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SOLṬĀN ḤOSAYN
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SOLṬĀN ḤOSAYN

SOLṬĀN ḤOSAYN, the ninth and last Safavid king (1078-105/1668-1727; r. 1105-35/1694-1722).

Solṭān Ḥosayn, the eldest son of Shah Solaymān I (r. 1077-1105/1666-1694), was born and reared in the royal harem, where he is said to have done little more than read the Qurʾan under the tutelage of Mir Moḥammad-Bāqer Ḵātunābādi, who would later become the shah's chaplain (*mollā-bāši*; ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, pp. 549, 556; Chick, p. 470). Like most Safavid rulers, he was most comfortable speaking Turkish, although he appears to have learned Persian as well (Aubin, pp. 56-57; Bell, I, p. 105).

Shah Solaymān, on his deathbed, is said to have told his courtiers that, if they wanted glory for the dynasty and the empire, they should select Solṭān Ṭahmāsb (ʿAbbās Mirzā or Mortażā Mirzā), the younger (age 23) of the two sons (out of 19), but if they desired peace and tranquillity, they should opt for the older one (age 26), Solṭān Ḥosayn (Gaudereau, apud Kroell, p. 65; Tehrāni, p. 98; Malcolm, I, pp. 399-400; Chick, p. 470, basing himself on Du Cerceau, calls ʿAbbās Mirzā the elder of the two, as does Fasāʾi, p. 490; Lockhart, p. 36). According to Père Martin Gaudereau, who was present in Isfahan at the time, Shah Solaymān had expressed a preference for Solṭān Ṭahmāsb (apud Kroell, p. 65). The court eunuchs, who wished to have a weak and pliable ruler on the throne so that they could maximize their own power, and Maryam Begom, Solṭān Ḥosayn's great-aunt, who was to wield great authority at his court, were the ones who secured Solṭān Ḥosayn's appointment (Chick, p. 470; Lockhart, p. 36).

Enthronement. The difference of opinion within the palace ranks combined with the need to select an auspicious moment for the inauguration accounts for the week-long lapse between the death of Solaymān on 29 July 1694 (6 Zu'l-Hejja 1105), and the enthronement of the new ruler in Isfahan in the early hours of Saturday, 7 August (15 Zu'l-Hejja; NA, VOC 1523, 7 Aug. 1694, fol. 694r.; VOC 1549, 15 August 1694, fol. 598r.; Chick, p. 470; Gaudereau, apud Kroell, p. 67; Krusinski, I, pp. 71-72; Lockhart, p. 36, n. 4, gives 6 August as the date, adding that some sources indicate the next day). In the interim the authorities stationed troops all over the city in order to guarantee stability among the people, who were left to wonder about the date of the ascent. Large amounts of food, made available to help the deceased shah's soul gain peace, were also distributed to the poor (Gaudereau, apud Kroell, pp. 64-65; Gemelli-Careri, II, pp. 123, 129). On 6 August the vendors in the bazaar were ordered to place lights in front of their shops. The next morning at 4 o'clock, the trumpets that had been silent for fifteen days were blown. That night the Royal Square (Maydān-e Šāh) and the adjacent bazaars were illuminated, and all kinds of wild animals were paraded in the square, while the trumpets and drums sounded all night (Gemelli-Careri, II, pp. 150-51; Gaudereau, apud Kroell, p. 67; Lockhart, p. 37). Preceded by an auspicious three-hour long rain shower, the actual enthronement took place in the Āyena-ḵāna, a palace near Saʿdābād palace on the south bank of the Zāyandarud, presaging the new ruler's insularity and aloofness (Fendereski, p. 73; Lockhart, p. 37; Babaie, 2008, p. 211).

Soltan Ḥosayn broke with the custom of his predecessors, who had had the leader of the Sufis gird the new shah with a sword, and requested that Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi, the *šayḵ-al-Eslām* of Isfahan and the most prominent cleric of the age, perform this task and preside over the ceremony. Majlesi convened a special session during which he conferred the title *dinparvar* (nurturer of the faith) on the new ruler (Gaudereau, apud Kroell, p. 67). Asked what he desired in return for officiating, he is said to have requested the enforcement of the rules and regulations of the Šariʿa. As a result, the reportedly 6,000 bottles of wine found in the royal cellars were ostentatiously poured out on the Square. A decree also went out proscribing all kinds of "unislamic" behavior, such as the production and consumption of alcohol, the visitation of coffeehouses by youngsters, and women going out unaccompanied by male escorts. Recreational activities such as pigeon-flying and playing games were banned as well. The decree was promulgated in the provinces and inscribed in stone friezes above mosques (Fendereski, pp. 35-36, 82-83; Naṣiri, pp. 35-40; Navāʾi, ed., pp. 61-63; Lockhart, pp. 38-39; Matthee, 2005, pp. 92-93). Further clerically inspired instructions for female behavior in public are contained in a work subsequently written at the behest of the shah (Jaʿfariān, 2015).

