 907/1501, the problem of how to incorporate into the administration of the state the Sufi organization of the Safavid order, of which the shah was also the moršed-e kāmel (“perfect spiritual director”), had been acute. Because the predecessors of Shah ʿAbbās had failed to merge this religious system into the state bureaucracy, the Sufi organization became an increasingly meaningless survival of the past. Such was the prestige of the ḵalīfat al-ḵolafā, the head of the organization after the shah, that the holder of the office from time to time challenged the shah’s authority. Such challenges were usually met by the shah’s appeal to the principles of ṣūfīgarī “conduct appropriate to a Sufi,” and were made tests of loyalty to himself. Thus the Safavid shahs had transferred the implicit obedience due from a morīd (disciple) to his pīr (mentor) from the religious plane to the political level, in the form of a vote of confidence in themselves as pādešāhs. Early in the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I (998/1589-90), the Sufis made their last serious challenge to the authority of the shah, and were crushed. Henceforth, Shah ʿAbbās deliberately sought to reduce their importance by ignoring them and treating them with disdain.

The administrative reforms of Shah ʿAbbās gave the Safavid state new strength and vigor. The delicate balance he maintained between the various peoples, or elements, in the system—Turks, Persians, and Caucasians—was the secret of his success. Though his successors failed to maintain this balance, with ultimately disastrous results, Shah ʿAbbās placed the administration on such a sound footing that its machinery continued to function, largely under its own momentum, for nearly a century after his death.

Within a short time after his accession Shah ʿAbbās had demonstrated his determination to rule de facto as well as de jure, but time was needed to build up the army sufficiently to be able to take the offensive against the archenemies of the Safavid state, the Uzbeks in the east and the Ottomans in the west. In the east, the Safavids suffered defeat after defeat; Mašhad fell, and Sīstān was overrun. Kandahār, in Safavid hands since 943/1537, was lost to the Mughals in 999/1590-91. In 1006/1598 the brilliant Uzbek leader ʿAbdallāh Khan died, and the dynasty was weakened by internal contention. Shah ʿAbbās took the offensive, routed the Uzbeks in Moḥarram, 1007/August, 1598, and recaptured Herat, which had been in enemy hands for ten years. It was not until 1014/1605-06 that Shah ʿAbbās felt strong enough to try conclusions with the Ottomans, but then success was rapid. After winning a major victory at Ṣūfīān near Tabrīz, he proceeded in successive campaigns to expel the last Ottoman soldier from Iranian territory as defined by the Treaty of Amāsya (962/1555), and peace was signed with the Ottomans at Sarāb in 1027/1618. At the battle of Ṣūfīān, Shah ʿAbbās revealed himself to be a general of consummate ability, carefully husbanding his forces, which were inferior to those of the Ottomans in numbers and firepower, and throwing in his reserves at the critical moment.

After his victory over the Uzbeks in 1017/1598, Shah ʿAbbās transferred his capital from Qazvīn to Isfahan, which he transformed into one of the most beautiful cities in the world. From the south, one approached the city by a highway which passed through the gardens and estates known as Hazār-ǰarīb, where many nobles had their residences. After crossing the Zāyanda-rūd by the Allāhverdī Khan Bridge, one proceeded along the magnificent tree-line avenue, the Čahār Bāḡ, to the Maydān-e Shah, the huge rectangular piazza overlooked by the ʿAlī Qāpū palace and two of the greatest masterpieces of Persian architecture, the Masǰed-e Shaikh Loṭfallāh (begun in 1020/1603, and Masǰed-e Shah (begun in 1020/1611). This splendid city was frequented by European ambassadors; by merchants seeking trading privileges; by Catholic friars seeking permission to open convents and carry on missionary activity; by gentlemen-adventurers such as the Sherley (q.v.) brothers, one of whom, Sir Robert, distinguished himself in the shah's service against the Ottomans; and by travelers such as Pietro della Valle, who left valuable accounts of Safavid Iran.

