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INTRODUCTION

Several members have asked what is the origin of the motif which appears at the head of the Society's stationery. I am grateful to Dr Fereydoun Ala for explaining this. It is a lion's head taken from a bas-relief at Persepolis. I understand that it was also used as a personal motif by Dr Ala's father, the late Hussein Ala, who as Iranian Minister in London was joint first chairman and patron of the Society from 1935-37.

This year has been a sad one for the Society, in that we have lost two former chairmen, Sir Denis Wright and Kenneth Bradford, who in their different ways made a huge contribution to the welfare of the Society and to whom we owe much gratitude.

The Council hopes that you will enjoy the programme for the coming year. We intend to hold several special events in addition to the usual lecture programme. We are also examining ways in which we can address a wider audience, thus helping to fulfil the Society's charitable object of spreading knowledge of Persian culture in the UK.

MICHAEL NOEL-CLARKE

Chairman

THE LIFE OF MIRZA HASSAN KHAN, MOSTOFI AL MAMALEK

Lecture given by Dr Salar Bakhtiar on 24 November 2004

This is a brief résumé of the life of an aristocratic liberal politician who was six times Prime Minister of Persia and formed twelve cabinets during his Premiership.

The meaning of “Mostofi al Mamalek”

The title Mostofi al Mamalek is a specific one, and it is important to understand its significance. Mostofi is derived from the Arabic word “estifa”, meaning “to charge and collect the amount of tax legally payable”. The Minister in charge of collecting taxes and making payments, the equivalent of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was called “Vazire Daftare Estifah” and if the Shah of the time was pleased with his work, he would be given the title of Mostofi al Mamalek. This title, once granted, could be withdrawn depending on the wishes of the Shah. During the four consecutive generations of Mostofi al Mamalek the title was never withdrawn.

Family background:

In the 18th century Mirza Mohsen Ashtiani was a wealthy and influential man in the province of Ashtian. His sons were Kazem, Hashem and Aghasy, and descendants of all three sons held high government office. Mirza Kazem became Chancellor of the Exchequer and was given the title of Mostofi al Mamalek by Fath Ali Shah. His son, Mirza Hassan 1st was given the title of Mostofi al Mamalek under Mohammad Shah Qajar. Hassan Abad, a district of Tehran, was named after him. Mirza Hassan’s son, Mirza Yousef, had the title of Mostofi al Mamalek for the last 4 years of Mohammad Shah’s reign and under Nasr-ol-Din Shah.

Mirza Yousef’s son, Mirza Hassan (2nd), the subject of this lecture, was thus the fourth consecutive generation of Mostofi al Mamaleks. His father, Mirza Yousef, held the title of Mostofi al Mamalek for nearly 50 years, despite twice being dismissed from the Ministry of Finance. Mirza Yousef was a very conservative politician who tried to avoid meeting foreigners. He was keen on public works and active in developing the villages and farm lands he owned such as Yousef Abad (named after him) and Vanak and other villages in the northwest of Tehran; he had a canal dug to carry water from the Karadj River to Tehran. This canal runs through Elizabeth Boulevard.

Mirza Yousef was open minded about religion, but not popular in religious circles for two reasons: firstly, his love of dogs and hounds (he kept about 50 of them in Yousef Abad), and secondly, because of his interest in Sufism. At that time, quite a few Persian dignitaries were followers of Sufism because they were afraid that their positions of power might make them cross that fine line between self belief and arrogance, and they turned to Sufism to prevent this. Mirza Yousef was a disciple of two famous dervishes of the time, one of whom was an alchemist, astronomer and fortune teller. Mirza Yousef built a meeting place for visiting dervishes in Yousef Abad and later a mausoleum in Vanak where he was buried, as were the two dervishes and other members of the family. The mausoleum was built in an orchard, which now forms part of the grounds of the Zahra Girls College. During the last ten years of his life, Mirza Yousef was de facto Sadre Azam (Prime Minister), but he resisted accepting the post as it attracted a great deal of envy. He also personally knew two Sadre Azams who had been executed on the orders of the Shah.

The early life of Mirza Hassan

Mirza Hassan was born in 1874. When he was eight years old his father Mirza Yousef asked Nasr-ol-Din Shah to bestow on him the title of Mostofi al Mamalek. This unprecedented step has been criticised by historians but the Shah, recognising the long years of service given by Mirza Yousef and his family to the Qajar dynasty, acceded to the request. A year after Mirza Hassan was given the title Mostofi al Mamalek, Mirza Yousef accepted the post of Sadre Azam, and died a few years later. The family rumour is that the Dervish Madad Ali Shah had prophesied the date of Mirza Yousef's death many years before, and this is why he had asked for the title to be passed to his son.

Mirza Hassan Khan Mostofi al Mamalek, known henceforth as MHM, was 12 years old at his fathers' death. The Shah ordered Mirza Hedayat (MHM's second cousin, and Dr Mossadegh's father) to run the Ministry and to prepare him for his future role. He had associated with the royal children from his earliest days. At the age of 18, he married Khanom Esmat el Molouk, Nasr-ol-Din Shah's granddaughter, and henceforth he officially became a member of the royal family. From this age also he developed his love of hunting which continued throughout his life. One year later, Mirza Hedayat Vazir Daftar passed away, leaving MHM in complete control of the Ministry, with the seal of Mostofi al Mamalek. In those days it was common practice among dignitaries to use a seal instead of a signature.

The Paris years

When MHM was 22 years old, Nasr-ol-Din Shah was assassinated and the Crown Prince Mozafar -al -Din Mirza came to the throne. He was a middle aged man and brought his own retinue to Tehran. MHM had some disagreements with the new ministers, and in 1900 he decided to visit the famous Paris International Exhibition. He stayed in Paris for seven years. He kept open house for Persian writers, politicians, thinkers and kept up with Persian politics. He also took advantage of all that Paris had to offer. He travelled to different European countries and studied their systems of government. On his trips to Europe the Shah several times expressed his wish that MHM return to Persia, but he declined the invitation.

The return to Persia:

Between 1896 and 1906 there was a great deal of political unrest in Persia. Public pressure was mounting for a constitutional monarchy. There were demonstrations, assassinations, and many people sought refuge in the British consulate. In 1906 Mozafar-al-Din Shah signed the Farman [order] establishing a constitutional monarchy in Persia. At his death in 1907, Mohammad Ali Shah came to the throne. But Mohammad Ali Shah was not a constitutional monarch at heart, despite taking an oath to uphold the constitution. He invited Mirza Ali Asghar Khan Atabak Azam (Sadre Azam under the two previous Shahs) to return to Persia and take over the Premiership. He believed that Atabak Azam was a Russophile but Atabak Azam had spent the preceding years travelling and had taken to heart the merits of parliamentary democracy, and was no longer pro-Russian. On the Shah's insistence, Atabak Azam returned to Tehran and convinced MHM to accompany him. On their return, Atabak Azam was appointed Prime Minister, but MHM wanted to explore the political atmosphere of Tehran before accepting a ministerial post. He established the Humanitarian society (Jameeyate Ensaniyat) and his deputy was Mohammad Mossadegh (who in 1951 nationalised the oil industry in Iran). After a few weeks, he accepted the post of Minister of War. Atabak Azam was assassinated in August 1907, but MHM stayed on as Minister of War in the next four cabinets.

The following events had a significant effect on Persian internal and external politics: in 1907 a convention was signed by Russia and Britain dividing Persia into two zones of influence: the Russian zone was the northern part, including Isfahan. The British zone was the southeast. In May 1908 oil was discovered in Masjed Solaiman in the Bakhtiary lands in commercial quantities. Henceforth Persian oil played a major role in Persian/British relations.

In 1908 the conflict between the Shah, parliament and the people reached a critical point culminating in June when Mohammad Ali Shah ordered the bombing of the parliament building. Two days before this MHM resigned from his post as Minister of War. The Shah's actions galvanised the opposition so that in 1909 Sardar Assad Bakhtiary in the south and Mohammad Vali Khan Sepahsalar in the north both organised armies, marched on Tehran and installed Ahmad Mirza on the throne. As the young Shah was a minor, Azad al Molk (chief of the Qajar tribe) became Regent and constitutional monarchy was reinstated.

The first term of office

MHM's first term as Prime Minister of Persia began in July 1910. There were two main parties in the Persian Parliament: the Melliyoun Democrats were mostly young, well educated and had travelled to Europe. They were in favour of the separation of church and state; taxing the landowners and businesses; adopting compulsory national service and borrowing internally instead of internationally. The other party was the Etedalioun (Conservatives). They were mainly landowners, merchants, the clergy and dependents of the royal family. MHM's cabinet, backed by the Democrats, was known as the "Young Peoples' Cabinet".