Characteristics: Gemelli-Careri, who attended a royal audience a few days after the enthronement, described the shah as rather short, with heavy eyelids, a pallid color, and a black beard (Gemelli-Careri, II, p. 158). According to the Portuguese envoy Gregório Pereira Fidalgo, who met him in 1696, the shah was of average height and short underneath the belt, and of happy mien (Aubin, pp. 88-89). John Bell, attending a royal audience for the Russian ambassador Volynskii in 1717, described Solṭān Ḥosayn as being of “middle stature, open countenance,” and endowed with a “small black beard,” adding that his legs were said to be remarkably short in relation to his body (Bell, I, p. 108). Others, confirming that the shah had bowlegs, speak of “monstrously crooked” legs (Chick, p. 470). Fendereski offers an idealized portrait of the shah’s physical attributes, and Rostam-al-Ḥokamā retrospectively concurred, giving Solṭān Ḥosayn pleasant features, wide blue eyes, broad shoulders, a small waist, powerful long arms, large ears, and fine lips (Fendereski, p. 37; Rostam-al-Ḥokamā, p. 85; for a portrait, see De Bruyn, reproduced in Lockhart. Pl. 1, and in Matthee, 2012, pl. 11).

In the course of his reign, Solṭān Ḥosayn became known for excessive piety mixed in with superstition, softness of character, sensuality, and profligacy, all of which have been presented by contemporary observers and later commentators alike as factors contributing to the terminal decline of the state he oversaw and represented (Jaʿfariān, 1993, pp. 19 ff.; idem, 2009, pp. 1337 ff.; Matthee, 2012, pp. xxi-xxx). His reputation for piety earned him the nickname *darviš*. He also became known as “Mollā” or “Mollā Ḥosayn,” and as a ruler all of whose acts were in accordance with the Šariʿa (ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, p. 557; Leandro di Sicilia, p. 29). Judasz Krusinski, however, qualified this characterization by insisting that Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn was more devout than his father yet not convinced that Islam was “a whit better than the Christian religion” (Krusinki, I, p. 131). Indeed, his piety was expressed in the absence of alcohol and female dancing from royal ceremonies, yet did not prevent the shah himself from taking to drinking months after he had come to power, apparently encouraged to do so by Maryam Begom, his great-aunt, who was herself given to the bottle (Bell, I, pp. 106-107; Chick, pp. 470-71; Aubin, pp. 58-59). Nor did the shah’s religiosity prevent him from having an openly

Sunni grand vizier, Fatḥ-ʿAli Khan Dāḡestāni, on his side for a full five years (Matthee, 2004).

All observers draw attention to the shah's meekness. This trait is presented either as compassion (*raḥm*) and fairness (*ʿadl o dād o enṣāf*) or as a lack of firmness contributing to the fall of the state (Fendereski, pp. 38-43; Rostam-al-Ḥokamā, p. 393). Krusinski (I, p. 133**)** described him as "less able and resolute than his father" and a "good-natured and human" who "hurt no particular person and by that means hurt all mankind." His naivete is encapsulated in the story that he reacted to any proposal with the words *yaḵši dir* (It is good!; Marʿaši, p. 48**).** ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi (p. 557), too, characterizes him as benevolent and loath to spill blood. Unlike his predecessors, he did not kill or blind any immediate rivals or family members, and he even did all he could not to harm animals. Whereas previous rulers had often meted out death as a form of punishment, retribution under Solṭān Ḥosayn never went beyond the forfeiture of property and monetary fines (Krusinski, I, pp. 77, 107-108). He also became known for his naivete. John Malcolm's verdict was that Solṭān Ḥosayn had neither the "violence nor the cruelty of his father," but that his "bigotry proved more destructive to the country than the vices of Soleiman" (Malcolm, I, p. 400). Many of his subjects appear to have seen his gentle nature as a sign of weakness. Officials are said to have openly mocked him, accusing him of ignorance and arguing that he had none of the characteristics of a king and behaved like a child (De Bruyn, p. 165; Harrach, fol. 24). Disappointment and anger at such royal feebleness eroded his legitimacy and elicited feelings of contempt that were expressed in scathing remarks and mocking verses (Jaʿfariān**,** 1993, pp. 65 ff.). Such sentiments over time gave rise to various plots, such as a rumored scheme in 1128/1716 to depose the shah and have him succeeded by his son, or even a desire to have the Russians enter Persia and occupy Qazvin (Hamilton, I, p. 106).

