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# THE IRAN SOCIETY

## OBJECTS

The objects for which the Society is established are to promote learning and advance education in the subject of Iran, its peoples and culture (but so that in no event should the Society take a position on, or take any part in, contemporary politics) and particularly to advance education through the study of the language, literature, art, history, religions, antiquities, usages, institutions and customs of Iran.

## ACTIVITIES

In fulfilment of these objects, the Society, which is registered in Great Britain as a charity, shall, among other things:

Hold meetings and establish, promote, organise, finance and encourage the study, writing, production and distribution of books, periodicals, monographs and publications,

Do all such other lawful and charitable things as shall further the attainment of the objects of the Society or any of them.

The full text of the Rules of the Society may be inspected in the Society's offices.

Those wishing to apply for membership can do so through the Society's website, or by writing to the Hon. Secretary for an application form. Students are encouraged to join.

## JOURNAL

The aim of the Journal is to reproduce edited versions of some of the lectures given over the year, to review books of interest to members and to publish short articles of general interest. The editor welcomes contributions and suggestions. The journal is financed by a benefaction from the Kathleen Palmer-Smith Publication Fund.

## CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

This year has been labelled by some as 'The Year of Iran', with hopes raised for a rapprochement between Iran and the West. The role of this society, while avoiding any involvement with politics, is to raise the level of understanding of the culture and history Iran among those who have dealings with Iran, whether as businessmen, journalists, diplomats or scholars, so that they are more aware of how Iran has come to be what it is today. Our lectures are programmed with this end in view and we welcome suggestions from members in this respect.

Three travel grants this year were awarded for this year: to study 15<sup>th</sup>-century Persian architecture in the Deccan, to visit Afghanistan to study the history of Herat and to visit Tehran to study the development of the Constitutional Revolution in the 1920s. We are grateful to our corporate members, whose subscriptions make these grants possible.

Antony Wynn

## **The Rise and Decline of Iranian Influence in South Asia from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century CE to the Present.**

**Lecture given by Professor Francis Robinson CBE, Professor of the History of South Asia, Royal Holloway, on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2012.**

There has been cultural exchange between Iran and South Asia for thousands of years. There are close resemblances between the Avestan and the Vedic Sanskrit languages. Under the Sasanians South Asia gave Iran the *Panchtantra* and Chess, while the Sasanians ruled its northwestern region. From the ninth century CE the Saffarids brought a new Perso-Islamic culture to Sind. Towards the end of the tenth century the Ismailis strengthened this culture in Sind and extended it into Multan and the Punjab. Firdawsi wrote the *Shahnama* at the court of Mahmud of Ghazna, so it was not surprising that Ghaznavid expansion towards Lahore and further east represented a further extension of Persian literary culture: the cities of the Punjab became destinations for scholars and literary figures from Iran, Khorasan and Mawarannah. From the early thirteenth century the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate created the base from which Perso-Islamic culture could spread east into Bengal and south into the Deccan. The poet and musician, Amir Khusraw (1252-1325), who is buried alongside the Sufi saint Nizam al-din Chishti in Delhi, represents one of the peaks of the new Indian-based Perso-Islamic culture. The latter half of the fourteenth century saw regional Sultanates develop, for instance, the Bahmanid in the Deccan and those of Bengal, Jawnpur and Kashmir in the north. They were all great centres of Perso-Islamic culture, their courts destinations for Iranians in search of patronage.

My aim in this lecture is not to talk about the emergence of Perso-Islamic culture in South Asia in the medieval period. I want to address its high point which stretches from the early years of the Mughal empire through to the mid-nineteenth century, when the British annexed the rich Shi'a-ruled state of Awadh. This was a period in which South Asia was an Eldorado for Iranians in very

much the same way that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the USA was for European artists, businessmen and scholars. It is worth reflecting that the Safavid empire at its height ruled 6.5m while the Mughal empire at its height ruled 100m. Moreover the Mughals developed a system of land taxation which generated, from the late sixteenth to the late-seventeenth century, steadily increasing quantities of revenue.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Power, people and Iranian influence in South Asia***

It was the assertion of Mughal power which made possible the massive extension of Iran's influence in South Asia. You will know the names of the Great Mughals, that extraordinary line of men who ruled India from 1526 to 1707 – Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Awrangzeb. But, what kind of world view did they represent? One of the problems of much history written over the past two centuries is that, whether written in British India, or in the independent countries of South Asia, it has come to be confined within the boundaries of the modern state. So, in the textbooks of South Asia, and I fear in the monographs of scholars who should know better, Mughal history is seen to begin when the Mughals entered South Asia. But, Mughal, as you know, is the Persian for Mongol. The Mughals saw themselves as Timurids; thus they were part of a great tradition of power which went back to Genghis Khan. Babur saw himself as descended on his father's side from Timur and on his mother's side from Genghis Khan.<sup>2</sup> The *Akbarnama*, Abul Fadl's great record of Akbar's reign, traces Akbar's ancestry back to the divine light which, in an Annunciation-like scene, entered the Mongol goddess Alanqoa.<sup>3</sup> In the seventeenth century there was a genre of one-off Mughal paintings which portrayed the crown being handed down from Timur through his descendants, to the Mughal

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<sup>1</sup> For the extraordinary increase in Mughal revenues under the Great Mughals see John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire. The New Cambridge History of India*, 1, 5, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 75-78, 138-41, 185-90.

<sup>2</sup> For the argument about the continuities and connections between the worlds of the Il Khans, Timurids and Mughals see Francis Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors and the Islamic Dynasties of India, Iran and Central Asia, 1206-1925* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), pp. 14-74, 112-79.

<sup>3</sup> Abu'l Fadl, *The Akbar Nama of Abul-Fazl*, H. Beveridge trans., (Delhi: Low-Price Publications, 1989), I, pp. 178-83.

rulers and ending with the Mughal ruler of the time.<sup>4</sup> Shah Jahan, when he constructed his Peacock Throne, had a large ruby placed in the centre of its breast which he had been given by the Safavid, Shah 'Abbas. On that ruby were inscribed the names of Timur, Shahrukh, Ulugh Beg, and Shah 'Abbas, as well as those of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. The Mughals came out of that great Persianate cultural florescence patronised by Timur and his descendants in Samarqand and Herat. This was a period of cultural vitality comparable to the Florentine Renaissance. It is not for nothing that my colleague, Stephen Dale, has compared the emperor Babur to Italian renaissance figures including Benvenuto Cellini.<sup>5</sup>

The Mughals brought with them the memory not only of great power but also of the highest Persianate cultural production. The *Shahnama* of Muhammad Juki, which belongs to our Royal Asiatic Society, and which represents a high point of book painting in the Persian style, was a treasured item in the Mughal library as we know from the seals of the Great Mughals in the book.<sup>6</sup> Babur's famous description of Hindustan in the *Baburnama* tells us of how he thought he had taken a step down culturally in establishing himself there: It 'is a place of little charm', he wrote, 'there is no beauty in its people, no etiquette, nobility or manliness. The arts and crafts have no harmony or symmetry... the one nice aspect of Hindustan is that it is a large country with lots of gold and money.'<sup>7</sup>

Iran, in the form of the Safavids, was intimately involved both in the rise of the Mughals and in the politics of the dynasty; in the form of the Afsharids it was closely involved in its fall. The emperor Babur, in his attempts to recapture his family patrimony of Samarqand from the Shaybanid Uzbeks, was helped by Shah Isma'il. Once in power in Hindustan he enjoyed two Caucasian

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 121.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Frederic Dale, 'Steppe Humanism: The Autobiographical Writings of Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur 1483-1530', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 22, 1990, pp. 37-58.

<sup>6</sup> The picture facing the title page of Barbara Brend's edition of the Juki *Shahnamah* contains the seals of the Great Mughals. There is also a fascinating discussion of the regular engagement of the Mughals and the librarians with the book by A.H. Morton. Barbara Brend, *Muhammad Juki's Shahnamah of Firdausi* (London: Philip Wilson for the Royal Asiatic Society, 2010), pp. 163-75.

<sup>7</sup> Babur, *Babur-Nama (Memoirs of Babur)*. Annette S. Beveridge, trans., (New Delhi: Oriental Reprint Corporation, 1979) pp. 518-9.

slave girls sent to him by Shah Tahmasp. The emperor Humayun, after he had been defeated by the Suri Pathans, took shelter with Shah Tahmasp, an event memorably recorded in the murals of Isfahan's Chihil Sutun.<sup>8</sup> He returned to India at the head of an army mainly of Iranians. The emperor Jahangir had the Safavids very much in mind: two of the great paintings he commissioned show him in close relationship with the Safavid Shah 'Abbas.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, he noted in his memoirs the day he received news of the Shah's assassination of his eldest son, Muhammad Baqir.<sup>10</sup> The Afghan city of Qandahar, which commanded the route from the Mughal to the Safavid empire, was constantly changing hands between the two dynasties. When the ambitious prince, Awrangzeb, failed to recapture the city twice in 1649 and 1652, Shah Jahan humiliated him, feeding the Prince's resentment, which led to Awrangzeb's overthrow and humiliation of his father, and his killing of his brother and nephew. When Awrangzeb's eldest and favourite son, Prince Akbar, son of his Safavid wife, Dilras Banu, failed to overthrow his father he fled to the Safavid court. Then, in 1736, it was Nadir Shah Afshar who gave the effective *coup de grace* to the Mughals. He invaded Hindustan, sacked Delhi, massacred its citizens, and carried vast quantities of wealth, Mughal princesses

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<sup>8</sup> Humayun's sister, Gulbadan, was present at the meetings between her brother and Shah Tahmasp. She described them when in later life she wrote a memoir of her brother. She tells of the entertainments they had together and charmingly summed up the relationship of the two monarchs thus: 'The friendship and concord of these two high-placed pashas was as close as two nut-kernels in one shell.' Gulbadan Begam, *The History of Humayun: Humayun-Nama by Gul-Badan Begam*, Annette S. Beveridge trans. and ed., (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902).

<sup>9</sup> To see these two painting together on one page see Amina Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1992), p. 56. Both these paintings are representations of Jahangir's dreams which in the Islamic context would be regarded as a source of prophecy. Moin suggests for one of these paintings which shows Jahangir embracing Shah Abbas, Jahangir standing on a lion and the Shah on a lamb, that it is the submission of the Shah which is being depicted. As two of his forefathers, Babur and Humayun had had to submit in various ways to the Safavids, now through his dream Jahangir was showing that the relationship had been reversed. As Moin says: 'Shah 'Abbas was now the recipient of Timurid charisma and *barakat*.' A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 204-06.

<sup>10</sup> Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i- Jahangiri or the Memoirs of Jahangir*, Alexander Rogers trans., Henry Beveridge ed., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978), Vol I, p. 294.

and the Peacock Throne back to Iran. The implosion of Mughal authority in the early eighteenth century made Nadir Shah's victory possible. The event announced to Indians and Afghans that the days of Mughal power were over. From now to the overthrow of the dynasty in 1858 they were men of straw to be manipulated by others.

A key source of Iranian influence in the Mughal world was the large number of Iranians who flocked to serve at the Mughal court. The emperor Humayun brought many Iranians with him on his return from exile in the Safavid court, amongst them leading painters from Shah Tahmasp's studios, who were to have a major influence on the development of Mughal art.<sup>11</sup> The emperor Akbar in the 1560s specifically encouraged Iranians to join his imperial service; he needed them to help him overcome the ambitions of his Chaghatay Turki nobles. But, moving beyond politics, Akbar was concerned that his court should be a home for leading Iranian scholars and poets. Illiterate, or dyslexic, we do not know, Akbar had large numbers of works in prose and poetry read to him – always in Persian. He himself composed verses in Persian and Hindi, although only his Persian verses have been recorded. Akbar was probably the first Muslim ruler in South Asia to institute the office of poet laureate (Malik al-Shu'ara). All the poets laureate, bar one, up to the end of Shah Jahan's reign were Iranians. Fifty out of the fifty-nine top-rated Persian poets at Akbar's court were Iranian. According to the historian, Badauni, Akbar and his nobles patronised 168 Iranian poets.<sup>12</sup>

The life of one Iranian family demonstrates how the Mughal court offered opportunities to rise from rags to riches. In the late sixteenth century one Mirza Ghiyas Beg, originally from Tehran, turned up destitute at Akbar's court. He had come in a caravan from Yazd but had been robbed close to Qandahar and left with nothing but two mules. Akbar found him a place in his household and, although getting into difficulties over embezzlement and backing the wrong horse in court politics, he rose to become wazir under

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<sup>11</sup> Two painters from the atelier of Shah Tahmasp accompanied Humayun on his return to India, 'Abdus Samad and Mir Sayyid 'Ali. They both played a key role in the development of Mughal painting under Akbar.

<sup>12</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India c. 1200-1800* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), pp. 124-27.

Jahangir. He is buried in that jewel of a tomb by the river Jumna at Agra, known as Itimad Dawlah's tomb, after his official title. The tomb was built, and probably designed, by his daughter Nur Jahan, a woman whose many gifts ranged from the arts through hunting, through business to politics. A great beauty, Jahangir married her when he was 42 and she was 34; his memoirs reveal that he was completely besotted by her. Towards the end of his reign he increasingly handed over the government to her: firmans were issued in her name; coins were also struck in her name. She lost the succession struggle which broke out as Jahangir neared death because her brother, Afzal Khan, changed sides to support Shah Jahan. She went into retirement in Lahore, supported by the vast wealth she had accumulated, and with the project of building her husband's mausoleum.<sup>13</sup> But the influence of this Iranian family did not end here. Nur Jahan's niece, Afzal Khan's daughter, Arjomand Begum, married Shah Jahan. While she was alive, she was his only wife to whom he was passionately devoted. Her palace name was Mumtaz Mahal and it was for her burial that Shah Jahan built – and he was involved in the process on a daily basis – that wondrous mausoleum, the Taj Mahal.<sup>14</sup> Thus Iranian blood ran in the veins of Shah Jahan's four sons and three daughters, several of whom had great gifts. Not many Iranian immigrants' stories glitter as this one does. But up to the nineteenth century, Hindustan continued to be a place where Iranians could fulfil their ambitions and, if they wished, become rich.

At this point I shall step aside from the Mughal world, for a moment, to consider the impact of some other Iranian immigrants on South Asia. The first are the Parsis, who settled on India's west coast around the tenth century CE. Nowadays a small community of no more than 100,000 they have had a disproportionate impact on Indian life. They have been prominent in music and the arts, especially in music, ranging from Zubin Mehta to Freddie Mercury. They have headed all three of India's military services. Homi Bhaba and Homi Sethna played a major role in developing India's

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<sup>13</sup> For Nur Jahan, her father's tomb, her relationship with Jahangir and her husband's tomb, see Robinson, *Mughal Emperors*, pp. 145-47.

<sup>14</sup> For a presentation and analysis of the Taj Mahal and its context conducted at the highest levels of scholarship see Ebba Koch, *The Complete Taj Mahal: and the Riverfront Gardens of Agra* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006).

atomic energy programme. Parsi names – Tata, Godrej and Wadia – figure amongst India’s greatest industrial families. The Tatas were, indeed, the founders of India’s industry and the saviours of some of Britain’s, for instance, steel in the form of Corus and motor manufacture in the form of Jaguar/Landrover. Parsis in the form of Pheroze Mehta and Dadabhai Naoroji were amongst the founders of the Indian National Congress – the Indian nationalist movement. The Parsi blood of Feroze Gandhi ran through India’s assassinated prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and today runs through his son, Rahul, who hopes one day to be prime minister.

There are two further stories of Iranian immigrant impact which I shall take together. The first involves Aga Khan I who in the early nineteenth century was more Iranian provincial notable than Ismaili Imam. After losing out in Iranian politics he moved to India, eventually settling in Bombay, where with great skill he managed to persuade the British to address him as ‘His Highness’ and the British courts to recognise him as the leader of the Khoja Ismaili community.<sup>15</sup> This was the beginning for his family of great wealth and of national and international political careers reaching from the Government of India, through the highest ranks of British society, to the League of Nations. In narrow South Asian political terms Aga Khan III played a major role in getting Muslim separatist politics off the ground in India, amongst other things leading the delegation to the Viceroy in 1906 which asked for, and was granted, special privileges for Muslims. The second story of Iranian immigrant impact involves men who played a leading role in the final success of Muslim separatist politics. They were the Ispahanis, businessmen who settled in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. They were leading supporters of the campaign for Pakistan in its last ten years, and important public servants in the new country.<sup>16</sup> Just as the Tatas

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<sup>15</sup> For the fashioning of the beginnings of modern Ismailism by Aga Khan I see Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: the Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean 1840-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) pp. 155-78.

<sup>16</sup> Haji Mohammed Hashem (1789-1850), the founder of the house of Ispahani, moved from Isfahan to Bombay in 1820. Under his descendant M.A. Ispahani (1898-1986) the business became a major corporation; Ispahani was a major figure in the industrial development of Pakistan. His younger brother, M.A.H. Ispahani, was particularly close to Jinnah (1789-1850), the leader of the movement for Pakistan, becoming the first Pakistani ambassador to the US.

founded the airline which eventually became Air India, so did the Ispahanis found Orient Airways which became PIA.

***The two pillars of Iranian influence in South Asia***

So much for the roles of power and peoples. I now want to turn to the two great pillars of Iranian cultural influence, the two great supports of Perso-Islamic culture. I mean the Persian language and religious knowledge.

