JOURNAL OF THE IRAN SOCIETY

Editor: David Blow

VOL. 2 NO. 14

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THE IRAN SOCIETY

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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.

ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY 2014-15

Lectures

October 14th — Angus Hay
Dunsterforce: The British army in the Caspian and the battle for Baku, 1918

November 26th — Professor Robert Gleave
Shi'ism in Iran: Theocracy and Democracy

December 16th — Charles Gammell
Herat and its History

January 21st — Peyvand Firouzeh
Persian art and architecture in 15th century Deccan

February 16th — Professor Anna Sreberny
The BBC Persian Service from World War II to 2009

April 20th — John Malcolm
Sir John Malcolm: Envoy to Persia and Historian

May 18th — Roxanne Volk
A personal account of making theatre and film in Iran

June 18th — Professor Robert Hillenbrand
The Mongol Shahnameh

TRAVEL GRANTS

This year three grants were awarded to undergraduates planning to spend time in one or other of the Tehran universities as part of their Persian language degree courses: two from Oxford and one from Exeter.

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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.

Dunsterforce: The British Army in the Caspian and the Battle for Baku, 1918..

Summary of a Lecture given by Angus Hay on 14 October 2014.

When the Bolsheviks assumed power in late 1917 they immediately withdrew Russia from the First World War and the fight against Germany and Turkey.

For the Caucasus, it meant that Russian troops withdrew from north Turkey and north Persia, leaving a gap in the eastern defences of the Allied Powers. The Germans and the Turks could now cross the Caucasus to access Baku oil and Turkestan cotton. They could also threaten the security of India's hinterland and the British Mesopotamian army's flank.

At the beginning of 1918, insufficient British troops were available to block the "Caucasus Gap". A mission of specialists was formed to go to the Caucasus to organize local units to resist Turkish-German advances, to control Baku's oil and to secure the Caspian fleet.

Major-General Lionel Dunsterville was given command of the mission. The troops under him became known as "Dunsterforce".

Dunsterville and a small group left Baghdad at the end of January 1918. After an epic journey of six weeks through the mountains , they arrived at Enzeli, a port on the coast of Persia, which was controlled by the Bolsheviks. They refused Dunsterville access to the ships that would take him to Baku. He could not force the issue, and left Enzeli to return to Hamadan. His timing was lucky: the following day Red Guards arrived from Baku to arrest him.

Dunsterville advised the British cabinet that to carry out his mission, he would need more troops, to clear the road to the coast of rebellious tribes and to counter the Bolsheviks in Enzeli.

He was told to remain in Hamadan, in Persia. Together with his small force he held the Baghdad-Hamadan-Qazvin line against Turkish advances from Tabriz.

Meanwhile, events in the Caucasus were developing rapidly. Both the Germans and the Turks wanted to reach Baku: although allies, they did not trust each other. Germany had signed a treaty with

Georgia, moving several thousand troops into Tbilisi. They controlled the railway, and denied it to the Turks. In the early summer, the Turks moved through Armenia and advanced towards Baku.

In June 1918, the first reinforcements from the British Mesopotamian army reached Dunsterville. He had formed an alliance with a Cossack general, Bicherakov, who attacked the enemy in North Persia. He defeated them and cleared the road to the port for Dunsterforce. But Dunsterville could not move to Baku, as the Baku Soviet (Bolsheviks) refused to ask the British for help against the advancing Turks.

At the end of July, the Turks were outside Baku. The Mensheviks ousted the Baku Soviet, forming a new government called the Centro-Caspian Dictatorship, and immediately asked for British help.

The first units of Dunsterforce landed in Baku on August the 4th. For the rest of the month troops drove and walked from Baghdad to Enzeli, from where they were shipped to Baku. By the end of August, Dunsterville had 1,000 troops in Baku. The Ottoman Caucasian Army of Islam numbered 14,500, together with 1,000 Azerbaijanis of the Savage Division.

Dunsterville discovered the Baku defences were poor and the Baku force, numbering 6,000, was ill disciplined and untrained.

By the end of August, the Turks had surrounded Baku and on August the 26th they attacked Dunsterforce positions on the Mud Volcano (near the present Coca Cola factory). Fighting lasted four days. The poorly trained Baku Force troops frequently abandoned their positions, leaving Dunsterforce units isolated, one unit being almost annihilated by the Turks.

Dunsterforce withdrew to positions immediately outside Baku. The Turks ceased their advance due to their heavy casualties incurred in the fighting and their misinformation about British troop numbers in Baku.

On September the 12th, a deserter from the Turkish side warned Dunsterville that the Turks would attack on September the 14th. Dunsterville reorganized his defences.

The easiest place to defend was Wolf's Gap, a road that zig-zagged up a steep incline to the top of the escarpment. A battalion of the Baku Force was placed there.

On September the 14th, the Turks attacked Wolf's Gap There was no defence: the defenders were not in position. This was a disaster for Dunsterforce, as the left and right flanks were split. Bitter fighting took place all day along the present Radio Mast Hill, and Dunsterforce units suffered heavy casualties.: the Baku Force failed to provide support when requested.

That afternoon, Dunsterville ordered the evacuation from Baku. Contingency plans had already been made. The evacuation was completed without further loss of life by 11.00 pm. Dunsterforce returned to Enzeli after six weeks in Baku.

Clerical Authority and Religious Seminaries in Iran

By Professor Robert Gleave, arising from a lecture he gave on the 26th November 2014.

Introduction

The close connection between Iran and the Twelver Shi'i expression of Islam dates back to the very earliest period of Islam, when Iran was incorporated into the expanding Muslim empire. From the 8th century onwards, a number of centres of Shi'i learning were founded and developed within the heartlands of Iran. Notable amongst these were Qum and Ra'y, but there were, in time, centres of Shi'i scholarship in Shiraz, Tabriz and Nishapour. After the martyrdom and burial of the eighth Imam in what became Mashhad in Khurasan, the Imam's shrine there became a place of pilgrimage for the Shi'a from across the Muslim world; this was supplemented by a large number of smaller shrines of descendants and relatives of the Imams, most notable of which was the shrine in Qum marking the burial place of the Imam Reza's sister known as Fatima Ma'soumeh (Fatima the Immaculate)

All these developments were to be exponentially accelerated in the Safavid period in the early 16th century. The Safavid Shahs, by establishing Twelver Shi'ism as the religion of their new empire reinvigorated Shi'i scholarship (in part through employing leading scholars from outside of Iran). By inculcating a series of public Shi'i rituals, and by tying Shi'ism to the Shah's imperial administration, the Safavids linked Shi'ism to Iranian identity, forming a bond which has had serious political and religious ramifications up to the present day. The position of the Shi'i clergy in today's Iran, enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and lived out in the workings of the contemporary Iranian state, can be most usefully traced to the early Safavid linkage between religion and government.

The political success of Shi'ism created, however, a series of theological and legal challenges. Twelver Shi'ism, as is well known, is based on the belief that after the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632, there was a series of twelve leaders, or Imams (beginning with

the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali). All of these Imams were directly descended from the Prophet, forming, in Shi'i parlance "the People of the Prophet's House" (*ahl bayt al-nabi*, or simply *ahl al-bayt*). The Imams were the rightful rulers of the Muslim community but their right to rule was unjustly ignored by the rest of the Muslims. Persecuted and in fear for the welfare of their followers, the twelfth Imam disappeared from public view in the 9th century, and in 941, announced (through his representatives) his total unavailability to the community until the day of his return. For Shi'ite theologians, this absence (*ghayba*) was justified in rational and tactical terms: if the Imam had remained visible, then his presence would have challenged the political authorities, and they would, in turn, have targeted the Imam's followers. For the good of the community, the Imam had to be hidden and unavailable.

Clerical authority in Shi'ism is the result of this absence, as the scholars amongst the Imam's followers gradually, over time, positioned themselves as the inheritors of some of the Imam's functions as community leader. There were elements of the Imam's role that they would not carry out (assuming political power and leading a holy war, for example), but they gradually secured the day-to-day running of the religious life of the community (including leading prayers, collecting religious taxes, and solving local disputes). They were also, of course, responsible for preserving the bulk of the literary record of the community: the sayings of the Imams, the accounts of the early history of the community, and the rules and regulations laid down by the Imams for their followers. The last of these, God's "Law" (or Shari'a), was their special area of expertise. More than theology, philosophy or Quranic exegesis, the elaboration of the legal sciences (known as *fiqh*) was the basis of the clerical class's authority through the centuries.

It is the responsibility of each generation of scholars not merely to study and preserve knowledge of the Shi'i tradition, but also to train the next generation of scholars so that the Shi'i community has an intellectual resource for the centuries to come. It is this educational responsibility which provides the *raison d'etre* for the seminaries of Shi'ism, known since at least the 19th century as *al-Hawzah al-'ilmiyyah* (the "Learned Precinct"). The Shi'i seminary, usually referred to simply as the Hawzah (or "Howzeh" in its Persianised form), traces its origins to the flight of the great Shi'i

scholar Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Tusi from persecution in Baghdad, to Najaf in southern Iraq. There, al-Tusi (996-1067) founded a scholarly circle, which developed into a school, which expanded and eventually established Najaf as a great centre of learning. Pilgrims could consult the scholars whilst visiting the Shrine marking the burial place of Imam Ali. In time Shi'i seminary complexes developed around the other shrines, in Karbala, Baghdad, Samarra, and in Mashhad and Qum.

Whilst the Hawzahs in Iran received enormous investment during the Safavid era, they did not challenge the primary position of Najaf, along with Karbala as the first and original Hawzahs. This changed in the 20th century, when scholars from Najaf (led by the great Ayatallah Abd al-Karim al-Ha'iri) came from Iraq to Qum with the express design of reviving the Iranian Hawzahs, and making Qum the principal seat of learning. Notwithstanding the ambivalent relationship of the Pahlavi dynasty with the Shi'i clerics, the establishment and development of Qum as the centre of Shi'i learning, and the persecution of Sh'i communities in Ba'thist Iraq, meant that by the 1960s and 70s, Qum was viewed as an intellectual powerhouse of Shi'ism which was rivalling Najaf for prominence. By producing scholars of fame and with innovative ideas (including Ayatallah Khomeini and his followers), Qum became known as a maverick alternative to the old-fashioned scholarship of the Iraqi shrine cities. After the Iranian revolution in 1979, the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, and the migration of scholars from Ba'thist Iraq to the Islamic Republic (particularly Qum), the city expanded its student cohorts, its teaching base, and with extensive investment both from charitable giving and state sponsorship, the Qum hawzah emerged as the principal international centre of Shi'i learning. With Iraq unavailable, and with grants and bursaries on offer in Qum, Iran led the way in promoting Shi'i seminary education in the 1980s and 1990s. Only in the recent past, with the reinvestment in the Hawzahs of Najaf and Karbala, has Qum faced any serious rivalry.

The intellectual grounds of Scholarly Authority: the Shi'i theory of *ijtihād*

The key element of legal theory which establishes a Shi'i cleric as the focus of authority amongst the laypeople is the idea of *ijtihād*.

Ijtihād means, in Arabic, to "exert effort", and is used both in Sunni and Shi'i legal circles in, broadly speaking similar ways. When searching for a law (in response to a question from a layperson or when exploring a legal problem), a scholar will follow a reasonably strict procedure (it normally is a male scholar, though female scholars are not barred from this activity). He will look at the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet – for Shi'i thinkers he will also examine the saying of the Imams. If he finds no direct answer to the problem there, he may look at what the community has agreed upon in the past to be the accurate interpretation of the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings. If this yields no clear result for him, then he will begin his own investigation, attempting to delve deep into the meaning of the texts to produce his own, novel interpretation. This is the "effort" he is supposed to exert, and this process of searching in the texts for a rule is known as *ijtihād*. This is a much simplified summary of the process, but the ability and qualifications necessary to be able to carry out this search set the cleric apart from the ordinary layperson. The cleric has, it is argued, gone through years of study and training; he alone has devoted his life to the understanding of these texts. His opinion then, as "one who exerts effort" (*mujtahid*) is more likely to be an accurate reproduction of God's intended law than that of an ordinary believer. Through this, the community legal authority of the *mutjahid* is established, and the rest of the community become "followers" (*muqallid*) to the *mujtahid's* rule.

