

Tahmasp I

Shah Tahmasp was only ten when he ascended to the throne of the Safavid Empire in 1519. He succeeded Shah Isma'il, the founder of the Safavid Empire. At this point the young Shah left the maintenance of his Empire to his ministers, and instead turned his attention to the arts of the book initiating the production of the his Shahnamah. Tahmasp himself may have been a miniaturist of some talent, while his brothers were also interested in supporting miniature painting. Tahmasp also patronized numerous wall paintings in architectural interiors.

Shah Tahmasp eventually assert his authority when he came of age, so much so that his reign of 52 years was the longest of the Safavid period. The Shah and his court faced many external challenges, while the internal institutions of the young empire were only just forming as well. During Tahmasp's reign the Uzbeks launched five major attacks and the Ottomans, under Sultan Süleyman II, made four invasions. The Safavids lost territory in many of these attacks, and Tahmasp was even forced to move his capital from Tabriz to Qazvin in 955/1548. Tahmasp was fighting wars on both Central Asian and Caucasian fronts. Nonetheless, in 1555 he was able to negotiate the Treaty of Amasya with the Ottomans on terms favorable to the Iranians. The Safavids enjoyed a relative peace for the remainder of Tahmasp's reign, and he provided a foundation for the successful reign of his successor 'Abbas.

History has not been kind to Shah Tahmasp. Travelers to the Safavid court portray the young ruler as greedy, cowardly and cruel. He was apparently unrestrained and self-indulgent in his youth, and the Shah even made a public act of repentance upon turning twenty. It was also at this time that Tahmasp began rigorously prohibiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages and hashish while also

restricting song, dance and the playing of musical instruments. These actions have consequently earned him the reputation as a kind of religious fanatic. His love of painting and the arts in general did fade, although master calligraphers and illuminators were still employed in the royal atelier in the mid 16th century. Many of his artists did eventually leave the court in search of other patronage in the provinces, including Ibrahim, the Shah's own nephew. Others such as Mir Sayyid moved on to Mughal India where they were developed the classical mode of Mughal court painting.

For more information, see:

Encyclopedia of Islam I-XII: Online Edition. <http://www.encyislam.brill.nl/>.
Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers. (esp. the articles "Safawids" and "Shah Tahmasp")

Savory, Roger. 1980. Iran Under the Safavids. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1997. Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.