Persia at this time was in turmoil, and there was a grave lack of security. As an example: Sayyed Abdollah Behbahani, a respected religious leader, was assassinated at his home. The Democrats were blamed for his murder, and the Conservatives took revenge by killing two Democrats. MHM decided to stop these assassinations: he declared an amnesty for anyone who gave up their arms. The government even offered to pay for the arms collected, but only a few people complied. Most of the outlaws were from the Mojahedin who had taken Tehran as part of Mohammad Vali Khan Sepahdar's army and were gathered at his residence. Government forces attacked the residence and took them all prisoner, thus proving that MHM was able to make tough decisions when necessary.

The Persian government received a letter from the British and Russian Ministers in Tehran complaining about the lack of security on the road between Bushehr- Shiraz- Isfahan. They gave the government 3 months to rectify the problem or else they would bring in up to 1500 Indian soldiers under British command to safeguard the route. The Persian government responded robustly that Iran was an independent country and would take the necessary measures to make the roads safe. To achieve this, they took steps to employ Swedish officers for the Persian gendarmerie.

The death of the Regent in September 1910 brought about an important turning point in Persian political life. Parliament was convened to elect the next Regent. The candidates were MHM and Mirza Abolghasem Khan Naser ol Molk. Naser ol Molk's followers emphasised the fact that he had been educated at Oxford, he had good relations with the British Government, and was on friendly terms with Sir Edward Grey and Lord Curzon, both of whom later became Foreign Office Ministers. He was also a member of the Apollo Lodge in Britain. MHM's supporters emphasised his patriotism, his popularity with the people, his membership of the royal family and his ability to take the middle way without antagonising either of the two major powers. Out of 70

members of Parliament, 28 voted for MHM, and 40 for Naser ol Molk. This was an unexpected result, as MHM's supporters had a majority in Parliament. Some people thought MHM had the backing of Sardar Asaad Bakhtiary but Sardar Asaad was a member of the French Lodge of Phase Orient and this may have influenced his decision.

At the time of the election Naser ol Molk was in Paris. He received telegrams urging him to return as soon as possible. However, he was extremely concerned about his personal safety, due to a number of political assassinations. Sir Denis Wright, in his book "The Persians among the English" writes that Naser-ol-Molk accepted the Regency because of his patriotism and pressure from Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary. It took Naser-ol Molk about 5 months to make his final decision and he arrived, at night, with an armed guard of Bakhtiary cavalry. During that time MHM was under a great deal of pressure from the Democrats to resign but he refused, saying: "the country has neither a King nor a Regent, if I resign it will not have a Prime Minister either, and this will cause chaos." And he said: "If you put me between two millstones, I will not resign." He also said: "When the Regent returns, even if you put a millstone around my neck, I will not stay." While he was still in office, the government contracted Morgan Shuster, an American financial expert, to modernise the Treasury.

The second term:

During the first part of the 20th century international diplomacy had significant ramifications for Persia. In August 1911, Germany and Russia signed the Potsdam Accord in which Germany agreed to seek no concessions in northern Persia in return for Russia not hindering German participation in the Baghdad Railway Project. This, in conjunction with the 1907 convention between Russia and Britain, gave the Russians the impression that they had complete control of northern Persia. Contrary to the Russian attitude in their zone of influence, the British Foreign Office and India Office had repeatedly telegraphed their political and military agents in Persia that the 1907 Accord was intended for trade and related purposes and was not occupation or domination. In 1914 the British Admiralty bought shares in the Anglo Persian Oil Company, thus reinforcing the importance of Persian oil in British/Persian relations. In 1915 the British signed a convention with the Russians, expanding the British zone of influence to the south and southwest of Persia, including the Bakhtiary oilfields and Khuzistan, allowing the Russians control of the Dardanelles Straits after the war.

MHM's second term of office as Prime Minister began in August 1914, immediately after the accession to the throne of Ahmad Shah, and the outbreak of the First World War. One of MHM's first acts was to declare Persian neutrality, as it would have been impossible either to have sided with the Allies against the Moslem Ottoman Empire, or with the Ottomans against the Allies. The government then asked both the Russian and Ottoman armies to withdraw from northern and western Persia. This request was ignored. The Ottomans stayed and helped Kurdish insurgents and German spies. The third session of parliament was inaugurated in December 1914. MHM was elected as an MP for Tehran but resigned in order to become Prime Minister. The manifesto he presented to parliament was considered the most comprehensive programme of reform yet undertaken by any Persian government. It included: taxing businesses and landowners; borrowing internally to pay for the budget deficit and reimburse foreign loans; expanding security organisations; bringing in compulsory military service and modernising the Ministry of Finance.

The third term:

MHM's third term began in August 1915. Although Persia had declared itself neutral, an army of about 12,000 Russian soldiers was heading towards Tehran and a contingent of 2000 arrived in Karadj (about 25 miles west of Tehran). The Persian government was afraid that if the Russians arrived in Tehran they may be put under pressure to sign agreements that were not in Persia's interests. Ahmad Shah and MHM agreed that it would be best if the Shah left Tehran and moved the capital to Isfahan. The British and Russian Ministers and the Persian parliament were against the move. The British and Russians sent a message to the Shah saying: "if you move to Isfahan a new Shah will be put in place." MHM said he would comply if the Russian army stopped at Ghazvin. Two MPs were assigned to negotiate with the Russian and British Ministers. The withdrawal of the Russian army from Karadj started in November.

At about this time some members of parliament, merchants, officers and others met and established the National Defence Committee, to arm themselves and fight against the Russians on a national basis, as the government had declared itself neutral. Parliament ceased to function and the National Defence Committee, after a few skirmishes in Qom, then in Kermanshah, finally retreated to the Ottoman Empire.

In order to fight the Germans and their sympathisers, MHM proposed to increase the number of the Cossack Brigades by 10,000. These Brigades were made up of Persian soldiers, under Russian officers. The British Minister in Tehran and the Indian Office originally favoured this idea, but later changed their minds and went for the South Persian Rifles. These were Persian and Indian troops under British officers.

The following few incidents illustrate the absence of security in the country and how it was caught up in the web of international politics: the manager of the Russian Bank in Isfahan, a Major Oliphant and a Captain Ranking of the British Army in Bushehr were assassinated. The British Vice Consul, his Secretary and a servant were shot at in Shiraz. The Aga Khan Mahalati, the Head of the Ismaili clan, who was of Persian origin but was in exile in India, proposed two solutions to the British authorities. Firstly, that they carve up Persia into two countries: the north to be handed over to Russia and the south to a reliable pro-British prince. Otherwise, the British, the Russians and the Americans should give Persia adequate financial aid and a proper guarantee of independence. Neither of these happened. The British Foreign Office and the Indian Office had their own contingency plans if the situation became untenable: they thought to create an independent country in Khuzestan, to evacuate British nationals from the Persian Gulf ports and put a brigade with a mountain battery in place to defend the oilfields. To prevent the incursion of German spies into Afghanistan and India, Russia and Britain created the East Persia Cordon: a heavily policed strip of land from the Russian border to southern Baluchistan. The Persian government also tried to obtain a 10 million dollar loan from the US, for which they pledged part of the jewels in the government vaults. However, this loan never materialized.

The fourth term:

MHM's fourth term of office as Prime Minister, which began in January 1918, was marked by a severe drought and famine which devastated the country. This was accompanied by an outbreak of influenza causing many deaths. The government was distributing 30 tons a day of cooked rice in Tehran. The American public donated millions of dollars in charity and had their own food distribution centres in Tabriz and Tehran. Despite these measures, 25% of the population died and

some even resorted to cannibalism to stay alive. As the 3rd session of Parliament had ended, MHM immediately instructed the Minister of the Interior to begin proceedings to hold elections.

In early 1918 the Ottoman army left Persia, but the Russian army was still occupying the country. Since the Russian revolution, relations with Russia were changing. The new (communist) Minister Bravin outlined his government's policy towards Persia. He confirmed the annulment of all previous agreements and the withdrawal of the Russian army. Although this was welcome, the retreating army created havoc: looting as they went; confiscating wheat, rice, livestock etc.; setting fire to farms, villages and towns and raping and killing those who had previously opposed them. In the west of Persia the British army was in control. Under General Dunsterville they were building roads, airports, barracks etc. between Baghdad, Kermanshah, Enzeli and Baku. The East Persia Cordon and the South Persian rifles were still operational. The British Army's policy was to pay for sustenance, material and services.