What happens when two *mujtahids* produce different rulings? This situation has produced much theoretical debate amongst the scholars, and the solution they arrived at can be summarised thus. Each scholar has tried their hardest to find a rule by examining the text and reasoning through the implications using the powers of his intellect. If he does this and eventually disagrees with other, learned and honest scholars, then they have to agree to differ. Their difference of opinion is, however, not like the difference between the *mujtahid's* opinion and the ordinary believer. That is a difference between a learned person and an ignorant one. Rather, when two scholars disagree, both of them can be followed by the ordinary believer. The believer must decide which he considers *more* learned and follow him. It would be illogical for him to follow someone he felt was less learned than others. We don't know what the law is for

certain because the texts are not clear, but it is sure that we stand the best chance of following the true rule if we choose the most learned scholar as our guide. It is up to each believer to make their own decision as to who is the most learned. This explains why we have a plurality of *mujtahids* at the top of the Shi'i clerical hierarchy, often saying different things. This is true in Qum as it is in Najaf. The followers of a *mujtahid* look to him for guidance – the scholar becomes the "source of emulation" (*marji' al-taqlid* in Arabic; *marja'-e taqlid* in Persian) for his followers.

There are, today, in Iran and Iraq a growing number of *marja's*. The authority structure is proliferating as more scholars gather followers and declare themselves to be a *marja'-e taqlid*. This causes more than a few tensions with the political structure in Iran, which aims to establish a single political authority with a high-ranking religious scholar at its head. Theoretically, there emerges a division between purely religious leadership (in which followers can devote themselves to which ever scholar they wish) and politico-religious authority (in which the people are citizens of the state and should not rebel against it). Ayatallah Khomeini's great innovation was to argue that even though there can be religious diversity amongst the scholars, if one of them manages to establish a religious state, the others should support him for the sake of the public good and the preservation of the benefits a religious system of government brings (called *maslahat-e nizam*).

The Operations of the Hawzah Institution

The main centres of *Hawza* education today are in Iraq and Iran: both are majority Shi'ite countries, and Iran with its political system based around the clerical class having a special position, gives the clerics a privileged access to political power. Understanding how the clerical class is formed, and how its authority is acquired and maintained in Shi'ite communities is crucial then to understanding the political dynamics of these two strategically important Middle Eastern countries. But the study of the Hawza is not limited to these two countries. The *Hawzas* in Najaf and Karbala (in Iraq) and Qum and Mashhad (in Iran) may form the centres of learning, but the Shi'ite clerics who lead the communities of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan and India have invariably been trained in Iraq and

Iran, and so the influence of these centres diffuses through the international community. The same is true in the disapora Shi'ite community in the West. London, for example, is a major centre for international Shi'ite activity, and has many clerics trained in Najaf and Qum, some even rising to the highest rank within the *Hawza*, that of Ayatallah. This diffusion of influence has led to the establishment of satellite *Hawzas*, the largest was in Damascus, now sadly reduced to almost nothing. The smaller Hawzahs in the Persian Gulf remain extremely active, though.

The *Hawza* system has a number of distinctive features. It is extremely informal and flexible. Traditionally, there is no set curriculum, no tuition fees, no specific examinations and no particular qualification which the student attains. Instead, each prospective student is taken on by a particular school or college (each individually also called *hawzas*, or alternatively *madrasas*), and receives a monthly stipend. This stipend is usually not enough to live on, particularly for a student with a family, and so as students acquire skills in their early years of education, they are able to earn supplementary funds through teaching beginner students, or even school children. Not a few students take on part-time jobs outside of the *Hawza* religious industry, in computing or translation. The monthly stipend comes with an expectation that the student will be studying within the recruiting college, and within each college there are individual classes, given by students at different stages of the hierarchy, all working under an individual or small group of clerics of advanced learning. The college then has a triangular structure, and as students reach the limit of their intellectual abilities, they leave, as clerics, to take on roles within the community. Only a few stay on to reach the apex, and teach at the higher levels of the *madrasa*.

Within this structure, the student has considerable autonomy to study what he (or she, for there are a few female *madrasas*) wishes. There are certain elements which are viewed as essential for progression (at the early stages, Arabic grammar and some jurisprudence, for example), but there are many optional subjects. The student designs his own programme of study, and the process is seen not simply as acquiring a qualification, but as a period of spiritual discovery and growth. Students are given freedom to experiment with subjects and themes, to develop areas of specialism

and interest. With little in the way of a centralised organising body, the *Hawza* is, to an extent, a "do-it-yourself" educational system. These structures have changed over time, and continue to do so as the *Hawza* modernises. There are also differences of emphasis in curriculum between the main centres, particularly between the Iranian centre of Qum and Najaf in southern Iraq. These two *Hawza* cities, both of which have grown up around revered shrines of past Shi'ite figures, are in fierce competition for students and for reputation. Each thinks itself superior to the other, though naturally there is traffic of students and scholars between them. Generally speaking Qum sees itself as philosophically advanced and more open to new ideas; whilst Najaf views itself as teaching the traditional religious sciences by the "tried and tested" methods. As mentioned above, before 2003, Najaf was seriously weakened by the Ba'th Regime of Saddam Hussein. His suppression of the Shi'a restricted Najaf's development; at the same time, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran was a huge boost to Qum as former Hawza professors, such as Ayatallah Khomeini, gained political control of the country and cemented the clerical class as a political entity. Today, Qum outstrips Najaf in terms of student numbers by 2 or 3 to 1. Najaf, though claims it has the history, the intellectual rigour and the political independence to offer a higher level of learning. Despite the expansion of Qum in the 20th century, the principal Ayatallahs (each claiming to be a *Marja' al-Taqlid*) are all based in Najaf and not in Qum.

Amongst the changes occurring within the *Hawza* is the gradual move towards a centralised bureaucracy, and a formalisation of educational qualifications. This has happened more rapidly in Qum, where educational reform has been linked with state intervention within the *Hawza*. There are moves to register teachers, check qualifications, offer western-style "degrees" such as BA, MA and PhD alongside the traditional *Hawza* learning. The *Hawza,* both in Iraq and Iran, is now in competition, not only with each other but also with the expanding secular higher education system on the Western model. In Iraq, Iran and elsewhere, the *Hawza* has to recruit students who might be tempted by more formal and internationally recognised qualifications. Recognising this new competitive context is at least part of the reason for the reforms the *Hawza* has witnessed in the last half century.

Of all the debates within the *Hawza*, two interlinked topics appear to dominate: philosophy and politics. Qum, with its greater philosophical emphasis, was the intellectual breeding ground for the ideas of the Iranian Islamic revolution. It was here that thinkers such as Khomeini, his onetime successor Ayatallah Montazeri, and the supreme leader of Iran Ayatallah Khamene'i cut their teeth. In time, they constructed a religious political theory which was eventually enshrined in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Philosophy, usually based around the Islamicised version of the Greek tradition, was used as a vehicle for political theory, implicitly using paradigms such as the Platonic Philosopher-King notion. Even when Khomeini was based in Najaf (after having been expelled from Iran by the Shah), his intellectual style remained "Qummi" and not Najafi. Many Najaf-based scholars reacted against this politicisation, and advocated a classical, jurisprudential approach to learning, where knowledge of the ancient legal texts was the primary criterion for religious excellence and community authority. For these Najafis, politicisation was a form of popularisation, and philosophy was a Trojan horse by which it was smuggled into the *Hawza*. The most eminent scholars in Najaf today, Ayatallahs Sistani, Fayyad and al-Hakim are not necessarily against all forms of philosophy being taught in the *Hawza*. Nevertheless, they certainly see the subject as potentially dangerous and misleading for young students, and have focussed their own efforts on developing complex and, to most, arcane systems of jurisprudence.

Conclusions

There tensions and debates are all part of *Hawza* life: the *Hawza* has always been a place where ideas have been challenged and orthodoxies tested by innovatory ideas. Qum, surprisingly for some observers, is a remarkably vibrant and exciting place to test out intellectual theories, and within which there is quite extensive freedom to express different views. There are limits of course, and these are not only imposed by the state, but also form part of the Qum *hawzah's* self regulation. But the theory of *ijtihad* and the informal nature of seminar learning (notwithstanding the reforms mentioned above) mean that absolute control is impossible. The reforming of ideas, and the new theories in politics, philosophy and law to emerge in the *Hawzah* context, provide the basis for the

change and adaption of the political system. That is, I am arguing that the dynamism of the *Hawzah* enables scholars to be flexible and responsive to changes in society, and this will, most likely, enable them to remain in positions of authority amongst the Shi'i community both in Iran and internationally for some time to come.

The Story of Herat

Lecture given by Charlie Gammell on 16th December 2014.

I am particularly happy to be speaking to the Iran Society on Herat's recent history, as it was through an extremely generous grant from this organisation that I was able to travel to Afghanistan and Iran in January and February of 2014 to research the city's history during the Qajar and recent periods. The research I did in Herat and Kabul with the money from the travel grant forms the basis of this talk.

As opposed to dragging us all through hundreds of years of Herat's history, I have chosen to look at a few themes, and to do this through the prism of a key event in the city's history. The main theme will, loosely, be Herat's relations with Kabul and Iran and how the city fits into Afghanistan as a modern nation, having gone from cultural relic in the early- and mid-20th century to the frontline of the war against the Soviets in the 1980s. Through this angle on Herat's recent history we can see that it has in this period looked east to Kabul, and not west to Mashhad or Tehran for support and also that Kabul is forever suspicious of Herat's success and perceived independence. I am sorry to disappoint any Iranians in the audience who still have designs on Herat, but Herat will stick with Kabul for now and for many years to come; its recent history has been one of troubled relations with Kabul, not necessarily close relations with Tehran.

My starting point for this evening will be a brief sketch of Herat's history up until the 20th century and the bulk of the talk will stem from the *qiyam* of March 1979 in which Herat rose up against the Communist government in Kabul and began the country's slide to war and I will briefly bring in Herat's wartime experiences and then up to the present day. This period, from 1973 to today has been what I like to call a time of –isms: Islamism, Marxism and Opportunism. Of those three, we all know that Opportunism is easily the most potent ideology.

It is an enduring irony, lost on many Heratis, that the city's apogee, its highpoint, as the centre of the largely stable Timurid Empire, at a time when Herat rivaled Renaissance cities of Italy, was, for two reasons, an aberration in thematic terms. First, Herat has rarely been utterly stable as it was during the Timurid times. A feature of the city's story is an almost constant cycle of destruction and Herat's superhuman abilities to regenerate after the horrors of a sacking or a siege. Secondly, Herat's history, this glorious Timurid blip aside, has largely been that of a liminal city, a city on the margins and yet a city frustrated by having played a marginal role in the history of the state or empire in whose service it has been. This is as true today as it has ever been. During the Il-Khanid period Herat was a key post abutting Chagatayid and Golden Horde territories but far from Il-Khanid Tabriz; Safavid Herat was a schooling ground for Shahs to be – Shah Abbas I learned the art of kingship in the lavish old Timurid court of Herat – and as Russia, Iran and Great British Imperial ambitions clashed in Central Asia, Herat, again, assumed real geopolitical significance, all the while at the edge, or edges, of Empire or nation state. Qajar Iran officially relinquished its claims to Herat, or was forced to, through the Treaty of Paris of 1857 by which Herat was recognised to be an official part of Afghanistan, something which had largely been the case since 1747. Visitors to Herat in the late 19th century with the Afghan Boundary Commission report on a city tired and broken by years of war and invasion. As Herat limped into the 20th century, the sense of the city as a faded cultural relic, somehow a part of Afghanistan and yet also distinct in so many ways, is a consistent refrain. An example of Herat as a cultural backwater comes from an article in the Kabul Times of May 1973 entitled 'Herat'. This 'ancient, aristocratic town' is portrayed as an enchanting rest-point for travellers or truck drivers to rest weary limbs and recharge on tea, bread and fruit, all set against the stunning backdrop of an elegantly fading Timurid capital. And yet, these visions of Herat are of a closed world, somehow stuck in time and preserved only for tourists. This notion of Herat as a forgotten cultural artifact was to change radically during the next 20 years as Herat was dragged into the Cold War and subjected to a hot war that would leave upwards of 80% of the province destroyed and a similar percentage of its population exiled to Iran.

