

# JOURNAL OF THE IRAN SOCIETY



# JOURNAL OF THE IRAN SOCIETY

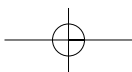
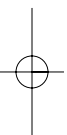
Editors: David Blow and Ben Cuddon

VOL. 2 NO. 9

## CONTENTS

Chairman's Foreword	7
Lectures:	
THE ZILL AL-SULTAN: PLACES, TRENDS AND TRAJECTORIES OF HIS POLITICAL CAREER	9
THE PERSIAN PRESS: FROM PULPIT TO PODCAST	28
THE IRANIAN GAS TRUNKLINE	38
Articles:	
FROM ISLAMIC SMALL TOWN TO WESTERNISED METROPOLIS	45
THE SHAHNAMEH AND BRITISH PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II	69
FROM THE TEHRAN PRESS	76
Travel Scholar's Report	
CALLIGRAPHY IN IRANIAN ART	78
Books:	
REFORMERS AND REVOLUTIONARIES IN MODERN IRAN	82
THE PERSIANS: ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL AND MODERN IRAN	86
AMONG THE IRANIANS: A GUIDE TO IRAN'S CULTURE AND CUSTOMS	90

2 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PJ  
Telephone : 020 7235 5122 Fax : 020 7259 6771  
Web Site : [www.iransociety.org](http://www.iransociety.org) Email : [info@iransociety.org](mailto:info@iransociety.org)  
Registered Charity No 248678



**OFFICERS AND COUNCIL 2010**  
(as of the AGM held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2010)

*Patron (ex-officio)*

H.E. THE AMBASSADOR OF  
THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

*President*

SIR RICHARD DALTON K.C.M.G.

*Vice-Presidents*

SIR MARTIN BERTHOUD K.C.V.O., C.M.G.

MR M. NOËL-CLARKE

MR B. GOLSHAIAN

MR H. ARBUTHNOTT C.M.G.

*Chairman*

MR A. WYNN

*Hon. Secretary*

MRS M. ANSARI

*Hon. Treasurer*

MR R. M. MACKENZIE

*Hon. Lecture Secretary*

MRS J. RADY

*Members of Council*

Dr F. Ala

Dr M-A. Ala

Mr S. Ala

Mr D. Blow

Mr R. Fattorini

Dr T. Fitzherbert

Mr A. Tahbaz

## CORPORATE MEMBERS

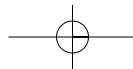
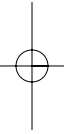
Balli Group plc

BP plc

HSBC Bank plc

HSBC Private Bank (UK) Ltd

Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art



# THE IRAN SOCIETY

## OBJECTS

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

## ACTIVITIES

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

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

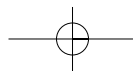
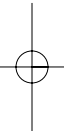
Do all such other lawful and charitable things as shall further the attainment of the objects of the Society or any of them.

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

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

## **JOURNAL**

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



## CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I am grateful to David Blow for taking over the editorship of this journal. With his experience of journalism and authorship, he is more than qualified to undertake this task. He is ably assisted on the technical side by Ben Cuddon, a recent travel scholar of the Society.

With Iran continually in the news, we have had to consider more than ever what the role of the Society should be. When the Society was founded, it was at the suggestion of the Persian Minister to London of the day, who complained that many of the British who were going to Iran at the time, or dealing with Iran from London, whether they were engaged in commerce, oil or diplomacy, were woefully ignorant about his country, its history and its culture and, in particular, of what made Iran different from Arabia or India. Our lecture programme therefore endeavours to put this right, by showing what has made Iran into what it is today, in some of its complexity. Our rules make it clear that the Society shall not engage in any political activity. This does not mean, however, that we should bar ourselves from looking, not only at past glories, but also at some of the more recent history of Iran while some of our members are still young enough to remember it and pass on their personal experiences, which may not have passed into recorded history.

This year is the millennium of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. The Fitzwilliam Museum of Cambridge has arranged an exhibition of illuminated manuscripts of this great Persian epic, which runs until January 2011, and a guided viewing has been organised for members.



Next year will be the centenary of the founding of The Persia Society, which in 1935 became The Iran Society. We are working on a suitable celebration. Sir Richard Dalton, our new President, has given us much encouragement and I am grateful to him for his support and for his suggestions for widening the base of our membership.

This year has seen us move our lectures to Canning House, which has given us the use of a larger room and brings us closer to our office, which we share with the Royal Society for Asian Affairs. The larger space enables us to accommodate more comfortably our growing membership. I would like to record our thanks to Morven Hutchison of the RSAA, who has given us, more than ever, a great deal of help with the running of our affairs and with dispensing the refreshments before lectures.

Finally I would like to record my thanks to Janet Rady, our honorary lecture secretary who, while running her new gallery of Persian art, puts a great deal of time and effort into putting together the programme of events, which is no easy task.

**Antony Wynn**

## THE ZILL AL-SULTAN: PLACES, TRENDS AND TRAJECTORIES OF HIS POLITICAL CAREER

Lecture given by Dr. Heidi Walcher on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009.

Mas'ūd Mīrẓā, who is better known by his later title of Zill al-Sultān, was born in 1850. Having survived three infant half-brothers, he was Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh's eldest son, next to his younger brothers the crown prince Muzaffar al-Dīn Mīrẓā and the shāh's favourite son Kāmṛān Mīrẓā. His mother, 'Iffat al-Saltanih ('Chastity of the Sovereign') was one of the shāh's early concubines. She was the daughter of one of the shāh's former servant-nurses and Riẓā Qulī Khān Ghulām, a court official. The fact that she was not a Qajar princess meant that Mas'ud Mirza was excluded from the succession in favour of his younger brother Muzaffar al-Dīn Mīrẓā.<sup>1</sup>

The Qajar practice of appointing the young princes to governorships and administrative posts, usually accompanied by an experienced official, imparted a certain 'training on the job', but it was also used by Nāsir al-Dīn Shah to control their closeness or distance from the court in Tehran. The often complex kinship relations engendered by multiple marriages and Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh's habit of pitching the princes against each other drove their competitiveness, but also created irreconcilable enmities among them, which pervaded the relations of the Nāsiri court and family.

The Zill al-Sultān, establishing his own quasi-royal family, had at least twelve wives. His large number of children, with fourteen sons and ten daughters, were a royal privilege and repeated patterns by Fath 'Alī Shāh and Abbās Mīrẓā, who had deliberately created

<sup>1</sup> Though some descendants dispute the non-Qajar descent of his mother, all available sources indicate that 'Iffat al-Saltanih was not a princess of one of the Qajar tribes, which was maintained as a crucial criterion for the succession to the throne. She died of cholera in 1310 [1892/93]. See: Abbas Amanat: *Pivot of the Universe*, IB Tauris, 1997 p. 37.

extremely large families as a statement of royalty, status, power and virility.

### **Titles and Ambitions**

In 1860/61, when he was only 11 years old, Mas'ūd Mīrzā received his first governorship in the northern provinces and was styled Yamīn al-Dawlih (Right Hand of the Government).<sup>2</sup> In 1866 he was made governor of Isfahan for the first time, in which post he was accompanied as his acting minister by the seasoned Amīr Arsalān Khān Majd al-Dawlih. At this time he also married Hamdam al-Saltanih, the daughter of Amīr Kabīr. Complaints about the embezzlement of taxes and bad government led to the young prince's recall and his guardian minister was replaced by Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Khān Shīrāzī Sāhib Dīvān. Two years later he was appointed to Fars, another important southern province and in 1874 he was again made governor of Isfahan. Now older, more experienced and intensely ambitious, this inaugurated a new phase in his political career in a position which he held for over thirty years – a period which shaped the immutable evocations of his image and irrevocably entwined his name with that of Isfahan.

In 1870, when reconfirmed as governor of Fars, the shāh conferred on him the legendary title Zill al-Sultān, by which he is remembered as one of the most controversial and scorned Qajar personalities, and which emerged as a label reflecting all the meanings and connotations of the term. In a certain sense it was both a title of high honour and one carrying a foreboding symbolic weight.

The title Zill al-Sultān, literally meaning the shadow of the king, bears an explicitly positive connotation, proclaiming the innately regal and indivisible part of his father's royal absoluteness. The title was both an extension and a diminutive of the royal title 'Shadow of God on Earth' (*zill allah fī'l 'arz*— a concept more current in Safavid than Qajar times). Following this logic it expressed the son's inseparable share in the divine royalty. It also stated the king's particular affection and esteem. At the same time, however, the holder remained merely the shadow of the king, unconditionally

---

<sup>2</sup> He was then governor of Māzandarān, Astarābād, Dasht-i Gurgān, Simnān, and Damghān in place of the shāh's uncle Mulk Ārā.

dependent on the shāh and quite unable to supersede him. Over the years, and particularly after the coronation of his unpopular brother in 1896, the title seemed to solidify into an almost cynical designation of Mas'ūd Mīrzā's claim to the throne – a claim that was not completely unjustified. In this sense, he was stuck in the shadow of his father and later in that of his younger half-brother, Muzaffār al-Dīn Shāh, which was even worse. Despite his abilities, astuteness and numerous efforts and intrigues to realize his royal aspiration he was unable to obtain the crown.

The title Zill al-Sultān was held before him by his great-uncle 'Alī Mīrzā, also known as Ādil Shāh, tenth son of Fath 'Alī Shāh, who at the latter's death rebelled against the crown prince and seized the crown for forty days before being exiled to Karbala. After the Zill al-Sultān's death his family insisted that the title would not be passed on to any other prince. A son of his younger brother, Kāmrān Mīrzā, eventually succeeded in obtaining a variation of the title as Zill al-Saltanih (Shadow of the Kingdom). But by the 1920s, particularly after the abolition of the Qajar monarchy, most of these titles lost their prestige and meaning.