The image of an idle, pleasure-seeking ruler completes the picture of the shah's dissipating indulgence (Krusinski, II, pp. 120-21; Rostam-al-Ḥokamā, p. 82). Under Solṭān Ḥosayn's auspices, the royal harem grew to immense proportions. Nicolas Sanson in 1694 estimated that the harem counted more than 800 women; in 1696 the shah is said to have taken more than 500 harem women with him on a hunting trip; and the Russian consul in Isfahan, Samseon Avramov, in 1129/1717 witnessed the royal caravan enter Kashan with 525 camels carrying 1,000 women guarded by 200 eunuchs (Sanson, p. 88; Aubin, pp. 52-53, Bushev, p. 204). To fill the ranks of the harem, the shah intensified a longstanding royal practice of selecting pretty girls from all over the country for the palace. The year 1700 seems to have stood out in this regard, for it would become known as *kizlarun ili*, the year of the women (Leandro di Sicilia, p. 30). According to Rostam-al-Ḥokamā (p. 83), the shah in his lifetime deflowered 3,000 women and slept with 2,000 more. These were then divorced and given to high-ranking officials.

A final trait ascribed to the shah is generosity shading into wastefulness. Abu Ṭāleb Fendereski, who wrote his work on Solṭān Ḥosayn's character within two years after the latter's accession, claimed that the shah was exceedingly liberal, handing out more than 1,000 tumans a day in gifts and benefits (Fendereski, p. 45). Naṣiri, covering the same early years of the shah's rule, reports that Solṭān Ḥosayn each day sent 12 tumans in cash in addition to 12 trays of sweetmeats to the *Tawḥid-ḵāna*, a place where Sufi shaikhs usually gathered on Thursday nights, located next to the royal palace (Naṣiri, p. 56). His encouragement of the pilgrimage to the Shiʿite shrine cities (*ʿatabāt*) in Iraq and the *ḥaramayn* (i.e., Mecca and Madina) in the Arabian peninsula each year caused massive amounts of gold to be drained from the country (ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, p. 553; Matthee 2000, pp. 251-52). Such extravagance, which also comes out in various later descriptions of court opulence, naturally left little money for pressing issues such as the upkeep of the military (Floor, ed. and tr., pp. 31-33; Chick, pp. 557-58; Tehrāni, pp. 99-100). Rather than on defense, Solṭān Ḥosayn spent large sums on religious causes, showering funds by way of *waqf* (religious endowment) on, especially, the shrine in Mashhad, which he visited in 1119/1706-1707 (Mostawfi, p. 115). In 1115/1704**,** he also made money available for repairs of the shrine of Imam Ḥosayn at Karbala (ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, p. 553) and endowed a *waqf* designating the revenue for the expenses of pilgrims (Jaʿfariān, 2013, pp. 1617 ff.**).**

Solṭān Ḥosayn spent substantial sums of money on religious, as well as civil, architecture (Krusinski, 1, p. 125; Rostam-al-Ḥokamā, pp. 71-81). Buildings erected under his auspices include the magnificent Madrasa-ye Mādar-e Šāh, also known as Madrasa-ye Solṭāni, a religious school along the east side of the Čahārbāḡ, the Jalāliya School, the Madrasa-ye Šamsābād, the Masjed-e Misu; and most importantly, the garden palace on the south side of the Zāyandarud named Faraḥābād, which was begun in about 1111/1700 and took several years to complete (ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, p. 559; Lockhart, pp. 480-84; Babaie, pp. 206-13; Rafiʿi, pp. 444-68, 475). In 1123/1711 the shah went to Faraḥābād and ordered new building and the construction of an entirely new garden (ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, pp. 562-63; Rafiʿi, pp. 80-81). He also built a large garden called Bāḡ-e Waḥš, part of which was a menagerie, located some 17 miles to the southwest of the city (Lockhart, pp. 483-84). During a trip to Kashan, which turned into a prolonged stay in 1129-30/1717-18, the shah started the construction of new buildings in addition to a *čahārbāḡ* modeled after the one in Isfahan (Floor, ed. and tr., p. 34).

