



# JOURNAL OF THE IRAN SOCIETY

Editor : Antony Wynn

VOL. 2 NO. 7

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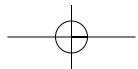
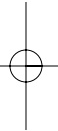
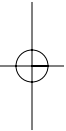
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# THE IRAN SOCIETY

## OBJECTS

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

## ACTIVITIES

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

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

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

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

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

## JOURNAL

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

## CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I am very pleased to introduce the 2008 edition of the Iran Society's Journal. What is new this year has been the expansion of the Society's website and the improvements made to it, which mean that we can now post audio recordings of the lectures onto it, which is most useful where the lecturer had no text to give us for publication. Two of the outstanding lectures of the last year, therefore, can be heard on the website: Richard Dalton on Cultural Cooperation between Britain and Iran and Tom Holland on his book *Persian Fire*. We are also posting onto the website the report of Mehdi Zarrei, who won a travel grant from the Society in 2007, on his visit to Iran to study the wild golden star lily genus (*gagea*). His report is accompanied by some splendid photographs, which come out better on the internet than they would in the Journal. This has left room for the inclusion in the Journal, among other items, of a lecture given by Alexei Trenouth, who received a travel award to help towards her trip to study the treatment of HIV sufferers in Iran, and an article by Katerina Lombartova on contemporary Iranian theatre in Tehran and Shiraz, which she studied also during a trip partly financed by a grant from the Society (there was no space in our programme for her to give us a lecture). The Society was in the happy position of being able to finance four grants from our 2007 budget. The fourth recipient, who has been studying modern Persian poetry, is expected back from Iran shortly. Two travel grants have been awarded this year, one to Caroline Mawer who plans to retrace the walk made from Isfahan to Mashhad by Shah Abbas in 1601; and the other to Maryam Ghorbankarime, whose research field is women and Iranian cinema.

The choice of subjects studied by our travel grant recipients reflects the efforts of the Council to widen the range of talks we think would interest members. The 2008 AGM agreed to a change in the wording of our rules to take this into account. The Council felt that the old wording tended to inhibit discussion of contemporary topics. The new wording says that the Society should not "take a position on, or take any part in, contemporary politics" (see opposite page), which will give scope for discussion of topics relevant to the Society's objects, but which in the past might have been avoided because they necessarily involved some discussion of the political influences bearing on them.

I much regret having to record the death of three of our most outstanding members during the year. They were Professor Ann Lambton, Persian scholar, who travelled widely in Iran and was Hon. Secretary of the Society in 1946-7; Paul Gotch, another Hon. Secretary to the Society; and Shusha Guppy, famous

for her books and music. All three were friends of many of our members, by whom they will be greatly missed. There are tributes to each of them in the Journal. Sadly, I also have to mention the death of Louise Firouz. I and no doubt many other members, not to mention almost every recent travel writer to visit Iran, were at one time or another welcomed by her and her late husband Narcy to their riding establishment near Tehran and, after Narcy's death, by her alone on their farm near Gonbad-e Kavous, where she retired to continue breeding the Caspian ponies that she had discovered, as well as Ahal Teke Turcoman horses, with which she took visitors on long riding safaris up into the Golestan National Park.

Because I could not be at the AGM in June, I take this opportunity to thank the members of the Council, and in particular the officers of the Society, for the time and effort they devote to running the Society and organising lectures and activities, which we hope members enjoy and find useful. Any suggestions from members for the programme will always be welcome. I also wish our President, Lord Temple-Morris, a speedy return to his normal full and busy life.

**Hugh Arbuthnott**

# Iran

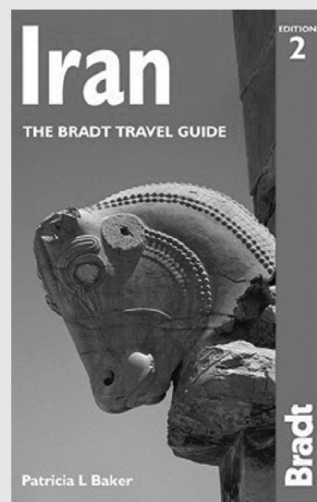
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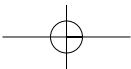
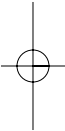
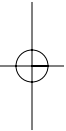
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## THE ART OF OMAR KHAYYAM:

### ILLUSTRATING FITZGERALD'S RUBAIYAT

Illustrated lecture given to the Iran Society on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007 by Bill Martin & Sandra Mason

Khayyam's name is widely recognised all over the world. At a mundane level, it is used to brand restaurants and hotels, wine and other products. There have also been no less than five films about Khayyam's 'life'. He is recognised as an important scientist and philosopher, but the growth of his world renown rests largely on the Rubaiyat, a set of around 100 four line verses that are attributed to Khayyam, and that were translated into English by Edward FitzGerald in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with translations from Fitzgerald into eighty different languages.

Our lecture is mainly concerned with the Rubaiyat and the extraordinary publishing phenomenon that is associated with it, particularly the extensive and continuing production of illustrated editions of FitzGerald's version of the poem. In it, we draw extensively on our recently published book on the subject.\* But we start with some background on Khayyam himself and on how FitzGerald, the Victorian gentleman of letters, came to be involved with the work of an 11<sup>th</sup> century Persian astronomer and mathematician.

Who was Omar Khayyam? We know that he was born in Nishapur in eastern Iran in 1048. He died somewhere between 1123 and 1131. He was well known as an astronomer and mathematician, who served Sultan Malekshah for a number of years. He published scientific and philosophical treatises, some of which have survived. But, although his fame rests substantially on the verse attributed to him, there is a major question: did he actually compose any poetry?

There have been many manuscripts over the years containing rubaiyat attributed to Omar Khayyam. But there is no contemporary evidence of his authorship. The first mention of verses to which his name is attached comes 50-100 years after Khayyam's death. Over the centuries, there was a gradual growth in the number of rubaiyat attributed to Khayyam. In some cases, these have reached over a thousand, though the authenticity of many of these verses is now discounted. The manuscripts used by FitzGerald in his version were the so-called Ouseley manuscript of AD 1460, now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford with 158 verses, and an undated manuscript from Calcutta with 512 verses.

There is still no definite answer to the uncertainty surrounding Khayyam's authorship of rubaiyat verses. The general view of scholars is that between 30

and 100 verses may be authentic, but the emphasis is still on the 'may'. Regardless of this, it is clear that the collections of verses in the two manuscripts mentioned provided a major inspiration to Edward FitzGerald. FitzGerald was born in 1809 and died in 1883. He came from a very rich family, of Irish origin. In 1829, he graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge, and later settled in Suffolk near Woodbridge where he was based for most of the rest of his long life. In essence FitzGerald was a Victorian gentleman of letters, who never took up paid employment, but occupied himself with writing and translation. He was a friend of Tennyson, Carlyle and other key literary figures, and his friends were a vital part of his life.

In 1844, Edward FitzGerald, now 35 years old, met a young 17 year old man from Ipswich named Edward Cowell. Cowell was the son of an Ipswich businessman and he was a gifted linguist who, in his teens, had already taught himself Persian and Sanskrit. He and FitzGerald quickly became literary friends and Cowell introduced FitzGerald to Persian poetry, as well as translating Greek, Latin and Spanish with him. In about 1851, Cowell began to encourage FitzGerald to learn Persian. Crucially for FitzGerald's future, in 1856, Cowell, while working in the Bodleian in Oxford, came across the Ouseley manuscript of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. He copied this out and sent a copy to FitzGerald.

The Rubaiyat intrigued FitzGerald, who started to translate the verses. Some months later, Cowell, now in India, found a second manuscript of the Rubaiyat and he sent a copy of this also to FitzGerald. The latter spent much of 1856 and 1857 translating the Rubaiyat, and he sent some quatrains to Fraser's Magazine for publication. In 1858, having had no response from Fraser's, FitzGerald decided to publish his version of the Rubaiyat himself. In March 1859, using Bernard Quaritch as a channel, 75 of FitzGerald's quatrains were published anonymously as *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

The subsequent story of FitzGerald's Rubaiyat is well known. The book was a flop initially and was put in Quaritch's 'penny box'. There it was later discovered by two literary men, Whitely Stokes and John Ormsley, who found it of interest and circulated copies among their friends, including Rosetti, Swinburne and others. Awareness of the poem spread gradually, including to the USA in the late 1860's. Quaritch, anxious to meet the demand for more copies, prevailed on FitzGerald to prepare a second edition of his Rubaiyat. This version, with 110 quatrains, including many revisions to the original verses, was published in 1868. A third edition of 101 slightly revised verses was published in 1872, and fourth in 1879. The final, fifth, edition was published in 1889 after FitzGerald's death.

This was just the beginning of the publishing phenomenon of FitzGerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. The chart shows how publication continued right

through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Almost every year since 1877 there has been at least one new edition or reprint of this single short poem. Publishing highlights of the early period include the following: in 1862 the first pirated edition produced in Calcutta; in 1870, the first US edition, a private printing of FitzGerald's second edition; in 1878, the first published edition in the US; and in 1884, the first illustrated edition, also published in the US by Houghton Mifflin of Boston. In 1909, which marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FitzGerald first edition, there were no fewer than 37 new editions and reprints of his Rubaiyat.

Why was FitzGerald's Rubaiyat so successful? There are a number of speculative answers that one can give to this. First, FitzGerald produced a good poem. It is not a direct translation from the Persian, indeed FitzGerald spoke of it as a 'paraphrase of a syllabus'. But many commentators, including Iranian experts, agree that the Victorian poet managed to convey much of the spirit of the verses attributed to Khayyam. The work was also a timely one, coming in a period of religious doubts when the work of Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill and others had led people to question some of their established certainties. The philosophy of Khayyam's verses had a substitute appeal. At the same time, interest in the Orient was growing as more artists and others brought back reports of an exotic world. Probably of greatest significance was the poem's commercial value to the publishers, particularly as new technologies were opening up a mass market for quality books at a time when the affluence of the literate middle class was rising. New techniques of colour printing were being developed, leading to opportunities for well illustrated gift books of all kinds. The Rubaiyat with its oriental imagery proved to be an ideal work with which to enlarge this market. Hence the large number of illustrated editions that were commissioned in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In order to appreciate the significance of the illustration of FitzGerald's Rubaiyat, it helps to look back to the nature of illustration of this work before FitzGerald's version was published. There is a long tradition of illustrated Persian manuscripts, particularly for the works of poets such as Ferdowsi, Nizami and others. But, the rubaiyat attributed to Omar Khayyam seem to have been very seldom illustrated in this way. This may reflect the uncertainties about the authorship of these rubaiyat or the view of the rubai form as being a less significant type of verse than the masnavi or ghazal. Some of the early Khayyam manuscripts have a degree of decoration; they include the Ouseley manuscript already mentioned. But we know of only one example of an illustrated Khayyam manuscript, which dates from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. This was documented and published in facsimile in 1939 by the Indian scholar Mafuz al-Haq. It contains five illustrations in the form of traditional Persian miniatures, at least one of which may be by the famous miniaturist Behzad.

The history of illustration of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam really starts with the publication of illustrated editions of FitzGerald's version of the poem. None of FitzGerald's own editions of his work were illustrated; the fourth edition contains a frontispiece picture but this relates to the Salaman and Absal of Jami which is included in the edition. The first version of the rubaiyat with specially created illustrations was published in the United States in 1884. The American artist Elihu Vedder was commissioned by Houghton and Mifflin to produce the illustrations, which were largely classical in style. The book contained nearly 50 illustrations and was a massive oversize volume weighing 14 pounds. The publishers produced a special collectors' edition of 100, thus starting a trend which has been a feature of many subsequent illustrated versions of the Rubaiyat.

This publication was the beginning of over 120 years of almost continuous production of illustrated Rubaiyats, right up to the present day. As the chart shows, production built up fairly slowly at first. Between 1884 and 1894, there were various reissues of the Vedder edition. In 1898 seven new illustrators tackled the poem. The number of new illustrated editions built up in the early years of the new century, as publishers took advantage of the new colour printing technologies, culminating in 15 new illustrated versions in 1909, which marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the first edition by FitzGerald, and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FitzGerald's birth. The number of newly issued Rubaiyats then fell back, but there has been a new illustrated edition or reprint nearly every year since 1898. We know of at least three new illustrated editions published since 2000.

Over the whole period since 1884, more than 130 different illustrators have been involved with the production of versions of the Rubaiyat. Who were these artists? The best known and longest lasting of them include the original illustrator, Elihu Vedder, and three others, Edmund Dulac, Willy Pogany, and Gilbert James. Both Pogany and James produced more than one portfolio of illustrations for the poem. Despite the popularity of the Rubaiyat, there were few big name artists among the illustrators. Exceptions are Sir Frank Brangwyn who produced some notable paintings which were made into illustrations, and Sir Edward Burne-Jones, who worked with William Morris on a one-off hand produced edition.

Some examples of the work of the major illustrators of the Rubaiyat are shown below, based on the well known quatrain number 11, which starts (in the first edition) 'Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough ...'. The work of these and other artists can be analysed in a number of different ways. In our book, we have looked particularly at the period of the work, dividing the 120 years since 1884 into three broad groups; we have given these the names of art

nouveau (up to 1918), art deco (1919-1945), and modern (from 1946 onwards), although not all the work in any one period is of the genre typical of the name chosen. The second set of illustrations, by Geddes, Fish and Sherriffs give examples of the three periods.

Another approach to the analysis of the illustrations is to consider the specific content of the pictures and assess how far they seem to illuminate the meaning of the verses. Some artists have drawn very precise inspiration from the imagery of individual verses. For example, the first quatrain, 'Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night/Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight ...', contains a number of clear images of 'morning', 'night', 'stars', and later 'Sultan's turret' and 'noose of light', which have been picked up by different illustrators. But other verses have more abstract content, which artists have clearly found more difficult to represent. And some illustrators have chosen not to try to match their picture to specific verses, preferring just to give a general feel and to illuminate the poem as a whole.

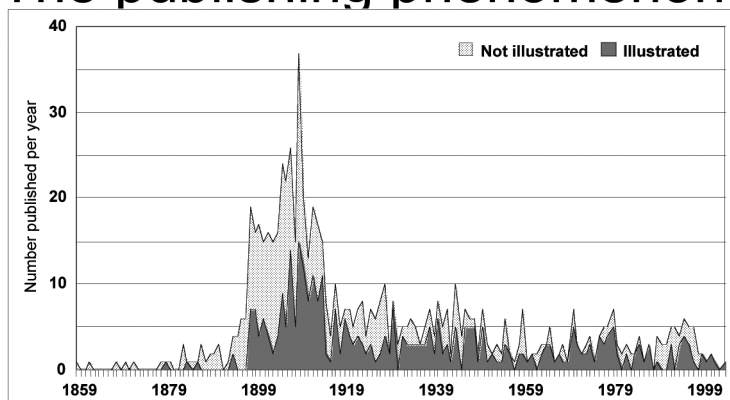
The work of Rubaiyat illustrators can also be analysed in terms of the general style or feel that the artist adopts for the poem. Here we have used three broad categories, distinguishing between illustrators whose representation is basically Western in imagery, those who mainly follow a Persian tradition, and the middle group who have adopted what we call an Orientalist approach. This classification is obviously very much a matter of individual judgement, but we have found it a useful analytical tool in looking at the work of many illustrators. In our assessment around two-thirds of the Rubaiyat illustrators fall in the Orientalist category, with around a quarter being basically Western in their images.