Afghanistan had come into the orbit of the Cold War in the 1950s as Soviet and American interests competed in the country. Russian interests eventually won out, largely owing to complicated relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan – the US was unwilling to abandon its allies in Islamabad, and Moscow stepped in and began their ultimately disastrous ideological colonisation. The event which, more than any other, caused the *qiyam* of March 1979 was the 'Saur Revolution' of April 1978. This Soviet-backed revolution brought to power the *Khalq* faction – the other faction being *Parcham* – of Afghanistan's largely Soviet-backed Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and saw the end of Daoud Khan's rule of Afghanistan, who himself had come to power through a coup in 1973. At its head was Nur Mohammad Taraki, a founding member of both the *Khalqi* party, and the PDPA. Behind him stood Hafizullah Amin, an opportunistic and sadistic strongman who quickly ordered the arrest of hundreds of his opponents. The Saur Revolution was initially seen from Herat as distant, despite the flurry of radio announcements and proclamations of the end of 'despotism and tyranny' in Afghanistan. After all, the membership of the PDPA at this time was little more than 12,000 people, mostly teachers and students, many in Kabul, and their impact in Herat was not nearly as pronounced as that of other left-wing groups, in particular the Maoist group *Shola-ye Jawid* [Eternal Flame]. However, what the *Khalqis* lacked in numbers and manpower they seemed intent on making up with violence and coercion.

The Saur Revolution was little more than a military putsch. However, the attempts by the *Khalqis* to modernise Afghanistan were revolutionary in their own way. By highlighting these reforms and the society created in Herat during this *Khalqi* interlude, we can see the locus of Herat's uprising and how this event has informed the city's history since then. The reforms announced by Hafizullah Amin were aimed at dragging 'feudal' Afghanistan out of its backwardness and bringing the Saur Revolution to the heart of the Afghan countryside; however, instead of creating a classless utopia, they caused untold misery and destruction for Herat and Afghanistan. The reforms dealt with three areas of Afghan life: agrarian reform, regulation on dowries and under-age marriage and eliminating debt in the market. These reforms totally and utterly backfired, leading to poor harvests – the ban on money lending and the forced land

distribution totally destroyed the balance of labour, credit and landholding which largely held rural Herat together.

Another ideological pillar of the Khalqi government was an admirable, if ambitious, drive to end illiteracy in Afghanistan. This bold initiative was given the unfortunate title of a 'jihad'. Its acolytes, beginning in May 1978, fanned out across the country, and particularly into Herat's districts, armed with textbooks promising that a man or woman could learn to read and write in 150 hours. The books showed cartoon tropes of men and women leaving behind their pasts of conservatism and Islam, and marching to a future in the city, full of factories. Sentences were learned through the ideological medium of progress and a strong rejection of the values that underpinned rural life, much as Taliban education would use Kalashnikov-based questions in the learning of arithmetic[1]. Stories of village elders and khans being humiliated and shamed for their supposed backwardness and inabilities are commonplace. All those in Herat who witnessed this time are unanimous in condemning the arrogance of the *Khalqi* ideologues and their almost total lack of care for the customs and social mores of conservative Afghanistan.

Even Islam was deemed a worthy target for this secular revolution. In perhaps the most complete and eloquent Persian account of the events that took place in Herat during this period, Ahmad Shah Farzan, himself imprisoned by the Khalqis in Herat, tells the following, highly emblematic, story about an incident he witnessed in his local mosque.

One Friday, as the worshippers were leaving the mosque after evening prayers, a young teacher, recently recruited to the party, approached the mullah and said to him; "How much longer are you going to have that ridiculous bushy beard? How much longer are you going to pray for? How much longer will you insist on these people following your path? Leave this path and come build a new society with our friend Taraki. This society has no need for Akhunds. We will kill you, but if you follow our society and be with us, you will be protected".

The thought of standing outside a mosque in rural Herat as a secular, young and presumably beardless teacher and saying such

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[1] 'If you start with 50 bullets and kill 10 infidels with 30 of them, how many bullets are left?'

things out loud is a terrifying one indeed. It came as no surprise to read that this same teacher was later, on account of his further insults to religion and religious figures, hacked to death by a mob. As with so many reforms which aimed to drag 20th century Islamic society 'forwards', be it in Iran, Turkey or Afghanistan, the speed of this pull only served to cause resistance; deracination is never a smooth process.

In keeping with Communism's love of bombast and hyperbole, on Saturday, 10th June 1978, Noor Mohammad Taraki, Prime Minister of Afghanistan, described the PDPA in the following terms: 'the sole nationwide, powerful, national, revolutionary, patriotic and democratic party… the true speaker for the interests of workers, peasants, intelligentsia, small and middle bourgeoisie or national bourgeoisie ...' and so on. This was pure pageantry and Herat was also an unwitting and unwilling participant in this red fandango. The city was quite literally stopped in its tracks to praise Taraki's benevolence and wisdom. Herat's shopkeepers, farmers, teachers and bakers were forced to march through the city shouting praise for Afghanistan's Great Leader. Ministries closed to deal with the logistics. The great Timurid Khiaban of Herat and the alleyways of the Old City rang out with half-hearted damnations of imperialism, tyranny and feudalism as ragged bunches of Heratis held aloft red banners and placards of Taraki. The great irony of this ideological charade was that most of the slogans being recited were utterly unknown to the illiterate farmers and labourers. Imported terms such as feudalism, or reactionary imperialism, were not ones with which these men and women were familiar, or could even pronounce. Alongside the marches, there were dictates requiring houses, doors, walls and windows to be painted red and photos of Taraki to be hung in every single place imaginable. Such was the *Khalqi* enthusiasm for the colour red that one witness recalls Taraki ordering that pigeons be painted red and released into the air in October 1978.

But it wasn't the ludicrous marches or the poorly-thought out reforms that angered Herat and Afghanistan so much. It was the brutality of the repression under the *Khalqis*, and the utter horror of the torture, arrests and executions that pushed Herat to a fever pitch of anger and resentment. Prisoners were electrocuted, whipped, frozen, had their fingernails torn out and were beaten to within an inch of their lives. Men were made to confess to crimes they most

often had not committed and the presence of spies all over the city gave the AGSA (Department for Safeguarding the Interests of Afghanistan) plenty of opportunities to pounce on unsympathetic comments made towards the *Khalqi* government. There were secret prisons, often located outside the city walls, to which Heratis were taken and executed. Names such as *Bagh-e Forushan*, and *Bagh-e Shahi*, from which men rarely came out alive, struck real fear into the hearts of Heratis. A war of control by fear was being conducted, and its battlegrounds were the streets and tea-houses of Herat and the prisons in which men and boys were radicalised by torture. These were the same prisons, overcrowded and dank, in which I would work thirty years later. I listened to similar stories of torture and ill-treatment levelled against Afghanistan's security services. Researching this period in Herat's history, I was constantly reminded of the interviews I had conducted in Herat's prisons, reminded of broken men in tears, as I listened to stories of similar brutality carried out on detainees The similarity – KGB-trained interrogators torturing Islamists in Herat's prisons – was a cycle which repeated itself and I witnessed this first hand.

It was from this atmosphere that Herat, in a concerted rural-urban effort, rose up against the *Khalqi* government and its Soviet paymasters in March 1979. This was the *Qiyam-e 24 Hout*. The *qiyam* was a largely chaotic and ill-directed affair which resulted in Herat briefly being 'conquered' by the rebels, an assortment of criminals, farmers and students, before the government in Kabul finally managed to retake the city, at great cost to its inhabitants.

It is a common notion that government and Moscow figures assumed there to have been Iranian and foreign involvement in the uprising. We get this picture through reference to the official documents from the Soviet Union, not to mention the more poetic accounts of the time, such as the account by a former Maoist from Herat, Ahmad Shah Farzan. Farzan, with his customary eloquence, reports on a conversation supposedly held between high-ranking remnants of Herat's ruling classes, gathered together at Herat's airport in the aftermath of the uprising. After ordering Herat's airport controller to send word to the base at Shindand to bomb the mutinous 17th Division, the trio turn to discussing why this had happened in Herat. 'It was Iran's doing; there is a foreign hand in this', said the military general, Sayyed Mokaram. Whilst this account may be

faulted in terms of the accuracy of its reporting, this assessment reflects a reality of the time in which Moscow and Kabul saw Herat as threatened from without – Iran and China being the prime suspects. A fascinating cache of documents, transcripts of Top Secret Politburo documents detailing discussions within the Soviet hierarchy and those had with Afghanistan's leaders, reveal these paranoid suspicions of Iranian involvement, as well as involvement of Chinese, US and Pakistani troublemakers. In a meeting of the Politburo on 17 March 1979, the Soviet high command described the events in Herat as the work of 'bands of saboteurs and terrorists, having infiltrated from the territory of Pakistan, trained and armed not only with the participation of Pakistani forces but also of China, the United States of America, and Iran' who were 'committing atrocities in Herat.' The report notes, with a characteristically flourishing rhetoric, 'The insurgents infiltrating into the territory of Herat Province from Pakistan and Iran have joined forces with a domestic counter-revolution.'

However, what is certain is that there was almost no involvement of Iranian, Chinese or Pakistani agents in the *qiyam*, in either its planning or its execution. Eyewitness accounts I have heard and written accounts from the time are clear that this was a few days of rage in which Herat's people, incensed at their treatment at the hands of the *Khalqis*, with their drinking, secularism, brutality and immorality, chose to destroy a hated regime, with little idea of what would follow. This was a spontaneous uprising in which Iran had no involvement; it began in the small villages surrounding Herat, and not in Mashhad or Tehran, and it took everyone, absolutely everyone, by surprise. Iran's new Islamic Republic was interested in exporting its Islamic Revolution, but in Herat it had no acolytes. This can be largely explained by sectarian reasons; Herat is a majority Sunni province and city, but it was also because Iran's Islamic Revolution was not seen in Herat as a defender of the conservative Islamic values which had been so threatened by the Khalqi reforms, but more as a radical and highly politicised revolutionary movement. In the months after the *qiam*, the leaflets that the Mujahedeen scattered across Herat were not calling for *Velayat-e Faqih* (Imam Khomeini's, albeit Shi'ite, revolutionary ideology) or using any of the distinctly revolutionary ideology that had largely informed Iran's transition from monarchy to Islamic Republic; this was not Shariati's

talk of the oppressed or the downtrodden; this was a discussion framed within the parameters of Afghanistan's history, a history in which Herat was playing and had always played a central part. The leaflets made the inevitable comparison between Kabul's then ruler, Karmal, and the 19th Century British 'puppet' ruler, Shah Shujah. Karmal was termed a *gondi* (puppet), *watanforoush* (nation-seller) and *dast-e neshan da* (pawn). We see how Herat chose to rise and fight in the name of Afghan history, a very important point for us in understanding Herat and how it fits into Afghanistan. However, what is interesting is that whilst we have seen that Iran's involvement in the *qiyam* was minimal, the use of distinctly Iranian language, with the vernacular and symbolism of Iran's Islamic Revolution, was used by Herat's Mujahedeen and Islamists as a way to interpret and present the *qiyam*. Accounts written in Herat after the events, notably Farzan's *Qiyam-e Herat* and Mohammad Zaher Azimi's, *Hout, Mah-e Tajali-ye Iman* [Hout, A Month of Glorious Faith], make liberal use of terms such as Islamic Revolution, *Enqelab-e Islami*, and the notion of resistance to tyranny, tropes which had become much used in the service of Iran's Islamic Revolution, and even occasionally using Farsi words and phrases. An exemplary sentence from Azimi reads as follows, 'This event [the *qiyam*] illuminated the great fire of resistance throughout Afghanistan. From a position of impossible wretchedness and darkness, oppression and brutality the country came alight in the process of this Islamic Revolution.' By referring to the events as an Islamic Revolution, this somehow elevated the *qiyam's* significance in the Muslim world. It was likewise for the symbolism. During the lead up to the *qiyam* Herat's rebels took to going onto their roofs and shouting Allah-u Akbar, in a conscious imitation of Iran's revolutionaries. People in Herat tell me they learned of this idea from Iran's revolution. So we have use of Iranian symbols of resistance and occasionally language, but for the qiyam and the war this was most definitely an Afghan affair.