Like his father, Solṭān Ḥosayn mostly ruled as a stationary monarch who preferred to stay in Isfahan and within the confines of his palace, which usually meant the palace complex located south of the Zāyandarud and known as Saʿādatābād (where he spent five months in 1007/1696; Naṣiri, p. 95). Solṭān Ḥosayn did travel outside the capital, but neither of his two long-distance journeys had any military objectives. In 1118/1706 he undertook his first lengthy trip, a pilgrimage to Mashhad, leaving on 28 August 1706 and returning on 18 November 1707 (NA, VOC 1719, 30 Nov, 1706; VOC 1763; ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, pp. 525-29). In 1129/1717 he undertook an extended journey to the north, first to Kashan, next to Qazvin, and finally to Tehran, returning in early 1133/1721 (Floor, ed. and tr., pp. 31-36).

Foreign Policy: Solṭān Ḥosayn was more active in foreign policy than Shah Solaymān had been, though he was less engaged with the external world than their predecessors. He abided by his father's policy of maintaining peaceful relations with the Ottomans. When the Kurdish tribal chief Solaymān Baba revolted in 1107/1696, he did not immediately organize an expedition but instead sent a mission to Istanbul urging the sultan to rein the rebel in. Yet three years later he did dispatch a military force to bring the Kurdish warlord to heel (Naṣiri, pp. 132-33, 177, 222 ff., 308 ff.). In 1124/1713 the Safavids mounted a campaign against rebel forces in Howayza in Khuzestan (NA, VOC 1843, 11 May 1713, fol. 159; ibid., 30 May, fol. 61). Solṭān Ḥosayn also engaged in regular diplomatic traffic with Istanbul and Mughal India. In late 1117/early 1706, an Iranian embassy with falcons and an elephant as gifts visited Istanbul to congratulate the new sultan, Aḥmad III, upon his accession (NA, Smyrna III, 16 Jan. 1706, fol. 543). A mission led by Rostam Khan in 1120/1708 was sent to India (NA 1779, fol. 255). In 1127-28/1715-16 an Ottoman envoy was present in Isfahan (Bushev, p. 58). In 1133/early 1721, as the fate of the Safavid state hung in the balance, the shah received Duri Efendi, the Ottoman ambassador, and reciprocated by sending Mortażāqoli Khan to the Porte later that year (Dourry Efendy; Lockhart, pp. 124-25, 215; Sotavov, p. 53).

Solṭān Ḥosayn's other foreign policy concerns focused on the Persian Gulf and the naval threat posed by the Arab-Omanis. In 1107/1696 war supplies (*soyursāt*) from all over Fars were collected to meet this challenge. Drought, however, scuttled the operation, necessitating its postponement (Naṣiri, pp. 153). In 1107/1696, intent on countering Omani naval raids on the Persian Gulf coast, the shah received a mission led by the Portuguese envoy Gregório Fidalgo. The planned cooperation failed, however, for lack of funds and Persia's inability to furnish troops (Aubin, pp. 23-24; Chick, p. 477). The Safavid court thereupon approached the French for naval support against Masqat in exchange for commercial privileges, a trading post, and possession of the two forts of Masqat. This gave Louis XIV a long awaited opportunity to play an expanded role in the Persian Gulf and led to a series of embassies between Paris and Isfahan in the period from 1699 to 1721. The embassy that visited Isfahan in 1708 resulted in a treaty that gave the French preferential treatment and Persia's Christians, as well as European missionaries, protection. Moḥammad-Reżā Beg led a counter- mission to Paris in 1714 **(**Navāʾi, ed., pp. 95 ff.; Kroell, 1976-77; Floor, 2003, pp. 45-46; Touzard, pp. 81 ff.; Lockhart, pp. 434 ff.; Herbette, passim**).**