The crown of Persia was the Zill al-Sultān's driving and life-long ambition. Only at the lowest point of his career, towards the end of his life, when he was utterly disillusioned and ill, did he seem to have surrendered this dream. Various stories stress his daring of offering the shāh one million Tumāns in 1880/81 if he would make him crown prince. According to one source, the shāh wrote to the Crown Prince, Muzaffār al-Dīn Mīrzā, asking him to match the Zill's offer. He received, however, a sarcastic reply from the prince's minister, commenting that once the Zill al-Sultān was nominated crown prince he would offer five million Tumāns to replace the shāh himself.<sup>3</sup>

Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh certainly recognized his son's aspirations. The governorship of Isfahan, which was grand, difficult and sufficiently far from Tehran, seemed the perfect position to appease Mas'ūd Mīrzā's ambitions and his talent for politics. Yet, in 1888, under the influence of his prime minister, the Amīn al-Sultān, Nasir al-Dīn Shāh ensured

<sup>3</sup> See: Shaykh Jābirī Ansārī: *Tārīkh-i Isfahān va Ray va Hamīh-yi Jahān*; Tīhrān, 1321 [1952], p. 286. Other sources give the date 1883 (1300).

that his son could not rise any further, by stripping him of all his governorships, save that of Isfahan.

### Perceptions, Reputations and Stories

Image and reputation played an important role in relation to the figure of the Zill al-Sultān, with a deliberate and rather modern use of the media in the form of texts such as newspapers and travel books, but also photography, rumour, colportage etc. During his early years as governor of Isfahan the Zill al-Sultān went to great lengths to promote his persona and public perception, particularly among European visitors, and Isfahan, with its ancient and charismatic Safavid palaces, offered the historical stage for a quasi-autonomous provincial court, which rarely failed to impress the Europeans.

There was a distinct evolution of the Zill al-Sultān's image over the span of his life. Earlier European descriptions of him, like most Persian ones, were largely approving and commendatory. Visitors were taken by the young prince's verve and power. In the 1870s a British traveller described him in glowing terms as "a youthful likeness" of the shāh with "an unexhausted appetite for enjoyment and consciousness of arbitrary power," and "a bold sportsman with the ambition to be a warrior."<sup>4</sup> Another early description found him "good-looking" and a "fine good-humoured youth, full of spirits", "clever, tolerant," enjoying great "popularity as a "good" and "severe governor." The typical rhetorical pattern juxtaposed such attributes alongside those of the crown prince, Muzaffar al-Dīn Mīrzā, who was described as "physically weak, and mentally imbecile," "impractical" and a "bigot."<sup>5</sup>

However, when the royal favour was withdrawn in 1888, European reflections on his character, appearance and politics changed in tone and sympathy -- strongly influenced in part by Curzon's pronouncedly sarcastic and antipathetic 1892 account. Descriptions of the prince took an explicitly negative bent, dwelling on his corpulence, squint, cruelty,

<sup>4</sup> See: Arthur Arnold: *Through Persia by Caravan*; Harper Brothers, New York, 1877, pp. 252-4.

<sup>5</sup> Charles J. Wills: *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun, or Modern Persia. Being Experiences of life in Persia from 1866-1881*, Ward, Lock and Co., London, New York, Melbourne, 1891, pp. 146, 199, 366.

and gout. There was a noticeable change in the tone of the foreign press—shifting from darling to villain, which in turn had unmistakable negative ramifications for his career.

There are countless anecdotes, which dwell on and endlessly rehash the negative aspects of his personality. These include the story that, as a child, he gouged out sparrows' eyes with nails, and the tale that he set up a pigsty on the way to his residence in order to humiliate the clerics who had to pass through it when visiting him on business, or the better authenticated story that he boastfully pissed into a flower pot in front of the minister of the press, I'timād al-Saltanih.<sup>6</sup>

The Zill al-Sultān's own self-projection of an image of power and cleverness also contributed to his lasting reputation as the most formidable, ruthless and avaricious figure of the Qajar regime. Accusations of murder damaged his reputation beyond redemption. The prince is alleged to have used poison to murder Mīrzā Husayn Sirāj al-Mulk in 1880, a minister, during his first tenure in Isfahan. In 1882, on the order of his father, he poisoned the Īlkhānī of the Bakhtiyārī tribe, Husayn Qulī Khān. There is no doubt that he killed his vazir Habīballāh Khān Ansārī Mushīr al-Mulk in 1891/92. He may also have killed another of his officials, Mīrzā Rizā Hākīm Banān al-Mulk, and the Sāram al-Dawlih, husband of his influential sister Iftikhār al-Saltanih Bānū 'Azmā<sup>7</sup> in 1888. The last three seemed to

<sup>6</sup> See: M. Hakīmī: *Dāstānhā-yi az Asr-i Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh*, Chāpkhānih-yi Rashīd, Tih-rān, 1366 (1988).

<sup>7</sup> For most of her life she seems to have lived in Isfahan where she acquired large wealth and was considered highly influential. Her sons and daughters intermarried with those of the Zill al-Sultān. The Zill al-Sultān writes that as a little girl she was always with him. In 1920 she spent some time in Kāzima-yin in Iraq in order to prepare her burial place in Najaf, also contemplating leaving some of her wealth for the endowment of a hospital, against her sons' hopes for a substantial inheritance. She was accompanied by a parrot in a small house. A cousin of the Āqā Khān then acted as her personal assistant. Gertrude Bell who met her there described her as an "intrepid woman," assertive against her "men folk," and going about Najaf "scarcely veiled." Bell deemed her once very "beautiful," with great "native distinction,"—an "intrepid woman," assertive against

have been involved in one way or another in the affair of his 1888 demotion.

Guilty of murder, and justly or unjustly accused of all sorts of other sins and misdeeds, such as the deliberate destruction of Isfahan's Safavid architecture, unscrupulous self-enrichment and rape, the Zill al-Sultān has emerged as a historical villain. The negative truths and myths turned him into the personification of Qajar despotism and decadence, an image which in retrospect was seen to justify his and the dynasty's demise.



The Zill al-Sultan in Military Dress

---

her "men folk" and going about Najaf "scarcely veiled." Gertrude Bell: Letters: Sunday [5, 12, 18 December 1920], Robinson Library Newcastle. Also in: *The Letters Of Gertrude Bell*, Boni and Liveright Publishers New York, London, 1927, vol. 2, chapter 19.

Yet, the historical context and causalities were far more complicated and an unsophisticated vilification of the Zill al-Sultān, however convenient, explains nothing of that. A crude and perhaps even propagandist judgment along the lines of good and evil, which has shaped the image by which the Zill al-Sultān has been remembered, has missed a more meaningful understanding of the historical realities and political situation of his time. It is conspicuous that despite the prominent negativity of his name, much information is still not accessible and even basic biographic details remain obscure and often anecdotal rather than factual.

### **The Scope of Isfahan**

Similar to the clear-cut clichés about the Zill al-Sultān, Isfahan is associated with a number of specific truisms about its historical and urban grandeur, its later ‘decline,’ and its mercantile mentalities and religious piety, which have been evoked, propagated, reconfirmed and adjusted through various historical periods. Isfahan’s socio-cultural milieu and the Zill al-Sultān’s provincial court were closely intertwined. Late Qajar Isfahan had multiple meanings, which are relevant in order to understand the trajectory of the Zill al-Sultān’s career.

Isfahan was the grand capital of the Saljuqs and five centuries later that of the Safavids. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, the successors of the Safavids forsook the city in favour of Mashhad and Shiraz and in 1796 Āghā Muhammad Khān moved the capital permanently to Tehran, shifting the centre of power to the north. For Isfahan the loss of status and the transition from capital to provincial city was extremely difficult. For decades the city’s urban elite harboured hopes for the re-establishment of Isfahan as the centre of power. To that end, in the early 1800s, the governor of Isfahan sponsored a palace there for Fath Alī Shāh; in 1835 ‘Abdallah Khān Amīn al-Dawlih, supported by the city’s most influential cleric Muhammad Bāqir Shafī, orchestrated a broad coalition of the south, enlisting the prince governors of Kirman and Fars against the succession of the incumbent crown prince Muhammad Shāh, obviously also hoping to re-establish Isfahan as a centre of power and the new Qajar capital.

All of this is also an expression of 19<sup>th</sup> century Isfahan’s political aspirations and self-importance, evincing an innate dislike of Tehran.



In a certain sense this polarity was repeated in the Zill al-Sultān's construction of his own quasi-court in Isfahan and his often stressed relations with the court at Tehran.

Even by the late Qajar period Isfahan still had an enduring patina of Safavid kingship, which accentuated the Zill al-Sultān's ambitions to the throne and compounded the already tense relations between him and the shāh.

Isfahan in the early 1910s was still considered the country's largest commercial centre between the Persian Gulf and the rest of Iran. In this sense, the city's politics and the role of the Zill al-Sultān as local ruler had a crucial influence on trade networks, commerce and the economy of Iran. The Zill al-Sultān occasionally played a crucial part in guarantees and backings for merchants who had payment difficulties. By such means he was able to interfere directly in the mercantile relations of Isfahan.

From the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century opium was the decisive factor in Isfahan's economy, superseding by far other cash crops like cotton and tobacco. The massive expansion of the cultivation, processing and export of opium enabled a number of merchants and large landowners to acquire enormous wealth, which in turn had immediate ramifications on the terms of trade, on socio-economic competition, and on land values both in the city and the surrounding countryside. The merchants and the landowning elite emerged as an economic group, acutely aware of its own economic interests – an awareness that was sharpened by the increasing commercial pressure of British business, the competitiveness of the economic milieu, and the political demands and expectations. As governor, the Zill al-Sultān's position was at the conjunction of these actors and demands.