The legacy of the *qiyam* is an important one for Herat and for Afghanistan. This was the first and most successful instance of Afghans rising up against the Soviet-backed government in Kabul and it definitively began a slide to war. The Politburo documents mentioned earlier show how important Herat was in forcing the Soviet Union to commit troops to Afghanistan, which it did in

December of that year. During the discussions in the documents the phrase 'Afghanistan must be kept at all costs' is a constant refrain. But, given the appalling condition – mutinies were rife – of the Afghan Army (sponsored by the Soviet Union), it becomes clear, quickly, that a Soviet military intervention was the only way of ensuring that Afghanistan would not be lost to Islamists and Maoists or that it would simply descend into chaos. Herat's *qiyam* had made it clear to the Soviets that if they wanted to keep Afghanistan as their fiefdom, they would have to send in their troops. Those documents reveal an almost total misunderstanding of Herat by Taraki, Afghanistan's president, and show how the city was isolated from Kabul and yet at the same time was a central and hugely significant part of Afghanistan's struggle against tyranny and Soviet oppression.

This sense of simultaneous isolation from Kabul, while yet also being at the frontline of the war against the Soviets, continued during the Jihad. The province and city were almost totally destroyed during the fighting; more than one visitor to Herat likened it to a post-nuclear wasteland and it nearly always experienced the highest levels of fighting and casualties. One English account of Herat in 1989 describes the district of Injil, central Herat, 'The most damaged square mile of Afghanistan.' And yet, in keeping with the theme of regeneration from destruction, Herat was possibly the only province to recover, albeit partially, from the devastation of the war and in 1993, after the victory of the Mujahedeen and Ismail Khan, Herat began an urban and rural recovery which astounded those who saw the diligence and determination with which the city's people went about rebuilding and repopulating the province.

Another legacy of the qiyam is a sense of suspicion from Kabul that Herat is a province whose fertility and natural intelligence, not to mention its wealth from the customs revenue from the Islam Qala border crossing, is to be feared. This continues today. When the Taliban were pushed out from Herat by the US and Iranian effort of 2001, Kabul actively sought to destabilise Herat and weaken its ability to act with the independence and success for which it had become known. This instability, created by Kabul, was used as pretext to put a military base in a province with almost no links to al-Qaeda and certainly no popularity for the Taliban. Kabul wanted to control Herat and make sure it didn't become too independent:

commissions were sent out from Kabul to collect taxes and trouble was stirred up so as to justify filling the province with Kabul's men.

Herat is a fully, if badly, integrated part of a chaotic Afghan polity in which centre-periphery relations are defined by suspicion as much as by anything else. Kabul should work with Herat, as an integral part of Afghanistan, not against it, as the country needs, more than ever, to be united as it faces the future. I was advised by a highly esteemed American friend of mine to present all this to the new President, Mr. Ghani, but from what I hear he is not overly keen on foreigners telling him what to do, so I shall have to hope he reads my book when it's finished.

Sir John Malcolm: Envoy to Persia and Historian.

Lecture given by his descendant, John Malcolm, on 20 April 2015.

In the time available, I will try to touch on the following themes: the Raj in India in Malcolm's time; Malcolm's life and career; his Persian missions; and his books – in particular *The History of Persia* and *Sketches of Persia.* Finally, I will sum up what I believe to be Malcolm's significance today.

First, then, the British Raj in India. The current perception tends to be of Curzon and Kipling and E.M. Forster and memsahibs and the Freedom Struggle; of a complacent and apparently immovable imperial edifice being outmanoeuvred by the non-violent tactics of the saintly Mahatma Gandhi. And before that, in the nineteenth century, of evangelically minded British Generals, crushing brave but hopeless Indian resistance with superior weaponry, epitomised in Hilaire Belloc's verse:

"Blood thought he knew the native mind
He said you must be firm, but kind.
A mutiny resulted.
I shall never forget the way
That Blood stood, upon this awful day
Preserved us all from death.
He stood upon a little mound
Cast his lethargic eye around
And said, beneath his breath
'Whatever happens, we have got
The Maxim Gun, and they have not.'

Yet there was an earlier period – roughly the half-century from 1780 to 1830, when things were very different. In 1780 the East India Company controlled Bengal, with outposts in Madras and Bombay. That's all. By 1830 it had achieved effective political hegemony over the whole of the sub-Continent, the first time that this had ever been

done (apart, possibly in the reign of the Emperor Ashoka in the second century BC). And this transformation was achieved by a small group of daring Britons (including John Malcolm), without any particular superiority in weaponry or numbers.

During this period 'British' India was ruled by a Governor-General, who reported to two masters in London, the Company's Court of Directors, and the British Government through its Board of Control. These two parties had very different agendas. For the Governor-General, the management structure was therefore a nightmare, further complicated by slow communications - letters between London and Calcutta took four to six months each way.

The key figure in this half-century was Richard Wellesley, first Marquess Wellesley (eldest brother of the Duke of Wellington), Governor-General from 1798 to 1805 It was Wellesley, and Wellesley alone, who had the clarity of vision to see that the chaotic state of India at that time could only be fixed by having a single controlling power; and that of the possible candidates – the Mughal Emperor, Tipu Sultan of Mysore, the Mahrattas and the Company - only the Company had the will, the discipline and above all the necessary wherewithal to succeed. From the date of his arrival he set out to do so, with breathtaking audacity; and moreover, against the explicit wishes of his two employers. The East India Company's Court of Directors wanted dividends, not territory; while the British Government wasn't really interested in India – it looked to North America and the West Indies for trade and expansion. Seven years later, when he was within sight of achieving this astonishing aim, Wellesley suffered the fate which has overtaken many a successful proconsul of the British Empire – he was (effectively) recalled; and when he returned to Britain, nearly impeached. The commercially-minded directors in London were understandably alarmed by the size of the negative cashflows which Wellesley's wars had generated. His project was put on hold. But it was reluctantly resumed twelve years later, and by 1818, largely achieved. Richard Wellesley is mostly forgotten today (unlike his younger brother Arthur), but his achievement as an imperial statesman can reasonably be compared with that of his contemporary, Napoleon Bonaparte (though obviously not as a general). Napoleon's career of conquest was spectacular, but within his own lifetime it ended in defeat and

humiliation for France; Wellesley's, for better or for worse, lasted for 140 years.

How does John Malcolm come into all this? Well, he was Wellesley's Private Secretary, troubleshooter and a sort of 'think-tank'. In the title of my book I called him an 'ideologue' of British India. He had an extraordinarily diverse and busy career, impossible to cover in a few minutes, but let me race through it.

He was born in 1769, the son of a tenant farmer living in the Scottish Borders; one of seventeen children of the same mother, born over twenty years, and all surviving infancy. She was aptly known as 'Bonny Peggy'. When John Malcolm was eleven his father went bankrupt, and had to send his sons out to work. Luckily he had a lot of charm and good contacts with the local lairds. This enabled him to get his son John a commission in the Madras army. So Malcolm left school, family and country and arrived in Madras as an ensign, still aged only thirteen. For the next decade he lived the life of a young officer. He was nicknamed 'Boy' Malcolm, and for the rest of his life he retained a youthful enthusiasm for field sports and fun and games. But behind this boisterous exterior lay serious intellectual ability and a considerable talent for government. As a soldier he later became a general, leading the Company's troops to victory in 1817 against the Mahratta chief Holkar at the decisive battle of Mehidpoor. Shortly afterwards the paramount chief of the Mahrattas, the Peshwah of Poona, surrendered to him personally, 'as an old friend'. As a diplomat he acted as trouble-shooter to successive Governors-General, and led three Company missions to Persia. As an administrator, he pacified Central India (roughly, today's Madhya Pradesh) and later became Governor of Bombay (ruling a large part of western India). As a scholar, he wrote nine books, including his magnum opus, *The History of Persia*. As a linguist, he spoke at least nine languages, including fluent Persian, picked up at Indian Princely courts, where it had been the Court language since the Mughal era; though Nancy Lambton once remarked to me that he probably spoke 'with an Indian accent'. He was known, too, as an expert judge of Arab horses; and as an enthusiastic amateur poet, and translator of Persian poets such as Hafez.

For the Iran Society, however, our chief interest must be in Malcolm's three Persian missions. Until the 1790s, the East India Company's interest in Persia had been purely commercial, but it also

had worries about the Afghans, who periodically invaded Hindustan, even Bengal, in search of plunder. A second threat came from Napoleon. When he invaded Egypt in 1798, the British government in London was puzzled by his motivation. But Richard Wellesley in Calcutta guessed that Napoleon intended Egypt to be a stepping stone on his way to India. He knew that the British navy would probably prevent him going there by sea, so he planned to go by land, via Persia. After all, Alexander the Great had done so. Several British historians of the 1970s and 1980s have claimed that a march through Persia by a French army was so obviously impracticable that Wellesley had only raised the spectre of a French threat to obtain approval for his wars in India. But these historians didn't consult the French archives. It was left to Iraj Amini in the 1990s to prove from the Paris archives that Napoleon really meant it. "C'est cela! C'est dans L'Inde qu'il faut attaquer la puissance anglaise! Voilà ou il faut la frapper!" Wellesley was right.

So he decided to send an envoy to Persia to encourage the Shah to oppose the French, as well as to attack the Afghans from the west. And he chose John Malcolm, then just 30 years old, to lead the mission. Malcolm arrived at Bushire in January 1800 with a large party and lots of presents. He had to wait several months for permission to travel; and when he did so, he had to fight a battle of diplomatic etiquette to make sure that he was treated as the representative of a sovereign power, not just of a commercial company. He finally arrived in Tehran in mid November, and stayed with the Shah's Chief Minister, Haji Ibrahim. He got on very well with Fath Ali Shah. By this time, however, the chief *raison d'être* of his mission had become less urgent – Napoleon's army had been beaten at Acre and he had returned to France; while the Afghan King had been deposed by his brother. He nevertheless concluded political and commercial treaties which involved rebuffing the French. The mission was later criticized in some quarters as 'unnecessary'. This was unfair, a bit like objecting to the purchase of a fire extinguisher on the ground that no fire subsequently occurred. It was also criticized for 'costing too much'. True enough in hindsight, but it is difficult to judge how much such a mission should have cost – is an expensive mission which achieves its objectives better than a cheap mission which does not? Whatever else may be said, in PR terms the mission was a huge success.

A few years later the whole issue of Persia's foreign relations flared up again. It has been said that 'between 1807 and 1811 Persia formed the meeting place of Indian and European politics'. There were five key players in this diplomatic game: in Tehran, Fath Ali Shah; in Paris, Napoleon, and his envoy, General Gardane; in St Petersburg, Tsar Alexander; in London, George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, and Robert Dundas, President of the Board of Control; and their envoy, Harford Jones (more on him later); in Calcutta, Lord Minto, the Governor-General, and his envoy, John Malcolm.