Let us consider the impact of Persian. In the two hundred years before 1600 Hindavi had been widely used in north India by court circles in administration and by Sufis when they wanted to communicate with their constituencies at large. The emperor Akbar changed this. He formally declared Persian to be the language of administration at all levels. The proclamation was issued by his Khatri Hindu revenue minister, Raja Todar Mal. At the same time all government departments were reorganised by the Iranian polymath, Fadl Allah Shirazi. ‘Earlier in India the government’s accounts were written in Hindi according to the Hindu rule’, declared the eighteenth century Muslim historian Ghulam Hussain Tabataba’i, ‘Raja Todar Mal acquired new regulations from the scribes of Iran, and the government offices then were reorganised as they were in wilayat [Iran].’<sup>17</sup> We should be clear that this was not just a change in the royal court and household; it went down to the lowest levels of government. Persian became the language used by small-town officials and village-based revenue officers. All Mughal government papers, from royal firmans down to the acceptance letters of village Chaudhuris, were in Persian. Persian was the language of the zamindar classes no less than the Muslim literati. Even the common soldier was expected to understand simple Persian.<sup>18</sup>

This meant that Persian spread beyond the purely Muslim world to embrace all those who worked in the imperial service. The large number of Hindu munshis expert in accountancy (*siyaq*) and draftsmanship (*insha*) – Khatris, Kayasths and Kashmiri Brahmins – became expert in Persian, lovers of its literature and producers of

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Alam, *Languages*, p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129

it. A famous letter of Chandra Bhan ‘Brahman’ to his son gives an idea of Hindu love and mastery of Persian:

“Initially, it is necessary to acquire training in *akhlaq* [good manners/ethics]. It is appropriate to listen always to the advice of elders and act accordingly. By studying the *Akhlaq-i- Nasiri*, *Akhlaq-i Jalali*, *Gulistan*, and *Bustan* one should accumulate one’s own capital and gain the virtue of knowledge. When you practice what you have learnt, your code of conduct too will be firm. ....Although the science of Persian is vast, and almost beyond human grasp, in order to open the gates of language one should read the *Gulistan*, *Bustan*, and the letters of Mulla Jami to begin with. When one has advanced somewhat one should read key books on norms and ethics as well as history books such as the *Habib al-Siyar*, *Rauzat al-Safa*, *Rauzat al-Salatin*, *Tarikh-i Guzida*, *Tarikh-i Tabari*, *Zafarnama* and *Akbarnama*. The benefits of these will be to render your language elegant, also to provide you knowledge of the world and its inhabitants... of the master-poets, here are some whose collections I read in my youth ... Hakim Sana’i, Mulla Rum, Shams Tabriz, Shaikh Farid al-din ‘Attar, Shaikh Sa’di, Khwaja Hafiz, Shaikh Jami ...” [plus 50 others].<sup>19</sup> He then goes on to list a large number of contemporary poets he thinks his son should read. This is a man, and there were many like him, who was completely drenched in Persian.

Let us turn to that second pillar, Islamic knowledge both formal and mystical. Under the Mughals, formal learning, by which I mean crudely madrasa learning, was given a powerful injection of Iranian learning. Classically, madrasa learning had two main halves, *manqulat*, the revealed sciences (Qur’an, Hadith etc...) and *ma’qulat*, the rational sciences (logic, philosophy, theology, maths etc...). Until the late sixteenth century the revealed sciences had been the dominant half in South Asia. This began to change with the arrival of Fadh Allah Shirazi at the court of Akbar in 1573. He promoted the study of the philosophical traditions of his countryman Jalal al-Din Dawwani (d. 1502/03), which led to great interest in the contemporary philosophers, Mir Baqir Damad of Isfahan (d. 1631) and his gifted pupil, Mulla Sadra of Shiraz (d. 1642). The study of the *ma’qulat* subjects gained an extra boost in the seventeenth

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-31.

century from the migration into South Asia of many scholars fleeing from the rigorous Sunni orthodoxy of the Shaybanid Uzbeks in Central Asia. Both Sialkot in the Punjab and Jawnpur in the centre of the Ganges valley became major centres of *ma'qulat* skills. The emperor Awrangzeb, a great believer in good administration, supported 'ulama expert in *ma'qulat* subjects with revenue-free grants. When one 'alim, Mulla Qutb al-Din Sihalwi, who was at the centre of the *ma'qulat* revolution, was killed in 1691 in a squabble over land, Awrangzeb compensated his four sons by granting them the sequestered property of a European Indigo merchant in Lucknow – Farangi Mahall. At Farangi Mahall, Mulla Qutb al-Din's third son, Mulla Nizam al-Din, fashioned a new style of teaching known as the *Dars-i Nizami*. This drew on the *ma'qulat* traditions of Iran to encourage students to think rather than learn by rote. The training both brought a greater flexibility in jurisprudence and enabled students to finish their madrasa course with greater speed. Thus Iranian philosophical traditions came to be established in the Sunni scholarship of South Asia. This said, a glance at the books, commentaries and supercommentaries taught by South Asian scholars would tell you that almost all of them had been written in either Iran or Central Asia between 1100 and 1600 CE. Those great rivals at the court of Timur, Sa'ad al-Din Taftazani and Sayyid Sharif Jurjani were the most widely represented.<sup>20</sup>

Sufism, Islamic mysticism, was no less a projection of Iranian cultural power into the subcontinent. The Chishti order, the major South Asia order and one only to be found there, had been brought by Muin al-Din Sijzi from the area around Herat at the end of the twelfth century. The Qadiri path was first introduced by Muhammad Ghauth, who travelled through much of the Perso-Islamic world before establishing himself in fifteenth-century Uchch. The Suhrawardis, founded by the Iranian Sufi, Ziya al-Din al-Suhrawardi (d. 1168) developed their most important bases in South Asia, most notably at the shrine of Baha al-Din Zakariyya in Multan, while in the late sixteenth century the Naqshbandiyya were brought from Central Asia. The letters of these Sufis, their *maktubat*, were in Persian, as were their sayings, their *malfuzat*.

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), pp. 42-55.

Moreover, the monistic teachings of that most influential Spanish Sufi, Ibn ‘Arabi, which even some Naqshbandis followed, were to be found everywhere in the work of the greatest Persian poets. It was not possible to recite the verse of Rumi, of Hafiz, of Jami or Nizami, as the ashraf ruling classes loved to do, without absorbing the ideas of this great mystic. Moreover, although this high Sufi culture can be treated separately from the South Asian world in which it moved, at saints’ shrines it embraced it. Muslim holy men to survive had to build bridges to the languages and religious customs of the primarily non-Muslim society in which they moved. Non-Muslims came to see these shrines, and their holy men, as places and people, where and from whom they could seek relief from the uncertainties of daily life.<sup>21</sup>

***The Pillars of Iranian Influence in the 18th and 19th centuries***

Now, you might think that the events of the eighteenth century meant the end of Iranian cultural influence. I refer to: the destruction of effective Mughal power by the mid-eighteenth century; the reduction of Muslim power itself by the early nineteenth century to the Mughal successor states of Awadh in the north and Hyderabad in the south; the rise of confident non-Muslim powers – the Sikhs in the Punjab, the Marathas across a great swathe of territory from Gujarat in the West to the Bay of Bengal in the East; the rise of the British in Bengal, most of the Gangetic Basin and Madras; the consequent decline of the highest levels of patronage; and the subsequent slackening of the tide of Iranians coming to seek their fortune. All these developments might have quickly brought Iranian cultural influence to an end. Far from it. There continued to be patronage and creativity throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the German art historian, Herman Goetz, was to describe it as the period of ‘highest refinement’ of Persian culture, a period to be compared with the late Renaissance in Italy, the golden age of Spain, and the era of French rococo.<sup>22</sup>

Consider the first pillar of Iranian cultural influence – Persian. Until the 1830s Persian was the language of government in most of

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16, 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> H. Goetz, *The Crisis of Indian Civilization in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1938), pp. 6-7.

the subcontinent. This was the case not just in the provincial Muslim courts which sprang up as Mughal power ebbed – Murshidabad, Hyderabad, Arcot, Mysore, Awadh, Shahjahanpur, Rampur, but also under the Sikhs, the Marathas and the British. All the successor states rested on the established systems of Mughal administration and the skills of its service classes. Indeed, as government functions began to expand in this period so did the Persian-speaking bureaucratic class. The British, in fact, were in the forefront of maintaining government-sponsored learning for this class when in 1782 they set up the Calcutta Madrasa. Gifted administrators were able to travel throughout the land in order to deploy their Persianate skills. Thus, when Muslim administrators, but also Kashmiri Brahmins with names like Dar, Chak, Sapru and Nehru, were forced out of the northwest by the rise of Afghan and Sikh rule, they were readily able to find posts in northern India. Such were the talents of these people that Mirza Qatil (d. 1817), a Hindu converted to Islam, was able to find work and make a home for himself in Iran, in Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran and Azerbaijan.<sup>23</sup> The East India Company official, Sir William Jones, became a great lover of Persian and a major channel by which the language and its messages were to travel to Europe.<sup>24</sup>

Arguably, Persian came to be more widely used in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than ever before. Hindu involvement in the language now reached its peak. The Hindu Raja of Benares gave substantial patronage to the greatest Iranian scholar to migrate to South Asia in the eighteenth century, Shaikh Muhammad ‘Ali ‘Hazin’ Gilani (1692-1760).<sup>25</sup> Hindus now came to use Persian forms of mystical verse, for instance, the *mathnawi*, to express religious themes. Hindus dominated the study of Persian grammar and lexicography. *Insha*’ now became a Hindu Kayasth monopoly and the considerable Hindu tradition of historiography in Persian reached its peak.<sup>26</sup> In the 1820s the leading Hindu

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<sup>23</sup> Robinson, *Farangi Mahall*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>24</sup> Michael J. Franklin, ‘Orientalist Jones’: *Sir William Jones, Poet, Lawyer and linguist, 1746-1794* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture* E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Husein, trans. and ed., (London: Paul Elek, 1974), p. 99.

<sup>26</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *An Intellectual History of Islam in India* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), pp.234-38.

intellectual of Calcutta, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, expressed his advanced views not in Bengali but in Persian. Indeed, in some areas Persian came to be used by the common people. ‘Knowledge of the Persian language in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, declared the Lucknow literary historian ‘Abd al-Halim Sharar, ‘was greater in India than in Persia itself ...this was particularly the case in the last century [19<sup>th</sup>] when Lucknow was famed throughout the world for its progress and education, when every child could speak Persian, when *ghazals* were on the lips of all, even the uneducated courtesans and bar workers, and when even a *bhand* [entertainer] would jest in Persian.’<sup>27</sup>

Let us now consider the fate of the second pillar of Iranian influence – religious knowledge. In formal learning the rational sciences, that is *ma’qulat* seemed powerful.<sup>28</sup> Until the mid-nineteenth century they were cultivated most vigorously in Awadh, which Shah Jahan had described as the ‘Shiraz of India’. Almost all the scholars involved were Farangi Mahallis or their pupils. Such was the reputation of their scholarship that it came in the early nineteenth century to be used in Cairo’s Al-Azhar to try to revive the rational sciences.<sup>29</sup>

Again the *Dars-i Nizami* syllabus, with its then emphasis on the rational sciences, a vehicle of Iranian intellectual influence, was carried by the Farangi Mahallis and their pupils throughout South Asia, into towns and qasbahs across the plains of northern India and into Hyderabad and Arcot in the south. The family’s pupils came to be scattered throughout India and the wider Muslim world. Most of the chains of teaching, declared Ghulam ‘Ali Azad Bilgrami, towards the end of the eighteenth century, go back to Mulla Qutb al-Din Sihlwi; all the [traditional] educational centres from Calcutta to Peshawar, declared Shibli Nu’mani at the beginning of the twentieth century, are mere offshoots of the *Dars-i Nizami*.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> Sharar, *Lucknow*, p. 100.

<sup>28</sup> Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah Wali Allah and His Times: A Study of Eighteenth Century Islam, Politics and Society in India* (Canberra: Ma’rifat Publishing House, 1980), p. 398.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Gran, *Islamic roots of Capitalism: Egypt 1760-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Rada Ansari, *Bani-yi Dars-i Nizami* (Lucknow:1973), p. 31; Shibli Nu’mani, *Maqalat-i Shibli*, Vol I, (Azamgarh: Dar Mutbah Mu’araf, 1955), p. 104.

East India Company's patronage of the *Dars-i Nizami* only helped to consolidate its dominance in South Asia, and by the same token the influence of Iranian scholarship that went with it.

In mystic knowledge the orders closest to those Persian Islamic mystical traditions, which stretched back through Mughal to pre-Mughal South Asia, seemed to revive and spread themselves more widely. The Chishti-Nizamis, through the energy of Shah Kalim Allah and his successors, became once more a vigorous All-India order, their Khanqahs springing up most thickly in the region from Awadh to the Punjab. The Chishti-Sabris became extremely active in the qasbahs of the Ganges-Jumna Doab, eventually producing Haji Imdad Allah (d 1899), the spiritual inspiration of more than one nineteenth-century reformist movement and the most influential Sufi of his time. The Qadiris also displayed new vitality in the Awadh and the Punjab. With this new vitality there also came some important new practices. Sufis began to be initiated in more than one order; they also began to place greater emphasis on formal Islamic knowledge while ulama acknowledged the importance of spiritual development. All was part of a coming together of the transmitters of the central messages of Islam at a time of growing weakness. But the Sufi aspect of these messages remained firmly in the Persianate tradition. Bahr al-Ulum Farangi Mahalli's magisterial study of Rumi's *Mathnawi* in the light of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus* and *Futuhāt* is a representative classic of the period.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the strengthening of the acknowledged pillars of Iranian influence in the eighteenth century there was also the establishment of a new one. This took the form of the emergence of a powerful and self-confident Shi'ite culture in constant interaction with the Shi'a heartlands in Iraq and Iran. The platforms of this development were the Shi'a satrapies which, as Mughal power declined, came forward as increasingly independent states. First, Murshidabad arose as a major commercial centre, and the seat of the governors of Bengal; at the same time Bengal's Hughli river came to be favoured by long-distance traders from Iran. Iranians began to settle there. When the East India Company took power in Bengal in the 1760s, these Iranians turned to Awadh where from 1722 another Shi'a satrapy had begun to flourish. This court, which had been

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<sup>31</sup> Robinson, *Farangi Mahall*, pp. 23-24.

established by Sayyids from Naishapur, grew steadily more Shi'ite in its institutions and its culture. From the 1760s the Naishapuri nawabs began to gather Shi'a ulama around them. In May 1768 Shi'a congregational prayers were held for the first time. By the early nineteenth century 2,000 *imambaras* and 6,000 *ta'zia khanas* were said to have been built in Lucknow alone, many of whose citizens threw themselves into Mohurram celebrations of a distinctly Safavid kind. Shi'a 'ulama led prayers, acted as muftis, collected the *khums* tax and distributed it as charity. The evolution of this Shi'a state reached its climax in the 1840s when a formal Shi'a judicial system was established and a royal madrasa set up. By this time the Shi'a nawabs of Awadh had long since claimed that they were the true successors of the Safavids.<sup>32</sup>

The Shi'a worlds of Murshidabad and Lucknow were regularly refreshed by emigrants from the cultural centres of Iran and the shrine cities of Iraq. Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali 'Hazin' Gilani, as we have seen, fled the wreck of the Safavid empire to finish his life teaching the rational sciences and verse composition in Benares. Descendants of the great Majlisi family of Isfahan came to serve 'Ali Vardi Khan in Murshidabad, their descendants moving on to Lucknow. Such men had vast networks of cousins who were scholars in the shrine cities of Iraq or high religious officials in the towns of the Iranian plateau. From the early nineteenth century the migration from Iran to northern India dwindled, but physicians, poets and architects still came in numbers and settled with success.<sup>33</sup>

With these men there also came ideas. When, for instance, the millenarian Shaykhist movement developed in early-nineteenth century Iran its impact was soon felt in Awadh. When the Akhbaris amidst the ruins of the Safavid empire came to dominate amongst the Iranian ulama, so they did in India. When from the 1760s the rationalist Usulis rose to prominence, supported by the Zand peace, Usulism came to the fore in Lucknow, led by the city's most famous Shia 'alim, Sayyid Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi 'Gufran Ma'ab'. In these circumstances Shi'ism emerged as a new carrier of Iranian influence, which it has been down to the present. Lucknow was its

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

centre. And from Lucknow it has created new centres, most especially in Hyderabad Deccan.<sup>34</sup>

***The swift decline of Iranian influence from the mid-C19th***

Arguably, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the high point of Iranian cultural influence in south Asia. Then from the 1820s and 1830s this influence declined with almost shocking speed. Part of the reason was the imposition of a self-confident British imperial power over most elements of Persianate Mughal institutions and culture. But another part lay in the increasingly vigorous rejection of Iranian models by most of the people of South Asia. What was happening was (1) that South Asian elites knew that to find a way forward under British rule they must abandon the old Mughal ways, which no longer had the authority of power and success, for British, or in aspects of religion, Arab models; (2) At the same time, in this context of British rule, elites knew for the first time that they needed to build bases – constituencies – in South Asian society, and that to do this they needed to use Indian languages.