As important as the commercial infrastructure was the fact that Qajar Isfahan managed to assert itself as the leading theological and religious centre in Iran. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century certain members of the city's elite even aspired to push Isfahan's importance against the weight of the Shi'ite shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq. Isfahan had the largest number of clerics, students and theological seminaries in the country, which meant a pervasive, influential Shi'ite orthodoxy with a number of high-profile clerical families. The involvement of a very visible and zealous Anglican mission since the 1870s as well as a proliferating and active Bābī community, and a large indigenous Jewish population underlined religious relevancies and dissension.

Contrary to the widespread notion of 19<sup>th</sup> century Isfahan as an open, cosmopolitan, tolerant city, it was a rather conservative, dogmatic and closed religio-political environment. One of the most determining factors of the Zill al-Sultān's rule in Isfahan was the influence of the important clerical families, the most prominent being the Āqāyān-i Masjīd-i Shāh or the clan of the Imām Jum'ih.

Lastly, Isfahan had a crucial geostrategic position and managed to control (against the competition of Shiraz), the majority of trade to the Persian Gulf. This point, specifically, was relevant for the British for whom Isfahan since the 1880s gained greater political and commercial importance. With the opening of a consulate in 1892 this consolidated into a political base, with the consent of the Zill al-Sultān, who saw advantages in another political player for his policy of balancing the various forces and interest groups in Isfahan and Tehran. At the same time, he must have seen the danger of Britain using him for its own purposes too.

All of these factors made Qajar Isfahan more than a provincial backwater, keeping it part of Iran's commercial, political and religious nexus. It posed as Tehran's alter ego and its governorship was thus both opportunity and challenge, reward and 'exile'. Over the years, the Zill al-Sultān established a miniature court in Isfahan and turned the city into his capital. As Iran's second city, its notable position also solidified the contrapuntal bipolarity of both cities as well as of the shāh and his son.

Determined to prove himself, young Mas'ūd Mīrzā had seized the challenge of ruling Isfahan--the country's most flamboyant but also most difficult governorship, at which most previous governors had failed. He managed to turn the city into his quasi-fief for over thirty-three years. Wilful, ambitious, conscious of his advantages of power and a master of the circuitous nature of Persian politics, he succeeded in using Isfahan's particular challenges for his own aims and turning it into his domain. With this base he vastly expanded his governorships, which at the height of his career covered about two-thirds of Iran.<sup>8</sup> As one of the largest landowners, with control over taxes and salaries and

<sup>8</sup> In 1878 he received the governorship of Burūjird, Khunsār, Kamarih and Mahalāt, in 1879 Yazd, in 1880 Khuzistān, Luristān and 'Arāq and Fārs, in 1882 Kurdistān. By 1888 he also held Kirmānshāh, Darjazīn, and Gulpaygān. See: Ansārī: *Tārīkh-i Isfahān va Ray*, passim.

heavily invested in trade, he amassed enormous wealth. A military enthusiast, keenly aware of its use as both a persuasive and a martial force, he assembled, with the shāh's sanction, Persia's largest and most effective troops. By the mid-1880s the Zill al-Sultān had succeeded in constructing a state within the state. One of the widely circulating and overused sayings claimed that he was only a "little smaller" than the shāh.

### **Trends in the Relationship with Britain**

From the 1890s Britain's drive for greater imperial and commercial control was the most defining factor of Isfahan's politics and, in consequence, of the Zill al-Sultān's political life. He was regarded as a partisan and servant of Britain, for which he was later criticized. Governing the important central and southern provinces he was bound to deal with the British and when it suited his goals he had no qualms about doing deals or collaborating with them. Yet, he was always aware of the limits of this kind of partisanship. Particularly in the latter part of his career he frequently acted against British interests when he found them in conflict with his own. In the early 1900s he openly complained to the British envoy about Britain's "disgusting policy" and unreliability, adding, "I have often been smothered in their smoke, but never warmed by their fire."<sup>9</sup> Much of the Zill al-Sultān's image as unconditional British stooge seems a retrospective projection of the far more extensive political dependency of his son Sāram al-Dawlih, who under changed imperial parameters was more immediately dependent on British backing and was forced to submit to Britain's agenda to a far greater extent for his political survival.

The 'Karun scheme,' by which Britain tried for about two decades to get the monopoly steam navigation rights on the Karun River, emerged as a crucial catalyst for the Zill al-Sultān's career in a number of ways. He laid his reputation on the line by offering himself as the most influential broker in persuading Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh to drop his rock solid rejection of the scheme. As a reward he demanded the

---

<sup>9</sup> Preece to Hardinge; No. 57, confidential, 31 December 1901; FO 60/650.

decoration of the Order of the Star of India, one of the Empire's most prestigious decorations.

These negotiations took place in the context of ongoing though not explicit discussions between Britain and Russia about the possible partition of Iran, to which was tied the very sensitive question of the succession. The Zill al-Sultān strove unrelentingly to ensure that he would be the only possible candidate for the throne of a southern domain. During the optimistic phase of his early career a highly active public relations campaign among Europeans was part of his design on the throne, or on obtaining autonomy in the case of partition.

After long-drawn-out discussions the British finally agreed in November 1887 to grant him the prestigious decoration and styled him "Grand Commander of the Order of the Star of India" in exchange for the Karun concession. Aside from the fact that the decoration weighed heavily in terms of status and honour, for the Zill al-Sultān the Order of the Star of India had further implications. Beyond the simple measure of prestige, it was a statement of symbolic value for both the Iranian and European environments, demonstrating that the Zill al-Sultān had joined the ranks of the Empire's highest elite. By 1905, for example, he was listed as Honorary Knight Great Commander alongside the top members of the Order – the King as the sovereign, Lord Curzon the Viceroy of India (who had always harboured a distinct dislike of the Zill al-Sultān), Muhammad Khudādād Khān ex-Wali of Kalat, Field-Marshal the Duke of Connaught and Strathhearn, followed by a list of Maharajas of the British Raj.<sup>10</sup> This association, by its very nature, implied that Britain had assumed, at least implicitly, a moral obligation to protect the Zill al-Sultan.

The whole episode, however, turned into a disaster when the following March the Zill al-Sultān was dismissed from all his posts except the governorship of Isfahan. This was a major setback for Britain's prestige, self-image and for the Karun question.

Britain eventually did manage to get limited navigation rights on the Karun, but these were far from the desired "monopoly." That new deal was brokered by the Amīn al-Sultān, the very man who had brilliantly engineered the coup against the Zill al-Sultān and who by this feat, together with a new and final Karun deal he had contrived for the British, ensured that he emerged as the most influential man at court.

<sup>10</sup> See: The India *List and India Office List*, 1905.

## The Demotion of 1888

By 1888 the Zill al-Sultān had reached the zenith of his career. He governed almost two-thirds of Iran's provinces, commanded an impressive military force, and was about to be decorated with one of the highest British orders. The Amīn al-Sultān—the ambitious and attractive prime minister and by then the man closest to Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh – had carefully cultivated the shāh's suspicions against his son. He presented the danger of a military coup by the Zill or a possible deal with the British to divide the country as plausible, although in practical terms they were very unlikely. When in February 1888 the Zill al-Sultān made bids for further offices in the annual round of distributing new and reconfirming old posts, the Amīn al-Sultān seized his opportunity. Instead of increasing and consolidating his offices, the Zill al-Sultān was swiftly dismissed from the command of his troops and all governorships except for Isfahan.

The multiple consequences, both immediately obvious and indirect long-term ones, cannot be overstated. The incident caused amazement in Iran and made news as far as the more remote places of New York State.<sup>11</sup> Despite the dramatic personal and political misfortunes he was confronted with in the years to come, for the Zill al-Sultān this may have been the most consequential event of his life. It was the beginning of a long-drawn-out descending trajectory. It represented an irreversible defeat by his arch enemy, the Amīn al-Sultān. It sabotaged his reputation, dignity and real power with consequences for political directions not only for Isfahan but for Iran in general. The loss of his military capability, which was reduced to Isfahan's standard regiments while the greater part of the arsenal was brought to Tehran, meant a decisive change in the urban and provincial balance of power. Having overcome the immediate shock and disbelief, the Zill al-Sultān resorted to long-term subversion and revenge.

The award of the Star of India and his defeat in the diplomacy over the Karun navigation rights only enlarged the Zill al-Sultān's curtailment of power and loss of image. Humiliated, he eventually received the decoration unceremoniously in the summer of 1888.

---

<sup>11</sup> See: *Mount Kisko New York Recorder* 1887-1889, column 6.

The 1888 demotion marked the beginning of a new phase in the Zill al-Sultān's politics, in which he was obliged to enter into more deals and pragmatic compromises with the political realities of Isfahan. All of this had various complex consequences. Over the years the Zill al-Sultān assiduously endeavoured to regain extensive governorships. Yet, with the changed political prerogatives in Isfahan and the monopolization of power in Tehran by the Amīn al-Sultān, he never again reached the scope of his previous power. The break-up of his troops lessened the effectiveness of his regime, which in turn changed the stakes of authority in Isfahan. With his power drastically curtailed, he was forced into more far-reaching compromises with the city's powerful priestly and merchant aristocracy. In the immediately following years the Zill al-Sultān channelled considerable energies into vengeance and self-enrichment.

While he managed to maintain an administrative hegemony over Isfahan, he found himself facing further difficulties in asserting his power over the many political elements in the city. These included the 'ulamā', the high ranking merchants, the bazaar, to some extent the increasingly restive Bakhtiyārī tribe, the British, and from 1897 the Russians too, whose presence in Isfahan, which was a result of Muzaffar al-Dīn Shāh's explicitly pro-Russian stand, the Zill al-Sultān viewed with profound misgivings.

Despite all sorts of stories and the real challenge of balancing his power against the authority of Isfahan's merchants and clerics, one of the Zill al-Sultān's most important post-1888 political legacies, though not necessarily an intended one, was the strengthening of Isfahan's clerical establishment, which had a trail of indirect long-term effects.

