



KERMAN VIII. HISTORY IN THE AFSHARID AND ZAND PERIOD

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Between the fall of the Safavids and the rise of the Qajar dynasty (ca. 1722-94), Kerman maintained a measure of stability and security under local rulers despite the rise and fall of dynastic states across the Iranian plateau. The principal sources for 18th-century Kerman come from the dynastic chronicles of imperial projects outside of Kerman, like those of the Afsharids and Zands, which refer to Kerman as a province on the margins of their kingdoms (e.g., Nāmi, pp. 90-91). By contrast, the comments of Europeans (notably East India Company officials) and 19th-century local authors (e.g., Waziri Kermāni, pp. 21-26) paint Kerman as a contested space, often under the control of local elites who aligned with the Afsharids or Zands as it suited their interests. Indeed, the willingness of prominent local families to work with rival claimants to the throne set up Kerman for its greatest modern calamity with the destruction of large portions of the city and the massacre or blinding of as many as 30,000 inhabitants in 1794, after the Qajar ruler [Āgā Moḥammad Khan](#) tracked his last major rival, Loṭf-ʿAli Khan Zand, to the city where he had received local support.

After the fall of Isfahan to the [Ġilzi](#) Afghans under Maḥmud in 1722, Kerman



remained in nominal Safavid control under the beleaguered Safavid Shah Ṭahmāsb II in 1722-26 and then Sayyed Aḥmad Khan until 1728 (Waziri Kermāni, II, p. 651, n. 99). By 1733, Ṭahmāsb-qoli Khan Jalāyer, a deputy of Ṭahmāsbqoli (the later [Nāder Shah Afšār](#)), controlled both Kerman and Shiraz and appointed a series of governors from among the local notables to rule in his place. In Kerman, he appointed Esmā'il Khan Afšār, whose family had governed Kerman throughout much of the Safavid period. Esmā'il Khan's ancestor, Wali Khan, had governed the city during the reign of Shah 'Abbās I (Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 603-16). Afsharid rule in Kerman was marked by gradually increasing demands for revenue, which were pursued with great severity (Avery, p. 58). In one instance shortly before his death, Nāder Shah is said to have passed through Kerman during Nowruz 1747 on his way to Khorasan and engaged in beatings, mutilations, and executions in Kerman in an attempt to squeeze any remaining revenue out of the city to fund his military campaigns (Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 670-72; Axworthy, p. 277; Lockhart, p. 259).

In October 1747, just four months after the death of Nāder Shah, Kerman was overrun by 15,000 Afghans and Tatars, who inflicted great damage on the Zoroastrian quarter outside the city walls and looted the East India Company office (Perry, pp. 124-25). This tragedy was followed by a severe famine in 1748. According to Ann Lambton (p. 164), the post-Nāder Shah interregnum in Kerman was “anarchic” and marked by repeated tribal incursions by Afghan and Baluchi tribesmen. However, in the midst of this crisis, a local notable named Šāhroḳ Khan, the son of Esmā'il Khan Afšār, seized power and brought stability to Kerman, holding the governorship there for more than twelve years (1747-60). Šāhroḳ Khan quickly sent a letter pledging obedience to Nāder Shah's nephew, 'Aliqoli Khan Afšār, who had ascended the throne as 'Ādel Shah (r. 1747-48; Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 675-76) and was reconfirmed the following year by his successor, Šāhroḳ Shah (Perry, p. 124). Šāhroḳ Shah officially reconfirmed him in 1752 as governor of Kerman, by sending him a robe of honor (*kel'at*) and a royal mandate (*manšur*). In response, he declared his obedience but refused to send taxes, saying that unjustified exactions by Nāder Shah had “caused such devastation in Kerman that the people would not be able to pay taxes for thirty years” (Waziri Kermāni, II, p. 676). Kerman was thus held within the sphere of the Afsharid kingdom under Nāder Shah's successors until Šāhroḳ Khan was killed during a siege in Bāfq in September 1758 (Nāmi, p. 91; Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 681-82).



Šāhroḡ Khan was succeeded by Ḳodā-Morād Khan Zand, who ruled for some time before he was killed and replaced by a colorful local figure described as a simple “charcoal seller” named Taḡi Khan Dorrāni, who held out for five years against the new rising power on the Iranian plateau, [Karim Khan Zand](#) (see Perry, p. 128). According to Waziri Kermāni, Taḡi Khan came to power by raising a small band of riflemen from his home district of Kuhpāya and killing a newly appointed, and as of yet unconfirmed, governor, Ḳodā-Morād Khan; he assumed the governorship with the support of the city’s leading families (Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 682-85; Nāmi, pp. 117-18). Taḡi Khan then held out against five Zand assaults on the city between 1761 and 1766 before he was captured and executed by Karim Khan in spring 1766 (Perry, pp. 128-33; Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 683-92; Nāmi, pp. 150-53).

After appointing a Zand governor to Kerman, Karim Khan quickly relented under pressure from local notables to return to the pattern of appointing or confirming Kermanis for the post. Taḡi Khan Dorrāni’s former *kalāntar*, Mirzā Ḥosayn Rāyeni, was installed alongside another local merchant and landowner named Āqā ‘Ali Sirjāni. These two ruled Kerman as a Zand province in tandem through a complicated division of territories. This arrangement quickly disintegrated, and power then fell to the Nezāri Isma‘ili *sayyeds* (the ancestors of Āqā Khan Maḡallāti [see [ĀQĀ KHAN i](#)]), who held Kerman as Zand appointees until just prior to the Qajar conquest of the city (Perry, p. 134; Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 694-99; Nāmi, pp. 152-53).

This relative political stability in Kerman under locally rooted governors was also periodically broken with attacks by pastoral-nomadic populations, most notably the aforementioned sack of the city by Afghans in 1747. The Dutch East India Company’s once prominent trade in down wool (*korḡ*) declined with the end of Safavid rule, but it revived in stops and starts along with the restoration of order (Matthee, pp. 377-79). The English East India Company also had offices at Bušehr (Bushire, etc.) and [Bandar ‘Abbās](#) along the Persian Gulf throughout the 18th century, as well as a company house in the Zoroastrian quarter of Kerman, maintaining a steady trade with India in Kermani wool, textiles, and minerals (Perry, pp. 125, 310-11).

As the Qajar dynasty consolidated its control over the north and west of Iran in the 1790s, Loṭf-‘Ali Khan Zand made his last stand at Kerman with the support of several local families, for which the city was largely destroyed and the population blinded and massacred by Āḡā Moḡammad Khan after a prolonged siege in 1794 (Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 746-50; see [KERMAN ix](#)).



QAJAR PERIOD).

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