The artists that adopt more traditional Persian imagery in their Rubaiyat illustrations include, not surprisingly, a number of those of Iranian origin who have worked on the poem in the past half century or so. These include several quite well known names working in Iran and abroad in the pre-revolutionary period, notably Sarkis Khatchadourian, Hossein Behzad Miniatur and Mohammed and Akbar Tajvidi. There have been a good many illustrated versions of the Rubaiyat produced in Iran in both the pre- and post-revolutionary years, generally aimed at the tourist and collector markets, and often with multi-lingual texts, some including as many as eleven different languages. More recently, some of the imagery in these Iranian editions has moved away from that of the traditional miniatures, taking up a more flamboyant and somewhat surreal style. The recent work of Shakiba and Farshian is typical of this approach.

A surrealistic style is also evident in some recent illustrated editions produced in the West. But there continue also to be reissues of older

illustrations, notably the work by Edmund Dulac and Willy Pogany, whose illustrations for the Rubaiyat were both first published in 1909. What is clear from our investigation of the history of illustrated version of FitzGerald's Rubaiyat is that there is still interest in this extraordinary 'book of verse'. In this sense, the heritage of the Astronomer-Poet and the Victorian man of letters is still alive. 2009 will bring renewed attention to FitzGerald, marking the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first edition of his Rubaiyat and the 200<sup>th</sup> of his birth. We hope that at least one publisher has it in mind to celebrate the year with a new illustrated edition of the Rubaiyat.

## The publishing phenomenon



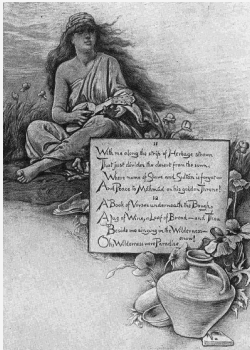
\* Martin W H and Mason S, *The Art of Omar Khayyam: Illustrating FitzGerald's Rubaiyat*, I B Tauris, 2007.



## THE ART OF OMAR KHAYYAM

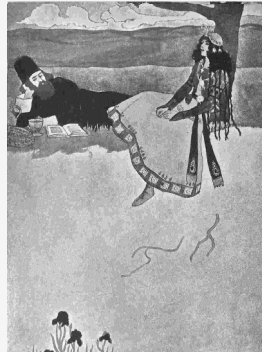
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**Elihu Vedder**  
1836-1923



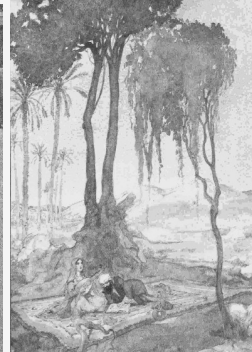
Published 1884

**Gilbert James**  
fl.1895-1926



Published 1898/1908

**Willy Pogany**  
1882-1955



Published 1909

Some famous illustrations for Quatrain 11  
(in FitzGerald first edition)

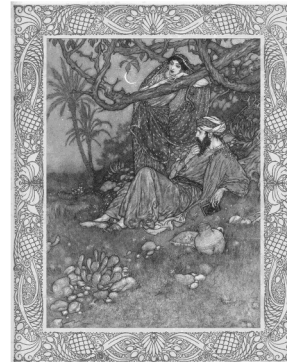
Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,  
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse - and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness -  
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.

**Sir Frank Brangwyn**  
1867-1956



Published 1906

**Edmund Dulac**  
1882-1953



Published 1909

## Three periods of illustration

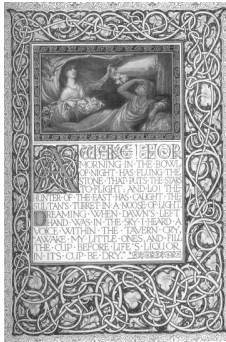
AWAKE ! for Morning in the Bowl of Night

Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:

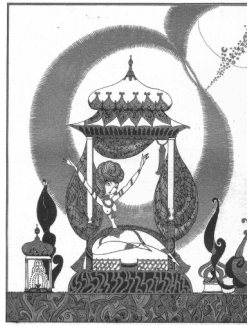
And Lo ! the Hunter of the East has caught

The S ultan's Turret in a Noose of Light.

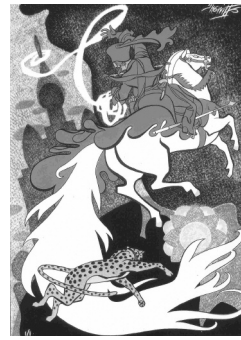
Quatrain 1 – First edition



Art Nouveau – 1884-1918  
E Geddes - 1910



Art Deco – 1919-1945  
A Fish - 1922



Modern – 1946 to date  
R Sherriffs - 1947

## **ACCEPTANCE & DENIAL: THE IMPACT OF HIV ON THE LIVES OF IRANIAN WOMEN**

Lecture given to the Society on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008  
by Alexi Trenouth,  
*University of Edinburgh, Iran Society travel scholar 2007*

In the summer of 2007, with the support of the Iran Society and the British Institute of Persian Studies, I travelled to Iran in order to conduct a research project on the current situation of women living with HIV in Tehran. Having worked in the field of HIV/AIDS in both Uganda and Edinburgh, my aim was to put HIV into a more Iranian setting, looking at both what being HIV positive means in Iran today, and how it affects the lives of those who have contracted it.

The meaning of HIV is highly context dependant, especially around cultural and societal forces. It is therefore essential to contextualise what being HIV positive in contemporary Iran implies (the focus being on people living in Iran rather than expatriates living abroad). The first section of this paper will do this by providing some background on the HIV prevalence rate, public attitudes towards HIV, the portrayal and debate of HIV in mainstream media and finally government policy with respect to HIV. The second section will introduce the cases of two Iranian women and their differing experiences living and coping with being HIV positive.

### **HIV in Iran**

#### *Prevalence and transmission*

The first known case of HIV in Iran was in 1987, which was then followed by a rapid increase in the number of reported infections. Since then the increase has been steady and, according to an official UNAIDS report, there are in the region of 66,000 people currently living with the HIV virus with the majority (96%) of these being male. Due to the small number of testing facilities and relatively low levels of awareness of HIV, the same study reports that the actual number could range from 36,000 – 160,000 cases.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS. 2007. Islamic Republic of Iran Country Situation Analysis. [Internet] Available at [http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Countries/Iran\\_Islamic\\_Republic\\_of.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Countries/Iran_Islamic_Republic_of.asp) [Accessed 15/02/2007]

The most common mode of transmission is through intravenous drug use (64.6% of cases), followed by sexual intercourse (7.4%). Mother-to-child transmission and contaminated blood products account for a total of 2.3%. The mode of transmission for the remaining 25.8% of cases is currently unknown, and this unknown proportion has grown from 8.2% in 1998.<sup>2</sup> While the percentage of reported cases of transmission through sexual contact remained steady between 1998 and 2006, many researchers feel these figures are unreliable. They suspect that some of those infected in this manner may deny it on account of the associated stigma. These cases are likely to be recorded as having been infected by 'unknown' means.<sup>3</sup> One can speculate, therefore, that the actual rate of infection through sexual contact is higher than the official figures suggest.

Since 2001 there has been a notable increase in the number of cases where spouses have been infected with HIV by their partners, from 6 cases in 2001 to 76, or 2% of all cases, in 2004.<sup>4</sup> The majority of these cases relate to drug-addicted husbands who contract the virus from an infected needle, and then transfer it to their wives through sexual contact. Due to Iran's location on the route from Afghanistan (the world's largest opium producers) to the West, it hosts a large number of drug abusers. A recent figure places the figure at 1.2 million and identifies 21.9% as intravenous users. The same report found that over 50% of the sample who were intravenous users had shared needles and 20% knew nothing about HIV and its modes of transmission.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Public attitudes and knowledge of HIV*

All over the world, HIV is accompanied by an array of myths and misconceptions. The resulting stigma can have a devastating effect on those who are infected, and often lead to them becoming socially isolated. To some extent this effect is heightened in Iran due to the traditional and religious lifestyle that the majority of its population observe. According to the general secretary of the *Tehran Journalists Association*, Iranian culture is 'both a blessing and a curse when it comes to the spread of HIV and other sexual diseases'.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, the traditional environment can be seen as a blessing insofar as the majority of Iranians are not often exposed to the kinds

<sup>2</sup> Razzaghi, E., Afarin, R., Hosseini, M. et al. 1999. Rapid Situation Assessment (RSA) of Drug Abuse in Iran. Prevention Department, State Welfare Organization, Ministry of Health of Iran & United Nations International Drug Control Program.

<sup>3</sup> Tavooosi, A., Zaferani, A., Enzevaei, A. et al. 2004. 'Knowledge and attitude towards HIV/AIDS among Iranian students'. BMC Public Health, 4:17.

<sup>4</sup> Tavooosi, Knowledge and attitude towards HIV/AIDS among Iranian students.

<sup>5</sup> Ragazzi, Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug Abuse in Iran.

<sup>6</sup> Mofidi, B. 2007. Interview. [Interview with the author at the Tehran Journalist Association Headquarters, 29/07/2007]

of behaviour which would put them at risk of contracting HIV. Indeed, the idea that traditional Iranian culture helps prevent the wider spread of the disease was discussed in a speech by President Khatami in 2002. He emphasized the need to maintain the conservative nature of Iranian society to ensure the population remain uninfected.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, despite the traditionalist culture, risky behaviour such as extra-marital sexual relations and drug abuse, does take place in Iran today. In this way, the traditional nature of Iranian Society is also a curse. It prevents proper discussion and education about the dangers of these sorts of behaviour, leading to misunderstandings about HIV and the acts which relate to its transmission.

Despite these misunderstandings, Iran boasts relatively high levels of public awareness with regards to HIV in comparison to other Middle Eastern countries.<sup>8</sup> For example, comparing two studies of knowledge and attitudes among students, one in Iran and one in the United Arab Emirates, 31% of the UAE students believed a vaccine had recently been developed to cure HIV, in comparison to 10% of Iranian students. Additionally 46% of the UAE sample believed that the HIV virus was food-borne in comparison to 13% of Iranian students.<sup>9</sup> In spite of this, a number of misunderstandings remain within Iranian society with respect to HIV and its transmission. Some of these can be seen in the responses taken from a government survey shown below:

TABLE 1

Question:	Correct %	Incorrect %	Do not know %
All those who are infected with HIV are morally bad.	21.6	72.4	6
It is possible to contract AIDS from a person who shows no signs of the illness.	81.4	10	8.2
In order to prevent the virus spreading in society we must not have those with HIV among us.	38.2	56.4	5.3
In order to prevent catching the virus, you can not eat with sufferers.	19.6	75.1	5.3

<sup>7</sup> 'Role of Culture stressed in combating AIDS'. Kayhan International.11/12/2002.

<sup>8</sup> Tavooosi, Knowledge and attitude towards HIV/AIDS among Iranian students.

<sup>9</sup> Ganczak.M, Barss.P, Alfaresi. F et al. 2007. 'Break the Silence: HIV/AIDS Knowledge, Attitudes, and Educational Needs among Arab University Students in United Arab Emirates'. Journal of Adolescent Health.

Question:	Agree %	Disagree %
In order to stop the disease you can not see people with HIV at all.	18.1	71.7
One must cut off relations with a person who is known to have HIV.	20.6	78.3
AIDS is a punishment from God.	14.8	82.7
If you have the power, you should help those living with HIV.	88.1	10.4
Those with HIV are creatures of God and we must respect them.	94.4	4.4
We can keep being friends with them after they have been diagnosed.	66.6	30

**Source:** Questionnaire conducted by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. *Attitudes and knowledge of HIV/AIDS*. (2005). Translated by the author.

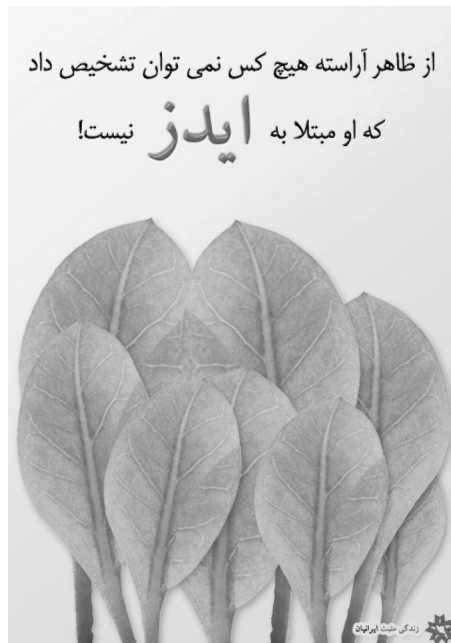
### *HIV in the Iranian Media*

Many of the individuals I interviewed blamed early documentaries which painted frightening and unjust images of those living with HIV at the time. According to one of my case studies, these documentaries 'only increased the fear and stigmatization towards the disease rather than aided the populations understanding of it'.<sup>10</sup>

During my time in Iran I watched a documentary entitled '*Gozarash e AIDS*'.<sup>11</sup> This was a study of the spread of HIV through drug abuse both in and out of prison in Iran today. A number of the interviews in the documentary were conducted in hospitals, with emaciated drug addicted patients strapped to beds, talking of the current situation on the street and in prison concerning the use of shared needles. The final section focuses on an HIV positive drug user in Kermanshah. He is filmed slumped on the floor of an apartment, which is strewn with dirty needles, rotten food and vomit. His neighbours are also shown talking of the fear they experience from having an HIV positive drug addict in their locality. A local shop keeper then relates a story of when he was held hostage with an infected needle by this drug addict while the drug addict stole food and medicine from his shop. The final scene of the documentary shows the addict lying in a pool of his own vomit. Subtitles then appear on the screen

<sup>10</sup> Fatemeh. 2007. Interview. [Interview with the author at her home, June 2007]

<sup>11</sup> *Gozarash e AIDS* translates as 'AIDS report'. *Gozarash e AIDS*. Date Unknown. [Documentary] Produced by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.



The above is a poster created by the NGO 'Zendegi Mosbat' (Positive Life) which states that you cannot tell just by someone's appearance if they are HIV positive or not.

saying that the man died seven days after finishing shooting the film. Needless to say, documentaries like this one are not improving the current climate those with HIV are living in.