The Zill al-Sultān has, with a degree of exaggerated simplification, often been labelled as a pro-British stooge. A closer reading of the sources, though, proves that this partisanship was rather fuzzy. It reveals instead the dilemma of balancing personal, local and domestic interests against those of a superpower as well as confronting the antagonism of rivals at court. In the 1888 episode the British Foreign Office was not willing to support the Zill al-Sultān beyond a few verbal representations to the shāh, while instantaneously turning towards the now suddenly more influential Amīn al-Sultān. The tactics in the dealings of the Karun question and the Star of India are an excellent example of a presumed mutual interest on the part of Britain and the Zill al-Sultān, which nonetheless ended in the contradiction of

a partial realization of the deal for Britain, which yet left massive resentments on each side.

When in 1892 protests broke out against the British tobacco monopoly concession, the Zill al-Sultān seized the opportunity to retaliate against the Amīn al-Sultān and the Shāh, but also against the British who had pragmatically turned to collaboration with his arch-enemy. While pretending to support the British deal he endorsed the ulama's action to bring down the Tobacco Regie, hoping this would lead to the fall of the Amīn al-Sultān (and almost succeeded). Following the cancellation of the British Tobacco monopoly in 1892 the affair turned into a major political and diplomatic disaster, also with long-term ramifications. When the British later discovered the Zill al-Sultān's spiteful double game, they were flabbergasted and furious.

Over the years, Britain's association with the Zill al-Sultān grew increasingly tense, her support lukewarm and haphazard. Numerous British officials spent years of imperious complaining about his antagonism, lack of cooperation and instrumentalization of the clerics. Yet, it was the geographical position in the central and southern provinces which tied both sides into mutual interests. Following the cancellation of the Tobacco Regie, the interaction between Britain and the Zill al-Sultān changed into one of pragmatic expedience, frequently tense yet unavoidable for both sides.

### **From the Death of Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh to the Sacking from Isfahan**

Despite the Zill al-Sultān's image of an all-powerful despot, he was tied into multiple dependencies and over the years suffered numerous political and personal defeats. From 1888 his position required vast energies to assert his self-preservation against a continuing loss of power. The assassination of Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh in 1896 exacerbated this trend and brought to an end a certain (if negative) equilibrium between his sons and the court. Britain was unwilling to back his claims to the throne and Muzaffar al-Dīn's Russophile regime brought forward forces that further eroded the Zill al-Sultān's position and in a certain sense precipitated his final fall from power in 1907.

Circumventing the obstructive commercial opposition of Isfahan by building alliances in the south and in Iraq, Britain had systematically intensified its collaboration with the Bakhtiārī tribe and its relations in Khuzistān. The 1897 road concession and the 1901 oil concession

changed the template of power relations, which reduced Isfahan's geostrategic relevance and required less compromises with the Zill al-Sultān or with the obstructive trade wars waged by the city's clerical and merchant elite. This change increased the obstacles to his regaining power in Isfahan and prepared the way for the eventual occupation of the city by the Bakhtīyārīs in 1909.

This altered constellation further solidified with the Anglo-Russian entente of 1907. Moreover, the Russian consulate, which opened in Isfahan just a few months after Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh's death, despite serious resistance on the part of the Zill al-Sultan, represented a superpower which had always acted against his interests. An agent of his ailing brother now turned shāh, the Russian consulate further polarized the inner urban antagonisms and even interfered with his family affairs by colluding with his sister, Bānū 'Azma.

By the time of the confrontations of the Constitutional Revolution and Muzaffar al-Dīn Shāh's death in 1906 the situation in Isfahan was extremely volatile. Even though Isfahan was a highly conservative environment and not at the forefront of revolutionary radicalism, the Zill al-Sultān was forced to abdicate in March 1907. He had secretly rushed to Tehran a month earlier in the hope of seizing his last chance of securing the throne. Away from Isfahan he was unable to control the public strike against him, which was led by Āqā Nūrallāh, who tried to assert himself against the authority of his brother Āqā Najafī and demanded the Zill al-Sultān's categorical dismissal. The Zill al-Sultān seems to have concluded an agreement of sorts with Āqā Najafī, whereby the latter agreed to support his eventual return to Isfahan. This however never materialized.

The infamous murder by the Zill's al-Sultān's son, Sāram al-Dawlih, of his mother Mūnis al-Saltanih, who had sought sanctuary (*bast*) in Āqā Nūrallāh's house following a fight over her will and over accusations of her being involved with Āqā Nūrallāh, caused a major uproar. While there is no proof that she had shared any intimacy with Āqā Nūrallāh the fact that she entered his house was enough to violate all codes of honour. His opponents argued that the murder was cause to expel all of the Zill's sons from Isfahan. Āqā Nūrallāh, who at this point had to fear serious consequences if the Zill al-Sultān ever returned, was willing to conclude a pact with the devil to prevent the prince's return in power. Also hoping that the constitutional movement could help him to supersede his brother Āqā Najafī as Isfahan's



supreme mujtahid, he involved the Bakhtiyārī chiefs as well as Russia in his schemes. At the height of events he even proclaimed a “Republic of Isfahan.” The success of Āqā Nūrallāh’s strike against the return of the Zill al-Sultān facilitated the Bakhtiyārī takeover two years later, which sealed the irrevocable end of his 33-year rule in Isfahan. In a sense, with this move Āqā Nūrallāh had won a final victory in the old feud between the two families that went back to the Zill al-Sultān’s seduction and marriage of Khānum Najafī, one of the wives of Āqā Nūrallāh’s father, in the late 1870s.

In the maelstrom of the constitutional revolution, the Zill al-Sultān pressed Britain, not for the last time, for a renewal of a guarantee of protection for his life and property. As always, Britain’s endeavours on his behalf involved no commitment. The British minister, Cecil Spring-Rice, argued with the government for the Zill al-Sultān’s reinstatement as governor, but did not press the case any further.

With the elimination of the Zill al-Sultān, Isfahan’s old balance of power collapsed. The power vacuum left the urban leadership in the hands of the Āqāyān-i Masjid-i Shāh and despite the internal rivalry between Āqā Nūrallāh and Āqā Najafī, any new governor had to reckon with the weight of their public, moral, and juridical authority. Between March 1907 and the Bakhtiyārīs’ occupation in January 1909 Isfahan’s governorship changed hands four times.

### **From Exile to the Shrine of Mashhad**

In Tehran, the Zill al-Sultān realized that his only option was to side with the constitutionalists. Many radicals of the time (and most later commentators) imputed insincerity and plain tactical motives to this move. On the other hand, it was a bold and extremely risky step for him to turn against the conservative Qajar court and to put himself in opposition not only to the reactionary anti-constitutional and pro-Russian cause of his nephew Muhammad ‘Alī Shāh but also his brother Kāmrān Mīrzā. And despite doubts, even the sceptical among the constitutionalists were not unwilling to use his money and weapons for their aims.

In June 1908, in collaboration with his sons, he was the central figure in the instigation of a coup to depose Muhammad ‘Alī Shāh. The coup failed, at which point, not only the Shāh but both Russia and Britain demanded that he leave Iran immediately. In its rhetoric,

Britain seemed more adamant about seeing him gone than even the Shāh or Russia. Insisting on going via Isfahan to sort out affairs there, perhaps hoping to find a way out of exile, he left for Paris in August 1908.

In the international press the Zill al-Sultān was described as the “most prominent leader of the Constitutionalist Party,” who to the disgust of the radical constitutionalists, and saving himself from punishment for treason after the failed coup, was willing to denounce the parliament as “anarchists” and vowed “perfect loyalty and obedience to the throne.”<sup>12</sup>

The superpowers had no interest in further political upheavals. Operating under the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907, they aimed to maintain the status quo. Britain, despite many critical voices about London’s Persia policies, had other priorities and was unwilling to jeopardize the agreement by antagonizing Russia. It was therefore ready to seal the Zill’s al-Sultān’s political obliteration.

In July 1909, upon the dethronement of Muhammad ‘Alī Shāh, the Zill al-Sultān made an impetuous return, perhaps hoping to grasp a very last chance of gaining the crown. He was arrested by border troops, brought to Rasht, coerced into an enormous ransom payment of 300,000 Tumāns and forced to return to Europe.<sup>13</sup>

The Zill al-Sultān felt little at home in Nice or Paris. After years in exile his sons in Iran lobbied actively for his return and during the First World War the Persian government and the British became convinced that his return was expedient. Even the Russians concurred.

In the chaotic situation of the Great War, when growing resistance to the 1915 Anglo-Russian agreement and a widespread sympathy towards the Germans, famine and total insecurity threatened to undermine the Allies’ war strategy in Iran, they deemed the unhappy Zill al-Sultān stuck in France a probable figure to re-establish some order and stability. The deal about his return was a favour to his sons, especially to Akbar Mīrzā Sāram al-Dawlih as well as an attempt to re-establish control over the escalating situation in Fars. Earlier in the war

<sup>12</sup> *New York Times*, 16 Aug. 1908, Special Cable News Section, p. C3.

<sup>13</sup> The event made news even in the *New York Times* which reported the “Ex-Shah’s Uncle Expelled” and “fined \$500,000 in Favor of the Persian Treasury.” 11 Aug. 1909, p. 4.

the Germans had collaborated with Āqā Nūrallāh and looted the Zill al-Sultān's estates in Isfahan. Britain thus counted on his gratitude, old authority and sure dislike of the Germans. He was brought back to restore some control, to secure the Allies' interests in the south, and in the effort to put some pressure on the ruling Bakhtiyārī Khāns.