Let us consider the process in the cases of the pillars of Iranian influence. First, Persian language. In the eighteenth century indigenous languages came increasingly to be cultivated and to challenge the cultural sway of Persian outside government. By the end of the eighteenth century Bengali, whose development had been held back by the dominance of Persian, was beginning to develop new and vigorous sanskritised forms; Punjabi had produced its two greatest poets, Bulhe and Warith Shah; and Sindhi, under the patronage of the Kalhora and Talpur dynasties was flourishing as never before. But it was the rise of Urdu which represented the real challenge to Persian. Urdu was the creation of Muslims in India; it was the language they had created to communicate with the Indian world about them. It combined regional grammar and syntax with Persian nouns adjectives and images, all written in *nastaliq*. Two streams had developed over the centuries of Muslim rule, one in the Deccan, the other around Delhi, After Awrangzeb's conquest of the Deccan these two streams came together to create a medium which

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<sup>34</sup> J.R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Chi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and the State in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 145-220.

the Mughal service classes found more satisfactory for the expression of their poetic genius than an increasingly artificial Persian style. Within a generation, so Aziz Ahmad the scholar of South Asian Islamic culture tells us, the Muslims of Delhi had discarded Persian as their main poetic language for Urdu.<sup>35</sup>

Changes in the preferred poetic language were important, but arguably the major blow to Persian came in the 1830s when the British abandoned it as the language of government and the law courts for English at the higher levels and the vernacular languages at the lower. At a stroke the main reason for learning Persian was wiped out. There were still jobs open in Persian in the Sikh Punjab and Awadh, that is until they were annexed by the British in 1849 and 1856. Only in the state of Hyderabad, until 1883, and the state of Kashmir, until 1889, did Persian continue as a language of government. The evidence of the impact these changes is salutary. Before 1857, Ghalib, the greatest poet of the nineteenth century, thought Persian the only fit literary language. But, in the following decade it was the loss of his Urdu verse in the chaos of the Mutiny Uprising that he regretted the most. In his MAO College founded in the 1870s Sayyid Ahmad Khan tried to teach Persian language and Persian subjects. He quickly stopped; students only wanted English. In the final decade of the twentieth century a mere 281 Persian books were published in the United Provinces, the heartland of Perso-Islamic civilisation as compared with 3547 Urdu books. There was, moreover, just one newspaper in Persian, as opposed to 116 in Urdu.<sup>36</sup>

Urdu might have supplanted Persian, but this language, which was itself a carrier of Persian words, images and sensibilities, in its turn found itself on the defensive. It was increasingly attacked from two sides. The first was from Hindu revivalists who wished to purge Urdu of its Persian elements and Sanskritise it instead. In fact they wanted to assert Hindi over Urdu and at the same time replace the Persian script with their own Nagri script. Pressure was put on the imperial government and by 1900 in the united Provinces Nagri had been given equal standing with the Persian script in the courts.

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<sup>35</sup> Robinson, *Farangi Mahall*, . 27; Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 252.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, *Farangi Mahall*, pp. 32-33.

The end of Urdu as a widely-shared literary language was signalled in 1915 when the leading north Indian novelist of the day, Premchand, switched from Urdu to Hindi.<sup>37</sup>

But the assault on the Persianate dimensions of Urdu also came from Muslims. In the second half of the nineteenth century leading figures of the Urdu literary world, like Muhammad Husain Azad and Altaf Husain Hali, were waging war against Urdu's Persianate heritage of artifice, what they felt to be the ornate and flowery products of a failed courtly culture. Instead, they now looked to Arabic for inspiration, as Hali tells us in the introduction to his *Musaddas*, his masterpiece on the rise and fall of Islam. Or alternatively both Hali and Azad also turned to English models, indeed, these provided models for most of the great Urdu writers of the late-nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, as they adopted models of Socialist realism, they had left Persian far behind.<sup>38</sup>

Let us consider the fate of the second pillar of Iranian influence, that is religious knowledge. In formal learning Iranian influences were mediated through the prominent position of the rational sciences. In mystical knowledge they were mediated through the predominance of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas in Sufi practice. From the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these Persianate elements in religious knowledge came increasingly under attack from Islamic reform.

In formal learning we can see the beginnings of the attack in a new emphasis on the study of Hadith which comes to be formalised in the curriculum taught at the madrasa established in Delhi at the end of the seventeenth century by Shah 'Abd al-Rahim. Rahim's son, Shah Wali Allah, driven by the need to strengthen Islam in South Asia in an age of political decline, continued the process. He attacked the rationalist scholastic traditions of Iran as a source of arid intellectualism and confusion. Muslims, he said, should return to the study of the revealed sciences; only these would bring them closer to the central teachings of the faith. But this line of thinking did not catch fire until Muslims were confronted from the 1820s by

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35; Hali, *Hali's Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam*, Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed trans., and introd., (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

the realities of British rule – namely a government which was removing all the grants which supported Islamic learning; a government which supported Islamic law only in a partial and bastardised form; and a government which no longer had places in its bureaucracy for madrasa students. ‘Ulama realised that their role had shifted from supporting a political power which maintained the *shari’a* to one of trying to preserve Muslim society altogether. The role of the rational sciences became devalued; those of the revealed sciences upgraded. ‘Ulama knew that in the absence of political power they must transfer to Muslims as a whole the knowledge and skills to fashion a Muslim society for themselves. This led to direct engagement with scripture (Qur’an and Hadith), the growth of self-interpretation, and a new emphasis on the Prophet as a model. It also led to the foundation of a host of reforming organisations from the Deoband School to the Tablighi Jama’at. It meant a major downgrading of Persian intellectual influences in Islamic scholarship.<sup>39</sup>

Sufism saw a similar decline in Persian influences. As in the case of formal learning its beginnings in South Asia can be dated back to the early seventeenth century when, in the context of Mughal religious eclecticism, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi attacked the monism of Ibn ‘Arabi. For the next two centuries this attack was carried in the Naqshbandi Sufi line which flowed from Sirhindi. In the late eighteenth century it flourished in the circles surrounding the descendants of Shah Wali Allah. Then again, from the 1820s and 1830s with the realisation of the full impact of British rule, and with Wahhabi influences having their impact from Arabia, it became a growing presence in Indian Sufism. There was a great attack on all ideas of magic. There was a great attack on any idea that there could be intercession for man with God at saints’ shrines. There was a new emphasis on the Day of Judgement. Islamic reform wanted to focus attention more fully on Revelation and the *Shari’a*; it was with these forms of guidance that the individual human conscience must work. There could be no escape clause through intercession. Thus the old inclusive Persianate Sufism came to decline; some wished that Sufism would disappear altogether. This said, forms of magic continued to exist in South Asian Sufi practice, but they did so

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-37.

without necessarily having the support which could be found in Persian literature, and they did so, too, in an environment in which their practices were strongly contested.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, these two pillars of Iranian influence came to crumble into the South Asian soil. By the twentieth century, Iranian influences were for the most part confined to traces: in the Persian script, in the Persian words in South Asian languages, in the remaining Parsi and Ismaili communities, in the Islamicate culture of Bollywood; in some aspects of Sufi thought; in the landed cultures of Awadh and the Indus Valley, and of course in the sometimes imperilled but vibrant Shi'a communities, whose numbers of 60-70 million, we should note, match those of contemporary Iran. Beyond this, there are elements of culture and material artefacts to which I have not yet referred: South Asia's Sufi musical tradition of *qawwali*; its many Islamic gardens, most of them in ruins, and its great shrines, amongst them the peerless Taj Mahal.

### *Two final reflections*

This said, I have a couple of final reflections on Iranian influences, admittedly felt at some distance, on the most dramatic event of twentieth-century South Asia; its division into India and Pakistan. The first reflection relates to Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of the Pakistan movement. He was steeped in Iranian influences. His first work, his Munich Phd thesis, was on the *Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. Most of his poetry was in Persian; he hoped to reach a wider audience than a purely Indian one. He loved the forms of classical Persian poetry, the *mathnawi* and the *ghazal*; he enjoyed those contrasting pairs – roses and nightingales, moths and candles; while he hated what he termed the Persian encrustations of Sufism, which mixed in the manner of Hafiz the profane with the divine, he acknowledged the prophetic example of Zarathushtra, and the inspiration of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, al-Hallaj and Rumi. We are credibly informed that Ayatollah Khomeini enjoyed his verse; we know that 'Ali Shari'ati was influenced by him. This was the man who in his Presidential speech to the All-India Muslim League in 1930 identified the northwest of British India as the future site of

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31, 37-38.

a Muslim state.<sup>41</sup> This was the man, too, whose Islamic thinking led to the conclusion that the individual Muslim self could only be fully realised in an Islamic order.<sup>42</sup>

My second reflection is connected to the first. It involves the Muslim element of the former Mughal governing class, a class shaped in many different ways by Iranian culture. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they had great difficulty in coming to terms with their loss of power and status. They mourned the passing of greatness and did so in ways certainly influenced by the Shi'a *marsiya* tradition, and typified by Hali's *Musaddas*, his elegy on the rise and fall of Islam of 1879 and Iqbal's *Shikwa-i Hind* of 1909.<sup>43</sup> 'The footprints in the sands of India still say', as Hali wrote, 'a gracious caravan has passed this way.'<sup>44</sup> This sense of past greatness, of special 'political importance', as they argued, meant that this *sharif* class demanded separate representation and reserved seats in the developing constitutional arrangements of British India. Here again, arguably, lingering Iranian influences pointed in the direction of Pakistan. Here we have a final irony. While Persianate Sufi traditions were inclusive, Iranian legacies of power pointed towards the division of British India.

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<sup>41</sup> Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada ed., *Foundations of Pakistan: all-India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947* (Karachi: National Publishing House Limited, 1970), Vol. II, pp. 153-71, but especially p. 159.

<sup>42</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 141-67.

<sup>43</sup> Hali, *Musaddas*: Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim: an introduction to the Life & Work of Mohammed Iqbal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 39-41.

<sup>44</sup> Translation by Gail Minault in G. Minault, 'Urdu Political Poetry during the Khilafat Movement', *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 4, 1974, pp. 459-71.

## **Opposition to Foreign Concessions and the Anti-Tobacco *fatwa* of 1891.**

**Lecture given by Mrs. Fatema Soudavar (writer-historian and Trustee of the Soudavar Memorial Foundation) on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2013.**

### ***Abstract.***

*The rebellion against a monopoly tobacco concession in the reign of Nasser-al-din Shah Qajar (1848-1896) is considered a watershed event in the awakening of modern political consciousness in Iran, culminating in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. Given that most of the existing literature is based on unquestioned assumptions going back five decades, another in-depth look is well overdue. After a brief overview of the history of concessions, this paper will propose an alternative reading of the standard account of the tobacco rebellion.*

Excluding the relatively unopposed telegraph lines of the Indo-European Telegraph Department in the 1860s, the history of foreign concessions in Iran begins with what Lord Curzon described as “the complete abrogation of a nation’s birthright in favor of foreign speculators,” granted for seventy years to Baron de Reuter in July 1872 during Nasser-al-din Shah’s first European trip. The shah’s reformist premier, Moshir-al-daula, promoted it as a means to reverse Iran’s stagnation while providing a counterweight to Russian ambitions. The massive concession included a trans-Iranian railway, tramlines, reservoirs, wells, dams, irrigation works (and the sale of their water), mining, forestry, gas supply, roads, post and telegraphs, mills and factories and customs. Sir Henry Rawlinson’s misgivings about Persian readiness to absorb the wide-reaching project and about a railway that would give Russia the desired extension to its own Transcaspian railway line, hinted at the many

obstacles that lay on the path of the Reuter concession. Despite good intentions, the Iranian signatories failed to factor in the laborious intermediate stages of social and educational reform on which the success of such a project hinged. When the stipulated deadline lapsed, Nasser-al-din Shah preferred to cancel an agreement which had become a liability. Russian opposition, funding problems and various backroom deals were compounded by resistance from the conservative clergy and budding progressives, both of whom took advantage of ignorance and discontent among easily aroused masses to block the project. It was doomed to failure and fail it did, leaving a trail of indemnisation which came back to haunt Iran in the form of the Imperial Bank and the tobacco concession.

British opposition to other concessions so long as the Reuter agreement remained nominally in force resulted in a lull until the late 1880s, when concession-seekers flocked to Iran like a “flight of locusts,” (quoting Curzon again), eyeing lucrative deals. Some propositions were abortive such as the scandal-rife Lottery concession; others were successful, notably the Karun shipping concession and its extension, the Ahwaz-Isfahan Road, awarded to the Lynch Brothers, and on the Russian side, the Qazvin-Anzali Road and a Mont-de-Piété which would become the Banque d’Escompte de Perse. An assortment of minor concessions, though also contested, had a lesser potential for arousing fury. The most contentious concessions were the banking rights awarded in 1889 in compensation to Reuter’s heirs, complete with a monopoly to issue the first banknotes in Iran and unimplemented mining rights, and close on its heels, an agreement concluded in March 1890 for a monopoly on the domestic sales and foreign exports of Iran’s tobacco crop, granted to Major Talbot, a distant relative of Lord Salisbury, the British prime minister. Although the British government was not directly involved, the wheeling-dealing British minister in Iran, Drummond Wolff, was an active promoter of the deal, who did not see it through due to a sudden breakdown that led to his departure, leaving Chargé d’affaires Kennedy in charge.

The fifty-year agreement stipulated an annual payment to the Shah of £15,000 plus one quarter of profits after deductions for expenses and a five percent dividend. Not mentioned in the official agreement were hefty bribes disbursed to Iranian dignitaries, the recipients of which and the figures paid out remained undisclosed,

leaving the field open for the wildest estimates. By the time the signed agreement was made public in February 1891 to coincide with the arrival of the concessionaire, the news had spread in an atmosphere of general discontent over shortages of basic goods and inflationary prices. Opposition began months before the announcement, initially through leaflets and placards accusing the government and the *'olama* of tyranny and venality while the masses suffered. These complaints were soon diverted to foreign concessions and reached their peak with the tobacco concession against which opposition became especially vociferous. There were fears that other vital agricultural crops might also be subjected to foreign control, following a failed bid for Iran's agricultural production. Anyway tobacco was the major cash and export crop of Iran, and the most lucrative, with about 5,400,000 kilos used domestically and 4,000,000 exported. The benefit of the concession was all the more questionable given that the first tobacco processing plant in Iran dated back to 1879, making foreign expertise redundant.

There were good reasons for widespread grievances among the population. Tobacco touched directly upon the daily life and subsistence of large numbers of Iranians, with an estimated 2,500,000 consumers (about a quarter of the population), of whom 200,000 were directly involved in production and sale. Cultivators, including overseers of religious endowments, as well as retailers and wholesale or export merchants were directly affected. Cultivators had to declare and sell their whole crop to the company, and merchants had to register with the Regie (as the company was known) to obtain marketing permits for purchases made in cash. Any divergence would be punishable. A foreign monopoly would deprive sellers of the freedom of action that a competitive market had hitherto allowed in compliance with Shar'ia law. They all stood to lose, despite the concessionaire's contention to the contrary, but most affected were the merchants who profited from exporting the high-quality tobacco of Iran to Ottoman lands.

The Ottomans had obtained far better terms for a lesser quantity of tobacco of inferior quality - an annual payment of £700,000 plus a fifth of profits, without the imposition of a monopoly on cultivators or merchants. Not surprisingly the unfavourable terms of Talbot's concession were first revealed in July 1890 by the Turkish

newspaper, *Sabah*, in an article questioning the wisdom of relinquishing Iran's main source of wealth and revenue to a company whose estimate for prospective profits was absurdly low. A Persian translation in the Istanbul-based reformist newspaper, *Akhtar*, was followed by an interview with Talbot, and ended with the conclusion that not even Zanzibar or Abyssinia were subjected to such abusive terms. Nor would the Iranian government benefit, since merchants in Isfahan were paying up to £20,000 for export rights. *Akhtar* was thereafter banned in Iran, but its revelations fuelled growing suspicion of a damaging deal concluded behind the backs of interested parties.

As the main losers, the cultivators and especially the merchants were in the forefront of opposition. The *'olama*, with few exceptions, were in principle opposed to any economic penetration of Iran, suspecting it might constitute a stepping-stone to political hegemony as in India and Egypt, and contaminate pious Moslems through proximity with intrusive foreigners who, according to one overblown account, sent missionaries to build churches and erode Islam, and who, to gain confidence, founded hospitals where chaste girls served as nurses without their "curtain of purity". Purity issues were undoubtedly of concern to the devout majority who resented the intrusion of arrogant foreign employees at the core of their lives, as was the handling by infidels of a product consumed through intimate contact with the body and the zeal to uncover hidden hoards of tobacco in the privacy of homes. An important issue, raised by Lambton, was that Iranians were unaccustomed to "systematic labour and excise regulations under foreign direction." All this gave ammunition to the habitually loyal clerical class who became actively militant lest they lose the loyalty of their flocks. But the economics of the concession did not figure large in their discourse and were barely understood by the illiterate masses who counted on their guidance to secure a better lot in the hereafter.

Mirza Hasan Shirazi, the leading Shi'ite *mojtahed*, a cautious conservative, was generally averse to politics from which he distanced himself by moving from Najaf to Samara (both in Ottoman Iraq). It took him six months to respond to a stream of petitions requesting his intervention against the tobacco concession. Reformist dissidents such as Malkam Khan or Seyyed Jamal-al-din Asadabadi, alias Afghani, who played on the clerical sensitivity to

foreign encroachment, in a scenario familiar from the 1979 Islamic revolution, saw the *'olama* as a means to an end, while the Shah and his ministers equated progressives with revolutionary Babis or *dahri* (pantheists) – labels used expediently to cast opprobrium on reformist trends. When Shirazi's rabble-rousing son-in-law, Seyyed 'Ali Akbar Fal Asiri, was banished, in May 1891, from Shiraz to Basra via Bushehr, Seyyed Jamal-al-din, humiliated by his own recent forcible expulsion, used the fortuitous circumstance to have him deliver an oft-cited Arabic letter to Shirazi, denouncing the sale of Iranian assets, accusing the shah and his ministers of tyranny, corruption and heresy (*zandiq*), and by contrast flattering the *'olama* as the high representatives of the Lord of the Age (the Occult Twelfth Imam). It came three months too soon to influence Shirazi's two telegrams to the shah and three months too late to impact a movement already on the march.