The diplomatic manoeuvrings in this period were so complicated, that when I tried to describe them in my biography of Malcolm, I was tempted to tell the same story from these five different points of view – rather after the style of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet of novels. But it didn't quite work! Most of these players, most of the time, were far away from the scenes of action. News from Tehran took at least two months to reach London or Paris, and three months to reach Calcutta. Ministers and diplomats had to take decisions based on information that had frequently been overtaken by events. Malcolm played a key role in these events, from start to finish, but because he tended to commit his thoughts voluminously to paper, his actual influence tends to be exaggerated.

The central figure in the story is Fath Ali Shah. His primary concern was the threat, and in due course the reality, of Russian invasion from the north. From the time of Malcolm's mission in 1800, he had tried to get help from the British, via the East India Company. But the British were wary of becoming embroiled in a Persian struggle with Russia, especially since the Russians were their allies in their war with Napoleon's France; so they procrastinated.

By about 1805, Fath Ali Shah was getting rather fed up with them. He was impressed by Napoleon's military prowess (especially after Austerlitz) and put out feelers to the French, seeking their help. Napoleon was at this time at the zenith of his power, and trying to subdue the Russians. He responded positively – seeing tactical alliances with the Ottoman Empire and Persia as a way of putting additional pressure on the Russians. This culminated in the Treaty of Finkelstein (a castle in Northern Poland) in May 1807. In return for French military help in expelling the Russians from Georgia and Armenia, the Shah agreed to declare war on Britain, and allow French troops to pass through Persia on their way to India.

At the beginning of October that year, however, the Persian government heard, from – of all people - the commander of the Russian forces in the Caucasus, that Napoleon had resumed fighting the Russians in July; and that after the battle of Friedland, where 25,000 Russian troops had been killed, he had signed the Treaty of Tilsit with Tsar Alexander. The French, in other words, were now the allies rather than the enemies of the Russians. So when the French envoy, General Gardane, appeared in Tehran at the beginning of December, the Shah was understandably less than happy. Gardane tried to explain that the French would now get the Russians to leave Armenia and Georgia by persuasion rather than by force – by honey rather than vinegar.

Meanwhile the British, both in London and in Calcutta, had heard of these developments with dismay. In London, Canning and Dundas decided to send an envoy directly from London to Tehran, without waiting to consult Calcutta. The man they chose, Harford Jones, had been the East India Company's resident in the area for 25 years – first in Basra, later in Baghdad - until expelled by the Ottoman pasha. He was an obviously intelligent and able man, fluent in Arabic and Persian. They told him to follow the instructions of the Governor-General, 'except where these were in conflict with his instructions from London'. This last phrase, seemingly quite sensible, was to prove a fatal flaw, as we shall see. Nevertheless, it 'seemed like a good idea at the time'. In Calcutta, Lord Minto was at least equally concerned, and after some delay decided that he would send an envoy to Persia, without at that time knowing that one was also being sent from London. Malcolm was the obvious choice, from his previous experience and good relations with Fath Ali Shah.

Uncertainties caused by slow communications delayed the departure of the two envoys. Malcolm reached Bombay in March 1808, and knew that Jones was on his way to Bombay from Britain, via the Cape. The two men had met in Baghdad back in 1800, and had entirely different views about how to deal with Persia. Malcolm nevertheless didn't wait for Jones to arrive, and sailed off from Bombay to Persia in mid April. He argued that time was of the essence, but the reality was that he knew that if he waited for Jones, the latter, as the King's envoy, would have pulled rank and been chosen to go instead of him. Nevertheless, it was still a highly

irresponsible decision – he should have waited for Jones's arrival, so that their plans could be co-ordinated.

Unfortunately for Malcolm, when he arrived at Bushire in May 1808, the Persian government, despite the Shah's misgivings, was still fully committed to the French alliance. Malcolm was rebuffed. After a fruitless month he decided to return to Calcutta to report to Minto and discuss the possible next steps. Meanwhile Jones was waiting, with commendable patience, in Bombay. But when Minto sent him a rather vague letter asking him to continue to wait until Malcolm had reported, but leaving it to Jones's discretion as to whether he should leave, Jones immediately set sail. It was just as irresponsible a decision as Malcolm's had been several months earlier.

Meanwhile, back in Tehran, the credibility of the French was rapidly disintegrating. In September 1808, when the Persian army went into battle with the Russians in the Caucasus, the French military contingent was ordered by Gardane not to take part. This was the final straw for Fath Ali Shah. The result was that as soon as Jones arrived at Bushire in late October, he was welcomed, and was able to set out almost immediately for Tehran. The French were asked to leave, and shortly after Jones's arrival in Tehran in February 1809, he was able to sign a Treaty, the terms of which had been largely drafted by Malcolm in the previous June. Jones had been as lucky in his timing as Malcolm had been unlucky.

During the next year Jones was in charge in Persia for the British. And an unfortunate fact emerged about his character. In all those lonely earlier years in Basra and Baghdad he had built up an enormous chip on his shoulder about the East India Company. Now he was able to exploit his semi-independent position to pay off some old scores. His quarrel was not so much with Malcolm as with Minto, who was equally fed up with Jones's alleged belittling of the East India Company. Minto reluctantly accepted the Treaty that Jones had signed, but since it involved the East India Company in supplying large numbers of weapons and equipment and some military advisers, he felt that a representative of the Company should be around in Persia to make sure that these measures were efficiently implemented. As the obvious person to carry out the task, he chose Malcolm; and in addition gave him a mandate to simultaneously carry out a survey of Persia's geography and economy.

Malcolm put together a strong team of young men and set them various tasks. He himself arrived at Bushire early in 1810. Jones bitterly opposed his arrival, and threatened to leave Persia if Malcolm were allowed to come to the Shah's Court. But after some unseemly haggling the Shah overruled Jones, and allowed Malcolm to proceed, He arrived at the Shah's summer camp at Soltaniyeh in late June 1810.

Meanwhile, back in London a new Foreign Secretary had been appointed – none other than Richard Wellesley. A letter from Wellesley to Jones arrived in early July. It stated that relations with Persia would henceforth be handled by London; that a new envoy, Sir Gore Ouseley, had been appointed; and that Jones's resignation (which he had submitted some months before, probably hoping that it would be refused) was accepted, without comment.

Now that relations with Persia were to be run from London rather than from Calcutta, this also spelt the end of Malcolm's mission. The Shah and the Heir Apparent, Abbas Mirza, tried to persuade him to stay around for a while to advise them on the Persian army's war with the Russians, but he felt he had to decline. As a special mark of favour the Shah honoured him with the newly created Order of the Lion and Sun. As Malcolm withdrew from his last audience, Fath Ali Shah cried out "Farewell, dear Malcolm, my friend". On his way back to India he called again at Bushire, and was pleased to receive a sack of potatoes – a vegetable which he had earlier introduced into Iran. Meanwhile Harford Jones hung around in Persia for a few more months in a sulk, and then went home, without waiting for Gore Ouseley to arrive.

From this web of diplomacy and intrigue, what conclusions can be drawn? First, for Fath Ali Shah and the Persian government. Under attack from the Russians, they had sought help first from the British, then from the French, then again from the British. They were let down by both. The French simply abandoned them, while the British blew hot and cold. The British may in the end have defeated the French, but it was hardly a triumph for British diplomacy. The trouble was that the British government couldn't make up its mind whether to deal with Persia from London or via Calcutta; and this wavering went on for another 30 years. Fath Ali Shah deserves our sympathy.

The main criticism of Malcolm lies in his decision in April 1808 to set off from Bombay without waiting for Harford Jones to turn up. But thereafter there was little he could have done to prevent his rebuff – other than to hang around at Bushire and hope for the best. On the other hand his conduct on the 1810 mission was exemplary.

This brings us to Harford Jones. The trouble with Jones was that he was a loner, unpopular with most of his peers (not just the Malcolm faction). He had the sort of personality that could be crudely described as 'all lick up, all kick down'. The Persians nicknamed him Mr *Na Jins* ('Mr Nothing). And he had a violent temper. A letter in 1809 from John Briggs, a British officer in Persia at the time, described him in a meeting with the Minister of Finance 'as having so little command over himself that he kicked down the shades, overset the pelsoozas and kicked the candlesticks in great style'. When I read this letter I thought that this was perhaps a bit of anti-Jones 'spin' from a member of the 'Malcolm' faction. But 25 years later the story was repeated with pride by Jones himself in his Memoir of the mission, claiming furthermore that he had actually grabbed Mirza Shafee (the Prime Minister) by the throat. and 'pushed him with a slight degree of firmness against the wall'! In short, he was a man who in the end fell out with just about everybody he came into contact with. Despite his undoubted talents he was the last person who should have been chosen for such a delicate diplomatic mission. Perhaps the moral of the story is that before making a staff appointment one should always take the trouble to find out what the candidate's peers think of him.

That leaves the Tsar and the Russians. While the other players in the diplomatic game moved back and forth and achieved very little, the Russians steadily increased their territory at very little cost. As Alfred de Gardane, General Gardane's brother, later remarked: "qui donc a gagné à la retraite de la France de Perse? La Russie seul" [who then gained from the withdrawal of France from Persia? Russia alone].

Perhaps Malcolm's friend in Bombay, Sir James Mackintosh, summed up this whole episode, and Malcolm's part in it, most aptly: "Malcolm's introduction of potatoes to Persia will be remembered long after the ridiculous Persian missions are forgotten".

Malcolm never went to Persia again. But over the next twenty years he remained a sort of expert (self-appointed) on relations with

Persia. In 1826 he managed to get his brother-in-law, Sir John Macdonald, appointed as envoy, and Macdonald brokered the Treaty of Turkmanchai between the Persians and the Russians in 1828, at a time when Malcolm was Governor of Bombay.

In November 1810 Malcolm brought back to Bombay a vast collection of information about Persia. He then obtained permission from Minto to take a year's paid leave based in Bombay to 'put these papers together into a useful format'. In January 1812 he went home with his family (there were already three children) on five years' furlough, and continued his work. He finally published his *History of Persia* in June 1815.

Now, at last, he could look forward to the rest of his furlough unencumbered by work. And at the end of June some even more pleasing news reached him – an invitation from the Duke of Wellington to visit him in Paris. He and Arthur Wellesley had met in India in 1799 and had worked closely together in India for several years thereafter. One eminent historian (Sir Cyril Philips) has even called Malcolm Arthur Wellesley's 'best and lifelong friend'. I think that goes a bit far; the Australian expression 'best mates' might be more apt. His host being the Duke of Wellington, the victor of Waterloo and the hero of all Europe, he was introduced to the Kings of France, Russia, Prussia and Austria, plus Marshal Blucher and several of Bonaparte's generals. Moreover, though few people had yet had time to read his book, the cognoscenti of Europe had come to know of it. He was a literary lion. It was any author's dream come true. His celebrity as the author of *The History of Persia* enabled him to meet and converse with an array of French savants, orientalists and painters – including people like Madame de Stael.

The historical significance of the book is that it was the first history of Persia in a European language derived primarily from Persian sources – previous efforts had relied primarily on Ancient Greek sources. How did he write the book? He had a phenomenal memory (he once boasted that "I never need to read a book twice") and recorded his impressions and thoughts in writing at great length. His method of research was chiefly to talk to people and hear what they had to say, then write it down. On his 1800 and 1810 missions to Persia he travelled slowly from Bushire to Tehran via Shiraz and Isfahan, taking several months. The daily routine would be to set off early, arrive at the next campsite in mid-afternoon; go hunting for

game; come back in the evening; have supper; and invite the local chiefs and savants to sit around the campfire talking until a late hour about local history and myths. He was particularly keen on myths, because, as he once wrote in his first book, about the Sikhs:

"In every research into the general history of mankind, it is of the most essential importance to hear what a nation has to say of itself; and the knowledge obtained from such sources has a value, independent of its historical utility….".

His *History of Persia* reflects this, the first volume covering in depth the great myths and legends of ancient Persia. Unfortunately the book has no Index or list of sources, and I am anyway completely unqualified to comment on its scholarship. This was done most admirably by Professor Lambton in her 1995 article in the *Journal of Persian Studies* (no 33, pp.97-109). Her review of the book cover six pages, incidentally guessing Malcolm's sources for each chapter – a remarkable feat of erudition.