After eight years of exile, ill, disillusioned and homesick the Zill al-Sultān yearned to return to Isfahan. At this point he had little enduring ambitions for high offices. Britain was even willing to proffer the governorship of Isfahan as bait. In Nice the Āqā Khān acted as arbitrator to work out the modalities of his return.

The Bakhtiyārīs, who since 1909 held with British support the highest offices in Isfahan, were promised that if they accepted the Zill al-Sultān's governorship in Isfahan and aided him in routing the Germans in Fars, the Zill al-Sultān would be appointed governor-general in Shiraz and the position in Isfahan would then be granted to one of the Khāns.

Bahrām Mīrzā, his favourite son, came to France to accompany him back to Isfahan, but drowned on the British vessel, which was sunk by a German submarine. The Zill al-Sultān was devastated by the death of his favourite son. Still, once the agreement on a large Russian-British compensation for the war damages to his properties was settled, he returned to Iran in July 1916. He travelled via London (it seems for the first time) where he was finally received at Buckingham Palace and was given the Order of St. Michael and St. George (his son Ismail Mīrzā travelling with him received the Star of India).<sup>14</sup> Back in Tehran he was well received by his great-nephew, the very young Ahmad Shāh.

The Zill al-Sultan went to Shiraz for a brief term as governor, but his further political involvement was short-lived. The indemnities paid to him by Russia and Britain were a final concession he managed to wrest from both powers, who had sealed his political fate in 1908. The First World War put a conclusive end to the old order and he bowed out of politics, retreating to the Bāgh-i Naw in Isfahan as an old man. Given that Isfahan since the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement was under Russian control, and having entrusted the safeguarding of his property during his exile to the Russian consulate, he saw the Russian revolution and the czar's execution as a terrifying new threat.

<sup>14</sup> *The Straits Times*, 11 May 1916.

Demented and suffering from erysipelas – a painful bacterial infection of the skin – he died in July 1918.

The funeral service was a subdued affair, attended by a handful of people, including the acting governor, the Armenian Archimandrite, the British and Russian consuls, the Russian officer of the Cossack Brigade, Dr. Aqanoor and a few other Europeans. Afterwards, his body was interred at the holy shrine of the eighth imām in Mashhad--in some ways another exile from Isfahan.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the topic see: H. Walcher: *In the Shadow of the King*, I.B.Tauris, 2008.

## FROM PULPIT TO PODCAST: THE 20th CENTURY PERSIAN MEDIA AND THEIR APPROACH TO REPORTING FACTS, FICTIONS, CONSPIRACIES AND REVOLUTIONS

Lecture given by Baqer Moin on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2010.

Newspapers started in Iran as government information messengers. They were a replacement for the public crier or *jarchi* who had been used for centuries to inform the public of major events and of the monarch's declarations and intentions. The papers combined this with the role of preachers who delivered a sermon for a specific purpose with a bombastic and rhetorical delivery, laced with a reported or purported saying of a saint or an imam here and a poem there. The early journalism inherited a bit of both. But it did not benefit from the heavy emphasis in religious studies on checking the credibility and reliability of sources when dealing with the traditions of the prophet and imams. Nor did it benefit from the advice of the Persian historian, Abu'l-Fazl Baihaqi (995-1077 CE), who said that "the news of the past either should be read in a book or heard from a person on condition that the source is trustworthy and telling the truth, and the rational faculty attests to the fact that the news is accurate." These words of Baihaqi can still be the motto for any journalist anywhere.

Success in today's media, however, is not about the pious intentions of individuals or firmans of the shahs. In this competitive age in which there are choices, imperfect as they are, success is about trust. People today would like to see themselves and their conditions reflected by the media so as to trust it.

Trust comes when the media environment is stable and there are clearly defined institutions upon which the media's operations are based. Periodic political understanding and social tolerance between the stakeholders is not enough. There must be a clear legal framework. This is obviously the responsibility of the authorities. In addition, the owners or operators of the media, whether public or private, must invest and manage effectively, and the content

providers and journalists must act professionally and responsibly and not confuse their role with that of the political opposition. In such an environment one may expect the media to gain public trust and confidence.

It may be unfair to put the blame for the failure of the media in Iran entirely on successive governments. Besides state control and censorship, there are historic cultural obstacles to media openness and transparency. One such is the culture of *ta'arof*, the culture of ambiguity, which is based on historic insecurity. Another is the concept of *biruni/andaruni*, of an inner private world and an outer public one, so prevalent in personal relations, society, politics, culture, literature, arts and architecture.

Iran has managed to be very vibrant in areas where the government has not interfered, such as painting, sculpture, poetry, the film industry and so on. We should, however, remember that due to religious decrees there was no sculpture in public places in Iran for some thirteen centuries, until the late Abu'l-Hassan Sadiqi created the statue of Firdowsi in the 1930s. In recent years and due to political pressure on the media, the Iranians have shown their creativity in the virtual world of the internet.

Against this background, although Iran has one of the oldest and richest cultures in the region, its media is poorer than the Arab and Turkish media in terms of comprehensive news. Nowhere does it reflect the consensus view from an Iranian perspective or mirror Iranian aspirations. It may be true, as some historians have argued, that the history of Iran is a cycle of chaos and tyranny. But one may also argue that the media scene has been a cycle of creative chaos and censorship.

Despite all this, the Iranian media have left their mark on history during major crises, such as the Tobacco Concession, the Constitutional Revolution, the fall of the Qajar dynasty, the abdication of Reza Shah, the coup that overthrew Musaddiq, the Islamic Revolution and now the reform movement's rise and fall, through to its current presence in the virtual world of the internet.

When we look at the history of the media, an interesting pattern emerges that applies to most periods: a government that attempts to control the media; an internal opposition that uses its energy and imagination to circumvent that control; a private sector that has not been allowed to play a constructive role in the media or simply does

not exist; a body of journalists which has neither the professionalism required nor the legal framework to work within; an educated elite that looks beyond to the country's borders in order to breathe, to think, to produce ideas and to change conditions at home; and since the late 1930's, there are the external powers who have found the media an effective tool for influence.

The history of the print media goes back to Mirza Saleh Shirazi who studied in England and brought back the first printing press to Iran and started the first paper, *Kaghaz-e Akhbar*, in Iran in 1837. He has been regarded as the first Persian journalist, although he soon gave up journalism. His printing press was a success but his paper was not. A warning sign for a doomed profession! It was a private enterprise. Who knows? Had it been successful the fate of the Persian media might have been different today. A decade later, during the reign of Nasir ud-Din Shah (1848-96), newspapers were introduced to Iran. Nasir ud-Din Shah was a cultured man, an avid reader, a poet, a writer and possibly the last learned monarch of Iran. Yet he was an autocrat who did not like democratic institutions and he was the man who institutionalised the censorship in Iran that continues to this day.

The first state-owned paper was a weekly state gazette called *Vaqāye'-e Ettefāqiya*, which first appeared on 7 February 1851 and continued for some ten years. It was, as intended, a court chronicle. This and other official newspapers were neither popular nor inspiring as they rarely reflected the everyday concerns or conditions of ordinary people. State employees were told to buy these official newspapers, the price of which was deducted from their salaries. The unholy tradition of not encouraging private media and of publishing with public funding and no readers is continuing on a larger scale today.

To make the early newspapers more interesting, translated pieces from foreign papers on topics such as nationalism, civilization, education, justice and the rule of law were added. However, they were not allowed to deal with politics at all. A French version of *Vatan* (La Patrie) was stopped after its first issue just because it declared that it wanted to tell the truth and not to indulge in flattery. Officials who compared Iran's media to those of Ottoman Turkey found that the quality of Iranian papers was far inferior.

In 1890, Nasir ud-Din Shah's attempt to control the media through his Censor Office faced a rude awakening. His decision to grant a monopoly on the production, domestic sales and export of tobacco to Major G. F. Talbot of Britain proved very unpopular. A fatwa published in the name of religious leaders banning the smoking of the water-pipe or *ghalyoon* reached the royal court. The story goes that when the Shah asked for his water-pipe, the Queen refused to offer it to him. When he inquired why, she said it was because smoking was forbidden and unlawful. "Who made it unlawful?" the King asked. "The person who made me your lawful wife," she replied.

The government-controlled newspapers virtually ignored the matter. But a new, unofficial medium, the *shabnameh*, or 'night letter' published the news and reached even the royal court. The *shabnameh* came as a shock to the authorities as it was distributed all over Tehran. The author of one of the first political *shabnamehs* was Mirza Reza Kermani, the man who eventually assassinated Nasir ud-Din Shah in 1897, though no one knew this at the time. Writing anonymously, he protested at the way concessions and new technologies were being used as a tool of foreign domination: "Oh you faithful! You Muslims! We lost the tobacco concession, we lost the Karun river, we lost the production of sugar, we lost the Ahwaz road. The bank has arrived, the tram has arrived, the country is controlled by the foreigners, and the king is not caring for the nation. Let us take control of our own affairs!"

There were also fabricated *shabnamehs* calling for Jihad or 'Holy War' in the name of the chief theologian of the time, Mirza Hasan Shirazi. But in not allowing his papers to report any of the critical events nor any criticism of his rule, the Shah had only himself to blame. The main traditional medium, the *menbar* or 'pulpit', was also used effectively in this period by the opposition clergy. A number of prominent Tehran preachers campaigned against the tobacco concession.

Leading intellectuals and dissidents who were based abroad and were sending their ideas back home were another source of inspiration for those who opposed the concession. The exiled media, being largely out of reach of the ruler, have often been more radical than the internal media. Naser ud-Din Shah's revolutionary opponents were already spread all over the place, publishing their



own papers in such major cities as Istanbul, Cairo, Calcutta and London. These papers were brought or smuggled into the country and had an impact on the elite. They captured the imaginations of those who read or heard about them. People gathered in the traditional tea-houses not to listen to story-tellers, as they usually did, but to listen to readings from these papers which they found were dealing with issues that expressed their aspirations. They provided a forum for the discussion of new ideas, enhancing political debate and encouraging reform and change. Serious debates also took place in secret societies where these papers were read, debated and discussed.