Style of government. The formal structure of Persia's government is neatly outlined in the *Taḏkerat al-moluk* and the *Dastur al-moluk*, administrative manuals that were composed with the aim of instructing the Afghans about Persia's government structure after they seized the country in 1135/1722 (Minorsky). Actual governance was much more personal in nature, depending on individuals, their family networks, and the factions to which they belonged. Major officials arguably played a more important role in this than they had done under stronger rulers in the past. Throughout his reign Solṭān Ḥosayn surrounded himself with advisers who often took on a leading role in politics to the point of dominating him. In the early years **of** his reign, the grand vizier Mirzā Mohammad-Ṭāher, and to a lesser extent, the court steward (*nāżer*), Najafqoli Khan, acted as his main counselors (Aubin, pp. 88-89). The shah left most state affairs in the hands of Fatḥ-ʿAli Khan Dāḡestāni during the five years that the latter served him as grand vizier, between 1127/1715 and 1132/1720, trusting him until the very end and only reluctantly giving in to the conspiracy that would bring him down (Matthee, 2004; idem, 2012, pp. 206-15). The high clerics, especially, had the shah's ear. The two who stand out in this regard are Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi, the *shayḵ al-Eslām*, and after his death in 1101/1699, Solṭān Ḥosayn's erstwhile tutor, Mir Moḥammad-Bāqer Ḵātunābādi. Solṭān Ḥosayn is said to have ruled under the spell of the former, and he kept in close contact with the latter, consulting him frequently and commissioning him to write treatise on religious matters (ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, pp. 552, 556, 559). The court eunuchs, too, steadily gained in influence. In 1107-1108/1696 Āḡā Kamāl, head of the black eunuchs, enjoyed the greatest credit with the shah. By 1126/1714, when their rule was said to be all but complete, the eunuchs were the ones who determined who was appointed, who was dismissed or promoted (Aubin, pp. 64-65; NA, VOC 1856, 24 May 1714, fol. 1117). By far the greatest influence on Solṭān Ḥosayn in his later years was exerted by his great-aunt, Maryam Begom, the daughter of Shah Ṣafi I.

Religious policy. The multiple *awqāf* endowed by Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn suggest his devotion. Yet, the trust enjoyed by the Sunni Fatḥ-ʿAli Khan Dāḡestāni, the curiosity the shah displayed visiting the churches of New Jolfa, as well as the various edicts (*farmān*) that he issued granting Persia's Christians protection and missionaries the right to operate their missions, suggest that the shah was personally not as bigoted as he is usually portrayed. Indeed, the position of European missionaries improved under his reign compared to that under his father (Metzler, pp. 686-87). The translation of the Gospels that he commissioned Sayyed Moḥammad-Bāqer Ḵātunābādi to make (from an Arabic copy) shows his interest in Christianity, even if it must be put in the context of the anti-Christians polemics conducted by members of the high clergy at the time (Jaʿfariān, 1996, pp. 34 ff.). Reigning under the spell of these same clerics, the shah allowed the latter to promote a doctrinaire agenda, which included anti-Sufi policies and enacting measures against non-Shiʿites. The Tawḥid-ḵāna was closed at his orders (Röhrborn, p. 37). Measures directed against religious minorities included the forced conversion of Zoroastrians, the destruction of their temple in Isfahan and the construction of a mosque in its place, the imposition of the poll tax (*jezya*) on Jews and Christians, and decrees forbidding non-Shiʿites from going out during times of rain lest they pollute Shiʿites. Most of these measures were either bought off with bribes or, in the case of the Armenians of New Jolfa, blunted through the intervention of Maryam Begom, the patron of the suburb (Chick, p. 474; Gaudereau, 1702, pp. 138-39; Matthee, 2012, pp. 220-22). Yet the increasingly intolerant atmosphere manifested in them had a negative effect in that it undermined the loyalty of Iran's non-Shiʿite inhabitants to the Safavid state. A number of rich Armenians, forced to pay ever higher taxes and threatened by a law that allowed the family member of an apostate to lay claim to their property, took out much capital to Italy and eventually decamped to Venice and Rome (Chick, pp. 485, 500; Matthee, 2012, pp. 220-21). The regime's anti-Sunni policies were most consequential in this regard, for they alienated Iran's large Sunni population, most of whom lived in the sensitive borderlands.