Sir Charles Marling, the British Minister in Tehran, sent a note to the Persian government outlining a number of proposals. The British would: help the foreign armies to leave Persia; annul the 1907 agreement with Russia over zones of influence; help Persia gain a place at the Paris Conference so that her views would be represented in the post war agreements; revise the Tariff collected by the British to benefit Persia, and pay the balance of the Customs receipts held by the British. The Persian government accepted the offer and requested that the South Persian Rifles leave and all their equipment be handed over to the Persian authorities; a Combined Command of all government forces be formed under Persian control; and immediate payment of the balance of the Customs receipts. These terms were not acceptable to the British government.

The fifth term:

MHM's fifth term began in January 1923. The First World War was over; the Russian Revolution was well established. Reza Khan who was then called Sardar Sepah had the post of Minister of War in MHM's cabinet. During this term, new trade relations were established with the Soviet Union who handed over Bandar Enzeli, a Caspian port, to the Persian authorities. In the south, the British handed over the control of the Post and Telegraph Offices. The bill for compulsory military service was passed by the parliament.

Preparations were made for the elections for the 5th Parliament. During the run-up to the elections, Modarres and his followers in the Parliament were actively campaigning against MHM. They tabled a formal question to the government, which was customarily followed by a vote of confidence. The ministers answered the questions convincingly. MHM, who was not used to this kind of street politics, was angry and disappointed. He delivered his most famous and eloquent speech to Parliament, blaming members of Parliament for "giving and taking *ajil* [dried nuts]", which in Persian means giving and taking bribes. He said "I have problems with my digestive system, and I do not take or give any *ajil*". He was the first Prime Minister to call Parliamentarians corrupt instead of cajoling and flattering them. He and his ministers left the Parliament, went straight to the Shah and resigned.

The sixth Term

MHM's sixth term began in June 1926. Reza Shah had been elected Shah and crowned. In order to legitimize his rule he needed a Prime Minister who had the confidence of the politicians and the general public, so he chose MHM. Although he was at first not keen on accepting the post,

Modarres and MHM's friends encouraged him to accept, reasoning that he was the only person who might curb the excesses of the Shah and his generals.

During this term of office a number of important actions were taken. The extra-territorial consular rights (capitulation) were abolished. The Russians had stopped trading with Persia, the merchants of the north demanded that the government buy their merchandise or else they would emigrate to Russian Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. MHM assigned Taymoor Tash to go to Russia and negotiate, and fortunately trade was restored. It was rumoured that Zoka el Molk Foroughi was sent by Reza Shah on a secret mission to Paris to offer Ahmad Shah one million pounds to resign, but the latter refused, calling Reza Shah's reign illegal. There were uprisings in Khorasan, Turkmenistan, Khoy and Salmas, which were overcome. Air traffic was established from Baku to Bushehr via Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz. The Ministry of Justice was modernised. A department was set up for the registration of official documents. Parliament agreed to impose a tax on sugar to finance the building of a railway between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. At the end of May 1927, MHM resigned from office and from political life.

The final chapter:

Mirza Hassan Mostofi al Mamalek died of a heart attack on the 27th August 1932. He was buried in the family mausoleum in Vanak village. The funeral procession was marked by the fact that the Armenian residents of Vanak carried the coffin for a mile to the Mausoleum, followed by a procession of 80 or more cars.

Mirza Hassan Mostofi al Mamalek had a unique position in the politics of Persia in the first part of the 20th century. His uniqueness lies in the length and breadth of his political career: he was a Minister at the age of 8 and Prime Minister 6 times in 17 years; the only Prime Minister to serve under both the Qajars and Reza Shah. As well as being Prime Minister he held a number of other posts during his political life: he was 7 times Minister of War; twice Minister of Finance; 3 times Consultant Minister (Minister without Portfolio), and 4 times Member of Parliament. Politics was in his blood, as he was the fourth consecutive generation of Mostofi al Mamaleks, but he was not ambitious and never schemed to be Prime Minister. He used to say: "I am not keen to be Prime Minister, but if the People and the Parliament require my services, I am happy to accept".

In his personal life he was a sportsman and a first class shot. Between many of his terms of office, he would leave Tehran to go on a long hunting trip. He was also a very generous man, donating the Karaj aqueduct to the people of Tehran. When the Americans asked to buy forty acres of land from him in order to build the Alborz College, he did not accept a penny. Instead, he asked them to spend the money on a bursary for poor Persian students. On one occasion the staff of the Prime Minister's office was asked to work over the New Year holiday, and he paid them all a month's extra salary from his own purse.

He was a liberal politician with socialist tendencies. He felt more comfortable dealing with the British as he believed they were basically interested in the expansion of trade, whereas the Russians were after territorial gains. He had little confidence in Persian politicians as he believed they changed their minds every other week. He used to say "one hears so many lies that one prefers to turn around and talk to the wall". Some historians called him soft-hearted and indecisive but his actions contradict this. My mother told me that one day MHM arrived at her house and ordered her son-in-law to stay in his room under guard. This detention lasted for two days until the two Bakhtiary snipers who were planning to assassinate Sardar Sepah were sent back to Isfahan.

During his life, he mediated on behalf of and saved the lives of a number of dignitaries such as Nosrat el Doleh Firouz [son of Farman Farma] and Soulat el Doleh [chief of the Qashqai], who was taken into custody the day after MHM's funeral. Within two years of his death a number of influential people were executed on the orders of Reza Shah.

Mirza Hassan Mostofi al Mamalek was honest, patriotic, incorruptible, polite, shy and well-mannered. In every respect he was a real gentleman. The people of Persia called him the father of the nation and even Reza Shah always called him "Agha".

FATH 'ALI MIRZA HASSAN AND THE BRITISH

*Lecture given by Samuel Parkinson, undergraduate of Oxford University
27 January 2005*

From earliest history the Persian royal court was famed for its great splendour. As successive dynasties rose and fell, royal splendour was nevertheless maintained. While many of these dynasties started out as uncultured nomads, again and again the royal court became a centre for art and poetry, as well as for politics.

At the end of the seventeenth century, as the reach of European empires grew closer and closer to Iran, European travellers, who had grown up knowing of Persian splendour and might from the pages of Xenophon and other classical authors, began to find it possible to travel to the court of the Shahs themselves. They did not find the glory and power of the ancient empires, nor that of the Safavids, accounts of whose courts many had read in the account of the traveller Jean Chardin.

When in 1736 Nadir Shah, for long a Safavid general, grew tired of fighting for his weak and inept sovereigns and usurped power, he degraded the title of Shah in the eyes of many. After his death in 1747 the country descended into anarchy, with various pretenders ruling from various cities, providing neither cultural nor political leadership. The era of the splendid, settled court was at an end.

In 1760 Karim Khan Zand took the title of 'Vakil', or 'regent', which connected his legitimacy to the Safavids themselves, rather than to the office they had held. Neither he nor his successors chose to uphold a kingly dignity. He is depicted in paintings not only smoking surrounded by friends, but by friends who do not even focus their interest upon him. A later traveller, Morier, described him, saying '*his profession was the single occupation of all his countrymen, robbery*'⁽¹⁾ He went on to describe the history of Persia in the eighteenth century as '*A catalogue of the names of tyrants and usurpers*'⁽²⁾. The sacred aura of the Safavids had long departed by the time Aqa Mohammad Qajar began to reunite Iran in the 1780s.

This man, bloody and treacherous though he was, regarded the office he held with great veneration – going as far as to beat a courtier who said the Afghan King had 'come to the earth at the feet of his slaves'⁽³⁾: this he regarded as the degradation of a title at once sacred and powerful.

Aqa Mohammad's aim to seat his nephew, Baba Khan, on the throne was easily accomplished after his death. He had defeated, with treachery and cunning as much open warfare, all those rivals still capable of offering a real threat. He executed his last great rival, Lutf 'Ali Khan in 1794, only three years before he was himself assassinated.

His nephew, the new Fath 'Ali Shah, presented a great contrast to his uncle, who had been a eunuch, prodigiously ugly, and known for violence and cruelty. Fath 'Ali Shah's experience, in contrast to that of his uncle, was of administration rather than war, and, vitally, he was young and virile. The twin signs of his fruitful masculinity, his great beard and his numberless children, were to become symbols almost of regality itself.