As well as television, radio is also a popular mode of spreading awareness of HIV. An interview with the chief HIV counsellor at *Health Radio* revealed that radio is slowly becoming more open as presenters are now allowed to talk more about HIV.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, again due to the station being government run, much information remains rather vague and certain modes of transmission still can not be fully explained. For example, mentioning the word 'condom' is forbidden. In addition, due to the culture and the current regime, talking of homosexuality is strictly prohibited. This means that the information given is largely lacking in detail.

Newspapers and magazines are another channel for informing the masses about HIV. The general secretary of the *Tehran Journalists Association* spoke

<sup>12</sup> Hossein, A. 2007. Interview. [Interview with the author , 29/07/2007]



The above is taken from an information brochure about ways in which HIV is contracted, myths about its transmission as well as advice for people who are currently living with the virus.

openly about the fact that, despite being censored, written media is the most liberal, especially a medical magazine called 'Medicine and Hygiene' which has recently published very clear and straightforward articles concerning HIV and its implications. She said that although there are well-written and informative articles in existence, the spread of the audience is limited and those who are most at risk are those who are least likely to come into contact with such literature.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the media, local NGOs who work in the field are increasingly active towards improving awareness and eliminating misconceptions. According to Zamani at UNICEF, peer education has been one of the most effective modes of education in Iran as people tend to respond to and accept advice and information more readily from someone of a similar age and background that speaks in a language they can understand and relate to. As well as this, there has been an increase in the amount of awareness material being produced by NGOs in the field. Some examples of these are shown above:

<sup>13</sup> Mofidi, B. 2007. Interview [Interview with the author at the Tehran Journalists Association, 29/07/2007]



*Government Policy*

Iran's government policy, particularly during Khatami's time, has been praised for its swift and relatively open response to the AIDS crisis.<sup>14</sup> Under Khatami's government, highly influential and progressive policy changes were made to ensure HIV awareness was increased and stigma was decreased. One such policy change was that of enforcing HIV education in schools, a policy that continues to be in practise in a majority of high schools today.<sup>15</sup> A law was also passed during this time which prohibited doctors from turning away patients who were known to be HIV positive.<sup>16</sup> Despite many seeing the new government as more conservative and less inclined to working as openly with the AIDS crisis as their predecessors, in comparison to other predominantly Islamic countries in the Middle Eastern region, Iran remains one of the more open and proactive countries in the fight against AIDS.<sup>17</sup> This is not to say there is no room for improvement. There remains a vast amount to be done, much of which can not be achieved with such strict governmental censorship.

To briefly summarise, despite Iran being praised for its proactive and open response to the crisis, HIV/AIDS in Iran remains largely unknown and is only totally understood by a very small percentage of the population. It is this imbalance of knowledge that has translated into highly diverse reactions and experiences among those infected with the disease. Examples of this diversity will be shown below with the stories of two Iranian women who are currently living with the HIV virus.

**Two Iranian women living with HIV**

Before introducing the case studies, it is important to emphasize that their purpose is to bring to life the struggle of living with HIV in modern Iran in detail rather than quantifying the scale of the issues and forces at play. It captures the stories of two women who were both infected by their husbands and both live in the Tehran area. Both were willing to be interviewed about their experiences and both attended support groups, which may not be a fair representation of most Iranian women dealing with HIV.

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<sup>14</sup> Kelley, L & Eberstadt, N. 2005. 'Behind the Veil of a Public Health Crisis: HIV/AIDS in the

<sup>15</sup> Muslims World'. The National Bureau of Asian Research Special Report.

'Official Says AIDS Awareness in School Curriculum is Iran's New Revolution' Associated Press. 15/04/2007.

<sup>16</sup> 'Iranian Doctors Ordered Not to Turn Away AIDS Patients' Agence France-Presse. 30/12/2002.

<sup>17</sup> Kelley, Behind the Veil of a Public Health Crisis.

*Conservative, Isolated & Depressed - Elaheh*

Elaheh is twenty six and married with a three year old daughter. She lives in Karaj (a town on the outskirts of Tehran) and is a part-time dressmaker. To gain extra money she also prepares vegetables for the richer households in her area. She was diagnosed three and a half years ago during the initial stages of her pregnancy. The disease was contracted from her husband who is a haemophiliac and who caught HIV through a blood transfusion five years ago.

The only person in her immediate family that knows of her status is her husband. She has not disclosed her condition to any of her family or friends and the only place where her status is known is in her support group. She has several friends in the group and has expressed how important these friends are to her, as they have had similar experiences and thus can help her through difficult times. She feels especially relaxed in the women's only groups for it is there that she feels she can be completely open about herself and her situation. Although Elaheh appreciates the support group, she has also expressed a feeling of isolation from the group due to the way in which many of the others contracted the disease. 'Many of them were or are still addicted, I don't belong to this group, they are so unclean.' She added that these people were the reason that HIV is so stigmatized in Iran and she did not want to be likened to them. She said that these addicts knew about the risks and they continued using drugs: 'My poor husband had no idea he was at risk'.

Elaheh always wore a *magna'e*<sup>18</sup> and a chador when we met in public, implying that she came from a relatively religious background. During one visit to Karaj I was invited to her cousin's pre-wedding party. Despite it being only for women, everyone stayed in *hejab*, whether this was a headscarf and coat or a chador. This was an interesting insight into the conservative environment in which she was brought up in, as usually, when a gathering is solely females, one is encouraged to be free, reveal your hair and wear whatever you have under your coat.

Elaheh said that she relies heavily on her family to help her to look after both her daughter and her husband. Currently only a very small number of different anti-retroviral drugs are available in Iran, to all of which Reza (Elaheh's husband) has experienced bad reactions. His ill health has forced him to leave his job and stay at home. As a result of this, both financial and physical support from Elaheh's family is essential for them to stay afloat. As with many Iranian families, Elaheh's is incredibly close, both emotionally and physically. A majority of her sisters and brothers live within walking distance of her house and see each other most days.

She has had several bad experiences with doctors who have mistreated her.

<sup>18</sup> *Magna'e*: A design of head scarf. They are required to be worn by office workers, nurses and university students. Their design ensures that only the face can be seen.

During her pregnancy several told her to abort the child while simultaneously expressing their contempt towards her for getting pregnant while having being HIV positive, despite the fact she did not know of her status during the time of conception. Her husband was strictly against the idea of an abortion and thus they took the risk of her daughter being infected. Elaheh took drugs during her pregnancy to lower the likelihood of infection yet she was still the victim of much abuse during her check ups. The worst of this was delivered by the doctors, nurses and dentists. She explained that even now her teeth are rotting and need medical attention, but she is too frightened to seek advice due to her past experiences.

In summary, Elaheh's experience has been an incredibly difficult and challenging one. She feels very much isolated in her family and in her support groups and admits to being very depressed.

The next case had a very different experience of being HIV positive, which has resulted in her being a lot more open about her status and much more optimistic about her future.

#### *Proactive & Positive – Fatemeh*

Fatemeh is a single parent with a son and a daughter. She was diagnosed as HIV positive four years ago and currently lives in an apartment in southern Tehran. At the time of the interview she was unemployed but had previously worked in a VTC<sup>19</sup> clinic helping those who have been diagnosed with HIV and those addicted to intravenous drugs. She gives information on the risks of their behaviour and on what preventative measures can be taken to ensure their health.

She was married to a drug addict who was sent to prison where he contracted HIV. It was upon returning that he passed the disease on to Fatemeh. She was with her mother when she went to the clinic to collect her test results and, although it was an incredibly traumatic experience, she said that having the support of her mother was of great help. From the outset Fatemeh said that she was very open with her status as she believes that 'when you yourself don't accept it and deny the problem, what do you expect? You are breeding the problem'. She explained to her family that she would not be upset if they forced her from the house, but also gave them a great deal of information about HIV and explicitly clarified the ways in which it could be transferred. She also hosted a gathering at her house, invited all of her neighbours and told them of her status. During this meeting she took the opportunity to distribute brochures and information packs that she had collected from several clinics to increase the neighbours' knowledge of the disease. She feels that this open attitude is the

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<sup>19</sup> Voluntary testing and counselling clinic.

only way to prevent the problem increasing and since her diagnosis she has dedicated most of her time to helping others who are HIV positive and increasing awareness amongst those who are not.

She gave several examples of where people she has worked with have been treated very badly by medical staff and the general public. For example, a young man told her that when he was first diagnosed he was hospitalized and when he finally left his ward, he saw someone had painted 'AIDSY' outside his room. The word 'AIDSY' is slang and a highly offensive term for someone infected with the HIV virus. The hospital staff had made no effort to erase it. She feels that it is experiences like this that cause people to keep their status a secret, thus perpetuating the problem.

Fatemeh feels the only way forward is *Amoozesh, amoozesh, amoozesh* which translates as 'education, education, education'. She explained how censorship needs to be loosened, so that attitudes towards subjects such as sexual health can be more openly discussed, and thus become more understood, especially by young people.

She said 'the cultural barrier is the biggest problem, for example only very recently has it been acceptable to talk about condoms'. She added that although there has been an increase in awareness and education, much of the material has been wrong and has led to an increase in misconceptions and stigmatization rather than the opposite. She says that now she has dedicated much of her time to finding out more and more about the issue and has discovered that much of the information given to her when she was diagnosed was in fact incorrect. Thus, for Fatemeh, it is not just a more open attitude, but a better-informed open attitude that is needed.

In general, Fatemeh's experience of the disease was much less stressful and depressing than Elaheh's. This is a result of a number of factors, but mainly the supportive and open environment in which she lives, the more encouraging reactions she has had towards the disease, as well as her own personal determination and strength of character. As can be seen, being HIV positive for Fatemeh has been completely different to Elaheh's experience.

### **Removing the mystery - education**

Whilst I understand the limitations of my research, I see education being the most important and useful step towards bettering the lives of those infected. This can be seen in the example set by Fatemeh, who proactively went to her social network and openly educated them about HIV. This has helped create a more supportive environment for her and her family. For Elaheh, a conservative social network with poor knowledge around HIV has led to a much less positive outcome. Increasing the general understanding of the virus will reduce the

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stigma and increase acceptance and sympathy for those infected. HIV is still very much a mystery in Iran today. Until the public are better informed about the disease, I see little changing in terms of the way in which those infected are treated and looked upon by both the medical profession and the general public.

*The lecture was followed by a discussion panel with Dr Mohsen Shahmanesh and Dr Maryam Shahmanesh, both specialists in the field of HIV treatment.*

## CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN THEATRE IN SHIRAZ AND TEHRAN

A report by  
Katerina Lombartova,  
*SOAS, Iran Society travel scholar, 2007*

Iranian cinema receives international recognition, but little is known about recent theatre in Iran. Although less known and publicised, the performing arts scene of Iran is equally interesting and has also received some international recognition and awards. For example Amir Reza Kuhestani and Vahid Rahbani are two award-winning directors from Shiraz.

As a [foreign] university student in Britain, living and studying in such a multicultural city such as London, it is my view that getting to know aspects of other people's culture contributes to a better understanding and appreciation of them. Furthermore, current political tensions overshadow the beauty and vast cultural heritage of Iran. From my own experience as a student and a member of Universities of London Persian Society there is a great interest among students in various aspects of Persian culture. This report will therefore attempt to give a short overview of Iranian theatre, both traditional and modern. It will also describe a personal account of a visit to Iran, which I made with the kind assistance of The Iran Society, during which I saw three plays in Shiraz and one performance in Tehran, visited one regional theatre conference in Shiraz and interviewed actors from both Shiraz and Tehran.

### **Traditional Iranian theatrical arts:**

Iran's theatre dates back to antiquity when ceremonial theatre glorified legendary heroes or ridiculed and humiliated the enemy. *Sug-e Siavash* [Mourning for Siavash, killed by Afrasiab] and *Morgh Koshi* [Chicken Killing] belong to such early ceremonies, alongside dances and narrations of historical mythological events or love stories, which were recorded by Herodotus and Xenophon.

### **Passion plays:**

After the arrival of Islam passion plays such as '*shabieh*' or '*ta'zieh*' developed and are still played today. The passion plays depict the story of the martyrdom of Imam Hossein and events related to it. Passion plays are played at the time of commemorating the martyrdom in month of Moharram. The passion plays are usually in a verse form and played by a group of amateur

players. There is not a great stress on depicting the event realistically and symbolic gestures are sufficient in reminding audience of the terrible event. It is generally accepted that passion plays are the only indigenous drama of the Islamic world.

### **Naqqâli:**

*Naqqâli*, one of the most popular forms of storytelling, is based on the deeds of the legendary heroes of the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi. A *naqqâl* – normally a man, although recently a few women have entered the scene – narrates stories from the *Shahnameh* in a very dramatic way, speaking from memory in classical Persian. There is no scenery or stage decoration, but only a big painting depicting a scene from the story.

### **Puppet shows:**

In Iran puppet shows also have a long tradition. Puppet Show – *kheimeh shab bazi* – originally acquired its name from puppet shows played in special tents called *kheimeh* but is now used to describe all puppet shows. A common topic for puppet shows are lovers' tiffs, domestic quarrels or tales of the rich and the poor. In these performances stage scenery is not important and the play is performed by professionals. Iran hosts the *Fajr* International Theatre Festival, which was established in 1982 and has since been run every year in February and includes the famous Puppet Festival. Foreign theatre groups take an increasing part in this festival. In turn, Iran is sending her own representatives to events such as the Paper Puppet Festival European in France, the Puppet Arts Festival of the Czech Republic and similar events in Poland and Germany, either to perform or to act as judges. Apart from the *Fajr* festival, according to Farah Yeganeh approximately fifty other festivals and mini-festivals are held in Iran.

### **Comic plays:**

In addition to passion plays and puppet shows, comic plays also belong to Iran's traditional performing arts. Comic plays such as *ruhowzi*, also known as *takht-howzi* or *siah bâzi* serve as entertainment. *Ruhowzi* were played at special celebrations such as weddings on a stage of boards placed over of a courtyard pool [*howz*]. *Siâh-bâzi* was a form of social satire where the main character painted his face black and had the role of a clown or jester. These comic plays were not performed in verse, as the passion plays were.

### **History of modern theatre in Iran:**

The beginning of western style theatre dates back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the reign of Nassir ud-Din Shah, who built the first theatre in Tehran

and supported the expansion of theatre in Iran. Students who had been sent to Europe returned to Iran and began to translate European plays. Among the first were works by Molière and Shakespeare. It was decades before Iranians created their own plays and developed their own style.

#### November in Shiraz:

I travelled to Shiraz in November 2007, which coincided with the first Theatre Festival of Fars Province, held in Shiraz. I was therefore lucky to see several plays and meet local actors.



