

# The safavid empire collapse history essay

[History](#), [Empires](#)



The Safavid Empire, which was founded as a political dynasty in 1501, was the second Great Islamic Empire to form. It originated as a religious sect, and it acquired the military and political traits of an empire only after 1501. The Safavid Empire also differed from the Ottoman and Mughal Empires because it was an officially Shi'ite empire. religious differences led to much antagonism between the Safavids and its Sunni neighbours. The Safavid Empire was the shortest-lived of the three, forming in 1501 and suffering its final collapse at the hands of the invading Afghans in 1722. It forever influenced Persian nationalism.

out of the remnants of the Safavid Empire grew the present-day country of Iran. Shah Ismail died in 1524. He was succeeded by his son, Tahmasp I, who was only 10 years old. The new shah's youth sparked a struggle between several Qizilbash factions for the advisory positions that would lead to great influence within the empire. For the first ten years of his reign, Tahmasp struggled to keep the Qizilbash from revolting, while at the same time keeping the Uzbeks from taking Khurasan and the Ottomans from taking Tabriz. In 1533 a surprise Ottoman attack, while the Safavid army was in the east fighting the Uzbeks, led to the Ottoman capture of Baghdad. which then remained in Ottoman hands for nearly 100 years. After a number of less successful Ottoman invasions in the next 20 years, the two empires signed the Treaty of Amasya in 1555, which maintained peace between them for the next 25 years.

During Tahmasp's 52-year reign, the Safavid state turned slightly away from the strict theocratic rule imposed by Ismail, towards a more secular administration. The shah was increasingly viewed in political terms, as a

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monarch, rather than only religious terms, as the head of the Safavid Sufi order. Under Tahmasp, the Safavids also began military operations in a new region - the Caucasus Mountains north of Persia - and conducted several raids against the Christian Armenians and Georgians there. Tens of thousands of prisoners were taken from this region back to Persia, which affected the ethnic mix of an empire populated mostly by Persians and Turks. Women from the Caucasus who were sent to the shah's harem tried to get their sons into positions of power, and men who were converted to Islam and trained for royal service often took up positions in the court.

Tahmasp was succeeded by his son, Ismail II, in 1576, whose brutality has led some historians to assert that he was mad. He attempted to return the Safavid Empire to Sunnism, he executed many members of his family and followers for unclear reasons, and he was murdered a year after taking power. The next ruler, Muhammad I, was nearly blind, and was deposed by his son, the 16-year-old Abbas, in 1587. Like the Ottoman Empire under Suleyman I, the Safavids under Abbas, sometimes known as Abbas the Great, reached their height during his reign. His task at the beginning of his reign was to rejuvenate the ailing Safavid Empire, which had fallen nearly to the point of collapse since the death of Tahmasp in 1576. Qizilbash revolts were paralysing the military, and the Ottomans and Uzbeks had taken advantage of that fact to occupy Tabriz and Herat, respectively, as well as much territory surrounding those cities. Respect for and loyalty to the shah had also dropped under the inept rule of Ismail II and Muhammad, and Abbas thus had the formidable task ahead of him of turning the empire around and reasserting its power in the Islamic world.

He turned his attention to military matters first, in an effort to reconquer the lands the Safavids had recently lost. In order to focus his resources on a war with the Uzbeks, Abbas concluded a humiliating peace treaty with the Ottomans in 1590. After a long war in the east, the Uzbek khan died in 1598, and in the ensuing chaos the Safavids were able to reconquer Herat and stabilise the eastern frontier. Abbas then turned against the Ottomans and retook Tabriz in 1605. In 1623, he reclaimed Baghdad after a century of Ottoman rule, and by his death in 1629, the Safavid Empire had returned to the borders first established for it by Ismail I. Abbas also concluded new agreements with foreign powers concerning trade. By the time of his ascension to the throne, the Portuguese had established bases on the islands of Hormuz and Bahrain, in the Persian Gulf, which diverted trade from the traditional overland routes across Persia to Portuguese controlled sea routes through the Indian Ocean network. Although the English occasionally traded through Persia and Russia to avoid passing through the Ottoman Empire, the Persian economy was weakened by the general loss of trade. With the establishment of the English East India Company in 1600, however, the Safavids saw a renewal of their lands as a trade route.

The East India Company broke the Portuguese trading monopoly, and by 1616 they had reached an agreement with the Safavids to trade English cloth for Persian silk. In 1622, the English helped Abbas take Hormuz from the Portuguese, since without a navy, he had been unable to quell the threat they posed to his southern coast any earlier than that. Trading relationships thus drew the Safavids into European affairs, either as a middleman for goods from India, or as an ally against the Ottoman Empire.

Domestically, Abbas also initiated several significant policies. Foremost on his agenda was to find a way to quell the constant Qizilbash fighting and revolts. He did this by establishing a permanent, paid army of his own, made up mainly of prisoners from the Caucasus, to avoid having to rely on Qizilbash military support in every Safavid campaign. The new army could put down Qizilbash revolts when necessary, and it was loyal only to the shah. In order to pay his new troops, Abbas increased crown land holdings by seizing land from Qizilbash landholders. This action not only added revenue to the royal treasury to pay the new army, but it also took further power from the Qizilbash, which was the original aim of creating a non-Qizilbash army in the first place. This internal restructuring of the empire caused a major power shift, resulting in the increased centralisation of power in the hands of the shah. In doing so, Abbas essentially ensured the survival of the empire for a century after his death, because despite the series of weak rulers who followed him, the central administration he established was able to continue operating.

In 1598, Abbas moved the Safavid capital to Isfahan from Qazwin, which had itself taken over from Tabriz, on the Ottoman border, 50 years earlier.

Isfahan was located in the centre of Persia, and thus it was not as vulnerable to attack as Tabriz or Qazwin. Abbas adorned Isfahan, which had also been the Seljuk capital centuries earlier, with the latest Persian architecture, including the Ali Qapu, or Royal Palace, and the Masjid-i Shah, or Royal Mosque. Under Abbas, Isfahan became one of the world's greatest cities.

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