The peace that had been restored in Persia changed the balance of power all across the region. Persia was now able to contain the Afghan threat and prevent the potentially more serious French threat to India. To ensure that she did so, Arthur Wellesley, the governor-general of India, followed up an earlier mission by a Persian by sending the first British envoy, Captain John

Malcolm, who himself recorded the reasons for his journey: the Persians 'have in most ages acted a conspicuous part on the theatre of the world'.⁽⁴⁾ In her closeness to India, the importance of Persia for trade and strategy could not be overlooked, especially as she renewed contact with other European States.

For the Shah and his court, Malcolm's arrival was an opportunity to display all the grandeur the court had to offer – and to vie with their models, all the ancient rulers of Persia.

As neither side was familiar with conducting such an affair, considerable negotiation preceded it. Malcolm noted again and again the strictness with which the Persians tried to adhere to precedent; a secretary produced several pictures of ambassadors from two centuries before, during the height of Safavid splendour. One of these, entitled 'Painting of the English Representative', depicted a man in full court costume from the time of Elizabeth I, most probably Sir Anthony Shirley. The Secretary went on to say 'This is the pattern which it is hoped you will adopt, as his majesty desires to follow in all points the usages of the Seffavean Kings, since they well understood what was due to the dignity of the throne of Persia'⁽⁵⁾. While this difficulty was resolved by simple agreement, in another the English themselves had to resort to Safavid books and pictures, to show that the suite of the embassy had the right to sit in the presence of the Shah.

This made a great impression on Malcolm, who wrote '*there is no court where a more rigid attention is paid to ceremony*'⁽⁶⁾.

Indeed, the ceremony of reception was long and elaborate. The moment the suite of the mission arrived in the court, wearing the long red stockings and high-heeled green slippers necessary for the audience, all was complete silence. Conducted to a small room, they were met by a principal officer of state and took coffee until the Shah was announced to be on the throne.

The approach to the Shah himself was careful and precise. The envoys advanced through a garden laid out in walks and fountains, along which all the guards, courtiers, nobles and ministers were arrayed in splendid costume. They, though, '*were eclipsed in a moment, when the eye glanced at the sovereign whose throne and dress are covered in the richest jewels*'⁽⁷⁾. Advancing between two officials carrying golden wands, Malcolm made his obeisance and the Shah bid him welcome. After a brief conversation on the difficulty of being King of England, with only one wife and no mistress, Malcolm presented his splendid gifts to the Shah.

Malcolm saw the Shah's court as a man who had begun his Indian service at thirteen; he was far from learned, and more soldier than diplomat. He was used to royal courts, and quoted appreciatively a Persian who told him 'to be understood by my countrymen, you must address their eyes'⁽⁸⁾.

The Shah's daily life intrigued Malcolm as much as the splendour of the court. Accordingly, he recorded the pattern of the Shah's daily life, as did other travellers after him. What he saw impressed him: he thought that 'there is no country where the monarch has more personal duties than Persia'. He was, according to Malcolm, accessible and engaged with the people – he was 'six or seven hours each day in public; during which time he is not only seen but accessible to a number of persons of all ranks'⁽⁹⁾. Nor was this merely symbolic. The purpose of these public appearances was to administer justice – one member of a later English military mission to Persia would receive redress for withheld pay by appealing to the Shah in person at the morning audience.

Malcolm also sought to modify views of the Shah as a brutal and tyrannous ruler. Though the lives of those in his immediate entourage depended upon his whims, those of the rest of the populace did not, for, as Malcolm pointed out, even an absolute ruler still risked losing his authority by acts of arbitrary injustice.

Malcolm's success in securing a treaty with the Shah was soon overturned by the French, who secured a treaty with the Shah in 1807, guaranteeing their troops passage to India. The terror this caused resulted in separate, rival envoys being sent from India and England. While Malcolm set out from India, Sir Harford Jones⁽¹⁰⁾, who had been Resident at Baghdad, was created a baronet and accredited by the crown, outranking Malcolm considerably. Eventually, they met and clashed in Persia, to the great embarrassment of all, but Harford Jones, accompanied by James Morier – who set out to keep a journal 'à la Chardin'⁽¹¹⁾ – arrived in Tehran first, in February 1809, and Malcolm returned, in the end, to India.

He, unusually, had experience in Persia, but this had been decades before, when the country was ruled by the Zands. Although he was accepted by Fath 'Ali Shah, whose dynasty had overthrown the Zands, the Shah told him in no uncertain terms that had he fallen into the hands of his uncle and predecessor he would not easily have escaped. He would later write rather bitterly of his journey, in an attempt to vindicate his own conduct and in an attempt to change British policy towards Persia.

The new envoy arrived at the court during Muharram, and was thus denied the spectacle of the court in its full splendour. Despite the honour of receiving even a sober and private audience with the Shah at this time, Morier was disappointed with the sombre tone the court adopted at this time.

Harford Jones's role was to obtain a preliminary treaty with the Shah, securing the country against French influence – hardly difficult, as the French had signed the Treaty of Tilsit with Russia, Persia's old enemy.

Though the treaty was soon secured, Harford Jones rapidly demonstrated his ineptitude as a diplomat - perhaps unsurprising in a man whose early career was as an adventurer and jewel merchant. In negotiations with the Prime Minister, Mirza Shefi, he was asked whether he sought to cheat the Persians. His response was to push the aged minister against a wall, kick over the candles, and ride away in a fury. When he appeared before the Shah himself, he continued to refuse to apologise for his conduct. Nor did he later come to regard this as ill-advised; instead of an apology, he told the Shah that his prime minister 'knows no more of foreign politics and policy, than a kitten'⁽¹²⁾, and that he wished to conduct negotiations with the Shah in person. Another minister noted that the Shah was highly amused at this – indeed, he had never seen him in a 'gayer mood'⁽¹³⁾ than when repeating this as a joke.

Successive missions would interact with varied ministers in utterly different ways, and became easily caught up in court factions and hatreds. While Malcolm was fond of the powerful Hajji Ibrahim, Harford wrote that he was 'as execrable a scoundrel as ever lived; he was the Macbeth of Persia'⁽¹⁴⁾. Malcolm quite excused this man's past bloodiness, and quoted his pathos-ridden response to his enemies: 'my object has been to give this country a king; I cared not whether he was a Zend or a Kajar' 'I have seen enough of these scenes of blood'⁽¹⁵⁾. In the end, Hajji Ibrahim proved too powerful for his own safety, and he and his family were brutally killed by the Shah; for a long time after, the Shah would blame his ministers for driving him to this. In crises, he would say 'where is Hajji Ibrahim? He alone was fit to give council to a monarch'⁽¹⁶⁾.

No short-term envoy, though, became more involved in court politics than Harford Jones. When the crown prince, Abbas Mirza, and a leading minister, Mirza Bozorg, wished to restrain the Shah from foolhardily attacking Russia, they asked Harford Jones to take part in the Shah's council. They did not dare present the weakness of Persian forces to the Shah, but Harford could. He said, 'A Persian council appeared to me to mean little more than to give the Shah an opportunity to deliver... his opinion and wishes on any matter he saw fit'⁽¹⁷⁾.

Fear of the Shah – especially after the death of Hajji Ibrahim – was normal among higher ministers, and this dangerous, unpredictable life fascinated Europeans. Harford Jones described especially Mirza Bozorg, who sought to make himself a less attractive target to an avaricious Shah by possessing no wealth. Indeed, the only fine possessions he owned were, because of his piety, his prayer carpets; he parted even with these as a farewell gift to Harford Jones, who had admired them.

The minister who was most involved with the British and the Europeans, however, was Hajji Mirza Abu'l Hasan Khan. He accompanied Morier to England as the Shah's envoy, to complete the signing of the treaty; Morier made him the basis of the hero of his novel Hajji Baba of Ispahan, which portrayed the Shah as an idiot and the Persians as scoundrels. For years afterwards, the novel was recommended to those involved in the diplomatic service in Persia, as an accurate portrayal of the country.

Yet Abu'l Hasan's long and colourful career was not typical, though it shows the uncertain nature of royal service. His first patron was Hajji Ibrahim – resulting in a precipitate flight to Basra and an uncharacteristically pious pilgrimage to Mecca when the minister fell. Later, when he was again received by the Shah, he went first to England (a task no powerful minister would accept, for fear of losing influence during a long absence), and then to Russia in 1815; in 1819, he was again the Shah's envoy, this time to Vienna, Paris, Constantinople and London. He rose to foreign minister until he opposed the 1826-8 war with Russia. His career ended in rebellion against the Shah's successor, due to his rivalry with another minister, the son of Mirza Bozorg.