In 1827 Malcolm published a much more light-hearted book, *Sketches of Persia*, containing some wonderful anecdotes and critical but affectionate insights into the Persian character. He probably wrote it as a bit of an antidote to the perhaps too mocking view of Persia and Persians in James Morier's Hajji Baba of Isfahan.

To sum up, why should Malcolm concern us today? First, as a man, who came from an impecunious Scottish rural background to achieve distinction in many countries, in many fields, through sheer ability and effort, despite many setbacks; in short, in contrast to these days of narrow credentialists, a quintessential all-rounder. A great and loud talker (George Canning nicknamed him Bahadur Jaw or 'General Jaw'), but a man of infinite goodwill to all, from the grandest Maharaja to the humblest peasant. His motto was *Char Derwazeh Kolah* [Four Doors Open]. Second, as a major participant during a crucial period of British and Indian (and Persian) political history. Third, as a steadfast servant of the East India Company, one of the world's first multinational corporations, during the critical half-century when it was transformed from a purely commercial venture into an agent of imperial government. Fourth, as one of the earliest players of the Great Game of diplomatic rivalry between Britain and Russia during the nineteenth century, in Persia and

Central Asia. Fifth, as one of a trio of eminent Scotsmen – the others being Thomas Munro and Mountstuart Elphinstone - who worked out in the 1820s a philosophical basis for British rule in India, a unique form of imperialism. It was an essentially 'Tory' concept – to allow local rulers a great deal of leeway to rule by traditional methods, even when these seemed clearly less efficient than western methods. This was in strong contrast to the 'Whig' approach, epitomized by Macaulay's Minute on Indian education, and such contemporary efforts as Bishop Heber's:

"Can we whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high
Can we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny"

Let me finish with a quote about the British Raj in India from one of Malcolm's books:

"Let us, therefore, calmly proceed on a course of gradual improvement: and when our rule ceases, for cease it must, as the natural consequence of our success in the diffusion of knowledge, we shall as a nation have the proud boast that we have preferred the civilisation to the continued subjection of India. When our power is gone, our name will be revered; for we shall leave a moral monument more noble and imperishable than the hand of man ever constructed."

What astonishing prescience! Unfortunately their ideas were 'forgotten too soon and remembered too late'.

Report by Travel Scholar, Tom Lewis.

The recent expedition I made to Iran to investigate Iran's environmental situation from an economic, political and social perspective was highly productive. Having spent two days settling into an apartment in Elahiyeh, familiarising myself with Tehran's layout and connecting with contacts, I set to work. A series of meetings and interviews with academics, NGO leaders, and environmental and policy analysts provided broad and useful insight into Iran's rapidly changing environment.

Kavous Seyed-Emami, director of the Persian Wildlife Foundation, and Prof Mehdi Zakerian, editor-in-chief of Tehran's International Studies Journal and a specialist in human rights and international environmental law, were just two of the many individuals I was able to meet. Kavous spoke of the position NGOs hold within the Islamic Republic, the regulatory changes that are teasing those involved in Iran's civil society and the corruption that hinders the implementation of environmental policy. Mehdi touched on the contradictions of a government that has prioritised unsustainable industrial growth despite having a bold environmental statement in its programme; there is a willingness to act and a mechanism (international environmental law), he says, but it is mired by a lack of independent funding and conflicts with powerful financial interests.

From Tehran I travelled with my host and a team from the United Nations to Kish Island for a conference organised by Tedx. Twenty-eight speakers from around the world gave emotive eighteen-minute "Ted talks" on the subject of "Tipping Points". Iran's environmental crisis was the subject of much discussion. Both Gary Lewis, my host in Tehran and the UN Resident Coordinator in Iran and Kaveh Madani, Imperial College lecturer, Iran water expert and one of my dissertation supervisors, gave important, environmental speeches.

The real success of the visit to Kish was an introduction through one of the attendees to her colleagues at the Iran Pistachio Association. This collective of pistachio growers, processers, traders and exporters from across Iran aim to support the interests of Iran's pistachio industry, the largest exported commodity after oil in

revenue terms. A growing interest of the association concerns the water crisis, which is seen as an existential threat to the pistachio industry in its heartland, around Kerman and Rafsanjan. The Pistachio Association invited me to Kerman for a day trip to visit the orchards and see the situation first hand.

Descending into Iran's pistachio growing heartland, Kerman's vulnerability is sketched out in lines for all to see. Regular mounds, dotted at intervals along predetermined paths. Roads, buildings and fields bend around them. The *qanats* – long underground irrigation channels marked on the surface by access shafts – have been here longer than anything else. But most of them have dried up.

A combination of factors, drought, bad water management, increased agriculture, badly regulated well digging have led to falling water levels, forcing the region's pistachio growers to try to prevent further decline and to plan for the future. The crisis has not yet reached its peak, and there is still hope that the situation can be corrected, but it requires immediate action. This has become the priority of all who rely on the pistachio industry here, and the Iran Pistachio Association is leading the way.

My introduction to Kerman began in the old town. In the bazaar locally made copper products, *pateh* (embroidered fabrics) and turquoise stones showcase Kerman's traditional industry and are still thriving today. Kerman's history as a centre of trade is evident in its grandeur; the Vakil carevanserai housed the most powerful merchants and the mint, now home to a collection of coins dating back to the Sasanid dynasty, shows its semi-autonomous administrative past.

There is a sense, in Kerman, of detachment from distant rulers, past and present. Its challenges too, may seem intangible to those living in Tehran.

The water table has been pumped unsustainably through deep wells and the salt content of what remains makes it almost unusable. With a few exceptions, traditional irrigation methods are now redundant, as the water table from which they drew water has sunk way below them. We drove towards Joupar, a small town in the higher grounds leading to the Joupar Mountain where *qanats* still survive. Haji Asghar-e Nahi, an elderly local, spoke of attempts to preserve the *qanats*, the importance of respecting one's environment, and the tensions that have arisen over access to water. As other towns

have struggled with water, people have moved to Joupar and the pressure on resources here is causing conflict. As we drove away from Mr. Asghar-e Nahi's plot, he shouted back to his neighbour, "can you guard my water allocation?" He talks of people stealing each other's water, a reality that used to be unthinkable.

We did not have time to see the other side, the modern agricultural techniques, where obsession with efficiency and yield has depleted the resources on which they rely. But at lunch, delicious *morgh polo*, I was privileged to discuss the matter with Mehdi Agah, a pioneer of change in the pistachio-growing industry. The problem, he thought, was how such crops were valued. The cost of production must incorporate the cost to the land, the cost of replacing the water that is used. If this is not the case, then there will be no incentive to change practices and it will become too late.

Such approaches, that challenge the current system and that are not afraid of change, are exciting to hear. The environment throughout Iran is vulnerable and businesses can make a big difference as soon as they see the threat that continued environmental exploitation holds for their future.

My visit to Kerman was a valuable experience, opening opportunities for collaboration with the Pistachio Association's think-tank (*Andeeshkadeh Ab*) and the potential for using the pistachio industry as a case study for my thesis. I wrote an article for their magazine.

I am immensely grateful to the Iran Society for making this trip to Iran possible.. It is a privilege to be given the opportunity to explore this growing and important field of environmental work. I hope to start contributing to it very soon.

Tarikh-e 'Azodi, Life at the Court of the Early Qajars, translated, edited and annotated by Manoutchehr M. Eskandari-Qajar, Mage Publishers, Washington DC, 2014, hb., xxxii, 414 pp. Illustrations, appendices. ISBN 1-933823-70-4 978-1-933823-70-6.

Reviewed by Vanessa Martin.

As Manoutchehr Eskandari Qajar explains in the introduction, this book brings to an English speaking readership first-hand the recollections of Soltan Ahmad Mirza 'Azod al-Dawleh (1824-1902) of the court of Fath 'Ali Shah (1797-1834). The author was the 49th son of the Shah, and remembered the court from his childhood, his recollections being supplemented by those of his older relations. The work, which was criticised by other Qajars for putting private matters in the public domain, was published in 1888. The translator has prepared the text for two types of readership: those with an interest in the depiction of a lost domain and its stories; and others with a specific academic or family interest for whom copious notes have been added.

Soltan Ahmad Mirza focuses on the life of the court with a singular sense of consistency of time and place, so there are only glancing references to the administration and councils of government, or to major political events. Instead, details emerge of the daily life and ceremonies of the court, and the organisation and functions, in particular, of the wives and family of the Shah. The main focus is on the Qajars, and their relationship with each other and as a royal family. By contrast with the Ottomans, who stressed their own dynasty and depended on a powerful state, and with the Mughals, who depended on lesser potentates and aristocrats, the Qajars secured their position largely through their bonds as a closely-knit tribe. For the retention of power, discord among the Qajars had to be avoided and unity reinforced by a variety of means. Great emphasis was placed on rank and precedence as linked to status within the Qajar family itself, and this extended to the Shah's wives

and those of his relations. In time, however, the order of rank among his sons came to depend less on their rank than on their age. As the family grew over the nineteenth century, this emphasis on privilege for Qajars was to incur resentment in the rest of the population and played a part in the coming of the Constitutional Revolution in 1906. In addition, the Shah had to be constantly vigilant not only over perceived threats from Qajar princes, but also over potential threats. For this reason, even princes of innocent intent could be blinded, but then returned to court, where one for example, became adept at chess, riding and rifle practice. In the course of the nineteenth century, however, under European influence, the level of violence in Iranian high politics was to diminish.

One of the remarkable characteristics of *Life at Court* is the attention the author gives to women of all ranks and their role. As a large and complex institution, the court offered opportunities that were unsurpassed then in Iran. For example, responsibility for the Imperial Harem and its considerable expenditure was in the charge of a former female servant, who had a seal reading 'Keeper of the Coffers'. Another was in charge of the royal storage rooms for crystal, porcelain, carpets and bedding. A former wife of his predecessor, Agha Mohammad Shah (1785-97), controlled the prayer room of the Shah and one of his treasury rooms. As a result of the sumptuous life-style of the court, those women in charge of the service of tea and coffee, who also could facilitate connection to the Shah, received lavish tips, from which they grew very rich. As in previous eras, women of the royal family acted as patrons of religious buildings, funding, for example, four minarets in Kazimeyn and a caravanserai for pilgrims. With the senior Qajar women, especially the Queen Mother, they had an important role in peace making between family members, as in a dispute between the Shah and his brother, Hoseyn Qoli Khan.

The harem had a few members of foreign or non-Muslim background, including one of the Shah's favourite wives, Maryam Khanom, who was of Jewish origin, and had previously been married to Agha Mohammad Shah. Others were Armenian and Circassian women of the court. Occasionally members of the court wore European dress, and one woman, Hosni Beyk Khanum, would dress in male and female fashion combined, as she considered herself as belonging to neither sex.

As indicated, the references to foreigners and foreign powers are rare. In his account of the transition to the reign of Mohammad Shah in 1834, in which the designated heir was challenged by one of his uncles, Zell al-Soltan, the events are depicted as being resolved by the Qajars themselves, whereas in fact his success was assured by the manoeuvres of Britain and Russia. The *Nezam-i Jadid*, or New Order, which was subsidised by Britain, is alluded to by the fact that, from the time of its founding, swords were worn at court. Dr John Cormick is mentioned at the death of the Shah's beloved son and first heir, 'Abbas Mirza, when the Qajar grandees came to inform him of his son's demise in Mashhad. 'The *valiahd* is not well,' he was told, 'and the doctor died on the way back here.' The Shah kept his countenance during the mourning ceremony, and before he retired to grieve, quoted Hafez, 'Count these moments precious, for when we pass from these fleeting stations we shall not meet again.'