The unexpected vehemence of protests resulted in pleas from the shah and his prime minister, Amin-al-Soltan, the main promoter of the concession, that the Regie proceed with tact and moderation. Kennedy made similar recommendations but knew that company agents, not being of "the class of men successfully to perform the delicate task entrusted to them," would give precedence to shareholders' interests. Most resented were the obsequious local employees assigned to spy on cheaters and their hidden supplies. The employment of armed horsemen to protect the provincial offices of the Regie without so much as a formal authorization, exacerbated fears of hegemonic intentions down the road. The newly arrived company director, Ornstein, tried to win over the top merchants by offering to sell them shares, but failed to impress upon them a sincere desire for equal partnership. In a further attempt at appeasement, a six-month moratorium was granted for the disposal of existing stocks. To mitigate the problem of forcing an unwilling seller into a transaction in contravention of Shar'ia law, the government forbade the confiscation of tobacco stocks without the owner's consent. Nevertheless, such was the degree of resistance that some merchants preferred to give away their stock for free rather than sell to the Regie. One merchant famously sold his whole stock of 12,000 sacks "straight to God", i.e. burnt them in a bonfire. The Regie, faced with such reactions, denied the intention of

interfering with religion or of importing large numbers of Europeans for their operations.

The first demonstrations erupted in Fars in April 1891, coinciding with the arrival of the Regie's agents. The province of Fars produced the best and the most tobacco, of such a fine quality that Curzon, a non-smoker, after only "a few perfumed inhalations," felt "an Olympian contentment" invading his brain cells. The protests were initiated by tobacco dealers and wealthy merchants, with backing from the influential landowning mayor Qavam-al-molk. A reluctant clergy was prodded to boycott mosques and *madrastas*, but violence did not erupt until the banishment of Fal Asiri following a fiery sermon during which he signified *jihad* by drawing a sword from under his cloak. A large crowd of protesters assembled in the shrine of Shah Cheragh to protest his expulsion was dispersed by tribal horsemen, leaving two dead and a few wounded, but the turmoil ended after two days.

The wrath of Azarbaijan was more vehement and lasted longer. Between May and September, protests in Tabriz escalated into a full-fledged revolt, peaking during the month of Moharram, involving, at its peak, the whole population "high and low," as well as a flow of *talabeh* (theology students) from outlying areas and from Russian-controlled Transcaucasia. While Azarbaijan was not a major tobacco producer, its merchants, including Russian nationals of Armenian and Caucasian extraction, handled fully one third of tobacco exports. In early May 1891, when Mr. Evans of the Imperial Ottoman Bank arrived in Tabriz to make preparations for the Regie, the concession was "the all-engrossing subject of conversation" among "leading members of society" who considered it injurious to Iran's finances and disadvantageous by comparison with the Ottoman concession. A profit of only one *toman* from every consumer, they calculated, would amount to an annual gain of 2,500,000 tomans (£780,000) for the domestic market alone, considerably more than the Regie's estimate. Evans's mission was to convince local tobacco merchants that "the Regie had no intention of taking the bread out of their mouths ruthlessly," but his imperious tone, as revealed in dispatches, must have irked them. The company had the means to succeed without them, he said, but "so long as the work could be carried on satisfactorily by the natives", would employ as many of them as possible, but only those

employed would enjoy a monopoly with a cut for the Regie. In case of unsatisfactory performance, they would be replaced by Europeans. The merchants pretended to be “pleased and flattered” when spoken to individually, but “reticent” when dealt with “in a body”. Obviously Mr. Evans was not familiar with Persian *ta’arof*, and went away feeling optimistic.

Letters attacking the company reached the Crown Prince in Tabriz, and his chief minister, Amir Nezam Garrusi, who doubled as the acting governor of Azarbaijan. By July, a *la’nat-nameh* (malediction) was posted around town proclaiming Shar’ia as the law of the land, declaring uncooperative *‘olama* as deserving of death, threatening the life and property of those found selling tobacco to *farangis*, and vowing to kill anyone who attempted to impose infidel customs. “Accursed those who keep silent,” it concluded. Christian Armenians would be included, if their Archbishop, a Russian subject, and his community refused to join the protests. This may have been a veiled warning to those Armenian merchants who, as Russian subjects, were not bound by the monopoly and thus aroused the resentment of affected colleagues. The bi-national Armenian patriarch deftly navigated between the conflicting parties and bade his Moslem colleagues to preach against attacks on innocent Armenians. In a petition to the shah and the Russian Consul-General, he advised against the Regie, suggesting that “if necessary the population would rather subscribe the sum to be paid to the Shah by the English ...”

In ordinary times the powerful chief *mojtahed* of Tabriz, Haj Mirza Javad Mojtahed, could rouse the province in any direction he pleased, but these were not ordinary times. Caught between great power rivalry and a seething populace, he was uncharacteristically reduced to impotence until forced into action during the mourning ceremonies of ‘Ashura in August 1891. On the seventh of Moharram, a leading *mojtahed* preached against interference by unbelievers in the tobacco business and branded collaborators as *koffar* or infidels worthy of death. On the same day the people of Tabriz, in a telegram to the British, Russian and Ottoman legations, threatened to massacre foreigners and Christians on ‘Ashura, if the shah insisted on selling off the country. A day later, with 20,000 armed men converging on the house of Mirza Javad, Amir Nezam, admitting helplessness, proposed to resign. The shah made a

desperate personal appeal to Mirza Javad, beseeching him to avert disaster. On the eve of 'Ashura, the wily *mojtahed*, announced from the pulpit that the Pride of the Universe (*fakhr-e ka'emat*, i.e. the Prophet) had appeared in his dream in a highly perturbed state, not owing to 'Ashura, but to complain about the cruelty of a people bent on spilling the blood of thousands of innocents for a meaningless cause. He advised the congregation to petition the shah and resort to action only if there was no reply. The sermon, together with the governor's tactic of ordering a symbolic closure of the Regie offices in Tabriz, forestalled aggression for the present.

The subtlety to which foreigners in Tabriz owed their salvation eluded Paton, the acting British consul who suspected the *mojtahed* of being a Russian puppet and an obtuse fanatic. Haj Mirza Javad came from the most illustrious line of *mojtaheds* in Azarbaijan. With a father who had left Tabriz in protest against the town's brief occupation by Russian forces in 1828, he was an unlikely candidate for Russian intrigues except where their interests converged. Curiously Lambton seems to have ignored the existence of this powerful personage and her attempt to decipher the names of the top four *mojtaheds* of Tabriz in a diplomatic dispatch reads 'Iavod' as 'Davoud' without bothering to cross-check Persian sources, or even General Gordon's description of how "Mirza Javad Agha ... since his successful contest over the Tobacco Régie," had become "one of the most important personages in Persia" and was "personally interested in trade." Similar suspicions, fuelled by Amin al-Soltan, targeted Amir Nezam, a respected statesman with a reputation for probity and competence, whom Paton described as "a pliant tool in Russian hands," "treacherous or incompetent," and guilty of "supineness or indifference, if not outright connivance." Yet this was a former high-profile diplomat who, having served in Paris and Istanbul, was acquainted with European languages and culture, and "imbued with Western and progressive ideas", according to Curzon who considered him "the best provincial administrator in Iran." Not only was he attuned to the popular mood in Azarbaijan, he also took care to maintain harmonious relations with a powerful neighbour sitting atop former Iranian provinces immediately to the north and itching to move south. Thanks to these two maligned dignitaries, 'Ashura came and went peacefully, but with no positive news from Tehran, Mirza Javad, in collusion with Amir Nezam, wired the shah

that, with Azarbaijan united in opposition, he refused to be held responsible for a mutiny if their demands were ignored.

The demands were set out in a petition signed by 4,000 citizens of all ranks and professions. The originals are not extant, but their contents have been transmitted in different versions, of which the most reliable attacks the sale of the country “piece by piece” to foreigners after a reign of forty-two years by Nasser al-din Shah. “We the people of Azarbaijan will not sell ourselves,” it proclaimed. A British dispatch adds that the petition accused the company of wanting to buy cheaply and sell dear to ruin the tobacco merchants through “forced purchases and forced sales.” Amir Nezam and even some *mojtaheds* were unhappy with the petition, but the movement had acquired momentum and threatened both Christians and Moslems. In this volatile atmosphere, Paton, in defiance of Amir Nezam’s warnings about the grave risk to European lives and in spite of increasingly obvious hostility against British nationals in Tabriz, insisted that the locks be removed from the Regie’s offices and the keys returned. Amir Nezam ignored the request.

Tabriz reacted strongly to the untimely arrival of a royal emissary bearing messages for the crown prince and the top ‘*olama*, and through them, to the “patriotic people of Azarbaijan,” who were to be told that intractable problems would result from surrendering to the Regie’s opponents, and attacks on foreign lives would entail military intervention and the ruin of Iran, as Russia desired. The shah was denounced as “an infidel merchant who has sold his country” and his emissary was blocked from entering the town until the Crown Prince fetched him in his personal carriage. He was warned, however, that his life was at risk if he stayed on, and any of the ‘*olama* who visited him would be “torn to pieces.” Similar threats were made to Iranian employees of the Regie if they failed to resign. Meanwhile citizens were equipping themselves for a protracted armed struggle. When a dog was taken around the bazaar with a scroll around the neck in mockery of the shah’s messenger and *farman*, it was clear that, barring the use of force, the emissary had to leave. Before departing he reminded Mirza Javad that the shah expected him to use his influence to establish the Regie in Tabriz, only to hear that the townspeople would never acquiesce.

In desperation, the shah sent Amir Nezam a telegram, variously reported as secret or *en clair*. It remains unclear whether Amir

Nezam was supposed to read it out in public or did so of his own accord to discourage mutiny. The telegram informed the *'olama* and the townspeople that negotiations were engaged, but patience was required to allow the process to follow its course; not even the British government could force the company to close down unconditionally without a backlash of contestation and heavy indemnity. Despite its calming effect, the distribution of the royal message gave Amin-al-Soltan the long-awaited excuse to dismiss Amir Nezam. To save face, the dignified statesman tendered his resignation. Instead of appointing a successor, the shah gave absolute powers to the Crown Prince, seconded by Prince 'Abd-al-Hossein Mirza, Nosrat-al-daula" (later Farmanfarma) as military commander. The young prince had the highest respect for Amir Nezam, under whom he had trained, and like him, believed that the troops sympathized with the protesters and that the Azarbaijan army "won't lift a finger against the orders of their religious leaders and will be the first to participate in plunder." It was a change of guard without change.

The shah may have chastised the heir apparent for not taking action against those who demonstrated against his personal envoy, but he knew that the Regie could not be imposed by force of arms in Tabriz - it sufficed that Azarbaijan was on the Russian border. The spectre of Russian troops invading Azarbaijan was never far from his mind. Nor was he ready for an outright cancellation for fear of worse consequences than hitherto believed. The British chargé had warned that royal sovereignty was under attack and other provinces were waiting for Azarbaijan to give the *"mot d'ordre* for revolution." The shah's offer of another "valuable concession" in replacement was also dismissed as "political suicide," since by discouraging future investment in Iran, it would lead to "decay", as Russia wished. The shah played for time with messages about the company's agreement with French and Ottoman companies for the sale of tobacco and its advance purchase of large quantities from Shiraz, Kashan and Tehran to that end. As more protests poured in, his misgivings increased and he squirmed at the idea of "mixing the Regie" with the blood of his subjects. He was, however, dissuaded from action by Amin-al-Soltan, though the latter's obstinacy gradually weakened as the shah became angrier and the British Foreign Office expressed disapproval of saving the Regie by force.

Rather than abandon a third of its profits, the Regie offered to employ only Moslem Azarbaijanis or to turn over its Tabriz offices to the local merchants for a year, in effect as sub-lessees. But with Tabriz adamant that the Regie must leave, the company's operations had to be suspended. The shah realized that the abandonment of Azarbaijan would render the concession meaningless. In another shift of mood, he decided to ban tobacco imports from other provinces to Azarbaijan, hoping that frustrated merchants would recant after heavy losses and accept the Regie's terms. When orders went out to other provinces ordering full support to the Regie, it became apparent that the suspension of Tabriz was a temporary ploy. The double ruse of a limited suspension, contradicted by safeguarding the Regie's export trade, was bound to backfire. Isfahan and Mashhad were next.

The Regie had a more solid position in Isfahan thanks to the powerful pro-British governor-general, Prince Zell-al-Soltan, and the well-entrenched Persian Gulf Trading Company, whose director, Muir, was put in charge of the Regie's offices there. Yet most of the complaints about obsequious local employees beholden to foreigners are reported from Isfahan. There too the merchant class initiated protests, hence Zell-al-Soltan's threat to physically punish or execute non-compliant merchants. But the chief *mojtahed*, Aqa Najafi, and his brother, wealthy landowners who vied with the prince-governor for power and wealth, soon took the lead. For the first time the use and even the cultivation of tobacco were declared *haram*. Foreigners were insulted, collaborators denounced as *najes* (ritually impure) or apostates, and as such not allowed to frequent baths, mosques or public fountains. Smoking stopped, *qalians* were broken, and all 'Muir' merchandise (thus known because imported by the Persian Gulf Trading Company) was boycotted. The banishment of the Najafis was contemplated by the shah who wondered why anyone should wish to muddy British-Iranian relations for the sake of a label. Given that the bazaar had been selling English goods for a century, that would make the whole country *najes*. His threat to resort to whatever measures necessary - cavalry, artillery, infantry, Cossacks - , if the 'nonsense' continued, made Najafi retreat from a full confrontation. The movement, which had risen spontaneously, died out, but the local *fatwa* planted a seed that would produce foul fruit.

In Mashhad the leading *'olama*, who controlled the largest endowments in Iran, adopted a more conciliatory tone. They broke up the *bast* (sanctuary) of *talabehs* and militant women armed with sticks to force their men into action, and had them expelled from the shrine and its mosque. That protesters planned to attack the British and Russian consulates and drive out all Europeans from Mashhad showed the limits of Russian intrigue. Nobody was fooled for long by crude propaganda alleging that all emitters of smoke (fuel, public baths, chimneys) were included in the concession. The mere thought of Russian troops arriving from the recently invaded territories of northern Khorasan to occupy the holiest of shrines was the worse prospect. Most effective was the shah's threat to send the fearsome tribal horse of Khorasan and have one hundred protesters blown out of cannon muzzles. In the end Mashhad was satisfied with the remaining four months of the moratorium on condition that alcohol not be sold in such close proximity to the sacred shrine, by either Moslems or non-Moslems.

Other provincial towns experienced lesser protests in fits and bursts, but Azarbaijan, with its indomitable will, and Isfahan, where the idea of prohibition first emerged, inspired Tehran. In Tabriz Haj Mirza Javad kept a watchful eye on the smouldering embers of revolt and undoubtedly communicated with Haj Kazem Malek al-Tojjar (Gertrude Bell's "King of Merchants"), the leader of the merchant community, with whom he shared a common ancestry and very close relations. They must have considered the best options for a worst-case scenario. That implied secret contacts of which diplomats would have been unaware, though Amin-al-Soltan did inform Kennedy that the chief *mojtahed* of Tabriz "had been in constant communication with Shirazi and the Russian Consul-General."

Significantly Shirazi's two successive telegrams to the shah and his son, Kamran Mirza Nayeb-al-saltana, Minister of War and Governor of Tehran, were written at the peak of the Tabriz riots, three months after his son-in-law's expulsion. Little heed was paid to the first message which was kept secret. A second message warned that foreign control of resources was tantamount to the nation's enslavement and the corruption of Islam. The failure to answer the religious leader was a lack of courtesy stemming from the belief that the *'olama* were out of touch with the times. If

concessions contradicted the Qur'an, the shah wrote to his son, why would the Ottoman Sultan, the titular 'Caliph of Islam', have granted concessions to foreigners for fifty years? While Iran had only one *farsang* (six kilometres) of a foreign-built railroad from Tehran to Shah 'Abdol-'Azim, they had five hundred times more linking them with the whole of Europe. Shirazi was no less obstinate. When the Iranian minister in Baghdad listed the justifications for the concession (the risk of invalidating the royal signature, funding the army, high cost of indemnity etc.), his arguments were rebuffed on the grounds that the concession was far more harmful than any problems ensuing from its termination.

It was illusory to think that a bad deal was the panacea for Iran's backwardness. The merchants knew better, and having reinforced their alliance with the clergy, were desperate for a way out. Isfahan showed the way, but Najafi's local writ had a limited reach and its observation was brief. Nonetheless it inspired precocious rumours of a *fatwa* sent from Samara to Tehran via Isfahan in response to inquiries from that town. Given the devious route, there was reason for doubt, but a writ from "the Deputy of the Imam" being mandatory, it could not be dismissed without inquiring about its authenticity. This was hampered by unusually severe winter weather which had disrupted communications. Nonetheless a rumour began to circulate that a *fatwa* was sent by Shirazi via Isfahan. It even reached the ears of the shah and Lambton took it for a fact, questioning it in the twenty years between her two accounts. When on Thursday, December 3, 1891, a credible *fatwa*, or more correctly, a *hokm*, (binding on all Shi'ites) allegedly from Shirazi, was delivered by post to the chief *mojtahed* of Tehran, Mirza Hasan Ashtiani, questions also arose, as nobody ever saw the original and Ashtiani gave evasive replies. The short forceful text, declaring the use of tobacco in any form equivalent to warring with the Lord of the Age, spread at lightning speed with immediate effect. By noon of the same day 100,000 copies were simultaneously posted in every street, bazaar and mosque, and transmitted to every province, despite government efforts to prevent dissemination through confiscation.