Though the rather strait-laced Morier had described Abu'l Hasan as a dear friend, and gained most of his understanding of Persia from him, a later traveller wrote, 'there is no man at court less respected and less deserving', and described him as 'proverbially false'⁽¹⁸⁾. He was in fact, extremely dissolute, disgusting the entire court. It is perhaps unsurprising that Morier regarded the entire nation as despicably untruthful and immoral.

Persia's ministers fascinated travellers. They had great influence, but their positions were precarious, dependent on the utterly unpredictable Shah for their lives and livelihoods. Though Malcolm saw them as competent and well selected, they perhaps evoked more sympathy than respect – Harford Jones wrote 'I know of no situation I should so little like to fill as that which may be called a cabinet minister of Iran'⁽¹⁹⁾.

The power of a tyrannous Shah was, to the British mind, perhaps well demonstrated at the festivities of Now Ruz. Amid the splendour of the court's greatest celebration, Harford Jones noted that Persia was 'the severest despotism... I doubt whether there is a place in the world where, generally speaking, when the people are collected in a mass, and in the presence of their ruler, a more submissive and silent awe is exhibited'⁽²⁰⁾. But at this gathering, for the horse races that ended just outside the city, he also noted that once the horses arrived, the division between the people and the ruler broke down; the Shah clapped and chatted outside his tent, demonstrating

that 'there is no difference in the clay of which the china is made, though there certainly is in the gilding'⁽²¹⁾

The British were as aware of the nomad origins of the Qajar as the Persians themselves were. Harford Jones, who had travelled with the Zands, was therefore fascinated to be invited to the royal summer camp at 'the beautiful plain of Sultania', where the Shah continued that life. As he noted, 'whether the camp was that of a Zand or Qajar prince, the form and arrangement of it were the same'⁽²²⁾; he pointed out that this was elaborate, and defined carefully the precedence of those privileged enough to accompany the Shah, who was himself set apart from the rest of the camp by large canvas screens. Harford Jones thought that 'the description of Darius' camp would almost serve for that of Fath Aly Shah'⁽²³⁾.

Even more than this, it was the great splendour of the camp that seemed to hark back to the glorious days of Darius. While travellers tended to be contemptuous of Persian palaces, they had to admit that their tents were far more splendid than European equivalents. Harford Jones noted that 'The prodigious extravagance of the Persians in their tents would seem to us almost incredible'⁽²⁴⁾, and estimated that some of the Shah's tents were worth thirty to forty thousand pounds. Some were lined entirely with cashmere scarves. The Shah sacrificed little comfort while at his camps – there was always a temporary fountain decked with flowers in front of his tent, and when staying in one place for a few days or more, he also had a little garden of sweet and flowering annuals.

This splendour was directly comparable to that of the ancient Persians of which the British knew from the classics: Harford Jones compared Fath 'Ali Shah to Darius on the march, as described by Arrian and Quintus Curtius, and concluding that their dress was 'as similar as it was well possible that they could be'⁽²⁵⁾.

The sheer size of the camp was awesome – Harford Jones estimated that it contained thirty to forty thousand people. The Shah was accompanied by all his ministers; even his gate had the same guards, and he had a balcony above an immense Maidan to conduct the same reviews of his troops.

Before he left in 1811 Harford Jones asked, as a special favour, to be allowed to examine the Persian crown jewels. While many had expressed doubts about earlier reports of their splendour, Harford Jones had himself been a jewel-merchant, and was thus able to appraise them accurately. As these splendid jewels – many of which had been looted from Delhi by Nadir Shah decades before – were a key part of the oriental splendour that so fascinated European audiences, Harford Jones's opportunity was unique and important.

His verdict was clear. Many of the gemstones in the crown itself, though poorly set, were 'perhaps the finest specimens in the world', and the innumerable pearls were 'unmatchable'. He noted that their combined weight, with that of the crown itself, was astonishing – so much so that once, when, in disobedience to protocol, he looked back while leaving the Shah, 'I saw one of the favourite Georgians taking the crown off the king's head and another place an embroidered handkerchief over the bare head'⁽²⁶⁾.

The splendour of these jewels was, in the British mind, linked to the splendour and power of the only Persia they knew anything about – that described in the classics. Robert Ker Porter would later say of the peculiar, tiered crown, that its 'shape has long been usual to the crown of the King of Kings'⁽²⁷⁾. As Fath 'Ali Shah was unquestionably the first to wear a crown of such a shape,

which was a modification of a design of his uncles, it is clear that travellers easily allowed themselves to be carried away by the dream of a continuity between the ancient and modern in the Persian monarchy.

With the signing of Harford Jones's treaty, and the recognition that the country had become peaceful, Persia moved into the true diplomatic sphere of Great Britain, and a more regular diplomatic presence was necessary. Sir Gore Ouseley, with the rank of minister extraordinary and plenipotentiary, was sent to the country. To impress the Persians with the permanence of their friendship, he was accompanied by his wife. Again accompanied by the younger Morier, they sought not only to continue diplomatic efforts, but also to collect art and visit ancient ruins such as Persepolis.

Not long after Ouseley's arrival, however, hostilities broke out between Persia and Russia. The Shah was disappointed by the lack of British help but this conflict also highlighted the impossibility of waging war against a modern power with ancient techniques. It deeply damaged the reputation of the Shah, of the crown Prince Abbas Mirza – who had conducted the war – and meant that the religious establishment, in particular, became dissatisfied with the conduct of war against the unbeliever. The prestige of the monarchy was damaged.

At this time, the British became similarly disillusioned. Gore Ouseley returned to Britain, and Morier remained in a country he grew to hate more and more. Although in most of his published work on the country he sought to restrain his dislike, to prevent diplomatic difficulties, he felt free to express his true feelings to his brother: 'I do detest it most cordially... I hate its inhabitants with an insurmountable hatred'⁽²⁸⁾. As his accounts, along with his novel *Hajji Baba*, shaped much of British perception of the country, we may wonder how this prejudiced relations between the two countries.

As Persia seemed to hold little attraction as a modern country, British images of the country were increasingly romanticised. This, of course, coincided with the Romantic Movement itself. Robert Ker Porter, an artist and travel writer, whose sisters were novelists, and whose commitment to the romantic movement was unquestioned, was one of the first tourists to the country, and his descriptions had none of the sobriety of earlier travellers. He was particularly fascinated by the harem, fitting neatly into the long European obsession with the mystery of a secret, female world. As Fath 'Ali Shah possessed one of the largest harems of any Persian monarch, Ker Porter was able to give his imagination free rein.

The only European reported to have entered the harem of Fath 'Ali Shah was Sir Gore Ouseley's wife, Harriet. As she was too overcome by shock to notice much around her, it remained an enigma. Malcolm wrote of the temptation that existed to 'give the rein to my imagination, and create scenes, that however unreal, might please and interest my readers'⁽²⁹⁾. He did not, and those who came after him followed suit; Harford Jones limited himself to suggesting that he had 'reason to believe the present Shah is fond of being read to'⁽³⁰⁾, in addition to listening to music, poetry and conversation when he entered the harem.

Ker Porter, the artist and romantic, saw no reason to limit himself so drastically – he was happy to imagine the Shah watching '*the loveliest objects of his affection sporting like naiads amidst the crystal stream*' of their baths, and eulogising the beauties '*from all parts of Asia*'⁽³¹⁾ that he had certainly never seen. His accounts of the Negaristan palace in particular paid little attention to the palace itself, and more to what occurred there during the few days the Shah spent there with members of the harem at the beginning of the summer.

More sober travellers left rather more sober details. The harem of Fath 'Ali Shah did not merely mirror the outer court in conception, but in all its details. Before the Shah left it in the morning, he held a levee comprising three hundred persons; these were co-ordinated by women holding offices identical to those in the outer court.

Ker Porter was equally imaginative in other areas, particularly those that concerned the antiquity of Persia. He pronounced that 'I see sufficient evidence to admit the probability that it even originated with, or rather was reappointed by the venerable antediluvian patriarch [Noah] himself'⁽³²⁾

At the same time, however, he possessed a sense of humour other travellers – especially Morier – had lacked. While others had described life in sober detail, he recorded his embarrassment and that of other Europeans in Persia circles. His descriptions of eating in Persian homes were particularly comic - Persians sat on the floor to eat, wearing hats, and leaning over to eat with their hands. The discomfiture of Europeans, who had to sit on the floor for hours, trying to prevent their cocked hats and feathers ending up in dishes as they ate, was severe; Ker Porter discovered that at every attempt to throw rice into his mouth, it went up his sleeve instead. Few others had been willing to describe their experiences so candidly, especially while seeking to make a career as respectable experts on Persia.