Fig 1: Poster for Fars Province Theatre Festival, Shiraz

The first play that I was able to see was a children's play performed in a local youth cultural centre. I was introduced to the local actors, who were mostly recent graduates of performing arts. Children were constantly involved in the performance by being asked to clap, sing or answer questions. Three young female actresses were performing this story of two funny beetles and an 'old lady' character. The best parts were the little dances and songs of the 'old lady' who was looking after the 'young beetles', which amused both children and adults. I had opportunity to speak to Samaane Ghasemi who played the role



of an 'old lady'. We were invited to a conference the same afternoon, in which the main topic was the spread of theatre from Tehran to the provinces. Local directors, teachers and actors were congratulated on the success of organising first theatre festival in Fars Province.

The second play that I saw in Shiraz was 'Shahrazad Performance' performed by a theatre group called 'Sepid'. The play was performed in the city festival hall and was well attended by people of all age groups. A small orchestra of classical instrument provided accompaniment to the play. The set and costumes were basic. The actors played several characters. The play used a lot of abstract elements, symbolism and metaphorical elements, which challenged the audience. The play was set in Iran several centuries ago. The main character of the story was a cruel king, surrounded by some servants, an adviser and a female character. The king was paranoid and confused and was often challenged by the woman who opposed him and stood up to him and even entered a sword duel with him. It was a strong performance that had an impact on one's senses.

The third performance was a historical play about Siavash taken from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. The most visible difference between this play and the others was the grand scale of the presentation. I greatly enjoyed the performance and, having taken a course in classical Persian poetry, I had no big difficulties in following the story. This play was less attended than the story of 'Shahrazad' but it could be attributed to both remoteness of the place and also to the fact that I viewed the play on a first night after a weekend.

### November in Tehran:

The Tehran City Theatre was closed for reconstruction. From billboards I found out that a National Festival was shortly due to take place, including Tchaikovsky's version of Hamlet and Chekhov's Ward No 6. Although I was not able to see any of those plays I visited a small authentically Iranian production which was performed in a small theatre hall of the Golriz Cinema. A friend had recommended the play, which turned out to be a musical comedy. There were no leaflets or billboards to advertise the play, which I found disappointing, especially as it was such a good performance. The play, which had been running for two years, was *Amir Arsalan dar Coffee Shop*.

Ehsan Karimi, one of the leading actors, explained to me that Amir Arsalan is a beloved legendary figure in Iranian culture. Stories about Arsalan were told to a Qajar king by the storyteller Mohammad Ali Naqib al-Mamâlek. In the contemporary play, set in modern Iran, Leila, the daughter of a coffee shop owner, is tired of modern men and love and longs to find a real love such as Amir Arsalan. She becomes ill from unhappiness with her life and her father sends for their family friend Shirin, who comes back from America to help.



Fig 2: Posters for Hamlet and play by Chekhov at the City Theatre, Tehran.

Shirin is a psychologist and her accent and manners are often ridiculed by two young men working in a coffee shop. These two male characters represent 'modern Iranian man', foolishly obsessed with superficial things such as money, technological gadgets and looking stylish by copying European-American culture. At the end Farshid, who at the same time played keyboard and was in charge of the whole music for the performance, turned out to be Leila's real love and the modern equivalent of Amir Arsalan.

The play used everyday life situations and slapstick humour to amuse the audience and even a spectator with intermediate Farsi, such as me, could understand enough to be swept away by the humour of the play. The play, a very light-hearted comedy, used stereotypes about social classes, genders, ages and nationalities.

### **One may strike a foreigner when going to a theatre in Iran?**

A westerner visiting a theatre in Iran may be slightly puzzled that plays rarely start on time and a delay of half an hour is not unusual. Nobody seems to be bothered by it and the time written on the posters and leaflets tends to be an approximate time to arrive rather than the time of the expected start of the performance.

The second thing that might amaze a foreign visitor is that parents bring

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their young children to a theatre. Perhaps because of the tradition of the family always being together and rarely leaving children with babysitters, parents bring children of any age at all, from babies of a few months through toddlers to school-age children. As you may suspect, children do not always appreciate a historical play or, even worse, a metaphorical psychological play that is difficult to comprehend even for an adult. The result is constant disturbance from someone's child talking out loud, crying or playing with other kids, along with the noise of crisp packets, sandwiches and other snacks to quieten down the children. On the other hand, when one gets over the surprise, it creates a very relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

It has been a very enjoyable experience to visit several theatres in Iran. I would like to share my experience and am intending to give a presentation at my university. I would like to thank The Iran Society, with whose help I was able to conduct this small research.

## HAJI SHEIKH BAQER OF HAMADAN

### A CONSULAR DISPATCH

Extracted from the National Archive by Antony Wynn

The dispatches from the British consuls in Iran, held in the Foreign Office archives at Kew, are like a Christmas pudding in that, after ploughing through a great quantity of stodge, one occasionally comes across a shining silver threepenny piece. Patrick Cowan was the consul at Hamadan during the First World War. At the beginning of the war he had been stationed at Kermanshah but, when it was overrun by Ottoman and German troops, he had had to withdraw to Hamadan, on the other side of the Asadabad Pass, which was guarded by a force of Russian troops, who had been there since the beginning of the war. The situation in Hamadan was tense. Alongside his dispatch is a note from Mr McMurray, the local manager of the Hamadan branch of the Imperial Bank of Persia, which shows how well pre-revolutionary Russian troops were looked after. He mentioned that a Russian circus was coming into town, preceded by twelve Russian girls: 'If they are good sports, they may be able to take attention off the political situation for a bit!' This may have pleased the Russians, but it did not please the conservative Hamadanis, who detested the presence of Russians in town.

Cowan was supposed to deal with the *Kargozar*, the official link between foreign consuls and the Persian Government, and the Governor of the province, but since the mullahs had far more control over the people than any government authority at that time, he also had to deal with Haji Sheikh Baqer, the chief *mujtahid* of Hamadan. The importance of religious feeling at that time is shown by the Haji's reaction to the arrival of thirty Russian frontier guards at Hamadan, who had been sent as a deterrent against Turkish advances. The Haji told Cowan that he could restrain the Hamadanis from protesting against the presence of the Russians, but only if the infidel foreign troops were kept out of sight. He could not, he said, be held responsible for the consequences if the unbelievers came into the town, particularly since the day in question was a holy day.

Cowan wrote a note about the venerable Haji Sheikh Baqer, who died shortly afterwards in July 1915. His comments are worth repeating, since they show how provincial towns in Iran functioned.

A man of humble origin, he had by his great religious learning and forceful personality won for himself a position of extraordinary influence in Hamadan, such as none of his colleagues could rival. It was said that he could single-

handedly start or suppress a riot. He had a strong constitution and a powerful voice and he was able to make himself heard at a great distance. It is to his credit that, latterly at least, he used his influence on the side of order. He was further credited with being absolutely incorruptible, and he had the rare distinction, appreciated though not generally practised among his countrymen, of never having taken a bribe. This is borne out by his humble way of living and the fact that he died penniless, and even in debt, though the debt was due to his having guaranteed the restoration of the great mosque.

His sound common sense and uncompromising directness led him to discard the usual semi-Arabic jargon of the ecclesiastics, and his style of speech was mainly Persian.

In his younger days he was extremely hot-headed, and it is only a few years ago that, having condemned a man to death for some offence under the law of Islam, and being unable to find anyone to carry out the sentence, he cut the man's throat himself. It is said, however, that he later bitterly regretted his action.

Although, like most of his class, he avoided the society of Europeans, he was not an extreme fanatic, and in times of danger to Christians he was known to send for one of the leading Armenians and warn him of the danger.

At the beginning of the war, Haji Sheikh Baqer was credited with pro-German sympathies. When, however, I brought to his attention the statements of the Agha Khan and the Nizam of Hyderabad and the declaration of the Government of India respecting the Holy Places of Islam, he changed his attitude and became a strong advocate of neutrality, though I doubt he overcame his dislike of Russia. He several times prevented the Turkish consul from making political statements in the mosque and on at least one occasion violently attacked one of the Turkish agents in public for seeking to involve Persia in the war.

The death of Haji Sheikh Baqer is to be regretted now that the populace require a clear-sighted and level-headed leader to control them. It is difficult to see how he can be replaced. Hamadan is notorious for the number of its ecclesiastics, but the quality is not commensurate with the quantity. For this reason I have refrained from making advances to any of them, lest I should make enemies of some who thought themselves unjustly ignored...

The danger lies in the fact that there will be a host of minor mujtahids, seyyeds and preachers trying to obtain a dominant position. During Haji Sheikh Baqer's lifetime they were kept in their place, but now they will seize the opportunity and any means that present themselves to make a name. One of the most obvious means is preaching a religious war and it is quite possible that German and Turkish intriguers may take advantage of the situation to pay some eloquent preacher to talk himself into eminence, and further their own objects at the same time.

It is a great loss to history that in 1947 the Foreign Office abandoned the practice of gathering regular consular dispatches of local news, on the grounds that they had neither the time to read them nor the space to store them.

## COLONEL C.E. STEWART – A SPY IN KHÁF

Antony Wynn

Colonel Stewart began his career with the Indian Army in 1854, three years before the Mutiny. In 1866 he travelled in Persia with Robert Murdoch Smith of the Anglo-Indian Telegraph service. In 1880, disguised as an Armenian horse trader from Baghdad, he travelled from Isfahan to Daregaz, on the Russian border north of Mashhad. His book *Through Persia in Disguise* tells something of this adventure, but reveals nothing of the true nature of his mission.

In July 1880, in the Second Afghan War, the Afghan Sardar Ayub Khan inflicted a shockingly great defeat on English troops at the battle of Maiwand, going on in September to lay siege to Kandahar, where General Roberts defeated him. Ayub Khan then withdrew to Persia, where he hoped to raise a force to return and overthrow Amir Abdul Rahman, the ruler of Afghanistan, who was supported by the British. To keep watch on the Persian border with Afghanistan and to give warning of the movements of Ayub Khan, Colonel Stewart was sent 'on special duties' to Kháf, where he stayed for two and a half lonely years, on watch. It should be said that he went with the agreement of the Persian Government and that his mission was directed at Afghan and Turkistani affairs, not Persian.

Kháf was then a group of mud brick villages to the south-east of Torbat-e Jám, close to the Afghan border. It was known for its funnel windmills, which still survive. Tall vertical poles attached to millstones stand between pairs of walls, which funnel the wind to turn the reed vanes sticking horizontally out of the poles. This part of Khorasán, although fertile when it rains, is flat and featureless, stretching out far into the lands of the Oxus. Here, with only one or two servants for company, Colonel Stewart had to stay on his lonely watch.

Stewart's private copy of his dispatches from Kháf, kindly lent to me by Lord Denman, form the subject of this article. In their understated way, they give an account of the almost unbelievably hard life led by the outlying servants of Empire, who took it all as a matter of unquestioned duty. I hope that it will inspire further research into the life of this extraordinary man.

In September 1881 Stewart arrived in Tehran and reported to Ronald Thomson, the British Minister, who told him to make his way to Kháf, but to avoid passing through Mashhad, so as not to excite the Russians into protesting at his presence. After Semnan, a town on the way to Mashhad, he took off in a straight line along the edge of the desert, passing only a few villages. One night the party had to camp without water after their guide lost his way. They encountered occasional nomads with sheep, goats and camels, who came down

## COLONEL C.E. STEWART – A SPY IN KHÁF

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from the Alborz mountains for the winter to feed their flocks on *buneh*, wild pistachio plants.

After marching for 29 days, Stewart arrived at Rui, one of the villages of Kháf, 540 miles from Tehran, where the local governor found him a house. Two of Ayub Khan's wives and forty of his men were there, having been thrown out of Herat by Abdul Qudus Khan, the governor. Ayub Khan himself was expected at Torbat-i Haidari, some miles to the south.

Kháf was a good place to catch news from the strategic city of Herat, but not as good as Mashhad for hearing news of the Turkoman. Stewart was able to report that about 2000 Turkoman had recently come down and settled at Sarakhs, on the Tejen river, the border with Turkistan, where Abbas Mirza, the Crown Prince of Persia, had settled some Salor Turkoman in 1832, although these had been forcibly removed by the Teke Turkoman not long afterwards. These extracts from Stewart's monthly letters, written to the British Minister at Tehran, to Colonel Sir Owen Burne, the Secret & Political Secretary at the India Office in London and to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, at Simla, tell the story:

December 1881: Ayub Khan arrived in Kháf with 300 mounted men, planning to march on Herat. Dervish Ali Khan, the local governor, did not wish to receive him, not least because of the expense that he would have to incur in feeding all his men! He forced Ayub Khan to leave by ordering that his men should not be supplied with food. Stewart tactfully withdrew from Kháf to another village.

A message came from Tehran to ask Stewart to inquire whether Ayub Khan had sold any English prisoners from Maiwand into slavery. His men told Stewart that such a thing was impossible, for they had all been too intent on looting and killing to think about taking prisoners. There was, however, a peaceful Uzbek merchant in Ayub Khan's camp who had a brother who dealt in slaves. If it was anybody, this was the man. Stewart sent inquiries to the Hindu traders in Maimana and Bokhara, who reported that there were no English slaves there. It later turned out that a Beluchi sepoy, in return for his life, had shown the Afghans where four English soldiers were hiding in a dry well. On his return this man had put about the slavery story.

The only prisoner who survived the battle was Lieut. Maclean. Ayub Khan frequently sent for him to have a chat. On the day after the failed attack on Kandahar a number of heads of Englishmen were brought in. After this Maclean refused to speak to Ayub Khan. When the defeated Ayub Khan made to retreat to Herat he sent for Maclean to take him with him, but found that he had been murdered by his guard of seven men.

Ayub Khan was in contact with the Russians. When a letter came for him from Abdul Kerim Beg, the Russian agent in Mashhad, he left Kháf for Ashgabad, in Ahal Teke country.

The Persian government offered Ayub Khan an allowance, but he refused it as being insufficient; he also rejected the condition that he settle in central Persia, away from Afghanistan. He declared that he had an arrangement with the Russians and that he hoped to raise the Teke Turkoman to take Herat. Stewart commented that this was 'a very wild idea of a not very wise young man'.

February 1882: The first hint of the hardships to come appears. A messenger returning from Herat had 'slightly frostbitten feet', for there was much snow on the ground. Ayub Khan, vexed that Stewart had engineered his removal from Kháf, was spreading rumours in Mashhad that he was building a fort. In fact, Stewart was so anxious to avoid giving the impression that he was there to stay that he had not repaired any of the broken windows in his house, which, he wrote, was now cold.

March 1882: Stewart reported on a visit to one Yusef Khan Hazara, aged 78, whose loyalties varied between the Persian and Afghan governments. He had a house, but preferred to live in the yurt outside it. He had nine Turkoman prisoners in leg irons, begging. At night they were put down a dry well with a lid on it. One of them was a nephew of Koushid Khan, the great Teke chief, from whom ransom money was expected.

