

Nadir Şah (iran)

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## Nadir Shah and the Afghans, 1732-47

The whole construction is dependent on a Persian foundation. For the story of Mir Wais leads up to Nadir Shah, and Nadir... was in a very real sense the founder of the Durrani Empire of Afghanistan.

OLAF CAROE<sup>1</sup>

**F**OLLOWING THE FALL of Herat, Nadir Quli Khan appointed one of his loyalists, Pir Muhammad Khan, as governor, backed by a substantial garrison. Some 60,000 'Abdalis were exiled to various parts of Persia and 12,000 of this tribe and a *lashkar* of Tokhi Ghilzais were conscripted into Nadir Khan's army. Over the ensuing decade, these Afghan levies earned a reputation for reckless bravery – a military experience that would prove significant when Ahmad Shah Durrani subsequently carved out his own empire. Nadir Khan persisted with the Safavid policy of appointing a *mir-i Afghaniha* to oversee the internal affairs of the tribes, but instead of giving the post to a Saddozai, he appointed 'Abd al-Ghani Khan Alakozai, whose sister, Zarguna Begum, was the mother of Ahmad Shah.

Nadir Quli did not pursue his campaign across the Helmand and attack Kandahar. Instead he marched west to combat a new Ottoman offensive. During this campaign the 'Abdali levies proved their worth, pursuing fleeing Arab horsemen at the Battle of Aq Darband near Kirkuk and putting them to the sword.<sup>2</sup> In 1735/6, during the winter campaign in Daghistan, when Nadir Quli was unable to take a particularly difficult stronghold, he told Nur Muhammad Khan 'Alizai, commander of the Afghan *lashkars*, that either the 'Abdalis take the fortress or they would all be put to death. The Afghans flung themselves against the walls and despite heavy loss of life they finally broke through the defences and took control of the citadel. When the battle had ended Nadir Quli asked how he could reward the 'Abdalis for their bravery, whereupon Nur Muhammad Khan 'Alizai requested that if, or when, Nadir Quli took Kandahar, he would allow his tribe to return from exile and that he would restore Safa to the Saddozais.



The ruins of Old Kandahar and the Arghandab plains as seen from the top of the Qaital Ridge.

Nadir Quli agreed and so unwittingly laid the foundation stone of the Durrani dynasty.

Buoyed up by his victories and the peace treaty with Ottoman Turkey, on 8 March 1734 Nadir Quli finally ended Shah Tahmasp's token rule and was crowned king of Persia with the regnal title of Nadir Shah. One of his first acts was to turn the Safavid's religious policy on its head by decreeing that from henceforth the official Islamic *mazhab* of Persia was Sunnism, not Shi'ism. This decision endeared him to his Afghan troops but it alienated other powerful factions in the army, particularly the Qizilbash, as well as courtiers who had formerly served the Safavid Shahs, and the influential Shi'a religious establishment.

### Nadir Shah's conquest of Kandahar and Kabul

Having made peace with the Ottomans, Nadir Shah was now free to punish the Hotaki dynasty for its ravages during its period of rule in Persia. In December 1736 Nadir Shah set out from Kirman via the shorter, Sistan route and in February of the following year the Hotaki outpost of Girishk surrendered. Nadir Shah pushed on to the Arghandab, where the 'Abdalis again proved their worth. 'Abd al-Ghani Khan Alakozai, hearing the Ghilzais were planning a surprise attack on the Persian army, set out in the dead of night to intercept them. As they drew near their camp the

Yašt 13 upholds his spiritual lineage, safeguarding it for future generations, and he also ensures that by doing so the proper cosmic order is maintained. In his humility, he attributes his accomplishment to the splendour and the Glory of the very entities that he dedicates his hymn to. Although he recognises his accomplishment as a pivotal one, he also sees it as a single event in the vast, continuous, and magnificent unfolding of the entire cosmos towards its eventual perfection, through the efforts of all the *frauuāšī-s* (affirmative choices) of the *ašauuan-* (righteous).

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ARTICLE

The wrath of God or national hero? Nader Shah in European and Iranian historiography

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Abstract

This article examines the way in which Iran's eighteenth-century ruler Nader Shah was portrayed in contemporary Europe as well as in Iran, and how the resulting image—half national hero, half ruthless warlord—has resonated until today. In an age short on 'great' leaders, Nader spoke to the imagination like no other contemporary ruler, Western or Asian. Nader's subsequent record can be read as a palimpsest, a layered series of images of multiple world conquerors, from Alexander to Napoleon. The latter, who shared Nader's humble background and evoked a similar ambivalence, represented the closest analogue, turning him into the European Nader Shah. In the modern West, Nader no longer speaks to the imagination. Modern Iranians, by contrast, have come to see him as the Iranian Napoleon. While still ambivalent about him, they admire him as the ruler who regenerated the nation and ended foreign occupation, yet his undeniable cruelty and imperialism make him an awkward national hero.

**Keywords:** Nader Shah; history; representation; Iran; Napoleon

Providence called forth an adventurer, a leader of thieves, to become the liberator of Persia, to recover its lost provinces from the foreigner

—Charles Picault, *Histoire des révolutions de Perse pendant la durée du dix-huitième siècle*, 1810, vol. ii, p. 38

The collapse of the Safavid state at the hand of a small band of Afghan insurgents in 1722 was as unexpected and dramatic as it was consequential. The fall of Isfahan unleashed a series of events that include the invasion of north-western Iran by Russian and Ottoman forces, the quick demise of Afghan rule, and the rise to power of a succession of mostly ephemeral warlords. In the process, large parts of the Iranian plateau suffered enormous bloodshed and extortion, resulting in widespread suffering and destitution. The long-term result of all this turmoil was that Iran and its inhabitants became isolated, largely disconnected from the wider world and certainly from developments in a rapidly changing Europe.

A hundred years earlier, at the height of the Safavid dynasty, Iran had been a proud country that derived its self-confidence from the very particularism that its status as the only Twelver-Shi'i state in the world conferred on it. It had reached its apogee of

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