Shah ʿAbbās' passion for building was demonstrated not only by the

transformation of Isfahan and such major projects as the restoration of the shrine of the Imam Reżā at Mašhad but also by the raising of a multitude of utilitarian structures all over the country: caravanseries, cisterns, bathhouses, bridges, roads, hospitals, schools, and other public works. His predilection for Māzandarān, where he spent most winters as he grew older, led him to construct palaces at Ašraf and Faraḥābād, and to attempt to defeat the mud of the Caspian littoral by the construction of the celebrated causeway along the coast. His most grandiose concept, however, was undoubtedly his plan to cut through a spur of the Zagros mountains in order to link the headwaters of the Kūhrang and Zāyanda-rūd (q.v.) rivers and to divert some of the waters of the former for the benefit of the city of Isfahan. The project failed because of the inadequacy of the means available at the time, but the plan was considered so sound that it was put into effect in recent years by modern engineers, who discovered that the alignment of the cut calculated by the shah's engineers was only fractionally off course.

Shah ʿAbbās took great pains to maintain the cult of the Safavid shaikhs at Ardabīl, and to show his reverence for the imams. He invariably made a visit to the tombs of his ancestors at Ardabīl before embarking on a military expedition or taking any decisive step. His avowed aim was, by means of prayer and supplication, to enlist the aid of the holy shaikhs of the Safavid order. This practice helped to maintain his position as moršed-e kāmel of the order, although, as time went on, he found himself obliged to repress those Sufis who challenged his directorship. He supported the shrine of the Imam Reżā at Mašhad generously, and, whenever he was in Khorasan, he would visit this holy place and perform various menial tasks there to indicate his devotion. In 1010/1601, he made the pilgrimage on foot from Isfahan to Mašhad in twenty-eight days. Such actions strengthened the claim of the Safavid shahs to be the representative on earth of the Hidden Imam. But, since Shah ʿAbbās was in all things a pragmatist, the development of Mašhad as a major center of Shiʿi pilgrimage kept in Iranian hands large sums of money which might otherwise have been spent at the other principal Shiʿi pilgrimage centers, Karbalā, Naǰaf, and Kāẓemayn; for during much of the shah's reign these towns were in Ottoman hands. An additional advantage of this policy was that the moǰtaheds, as long as they received tangible benefits in the form of awqāf (endowments), restoration of shrines, and enhanced status and prestige, were more prepared to acquiesce in the usurpation by the Safavid shahs of their own prerogative of acting as the general agency on earth of the

Hidden (i.e., Twelfth) Imam.

The reign of Shah ʿAbbās marks a high point in that remarkable final flowering of Persian classical arts which occurred in Safavid times. Under his patronage, carpet weaving was elevated to the status of fine art. It was probably during his reign that the first carpet factory was constructed in Isfahan, although carpet weaving as a cottage industry was of ancient origin in Iran. Equally outstanding were the textiles: Isfahan, as well as Yazd, Kāšān, and Rašt, became great centers of weaving. Safavid craftsmen excelled in the making of textiles of complicated workmanship, brilliant color, and intricate design, the finished products exciting the admiration of travelers who visited the court. Especially renowned were Persian silks, damasks, and brocades. Shah ʿAbbās made the manufacture and sale of silk a royal monopoly. In the "arts of the book"—calligraphy, the illumination of the manuscripts, and bookbinding—the productions of the period of ʿAbbās I are unparalleled. Safavid pottery rivaled Chinese ceramics in the markets of Europe. The glazed polychrome and mosaic tiles which adorned mosques, madrasas (religious schools), emāmzādas (shrines of the descendants of the imams), and other shrines throughout the land reached perfection in masterpieces like the Shaikh Loṭfallāh Mosque; they display an art essentially of line, light, and color.

Under Shah ʿAbbās, Isfahan became a prosperous city. Indeed, the shah's patronage of the arts was inspired not only by esthetic considerations but also by strictly commercial motives. Merchants from China, India, Central Asia, Arabia, Turkey, and Europe flocked to his capital to buy the luxury items produced by Safavid craftsmen. Thousands of skilled Armenian artisans were transferred from Jolfā in Azarbaijan to "New Jolfā", a suburb of Isfahan on the right bank of the Zāyanda-rūd. The Qayṣarīya or Royal Bazaar extended for acres from its entrance at the north end of the Maydān-e Shah. Not since the development of Baghdad in the 8that century A.D. by the caliph Manṣūr had there been such a comprehensive example of town planning in Islamic world, and the scope and the layout of the city center clearly reflect its imperial status. Always a realist, Shah ʿAbbās devoted his energies to developing those arts and crafts which would bring wealth to the state, and his resultant neglect of poets caused many to seek greener pastures in India at the court of the Mughal emperors.

