

# Persian Empire

The **Persian Empire** or **Imperial Iran** (Persian: شاهنشاهی ایران, translit. **Šâhanšâhiye Irân**), refers to a series of imperial dynasties that were centred in Iran (Persia) from the 6th century BC Achaemenid Empire era to the 20th century AD in the Pahlavi dynasty era.

## Contents

### History

- Achaemenids
- Sasanians
- Safavids
- Afshars
- Zands
- Qajars
- Pahlavi dynasty

### List of dynasties described as Persian or Iranian

### See also

### References

- Citations
- Sources

### External links



Persian Empire in the Achaemenid era, 6th century BC



Tomb of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid Empire (the first Persian Empire) in the 6th century BC



Taq Kasra (Arch of Ctesiphon), symbol of the Sasanian Empire, 3rd century AD

## History

### Achaemenids

The first dynasty of the Persian Empire was created by the Achaemenids, established by Cyrus the Great in 550 BC with the conquest of the Median, Lydian and Babylonian empires.<sup>[1][2]</sup> It covered much of the then known Ancient world.<sup>[3]</sup> Persepolis, the most famous historical site related to Persian Empire in the Achaemenid era, has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Sasanians

From 247 BC to 224 AD, Persia was ruled by the Parthian Empire, which supplanted the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire, and then by the Sassanian Empire, which ruled up until the mid-7th century.<sup>[5]</sup> The Persian Empire in the Sasanian era was interrupted by the Arab conquest of Persia in 651 AD, establishing the even larger Islamic caliphate, and later by the Mongol invasion. The main religion of ancient Persia was the native Zoroastrianism, but after the seventh century, it was slowly replaced by Islam.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Safavids

The Safavid Empire was the greatest Iranian Empire established after the Muslim conquest of Persia. From their base in Ardabil, the Safavid Persians established control over parts of Greater Persia/Iran and reasserted the Persian identity of the region, becoming the first native Persian dynasty since the Sasanian Empire to establish a unified Persian state.<sup>[7]</sup>

Literature, art and architecture flourished in the Safavid era once again, and it is often cited as the "rebirth of the Persian Empire". Safavids also announced Shia Islam as the official religion in the empire versus the Sunni Islam in the neighbouring Ottoman Empire. The Safavid Empire was the first Muslim Iranian state to be a match for the Ottomans and Mameluks.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Afshars

The Afsharid dynasty was an Iranian dynasty that originated in Khorasan from the Afshar tribe. The dynasty was founded by Nader Shah. Nader rose to power during a period of chaos in Iran after a rebellion by the Hotaki Pashtuns had overthrown the weak Sultan Husayn, while the arch-enemy of the Safavids, the Ottomans, as well as the Russians had seized Iranian territory for themselves. Nader reunited the Iranian realm and removed the invaders. He became so powerful that he decided to depose the last members of the Safavid dynasty, which had ruled Iran for over 200 years, and become Shah himself in 1736. The Afsharids ruled Iran from 1736 to 1796.

## Zands

The Zand dynasty was an Iranian dynasty of Lak a branch of Lurs<sup>[9]</sup> origin founded by Karim Khan Zand that initially ruled southern and central Iran in the 18th century. It later quickly came to expand to include much of the rest of contemporary Iran, as well as Azerbaijan, Bahrain,<sup>[10]</sup> and parts of Iraq and Armenia.

## Qajars

In 1796, after the fall of the Zand and Afsharid dynasties, Agha Mohammad Khan of Qajar dynasty was the sole ruler of Iran. But soon after, in 1797, he was assassinated by his servants. Since he had no children, the shah was succeeded by his nephew, Fath-Ali Shah.<sup>[11]</sup> The reign of Fath-Ali Shah saw huge and irrecoverable territorial loss for the Persian Empire after wars against the Russians in 1804–13 and 1826–28.<sup>[12]</sup> Fath-Ali died in 1834 and was succeeded by his grandson, Mohammad Shah.<sup>[13]</sup>



Abbas the Great, the most powerful king of the Safavid dynasty

During his short reign, Mohammad Shah tried to modernize the Iranian army and recapture Herat. However, his attempts were unsuccessful. He died at the age of 40 in Mohammadih Palace in 1848. After the death of Mohammad Shah, his son, Naser al-Din Shah, ascended to the Sun Throne. He ruled for 50 years, and became the third longest reigning monarch in Iranian history after Shapur II and Tahmasp I. Many events took place during his long reign, including wars with the British Empire, the rebellion of Babis, the assassination of Amir Kabir, and the Tobacco Protest.