Ayub Khan left Mashhad for Tehran, Stewart reported, and Sardar Abdul Qudus Khan of Herat now had six wives.

April 1882: Letters from England were taking 40 days, and from India (Calcutta) 48 days, but if they were delivered by Turkoman courier via Herat, they came through in 15 days.

He writes that he needs to give presents of guns and rifles to the local governors and requests reimbursement. 'If the money is not granted my position will be a very uncomfortable one, as my conduct in not giving will be contrasted in a very disagreeable manner with Russian and other travellers who comply with the customs of the country.'

May 1882: He visits Mir Alam Khan, Heshmat ul-Molk, at Birjand, where he notes that saffron is selling for 5/- [c. £15 today] an ounce, more than double the usual price. He notes the fine carpet weaving at the village of Durukhsh, started by the Alam family, and also that many of the villages still speak Arabic, for the Alams came originally from Arabia.



He comes across Lt. Alikhanov, a Lezgi from the Caucasus, a brave and dashing officer who had been a Captain on the staff of the Grand Duke Michael until he struck a senior officer, after which he had been demoted and banished to the Ahal Teke country by Ashgabad.

Russian caravans taking goods to Merv were halted by the Teke, who said they needed nothing. The goods remained unsold.

May 1882: Rukn ed-Dowleh, the governor of Mashhad, 'has taken most of the district of Khaf away from Dervish Ali Khan for being civil to me'. He begs the Legation to compensate Dervish Ali Khan for this.

British goods are coming up to Mashhad across the desert from Bandar Abbas via Ravar (north of Kerman) and Neiband [In 1974 this was no more than a track]. Sugar, tea, indigo, iron, cotton and crockery are being traded for carpets, opium and saffron to Bombay.

June 1882: The Russians are attempting to get the Teke of Merv to submit to Russian rule. Stewart notes that the Russians in Khorasan travel with large mounted escorts but that if he were to do so, the Persians would protest loudly. Large parties of Russians were travelling all over the Atak [border] country, suborning the local governors. Skobelov [the conqueror of the Teke at Gök Tepe] was loosening the hold of Persia on this territory.

July 1882: Stewart begs leave to remain at his post for a few months until the Afghan situation has settled and to keep an eye on Russian activity on the border. He requests 4 months' home leave to start in November, before the Volga froze over. He was already due 90 days Indian Army leave:

You are aware that I left England at a very few days notice for this special duty in Persia and I am anxious to make some arrangements for my family before returning to India... Under the circumstances of how very solitary my life on this frontier is, where I have no Europeans of any sort to speak to, it is not too much to ask for 4 months leave after about 16 months of service in such an out of the way place. I would not ask for this leave if my service were at the time likely to be required or even if granted I would not avail myself of it if I found that any important movements were afoot. As I would of course pay my own expenses from Bandar Gaz [on the Caspian] to England, the Government would be put to no expense by granting me this leave... Even if granted, this leave would give me only a very short time at home.

August 1882: Large parties of Russians are surveying the border region on the Persian side, to accustom the Persians to their presence prior to annexation of the province.

October 1882: He has had to buy mules for his journey to Tehran since the muleteers who normally hired them out were too afraid of Turkoman raiders on the road.

August 1883: [Back from home leave] Stewart meets Naser ed-Din Shah in camp at Quchan, with a retinue of 18,000. Also there were 130 Kuban Cossacks with a regimental band. The Shah is vexed, since he considers that only he should have the right to a band. The Shah asked Stewart to replace his Persian ‘newswriter’ at Dareh Gaz with a non-native ‘to avoid trouble’.

He declares the gift of a gold snuff box from Naser ed-Din Shah, ‘with HM’s portrait in fake diamonds, of no value but pretty’. He requests permission to keep it, having had to give 15 *tomans* [£5/6/-] to the servant who delivered it, as was the custom. This snuff box gave rise to a long correspondence, since it later turned out that the diamonds were real and that it was worth nearer £20, which meant that he would have to hand it over to HM Treasury. Government servants were not – and are still not – allowed to keep such presents.

The Russians had just finished drilling an oil well at Kizil Arvat [in Russian Turkistan]. 427 feet deep, it had taken them four months to sink. It was giving 9½ tons a day.

October 1883: [Torbat-i Jám] The Persians had moved troops 25 miles into Afghan territory and were claiming 2700 square miles of Afghan territory. They were building a large but weak fort at Zohrabad, where 1000 Salor Turkoman are living in reed huts. Stewart is certain that the Russians had encouraged the Persians to do this, to secure an easy route for them to Herat. The Persians would hand the territory over to the Russians when asked. The Russian pretext is protection against Turkoman raids, which should be the responsibility of the Afghans [who were being subsidised by the British].

He asks for £70 to be sent to his wife in London.

November 1883: Somewhat taken aback by the double loyalties of Afghan families, who often sensibly hedged their bets, Stewart wrote to say, ‘Mirza Abdul Rizaq, the newswriter at Herat employed by Mirza Abbas Khan C.I.E. [the British agent at Mashhad], who has given every satisfaction for many years, is father-in-law to Mohammed Sadiq, the Russian newswriter!’

At the end of November, clearly suffering, he wrote to Thomson at Tehran:

I asked you in my last letter to permit me to go to Mashhad for a short change at the end of December. I shall be very glad if you are able to permit me to do so, as it is very uncomfortable here. Even wheat to make bread I have to carry 14 miles and it is not very easy to get. When it is cold my shelter is so bad

that I suffer a good deal from the cold. Still, I can manage and am quite prepared to stay here all the winter in spite of the discomfort if you think it undesirable to permit me to take a run into Mashhad for a short change in the winter... I am only anxious to carry out your wishes, whatever they may be.

December 1883: [from Mohsenabad, a tiny village on the Afghan border, near Tayebad]. Ayub Khan is said to be on the move from Tehran to Maimana, via Bokhara, where he was rumoured to have 7 *lakhs* of rupees waiting for him. Stewart's request for a break has been refused:

I quite understand your reasons and am quite happy to winter here, which is a better place for news than Kháf... We had a heavy fall of snow last night and the thermometer showed 7 degrees below freezing. I am now more comfortable than I was. I have got in a supply of wood from a distance and put a small window in my room and built a proper fireplace. I have also got shelter for my horses... I do not mind roughing it. I have heard of a village where food and forage can be purchased and am sending camels to bring 2½ months' supply.

There was panic at Herat at the news of Ayub Khan's departure from Tehran. The Heratis were burying their valuables and some of them were leaving town. Ayub Khan's men, still on the border, had been told to prepare to join him when he reached Khorasan. All caravans between Mashhad and Herat had stopped. A local Hazara chief proposed to offer his house in Mashhad to Ayub Khan, free of rent. Ayub Khan has a lot of support in the Herat and Maimana district. He has to be prevented from going there. He will probably make a move in the spring. Stewart volunteers to stay on over the winter at Mohsenabad until May, by when matters should be resolved.

The Russian 'newswriter' in Herat had been sent in chains to Kabul, as an example of what Amir Abdul Rahman would do to those who worked for the Russians.

Stewart passes on a report by a Lieut. Naziroff of the Turkistan Rifles on the roads between Merv and Charjui on the Oxus. He does not say how the report came into his hands.

January 1884: The Persians are occupying parts of Afghan territory to protect their border against continuing Turkoman raids from the other side.

February 1884: Ayub Khan is sitting out the winter at Sabzevar, on the road from Tehran to Mashhad. Naser ed-Din Shah has given orders that he should be prevented from crossing into Afghanistan. Stewart hears of letters being sent

from Ayub Khan's followers in Mashhad to the Wali of Maimana. Later in the month Ayub Khan was arrested and detained in Mashhad. The Afghan authorities take several of the Turkoman chiefs around Maimana hostage against the good behaviour of their clans.

March 1884: Food is running out and cannot be bought at any price. Stewart's servant, a Rashti, has run away, carrying 50 *tomans* that Stewart had given him, a very fine mule, a carbine and a revolver belonging to the Legation, some small letters and newspapers, but nothing official. He was last seen heading for Mashhad, where he was said to have a *khatun*. Mirza Abbas Khan has been asked to arrange for his arrest and the return of the government property.

In response to notification that his tour of duty is to be extended for another year, he requests a short home leave, without mentioning that his wife has been in London for all this time. He goes on to describe the worsening conditions in Mohsenabad:

Mohsenabad is a small village inhabited by Hazaras, an uncouth sort of people. The water is brackish and food of the simplest description is found with the greatest difficulty... Many of the people are living on barley bread and have only enough to last them until harvest, so naturally are unwilling to sell at any price. I have supplies for about two months, but harvest will not be until July. There is no chaff for the horses within a radius of 80 miles. Any grain that was available was consumed during the Shah's visit.

No sort of fresh vegetables can be procured and in consequence of the brackish water and poor diet I have suffered from scurvy and am showing symptoms again. In the winter, if I wanted a fire, I had to send my servants 30 miles to fetch wood. If I had been allowed to go into Mashhad for a break where, although there are no Europeans, at least there are educated Persians and vegetables, it would have been different, but I was informed that if I had gone to Mashhad it would have led to a Russian official being detached to that place and I quite see the reasonableness of the objection to my going there... If it is considered necessary that I should stay on the Persian frontier without any change for another year, I am ready to do it without any regard to myself, but I must say that I look forward with dread to passing another year of utter loneliness without speaking to a civilised human being. When Major Napier was on this frontier it was quite different; he could go into Mashhad for a change and he even sometimes went to Tehran.

He goes on to say that his landlord has asked him to leave the village, since his little party are causing shortages, but has since apologised for his rudeness.

He asks for home leave from May, with immediate local leave to cross the border and go to Herat for a while, where there will be vegetables.

Merv has submitted to Russia. He suggests that he go to visit the border region of Afghanistan as a preliminary to establishing a commission to formalising the border with the Russians.

His handwriting deteriorates at this point, as he is suffering from recurring fever and singing in his ears. He announces that, with or without permission, he will go into Mashhad to consult a native doctor. He goes on to ask for a pension for his wife in case of his death, at the higher rate, as if he had died on active service, to which his life at Mohsenabad ought to equate, and that the money he has spent on travelling should be reimbursed to her. Without it, his wife would be left badly off. He had also lost £17/17/, with which the messenger bringing it from Tehran had absconded. He apologises for being too ill to make a copy of his letter for India.

April 1884: He is in Mashhad, being treated by a local doctor, but still very unwell. Mirza Abbas Khan, the British agent, is to accompany him to Tehran to see the Legation doctor, as soon as he is well enough to move.

By early June he is safely in Tehran, but meanwhile has managed to continue sending in reports from the Afghan-Turkistan frontier, in handwriting that is barely legible. On reaching Tehran he was granted sick leave and allowed to go home.

When Stewart returned to England he was posted to full colonel and awarded the CMG and CIE. In 1888 Ayub Khan surrendered to the British agent at Mashhad and became governor of Herat. He later became a pensioner of the British and was buried at Peshawar.

Returning from his sick leave in England, Colonel Stewart served on the Afghan Boundary Commission before becoming Political Officer at Herat. His letter book from Kháf continues with some of his letters from this period. In November 1887 he was appointed Consul at Rasht, but instead was sent to the east coast of the Red Sea. In 1888 he joined Drummond Wolff at Tiflis en route for Tehran and from 1888-1891 he was sent to Astarabad [modern Gorgan], to report on the Turkoman tribes on each side of the border with Russia. From Astarabad he was sent to relieve the British consuls at Mashhad and Tabriz when they went on leave. He wrote a number of articles on the Turkoman country for the Royal Geographical Society and passed much of his local knowledge on to Percy Sykes at the beginning of his first journey into Persia. From 1892-1899 he served as consul at Odessa.

He had only four years of retirement from this life before dying in 1904.

Colonel Charles Stewart was the son of Algernon Stewart (1836-75), a nephew of Lord Galloway, and his mother was the daughter of Francis Lord Elcho. He married Annie Nairn, a daughter of Philip Carmichael-Anstruther, Bt. He lived at quite an acceptable address in London: 51 Redcliffe Square. That makes it all the more remarkable that he was able to withstand the horrors of Kháf. He was deeply religious, interested in missionary work and the Church Missionary Society in particular. Perhaps this sustained him through those harsh winters and summers, as well as his sense of duty.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> I am indebted to Dr John Gurney for the biographical information.

## **PROFESSOR A.K.S. LAMBTON O.B.E. (1912 – 2008)**

Hugh Arbuthnott

Ann Lambton, known as Nancy to her friends, devoted the greater part of her life to Iran and the study of Iran. Iranians who knew her thought she was either a saint, a scholar, a spy or all three. She was tough, physically and mentally, and almost an ascetic. She was a walker, a climber, a horsewoman and a squash player. She was a scholar who wrote some of the standard works on Iranian language, agriculture, land tenure and history. She was involved in some of the most dramatic of 20th-century Iranian political events. She was a devout Christian.

Lambton was the second child of the Hon. George Lambton, fifth son of the 2nd Earl of Durham; and of Cecily, daughter of Sir John Horner. Her father trained racehorses, including George V's, at Newmarket, and she was a good horsewoman herself. Her mother did not believe in education and kept her at home. She had almost no formal schooling and spent her youth in her father's stables until she became too tall to be a jockey (a younger sister, Sybil, died in a riding accident in 1961).

At 16, Lambton later told a friend, she read T. E. Lawrence's *Revolt in the Desert* and became fascinated by the idea of travel in Arabia. She later met Denison Ross, the orientalist and director of the School of Oriental Studies (later the School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS, of London University), who encouraged her to study at the school. She enrolled in 1932 as a student not registered for a degree course. Ross persuaded her to concentrate on Persian rather than on the Arab world, and she later registered for an honours degree course in Persian with subsidiary Arabic.

Her first visit to Iran was in the summer vacation of 1934. She obtained her first degree in 1935 and, after winning an Aga Khan travelling fellowship, spent 1936-37 in Iran, and gained a PhD in 1939 with a thesis on Seljuk (pre-Ottoman Turkish) institutions. She spent much of her time in Iran in Isfahan where she made many close friends. She also worked at the British Hospital, run by Anglican missionaries, in Isfahan and got to know Persians whose families remained friends for the rest of her life. She also travelled widely, studying Iran's economy and especially in agrarian questions while becoming expert in the language; her first book, *Three Persian Dialects*, was published in 1938.

She was in Iran at the outbreak of the war and joined the British Legation (later Embassy) as press attaché. Her head of mission, Sir Reader Bullard, wrote in

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one of his letters home that her decision to go to Persia “was fortunate for us, for she learnt Persian extremely well and made many Persian friends”.

