

'news of a fresh set-back of their comrades at Qazwin the Afghans in Isfahan, instead of choosing the brother in Kandahar of Shah Mahmud, went to the prison where Mir Ashraf had been confined for nearly three years and offered to release him, if he would accept the sovereignty. He agreed on condition that first the head of his cousin the Shah were brought to him. After having had to overcome the resistance of some five hundred of the Shah's Hazara guards the mutineers entered the palace and, having suffocated Shah Mahmud with a pillow, decapitated him. Thus perished after a brief and bloodthirsty reign effective over no more than the centre of Persia the bold man who had destroyed the Safawi kingdom: he was not 25 years old: this was in April 1725.

'Mir Ashraf, passing through the courtyard on his way to the royal apartments, is said to have observed the remains of the Safawi princes, and ordered them to be put in chests: on four camels they were taken to Qum, one thousand Tumans being distributed to the keepers of the shrine in that town so sacred to the Shiah (the eyes of the Christian Georgian camelteers were put out on arrival—the unfortunate men were considered to merit, as bearers of such dire misfortune, the punishment of never seeing any other sight). The ex-Shah Sultan Husain had been caused by Mir Ashraf to witness this act: whether in suspicion, or mockery, or earnest, Mir Ashraf then proposed to the deposed monarch that he should resume the throne and even threw the emblem of sovereignty at the feet of Sultan Husain, while condemning the conduct of Shah Mahmud. The Safawi declined, lamented his cruel treatment by the dead Afghan and begged Mir Ashraf to accept in marriage one of his daughters: he was rewarded by the doubling of the allowances Shah Mahmud had made him—fifty Tumans weekly—and allowed to occupy himself with the building of the great palace at Farrahabad begun in his own reign but not completed.

'Hardly any less cruel and savage than his predecessor would Shah Ashraf seem to have been. On the day following his accession he ordered the Hazara guards of Shah Mahmud to be decimated in the Maidan of Isfahan: all confidants of his dead cousin were also killed: eight days later he had all principal Afghans who had rebelled against Mahmud arrested: some he had killed, others imprisoned. Amanullah Khan the general had had himself crowned king in Qazwin, so he was killed: the mother of Shah Mahmud was sent back to Kandahar.

'Meanwhile Tahmasp Mirza, the fugitive heir of Sultan Husain, from Tabriz had harassed the Armenians with constant exactions, so that some forty thousand of them are said to have retired to the mountainous country on the borders of Greater Armenia: he tried to use force and was beaten off.

'In 1724-5 the Ottoman Turks seized the opportunity of the internal strife to annex Persian territory at three points in the frontier marches. 'Ali Sarkash Pasha invaded Georgia, the chief town of which, Tiflis, had already been destroyed by the Daghistanis: Ganjeh capitulated after two days' investment. Tahmasp Mirza thought it better policy to fight the enemy from outside before taking up the struggle with the Afghans and, changing his attitude towards the Armenians and having successfully begged their assistance, defeated the Turks of the army of 'Uthman Pasha, which retired to Kars. Instead of marching at once on Isfahan he went, however, against the other Turkish army which was devastating the Georgian country, and was badly beaten; so that, after passing the rest of 1724 in the high mountains of Armenia he crossed to Mazandaran with only 8,000 to 10,000 men, and spent his time in intrigues with Qajars and Georgians, and receiving luring messages from Shah Ashraf to meet in conference.

'A second Turkish army under 'Uthman Pasha of Erzerum—whether before 1724 and the retirement on Kars, or in 1725 is not made precise in the accounts of Fr. Leander of S. Cecilia and Fr. du Cerceau—'entering by Erivan, there put 30,000 Armenians to the sword: and at the end of two months by the mediation of the patriarch of Echmiadzin the citadel of Erivan was surrendered. Tabriz was besieged' (and, as already related, 'Uthman Pasha was one of the first killed when this city was assaulted): 'many thousands were killed then, and more taken away and sold as slaves.