Among the most influential of these newspapers published abroad were *Qanun* ('Law') and *Habl al-Matin* ('Strong Cord'). *Qanun* was the more popular and radical of the two and its mere possession became a criminal offence. It was published in London in 1890 by Mirza Malkom Khan, who argued that change could only be achieved by bringing ideas together and that a newspaper was the best place to do this. *Habl al-Matin*, was published in Calcutta by Sayyed Jalal ud-Din Mo'ayyad-al-Eslam, who believed that newspapers could play a valuable role by informing people of shortcomings and bringing pressure to bear on governments.

These exile papers increased interest in the print media and as the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 gained momentum, some one hundred newspapers and publications came out in the course of a single year, which was more than during the whole of the previous century. Once Mozaffar ud-Din Shah agreed to the establishment of a *Majlis* or National Assembly in August 1906, many of the restrictions on the media were lifted. This heralded a new and historic moment for the papers which were able to indulge in an unprecedented though short-lived period of open debates and discussions. Now that there was a greater role for journalists inside Iran, the influence of exile papers declined. The monthly *Habl al-Matin* felt it could no longer reflect events in Iran from India, so it moved to Tehran where it started publication as a daily newspaper.

The importance of the media first became apparent in this period. Reading newspapers became a habit for a population that was more used to an oral tradition. Despite the low level of literacy, the paper *Sur-e Esrafil* ('Trumpet of Esrafil') achieved a circulation of 5,000 copies and there was always a large crowd outside the printing-press

waiting for the freshly printed copies. People who could not read gathered in the tea-houses to listen to what was in these papers.

This first period of creative chaos came to a temporary end with the coup of Mohammad Ali Shah in 1908. Many journalists, editors and owners of papers were jailed, some were executed, and many were forced to flee the country. But the despotism was short-lived and was followed by a new journalistic vigour and a new phase of creative chaos that continued until the consolidation of power by Reza Shah in the late 1920s.

The Constitutional Revolution left its legacy on the Iranian print media. It learnt to cover events, broaden the debate, and increase its reach by employing cartoons, photographs, and drawings, enriching the cultural life of the nation. It also led to the use of a more modern, direct, and simpler style of language. New inventions such as photography, the telegraph and gelatine copying were fully employed to report the degree of national participation in Iran's first modern revolution. The preachers, both those who supported the constitution and those who opposed it, also played a major role by taking the ideas produced in the media to a larger public.

This period of creative chaos ended when the Pahlavi dynasty was founded by Reza Shah in 1925. By concentrating power in Tehran and in his own person, Reza Shah played a major role in unifying the country. At the same time, however, he introduced harsh censorship and severe punishment for those who defied his rule.

Where *shabnamehs* and exile papers were novelties that were seen as enemies of Naser ud-Din Shah, in the last years of Reza Shah's rule radio became a new irritant which was less easy to control when the broadcasts came from outside the country. In an attempt to combat this, owners of radio sets were made to apply for permits.

The first foreign radio station to broadcast in Persian was Radio Ankara, early in 1939. Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, Radio Berlin started its broadcasts in Persian followed by the BBC on 28 December 1940; it was followed in turn by Persian-language broadcasts from Rome, New Delhi, Moscow and Baku. Tehran Radio was inaugurated in early April 1940 by the then Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Tensions between Reza

Shah and Britain over the Shah's pro-German sympathies resulted in the BBC, which was an effective part of the British war effort, undermining Reza Shah and contributing to his removal from power.

As in the case of the Constitutional Revolution, the media scene reconstituted itself and a new generation of young, educated journalists entered the scene. Issues such as materialism, democracy, socialism, westernisation, secularisation, and the popular nationalism encouraged by the Shah's court had sharpened the differences between forces of the left, the right, the nationalists and the religious factions which came to the fore after Reza Shah's departure. New political parties and fronts were formed and new newspapers and magazines appeared; some of the papers were independent but most represented factions. They started to debate not only conceptual issues but also real issues such as the war, the invasion of Iran by the Allies, internal political tensions and the emergence of the new forces supporting the occupiers.

This period of high hopes and changing governments brought a period of democratic openness. It had its periods of fear and occasional repression, but it was full of creativity. It came to an end in August 1953 with the fall of the Prime Minister, Dr Mosaddeq. But this period was intensive and long enough to leave an indelible mark on the Iranian psyche and to become a reference point for media activity until the revolution of 1979. The two groups who were seen as the martyrs of this phase were followers of Dr Mossadeq and the communist Tudeh party. They had many secret sympathisers inside the country to keep their memory alive. A mythology evolved around them which was expressed through symbolism in the media and literature. Public debates were gradually suppressed but private discourse was heavily influenced by these two groups, some of whose members were killed, imprisoned or forced into exile. The post-1953 exiles were scattered around Europe and North America and some joined radio stations abroad, notably the Voice of America (VOA), the BBC, and stations in Peking, Moscow, Cairo and Baghdad. The Tudeh party and Radio Moscow were very active in broadcasting to Iran. Jamming Radio Moscow was not that effective but the USSR was capable of jamming Iranian broadcasts inside Iran at will. Powerful Soviet jamming stations were based in Armenia and Tajikistan.

In this period, while political papers were banned, social and literary magazines were encouraged. Religious publications went unhindered, except for Islamic radical papers that were also suppressed. Despite the increase in the literacy rate and new technologies, censorship left no room for creativity. Some attempts to liberalise the regime in the early 1960s by the then Prime Minister, Dr Amini, backfired, rattled the Shah and were stopped.

In 1963, in the Shah's attempt to create a two-party system with both parties being pro-government, some 60% of the newspapers and magazines with "low circulation" were closed down. In reality, it was a failed attempt and marked the end of the Shah's flirtation with democracy.

By late 1960 the main dailies, *Ettela'at* and *Kayhan*, had a circulation of 200,000. The content was often dull and the style tedious. Only five Iranians out of a thousand read a newspaper. But it should be said that *Kayhan* and *Ettela'at* gradually became serious money-making institutions, thank to the advertising revenues and state support.

In 1967 the paper, *Ayandegan*, appeared with a superior content and ended the monopoly of *Kayhan* and *Ettela'at*. It created waves for its journalism, its novel style and its brave attempt to introduce a more refined language. Politically, however, it was a more openly pro-western paper than the other two.

Television came to Iran as a private enterprise, first in the city of Abadan and then in Tehran. The state TV started broadcasting in the late 1960's and it was soon decided that the state should take over the private TV stations. This was an unfortunate move that has prevented Iran ever since from becoming a competitive market for the electronic media. The National Iranian Radio and TV (NIRTV), played a major social and cultural role with its documentaries, good dramas and music programmes. News was never its strength; in fact it was downright bland and boring. That is why when the crisis came and the revolution unfolded, it did not have the political credibility to play a role as a medium trusted by its audience. In the final month of the Shah's rule, it wavered between broadcasting some opposition news, the Shah's message to the people that "I have heard the voices of your revolution", and decrees of the military government ordering a clamp down on the media. The latter led to strikes by journalists in national radio and television and in the print

media. In this period and until Dr Bakhtiar took over as prime minister in January 1979, NIRTV effectively abdicated its responsibilities and did not deal with national events. As there was no other serious Western broadcaster on the scene, the BBC became almost the sole source of news and gained an unprecedented popularity, and thus the blame by the Shah's supporters for the revolution.

Dr Bakhtiar's period of office started with an end to strikes and a period of freedom in the media similar to that which followed the fall of Reza Shah in 1941, but on a much larger scale. This was another period of creative chaos. With the success of the revolution, the country's new leaders introduced social censorship and a total clamp down on female singers and pop music on radio and TV. Political pluralism in the media, however, continued on and off until the fall of President Bani-Sadr in 1981. Hundreds of new publication appeared in this period. The three pre-revolution dailies – *Ettela'at*, *Kayhan*, and *Ayandegan*, which were taken over by the staff – had the highest circulations. Soon, however, independent newspapers found themselves at the receiving end of the new rulers' anger and were ultimately closed down or taken over by the revolutionary organisations.

The media were heavily controlled during the Iran-Iraq war from 1981 to 1988, when Iran agreed to a UN ceasefire resolution. During this period, the only hope of finding out what was happening inside the regime was to look at the factional papers which never ceased their ideological war of attrition. You had to read between the lines.

After the end of the war and Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989, Iran experienced a degree of openness and economic growth under President Rafsanjani, and a relaxation of cultural restrictions. This opening was led by the then minister of culture, Mohammad Khatami. He supported independent media and reduced the pressure on journalists. In the short period he was in charge, Khatami changed the cultural scene but he had no power over the factional papers or over radio and TV. Khatami's policy was not acceptable to the conservatives and he was forced to resign. Rafsanajani did not put as much emphasis on political development as on growth which laid the economic foundation for the media development that came later.

The best chance for the print media to be regulated in Iran came when Khatami was unexpectedly elected president in 1997. He was more trusted than others to bring about a *modus operandi*. Khatami allowed scores of new newspapers to be published. They could have become economically viable as people were avidly reading the papers. The local print media were now the source of news, not the exile or foreign broadcasters. The radicals among the reformists were calling the tune. But there was an excessive expectation on the part of Khatami's reformist allies that the media could be used to defeat the hardliners in the conservative camp. The hardliners were vigilant and, with the support of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamene'i, they used their power to halt this development. Many newspapers were closed down, the revision of the press law stopped and journalists tried and jailed.

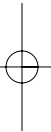
This period of clampdown, coincided with the advent of the Internet. The closure of the papers led journalists to start a new life in the virtual world. Many Iranian journalists abroad started websites and web logs. As pressure on journalists and newspapers grew in Iran following of the election of Mr Ahmadinejad, the internet gained more popularity and the new technology enabled Iranians to participate in interaction and debate online.