Bullard also told the story that when he presented his credentials, the Shah had been interested to find a woman among the senior officials accompanying the ambassador, and even more so when he found that she spoke excellent Persian. There was no uniform for women, so she wore an academic gown and hood. Bullard noted that his press attaché “thus presented a striking appearance, not diminished by the fact that the hood was of the wrong colour, the wrong faculty and the wrong university”.

Lambton played an important role in the events leading up to the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941. His sympathy for Nazi Germany led to the Allied occupation of Iran in that year, and his replacement by his son, Muhammad Reza (who was himself deposed in the 1979 revolution). Lambton first tried to see that the British news got its fair share of space as compared with news about Germany, and later did propaganda work, particularly supplying information to the Persian Service of the BBC about Reza Shah’s corruption and greed. She was seen ever afterwards by many Iranians as an *éminence grise* of the British Government, possibly even a member of the intelligence services. She was appointed OBE in 1943. In 1945 she returned to the UK and to SOAS, first as senior lecturer in Persian, later as reader and in 1953 as professor until her retirement in 1979.

It was as a scholar and teacher that Lambton most deserves to be known. Her knowledge of the language resulted in the publication, after *Three Persian Dialects*, of her *Persian Grammar* and then *Vocabulary*, used by many generations of students. She also published her minutely detailed analysis of land tenure in *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* which, it is said, supplied much of the detail on which the Shah’s land reform was based. Her investigations into land tenure took her everywhere in Iran, and she was known in the most remote villages.

Her later work, *The Persian Reform 1962-66*, also the result of tireless travel in the country, was critical of the way in which the land reform had been carried out.

She also wrote extensively on the politics, history, administration and religion of Iran, and her scholarship was fully recognised and honoured by the academic world; she became a DLitt of London University; a fellow of the British Academy; an honorary doctor of Durham and of Cambridge and of one of its colleges; and an honorary Fellow of SOAS.



Besides her university teaching, she taught Persian to many members of the Foreign Office in preparation for their postings to Iran or Afghanistan. Although her style of teaching was not considered by many as totally in keeping with modern theories, for most it provided the basis of a sound knowledge of the language, a lasting interest in Iran and an enormous admiration and affection for their teacher.

All who knew Lambton respected her not only for her intelligence but also for her physical strength and endurance. She was a fine squash player and often beat students a great deal younger than her. She always cycled between SOAS and her flat in Maida Vale. In Iran and in Northumberland she was a tireless walker up the steepest of hills at a huge pace and she walked everywhere in Iran, besides travelling on horseback or camel.

Although she did not hold an official position after her time in the embassy in Tehran during the war, British and Iranian ministers and officials frequently sought her advice on Persian affairs. In 1946, during the Azerbaijan crisis, when the Soviet Union at first refused to evacuate Persian Azerbaijan, she once acted as an informal ambassador between the Iranian and British governments. She was consulted by British officials on developments in Irano-British relations, especially during the crisis in 1951 when Iran's Prime Minister, Muhammad Mussadiq, caused a furore by nationalising British oil interests in Iran. The Shah, in a power struggle with Mussadiq, fled to Rome in 1953. In August that year the CIA orchestrated a coup that toppled Mussadiq and restored the Shah and Western oil interests.

The Shah was probably aware that Lambton had never had a high opinion of him, but Lambton's criticism of the White Revolution, wrote Parviz Raji in 1978 in his book *In the Service of the Peacock Throne*, "brought upon herself the Shah's permanent displeasure". "No Iranian ambassador who consorted with her could ever be sure of retaining his post for long," he said.

If she was out of sympathy with the Shah, Lambton had no love either for the Islamic Revolution and did not visit Iran after it. She nevertheless continued to write about Iranian history.

In retirement she moved from London to Northumberland, a county with which the Lambton family had close connections. She was active in her Anglican church, she became a lay preacher and took a particular interest in the history of Christianity in Northumberland. She received the Cross of St Augustine from the Archbishop of Canterbury in November 2004. The award was made in acknowledgement of her work for, and commitment to, Christianity and the Church of England in particular.

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Formerly chairman of the Iran Diocesan Association, she served on the Middle East committee and advised archbishops on interfaith matters. She was reader emeritus in the Diocese of Newcastle, was still giving lectures at an advanced age and had delivered Lent lectures biannually to clergy and laity for many years. At 93 she was still preaching regularly in her local church.

Lambton appeared to be severe and difficult to get to know. She rarely spoke about herself and she could also be rather frightening, especially to her students. But once past the initial barriers of reserve, they found a kind and generous person. She was hospitable and always ready to try to help those around her who needed it, whether in Britain or Iran. She was modest and never sought attention for her personal experiences and exploits nor, which is a pity, did she ever publish anything about them. She was a great traveller and a great scholar. She did not marry.

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**PAUL GOTCH, O.B.E. (1915-2008)**  
**Hon. Lecture Secretary 1978-2000**

Paul Gotch's interest in Iran began with his appointment as British Council representative to Shiraz in 1959. The elegant building that housed the home, office, library and classrooms of the Council, with its wide, shaded verandah along the front of it, stood in the middle of a large walled Persian garden shaded by tall plane and pine trees, with parakeets squawking in the tops by day and nightingales singing lustily at dusk. It had previously been the British Consulate, with extensive stabling at the back for the Indian cavalry escort. Living in such a place, no-one could fail to fall in love with Iran. And so Gotch did, cultivating the friendliest possible relations with the university, leading local families and government authorities. Far from the frenetic contract-chasing of Tehran, he was able to act as a cultural bridge, untainted by the politicking of the capital. He had the inspired idea of staging amateur dramatics on the verandah of the Council building, with the audience seated under the trees in the garden. He made many lasting friendships in Shiraz, among all sorts of people, and was the life and soul of many a party, hosting the Queen, among others, when she visited Iran. His weekends were spent on archaeological hunts in the Marv Dasht plain, where he discovered some Zoroastrian fire altars, which later became the subject of a BBC documentary.

His all too short posting to Shiraz ended in 1966, after which he went to Bogotá and then Beirut, which he left with the evacuation of 1975. In 1976 he joined the Iran Society as assistant to the Lecture Secretary and in from 1978-2000 he served as Hon. Lecture Secretary, helping to see it through some of the difficult years following the Islamic Revolution. His good sense and jovial humour kept the society's flame burning at a time when the great and the good were losing interest in Iran. His object was to manage a balance in the lecture programme between biography, the arts, history, geography and religion, working up to recent publications and speakers who were interesting in themselves, whether Iranian, non-Iranian, men or women, always with the goal, in Gotch's words, 'to present programmes which reflect as wide a spectrum of Persian culture and life as possible'. Gotch himself was an excellent and amusing lecturer and was the best person to fill in for an absent speaker.

Gotch gave no less than five lectures to the Society on subjects ranging from *Images of Persia through the Ages* to *Persia and English Literature*, *Aurel Stein in Persia* and a very touching *Tribute to the Rev. Norman Sharp*, his close friend

from his days in Shiraz, given with Ronald Ferrier. His best lecture, given on 21st December 1999, was *Seven Years in Shiraz - Tales from a Persian Garden* and it was his last. One of the best lectures that he organised was given by Dr. Michael Robbins, on *British Railwaymen on the Trans-Iranian railway, 1941-1943*. It was worth going to the lectures just to hear his learned and witty comments delivered in his votes of thanks, when he often appeared to know as much about the subject as the lecturer.

Paul Gotch was educated at Shrewsbury and studied printing before starting work with his uncle at HMV, where he developed his interest in modern music. In 1939 he and his wife, Billy, cycled through Europe. On the day that war was declared they were thrown out of Bulgaria. Arriving in Athens, Gotch joined the British Council and was sent to Cairo, where he produced a film about the Council, a book *Three Caravan Cities and St Catherine's Monastery*, some radio plays and concerts for wounded troops. Later appointments to Athens, Milan, Barcelona and Accra gave him the opportunity to promote his love of jazz, organising concerts with Louis Armstrong and Glenn Miller. He wrote songs and played the guitar, dropping into jam sessions with kindred spirits wherever he went. In his retirement he was a popular guest lecturer for Swan Tours all over the Middle East, bringing the local archaeology alive for the clients.

He is survived by his partner Jean Coles and his three children, Linnet, Sheila and Adam. His other son Jason predeceased him.

Antony Wynn,  
with contributions from other members.

## SHUSHA GUPPY (1935-2008) A MEMORIAL ADDRESS

David Suratgar

How can one do justice to such a wise, kind, courageous but, above all, a cultured and civilised life? Writing in the introduction to Shusha's collection of interviews with women of literary achievement, *Looking Back*, Anita Brookner reflected on Virginia Woolf's comment that, to be a successful writer, 'a woman would need a room of her own and an income of five thousand pounds a year'. She noted the difficulty of forging a literary career, given the role of women as wives, mothers and hostesses, all roles that Shusha fulfilled superbly. Yet one must also emphasise Shusha's courage. She had no modern equivalent of 'five thousand pounds a year'.

Like Joseph Conrad and Tom Stoppard, she used her extraordinary command of the English and French languages to earn her living and bring up a family. A true Mother Courage, Shusha rarely complained or exhibited the stress she must have had as a constant companion. Ever kind, she was ready to share her success with those of us who were blessed with her friendship.

We were never willing to miss sharing her *tours de force*, be it an exhilarating concert, listening to her unforgettable mellifluous voice singing Persian melodies, lyrics from Baudelaire, Verlaine or her mentor Jacques Prévert, or be it one of her lectures or interviews. She never failed to enchant. These performances provided us with an understanding of the lessons of love, marriage, bereavement and above all faith – faith in the intrinsic common goodness of man.

As she always claimed to be, she was a true sister to me. Shusha has featured throughout my life and she will remain in my memory as a joy and a guiding light. In *The Blindfold Horse*, she pays tribute to the fast friendships of our families and the rapport between her father and mine, one a distinguished theologian and philosopher, the other the poet laureate, both Sufis. I clearly remember visits to the Assar family home and in particular one memorable childhood holiday visit to Shusha and her family at their cool summer retreat in a mountain-top garden on Mount Demavand. I vividly recall the warmth of the fireside gathering and, in particular, the kind girl and her brother who took me to play in the dappled sunshine of the fruit orchards by the cool, clear mountain streams.

Shusha was born in 1935, and grew up imbued with the mystical poetry of the Sufi tradition, the memory of which she evokes with such fervour and warmth in her prize-winning memoirs *The Blindfold Horse* and *Memories of a Persian childhood*.

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From the French Lycée she went on to the Sorbonne to study languages and literature. She describes the Left Bank milieu and her literary and artistic friendships vividly and honestly in her memoirs of those bohemian days *A Girl in Paris*, where she recalls her growing disillusionment over the muddled morality of Sartre and Aragon and her short-lived student flirtation with communism.

While in Paris, Shusha learned to deploy her superb contralto voice and to become a recognised singer. She acted on the Paris stage and under Jacques Prévert she began to record Persian mystic ballads and romantic French and English poetry set to music. Having married and come to England, she sang professionally in concert halls and on television and made numerous records. Equally memorable was her narration in the Oscar nominated film *People of the Wind*, which saw her travelling with the legendary Bakhtiari tribe on their annual migration.

In London she became a well loved figure on the literary scene, forming friendships with many of the leading poets, scholars, playwrights and authors. Her salon brought together a wide cross-section of this world, reflecting her role as the European editor of the Paris Review and as literary reviewer for major national newspapers and broadcaster on BBC Radio 3 and 4.

Her work received many accolades and literary awards here in England and in France. I well recall the praises of the French Ambassador at the Embassy reception marking her being awarded the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1997: 'Thanks to you, Shusha, for your love of the French language, thanks for your love of music and French songs and literature; thanks to your records and your books, our culture is well represented in this country.'

I have a vivid memory of Shusha walking towards my mother and myself along a grey Yorkshire station platform in the early 1950s, a Juliette Gréco-like apparition from Paris. She came to summer in a Dales village and to perfect her already amazing command of English. I recall my mother's pride at the attainments of Shusha, her star student, and her concern when Shusha's hostess, my mother's titled county set friend, called us to express shock at learning from the village Post Office that Shusha had been trying to place a long distance call to a student friend in Moscow!

The news of Shusha's serious illness struck me with a body blow. There was so much I wished to talk to her about. Despite our many meetings and dinners and her visits to stay with us in Oxford and Burford and meetings in Washington, there was never enough time for me to explore the depths of her erudition, her insights and to benefit from her wise counsel. Each conversation opened new vistas and lines of thinking. I have sat at the feet of many scholars, writers and academics but, as was the case with my late father, so with Shusha,

I always felt the urge to explore literature, philosophy, cultural history and the meaning of life.

We shared our ideas about the true qualities and contributions of Persian culture and thought. We talked of Zoroastrianism, the links between Avicenna's Persian thought and the learning of Ancient Greece, the cult of Mithra and the Albigensian heresy and above all the Sufi tradition in Persian religious history. We shared our misery over the dreadful and unnecessary misunderstandings between the extreme adherents of Islam and the modern fundamentalist Christians and, inevitably, the unreasoned intractability of the Palestinian question. She truly strove to provide a bridge between cultures.

News of her illness and imminent mortality enveloped me like a dark cloud – an impending storm. I returned to London with dread only to discover, in the few hours I was fortunate enough to spend with her over her last few weeks, that she still had retained her extraordinary courage and the will to provide final priceless parting gifts. Alert, composed, uncomplaining she gave me what I can only describe as life-enhancing tutorials displaying truly saintly courage in facing death. How I admire her, how much I owe her for those last meetings. These were truly meetings with a remarkable woman. She lay there and with unrelenting lucidity spoke of her father and mine and of their humanity and wisdom. She recited Blake's lines:

Seek Love in the pity of others' woe,  
In the gentle relief of another's care,  
In the darkness of night and the winter's snow,  
In the naked and outcast, seek Love there!

She also spoke about the lessons of the *Shahnameh*, the Book of Kings, and of the failings of modern politicians. She sought to steer one's future thinking and reading and spoke in glowing terms of the best of the traditions of Iran and of this her adopted country and also of the understanding and empathy of HRH Prince Charles and of his support for the work of Kathleen Raine and the Temenos Academy, which we both valued. I left her bedside with deep sadness, yet enlightened and with an enhanced perception of all that matters and is best in life.

In this context one must emphasise Shusha's attachment to the Sufi tradition in Persian thought. Writing in *A Girl in Paris* of her attachment to the work of her "two Masters", the Catholic orientalist Louis Massignon and the Protestant scholar of Sufism and the School of Illumination, Henri Corbin, Shusha says: 'In Islam as in Christianity, Judaism and other great religions, it is the esoteric and the spiritual that sustains the exoteric temporal edifice of faith and preserves it in times of trouble and decline, just as the hidden spring feeds and replenishes

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the pond which would otherwise become stagnant and putrid. When churches become darkened by corruption, intolerance and laxity, the flame turns inward and smoulders until the black storm has passed. Yesterday the Inquisition, today Fundamentalism, East and West – they come and go like plagues while Love endures and redeems.’