The Safavid empire, together with the Ottoman and the Mughal empires, may be regarded as the final flowering of medieval Islamic civilization before the technological superiority of the West ushered in the age of western imperialism and domination of much of the Islamic world. Shah ʿAbbās, and his contemporaries Süleymān the Magnificent and the emperor Akbar, conducted diplomatic and commercial relations with the West on the basis of parity of esteem. In the Persian Gulf, Shah ʿAbbās was able to use to his advantage the rivalry of the Portuguese, English, and Dutch for mastery of the lucrative East Indies trade; a notable example was his enlistment of English aid in 1031/1622 in expelling the Portuguese from the island of Hormoz (q.v.; see also Portuguese Empire).

Shah ʿAbbās possessed qualities which entitle him to be styled “the Great.” He was a pragmatist in all things, whether they related to religion or politics, to trade and commerce, or to civil or military matters. Unlike his forebear Shah Ṭahmāsp, he never allowed religious bigotry to interfere with trade. He was a brilliant strategist and field commander whose chief characteristic was prudence. Though personally a brave man, he would never have led his cavalry in a wild charge against the Ottoman guns as did his more flamboyant ancestor Esmāʿīl I at the debacle at Čālderān (920/1514). If Shah ʿAbbās could attain his ends by diplomacy rather than warfare, he preferred to use peaceful means and was prepared to wait years to achieve his objectives. He was famed for his forced marches with small bodies of crack troops, in a manner reminiscent of Julius Caesar—a tactic which on many occasions gave him the advantage of surprise. His leadership enabled him to drive his men to the limits of their endurance, especially during winter campaigns. His ability to maintain his army in the field in cold weather was another reason for his successes against the Ottomans, whose Janissaries regularly forced their commanders to retire to winter quarters on November 8. His deployment of forces (usually numerically inferior) was worthy of the great commanders of history; and his excellent intelligence service, which operated as far away as Istanbul, gave him vital and frequently decisive information regarding the size and composition of the Ottoman forces. Two notable characteristics of the shah were disregard for his personal safety and concern for the lives of his men. His amirs had orders, when preparing the muster rolls, to give details of particular acts of heroism in action, so that the men concerned might be suitably rewarded.

Shah ʿAbbās was famed for the severity of his justice, and was implacable in his punishment of disloyal officers. On the other hand, his affection for old and tried retainers was strong and lasting. To men he trusted, ʿAbbās was ready to delegate wide powers—the mark of a great leader. His informality and dislike of excessive ceremony are well attested. He was beloved of his people, because he possessed the human touch, and both Persian and Western sources describe his practice of touring the streets of Isfahan incognito and of conversing with people in teahouses. Such tactics helped him to learn much useful information which courtiers and officials might otherwise have withheld from him.

As stated earlier, the youthful experiences of Shah ʿAbbās had created in him the moribund fear that ambitious men might use his own sons against him, just as he and his brothers had been used against their father. Consequently, because of a number of revolts and plots on behalf of his sons, he ceased to follow the traditional Safavid practice of appointing his sons to provincial governorates, with each prince in the care of a Qezelbāš amir who acted as his guardian and was responsible for his physical and moral welfare. Instead, he confined his sons to the harem, where they were brought up by the women of the royal household and by eunuchs. This system was open to a number of serious objections: It gave rise to harem intrigues far surpassing in scale the occasional revolt of a provincial governor; it denied the royal princes the opportunity of gaining experience of government and administration, with the result that, when called to the throne, they proved incompetent; and it caused psychological deterioration and physical degeneration of the royal stock. This practice was undoubtedly one of the major causes of Safavid decline. As his obsessive fear of assassination increased, ʿAbbās either put to death or blinded any member of his family who aroused his suspicion; in this way one of his sons was executed and two blinded. Since two other sons had predeceased him, the result was personal tragedy for Shah ʿAbbās; when he died on 19 January 1629, he had no son capable of succeeding him.

See also ĀB-ANBĀR, ART ix, CARAVANSARY, ISFAHAN.

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For a critical analysis of this literature, and references to the relevant portions of these travel accounts, see *Taḏkerat al-molūk*, ed. Minorsky, pp. 6-9.