Ker Porter, though not the last to visit the Shah's court was one of the last to be genuinely impressed by its full splendour. That splendour did not outlive the Shah, who died in 1834. A young man accompanying a mission to the court of his successor Muhammad Shah wrote 'I was much disappointed, having expected to find some remains of that Asiatic splendour which in Europe is supposed to accompany the persons and courts of Eastern monarchs... with the exception of the regalia itself there is not a thing worth looking at in the Persian court'⁽³³⁾. Poverty, and shame at the constant failures of Persian troops against the Russians, made the splendour inherited from generations of Persian rulers seem worthless, a bauble without substance. The long age of Persian courtly splendour was over.

(1) J Morier 'A Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor' (London 1812), pxiii.

(2) Ibid, p.x.

(3) J Malcolm 'The History of Persia' (2 vols, London 1815), ii, 300.

(4) Ibid, ii, vii.

(5) J Malcolm, 'Sketches of Persia' (2 vols, London, 1827) ii, 208.

(6) J Malcolm, 'History of Persia', ii, 554.

(7) Ibid, ii, 556.

(8) Ibid, ii, 569

(9) Ibid, ii, 434.

(10) Later Sir Harford Jones-Brydges

(11) Balliol College Library, Morier Family Papers, D1.6.7 (J.J. Morier to D. R. Morier, 16th November 1808).

(12) H. Jones-Brydges, 'An account of his majesty's Mission to the Court of Persia' (London, 1834), p. 211.

(13) Ibid p.211.

(14) Ibid p.413.

(15) J. Malcolm, 'Sketches', ii, p.222.

(16) Ibid, p.224.

- (17) H. Jones-Brydges, *'An Account'*, p.266.
- (18) J. Baillie Fraser *'Narrative of a journey into Khorasan'* (London 1825) p.150.
- (19) H. Jones-Brydges, *'An Account'*, p.424.
- (20) *Ibid*, p.234
- (21) *Ibid*, p.235.
- (22) *Ibid*, p235.
- (23) *Ibid*, p237.
- (24) *Ibid*, p238.
- (25) *Ibid*, p242-3.
- (26) H. Jones-Brydges, *'An Account'*, p382.
- (27) R. Ker Porter *'Travels in Georgia, Armenia, ancient Babylonia, &c.'* (2vols. London 1821-22, i,325.
- <!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->⁽²⁸⁾ Balliol, Morier Family Papers, D1.8.12 (J.J. Morier to D. R. Morier, 6th June 1812).
- (29) J. Malcolm, *'Sketches'*, ii, 219.
- (30) H. Jones-Brydges, *'An Account'*, p423.
- (31) R. Ker Porter *'Travels'* i,339.
- (32) *Ibid*, i, 318.
- (33) D. James *'An Irish Visitor to he court of the Shah'*, in *'Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review'* (Dublin), LX 1971 p. 153.

THE IRANIAN STATE TREASURY

Abbreviation of a lavishly illustrated lecture by Diana Scarisbrick, on 23rd June 2005

Although there are other royal treasuries, notably in Lisbon, Dresden, London, Moscow and Istanbul, none of these equals the size and quality of that of Iran. The regalia – crown, sceptre and sword – of the Western monarchies were inspired by those of the Achaemenid rulers of Persia. Alexander the Great was so impressed by these symbols of sovereignty that, after defeating the Emperor Darius in 331BC, he adopted them for his own court and thereafter they became part of the European royal tradition.

Nothing remains of the treasure of any of the dynasties that followed the Achaemenids, not even of the great treasure of Shah Abbas, which was admired by the travellers and jewellers J. B. Tavernier and Sir John Chardin when they visited Isfahan in the 17th century. The collection as we see it today is due to four later rulers: Nadir Shah, who in 1739 acquired the Moghul treasure of India; Fath Ali Shah, who used Nadir Shah's treasure to evoke the ancient glories of Persia; Nasser ud-Din Shah, who made substantial additions to it, and Mohammed Reza Shah, who brought it up to date.

It was Mohammed Reza Shah who in 1960 installed the treasure in its present form in the museum constructed by Boucheron, the famous Paris jewellers. It was his father Reza Shah who, on the advice of Calouste Gulbenkian the great oil tycoon, in 1931 asked Louis Boucheron to estimate the value of Nadir Shah's treasure so that it could be used as collateral for a loan. This telegram: 'Mr Boucheron please come and value my treasure signed the Shah of Persia' which came out of the blue, in the midst of the economic slump then afflicting the West, seemed so fanciful that Louis Boucheron assumed it was a hoax and ignored it. The Foreign Secretary then persuaded him that the request was genuine and, on arrival in Tehran, he was appointed Hereditary Keeper of the Treasure, which was then in a state of confusion stacked up in chests in the vaults of the Gulistan Palace. He duly made his valuation and in 1937 the treasure was declared State Property and became the guarantee for the currency. World War II intervened and it was Louis Boucheron's son Gérard who was responsible for the display we see today.

Now we must look at the founder and his successors: *[slide of portrait of heavily bejewelled]* Nadir Shah, who captured Delhi in 1739 and seized the vast treasure of the Moghul Empire. What we see in the Central Bank today is what is left of this extraordinary collection. The reason why these gems are merely polished and not faceted is that the Moghul and Iranian courts believed that the power of the wearer was in direct proportion to the weight of the stones he owned and, since faceting reduced it, they preferred them to remain in their natural cabochon form.

The next ruler responsible for the Treasury as we see it today was Fath Ali Shah who during his reign 1797-1834 maintained the absolute authority of the Qajar dynasty by dazzling his subjects with wonderful shows of splendour for the New Year celebrations, firework displays, military reviews, and diplomatic receptions. Like Louis XIV before him he was convinced that men are ruled by their eyes and not their intellect and that therefore an outward show of magnificence is the essential means of conveying the majesty and glory of the monarch.

In this portrait sent to Napoleon in 1807 he is shown ablaze with jewels surrounded by the accoutrements of sovereignty that invest him with the sacred aura of Persia's ancient kings. Note that the two biggest jewels are set in the armbands rather than in the crown. These are the diamonds *Darya-i Noor* [Sea of Light] and the *Kuh-i Noor* [Mountain of Light]. The Sea of Light

is still in the collection, but the *Kuh-i Noor* is now part of the British Crown Jewels, set in the centre of the Queen Mother's Crown.

Note also the Royal Crown surmounted by the magnificent aigrette of egret's feathers which were emblematic of Persian royalty. Fath Ali Shah was determined to associate himself with the ancient kings of Persia and there is no doubt that his royal crown was inspired by the crenellated crowns of the Sassanian kings of the third to seventh centuries A.D. as seen on their coinage. The tall jewelled cylinder enclosing the red velvet cap is crenellated as in the Sassanian prototype. Made in 1797 for Fath Ali Shah, it consists of a diamond studded headband, a pearl pavage rising to the top which is centred on two jickahs or jewelled plumes, one of diamonds the other of emeralds, rising from a great emerald of 80 carats. Some of the pearls and stones can be removed so that others from the Treasury can be displayed in their turn. What you are looking at is no less than 1800 pearls, 300 emeralds, 1500 rubies or spinels and many, many diamonds. Each of the seven Qajar monarchs who followed Fath Ali Shah was crowned with it.

After Reza Pahlavi replaced the last of the Qajar emperors in 1925 he had a new crown and a new sceptre and robe made for his coronation in 1926, to mark the establishment of a new dynasty. The Pahlavi crown is also inspired by Sassanian prototypes, as is indicated not only by the crenellated top but by the sunbursts in the centre, set with a 60 carat yellow brilliant cut diamond, and by the motif used for the aigrette which is also repeated on the headband. It was made by Iranian jewellers supervised by Haj Serajeddin, formerly court jeweller to the Emir of Bokhara, and comprises 3,389 diamonds, including the marquise shape below the aigrette, 369 pearls, five emeralds and two sapphires.

Since I am talking to the [Anglo] Iranian society I should mention that the English were involved. The contents of the Treasury were still in the Gulistan Palace and the Lord Chamberlain invited Lady Loraine, wife of the British Minister, to choose jewels to display in showcases round the walls of the Throne Room. This experience captured the poetic imagination of Vita Sackville West, whose husband Harold Nicolson was at the Legation, and she remembered how "We plunged our hands up to the wrists in the heaps of uncut emeralds and let the pearls run through our fingers. We forgot the Persia of today and we were swept back to Akbar and all the spoils of India."