After the assassination of Naser al-Din Shah, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah ascended to the throne. The first Iranian revolution, the Constitutional Revolution, took place during his reign.<sup>[14]</sup> Mozaffar ad-Din Shah was the last shah who died in Iran. Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar succeeded his father in 1907. He dissolved the parliament and declared the Constitution abolished<sup>[15]</sup> and bombarded the Majlis.<sup>[16]</sup> However, he abdicated after the Triumph of Tehran by pro-Constitution forces and re-establishment of the constitution.<sup>[17]</sup>

Following the abdication of the shah in 1909, the Majlis placed his 6-years-old son, Ahmad Shah on the Iranian throne.<sup>[18]</sup> World War I took place during his reign and Iran declared neutrality. However, it didn't stop the British forces and they occupied many parts of Iran, which caused the Great famine of 1917–1919 and death of 2 million Iranians.<sup>[19][20][21]</sup>

With the 1921 Persian coup d'état, Reza Pahlavi took control of the country.<sup>[22]</sup> Ahmad Shah left Iran for health reasons In 1923 and with the official end of the Qajar dynasty in 1925 and the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty, his tour became an exile. He died in 1930 in Paris.

## **Pahlavi dynasty**

The Pahlavi dynasty was the last ruling house of the Imperial State of Iran from 1925 until 1979, when the Persian monarchy was overthrown and abolished as a result of the Iranian Revolution. The dynasty was founded by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925, a former brigadier-general of the Persian Cossack Brigade, whose reign lasted until 1941 when he was forced to abdicate by the Allies after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran. He was succeeded by his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran.

## **List of dynasties described as Persian or Iranian**

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- Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC)
- Sasanian Empire (224–651 AD)
- Safavid dynasty (1501–1736 AD)
- Afsharid dynasty (1736–1796 AD)
- Zand dynasty (1751–1794 AD)
- Qajar dynasty (1785–1925 AD)
- Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979 AD)



Extent of the first Persian Empire, the Achaemenid Empire



Extent of the Sasanian Empire in 621



The maximum extent of the Safavid Empire under Shah Abbas I



Extent of the Afsharid Empire under Nader Shah, around 1740. The borders only shrank since Nader's murder.

## See also

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- List of monarchs of Persia
- Iranian monarchy
- List of Iranian dynasties and countries
- Iranian peoples
- Persian people
- List of tombs of Iranian people

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19. [Abrahamian 2013](#), pp. 26–27: "A contemporary Iranian historian recently made the wild accusation that British food exactions to feed its army of occupation during World War I resulted in 10 million dead—half the population. He accuses the British government of "covering up" this "genocide" by systematically destroying annual reports. In fact, no annual reports on Iran were written from 1913 until 1922; the British expeditionary force of some 15,000 would not have required that much grain; and although as many as 2 million may have lost their lives in these years, the vast majority died not because of food exactions but from cholera and typhus epidemics, from a series of bad harvests, and, most important of all, from the worldwide 1919–20 influenza pandemic."
20. [Katouzian 2013](#), p. 1934: "Russian Revolution of 1917 brought much relief to Iran after a century of imperial interference and intimidation. But it was followed by severe famine and the Spanish flu pandemic which, combined, took a high toll of around two million, mostly of the Iranian poor."
21. [Rubin 2015](#), p. 508: "Despite Iran's official neutrality, this pattern of interference continued during World War I as Ottoman-, Russian-, British-, and German-supported local forces fought across Iran, wreaking enormous havoc on the country. With farmland, crops, livestock, and infrastructure destroyed, as many as 2 million Iranians died of famine at the war's end. Although the Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the recall of Russian troops, and thus gave hope to Iranians that the foreign yoke might be relenting, the British quickly moved to fill the vacuum in the north, and by 1918, had turned the country into an unofficial protectorate."
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## External links

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-  The dictionary definition of *Persian Empire* at Wiktionary
-  [Persian Empire](#) travel guide from Wikivoyage

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