Although the court was evidently Islamic in culture, specifically religious references are rare. The Shah was pious, and had a tendency to support and sympathise with heterodoxy, especially Sufism. He also took an interest in Sheykh Ahmad Ahsa'i, the founder of the Sheykhi movement, whom he invited to Tehran, accompanied by Mirza 'Ali Reza'i, the famous *mojtahed* of Yazd. He further protected the Isma'ilis and ferociously avenged the assassination of their leader, Shah Khalilollah.

With regard to culture, Fath 'Ali Shah was a considerable patron of letters and the arts, but this aspect of his reign figures only briefly here in terms of his respect for men of learning, with whom he debated on history, poetry and the sciences. He included his own verse in his messages to at least one of his wives, who reciprocated in kind, in the same manner as in the Japanese court as depicted in *The Tale of Genji*. There were numerous musicians at court who had their own pavilion, and dancers were dressed in all the splendour shown in the famous paintings of the time, every one of them being 'outfitted with a fine tunic onto which a thousand coins were sewn, with jewel-studded belts and headbands, and precious necklaces and earrings'. Women musicians had the opportunity to reach such a level of excellence as to be entitled *ostad* 'master'. Wine was drunk at festivals and given to guests. Agha Mohammad Khan was a connoisseur of grapes, and of the difference made to their flavour even in one town, one soil and one climate.

The book has been lucidly and eloquently translated by Eskandari- Qajar, who has also provided learned full annotation to illuminate the text, making it a valuable and engaging work for specialist and non-specialist alike.

Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis, edited by Sussan Babaie and Talinn Grigor, I.B.Tauris, 2015, pp.260. ISBN: 978 1 84885 751 3, eISBN 978 0 85773 477 8.

Reviewed by David Blow

This is a fascinating survey by six leading scholars of the way in which Persian dynasties from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis have used architecture to convey their vision of kingship and to strengthen their own legitimacy. The need for this was made all the greater by the many upheavals and challenges that Persia has experienced in the course of its long history.

The Achaemenid king, Darius I (522-486 BCE), seized power after overthrowing an alleged usurper and crushing a series of rebellions across the newly created Persian Empire. He was not a direct descendant of the empire's founder, Cyrus II (ca.558-530 BCE), but came from a collateral line. Once securely on the throne, he immediately began building his great palace complex of Persepolis, the symbol, as Margaret Cool Root points out, of a new order and one that was emphatically Persian rather than Perso-Elamite, as she describes the kingship of Cyrus.

There can be few places so loaded with symbolic imagery as Persepolis, or what Root calls 'Greater Persepolis', which includes the rock-cut Achaemenid tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam. She argues that Persepolis stood for the empire as a whole and that the jigsaw-puzzle masonry which covered the platform on which the palace complex was raised was intended to represent the many different peoples of the empire, "all joined harmoniously together". In another illustration of the symbolism to be found all over Persepolis, Root draws attention to the cosmic elements implicit in the inverted lotuses carved on bell-shaped column bases. Persepolis was, she says, the ceremonial centre of the empire, where the king was the focus of a cult of "hegemonic divinity". This cult involved performances and

rituals, the keynote of which was reciprocity. One such was the giving and receiving of gifts to and from the king. Root describes the reliefs of gift-bearers on the double staircases as "visual hypertexts of ritualized court performances". Another performance was the appearance of the king, allowing himself both to see and be seen. She believes that the image on the tomb façades at Naqsh-e Rostam of the king on his throne being held aloft on a platform by the peoples of his empire may reflect an actual performance which took place on the roof of the great audience hall, the Apadana, so that the king could both see the assembled peoples and courtiers all around the palace and be seen by them.

The fall of the Achaemenids following the invasion of Alexander is described by Matthew P.Canepa as "one of the deepest ruptures in Iranian culture, rivalled only by the invasions of Islam in the 7th century CE". For the best part of the next two centuries most of the Iranian lands were ruled by the Macedonian dynasty of the Seleucids and large numbers of Greeks and Macedonians were settled in new towns across the Seleucid Empire. Achaemenid ritual and architectural traditions, he says, fell into obsolesence and the Seleucids created a new architectural expression of kingship in the form of the dynastic sanctuary. This was a temple with statues of royalty and the gods, where a cult of the ruling dynasty was celebrated. Canepa describes how this was taken up and developed by subsequent Iranian-speaking or Iranian-influenced dynasties, such as the Parthian Arsacids, their vassal dynasties in Armenia and in Elymais in south-western Iran, the dynasties of Pontos and Commagene in Anatolia, both of which claimed Achaemenid descent, the Kushans in Bactria and India, and the Sasanians. Iranian features were incorporated to a greater or lesser extent into what became monumental structures. These included the siting of the sanctuaries on elevated ground, preferably a mountain or hill as these had sacred connotations for Iranians, cults of fire and water, and Iranian funerary traditions. Canopa writes that "dynastic sanctuaries became an important and flexible expression of power within the Iranian world between Alexander and Islam….They not only communicated a family's royal claims and connections with patron deities, but also put their claims in a ritual and visual idiom that had meaning beyond their kingdom or even empire."

After a short essay by Lionel D.Bier in which he concludes that the influence of the Sasanian palaces on early Islam "was largely in the realm of poetry and metaphor", there is a revelatory essay by Melanie Michailidis on three tomb towers, which are the only surviving structures of the little-known Bavandid dynasty of Tabaristan (now Mazandaran). The Bavandids were of Sasanian royal descent and ruled from 665 to 1349 CE, making them by far the longest ruling dynasty in the history of Iran. The natural defences of their mountain kingdom enabled them to resist the Arabs and other invaders and to maintain a largely pre-Islamic culture. They converted to Islam in the mid-9th century, becoming Shi'a Muslims, but according to Michailidis, "the majority of their subjects remained Zoroastrian for several centuries thereafter, and the regional chronicles do not give a single example of a Bavandid ruler constructing a mosque, madrasa or *khanqah* (Sufi lodge)".

The three Bavandid tomb towers were built in the 11th and early 12th centuries. As Michailidis describes them, they are tall, cylindrical buildings with double-domed roofs, sited on hilltops in isolated locations, as were the pre-Islamic dynastic sanctuaries. The only door into the towers is 1.5 metres off the ground with no steps, apparently to discourage entry. Inside, the towers are dark, windowless and undecorated, and no bodies have been found buried there. The most striking feature is the two foundation inscription bands on the exterior, below the roof. One is in Arabic and the other is in the official Middle Persian language of the Sasanian Empire, Pahlavi, and uses the Sasanian solar calendar. Michailidis says that this use of Pahlavi is unique in Islamic monumental epigraphy. In addition, both the Arabic and Persian inscriptions on the earliest of the tomb towers (1016-21 CE) use the title of *ispahbod* for the Bavandid ruler, which Michailidis explains was the title of a high-ranking general in the Sasanian period and was the official title of the Bavandids. Michailidis cites Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, notably his account of the death of Nushirvan, to illustrate what Iranians at that time believed Sasanian mausolea to have looked like and how they were used; the deceased ruler was not buried, which would have been contrary to Zoroastrian beliefs, but instead his embalmed body was placed on a platform in the mausoleum. Michailidis believes this explains the absence of burials in the Bavandid tomb towers which she notes are very similar in appearance to those described by

Ferdowsi. All this shows clearly the extent to which the Bavandid tomb towers were intended to highlight their Sasanian origins, which unlike those claimed by other Caspian dynasties like the Buyids, were genuine and on which they based their right to rule.

The imposition of Imami Shi'ism on Iran by the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722 CE) led to a close association between the Safavid shah and the Shi'i clerics. Foremost in this partnership were the immigrant Shi'i jurists from Lebanon who gave a religious sanction to Safavid rule, thereby overriding the traditional Shi'i belief that there could be no legitimate government in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. This religious connection was a key part of the redefinition of Persian kingship by the Safavids. Sussan Babaie explores and illuminates this redefinition as it assumed its most complete expression under Shah Abbas I. Babaie shows how Abbas gave visual form to the Safavid concept of kingship in the urban *maydans*, the great public squares which he or his officials built. It was expressed in the buildings erected through royal patronage around the *maydan* – the mosques, the palaces with their government quarters, the commercial buildings and the public amenities. Babaie illustrates the symbolic significance of Abbas's *maydans* by describing three of them – the *maydans* of Isfahan, Farahabad and Kerman. She likens the *maydans* to a "theatrical stage", where "the performance of kingship…….in its conceptual fullness as both spiritual and imperial, religious and political, social and economic, animates the urban experience."

With their spectacles and ceremonies and their busy daily life around the coffee houses, shops and markets, the *maydans* were also the place where, as Babaie points out, "interactions and reciprocities" between the monarch and the people were played out. This is reminiscent of some of what Root has to say about Persepolis. Babaie draws attention to the similarity between the Safavid and Achaemenid ceremonies of presenting gifts to the king at Nowruz, as well as between the pillared halls of the Safavid *talar* (columned porch) and the Achaemenid *apadana* (columned audience hall) where this took place. "The practices of Persianate kingship and its ceremonials and symbolics of power," she writes, "drew from deep-seated cultural habits and the practices of encounter between the king and the citizenry."

The Qajar and Pahlavi rulers in the 19th and 20th centuries used their architecture to uphold Persian kingship at a time when Iran was

being exposed as weak and backward in relation to the West. With this end in view, the Qajars developed what Grigor Talinn calls a 'hybrid style', which mixed pre-Islamic, Safavid and European features. Writing of Naser al-Din Shah (1848-1896) and his Sun Palace with its clock tower built in 1867, Talinn says that "the shah and his reform-minded advisers aimed to provide a model of cultural restructuring that would restore the image of the monarchy as ancient, forward-looking and powerful". However, as Talinn explains, this 'hybrid style' along with everything associated with the Qajars was rejected and denounced by the Pahlavis who sought to create a new, secular concept of kingship and a homogeneous nation inspired by the grandeur of ancient Iran and the drive for modernity.

Talinn sees two buildings as emblematic of the Pahlavi vision of their rule: the mausoleum of Reza Shah at Rayy in south Tehran, built in 1951 and destroyed in the Islamic Revolution, and the Shahyad or King's Memorial Tower in west Tehran, built in 1971 as part of the celebration of 2,500 years of monarchy and since renamed the Freedom Tower. The mausoleum is described by Talinn as "a modern reinterpretation of a Zoroastrian fire temple, consisting of a drumless dome upheld by a simple cube". Talinn explains that this architectural form, known as *chahar taq*, had been used by successive dynasties from the Achaemenids onwards. With its austere white walls, the mausoleum represented both Iran's ancient past and its modernity. In addition, the siting of the mausoleum near the famous Shi'i shrine of Shah Abd al-Azim gave it a calculated religious overtone. As for the Shahyad, a tower of white marble, soaring to a height of 50 metres, Talinn writes that "until the dawn of the Iranian Revolution, it became the symbol of the modern nation, marching forward, captured in the dynamic form of the landmark and connected to the past with the general configuration of the plan and the elevation along with the decorative details and prototypes". It was to be the last manifestation of Persian kingship in architecture.

Land of the Turquoise Mountains: Journeys Across Iran by Cyrus Massoudi. I.B. Tauris 2014. 243 pp. including notes and bibliography. ***Iran: A Very Short Introduction*** by Ali M. Ansari. OUP 2014. 120 pp. including chronological table, bibliography and index.

Reviewed by Hugh Arbuthnott

This will not be true of members of the Iran Society but most British people probably think of Iran as the land of the Ayatollahs where the people are oppressed by the mullahs and where visitors from the West will be afraid that they will be in danger from a dictatorial and fanatical regime - or something along these lines anyway. Massoudi does his best to dispel such ideas.

He was born in Britain after his parents left Iran over 30 years ago. He therefore grew up having no direct experience of the country in which his roots were. He decided to explore it and based himself in Tehran for three years, from 2003-2006, making expeditions every now and then into the provinces. Each chapter describes a different trip and also some aspect of Persian history, usually relevant to the area which he had chosen to visit. He has done his homework thoroughly as shown by his bibliography which lists a wide variety of published sources. He clearly found useful *The Land of the Great Sophy* by Roger Stevens from which he often quotes.