Writing of the demise of a famous Persian poet my father composed an elegy which somehow can be adapted with unusual aptness to the loss of our friend Shusha:

Alas the shining sun has set and the dust of grief has settled on Iran.  
 From the thumb-stall of the times an arrow has been shot,  
 Whose shaft has settled in our heart and soul.  
 Literature is standing at her grave in mourning, learning is sitting at her tomb in sorrow.  
 At thy table, to pick up thy crumbs, a group of Muslims and non-Muslims would always gather,  
 Sitting with heads bowed low, knowing who sat at the head of the table.  
 On those glowing cheeks the tears of expiration,  
 Thou wouldst say, appear like rain drops on the petals of a rose.

Oh, how we shall miss her, but how I wish to celebrate her life and testify to what we owe to her. I have had that precious gift of her friendship. I console myself with the lines of another poem of my father’s which Shusha quotes in her *Blindfold Horse*.

They say there is a place on the other side of the world,  
 Where grief and sorrow have never walked.

I am certain she will be there to greet us all.

*Shusha (Shamsi) Guppy, singer and writer, was the daughter of Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Kazem Assar, the distinguished Shia theologian and philosopher, who held the chair of philosophy at Tehran University. The author’s father was Professor Suratgar of Tehran University.*



## OMAR KHAYYAM: POET, REBEL, ASTRONOMER

Hazhir Teimourian, Sutton Publishing 2007

ISBN 978-0-7509-4715-2. £20.

Reviewed by David Blow

Omar Khayyam (1048-1131 AD) remains the only Persian poet to have reached a wide audience outside Iran, thanks to an English-language translator of genius. Teimourian is not exaggerating when he describes Edward Fitzgerald's mid-19<sup>th</sup> century 'rendering' of the quatrains of Khayyam as "one of the most inspiring feats of translation in world history". The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, as Fitzgerald's translation is called – rubaiyat being the plural of *rubai*, the Persian word for a quatrain – has become one of the best known and best loved poems in the English language.

The irony is, as Teimourian's fascinating biography reminds us, that Khayyam was not a poet by profession, as were most of the other great names of Persian poetry whose work is much less well-known to non-Persian speakers. He made his living as an astronomer and mathematician, gaining an early and lasting fame for his achievements in these fields. He composed his quatrains for private circulation among friends and colleagues who shared his religious scepticism and his Epicurean outlook. It seems clear, however, that many others among Khayyam's contemporaries soon became familiar with the quatrains – not least clerical circles where he was already unpopular for his love of ancient Greek learning and which were quick to denounce him as a heretic.

To write a biography of Omar Khayyam is no easy task as the information we have about him is relatively sparse, but it is a task that Teimourian has carried out with skill and panache. He fills in the gaps with a fair amount of reasonable speculation. He also gives us a powerful sense of the world Khayyam inhabited and cleverly weaves into his story such relevant contemporary developments affecting the Muslim world as the start of the European Crusades and the fatal weakening of the Byzantine Empire.

Teimourian writes in a lively style and with a passion that is unashamedly polemical. He regards the overthrow of the Sasanid Empire and the destruction of its Zoroastrian culture by the Arab armies of Islam in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century AD as the greatest calamity to befall Iran and he is in no doubt that Omar Khayyam was of a similar view.

Khayyam spent his formative years in his birthplace of Nishapur in north-eastern Iran and in the great central Asian cities of Bokhara and Samarqand – a region where the memory of pre-Islamic Iran was still very much alive and which had recently seen the rebirth of a distinctively Iranian culture for the first

time since the Arab conquest. The most outstanding manifestation of this was the composition by the Persian poet, Ferdowsi, of a national epic entitled the *Shah Nameh* or 'Book of Kings'. Khayyam's quatrains show the extent to which, as Teimourian points out, he was steeped in the old Iranian world of the *Shah Nameh*. He also had a Zoroastrian tutor in the philosopher Abu Hasan Bahmanyar bin Marzban, whose ancestor must have been a Sasanian *marzban* or governor of a frontier province.

Along with this revival of Iranian culture went a tremendous interest in learning in general, including that of the ancient Greeks. No one exemplifies this better than that great polymath, Ibn Sina or Avicenna as he is known in the West, who grew up in Bokhara and died in western Iran eleven years before Khayyam was born. Under the influence of Bahmanyar, Khayyam became a follower of Avicenna and through him of Aristotle, as his philosophical writings reveal. In the fields of mathematics and astronomy, where Khayyam made his most important contributions, he learnt, among others, from Euclid and Ptolemy. Teimourian speculates that Khayyam may well have acquired enough Greek to read the works of the Greek masters in the original.

While Khayyam was growing up, the Saljuq tribe of Turkish nomads from Central Asia was extending its rule over the whole of Iran. Teimourian is almost as harsh on the Turks as he is on the Arabs, on the grounds that they gave their support to orthodox and often intolerant Sunnism in return for religious sanction of their rule. This intolerance stifled the spirit of free enquiry that had characterized the Iranian cultural renaissance and eventually led to a clerical condemnation of Khayyam for blasphemy. He was forced to go into hiding and to make a humiliating show of religious orthodoxy through a pilgrimage to Mecca. Teimourian likens his position at that time to that of the modern writer Salman Rushdie, after he was condemned to death in a *fatwa* by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Before this, however, Khayyam enjoyed the patronage and friendship of two enlightened and thoroughly Persianized Turkish rulers, neither of whom had much regard for the Sunni clergy. Khayyam made his name as a mathematician with an important treatise on cubic equations while working in the royal treasury in Samarqand of the Qarakhanid ruler, Shams al-Mulk. He was later summoned to Shams al-Mulk's court in Bokhara where Teimourian speculates that he was employed as an astrologer, although Khayyam personally had no belief in astrology. From there he was lured by the Saljuq Sultan, Malik Shah, to his capital of Isfahan, where he helped construct a new observatory and played the leading role in reforming the Persian solar calendar so that *Now Ruz* or the New Year began precisely at the spring equinox. To do this he had first to measure the length of the year, which he did with an accuracy that still astonishes scientists. It was one of his greatest achievements.

Teimourian concludes his thoroughly engaging book by boldly setting his own translation of Khayyam alongside that of Fitzgerald. The verse I like best is presumably the one he does too, as it also appears on the jacket of the book:

This Circle in which we ebb and we flow,  
Neither beginning, nor an end does know,  
The Riddle stands as posed long ago:  
Where do we come from? Where do we go?

## OBEYD-E ZAKANI: ETHICS OF THE ARISTOCRATS AND OTHER SATIRICAL WORKS

Edited and translated by Hasan Javadi, Mage Publishing  
ISBN 1-933823-22-4

Reviewed by Antony Wynn

A common view of Persian poetry is that it is a matter of roses, nightingales, wine and young beauties of indeterminate gender. The 'Orientalists' and Fitzgerald added whimsy to the picture. In the same way that Timur, whose court was full of poets and illustrators of manuscripts, was responsible for some of the most beautiful and refined architecture that the world has ever seen and was also responsible for pillage, slaughter and destruction, so does Persian poetry have another face, which is less well known. Obeyd Zakani, a contemporary of Hafez, was a polemical satirist of Rabelaisian and scabrous wit.

Obeyd was born in Qazvin in about 1300AD. He later went to live in Shiraz, at a time when Iran was being ruled, or misruled, by a number of local warring *il-khans*. Shiraz was then ruled by Mubarez ul-Din Muhammad, described as 'brave and devout, but at the same time cruel, bloodthirsty and treacherous'. He admitted to having killed 'just over eight hundred' men with his own hands. On one occasion two prisoners were brought to him as he was saying his prayers. Between two prostrations he took his sword, cut off their heads and returned to his devotions undisturbed. Obeyd, whose lampoons of this man and of the corrupt judges and clerics of his time led to accusations of blasphemy and heresy, had to flee to Baghdad.

Obeyd's work *Akhlaq ul-Ashraf*, Ethics of the Aristocrats, follows the form of the *Gulistan* of Sa'di, on which so many future servants of the Raj were raised. Each section begins with an account of a recognised Muslim virtue, such as generosity, mercy, justice and forbearance and goes on to show how the behaviour of the rulers of the day measures up to these ethics. Each section ends with a pithy anecdote, full of heavy irony, to make the point.

The second part of this volume is a short treatise on Definitions, in which he crudely and brutally lampoons the Turks (i.e. the Mongols), judges, clerics, landlords, officials, mind-bending drugs and women. Of the latter, he appears convinced that there was no such thing as a woman of virtue and that all men were cuckolds.

In the third part, a parody of the many books of maxims, advice to young princes and the like, that were the fashion for many years, Obeyd propounds his own 100 maxims, which turn all conventions on their head. Followers of the acknowledged virtues of this world, he says, are losers. To succeed in this rotten world a different approach is needed and, here, Obeyd's earthy language comes into its own. About the only printable of his recommendations is: 'In this age of ours do not expect to find a just governor, a judge who does not accept bribes, an ascetic who does not speak hypocritically, a pious chamberlain, or a statesman who has not been b\*\*\*\*d in his youth'. His other maxims leave no doubt as to the gender of the beloved in Persian love poems. The very earthiness and humour of his approach, using the language of a muleteer, defies prurience.

Obeyd also wrote a collection of anecdotes from the Arabic and the Persian. Jokes are impossible to translate adequately in any language, but at least they show the mind of the teller. One of Obeyd's less salacious ones concerns Juha, the equivalent of Mulla Nasreddin, who had become apprenticed to a tailor. As the tailor went out one day, leaving a bowl of honey in the shop, he told Juha that the honey was poisoned and that he must not touch it. As soon as he had gone, Juha took a length of the tailor's cloth and sold it for a large loaf of bread, with which he devoured the honey. When the tailor came back he demanded to know what had happened to his cloth. In a brilliant display of quick wittedness, Juha replied that a thief had come in and stolen it. As for the honey, he said, he had been so afraid of a beating that he had decided to eat the poisoned food, preferring death to the wrath of his master. 'I am still alive, however, so now you can do what you will with me.' It is this sort of wit that rulers rewarded with either a bag of gold or instant execution, according to whim.

The book ends with a magnificent translation by Dick Davis of Obeyd Zakani's well-known poem *Mush o Gorbeh*, the Cat and the Mouse, a fable of a tyrannical cat of Kerman, a satire on Mubarez ul-Din Muhammad, the savage ruler of Shiraz. Davis is a poet in his own right and has produced better translations of Persian poetry into English than anyone. Most of his work is published by Mage in the USA.

Hasan Javadi is to be congratulated for producing this welcome antidote to misplaced romanticism about Persia. The ribaldry of Obeyd Zakani, the gentle reader should be warned, is not for the faint-hearted, but is no less amusing for that. One could pass happy hours with a Qazvini lorry driver discussing its finer points.

## IRAN – THE BRADT TRAVEL GUIDE

Patricia Baker, Bradt Travel Guides 2005 (new edition due July 2009)

Reviewed by Antony Wynn

I have always enjoyed the Bradt guides. Written by people who either live or work in the countries, or who have travelled extensively in them, the authors draw on the expertise of all sorts of academics, businessmen and local tour guides to provide a well rounded view of the countries in question. They are not backpackers' guides; they are for serious travellers who want to visit not just the obvious sites but to go off-piste to visit places not frequented by busloads of tourists. They are well written, lively and interesting, concerned just as much with the human as with the architectural, even giving the names of good local guides who will make that extra effort for you.

The flavour of Iran is given in 'a businessman's view', by an anonymous writer who clearly knows the place well and loves it. His advice is impeccable:

The savvy will be able to spot the drift of an opportunity by asking firm questions and getting their Iranian counterparts to follow firm agendas and sign minutes of meetings. Politeness and warm greetings are no substitute for serious and contested negotiations... The strength of the discussions, as opposed to mere civility, will tell the businessman he is on the right track... Negotiation is a national sport that most Iranians love... The overseas businessman must prepare for this sport. Practise a sour or disappointed look at the first mention of a discount. Work at this in front of a mirror. Until tears roll down your cheeks looking at your reflection, you have not practised enough... Always look both ways before crossing a one-way street. However inappropriate for the weather, always wear a jacket and tie, because it fits the Iranian idea of a foreign businessman... Try the local food and revel in the difference...

This is all very sound advice. More good advice follows for the traveller in difficulty with local officialdom:

Do not lose your temper, do not shout, do not threaten. Be polite, apologetic, not abject. Ladies, forget feminist scruples and cry.

There is a very useful list of England-based and local tour operators, most of whom can arrange tailor made trips to unusual places. A whole page is devoted to a description of a riding holiday with the well known Louise Firouz, who sadly died last May. The family are hoping to be able to arrange for these expeditions to continue.

There is a good section on the history of Iran. The only quibble I would

raise is the statement that 4000 anti-Shah demonstrators were killed in Tehran on 8th and 9th September 1978. As far as I was aware at the time, none were killed on 8th September and, although there was firing during most of the following day, the dead amounted to hundreds, not thousands. The description of each city starts with its history. Particularly good is the description of Kashan and its recently restored Qajar merchants' houses, much neglected by tourists in the past, but now a 'must'. Also good is the description of the mosques at Ardestan and Zavareh, between Kashan and Nain, the oldest mosques in Iran, which surprise all visitors with their numinous magic. Another gem, Nain, is also very well described.

The problem with all travel guides is that they are out of date the minute they are printed. The reproduction of the Ardebil carpet in the Victoria and Albert Museum, in progress when the author visited the shrine of Ardebil, has at last been finished and is in situ. There is no mention, for example, of the many very good private boutique hotels that now exist in the big cities, which are much better places to stay in than the tired old government hotels. Restaurants, of course, come and go, but there are many good ones that should be included in the new edition. The account of the monuments on Kharg Island, the oil terminal, is interesting, but no guidance is given as to how to get there. There is a perfectly decent hotel in Torbat-e Jam, with a friendly owner, and there is even an English lady hairdresser in this very remote spot, married to an Iranian, who has lived there for some years.

One piece of advice that the guide could have given is that, all over the country where there are historical monuments, there is usually an office of the Iran Cultural Heritage Organisation, the *Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi*, whose local officials are usually delighted to guide foreigners to little-known sites of interest and to open doors.

Enjoying Iran is a question of attitude, summed up nicely in this guide by an expatriate spouse:

Of course I was nervous about going to live in Iran; politics cannot be ignored, and neither can the chador... Iran is one of the safest places that I have lived in, and the wearing of a baggy *manteau* and a 1950s home counties headscarf makes one feel very secure... Inevitably, there are frustrations for the foreigner, but all is forgotten when a stranger invites one in for tea and cakes...