In 1967 Mohammed Reza Shah, like his father, crowned himself with the same crown. He then crowned his wife the Empress Farah with a new specially commissioned crown. This was the masterpiece of the Parisian jeweller Van Cleef and Arpels. Van Cleef took some time before grasping what was required. The preliminary sketches show variations of the European crown similar to ours, then versions of Indian style turbans with great aigrettes until finally the final design emerged which, although different from the red and white Pahlavi crown, is still very Iranian in character as well as royal and modern. The green, white and red stones represent the colours of the national flag. The great 150 carat Moghul fluted emerald that is the heart of the design proclaims the link with Nadir Shah, as do the other 1,646 wonderful stones which contribute to the effect of great splendour. Looking at it today, one would never guess that it was executed in the most difficult conditions. Not even the Shah dared ask permission from the Bank authorities for Van Cleef to remove the stones so that they could be set in the Paris workshops, nor was any recutting of the stones permitted – as Pierre Arpels commented, "They just don't trust us!" During all the time that the Van Cleef team were working on the crown they were supervised by the court dignitaries. They managed to overcome the problems by making moulds so that each of the stones could be cast in metal, and then inserting these copies in the wax model of the crown itself. After three months' work the platinum and gold frame was ready and was sent

from Paris, with the stone setters and polishers working in the bank to put the real stones and pearls in place in time for the coronation. The only suggestion from the Emperor and Empress was to ask that the rubies round the central emerald and in the centre of the two side elements should be on the pale side; otherwise they had total confidence in Pierre Arpels. As he had to travel twenty-five times to Teheran and take his staff there he did not make any money from this commission, for which he was paid \$54,000, but the thrill and the excitement of creating such a jewel made it all worth while. When completed, he gave it to the Empress who put it on her head, looked in the mirror, turned towards him and said, “Mes compliments, Monsieur!”

Although Nadir Shah is said to have brought 10 jewelled thrones from Delhi, none survive. This one is sometimes mistaken for the jewelled peacock throne of the Moghuls, but in fact it was originally called the Sun Throne after the diamond sun burst shining out at the top of the back. The confusion over the name is due to the fact that it was renamed after a wife of Fath Ali Shah, named *Taous* [Peacock]. Another throne, although called *Nadir* [Rare, Marvellous], was in fact made for Fath Ali Shah. The frame of wood is covered with gold plaques enamelled and encrusted with 26,733 gemstones. The motifs include parrot heads, suns, ducks, foliage, jewelled medallions and lions. It can be dismantled into 12 separate sections to accompany Fath Ali Shah on hunting trips and tours of inspection.

Among the thousands of diamonds brought back from Delhi by Nadir Shah is the *Darya-i Noor*, part of the Great Table diamond. Fath Ali Shah wore it on the centre of one of the armband above his elbow and had his name inscribed on the outer edge. About 4cms wide, and weighing 185 carats, it is the largest pink diamond in the world. It came from the Golconda mines in India. Fath Ali Shah's successors, who adopted European style clothes, liked to pin it to the hat as an aigrette. For this purpose it was set in this diamond frame surmounted by a version of royal crown flanked by two lions carrying swords. Reza Shah also wore it pinned to his military cap.

Another great diamond in the collection is the Taj-i Mah or Crown of the Moon. Although the Koh-i Noor was later lost to Iran, as was the Shah diamond, there still remains this stone, the largest unset Indian diamond in the Treasury. It weighs 115 carats and is flawless and colourless: length 1.3 inches. Nasser ud-Din Shah (1848-1896) added substantially to the collection of diamonds, not only through the many presents he received from Queen Victoria and the King of Italy but also by spending lavishly on the large yellow Cape diamonds which are one of the remarkable features of the collection. He set up diamond cutting workshops in the Gulistan Palace. This explains why there is such a variety of cuts: flat table, rose, brilliant, marquise, baguette, briolette and mogul – adding up to no less than 62 different types. Although Iranians objected to faceting coloured stones this did not apply to diamonds, for they recognised that it is the faceting which releases all their fire and brilliance.

Pearls from Bahrain: According to Chardin, Bahrain produced one million pearls per year, of much more splendour and better and higher colour than those of the West. The Shah had the right to the best and largest of them. Strung into strands, tassels, ropes epaulettes, belts with emerald fringes, prayer beads, embroidered on carpets and cushions: like diamonds, they balance the bright colours of the wonderful rubies and emeralds. In this portrait of Nasser ud-Din Shah painted in 1857, he wears ceremonial dress of Western design with insignia, diamond epaulettes, belt, arm bands and sabre scabbard. Additional adornment is provided by the ropes of wonderful pearls festooned across his chest, echoed by the pearl drops hanging from the jickah pinned to the tall lambskin hat with egret feathers. The artist has conveyed something of the lively personality that won him so many friends on the three great trips he made to Europe.

The Great Globe: this is perhaps the most amazing object of all in a collection that gemmologists describe as “out of this world”, commissioned by Nasser ud-Din Shah. The sea is composed of emeralds; South-East Asia, Iran, England and France are of diamonds; India is shown in pale rubies; Central and South America in sapphires, and the equator in diamonds and rubies; the gold stand itself is also studded with gems. It anticipates Fabergé. Looking at it today we can feel something of the huge pleasure Nasser ud-Din Shah took in contemplating such an amazing object. And it brings me to the end of my brief survey of this incomparable collection of nature’s most marvellous creations.

OBITUARY

SIR DENIS WRIGHT G.C.M.G, 1911-2005

A compilation of tributes from some of his Iranian and British friends

Denis was chairman of the Iran Society from 1976 to 1979 and president from 1989 until 1995. His term as chairman coincided with the upheavals of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Through his own personal prestige, as well as by firm but tactful chairmanship, Denis ensured that, at a time of exceptional turbulence, the Society avoided any involvement in Iranian politics and survived. Other friendship societies have split or collapsed at times of revolution. Denis not only kept the Society together but, with the fate in his mind of the original Persia Society, which faded away due to lack of public interest, he drove it forward by the force of his energy.

On his retirement from the Diplomatic Service after an unprecedented two consecutive terms in Iran, Denis had several second careers: he was a director of such UK companies as Shell, Mitchell Cotts and the Standard & Chartered Bank and was president of the British Institute of Persian Studies from 1978-1987. Although he always denied being a scholar, he made a notable contribution to the history of Anglo-Iranian relations, not only with his books *The English amongst the Persians* and *The Persians amongst the English* but with numerous other historical articles and vignettes, which the Iran Society later compiled and published as *Britain and Iran 1790-1970*. He also held honorary fellowships at his own college, St Edmund Hall, and at St Antony's College, Oxford. On the eve of his ninetieth birthday, long after he had retired as president, he wrote the history of the Iran Society.

He wrote well and was a practised public speaker, often without a note, but perhaps his forte was his private conversation, which was humorous, well-informed and always inquisitive. Above all, he wanted to know things. Even in extreme old age, the range of his activities was astonishing and his vigour and enthusiasm remained undimmed. He was particularly generous of his time to researchers. His house saw a constant stream of scholars, English and Iranian, seeking his views or advice on where to find source material. With great courtesy, he answered all letters of inquiry by return and at length.

They are fortunate who have known Denis, to have enjoyed his friendship and benefited from his wisdom. Diplomat, scholar and traveller, Denis was ever the loyal servant of his country, but with a genuine honesty in expressing his own extraordinarily perceptive views on matters of policy. This was particularly noteworthy when it came to questions such as the Iranian oil nationalisation, the Suez crisis and the development of British policy towards Yugoslavia in the immediate post-war period. Time will prove the wisdom of his advice, which was not always taken, not least on matters such as the recent invasion of Iraq.

Denis and his wife Iona loved Iran and knew Iran – its culture and history, its mountains, tribes and customs. Iranians knew this and this helped make Denis the most effective and trusted of diplomats. Many Iranians have remarked how free he was of pomposity or the imperial hubris that often characterised British diplomatic relations with Iran. One of them, who as a young left-wing student met him many years ago and never forgot him, sums up the feelings of many:

“I had a peculiar affection for Sir Denis although I met him only twice: once when he paid a visit to my father's house and again when he invited me for lunch at his residence in the Tehran embassy and invited me to play a game of tennis. His humility, stemming from genuine,

unobtrusive, inward self-confidence, was refreshing and his taking a mere novice of an undergraduate seriously and deigning to listen to his half-baked yet ardent prattle on human justice and the excesses of capitalism was more than what I am prepared to do now.”