As Massoudi seems to have found, Stevens's book is still an excellent guide for a first-time visitor to Iran even if written before the Islamic Revolution while Massoudi is describing a relatively recent post-revolutionary Iran. He not only writes about the places he visited and the history of the country but also about the religious ceremonies he witnessed, the customs he observed, and the Persians themselves in groups and as individuals. He was struck, as all visitors have been, by the hospitality and generosity of the people towards visitors but also by the contradictions in the Persian character, particularly, as he puts it, between "innate hedonism and austere

piety" which he suggests is the result of the country's evolution from both ancient Persia and the arrival of Islam.

This is not a guide book, nor of course did the author mean it to be one. For one thing, it does not cover the whole country. The author seems not to have travelled to Sistan-Baluchistan. I read that the FCO advice on the day I wrote this was not to go there or anywhere within 10 miles of the Afghan border but if this is the reason Massoudi didn't include that area, he doesn't say so. There are no photographs, which is a pity, but of course illustrations put up the price of books. More importantly, the book has no index nor are there chapter headings to help the reader find his way around it. These faults aside, the book is not only interesting and well-written about the country and people but also about the author's search for his identity, the search made by all immigrants to countries which are not those of their parents. Is he British? He was born in Britain and lived and was educated here for more than 20 years before visiting Iran. Is he Persian? He spoke Persian at home with his parents but still described his grasp of Persian as "rudimentary" after some time in Iran and judging by his bibliography, he hasn't used any Persian language sources. Wherever he ends up in his life, however, he was right to visit Iran to see it for himself and discover the rich culture of the country from which his family has come.

Professor Ali Ansari's book is in a series of Very Short Introductions published by Oxford University Press. Before seeing this book, I was not aware of this series, which now contains over 350 volumes. If it is typical of the other volumes, I wish I had come across the series sooner. We all know how difficult it is to write short but comprehensive and comprehensible works. The author of this volume has succeeded admirably in describing the essential events in Iranian history and how the people have been influenced not only by them but also by the myths which have grown up about their past as described in particular by the poet Ferdowsi in the Shahnameh, the Book of Kings. In fact, this is not surprising. We are all influenced by the myths which have grown up in our societies or nations; one has only to think of Alfred and the cakes or Drake playing bowls to realise how pervasive they are. But thanks to Ferdowsi, they live on in a remarkable way in Iran because the mythology is tied closely to the pre-Islamic period; as Ansari says, "Ancient – pre-Islamic – Iran looms large in the Iranian

consciousness" and the chapter on ancient Iran is entitled Mythology and History and describes both together.

Indeed, although the book describes the essential historical events, it is not a chronological political history but a history of the idea of Iran and the way in which this idea has survived not only the Arab conquest but the various invasions which succeeded it. Ansari argues that one of the principle reasons for this was the influence of a class of Persian bureaucrats who were the "conveyors of Persian culture" throughout the Islamic period. A second reason, linked perhaps to the first, was the re-emergence of the Persian language, written in the Arabic script, but widely used and superseding all other Persian languages. And although myth may have played a large part in the Persian psyche, there were also formidable Persian scientists. Avicenna, Ibn Sina, who wrote in Arabic but was Persian is well-known in the West as an expert on medicine but was also a philosopher. Unknown in any case to me was Biruni who died in 1048 but calculated the circumference of the globe to within 17 km of the correct figure. There were other outstanding scientists, philosophers and, of course, poets.

The third major section of the book describes the relationships between Iran and the West. It covers the arrival of the Europeans in the 16th and 17th centuries and the growing influence they had on Iran. To me the most interesting part of this section is the influence which the European Enlightenment had on Iranian thought, leading up the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and then the influence of that on the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The first aimed to limit the power of the monarchy and while the liberal opposition to the Shah had the same objective for much of the period up to 1979, the Islamic Revolution was of course to abolish it altogether – yet then try to substitute for it another different type of autocracy, a development which leads Massoudi to ask if it is part of being Iranian to need absolute rulers. Here for Ansari, like Massoudi, it is the contradictions in modern Iran which are so bewildering. I cannot do better than quote Ansari here. "The Islamic Republic, like the Iranians themselves, appears to defy definition. It is at once theocratic and autocratic, yet……it seems also to be possessed of democratic characteristics, not simply in the fact that it holds regular elections, but more profoundly in the eccentric, idiosyncratic, and outright rebellious nature of its people".

Anyone who reads these two books before going to Iran for the first time will have a good idea of what to expect (but they will probably still be surprised by what they find). Even if you have been to Iran or know it already, I recommend you read both; from Massoudi you will get a good idea of daily life in modern Iran and from Ansari you will understand the profound reasons which have made it what it is.

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Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers and Spooks, Ali Rahnema, Cambridge University Press, 2015, ISBN 9781-107076068, £60.00 ($99.00)

Reviewed by James Buchan

Nobody now disputes that the conspiracy by the Pahlavi Court and British and US secret agents to overthrow Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq during the night of August 15/16, 1953 in Tehran was a fiasco. What remains a matter of debate is whether the successful coup d'etat three days later, which began with four organised marches from the south of town and ended with the bombardment of Mossadeq's house in Kakh Street, was the work of those same foreign agents or primarily an Iranian affair.

That is not just a quarrel of historians. The arrest of Mossadeq, who had led the campaign to nationalise Iran's oil industry, "derailed the course of Iran's political and economic development," as this author writes, "while traumatising Iranians." It tainted all the later successes of Shah Mohammad Reza, converted an admiration for the US into suspicion and hatred, and left Iranians in despair of ever being a free and happy people.

The book under review, which is the best to have appeared in either Persian or English in the last sixty years, avoids extremes of emotion or posture. For Ali Rahnema, a Paris-based scholar best-known up to now for a life in English of the Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati, the events of August 19/28 Mordad were "primarily home-spun." But, and it is quite a but, the "second coup...continued to employ the tools and agents that had been clearly articulated and identified" in the plans drawn up in the first half of 1953 by the US Central Intelligence Agency and the British Secret Intelligence Service and known as TP/AJAX. [249]. What 28 Mordad 1332 was not, and Rahnema insists on this, was a spontaneous popular uprising.

Rahnema devotes little space to the origins of the oil dispute, the personalities of the principal actors, the planning in Nicosia and London of TP/AJAX, the botched attempt very early on August 16 by Col Nematollah Nasiri of the Imperial Guard to present the Shah's

order dismissing Mossadeq, or the Shah's flight from the country. Rahnema's story begins in earnest with the council of war at the US Embassy on August 17, attended by among others Asadollah Rashidian, a powerful ally of the Shah and the British with a web of clients in south Tehran, and the decision to stage a "great demonstration" on Wednesday, August 19/28 Mordad.

Here Rahnema puts aside his western sources (notably the CIA Clandestine Service History, written by Donald Wilber in 1954 and published by the New York Times in 2000) to penetrate the political topography of south Tehran, and identify the neighbourhood bosses that controlled the streets and wholesale markets round Molavi Street to the south of the Bazar. Rahnema calls these men "thugs" and "roughnecks" but those English words do not begin to describe such Rostams of lane and bazar, with their colourful names (Naser the Skewer, Mostafa the Insane), their precise codes of honour, their love of fracas and dissipation, their athletic fraternities and religious processions. In the book's admirable maps, stickmen with club in hand and labelled "ruffians" are shown at different points of town as the morning of 28 Mordad elapsed. Mustered and paid (rather little) by Rashidian and Ayatollah Seyyid Mohammed Behbehani, the four columns of perhaps three thousand men in total collected at dawn, moved north into midtown, chanting "Death to Mossadeq" and "Long Live the Shah", and converged on the government buildings at Toupkhaneh, and Baharestan Square, home to the parliament and politcal party offices. The police either held aloof or fraternised. Too lightly armed to take over defended buildings, the columns seem to have received new life and orders from political activists and agents of the conspirators. Four squadrons of M4 and M24 tanks, despatched against them from the military base at Saltanatabad in the north, became hopelessly entangled in the crowd and were taken over for attacks on the radio broadcasting station on Old Shemiran Road, which fell without a fight, and Mossadeq's house which held out until the evening.

Here Rahnema shows his wisdom in breaking with the conspiratorial approach to recognise the contingent in fast-moving events, the muddle of insubordination, cowardice and mutiny among the officers and the particular military disease known to a previous generation as SNAFU

(Situation Normal All Fed Up). There are premonitions here of the disintegration of the Shah's Tehran garrisons during the night of February 10/11, 1979. What Rahnema could perhaps have made more of is that eternal and invariable impulse in human beings, which is the wish to be on the winning side. The tide had been turning against Mossadeq for months

The threats of British insolvency and Communist expansion that set in train the British and American conspiracy in 1953 long ago evaporated, leaving only the memory of an abominable perfidy. Yet the Iranian people did not on 28 Mordad rise up to defend and protect their hero but instead left him to gaol and internal exile and submitted to the Pahlavi autocracy and then to the Islamic Republic. In that sense as well, 28 Mordad was a homespun affair.

PERSIAN PEARL: CLASSICAL PERSIAN POEMS AND RECORDINGS: compiled by Khorshid Farman Farmaian and Sahba Ladjevardi, 135pp + CD privately published 2015 ISBN 978-1-872302-23-2 £18 Hb, £14Pb available via www.persianpearl.net

Reviewed by Antony Wynn.

With this work the compilers have rendered an enormous service to those beginning to study Persian poetry in all its glory. I remember summer Thursday afternoons in the bazaar at Hamadan, where I spent four years, when a well known local poet, wrapped in his threadbare brown cloak covering a waistcoat of many pockets bulging with his own *daftars* of his poems, used to do the rounds of the hajjis. Thursday afternoon was when the beggars came round, to collect a few *rials* by way of charity from the bazaaris, but to the poet they gave substantial alms. This was no ordinary beggar, but a respected man of letters who had fallen on hard times. When I told him that I liked reading Hafez, but that I found it very difficult to understand the meaning, he offered to help me. He told me to go away, study a *ghazal* and the next week we would look at it together. I chose a poem, looked up the difficult words, read it many times but still could not understand it.

The following Thursday my new friend sat me down in a shady corner of the caravanserai with a glass of tea and asked me which poem I had been reading. When I read out the first line, he recited the whole *ghazal* from memory; just his saying it made the whole meaning of the poem burst out with glowing and glorious clarity. The meaning that had been concealed by words had been unveiled by his voice. The same is true of the poems in this book.

Persian Pearl is a collection of poems from Rudaki through to Hafez, beautifully recited on the accompanying CD strictly according to the metre, with some musical accompaniment and, usefully, a parallel translation. The poems are all well known, none more so than an extract from the Shahnameh where Rostam meets the

smouldering Tahmineh, who will be the mother of Sohrab. It is delicately and clearly recited, quite unlike the overly dramatic bawlings of the *naqqals* in traditional *chaikhanehs*, posturing and grimacing for the benefit of the illiterate. These recitals are for respectable family gatherings. The musical accompaniment and sound effects provide an added element of drama. The translations are for the most part literal. This helps the student of Persian. The only quibble that I have is that the گور (onager or wild ass) hunted by Rostam is translated as zebra, native to Africa, a long way from the hunting grounds of Persia.

The rest of the compilation includes well known works from Manuchehri, Omar Khayyam, Nezami, Rumi, Sa'di, Eraqi, Khajoo Kermani and Hafez, a basic primer for those embarking on the study of classical Persian poetry. All are recited with great precision and clarity – a model for the student to follow.

For those who want to take their studies one stage further, Bruce Wannell's *Persian Poems: 20 poets over 1000 years*, reviewed in the 2013 volume of this journal, is also valuable. This is a parallel English-Persian text, with the added benefit of a chapter of explanation of Persian metre and prosody and much background material on the poets and explanatory notes. Both of these books should be in every student's library. I only wish that I had had both these works to hand when I started out on this path.