Main events and developments. The relative peace and stability that Persia had enjoyed since the Treaty of Zohab with Turkey in 1049/1639 (for this, see Hurewitz, I, pp. 25-28) persisted far into the administration of Solṭān Ḥosayn. Yet the underlying state of the country was worrisome, and frequent tribal uprisings and raids in the first years of his reign suggest deteriorating conditions. As his father lay dying, unrest broke out among the population of Isfahan, caused by concerns about Baluchi raids taking place within a day's march of the city. Baluchi and Torkman incursions meanwhile made the eastern and northeastern parts of the country unsafe (Gaudereau, in Kroell, pp. 65-66; Naṣiri, pp. 64 ff., 70 ff., 246-47). In 1119/1707, there was a Torkman rebellion said to have involved 20,000 tribesmen (NA, VOC 1763). In the same year, poorly managed food policies in Isfahan provoked an uprising among its inhabitants (NA, VOC 1747, 1 July 1707, fols. 233-34).

The last decade of Solṭān Ḥosayn's rule saw a spiraling welter of urban unrest, tribal revolt, and foreign aggression. In 1127/1715 the people of Isfahan, battered by severe food shortages, staged a protest, setting the house of Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi on fire (ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Ḵātunābādi, pp. 567-68). Two years later a grain monopoly reportedly led by grand vizier Fatḥ-ʿAli Khan made food prices in the capital escalate to the point of causing many thefts and murders in the city, leading to bread riots in the spring (NA, VOC 1897, 19 January 1717, fol. 268; Bushev, p. 106). Conditions in the borderlands were hardly any better at this point. In 1128/1716, Afghans besieged Mashhad after defeating a Safavid army of 3,000 to 4,000. Uzbek incursions, meanwhile, resulted in the capture of reportedly 60,000 people, the loss of 150,000 head of cattle, and the destruction of 800 villages (Bushev, pp. 161-62; Tehrāni, pp. 101-3). Turmoil broke out in ʿArabestān (Khuzestan) in the same period (NA, VOC 1870, 13 Apr. 1715, fol. 442; VOC 1897, 30 Nov. 1716, fol. 16). The Caucasus, too, witnessed strife and violence. As early as 1120/1708, Lezghi tribesmen staged raids into Šervān from Dāḡestān. In 1129/1717, they took villages close to Šamāḵi and threatened Darband (Bushev, pp. 2146, 219-20; Sotavov, p. 46). Gilan in the same period erupted in violence following heavy taxation imposed on the province (Bushev, p. 107). Azarbaijan, including Tabriz, was in a state of turmoil, too. In 1131/1719 the people of Tabriz rose up against their governor, Moḥammad-ʿAli Khan (Kroell, 1976-77, p. 64; NA, VOC 1947, fol. 75). Kurdish incursions into the western borderlands are reported for the same year (Doury Efendy, p. 69).

The court's reaction to these challenges was half-hearted at best. No serious steps to formulate a military response were taken until the fall of Bahrain to the Omanis in October 1717, at which time the shah left Isfahan for a visit to the north. At this point the octogenarian Maryam Begom prodded her grand-nephew into action, warning him that he might lose his realm and see her enslaved in her last years. She made money available from her own funds, and in addition money for an expedition was collected, extra taxes were imposed on the population, various southern governors were dismissed and replaced by others, and the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie [VOC]) and the British East India Company were asked to provide naval support. Money, as usual, was in short supply. New gold coins were brought into circulation, and restrictions were issued on the use of gold thread in textile manufacturing. As a last resort, the gold of the candelabras in Mashhad was melted for gold coin (Tehrāni, p. 118; Matthee, 2012, pp. 236-37). Yet the army remained ill-equipped and badly managed, and its misbehavior in the south did more to provoke a local rebellion than to engage the enemy (Marʿaši, pp. 35 ff.; Bushev, pp. 184-85; Floor, ed. and tr., pp. 31, 34-35). The mismanagement manifest in such failure naturally eroded the prestige of the shah to the point where in 1716 a rumored plot was hatched to depose him in favor of his son and to invite the Russians to enter the region of Qazvin (Hamilton, I, p. 106).