From the beginning there were strong suspicions that the initiative originated with Malek-al-tojjar who had consistently opposed the concession. Indeed the concise text was more

characteristic of his pen than of Shirazi's. The strong layered text inspired one anonymous author to liken the wording to emanations from the tongue of the Hidden Imam. The rumor mill churned out other likely or unlikely names, including Ashtiani's, Seyyed Jamal-al-din's, the Russian envoy's, even the shah's, but none so consistently as Malek-al-tojjar's. Some claimed that he wanted to get even with the Regie for having rejected his proposal of partnership, but the facts contradict any such negotiation, for which there is no record either. Informed sources widely assumed a forgery. Sheikh Karbala'i, a student of Shirazi's, in his eyewitness account of the crisis, called it just that, namely a *j'al* (forgery), unbacked by a reliable document, and generally attributed to Malek al-Tojjar. Mirza Yahya Daulatabadi, a student of Ashtiani's, recognized the mettle of Malek-al-tojjar and called the attribution to Shirazi a lie, though the latter may have allowed his name to be used "to silence the English," while maintaining the option to admit or deny, depending on the measure of success. It was believed because "sedition is blind" (*balva kur ast*), the same author concludes. Seyyed 'Abdullah Behbahani, who smoked openly, also considered it a politically motivated fabrication (*sakhtegi*). Some like Nazem-al-Eslam Kermani and the Cossack Brigade's Kosogovskii attributed the drafting to Ashtiani with the acquiescence of Shirazi following complaints which, according to Kosogovskii's retrospective account, consisted of "detailed information" from Malek-al-tojjar "regarding English plans to use the tobacco monopoly as a step towards the occupation of the whole of Persia." As Kosogovskii's account was based on later hearsay, he may have amalgamated several strands of fact and rumour in the person whose name was on the tip of all tongues. One additional piece of important evidence, handed down orally, comes from Malek al-tojjar's steward who, years later, related that his employer scribbled something on a piece of paper and instructed him to deliver it to the post office in haste.

An argument advanced against Shirazi's authorship is that he was legally bound to provide an unequivocal reply to inquiries about the authenticity of a writ, whereas he neither confirmed nor denied. While he did eschew the issue when in correspondence with court and government officials, he sent vague affirmations to individual *mojtaheds*. Those telegrams were allegedly intercepted, but their

contents leaked out. The closest Shirazi came to an admission was a curt reply to the Imam Jum'a's inquiry, that "yes", he had "formerly" so decreed. Inquiries from provincial 'olama were similarly answered, but those too were withheld. The fact remains that the original text never showed up. Then why was the authenticity of the *hokm* not questioned by later historians? Adamiyat, who gives all the credit to the merchant class and points out the religious inadmissibility of a ban as *daf'e fased be afsad* (eliminating one evil with another), considered Malek-al-tojjar's authorship probable but irrelevant; people wanted it to be true., Teymuri believed that Malek-al-tojjar's name was implicated by Amin-al-Soltan to discredit the *hokm*. Nowadays, with Shirazi designated as a role model of the Islamic regime, Iranian scholars are reduced to silence. Non-Iranian historians have mostly adhered to the standard version, ignoring doubts expressed in diplomatic dispatches. That view is beginning to change, based on strong evidence in Persian sources, but it has yet to become mainstream.

Why would Malek-al-tojjar have forged a religious edict in the name of the highest Shi'ite authority and compromise his good relations with court and clergy? A family history of protectionist trends is one explanation. His father, the first *Malek-al-tojjar-e mamelek-e mahruseh* (King of merchants of the Protected Domains of Iran) of the Qajar era, cooperated closely with Amir Kabir on his aim of giving precedence to native industry and crafts to stem the tide of imports. This was reiterated in the constitution of the new Assembly of Merchants, on the board of which Haj Kazem sat as a novice after inheriting his father's title in 1870. By 1891, although not engaged in commerce himself, he was ready to address the merchants' grievances. Tobacco merchants published their objections in the official newspaper a week before the concession was announced. When it was officially revealed, an assembly of sixty top merchants met in Malek-al-tojjar's house to draft a petition proposing to pay more in tobacco taxes than the Regie offered in gifts and bribes to the shah. They then proceeded with the tobacco sellers to the shrine of Shah 'Abd-al-'Azim, whence another petition, declaring unanimous refusal of the concession, was dispatched. That news of the meeting was leaked by a secret informant to the British Legation and forwarded to Salisbury indicates the level of concern about the potential fallout on British

relations with Iran. That the shah first began to harbour doubts at that stage proves that the merchants' views were reckoned with. This is significant at a time when the *'olama* were as yet barely involved.

With roots in Azarbaijan and close relations with the leading figures and top merchants of the province, Malek al-Tojjar must have kept abreast of developments in Tabriz. After the company's operations were suspended in Azarbaijan, the realization that the Regie would continue functioning in other provinces and that the shah contemplated prohibiting tobacco imports from other provinces to Azarbaijan, revived the rage of Azarbaijan. There was worse in store if the exemption of the domestic market left the Regie in control of the export market, implying the reopening of its offices in Tabriz - an unacceptable proposition. When, after two months of calm, protests revived, in Tabriz, as well as in Isfahan and Shiraz, there was cause for concern. With the inauspicious end of the six-month moratorium approaching on December 9, 1891, panic seized the top merchants. They could neither wait for inclement weather to clear up, nor for haphazard communications to resume. Therein may lie the key to the writ. Malek al-Tojjar had the clout and the means to tackle the emergency, conceivably with the help of erstwhile Luti companions from his adolescent days at the *zurkhaneh*. The most likely scenario is that Shirazi was neither the author nor the inspiration, but was probably informed, though perhaps not consulted, about a boycott in his name. There was no time to wait for him to react. Malek-al-Tojjar, backed by Ashtiani and leading merchants, and almost certainly prodded by Mirza Javad, drafted the cryptic text and organized its dissemination before it could be stopped. It was, in Adamiyat's words, "a political arrangement in religious clothing" (*arayesh-e siyasi dar pushesh-e dini*). Daulatabadi confirms that Shirazi preferred not to be implicated until the efficacy of the initiative was proven.

The decisive role of Malek al-Tojjar, in collusion with Ashtiani, in organizing the publication and simultaneous dissemination of the *hokm* and his banishment on that charge are unequivocally recorded. Following reports that he was seen on the eve at Ashtiani's home, he was summoned to court for negotiations with Nayeb al-Saltana, but found himself hoisted into a carriage and whisked off to prison in Qazvin. There was no mention of forgery, since no one dared

question a writ from the Shi'ite leader. Other well-known merchants from Tehran were subjected to milder punishment for complicity. During Malek al-Tojjar's absence, the protests in Tehran, muted until then, took a violent turn. The government decided to release him in the hope that he could douse the fire he had ignited. A brief account of the insurgency in Tehran shows why the government felt so desperate.

As soon as the *hokm* was revealed, tobacco was universally boycotted throughout the country, including in the shah's harem and in military barracks. Only a handful of dignitaries defied the ban, though others may have smoked secretly or resorted to intoxicating substances. Even Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews observed the prohibition as did Shi'ites in the Caucasus, India and Iraq. The Tsar's Moslems were encouraged to do likewise. Nothing like it had been seen before; foreigners were in awe. The shah, realizing the gravity of the situation, instructed Amin-al-Soltan to launch negotiations with the British Legation and the Regie at any cost and to reach an understanding with the top clerical and mercantile representatives to remove the boycott. The '*olama* insisted that they had no competence to lift the ban, and risked losing credibility with their flocks who would "tear them to pieces." Since their argument was based on Shirazi's messages to the shah rather than the *hokm*, Amin-al-Soltan retorted that by that token the postal and telegraph services were also *haram*. The main objection was to the word 'monopoly', the very basis of the concession, which, after being explained, was deemed to contravene the Qur'an. Amin-al-Soltan proposed to have it removed if they empowered him to negotiate the exemption of the domestic monopoly - a ploy that would leave the export trade untouched, but allow producers and merchants to sell at will, including to the Regie. The cost of the company's loss would be covered by a tobacco tax, no one would suffer losses from indemnification and the shah's signature would remain honoured. Amin-al-Soltan chose to interpret this outcome positively and met with British Minister Sir Frank Lascelles, who had arrived in October to clear the charged atmosphere. The final decision rested with the foreign shareholders who notified Ornstein of their conditional agreement, pending the calculation of their estimated loss. However, since exports to the Ottoman market were covered by a separate agreement with the concessionaire, the Iranian

government had no say in it. Assuming that the problem was solved, the prime minister expected smoking to resume, but the *'olama* would not turn a *haram* into a *halal* without Shirazi's express approval. The latter, advised that the domestic concession was cancelled, took time to send a typically vague reply with praise for cutting off foreign hands, but no mention of the ban.

On Friday December 25, 1891, a declaration of *jihad*, attributed to Shirazi, was announced for Monday. The next day another bulletin threatening to kill Europeans in Tehran if the Regie's foreign agents were not expelled aroused panic until Ashtiani denounced it as a fake emanating from 'corrupt elements' who wished to rupture relations between the government and the nation. Foreigners are said to have fled or taken refuge with Iranian friends, but it was hardly an exodus, since French sources mention a diplomats' ball on that night. The date went by without an incident. Nasser-al-din Shah, now determined to seal the chapter, proclaimed his decision to terminate the concession, but he was no longer trusted. Realizing that for as long as abstention frayed nerves, turbulence would persist, the shah wanted the *hokm* revoked without delay. Disappointed with Shirazi's ambiguous message, he wrote an unusually harsh letter to Ashtiani, accusing him of demagoguery and surrender to hot-headed students and ignorant ruffians, of distributing a spurious *hokm* without consulting the government and encouraging the use of opium and other unhealthy filth by upholding the ban. Was he not aware that, without the government, Babis would kill them all and their families would be prey to Russian Cossacks, Ottoman and English troops, and Afghan and Turkoman raiders? Ashtiani felt resentful that the shah showed him less respect than a Sunni or Armenian preacher enjoyed in Ottoman or Christian lands, and therefore requested permission to remove his "harmful existence" to the 'Atabat (Shi'ite shrines of Iraq).

Nasser-al-din Shah subdued his tone, but receiving no more than verbal gratitude, lost his temper and ordered Ashtiani to smoke in public or be gone from Tehran. When the *mojtahed* chose to leave, his students spread news of the ultimatum and ordered shops to close, for "this is the day to defend religion and kill unbelievers." A swelling horde of men in shrouds, women and children, converged on the *mojtahed's* home for a tearful farewell, and thence proceeded to the royal citadel of the Arg where the barricaded gates

felt the pressure of a human wave numbering in the thousands. Meanwhile the Imam Jum'a was pulled down from his pulpit at the Masjed-e Shah and beaten up. In front of the Arg the Shah was derided as a woman and an unbeliever, while the demonstrating women complained, "Our religious leaders are being expelled for foreigners to wed and bury us." A messenger sent to Ashtiani returned with the usual refrain. The shah pledged to cancel the whole concession and nobody would be coerced to smoke in the interim. By then the people wanted much more, they wanted Amin-al-Soltan's head and an end to all concessions, old and new. An averted attack on the cowardly Nayeb-al-Saltana resulted in hundreds of hysterical people bursting into the Arg in his pursuit, smashing doors, windows, and lamps. Armed retaliation, resisted until then, became inevitable. Even though the Special Brigade refused to shoot at fellow Moslems and *seyyeds*, auxiliaries fired fifty volleys into the mob, resulting in ten martyrs, of whom seven were killed on the spot, and three times as many wounded. The rest of the crowd fled or dispersed, carrying four of the retrieved corpses on makeshift stretchers.

While the Arg was under assault E'temad-al-Saltana happened upon Malek-al-Tojjar pacing the palace grounds in a *khal'at* (robe of honour) of the finest texture. Summoned back for mediation, he was greeted en route by thousands of ecstatic well-wishers who sacrificed sheep and chanted verses in his honour. Such was his popularity then. Entrusted forthwith with letters for Ashtiani from the shah and Amin-al-Soltan, he donned a plain *aba* cloak to blend in as he ploughed his way through agitated crowds to reach Ashtiani's home. The letters promised cancellation but warned that if the mobs were not dispersed, many would succumb to bullets. Malek-al-Tojjar's subsequent report to Amin-al-Soltan reveals that he was shocked by the overreaction of ruffians, and referred to them as "*in khalq-e pedar sukhte-ye ghaugha-talab*" (this sensation-seeking son-of-a-burnt-father populace) incessantly arriving from near and far to receive instructions. Seeing villagers from Kan(d), equipped with arms for the rumoured *jihad*, he rebuked them for bloodlust and told them to go back.

Malek-al-Tojjar's mission was instrumental in bringing Ashtiani back to the fold. The letters convinced the *mojtahed* of the sincerity of the government's promise, pending final confirmation. Ashtiani

even contemplated permitting smoking without waiting for the Mirza's approval, if his conditions were met. Thanks to mediation by Malek al-Tojjar and 'Azod al-Molk, the elder of the Qajar tribe, the violent phase lasted barely a day and never spread beyond Tehran, but it would take more back-and-forth negotiations to end the crisis. An emboldened Shirazi now asked Ashtiani to double-check the government's intentions and send him a copy of the abrogation document to ascertain that it would not produce another damaging deal. Shirazi's evasive replies tested the patience of the shah and Amin-al-Soltan. An exasperated Ashtiani requested to be relieved of responsibility, except to negotiate on the nation's behalf for their three conditions: blood money for martyrs' families, amnesty for all demonstrators, and an official announcement from the Regie confirming withdrawal and the restitution of all tobacco stocks at the purchased price. Ashtiani compromised on other concessions which he agreed to leave untouched, regardless of Shirazi's aversion to foreign presence on Moslem soil. Four leading *'olama* were requested to write individual confirmations to Shirazi, to be delivered, with Malek-al-tojjar's mediation, via Kermanshah and Baghdad. Meanwhile Malek-al-tojjar was to reassure all the merchants and tobacco-sellers that the decision was definitive. The shah was perplexed as to why doubts lingered on even though people were invited to reclaim their stock (none had done so) and most of the employees were already dismissed, with the rest to follow once accounts were settled. But he still wanted political propagandists denounced for punishment or deportation.

Finally, a brief note with Shirazi's seal in reply to the four *'olama* affirming that no obstacles remained if the cause was removed, was conveniently interpreted by the relieved *'olama* as ending prohibition and was distributed in that sense in 10,000 copies. Ashtiani smoked in front of elated crowds. There followed a succession of hyperbolic exchanges between the shah and his prime minister with Ashtiani and Shirazi. Thereafter the *'olama* were to be consulted on all major deals. The effect on Iran's balance of trade had not featured in negotiations with the domestic opposition, but the vexing compensation of £500,000, which saddled Iran with its first foreign debt, secured by the pledge of its customs revenues, was to generate renewed criticism.

When all was done, Amin-al-Soltan switched allegiance to the Russian side, leading to speculation about the trumpeted Russian role. While there is no denying that Russia strongly opposed any monopoly concessions other than her own as contrary to the freedom of trade stipulated in the Treaty of Turkomanchai, the crucial question is how much impact their crude intrigues and bombastic rehteoric actually had on fanning insurrection. Ultimately it was the *hokm* that determined the outcome and that lay beyond either Russian or British reach. Even Lascelles denied any significant Russian role in stirring the protests. He was more concerned with the risk of antagonizing a discontented population. Thanks to his warning of a potentially larger rebellion endangering foreigners' lives, the Regie finally agreed to withdraw. The Russian flag was nevertheless a useful scarecrow. Ashtiani's warning that, unless the three conditions were satisfied, people would drag him by a cord around the neck to implore help and protection from the Russian Legation, amounted to verbal blackmail, no less effective for leaning more on words than action. Paradoxically, Russian opposition achieved the desired result by nurturing the ever-present fear of another breach of Iranian frontiers.

### **Conclusion**

While corruption, fanaticism, progressive ideas, and the other usual arguments remain valid, the main motivations for opposing the tobacco concession were commercial and geopolitical. These have been overshadowed by the victory claimed by the *'olama* who felt empowered by their newfound ability to influence events. Daulatabadi was prescient in voicing concern over the fruit that would grow from "the seed planted in the clerical field," and wondering what force would disentangle the unhealthy blending of politics with religion and return the clergy and the government to their respective duties. The answer to that question lies in an as yet uncertain future. But institutions, clerical or otherwise, evolve and change.

## **Ottomans and Safavids: Sultan Süleymān and Shah Tahmāsb.**

**Lecture given by Colin Imber on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2013. Colin Imber was Reader in Turkish at the University of Manchester until his recent retirement and is the author of ‘The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power.’**

The posthumous reputations of the Safavid shah Tahmāsb I (r. 1524-1576) and the Ottoman sultan Süleymān I (1520-1560) could hardly be more different. While Süleymān has a place in popular memory as the greatest Ottoman sultan, Tahmāsb is often remembered as a mediocre ruler, suffering in comparison with his father Shah Isma‘īl I and grandson ‘Abbās I ‘the Great’. Tahmāsb’s unflattering reputation stems in part, perhaps, from his religiosity and preference for fishing over hunting, but more importantly from his failure to confront and defeat Süleymān during the three Ottoman invasions of Safavid territory in 1534-36, 1548-49 and 1553-55. There is, however, another way of understanding the conflict between the two rulers: realising that he could never defeat the Ottoman army in a set battle, Tahmāsb instead devised a strategy that constantly frustrated Süleymān’s plans to destroy him, the Safavid dynasty and the *qizilbash* ‘heresy’.