Iran now has one of the highest numbers of bloggers in the world. Persian is the third most popular language on the internet. Almost half of Iran's adult population has access to the Internet one way or another. The presidential election campaign in 2009 and the debate that accompanied it showed how politically active the population is. When the protests started after the election, the newly politicised youth used its awareness of the new technology to turn itself into a generation of citizen-journalists. In no other event has Iran become so prominent internationally with pictures and videos taken by its citizen of events that were going on in the country. Suddenly it was these 'reporters' who were leading the news and setting the agenda for the world media.

## THE IRANIAN GAS TRUNK LINE

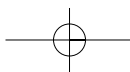
**A joint presentation by Hal Oliver and David Pickford given to the Society on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010**

*This event was held to honour the memory of Ian Bowler, the managing director of IMEG (International Management and Engineering Group), who conceived the project of collecting gas from the oil wells of Agha Jari in the south of Iran and laying a pipeline across the Zagros to deliver it to Astara on the USSR border. The speakers produced an elaborate Powerpoint presentation from their old slides. What follows is a summary of their account. Hal Oliver was involved with the project from the beginning and David Pickford joined later to set up the communications system along the length of the line. The full presentation can be viewed on the Society's website.*



Ian Bowler had been working in Iran with Costain John Brown since the early 1950s, constructing refineries and pipelines. At that time, gas from the oilfields was just flared off. In 1959 he was responsible for building the first gas pipeline in Iran, a 10-inch line from Gach Saran to Shiraz, to power a fertiliser factory. Having realised the enormous waste of gas being flared from the Agha Jari oilfield and seeing its potential, four years later Bowler had left Costain and started his own company, IMEG, and was in negotiations with the National Iranian Oil Company and the Soviet government for the delivery of gas to the USSR.

IMEG was practically a one-man band at the beginning. Bowler's skill lay in recruiting the right technical and commercial staff to join him and then to persuade the largest international construction companies to work under IMEG's direction. Not only that, he had to persuade the Iranian and Soviet authorities that this new company, with no history, was a credible enterprise. At the beginning the company was made up of five directors, two accountants and three secretaries. Hal Oliver joined the company in August 1963 as the solitary engineer and general factotum. This was a difficult time as the company was trying to get itself established in



a unique manner. They had a number of small projects which helped to pay some of the bills. These included studies of the products shipped from the Abadan refinery and the design and management of three sugar factories in Iran. In 1964, the opportunity to design and construct an oil pipeline in Algeria came into the office. Bowler took this as an opportunity to establish IMEG as a credible organisation. In order to carry this out he made a joint venture deal with Costain, the finance to come from the Kuwait Development Bank. Since the bank would not accept IMEG, still an unknown quantity, as the project leader, Costain became the prime contractor for the EPC (Engineering, Procurement and Construction) project, with IMEG as subcontractor.

It was in Algeria, where a Liquid Natural Gas plant was being built to supply Canvey Island, that Bowler began to formulate his thoughts for exploiting the gas that was being flared off in the southern Iranian oilfields and transporting it to Tehran by a pipeline. At the same time NIOC, the National Iranian Oil Company, was looking into this possibility as part of the overall development plan for the country. Nobody knew whether it could be done. As a first step, IMEG was awarded a feasibility contract to look into the possibility of establishing a route from southern Iran across the Zagros to Tehran. Thus in April 1965 the initial ground work started on what would become the Trans- Iranian Pipeline.

The first survey of potential routes through the Zagros mountains was made in a light Cessna aircraft, but further flights were forbidden on security pretexts. With little finance yet available, Bowler borrowed a Land-Rover and driver from his wife's farm at Shahrud. With an Iranian-Austrian as interpreter, they set off for the south with their camping equipment.

The start of the pipeline was at Gach Saran, near the Khanabad river, where the team reported to Colonel Salimi of the local SAVAK (State Security) office, who became a very good friend and intermediary for them. There were two possible routes.

The first one ran directly north towards the oasis of Cheshmeh Belgaz, through the Tang-e Pir-e Zan pass, but there was also a new road being built east of Do-Gonbadan, which offered some advantages as the road under construction would eventually reach an east-west road through the Pirin Valley and Ardakan to the east and Pataweh to the north-west. From Pataweh the line went due north to



Farah Donbeh, west of Isfahan and Kashan. The route continued north on the east side of the Dasht-e Kavir and on to Tehran.

At an early stage the NIOC and later IMEG carried out feasibility studies for the supply of natural gas from the southern Iranian gas oil fields to major cities in central Iran. The first field feasibility study was for a pipeline from Gach Saran to Tehran. The feasibility study produced a plan for a pipeline 1113km in length, of which 612km would be 42-inch diameter and 500km of 40-inch pipe. A 30-inch branch line would deliver gas to Tehran. Branch lines would supply gas to the major cities along the route. The system capacity was established at 1.65 BC FD.

The line would cross some of the most difficult terrain ever traversed by a pipeline. Starting at sea level, it would rise to 9600ft as it crossed the Zagros range and descend to below sea level when it met the Caspian coast. Extreme weather conditions all along the route made problems both for construction and operation of the line, for which new solutions had to be found, as there was no precedent for working at such altitudes and temperatures, which affected both the pipe itself and the gas within. To achieve the best possible economics for the project required the use of the most advanced techniques in pipeline construction. Innovative ideas to overcome the technical and terrain conditions were implemented based on the experienced gained on smaller pipeline projects and adapted on a large scale.

The project called for cooperation not only between Iranian, Soviet and British technicians in the design of the system, but also between firms from the UK, USSR, Netherlands, France, Germany, Japan and the USA for supply and construction of the line, gas treatment stations and compressor stations along the way. The construction of the 42-inch portion of the pipeline was divided between three European contractors: Williams Brothers (UK), Williams Brothers (GmbH) and Entrepouse of France. The compressor stations located on the 42-inch section of the pipeline would be constructed by Mannesmann of Germany.

Initial route selection was undertaken using a small plane to fly the route. Snow in the mountains prevented a really close inspection but a general alignment was chosen. This time the transport situation was considerably improved. As part of the advance in fees the company was able to purchase nine Land-Rovers. A team was put

together, which included Alan Catchpole, an American pipeline expert, and a member of the survey company. Also joining the team was Colonel Salimi, who had by now retired from SAVAK. He became the point man and interpreter.

They left Tehran on April 24<sup>th</sup> for the south. The intent was to see if they could cross the mountains to Pataweh. This meant crossing the highest point of the line at 9600 feet. From a view point south of this range of mountains they could see a track in the snow where the existing road should be; it was just a case of getting there. As it happened, the journey was full of problems. When they reached the high point they found that the snow was deeper than they had thought. It was decided to camp for the night and try again in the morning. The weather changed overnight and when they woke up they found over a foot of snow on the ground. After trying to get the vehicles moving they gave up. They were told there was a small village in the next valley, so they collected everything they needed and walked down the mountain-side to the village. It turned out to be an interesting walk through the snow and over a few small streams. The villagers were very hospitable and welcomed them, even though they had very little to offer. They spent three days in the village before the weather changed and they could get back up the mountain to try to continue the journey. The entire village was hired to help dig them out. Colonel Salimi arranged all the negotiations and by mid-afternoon they were on the move. On their return journey through the area, they could not believe how they had driven the vehicle over the boulders and rocks.

Over the next few months Oliver had many opportunities to visit the little village and in particular Mohamed Nabi, in whose house they had taken shelter over that difficult time. By April 1967 the route had been selected and the survey was nearly complete. Detailed engineering work was well underway both in London and Tehran. Procurement of materials was a major part of the work with some 900,000 tons of materials and equipment. Construction contracts for the southern sections of the line were negotiated with William Brothers and Entrepouse of France. Each company arranged the financing of its own work. A gas processing plant at Bid Boland was negotiated with Costains of the UK. A pipe mill was constructed at Ahwaz to roll the pipe for the project. Construction in the south by Williams Brothers (GmbH) started on September 6<sup>th</sup> 1967. The

main line from Bid Boland by William Brothers (UK) started in December and worked north. The Entrepouse spread started in October just south of Kuh-e Namak and worked south. The Russian pipeline spreads working from Kuh-e Namak went towards Qazvin, Rasht and Tehran. Mannesman of Germany were contracted to build the first six compressor stations.

The 42-inch diameter pipeline was completed by mid-1970 and gas was allowed to free flow through the system at a rate of some 400MMSCD. As the compressor stations came on line the gas volume increased.


### Technical aspects

The pipe for the project was made from high strength steel conforming to API Grade X-60. That is, the steel had a minimum tensile strength of 60,000 psi. This was the latest improvement in pipe strength at the time. The maximum operating pressure (MAOP) for the pipeline was 1030 psi. except for the section over the mountainous area, where it was 1065 psi.

The pipeline at maximum capacity would have a total of 10 compressor stations. The 2 compressor stations in the south were supplied with western units with a nominal 8,700 hp rating. The 8 stations north of the Zagros range were supplied with Russian-built units with a nominal 10,350 hp rating. The total installed horsepower was 346,000 for the maximum system capacity. The initial gas volume was 400,000 MMSCFD under a free-flow condition, and increased over an 8-year time frame to the design capacity. A total of some 450,000 tons of pipe was used on the project. Overall, the total weight of materials and equipment was close to 1 million tons. The pipeline was designed in accordance with ASME B 31.8. Isolating block valves each weighting over 20 tons, were installed every 36 km or closer depending on the safety requirements.

Due to the gas temperature in the pipeline cooling units were installed at each compressor station to keep the flow temperature under 45 degrees C., a difficult design function based on the climatic conditions.