The most serious challenge came from the east. Having raided the vast eastern borderland for decades, the Baluchis in 1110-11/1699 overran Kerman Province. To meet this challenge the shah appointed Gorgin Khan, former viceroy of Georgia, as commander-in-chief **(***sepahsālār***)** and governor of Herat, Qandahar, and Kabul (Marʿaši, pp. 39-40; NA, VOC 1913, 17 April 1718, fol. 347)**.** The oppressiveness of his rule and the brutal behavior of his troops vis-à-vis the Sunni population of Qandahar alienated the eastern borderlands and provoked a rebellion led by the Afghan warlord Mir Wais. Mir Wais's decision to revolt against the Safavids was a direct outgrowth of the cancellation of his post as supervisor of the eastern caravan trade, ostensibly for his lack of service and dereliction of duty in collecting tolls and taxes. This amounted to the cutting of the subsidy that his clan effectively enjoyed. The Safavids thought they might use accommodation to soothe the Afghans after Mir Wais's death in 1129/1717; but they miscalculated, for his son and successor, the firebrand Mahmud, vowed to exact revenge upon the Persians and ignited his fatal rebellion.

Following various Baluchi incursions, the Afghans marched into Persia’s heartland in 1720, taking Kerman. They left after six months but returned the following year, at which point the entire southeast and east erupted in turmoil. Yet Solṭān Ḥosayn, returning to Isfahan in 1721, continued to spend most of his time and money on his building activities (Floor, ed. and tr., p. 36).

In early 1722, Maḥmud and his troops arrived at Golnābād, a village some 20 km from Isfahan. Even at this point, their occupation of the Safavid capital and the concomitant fall of the dynasty was anything but inevitable. Numerically inferior and mostly equipped with swords, the Afghans should have lost any open confrontation, but the fact that they did not was mostly due to the disarray and discord in the ranks of the Safavid establishment. The shah’s superstition was fully on display as well. Confrontations were postponed at the advice of astrologers, and on the eve of the battle of Golnābād, he gave orders for his troops to be given a magic broth that would make them invisible to their adversaries (Ferrier, pp. 43-44; Lockhart, pp. 137-38). They defeated a hastily assembled Safavid force on 21 Jomādā I 1134/9 March 1722, and next moved to Faraḥābād and Jolfā, whose Armenian population greeted the Afghans (Lockhart, pp. 150-52).

The Afghan siege of Isfahan that followed lasted until the fall of the city in late October. In April popular frustration with the shah’s inertia caused an outcry of people who sought to replace Solṭān Ḥosayn with his brother, ʿAbbās Mirzā. Such attempts continued into the summer. ʿAli Mardān Khan, the governor (*wāli*) of Luristan, requested that he abdicate in favor of his brother as a more capable leader, but he refused and sent his third son Ṭahmāsb out of the city (Floor, ed. and tr., pp. 110-11, 119, 152; Lockhart, p. 161).

Even during the siege Maḥmud still showed himself willing to negotiate. In August 1722, at the height of the siege, the Afghan warlord reached out to the shah, proposing to withdraw with his forces in return for being granted control over the eastern half of Iran, Khorasan, Sistan, Qandahar, and Kerman, as well as a payment of 400,000 tumans (Gilanentz; Floor, ed. and tr., p. 157). Frantic attempts were made to collect money, by raising taxes and forcing Armenians and companies to provide “loans” in return for future favors; the VOC was asked to furnish 70,000 tumans, and agreed to pay 17,000 (Floor, ed. and tr., pp. 166-69). The Persians were unable to collect enough revenue, however, and, following final negotiations, Solṭān Ḥosayn, faced with a city filled with starving people, on 9 Moḥarram 1135/21 October 1722 was forced to surrender. That night, he rode out through Isfahan's corpse-littered streets to Maḥmud's camp, where he handed over his regalia, next to be imprisoned. Four days later Maḥmud entered the city as its new ruler (Floor, ed. and tr., pp. 173-74; Lockhart, pp. 168-73). Solṭān Ḥosayn subsequently was kept in confinement for two years.

In late 1726 the Ottomans invaded Persia, and Aḥmad Pasha, the Turkish commander-in-chief, sent an insulting message to Ašraf, who had meanwhile succeeded Maḥmud, saying that the Afghans were a miserable lot and that the Ottomans had come to reinstate Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn. Ašraf thereupon ordered the execution of Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn. He was beheaded on 9 September 1727, and his head was sent to Aḥmad Pasha in Hamadan (Floor, ed. and tr., p. 248; Lockhart, pp. 288-89). His abdication and death marked the end of effective Safavid rule, even though, formally speaking, the Safavids continued to govern until Nāder Shah Afšār deposed Solṭān Ḥosayn's son and successor, Ṭahmāsb II, in 1145/1732.

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