Süleymān’s intentions became obvious to Tahmāsb immediately on his accession to the throne, when he received a letter from the sultan, reproaching him for not offering his submission and threatening to invade his realms and overwhelm him with the strength of Ottoman artillery, evoking unpleasant memories of Selīm I’s victory over Shah Isma‘īl at Chaldiran in 1514. The threat, however, was an empty one: in 1524-5, the Ottomans faced serious problems in Egypt and, in 1526, Süleymān turned his attention westwards to Hungary, and it was only in 1533 that he could contemplate a campaign against the shah. Süleymān had with him – or so he believed – an excellent source of advice on Safavid affairs. This was Ulama Tekkelu, a former Safavid governor, who

had begun life as an Ottoman subject and participated in the great Shah Kulu uprising against Bayezid II (1481-1512) in 1511. When the rebellion collapsed, he had fled to the protection of Shah Isma'īl and prospered in Safavid service, rising eventually to become governor of Azerbaijan. He had remained loyal to Tahmāsb when his fellow Tekkelus rebelled, but when their insurrection failed and ended in a massacre, he began to fear for his own life and, in 1531, fled to the sultan's protection. It was Ulama who was to become his chief advisor on the campaign.

In September, 1533, Süleymān's grand vizier Ibrāhīm Pasha left Istanbul for Aleppo to oversee preparations for an invasion of the Safavid realms. The initial intention was to send ships and artillery down the Tigris to attack Baghdad – the defection of its Safavid governor in 1528 had given the sultan a tenuous claim to the city – but, on the insistence of Ulama, Ibrāhīm and the governor-general of Diyarbekir, the plan changed. Rejecting peace overtures from Tahmāsb, in the spring of 1534 the grand vizier led his troops through Bitlis into Azerbaijan. The Ottoman strategy worked perfectly. The Kurdish lords to the east and west of Lake Van whose loyalty Ibrāhīm had courted over the winter transferred their allegiance from shah to sultan, as did the lords of Shirvan and Gilan on the shores of the Caspian. The fortress of Van surrendered without a fight, and Ibrāhīm marched unimpeded to Tabriz, entering the city in August. Süleymān, meanwhile, had left Istanbul in June with the remainder of the army and, as he journeyed eastwards, received two messages from Ibrāhīm, the first recommending the appointment of Ottoman governors to the newly conquered Azerbaijan, and the second suggesting to the sultan that he march as far as Erciş on Lake Van and then retire with his army to overwinter in Diyarbekir.

Tahmāsb had learned of the invasion but could offer no resistance. Süleymān had co-ordinated his offensive to coincide with an Uzbek attack on Herat, forcing the shah eastwards and leaving his western borders undefended. It was only in late August after his victory over the Uzbek khan °Ubaydullah that he could take action against the Ottomans. In a rapid march across his entire realm, pausing only in Mashhad to seek the help of the Almighty by renouncing wine and issuing a decree closing all taverns, brothels and gambling dens throughout his dominions, he reached Qazvīn. It

was when he was there that Ibrāhīm and Ulama learned of his presence: Ulama had recognised the turban that one of Tahmāsb's close associates had lost in a skirmish with Ottoman troops. At this point, Ibrāhīm panicked. Since his troops refused to fight the shah unless the sultan himself was in command, he wrote to Süleymān urging him to hurry to Tabriz and, after a march through wind and rain and over a pass so narrow that two horsemen could not ride abreast, the sultan arrived in the city. On 30 September, he appeared before his troops at the shah's favourite summer resort at Ujan. From here, he sent a letter to Tahmāsb, challenging him to battle.

After the march from Herat, Tahmāsb had with him only 7,000 men, of whom only 3,000 were fit for battle and, in these circumstances, he had no intention of fighting. Instead, as the Ottoman troops went in pursuit, he went one stage ahead of them removing all food supplies in their line of march. In mid-October, as the Ottomans camped near Soltaniyya, it began to snow. Over the next fortnight, as they followed the shah southwards, the snow became so deep that on some days the troops were immobilised amidst such cold as they had never before experienced. The only sign of the enemy came when Safavid raiders emerged out of the darkness to seize prisoners as informants to bring to Tahmāsb. Finally, the sultan took the decision to abandon the chase and go instead to Baghdad. On 29 October, his army camped near Hamadan, preparing to cross the Zagros mountains. By now, with reinforcements arriving from Kuhgiluya, the initiative had passed to the shah. However, he chose not to attack Süleymān but instead, learning that Ulama had returned to Tabriz, followed him northwards to the city. As he approached, Ulama fled to the citadel of Van. With his flight, the sultan lost Tabriz and Azerbaijan.

By 2 November, the Ottoman army reached Dinaver, the last inhabited place before Khaneqīn near lowland Iraq. Added to the rocky terrain, the troops suffered thunder and hail and, despite rain 'like Noah's flood', lack of drinking water. The wet rocks were slippery underfoot, and what in the summer were pleasant upland pastures had become impassable swamps. Between Dinaver and Khāneqīn men and animals suffered unparalleled hunger and thirst. Many died, but what probably worried the sultan more was the loss of his artillery, buried to lessen the load for the army to carry and to keep it hidden from the shah. In the lowlands beyond Khāneqīn,

many men and most of the surviving animals lost their lives in the flooded Diyāla river and, once beyond the Diyāla, as the weather turned cold, the army stumbled its way through frozen rice paddies towards Baghdad. In the meantime, at Khāneqīn, Süleymān had received an envoy from the Safavid governor surrendering the city. His motives are uncertain. Since the Ottoman army was too exhausted to undertake a siege and had no artillery, he more probably feared a coup by the Tekkelu garrison in the city. On 7 December, Süleymān entered Baghdad. Two days later, he learned that Tahmāsb had re-taken Tabriz and that most of the Ottoman garrison had defected.

Tahmāsb's priority was to regain what he had lost and, to this end, he left Tabriz to besiege Ulama in Van. Süleymān by contrast spent the winter in Baghdad, securing the allegiance of the local Safavid governors in Iraq and the loyalty of the Kurdish chiefs on whom he relied for his passage through the mountains and the recovery of his abandoned artillery. He had also to restore his army, and throughout the winter and spring fresh troops, equipment and supplies arrived at Altun Köprü on the Great Zāb river: on 20 May, 1535, they began the march through the mountains to Tabriz. The weather was mild; in April the sultan had received the welcome news that Tahmāsb had abandoned the siege of Van; and at the end of May, he received a letter from Tahmāsb's brother, Sām Mīrzā, offering his submission. Nonetheless, the campaign of 1535 was a failure.

During his march through the mountains, Süleymān had rejected a peace offer from the shah but, when he arrived in Tabriz on 1 July, to find the city abandoned, he received a second proposal to end hostilities. Dismissing the offer with an angry letter taunting Tahmāsb for cowardice and again challenging him to battle, he set off in a futile pursuit. There was no sign of the shah, only that he had removed all the grain along the Ottoman line of march, forcing the sultan, at the beginning of August, to lead his exhausted troops back to Tabriz. With the troops saying openly that they would refuse to stay in the city, Süleymān had no choice but to return to Istanbul. On 27 August he departed, leaving the city in ruins. From this point, Tahmāsb's fortunes rose. Learning that the sultan had gone, he went first to the Safavid shrine at Ardabil to seek blessings from his ancestors, and then set off towards Van, avoiding any contact

with the main body of the Ottoman army. Here he found that the Ottoman garrison had abandoned Van and left it to one of Tahmāsb's Kurdish allies, prompting the sultan's last major action of the campaign. In an attempt to recapture Van, he sent Ulama with a cavalry force around the southern shore of the lake, while the shah waited for him in a narrow valley near Gevaş. When the attack came, the Ottomans could not resist the superior force of the Safavid cavalry in the constricted terrain and suffered a severe defeat. With no hope of recovering Van, with Sām Mīrzā's rebellion having come to nothing and with the winter approaching, the sultan returned to Istanbul. He arrived in January, 1536. In March, he ordered the execution of his grand vizier, Ibrāhīm Pasha. Ibrāhīm had been his boyhood friend and, as grand vizier, had gained unprecedented power, but became, it seems, the scapegoat for the failure of the campaign.

Tahmāsb, for his part, had lost Baghdad but had learned two lessons: first, that the inhospitable geography of Iran was by itself sufficient to defeat an Ottoman invasion and, second, that in the right circumstances the Ottomans could not resist the superior force and manoeuvrability of his cavalry. These lessons proved invaluable in the two subsequent Ottoman invasions.

The second of these came in 1548. In 1547, Tahmāsb's brother, Alqāsb Mīrzā, fled to Süleymān's court in Istanbul. In 1548, assured that Alqāsb had a large following in Iran, Süleymān sent him ahead to Tabriz under Ulama's tutelage while he himself followed in command of his army. Alqāsb had meanwhile sent a letter to his brother boasting that this army was bringing camels loaded with water and had collected intelligence on water channels in the desert, so that 'a hundred thousand men' could pass safely through. Tahmāsb's own calculation that Ottoman provisions would not last more than a month proved to be more accurate. The sultan found that, once again, the shah had burned the land and removed all food supplies along his route: when he reached Tabriz at the end of July, ashes from the scorched countryside obscured the daylight, and innumerable horses, mules and camels died as they tried to survive on bark and leaves. Forced by hunger to abandon Tabriz, the Ottoman army retreated as far as Van, whose governor had earlier refused to defect to Alqāsb. Now, after a short siege, he surrendered to the grand vizier, Rüstem Pasha. Tahmāsb knew that Van had

fallen but, rather than confront Rüstem's army, he sent his son Isma'īl to destroy the Ottoman fortress at Kars, and another commander to plunder the lands to the west of Lake Van. By the time he retired to Qarabagh for the winter, Tahmāsb was satisfied that he had plundered 'everything that was halāl' and exacted revenge for the damage that the Sultan had inflicted on his realms.

Süleymān spent the winter in Aleppo, replenishing the losses, especially of animals, that his army had suffered in 1548. He also reluctantly tried another tactic against the shah. In late September, he allowed Alqāsb to raise troops in Iraq and mount an expedition into Iran, forcing Tahmāsb to leave Qarabagh to face this new threat. Alqāsb's campaign was a fiasco. He plundered Hamadan, Kashan and Qom, but when he learned that his brother was approaching, fled southwards. No town or fortress offered him allegiance and his troops pressured him to return to their Iraqi homeland. By the time he crossed the border, the sultan and Rüstem Pasha had also begun to suspect his motives, forcing him eventually to take refuge with the Kurdish lord Surkhāb. After long negotiations, Surkhāb delivered him to his brother for execution.

In June 1549, the sultan left Aleppo to lead a new campaign but, in early July, fell ill immobilising the army and frustrating his intention to continue the campaign. Instead, he sent the vizier Ahmed Pasha on a successful expedition against Georgia, a kingdom which occupied a strategic zone between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. This was the end of the campaign: the exhausted troops refused to fight for a third successive year. Süleymān had added Van and parts of southern Georgia to his realms, but this was small compensation for his failure to overthrow Tahmāsb.

Süleymān's departure was Tahmāsb's opportunity. With the absence of a major Ottoman army in the region, he was able to force some of the Kurdish lords in the zone between the two Empires to abandon their allegiance to the Ottomans and, in 1552, with Ottoman forces engaged in Transylvania, began the re-conquest of the fortresses around Lake Van. He began with Ahlat on the western shore and then laid siege to Erciṣ, choosing this fortress presumably because he believed the more important prizes of Bitlis, Van and Adilcevaz to be too well defended. It was while he was besieging Erciṣ that his son, Isma'īl left to attack Erzurum, luring the governor-general Iskender Pasha out of the city with a fully

equipped force, expecting to overwhelm the prince. Instead, the Safavid force lay in ambush and routed Iskender's men before they could form up in battle order, forcing them back to Erzurum in a disorderly rout. It was the appearance of Isma'īl outside Erciş with a display of the severed heads from Iskender's defeated army that persuaded the Ottoman garrison to surrender.

Iskender's defeat was the signal for Süleymān's last campaign against Tahmāsb. On receiving the news early in 1553, he sent the grand vizier Rüstem Pasha on a futile march eastwards: at Konya, heavy snowfall forced Rüstem and his men to return to Istanbul. This fiasco did not deter the sultan, nor did the urging of his wife Hurrem, daughter Mihrimāh and son Selīm to end the wars. Süleymān had made a solemn vow in 1550 to mount a campaign to eradicate Tahmāsb and, in August 1553, left Istanbul for Aleppo. The journey was ill-fated. At Ereğli, he ordered the execution of his eldest son Mustafa for suspected treason, arousing murmurs of resentment among the troops and forcing the dismissal of Rüstem Pasha whom they blamed for plotting Mustafa's downfall; in Aleppo, another son, Cihangir, died a natural death. These events formed the melancholy backdrop to an unsuccessful campaign.

Instead of attacking Tabriz, the army marched to Kars and, from there, Süleymān issued his habitual taunts and threats to Tahmāsb, asserting that 'if he preferred a woman's fillet to a helmet, he could not call himself shah.' Tahmāsb, for his part, rejected advice to make a surprise attack, calculating instead that the size of the Ottoman army made it 'an enemy to fodder and provisions' and, with lack of these, it would 'go to hell unaided'. He was right. From Kars, the Ottoman army proceeded to Yerevan destroying the gardens and orchards belonging to Tahmāsb's family. From Yerevan, it followed a destructive course up the Aras river to Nakhichevan, where the troops destroyed and plundered the residences of the shah and the Safavid amirs. Tahmāsb was nowhere to be seen. However, as the frustrated sultan returned from Nakhichevan down the Aras, he opened a correspondence with the Ottoman viziers. The grand vizier Ahmed Pasha clearly had a realistic view of the prospects for the campaign and, beneath the rhetoric of his replies, hinted at the possibility of peace. This, it seems, put him at loggerheads with the sultan, who threatened to destroy Ardabil and to continue the war into 1555. Ahmed Pasha,

however, knew that the exhausted troops would refuse to fight another year and, in the end, it was his view that prevailed. The peace agreed at Amasya in 1555, fixing the border between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires brought the wars between Tahmāsb to an end. A victim of the peace was Ahmed Pasha. It was probably for his recognition that the campaign was futile and raising with Tahmāsb the possibility of securing peace that the sultan ordered his execution. His realistic outlook on the war had finally shattered Süleymān's fantasy of a victory over the Safavids.

In one respect, it was Tahmāsb who emerged victorious. He had preserved his realm and his dynasty in the face of an aggressive enemy who commanded superior resources in money, manpower and artillery and, as Shah Isma'īl had learned to his cost at Chaldiran in 1514 and Tahmāsb himself at Van in 1548, possessed unrivalled expertise in conducting formal battles and sieges. By relying on scorched earth tactics and the hostile geography of Iran, and exploiting the mobility of his cavalry to harry the Ottomans at their weakest points, he frustrated all Süleymān's efforts to repeat his father's victory at Chaldiran. Tahmāsb very quickly learned how to conduct asymmetrical warfare: Süleymān never did.

## **Into the Labyrinth: Researching Soviet-Iranian relations in the Russian Archives, April – June 2013.**

**Report by Travel Scholar, Savka Andic, of St. Antony's College, Oxford.**

Working in Russian archives is not for the dim-witted or the faint of heart. The challenge of working there is that nobody tells you anything, not necessarily out of deliberate obfuscation, but more likely because no-one has thought of it. There are no welcome guides, user manuals, handy printouts, orientations, information desks or any other such luxuries. In the case of the Foreign Policy Archive,<sup>45</sup> (henceforth referred to by its Russian acronym, AVP RF), there is not even a proper archive catalogue which is accessible to researchers. Thus my research trip was coloured by a series of emotions, beginning with excessive optimism and giving way to bewilderment and frustration before finally reaching the ideal state – stoic persistence. This is the attitude one must adopt when navigating Russian archives – you may meet with triumph or disaster, but like Kipling, treat those two impostors just the same.

Unlike the compact English National Archives at Kew, Russian archives are highly decentralised. Major archival collections are roughly organised into two groups: those under the auspices of Rosarkhiv, the federal archival agency, and those under other federal agencies, such as the Ministry of Defence or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I worked at archives in both groups: under the former, the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF)<sup>46</sup>, the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI)<sup>47</sup> and the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI)<sup>48</sup>; and under the latter, the Foreign Policy Archive (AVP RF). In addition I consulted the library and interviewed faculty members

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<sup>45</sup> Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii

<sup>46</sup> Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii

<sup>47</sup> Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii

<sup>48</sup> Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (Fond 89 is available in the Bodleian and British Libraries)

from the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IVRAN).<sup>49</sup> I also refer to several (mainly Russian language) memoirs in this article, which give important context to the documents.

The Soviet-Iranian relationship was remarkably settled during the late Pahlavi period, followed by a period of Soviet activism during the early revolutionary years (1979-1980). In the midst of a bipolar world, the Shah had apparently succeeded in tempering his pro-American orientation by establishing multiple cultural, technical and economic ties to the Soviet Union – just enough investment to provide good insurance against a possible souring of relations. The Soviet leadership was not unappreciative of his efforts and reciprocated as much as diplomatically possible. The cordial and restrained, if occasionally tense, nature of Pahlavi-Soviet relations was followed by a period of activism from 1979-1980, when the turbulent internal situation provided more opportunities and incentives for the Soviet Union to seek to spread its influence in Iran.