OBITUARY

KENNETH BRADFORD, 1926-2005

An Obituary by Alan Ashmole, Honorary Secretary 1996-2003

Kenneth Bradford joined the Iran Society as a Life Member in 1972. He was elected a Council Member in 1981, serving as Honorary Secretary from 1982-1989. He was elected a Vice President in 1988 and served as Chairman from 1990-1996, remaining a Council Member until his death.

He was at various times my employer and later a colleague. He spent his working life in The British Bank of the Middle East, which he joined in 1943. He was initially posted to Tehran but then served in various branches in Iran and the Middle East. He returned to Tehran from 1969 to 1973 as Director and Adviser of The Bank of Iran and the Middle East (a joint venture in Iran of The British Bank of the Middle East with local interests). In 1973 he returned to the UK as Chief Inspector of BBME and subsequently became General Manager.

I first met Kenneth when he was Chief Inspector and I was working in the Bank's Inspection Department in London. He had the reputation then of being a very fair and far seeing officer. When I was co-opted on to your Council Kenneth proved to be a very helpful and encouraging mentor.

Throughout his time as a Council Member, Kenneth was a man of great perspicacity with a clear, level headed and logical mind which usually got to the heart of any problem. He was universally liked and respected. I consulted him frequently on various aspects of the Society's work and always found I could rely on his help and sound judgement.

Kenneth was a well-read, scholarly man of many interests as well as being a devoted family man. He had a deep appreciation and understanding of Persian culture and mores and the Society was very fortunate to have him to guide it through a period which had its share of difficulties. This was particularly so as Kenneth kept himself extremely busy in his retirement with a multitude of organisations both local and international.

We shall miss him greatly.

BOOK REVIEW

IRAN : A CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

Saeed Alizadeh, Alireza Pahlavani and Ali Sadrnia

Published by the authors, Tehran, 2002. ISBN 964-06-1413-0

Any history is fundamentally the telling of a story and the story becomes a terrible muddle if the sequence of events is confused. This little book is an invaluable reference to what happened when, and who did what, over the long and turbulent history of Iran. Events of importance are listed chronologically under the year of the Christian era in which they occurred, beginning with the birth of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, in 590 BC, and ending with the Islamic Revolution of 1979. They are often accompanied by short explanations and are helpfully placed in a wider context by a reference to events happening elsewhere at around the same time.

Thus we are reminded that the Mongol invasion of Khurasan in 1220 came five years after the signing of the Magna Carta in England, that Tamerlane was a contemporary of Chaucer and that the last of the Zand rulers, Lotf Ali Khan, ascended the throne in 1789, the same year that the French Revolution broke out and George Washington became the first President of the United States. The book is divided into separate sections under the heading of the dominant political force of the time, which in most cases is the ruling dynasty. Each section is provided with a short introduction, outlining the main developments that took place. There are useful appendices which, besides listing all the rulers of Iran and their dates -- there are thirty-six Parthian rulers alone, six of them bearing the name Vologeses -- list the twelve Shiite Imams, the major events in Iran and Mesopotamia that preceded the Achaemenids, and the important archaeological sites in Iran, of which there are twenty-five besides Persepolis. There is also a glossary with brief definitions of everything from squinch to Sunnism and an excellent index.

The book suffers from a few errors and omissions. 1558, the year in which Queen Elizabeth I succeeded to the throne of England, is wrongly given as the year of her birth; there is no mention of the attempts by the Safavid Shah, Ismail II and later by Nadir Shah to return Iran to Sunnism, nor of the sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah, nor of the Babi attempt to assassinate Nasir al-Din Shah in 1852 and the subsequent severe persecution of Babis. Nonetheless, this remains a book that anyone interested in the history and culture of Iran ought to possess.

BOOK REVIEW

A JOURNEY TO PERSIA: JEAN CHARDIN'S PORTRAIT OF A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EMPIRE

Translated and edited by R W Ferrier IB Tauris ISBN 1-85043-564-2I

IB Tauris have continued to do great service to Iranophiles by republishing this work by Ronald Ferrier, who taught at the University of Shiraz 1962-1965 and was for many years afterwards Lecture Secretary of the Iran Society.

Chardin, a young French Protestant jeweller and trader in the time of Louis XIV, travelled to India on business for his father and, on his way home, spent some time in Isfahan. There he was appointed a royal merchant to Shah Abbas II, who commissioned him to make some jewellery from the gems in the royal treasury. After reaching Paris, Chardin decided to seek his fortune in Persia and in 1673 he returned with a stock of fine clocks and watches. He stayed in Persia for over four years and, with his keen scientific mind, made an extensive study of the life and government of Isfahan. Since he had bona fide business there, his account is not that of a passing traveller, but that of an acute, well-informed and intimate observer.

Not only did he give an account of the monumental buildings of Isfahan, he delved into the more interesting private houses and described how they were acquired and who lived in them. Bazaars, craftsmen, the farms surrounding the city, mosques, mullas and courtesans: Chardin missed nothing.

The intense energy and passion of the Persians Chardin attributed to the hot dry climate, where nothing rusts.

There were no prisons in Safavid Isfahan. Miscreants were guarded in unlocked but nauseous rooms until they could pay their way out. Murderers were executed in public in variously spectacular ways, none of them briefly merciful, unless they could come to terms with the victim's family. Minor crime was dealt with by the bastinado to the soles of the feet. Robbers were branded on the forehead, burglars had their hands amputated; perjurers had their mouths plugged with lead. Each local governor was responsible for restoring stolen goods to their owners. Chardin noted approvingly that there was much less serious crime in Persia than in Europe.

Chardin noted everything: the method of making Shiraz wine, which was exported to India, China and Japan; stone-cutting and its tools; soap making and cotton-washing; trade guilds in the bazaar; pearl-diving; formal manners and ruinous extravagance in the face of good fortune; the unpredictable whims of the Shah which could make or ruin a man in a day; marriage, medicine, death and burial; food and entertainment; bricks and plasterwork. He was no romantic fantasist about the Orient, but an inquisitive and thorough observer. What he could not see for himself he inquired about.

Chardin brings before us the majestic portals of the mosques and the dangerous potholes of the streets, the elegant finery of the courtiers, the sumptuous displays of the royal receptions, the excitable behaviour and noisy accompaniment of public festivals, the piles of fruit and vegetables in the markets, the bales of goods in the bazaars, the lascivious displays of dancers, the ambivalent ambiance of teahouse life, the importance of protocol and politeness and the varied

skills of the artisans. Below the surface he reveals the running of the bureaucracy, the role of religion, the social inequality and personal insecurity of the Court.

This handsome book, beautifully produced and illustrated, is a flowing stream, a moving picture, of a Persia that has only partly vanished with time and Ferrier has produced a fresh and readable version of Chardin's original. Visitors to Isfahan should take this book with them to bring to life the standard guide books, which show no more than the visible bricks and tiles; Chardin tells us what went on behind the façade.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE SECRET OF LAUGHTER: MAGICAL TALES FROM A CLASSICAL PERSIA

Sasha Guppy, IB Tauris 2005 ISBN 1-85043-427-1

There are many sugary collections of Persian fairy tales on the market, each one blander than the last. This book is an exception. The author, a well known writer on family life in Iran, now living in England, who has also made a superb film of the Bakhtiari migration, has retold the stories that she heard from her old family retainers. Some of these are well known folk tales, while others are popular versions of stories from the Shahnameh.

The theme behind many of these stories is that ordinary people are born with the dice loaded against them, but that quick wittedness, honest labour and good intention will reverse the scales. And the greatest of these is quick wit, hazer jevabi, whereby a miscreant brought before a tyrant for punishment can not only save himself by a felicitous word, but can be rewarded by having his mouth stuffed with gold.

Another element in these stories is luck. The Fars-nameh tells the story of an Indian emperor who sent a chess set to the Persian king Anushirvan, telling him to explain what it was or be invaded. The Persian vizier Bozorgmehr realised that it was a game that symbolised war. Not only did he solve the riddle; in return he devised the game of backgammon and, in reply, sent it to the Indian with the message that this was a more realistic reflection of life, in that it included the missing element of chance. In these innocently sophisticated stories, fortune smiles only on the faces of those who seize her proffered hand.

Some editing for the next edition would help. [The princess] Dorna does not mean 'pearl-like', but a crane [bird]; Goshtasp was not the daughter of Rostam, but a Kayanian king.

That minor cavil apart, the stories are well told in a modern and uncondescending idiom. The reader feels welcomed into a large Persian family and embraced by a wise and kindly old aunt, who knows all of man's foibles and how to deal with them, and is quietly and subtly putting the world to rights. This book should be on every Christmas present list, to entertain and enlighten both young and old.