Every recent visitor to Iran that I have met has commented on the almost universal friendliness shown to them by people from all walks of life. They have all come back wishing that they had gone for longer. Now is the time to go, before the tourists start swarming all over it again.

## **EMPIRE OF THE MIND: A HISTORY OF IRAN**

Michael Axworthy, Hurst & Company, London, 2007.

ISBN 978-1-85065-871-9. £25.00.

Reviewed by David Blow

How did Iran assimilate its Arab, Turkic and Mongol conquerors, and to a large extent, in earlier times, its Graeco-Macedonian ones as well? How did the Persian language and a strong sense of Iranian identity survive for some eight and a half centuries after the Arab conquest, when there was no Iranian state as such? How did Iran extend its cultural reach far beyond its frontiers – into India in the south, where Persian became the official language of the Moghul Empire; into Central Asia in the east, where Persian remains the language of Tajikistan and of much of Afghanistan; and into the Ottoman Empire in the west, where it became the language of diplomacy and where the Sultans wrote Persian poetry? The answer, according to Michael Axworthy, is that Iran was fundamentally an ‘Empire of the Mind’.

It is a persuasive way of viewing Iranian history, although, as Axworthy points out, the strong literary element in Iranian culture was absent in Achaemenid times when, as he says, Persians were taught to ride, to shoot the bow and to tell the truth, but not, it seems, to write. In an interesting attempt to explain this, Axworthy cites what he describes as an early tradition that the Iranian peoples, and the Magian priesthood in particular, “considered writing to be alien and demonic”. His suggestion is “that they associated it with the Semitic and other peoples among whom they found themselves” in the centuries after they migrated from southern Russia onto the Iranian plateau. Whatever the reason, in the Achaemenid, and also in the Parthian worlds, history, legends and stories were transmitted orally. “The Achaemenid Empire,” concludes Axworthy, “was an Empire of the Mind, but a different kind of Mind.” Although a literary culture emerged under the Sasanids, the oral tradition remained strong and it was largely in this way that the memory of ancient Iran was kept alive after the Arab conquest. The transmitters of Iranian culture during this crucial period, as Axworthy explains, were the class of small landowners known as *dehqans*, who came into being in Sasanid times and who played a leading role as scholars and bureaucrats in the new Iran that was a part of the Islamic caliphate. The Samanid rulers of Transoxania and Khurasan, who promoted the first great flowering of Perso-Islamic culture in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, were of *dehqan* stock.

Axworthy draws attention to some of the ideas and beliefs of ancient Iran which were carried over into the Islamic period, such as the concept of the just



ruler, as well as millenarian, gnostic and egalitarian beliefs. Old patterns, too, repeat themselves, so that he finds striking parallels between the unsuccessful rebellion led by Gaumata the Magian in 522 BC and the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79 led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Gaumata's was "an Iranian revolution," writes Axworthy, "led by a charismatic cleric, seizing power from an oppressive monarch, asserting religious orthodoxy, attacking false believers, and drawing support from economic grievances. How modern that sounds." He also notes that traditional Persian tolerance gives way to intolerance once clerics gain too much influence in the state, as the Zoroastrian high priest, Kerdir, did under the Sasanids, as also did the Shi'ite chief mullah, Muhammad Baqer al-Majlesi under the Safavids, and as has been the case under the current theocracy in Iran. Axworthy observes that the attitude towards the religious minorities became more hostile after the adoption of Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran under the Safavids in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and that since then the Jews, who are the oldest minority, and the Baha'is, who are the youngest, have suffered the worst persecution.

Axworthy points out that the religious minorities fared best under Nader Shah (1736-'47) and the Pahlavis (1925-1979), who had little or no religious conviction themselves and were in varying degrees hostile to the Shi'ite clergy. As the author of an important biography of Nader Shah, Axworthy commands attention when he emphasises Nader's role as a modernising reformer, citing his reforms of the military, the administration and the tax system. He argues that had Nader continued down this path and not become deranged in the last years of his life, he might have made Iran strong enough to resist the subsequent Anglo-Russian interference in its affairs.

One of the many merits of this book is the space devoted to the classical Persian poets and to the Sufism that inspired so much of their work. This poetry is not only a supreme cultural achievement, but it is also of the greatest importance to all Iranians, regardless of their background. Axworthy may not be overstating the case when he says that out of it emerged the Iranian soul. But the mesmerising effect of the poetry and its grip on the Iranian mind has not been without its critics. Axworthy mentions a principal one in modern times – the historian and secular nationalist intellectual, Ahmad Kasravi (1890-1946), who criticized the habit of many Iranians of quoting from the poets rather than thinking for themselves.

It may come as a surprise to some to learn that the stern leader of the Islamic Revolution, the Ayatollah Khomeini, was much influenced by Sufism – not, however, by the outpourings of mystical love found, for example, in the poetry of Rumi, but by the concept of the Perfect Man developed by the 13<sup>th</sup> century Sufi thinker, Ibn Arabi. This enables Axworthy to give a fascinating explanation

of Khomeini's well-known reply to an enquiring foreign journalist, that he felt 'nothing' on returning to Iran in triumph after so many years in exile. "Through contemplation, religious observance and discipline," writes Axworthy, "his aim was to approach the point at which his inner world reflected the world beyond himself, and in turn, reflected and became a channel for the mind of God..... The *mojtahed* on the path to becoming the Perfect Man had no place for feelings or the manifestation of feelings."

This short history of Iran was designed for the general reader and fulfils that purpose admirably. But Axworthy throws out so many thought-provoking ideas that his book can also be read with enjoyment and profit by those more familiar with the subject.

## **IRAN – A CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY**

HISTORY, CULTURE, ARCHITECTURE

Saeed Alizadeh, Alireza Pahlavani, Ali Sadrnia

Published by the authors, [www.iran-history.com](http://www.iran-history.com)

ISBN 964 06 1413 0

Reviewed by Antony Wynn

This is a handbook for the non-specialist who needs to look up the dates of the important events of Iranian history from the birth of Cyrus to the Islamic Revolution. Just seeing that it takes 140 pages to cover the period from the Achaemenians to the Safavids and only 30 pages for the rest brings home the very antiquity of Iran.

The authors insert among the events of Iranian history other events in Europe that are intended to give some context. How many of us would reflect that the Great Fire of London took place in the last year of the reign of Shah Abbas I, or that Machiavelli died three years after Shah Ismail, or that Genghis Khan was born in the year that Oxford University was founded?

Commentators on Iranian affairs are not always familiar with the early history of Islam, which is dinned into the ears of every Iranian schoolchild and forms their thinking. This book is good on the lives of the Prophet and of the Imams. A welcome addition would be more detail on the events in Iran during World War I, particularly the extent of Turkish occupation, which is barely mentioned.

At the end of the book is a list of the principal archaeological sites, with a brief account of them, a brief look at prehistory back to the Elamites of 4500BC, a list of the kings and their dates. The scope of the book can be seen in its index, which ranges in the letter S from Saddam Hussein to Squinch-net vaulting, Sohravardi, Salamis and Shakespeare. All good stuff, and plenty of ammunition for quiz setters.

## IN THE ROSE GARDEN OF THE MARTYRS

A Memoir of Iran:

Christopher de Bellaigue, Harper Collins 2004

ISBN 0-00-711393-5 £20

Reviewed by Antony Wynn

The author, who is married to an Iranian, lived for four years in Tehran writing for *The Economist* and other journals. He learned to speak Persian well and, unusually for a foreign journalist, interested himself in the ordinary working-class people of Tehran who live down in the traditional south of the city, away from the privileged northern suburbanites up the mountainside, detached from the city life below. These are the people who turned out in their tens and then hundreds of thousands in 1978 and 1979 to rid the country of the Shah and all his works. Simple Muslims for the most part, these ordinary people were led to believe that an Islamic government would bring them a better world.

de Bellaigue has a sensitive feel for the pulse of the common man of Iran. His subjects are part of a traditional society, held together by family, neighbourhood and mosque. The Iranian Shi'i mind is fed by the constant remembrance of the martyrdom of the Imam Hossein. Grown and sober men, when the mullas pull at their heartstrings during *Ashura*, will weep and flail their backs with chains to a bruised and bloody mess. To witness this process at work is to understand how the Shi'i mind is moulded into a longing for martyrdom. de Bellaigue visits *Ta'zieh* plays performed to commemorate the death of Hossein at the battle of Kerbela. He explains, better than any other contemporary writer, why the man in the street venerates the Imam Hossein and his father the Imam Ali, who is buried at Najaf, as symbols of a heroic attempt to right injustice and to rid the world of the corruption of the day. Reading his account, one can see just why Najaf is such a holy place for the Shi'i. de Bellaigue notes the skill of the preachers at bringing tears to the eyes of their hearers. He might also have noted that at least one liberal senior cleric has declared these *Ashura* practices to be a perversion of Islam.

After the revolution came war with Iraq. The western press printed many lurid articles about waves of teenage *Basij* volunteers charging over the Iraqi minefields to clear a path for the army behind, but little attempt was made to understand what inspired them. de Bellaigue interviews survivors of this war. As he listens to these men – some of whom were not teenagers at the time but grown men with families – their simple patriotism, combined with their traditional piety in the face of the horrors of war and of enemy nerve gas, sings from the page. Not all of these men were brainwashed fanatics. It is too

simplistic for the west to say that the mullas just manipulated these people; there was more to it than that, and this is what de Bellaigue is trying to put his finger on.

He takes up the story of a Revolutionary Guard during the war with Iraq. A famously brave man, and successful in the field, he discouraged useless martyrdom. Greatly admired for his heroism and for the way he looked after his men, he attracted a large following of admirers as he rose through the ranks and was made a public hero. One day he was mysteriously killed in action. It was whispered that he had attracted too large a following and had fallen out with the authorities.

In one of the most illuminating chapters, the author visits the seminaries of Qom and listens to young mullas, often lonely and far from home, talking about their training. It starts with Arabic grammar and moves on to rhetoric and logic. Armed with these three, the weaker minds are safe against the assaults of Philosophy, that seductive Greek harlot who suggests that human reason is higher than divine revelation. Only the steadiest minds of Qom are allowed a sniff at her heady Hellenic arts.

In the Tehran bazaar de Bellaigue introduces us to the toughs of the *zurkhaneh* [house of strength], occasionally visited as a folkloric curiosity, but in reality a chivalric guild of ruffians of rough and ready patriotism, of a sinful piety in public, of virtue at home and violence on the street – and able to bring out mobs to order, as they did in 1953 to remove Mosaddeq.

Other chapters deal, albeit at second-hand, with the revolution of 1979 and with more recent events. The best parts of the book are where the author steps back and lets his subjects speak for themselves, even though he had to be circumspect about what he let them say. He has gone very close indeed to the bone. Although some might argue with the author about his interpretation of some historical events and carp at minor errors of detail, those contemplating doing business with the Iran of today, whether as diplomats or oil men, will find no better guide to the mindset of their interlocutors.

## PERSIA THROUGH WRITERS' EYES

David Blow, Eland Press, 2007,  
ISBN 978 0955010 55 2

Reviewed by Sarah Searight

David Blow introduces this admirable selection of mostly foreign writers on 'Persia' (he prefers 'Persia' to 'Iran' for 'having a richer resonance for Europeans') by reminiscing on how on long bus rides through the country he filled the landscape with the countless Persian and foreign armies that had also criss-crossed the land, as well as with the slow and more peaceful movement of courts between winter and summer palaces and hunting grounds or merchants on the ancient caravan routes that traverse desert and mountain – 'sweet to ride forth at evening from the wells' (not quoted, however, nor its important sequel: 'for lust of knowing what may not be known'). The excerpts re-peopled the landscape for me, especially the region I was mainly visiting – the wide open hills of Iranian Azerbaijan repeatedly scoured by Turkish, Mongol and more Turkish horsemen. It is a landscape, often apparently empty for miles on end, now filled once more by these writers.

Thanks to *Persia through Writers' Eyes*, I revived many an old friendship on a recent journey – from Xenophon to Jonas Hanway to Robert Byron and Shusha Guppy. Few of them set out to write about the country they travelled through but then they were bewitched; they knew the ignorance of the folk back home and how important it was to reduce that ignorance. After all, in the seventeenth century Isfahan was *nesf-i jihan*, half the world, and a great deal more elegant and sophisticated than the average European city of the period. The book is divided into seven chronological sections, each of which is prefaced by an italicised preliminary paragraph followed by a not so potted history of the particular period.

There is a thrilling excerpt from Aeschylus' play *The Persians* describing the Persian defeat at Salamis, translated superbly by Gilbert Murray and accompanied by 'The Persian Version' by Robert Graves ('Truth-loving Persians do not dwell upon /The trivial skirmish fought near Marathon'), followed by a remarkably detailed description of the Persians by Herodotus. And a piece from Xenophon (who surely knew them well) on Persians as they would most like to be seen, as cultivators and gardeners. Medieval Iran is a bit thin – Marco Polo of course including his description of the Assassins, a snippet by Ibn Battuta (the only Arab in the compendium) and the Castilian Ruy

Gonzales de Clavijo who reached Timur Lang when the dying brute had to be carried by litter to inspect his enormous new mosque in Samarkand. I would have liked to see one or two more Arab travellers – Ibn Hawkal perhaps on the Great Khurasan Road, Yaqubi or Muqaddasi. In the seventeenth century we have the adventurous Dutch artist and travel writer Cornelius de Bruyn, by the nineteenth century and preliminary moves in the Great Game we have John Malcolm from the East India Company vying with Harford Jones Brydges despatched from London, later Lady Sheil (one of my favourites), and in the twentieth century the recently deceased Shusha Guppy on her Persian childhood (one of the few natives to be included). Anthony Parsons, British ambassador at the time of the Shah's departure, bids a poignant 'farewell to a broken Shah'; the Shah had to tell him not to weep. We conclude in the twenty-first century with a hilarious report by Christopher de Bellaigue on a taxi ride in Isfahan. There are some notable omissions, for instance the wonderfully informative Hajji Baba, and the equally informative but ponderously Persophile, E.G. Browne. One can't have everyone and those we do have, are informative, often erudite, often entertaining.

Just to demonstrate this book is not just for travellers, I shall end with the following quotation from Sir John Malcolm. 'The citizens of Persia,' he wrote in his *History of Persia*, 'are not subdued by their situation into a submissive temper. They are easily inflamed into passion, and, act, when under its influence, like men careless of the result. A stranger, unacquainted with the nature of the government, and the latitude of speech which it permits in the persons it oppresses, is surprised to hear the meanest inhabitant of a town venting imprecations against his superiors, nay, sometimes against the King himself. These extraordinary ebullitions of passion, which are very common among the lower orders, generally pass unheeded. Sometimes they may provoke a reproof, or a few blows, but they never receive consequence from the unwise interference of power.' Should Mr Blow send a copy of his book to the White House?