In Soviet political terminology Iran was classified as part of Asia or the ‘Middle East’<sup>50</sup> along with Turkey and Afghanistan, distinct from the predominantly Arab ‘Near East’<sup>51</sup>, which recalls US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’ idea of the ‘Northern Tier’ as a bulwark frontier region adjacent to the USSR. During the 1940s and 1950s, Iran was a focal point for Soviet wartime and post-war strategy, as seen by the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran from 1941-1945 and the 1946 Azerbaijan Crisis, considered by scholars to be the first confrontation of the Cold War. The actions of the Communist People’s Party of Iran (PPI, or Tudeh) were closely followed in Moscow at the time, and a substantial amount of Soviet political correspondence concerning Iran was written by or circulated amongst top-level officials: Molotov, Khrushchev, Malenkov, the notorious Beria and frequently, Stalin himself.<sup>52</sup> CPSU funding to the Tudeh was substantial - in 1954, a total of \$60,000 USD was disbursed to the PPI from the CPSU coffers. At the time, the PPI was one of only 17 foreign communist parties in

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<sup>49</sup> Institut vostokovedeniia Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk

<sup>50</sup> *Sredniy Vostok*

<sup>51</sup> *Blizhniy Vostok*

<sup>52</sup> RGASPI, 82/2/1217-1221

opposition (therefore excluding the Eastern bloc parties) to receive this funding, and the only non-Western party, with the exception of India and Israel. Overall it ranked 11<sup>th</sup> out of 17 in terms of funding income –below various Italian parties, France, Finland, Austria, England, the USA, India and Greece, but above Sweden, Israel, Norway, Denmark, Belgium and Luxemburg.<sup>53</sup> Hence, Iran was firmly on the Soviet radar.

Iran's signature of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 and Bilateral Defence agreement with America in 1959 caused consternation in Soviet ruling circles, prompting the Central Committee (CC) of the CPSU to pass a resolution creating the National Voice of Iran radio station in March 1959 as part of its wider goal to “*destabilise the Shah's regime and mobilise the Iranian masses to fight for radical change in the country*”.<sup>54</sup> A few years later in early 1962, a livid Khrushchev reputedly ordered an assassination attempt on the Shah, which was ultimately botched.<sup>55</sup> The re-establishment of normal relations with the USSR in 1962 laid the foundation for a series of official visits, beginning with Brezhnev's visit to Iran in 1963, and for the conclusion of numerous agreements on technical cooperation, trade and cultural exchange. This state of affairs persisted up to the end of the Pahlavi regime. Official correspondence between Soviet and Iranian officials throughout the 1970s was exceedingly cordial, even by the fulsome standards of diplomacy. The Shah and Brezhnev never forgot each others' birthdays, the Shah proffered his hearty congratulations when the Soyuz-17 space shuttle successfully completed its flight in 1975 and his condolences when Brezhnev's mother died<sup>56</sup>, and the correspondence spoke obsessively about the “*friendly relations*” between the two countries, based on “*good neighbourliness, cooperation, and mutual understanding*”.<sup>57</sup> The two countries supported each other in various international forums, including in the United Nations, where among other things, the USSR supported Iran's candidacy for the ECOSOC Human Rights Commission in

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<sup>53</sup> RGANI, 89/38/28

<sup>54</sup> RGANI, 89/13/2

<sup>55</sup> Kuzichkin, 215

<sup>56</sup> AVPRF, 174/59/140

<sup>57</sup> AVPRF, 94/68/012

1977.<sup>58</sup> The exchange of diplomatic niceties could produce unusual twists. When the Shah's brother Prince Abdol Reza visited Russia (Yakutia) for a hunting trip in October 1977, he met with various party functionaries and expressed great joy that his trip had coincided with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution. He conveyed the (Communist-phobic) Shah's warm greetings to Brezhnev for the auspicious occasion, explaining that the Revolution had a special meaning for Iran, since Soviet Russia was the first state to reject oppressive, imperialistic-style relations with Iran and move forward on a new basis of equality and friendship – something which Iran would never forget!<sup>59</sup>

The numerous examples of cultural, technical and economic exchange and cooperation between the Soviet Union and Iran have been well documented by Soviet/Russian scholars. Major technical projects included the Isfahan steel mill, the Arak hydroelectric plant and machine works, and the trans-Iranian gas pipeline opened in 1970, which was described by Radio Moscow as “*without precedent in the history of international economic cooperation*”<sup>60</sup>. The 1976 Soviet-Iranian trade agreement was said to be the “*biggest in Iranian history*”<sup>61</sup>. There were five-year plans in place for Scientific-Technical Cooperation and Cultural Exchange, which encompassed cooperation in the prevention of Caspian Sea pollution and seismology, academic exchanges between leading Soviet and Iranian universities, performing arts and ballet visits, film festivals, youth delegation exchanges and athletic events.<sup>62</sup>

By the late 1970s detente appeared to be faltering after a decade of adventurism in Africa, and Soviet foreign policy was in disarray. Karen Brutents, a senior figure in the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee from 1961 to 1991, which was responsible for maintaining relations with foreign communist parties in Asia and Africa, claims that in fact the Soviet Union had no overarching ‘grand’ strategy vis-à-vis developing countries, including Iran, and was simply reacting to events on an ad-hoc basis. The atavistic drive towards warm water ports, ascribed to

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<sup>58</sup> AVPRF, 94/67/011

<sup>59</sup> GARF, 612/1/312

<sup>60</sup> AVPRF, 174/60/040

<sup>61</sup> AVPRF, 174/60/040

<sup>62</sup> AVPRF, 174/59/042

Russia since the time of Peter the Great, and the desire to encircle the Persian Gulf, were allegedly pure fiction. Even the commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology and solidarity with foreign communist parties had been eroded by the late 1970s, leaving superpower politics and pragmatism as the driving forces of Soviet policy. There was an implicit acceptance that most Communist-type parties would have little chance of coming to power in the Middle/Near East for the foreseeable future, hence the USSR, which as a rule did not give serious backing to such parties, thought it expedient to target charismatic leaders in the region instead and draw them into its orbit.<sup>63</sup>

The implications for Iran were that the USSR sought to cultivate and maintain good relations with the Shah and treated the opposition (including the Tudeh) with extreme caution, until he was overthrown. Any intrigues could drive him further towards the Americans, undercutting existing Soviet influence. Much like the British or Americans, the Soviet leadership were convinced of the inviolability of the Shah's regime and were late in predicting its demise. By some accounts, the KGB had already concluded by August/September 1978 that the monarchy's days were numbered,<sup>64</sup> although this prediction did not much affect the circumspection of the Soviet leadership. The Tudeh had practically fallen off the list of Soviet priorities. By 1973, the party was at the bottom of the world list of CPSU funding beneficiaries, which had grown to cover nearly 70 entities, receiving even less money than the Communist Party of San Marino!<sup>65</sup> This was a steep plummet from its relatively privileged position 20 years earlier. It was the exiled Tudeh leadership which took the initiative in approaching the CPSU with plans and requests for assistance, not vice versa. In 1976, the Tudeh Secretary General Iraj Iskandari appealed to Brezhnev to find a new location for the party's illegal broadcasting, which had recently been discontinued from Bulgarian territory. The Soviet response was positive but lukewarm – the Bulgarians could not be convinced to reinstate Tudeh broadcasting, so another location would have to be found. Mongolia was ruled out on the grounds that it would seem

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<sup>63</sup> Brutents, 289,291,292,333,334; Kuzichkin, 203,205

<sup>64</sup> Shebarshin, 108

<sup>65</sup> RGANI, 89/38/40

the broadcasts were coming direct from the Soviet Union, which constituted most of the territory between Iran and Mongolia – an impression which had to be avoided.<sup>66</sup>

Following the Shah's departure in January 1979, the CPSU was more disposed to grant Tudeh requests for small sums of money, usually for travel expenses on party business.<sup>67</sup> However, in more sensitive areas they continued to vacillate. In August 1979 the new Tudeh Secretary General Nureddin Kianuri requested various arms of non-Soviet manufacture from the KGB and Soviet Ministry of Defence to help the Iranian progressive forces defend themselves against reactionaries or in case of civil war. The Soviets stalled for a year before deciding that, due to the "*sharp political character of the question, and current status of the Tudeh and leftist forces in Iran*", the matter required further consideration and was shelved. The document was approved by no less than KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov and Boris Ponomarev, the head of the International Department.<sup>68</sup>

By 1979/1980, Soviet attention was gripped by a new and unanticipated phenomenon – the rise of political Islamism. When the Presidium of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee (which counted veteran Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko among its members) met in March 1980, Islam and Islamism were the topics du jour. Much of the discussion revolved around crafting Soviet responses to the situation in Iran and Afghanistan, where the population had to be convinced that the Soviet Union, although founded on an atheist ideology, was in fact a friend of Islam and "*not opposed to religion, only to fanaticism*". The 'anti-imperialist' character of the Iranian Revolution had to be continuously emphasized, thereby positioning the similarly 'anti-imperialist' USSR much closer to Muslim Iran than the "*Christian Imperialists, whom Brzezinski and Carter are trying to present as the protectors of Islam*". The important thing was to avoid taking offence from fiery anti-Soviet rhetoric – "*although Khomeini and Bani-Sadr rage against Western oppression and Eastern Communism, we should not*

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<sup>66</sup> RGANI, 89/27/26

<sup>67</sup> RGANI, 89/27/45; 89/32/33; 89/43/2

<sup>68</sup> RGANI, 89/32/10

*write them off*”, since after all Lenin himself had said that some clerics are closer to socialism than many atheists.<sup>69</sup>

Delegates noted that the centre of gravity of the Middle East Conflict had shifted from Suez to the Gulf, and had acquired a new dimension – that of social/revolutionary struggle. Anti-imperialist revolutions in the Middle East were said to have two stages – first, anti-colonial and then anti-capitalist. The situation in Iran was seen as evidence that “*freedom-seeking revolutions are increasingly acquiring an anti-capitalist character*”, as manifest in the anti-Americanism of the US embassy hostage crisis. Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, one of the most powerful men in the Soviet Union, was present throughout this meeting and broadly endorsed the viewpoints expressed by other Presidium members.<sup>70</sup>

Thus the Soviet line vis-à-vis Iran consisted not of promoting the Tudeh or even Communism, but attempting to generate goodwill towards itself by showing Soviet acceptance of Islam, and sparking further antipathy towards America/the West by playing up the ‘anti-imperialistic’ character of the Iranian revolution. This became amply clear in July 1980, when the CPSU Central Committee drew up a secret plan for intensifying its ‘informational-propaganda work’ in Iran. Designed to counter both the recent onslaught of ‘Western/imperialist propaganda’ in the country and the increasingly anti-Soviet bent of some clerics in government circles, the plan sought to increase the volume of Persian language TV and radio broadcasting to Iran from Tashkent and Baku, to promote closer collaboration between Soviet and Iranian news agencies and broadcasting corporations, to prepare and distribute brochures on ‘Soviet attitudes to Islam’ and the journal ‘Muslims in the USSR’, to invite Iranian journalists and writers to visit the USSR and especially the Muslim-majority areas and to publish and distribute greater quantities of socio-political literature in Persian and Azeri. The plan was approved by CPSU heavyweights including Mikhail Gorbachev, who had recently ascended to the Politburo.<sup>71</sup>

Overall, Soviet policy towards Iran during the late Pahlavi and early revolutionary years was mainly opportunistic *realpolitik* rather

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<sup>69</sup> GARF, 9540/1/453

<sup>70</sup> GARF, 9540/1/453

<sup>71</sup> RGANI, 89/39/6

than ideologically motivated, even if traces of nostalgia for the idea of Socialist solidarity lingered in some quarters. The objective was not to engineer a Communist vassal state – practically impossible in the given circumstances– but rather to establish a solid relationship and exercise a substantial degree of influence over what would hopefully become a resolutely anti-American/anti-Western ally.

I am most grateful to the Iran Society for providing a sizeable grant which made this research possible.

## **A Journey through Architecture and Manuscripts in the Deccan.**

### **Report on field research in August 2013, by Peyvand Firouzeh, PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge**

Traveling to India in the monsoon season might not be very appealing to many, but seeing the architectural masterpieces of India in a lush setting under the rain is – in my view – definitely worth it. My journey to India became possible through a generous grant from the Iran Society in August 2013. The material gathered in this field research is to be used for completing my PhD dissertation entitled "Patronage of Sufi Architecture at the time of the Timurids; the Case of the Ni'matullāhī Order's Architecture" which is in progress under the supervision of Professor Charles Melville at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge.

When one thinks about the relations between Iran and India throughout history, relations of the two regions in ancient times, or during the Mughal period are more likely to come to mind. The study of relations between Iran and the Deccan – the region that comprises most of the southern parts of India – is very much overshadowed by the studies of ancient or Mughal India in previous scholarship. Iran-Deccan relations have, however, seen flourishing moments, especially after the establishment of the Bahmanid dynasty (1347-1528) that deserve much deeper studies.

Mainly through sea routes, artists and scholars from the Islamic world, among them Iranians, travelled to the Bahmanid court, keeping the place as an up-and-coming cultural centre. They held positions such as governors, viziers, court poets, dynastic historians, and doctors, and in return were paid generous salaries. It was in this context that Ahmad Shāh Bahmanī (r. 1422-1436) sent an invitation to Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī in Mahan, received his grandson at his court in Bidar, and sent donations to Iran for the foundation of the mausoleum of Shāh Ni'matullāh in Mahan. The presence of the Sufi order in the Bahmanid Deccan was later celebrated by the erection of the mausoleum of Shāh Khalīlullāh – son of Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī – near Bidar, in Karnataka.

It was for the purpose of visiting the sites and monuments related to the Ni'matullāhīs, and exploring the architectural representations of their relations with the Bahmanids that I travelled to the Deccan in August 2013. To put my architectural visits in Bidar – that includes the main monuments with which I am dealing – into perspective, I visited other contemporary important sites of the region such as those located in Hampi, Bijapur, and Gulbarga.

Starting from Mumbai, I travel south-east to Vijayanagara, the capital of the medieval empire of the same name, near modern-day Hampi, in Karnataka. The capital was a lively centre of flourishing art and architecture, perhaps the Hindu counterpart of the Bahmanid capitals. Being in conflict with the Deccan Sultanates at the time, and later, after the fall of the Bahmanids, did not mean that Hindu-Muslim relations and cultural exchanges were lacking in Vijayanagara.. In fact, today, one can at times see the juxtaposition of Islamic and Hindu architecture in the royal sites in Hampi. (figure 1)

Moving north, after visiting Bijapur, where the abundance of 'Adil Shāhi monuments, from the well-known Gol Gumbaz mausoleum of Muhammad 'Adil Shāh, (r. 1627-1657) and Ibrāhim Rauza housing the tomb of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II (r. 1580-1627), to numerous *mahals* (palaces) spread throughout the city that take visitors by surprise (figure 2), I reached Gulbarga, the first capital of the Bahmanid dynasty. In Gulbarga, as well as the great mosque in the fort of Gulbarga (figure 3), I visited the two major sites of the early Bahmanid tombs located to the east and west of the fort. The earlier, poorly-preserved site to the east of Gulbarga is home to the tombs of the very first Bahmanid Kings, 'Alāuddīn Hasan Bahman Shāh or Hasan Gangū (r. 1347-58), Muhammad I (r.1358-75), and Muhammad II (1378-97). (figure 4) The layout of these domed cubic structures serves as the basic pattern of the later Bahmanid Tombs with a few alterations, as seen in the Haft Gumbaz complex, the site of the later Bahmanid kings located to the west of the fort in Gulbarga. (figure 5)

Moving about 115 kilometres to the north-east, I reached the second capital of the Bahmanids, Bidar, where I focused on the buildings related to the Ni'matullāhī Sufi Order.

The *Chaukhandi* or mausoleum of Shāh Khalīlullāh, houses the tomb of the saint and those of some of his disciples and descendants,

and is located in Ashtūr, near Bidar. (figure 6) The mausoleum was built after the death of Shāh Khalīlullāh in Bidar during the reign of ‘Alā al-Dīn Bahmanī (1436-1458). It consists of a domed chamber wrapped inside an octagon which creates a Circumambulation – a type of space around the mausoleum giving way to an annexed dome chamber. This is a later addition with an inscription dated 1086/1675-8. The very special design of this building makes it an interesting and promising subject for further research.

To the east of the *Chaukhandi* lies another site of the Bahmanid royal tombs, belonging to the Bidar period of the dynasty that starts with Ahmad Shāh Bahmanī. (figure 7) In terms of the decorations, the mausoleum of Ahmad Shāh represents one of the strongest ties between the Bahmanids and the Ni’matullāhīs of Kerman. The interior of the mausoleum is covered with paintings and inscriptions. Although it is very dark inside, one can spot the name of Shāh Ni’matullāh – in his own poems – appearing twice on the higher inscription of the eastern wall of the mausoleum.

The short journey from Bidar to Hyderabad conveniently led me to the hub of libraries and archives that I was planning to visit. While being hosted by the Henry Martyn Institute in the tranquil gardens in Shivarampally, Hyderabad, I had the chance to familiarize myself with some lesser-known secondary sources on Deccan Studies in the Institute’s excellent library. I also explored other remarkable manuscript collections mainly in the Salar Jung museum and the Andhra Pradesh Government Oriental Manuscripts Library. Both libraries benefit from a great collection of Persian manuscripts. I consulted various manuscripts on Sufism, history, and literature and could buy a limited number of digital copies of the ones related to my research.

Having gathered such visual and textual material, before returning to Cambridge, I stopped in Sarajevo for the Sixth Biennial Convention of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies (ASPS) to present a paper on the Iran-Deccan relations in the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The field work in the Deccan was a great help in preparing for this talk. I am now looking forward to analysing all the material gathered in India and including it in my research.



**Figure 1. Mosque in the so-called Islamic quarter of Hampi**



**Figure 2. View of Bijapur from the top of Gol Gumbaz**



**Figure 3. The great mosque in the fort of Gulbarga**



**Figure 4. Mausoleum of Hasan Gangū, Gulbarga**



**Figure 5. Haft Gumbaz complex, Gulbarga**



**Figure 6. Chaukhandi of Shāh Khalīlullāh**



**Figure 7. Mausoleum of Ahmad Shāh, Bidar**

***German Foreign Policy Towards Iran, Rashid Khatib-Shahidi, I.B.Tauris 2013, Hb. 223 pp. ISBN 9781 84885 324 9***

***Reviewed by Hugh Arbuthnott***

I remember once in Paris meeting a French professor who was an expert on Iran. We discussed Cyrus Ghani's book on Reza Shah which had just come out and which he had also read but, he complained, it would have been better if the author had used some French sources. I wonder how far British historians of late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran and its relations with Europe have used original sources in other languages than English. In recent years, Russian sources, perhaps, but I have looked briefly through a number of my own books in English on this period and haven't found any references to such original sources nor even many published ones. In one area especially it would be interesting to see what other Europeans thought about how Reza Shah came to power and whether contemporary French or Italian or Dutch observers, official or unofficial, thought that the British had put him there or that it was a more complicated story.

Rashid Khatib-Shahidi's book does not throw any new light on this particular area. His first chapter describes the beginnings of a German policy in the Middle East, initiated both for political and especially economic reasons; Germany needed raw materials and markets for its exports and faced considerable difficulties because of bad communications, hence the efforts to create railways through Turkey and what was to become Iraq; and, of course, the Germans found it difficult to make any headway against Russian and British influence in Iran. Mr. Khatib-Shahidi on the whole draws for this chapter on published sources in English, German and Persian although he also uses some original German documents.

It is in the rest of the book, covering the period from 1927, that he breaks what as far as I know is entirely new ground. Every reference in this chapter is to a document from German archives, mainly official but often commercial or industrial. Even when the Financial Times of February 1934 is quoted it is from a copy found in the Bundesarchiv Potsdam.

The author tells a remarkable story of German success in building up economic influence after the departure of the American financial adviser, Millspaugh, through the establishment of the National Bank headed by a German and with a large number of other German employees and through the Junkers airline and the construction of the Trans-Iranian railway. However, it was far from plain sailing for the Germans. Although, surprisingly perhaps, the National Bank was not affected by the rows with Reza Shah over articles in the German press which supported Persian communists and criticised the Shah, (this sounds familiar to British observers of Iranian affairs in the time of Reza Shah's son) politically the Germans lost ground. At one point (1931) the Shah even withdrew the Persian Embassy from Berlin.

Where the Germans did lose out economically, however, was when their principle supporter, Mirza Abdul Hossein Khan Taimurtash, the powerful Court Minister, fell from grace and later died, while his enemies raised questions about the way in which the bank was run. As a result, the German Director of the National Bank, Lindenblatt and his Deputy, Vogel, were accused of mismanagement of the bank and of corruption. Khatib-Shahedi speculates whether the British had been behind these German difficulties without coming to a definite conclusion. He quotes a German source for the idea that the British were behind the anti-Shah press articles in Berlin and Germany's difficulties over the National Bank, but only the one source. The rest seems to be speculation, although it is no doubt true, as the author claims, that the British at this time in the early 1930s were working hard to maintain their economic and political influence in Iran. But were they then, as opposed to the late 1930s, using less conventional methods of tackling the competition? It would be interesting to know what British sources reveal about Britain's role in the affair.

Before he could be brought to trial, Vogel committed suicide but in October 1933 the Persian Government initiated a lawsuit against Lindenblatt and other German employees of the National Bank in a trial which was the first case brought against foreign nationals since the abolition of capitulations. It was conducted fairly and openly according to the German Ambassador of the time. Lindenblatt was found guilty and condemned to a fine and a short prison sentence. The whole episode was greatly damaging to

German political and economic relations with Iran and German companies lost millions of marks through lost orders.

This started to change after Hitler came to power in Germany. The German Government began to take an interest in Iran whereas previously the running had been made by German individuals. This interest was sharpened by Reza Shah's decision in 1935 that in all official dealings with his country, it should be known as Iran, which was the name of the country in its own language, Persian. This was to emphasise the origin of the name as being the country of Aryans and so was an encouraging sign for Germany; according to a Persian document, the idea came from the Persian Ambassador to Berlin. (There is no direct reference to the Persian document which is quoted in a letter from the German Ambassador in Tehran to the German Foreign Office). From around 1935 onwards, German political and economic influence in Iran steadily increased until the outbreak of war, the invasion of Iran by Britain and the Soviet Union and the exile of Reza Shah.

This book represents a remarkable initiative by Mr Khatib-Shahidi and he is to be congratulated on his effort to track down his original German sources. Nevertheless, and while I have perhaps missed the odd reference to other sources in all but the first chapter, the reliance on German sources only in a discussion of Iran's relations with Germany covering basically the period 1927-1940 is a weakness in this otherwise most interesting book. To have drawn on reports from observers from other countries too, especially Iran itself (are such records accessible to-day? or have they ever been or do they exist?) would have further increased the book's value. I hope Mr Khatib-Shahidi will tackle writing a history of the period that draws on a more varied range of documents to help us in our understanding of the period. He is well-qualified to do so.

***Nuclear Iran: The Birth of an Atomic State*, David Patrikarakos, I.B. Tauris, 2012, 340pp. ISBN 9781 78076 125 1**

***Reviewed by James Buchan***

This book, by a young Persian scholar scarcely out of Oxford University, is the first comprehensive account of the Iranian nuclear industry, but its value is not merely its priority. David Patrikarakos shows how nuclear fission, long in discredit in the world and unsuited to Iran's resources and hydrography, has come to monopolise or engross the country's economy and foreign relations and, somewhat in the manner of electrification in the early Soviet Union, its ideology. "Communism," said Lenin in December, 1920, "is Soviet power plus electrification." Islamic government, it appears, is *velayat-e faqih* [clerical authority] plus the nuclear fuel cycle.

Beginning in the 1950s, when Iran was offered a US reactor under President Dwight B. Eisenhower's 'Atoms for Peace' programme, Patrikarakos follows the Iranian nuclear industry through its many transformations.

The first reactor, a 5-megawatt 'swimming-pool' device on the grounds of Tehran University at Amir Abad, was supplied with fuel by the US and went critical in the Coronation year of 1967. Shah Mohammed Reza, anxious that the high extraction rates of the early 1970s would soon deplete Iranian oil reserves, ordered two reactors for Bushehr on the Persian Gulf from the West German nuclear industry, known as Kraftwerk Union. Work began in 1975. A second contract with French industry, for two reactors at Darkhovein on the Karun, did not proceed beyond site surveys. Whether Mohammed Reza would have proceeded to develop a nuclear weapon is a speculation for those with leisure for such pursuits. The fact is, as Patrikarakos records, the Shah did not insist on establishing on Iranian soil those nuclear processes (uranium enrichment and the chemical treatment of spent reactor fuel) that throw up bomb explosive.

At the Revolution in 1979, the Islamic Republic wanted at first nothing to do with an extravagant and alien technology, and (it seems) cancelled the Bushehr contract by fax. The uncompleted reactors were then damaged by enemy action in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88. Iraq's use of unconventional weapons in the war revived Iranian interest in nuclear technology and, in the course of the 1990s, the Islamic Republic bought blueprints for a fuel-enrichment plant from the clandestine network of the Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan. The Russian nuclear industry undertook to rebuild Bushehr. Nuclear science in Iran has thus gone through its own revolution.

All the while, the Islamic Republic was constrained by Mohammed Reza's policy. On July 1, 1968, at the Foreign Office in London, Ardeshir Zahedi, then Iran's foreign minister, signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on the first day it was open for signature. For Mohammed Reza, the NPT and its safeguards and inspection regime were a sort of umbrella for his conventional armament, an earnest to the Powers that his military build-up would not disrupt the international system. It has proved fateful for the Islamic Republic.

*Awfu bil-uqud*, God says in the Koran (5:1), 'Abide by your engagements.' Patrikarakos believes that the Islamic Republic also wishes to remain within the treaty work rather than out in the desert of outlawry with North Korea. To do so, a country with nuclear ambitions but without friends has resorted to concealment, for example, of the Natanz fuel enrichment plant up to 2002. As Patrikarakos puts it, 'when a country that does not yet have any nuclear power plants goes after enrichment [at Natanz] and plutonium production [at Arak]-- the two ways of making nuclear weapons-- something is amiss.' In 2004, in order to forestall referral under the NPT to the UN Security Council, the Islamic Republic (with Hassan Rowhani as chief negotiator) agreed to the suspension of uranium enrichment. It is hard to imagine such a step today. In May, 2013, Mr Rowhani, a candidate for the eleventh presidential election, was berated by his interviewer on Iranian state television for the suspension.

Patrikarakos stresses that Iranians consider this troubled seventy-year-old technology to be modern. For him, Iran's nuclear programme is the vehicle by which a proud and ingenious country expresses its yearning both for modernity and for a place at the

table, or what the Germans (in analysing Soviet post-war policy) called *ebenbuertigkeit* or 'an equal birth-right. '

It has come at an almost unbelievable cost. Leaving aside the billions spent over forty years at Bushehr, which Patrikarakos believes will never supply electricity to the grid, the Arak heavy-water plant and the enrichment centrifuges at Natanz and elsewhere, the programme has provoked international sanctions that have shut down much of the oil industry, pauperised the country and demolished its credit and currency. The Islamic Republic now talks of a 'resistance economy', where the fall in real wages will attract emigré investment for non-oil manufacturing, rather as the declining value of the *kran* in the late nineteenth century gave birth to a hand-loomed carpet industry. Iranian oil, I suppose, will stay in the ground.

Here, the United Kingdom nuclear industry is an object lesson for Iran. Civil nuclear power, launched in Britain in the early 1950s as a cloak for bomb-making, saddled the country with unsuitable reactors and more than any branch of industry ensured her post-war economic mediocrity. The United Kingdom did not have an efficient reactor for half a century (Sizewell B; 1995), but bombs she had, accidents, a plutonium mountain, oceans of waste, seaside sites polluted for eternity, a fast-breeder reactor that did not deliver a single watt of electric power, useless mixed-oxide and reprocessing factories, and money liabilities with a present value of £50 billion. I have said that often to Iranians, and never been believed.

For Patrikarakos, Iran is in a bind. He ends thus: "Iran's nuclear programme is the ultimate expression of its desire for acceptance (on its own terms) that is pursued through the one means that will ensure it remains a pariah."

***Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, Ghoncheh Tazmini, I.B.Tauris 2009, New Pb edition 2013, 206pp, ISBN: 978 1 84885 182 5.**

***Becoming Visible in Iran: Women in Contemporary Iranian Society*, Mehri Honarbin-Holliday, I.B.Tauris New Edition 2013, 205pp, ISBN: 978 1 78076 086 5.**

***Reviewed by David Blow.***

These are new editions of two useful works on the struggle for a more democratic society in Iran. They are especially timely in view of the election to the presidency in June of Hassan Rouhani, who has pledged to uphold justice and civil rights and end government interference in people's private lives. Rouhani had strong backing from the former reformist president, Muhammad Khatami, whose two periods in office from 1997 to 2005 are the subject of *Khatami's Iran*. The author, Ghoncheh Tazmini, provides a clear analysis of the forces that gave rise to the reform movement, in particular the aspirations of a growing population of educated, urban youth. She is also a helpful guide to the plethora of factions that supported and opposed Khatami, although it remains hard to remember that the Society of Combatant Clerics is in the conservative camp, while the Association of Combatant Clerics is in the reformist one. She attributes Khatami's inability to realise his goal of a 'religious democracy' not only to such factors as the control by hardline conservatives of powerful unelected institutions like the Guardian Council, but also to Khatami's failure, as she sees it, to get across his message that he wanted to reform Iran's theocratic system in order to save it, not to undermine it. She also argues that conservatives would have been "relatively more receptive to change," if Khatami had explained what he meant by terms like 'religious democracy' and 'civil society'. As it was, they feared the worst and determined to maintain the status quo with all the means at their disposal. However it seems doubtful whether Khatami could have explained his reformist ideas in a way that would have reassured the conservatives without forfeiting the support of students and intellectuals, especially as she suggests that this would have involved giving the latter "a realistic idea of the

confines of democracy within the existing structure,” – a structure which he is anxious to maintain.

In a new preface, Ghoncheh Tazmini emphasizes Khatami’s belief that change has to come about gradually within the framework of Iran’s “hybrid democratic-theocratic political system.” Hence his opposition to any reformist boycott of elections and the “subtle but significant efforts” she says he has been making since his presidency to find common ground between progressive conservatives and reformists. She finds that in two areas he has left his mark. On the international level, his call for a “Dialogue Among Civilizations” continues to resonate, while domestically he has unleashed “a vibrant civic activism and budding pluralistic momentum” that has continued to this day. This is well illustrated in Mehri Honarbin-Holliday’s *Becoming Visible in Iran: Women in Contemporary Iranian Society*. Iranian women have been at the forefront of the fight for human rights, because so many of their rights have been denied by the particular interpretation of Islam that has prevailed in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In a series of interviews, women who grew to adulthood after the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) tell the author how, since the Khatami presidency, they have been asserting their individual identity and their rights. They have done so by, among other things, challenging the strict dress code, seeking financial independence and engaging in political activism. As Mehri Honarbin-Holliday points out, these articulate and independent-minded women from different backgrounds are realising Khatami’s vision of a ‘civil society’. Her book provides a valuable insight into one of the more dynamic and hopeful aspects of life in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is only to be regretted that it was not subjected to more thorough proof-reading.

## A CARPET THIEF

*By Antony Wynn*

Nowruz not only marks the beginning of spring in Iran, but also the end of the financial year, when all debts must be settled. Such was the nature of the carpet bazaar in Hamadan that few traders were ever in a position to settle, so by way of general amnesty and to save general embarrassment, the bazaar closed for three weeks, which gave time for your correspondent to take leave at a time when Iran is at its most beautiful, with blossom everywhere and the desert temporarily green before the summer burn-up. It being unwise to leave the house unoccupied for such a long time, Ahmad Ali, the head *farrash* in the office, volunteered to house sit.

On our return from tour, we discovered not only Ahmad Ali sitting in the house, but his entire family, including his youngest son, who had celebrated his newly acquired skill in writing by carving his name on the dining table made of local walnut. There were also some gaps on the floor where rugs had been. What had happened, as Ahmad Ali put it, was that on the eve of Nowruz itself he had felt obliged to see in the New Year with his family at home, thinking that it would be safe to leave the house empty 'just for one night'. Regrettably, that was the night of choice for a thief to come in the darkness and help himself to four rugs. Ahmad Ali had reported the theft to the police, who had told him to take his duties more seriously and stay full time in the house, in case the thief came back for more. Unable to leave his family all that time, and to prevent his own starvation, he had moved them all in – hence the unfortunate writing practice on the table.

About a week later the police came round to the house to say that they had found the thief and the rugs. Would I come down to the station to identify the property? There, huddling on his hunkers, was a rather pathetic looking young drug addict. In front of him were the missing rugs. He had been caught, said the police, when he had tried to offer one of them for sale in the bazaar. The merchant had turned it over and immediately saw the company's label on the back and, since news of the theft was abroad, he had seen fit to put a halt to the young man's enterprise. I was just about to take the rugs back when the police told me that I would be

required to come to court to pass sentence on the wretched man. 'Pass sentence, but surely that is a matter for the judge?' But no, as the offended party, it was up to me to inform the judge of my terms of satisfaction.

Hanging clearly being out of the question, I sought advice from 'Thick Neck' Ahmad, the unofficial neighbourhood warden. 'Thick Neck Ahmad' was built square and solid and, although a kindly soul to his friends, was not a gentleman to be trifled with. He was the one we all turned to, in preference to the police, when there was any local trouble. He knew everybody and dealt with things in the old fashioned way. We discussed the matter solemnly and his verdict was thirty days inside, so away the boy went to serve his time.

On the thirty-first day, at noon, there was a knock at the garden gate. It was the thief. A conversation followed, such a conversation as can only happen in Iran.

'Salaam aleikom,' he said, 'I have come to ask after your health. Is all well with you?'

'Aleikom salaam,' I replied, not quite sure of where this might be leading. I decided to play this by the book. 'My health is good. And how is your health?'

'My health is very good indeed. And how is the health of your family?'

'My family are all well, *al-hamdulillah*, and how are you yourself?'

'I am your slave, and you are clearly a very good man. I am your servant, by the grace of the holy Prophet, and I am ready to be your sacrifice.'

'What do you want?'

'Well, in prison I saw the error of my ways and decided to give up stealing things and become an honest man. I have also given up drugs. I am going to make a new start.'

'That is very good to hear. And what form will this new start take?'

'I am going to go into business, as an honest man, a really honest man.'

'That is even better news. And what sort of business have you in mind?'

‘I am going to obtain a barrow and sell matches, cigarettes, chewing gum and soap. Possibly also some fruit and vegetables, in season...’ There was a pause, which I did not interrupt. Then, as he hopped awkwardly from one leg to another, it came out. ‘The thing is, your sacrifice, that I need some capital to become honest, and I wondered whether your exalted presence might be in a position to help me, as an investor, of course...’

Never say no in Iran. Play for time, is the accepted local rule. ‘I need to consider your proposal. Come back and see me at the same time tomorrow.’

‘Thick Neck’ Ahmad, when I told him about all this, said that he would deal with the matter. He told me to send for him when the young man returned. Punctually, for there was money to be had, at noon the next day the young man turned up. I told him to wait at the garden gate while, by the front door, I went out in search of Thick Neck, who went round to the garden gate in the back alley, with two of his sons. ‘Stay inside,’ he said, ‘this has nothing to do with you.’ There then followed a series of thumps, curses and howls of pain, then silence. After a minute or two there was a knock at the gate. There was Thick Neck, with no sign of sons or thief. ‘You won’t be troubled again, I wish you good day,’ he said and left.

The most important lesson in Iran is that nothing is what it appears to be. A few days later I heard that the young thief in fact worked for Thick Neck in an opium den that he ran on the edge of town. The thumps had come from Thick Neck banging his own fists on his capacious belly and the screams had come from one of his sons. Nevertheless, I was never troubled again.