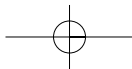
The gas treatment plant at Bid Boland was designed to treat the gas received from the Aga Jari field. This gas was sour, in that it contained hydrogen sulfide ( $H_2S$ ), which had to be removed using the amine process. At the time of the project, the operating companies were in the process of installing gas liquids removal plants at the production units. That meant the gas at Bid Boland was dry and almost pure methane. Gas from other fields was added later to meet the rising gas system requirements. Four processing towers were installed to begin with. Each tower was capable of processing 240 MMSCFD. The final design called for 8 processing towers plus one stand-by.



In the early stages of the project it was decided that the construction of a pipe mill to roll the pipe would have long term benefits. Negotiations were made with Torrence of California, for the purchase and installation of a pipe mill at Ahwaz. A large part of the justification of the pipe mill was that it was cheaper to import flat plate than to bring in rolled pipe. Shipping costs were and still are based on volume and not tonnage. In order to meet the schedule the 36-inch gathering line was to be made in Japan. The major part of the 42-inch, 40-inch and 36-inch plus the smaller pipe would be rolled in Ahwaz. Unfortunately there were some teething problems with the mill at the beginning. In order to keep the schedule additional rolled pipe was imparted from Japan. With the rolling problems resolved, the Ahwaz pipe mill rolled the pipe for the pipeline. About 80% of the pipe was manufactured at Ahwaz for the project with a substantial cost saving to IGAT and for future pipelines constructed in Iran.

While the pipeline was starting to be filled with gas in mid-1970, the first gas delivered to the custody transfer point at Astara was on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1970. The official opening was made at Bid Boland a year later. The IGAT project cost just over \$750 million at the time, a large project by any standards. In addition the project was within the original budget and on schedule. This is a tribute to all the people who worked on this project.

*[Ian Bowler's obituary in The Independent can be found on the internet.]*





Pipeline construction work

# FROM ISLAMIC SMALL TOWN TO WESTERNISED METROPOLIS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEHRAN UNDER THE QAJARS AND THE PAHLAVIS

By David Blow

*This essay first appeared in the June 2010 edition of The Court Historian: The International Journal of Court Studies. It is based on a lecture given at the third joint Society for Court Studies / Victorian Society conference on Courts and Capitals 1815-1914, held at the Art Workers' Guild, London WC1 on 7 November 2009.*

When Aqa Muhammad Khan, the first of the Qajar rulers of Iran, made Tehran the country's new capital and was enthroned there in 1786, it was the fifth change of capital in a little less than three hundred years. It also heralded the third change of dynasty over the same period – or the fourth if one includes the brief period of Afghan domination from 1722 to 1729. This is a testimony to the instability which plagued Persia during the eighteenth century and from which it was only finally rescued by the Qajars, who, for all their faults, gave the country a long period of internal peace, ruling until 1925.

The cities that preceded Tehran as capitals over this period were spread over the length and breadth of the country and were, in this order, Tabriz, Qazvin, Isfahan, Mashhad, and Shiraz. All were sizeable cities of economic and cultural importance at the time that they became capitals. Tehran, on the other hand, was a small town of no great importance. Its population at the end of the eighteenth century is estimated to have been no more than 15,000, compared with up to 50,000 for Tabriz and Shiraz and around 100,000 for Isfahan – the greatest and the most splendid of the former capitals.

Aqa Muhammad's choice of Tehran as his capital was dictated by his strategic concerns. At the time, in 1786, he was still fighting to overcome the last representative of the previous Zand dynasty, which had its capital in Shiraz. His own previous headquarters had

been at Sari, on the northern side of the Elburz Mountains. Sari had the advantage of being next door to the lands of his Qajar tribe, which were around the south-east corner of the Caspian Sea. But it was not an easy base from which to assert his authority over the greater part of Iran, which lay on the other side of the mountains. Tehran was a much better location. Situated on the southern edge of the Elburz, it occupied a commanding position on the Iranian plateau, while remaining reasonably close to the Qajar tribal lands. Aqa Muhammad finally defeated the Zands in 1794 and held his long-delayed coronation two years later.

There was nothing particularly attractive about Aqa Muhammad's new capital, apart from the dramatic backdrop of the mountains and the permanently snow-covered peak of Mt. Demavand, the highest of them all. The climate was, as it is today, very cold in winter and unbearably hot in summer. Most of the houses were dull single-storey buildings of yellowish sun-baked brick, with flat roofs, many with small domes. The streets, better described as alleys, were narrow, dirty and unpaved, producing clouds of dust in the dry season and seas of mud when the snows melted or when it rained. But in a country notorious for its aridity, Tehran's proximity to the mountains meant that it did at least have a ready supply of water which was brought into the town through the ancient Persian system of underground channels, known as *qanats*, although it also exposed the town to flash floods in the spring if there was a too-sudden melting of the snow on the mountains. Aqa Muhammad also inherited some useful structures, including modest palace buildings, provided by various earlier rulers.

The Persian concept of a palace which had become established by Aqa Muhammad's time had nothing in common with the European idea of a single great building like Versailles or Schönbrunn. Rather, it was a complex of much smaller buildings, serving different functions and set amidst gardens. These were intersected with alleys and contained water channels and fountains, and were planted with trees, shrubs and flowers. Often these buildings were open to the gardens on one or more sides, emphasizing the close relationship between the two. Although the Qajars were later influenced by European models and did begin to build on a larger scale, in general they adhered to this concept of a complex of palace buildings surrounded by gardens.

Tehran, as Aqa Muhammad found it, had a defensive mud wall some three miles long with numerous towers and a ditch and pierced by four gates, one on each of the four points of the compass. This was built in 1554 by Shah Tahmasp I of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722). Much of the area he enclosed was uninhabited and consisted of gardens and orchards. That was still the case in Aqa Muhammad's time. Periodically repaired and in parts rebuilt, Shah Tahmasp's wall remained in place until as late as 1867, when it was finally torn down. Tahmasp also built a partially covered bazaar and his Safavid successors added a modest palace complex. This was set within a larger rectangular site, known as the *Arg* or citadel, which adjoined the north wall of the town.

But in 1722 the Safavids were overthrown by rebel Afghan tribesmen who captured their capital of Isfahan, plunging Iran into a long period of turbulence, which brought much destruction to Persian towns and a general decline in the urban population. This was briefly halted in the early 1760s by Karim Khan Zand, the founder of the short-lived Zand dynasty, which Aqa Muhammad later defeated. Karim secured control of three-quarters of the country and may initially have contemplated making Tehran his capital, before eventually opting for Shiraz. At all events, he repaired much of the damage to the city, rebuilt and extended the palace complex, and surrounded the whole citadel with a rampart and a deep ditch.





The Audience Hall of the Golestan Palace ('Vue extérieur de la Salle du Trône', plate 31 from *Voyage en Perse: Perse Moderne* by Eugene Flandin and Pascal Coste. British Library Shelfmark 646.c.2.)

(Reproduced by kind permission of the British Library © The British Library Board)

Aqa Muhammad was the beneficiary of the work carried out by his Zand enemy and his own contribution was largely focused on the centrepiece of the palace complex, which was a two-storey pavilion (Figure 1) built by Karim Khan Zand, known as the *Divankhaneh*.<sup>16</sup> This was the administrative building, but it is usually called the Audience Hall, because it was here that the Shah appeared on ceremonial occasions and where he received foreign envoys. These events took place in the open porch in the centre of the building,

<sup>16</sup> Yahya Zoka, *Tarikhche-ye Sakhtemanha-ye Arg-e Saltanati-ye Tehran va Rahnama-ye Kakh-e Gulistan*, (Tehran, 1970), pp.45-46.

which is a traditional feature of Persian architecture, known as a *talar*. Aqa Muhammad embellished the Audience Hall with valuable decorative objects taken from Karim Khan Zand's palace in Shiraz, including gates, inlaid doors, glass and pictures, and two spiral marble pillars which he used to support the roof of the *talar*. In a gruesome act of vengeance, he also had Karim's bones dug up and reburied under a part of the palace which he regularly passed through, so that he could have the perverse pleasure of trampling on the remains of his enemy – this in spite of the fact that Karim had treated Aqa Muhammad with great kindness and generosity when he had him in his power.

Aqa Muhammad was an efficient soldier and ruler, but he was avaricious, cruel and vindictive – in part, no doubt, the result of having been castrated at the age of six in the course of the civil wars of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was murdered in 1797, only a year after his coronation, by two of his servants whom he had sentenced to death over a quite trivial matter, but whose execution he had unwisely postponed until the following day.

Within the Qajar palace complex was a large garden known as the Gulistan or Rose Garden and this name soon came to be applied to the complex as a whole. Aqa Muhammad began the construction of a substantial building in the garden, which was later used to house the treasury and the royal wardrobe, but he did nothing to improve or develop the town outside the royal quarter. He did, however, raise the standing of Tehran by bestowing on it the title of 'Seat of the Caliphate', thereby distinguishing it from the two former capitals of Tabriz and Isfahan, both of which retained the title of 'Seat of Kingship', which they had enjoyed since Safavid times. Tehran's new title also hinted at a Shiite rivalry with Istanbul, the seat of the Ottoman Caliph of Sunni Islam.<sup>17</sup>

Aqa Muhammad was conscious of the importance of royal symbolism and staged his own coronation in a way that made him appear to be the legitimate successor of the Safavids – the greatest of the previous Islamic dynasties and the only one to which the Persian people felt any kind of loyalty. But he remained more of a tribal chief in his way of life than a *shahanshah* or 'king of kings', like the later Safavids. He was not by nature a sedentary ruler and

<sup>17</sup> Abbas Amanat, 'Fath Ali Shah', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

for much of his short reign was busy campaigning in an attempt to restore the former frontiers of the Safavid Empire. Tehran was not his main preoccupation and he spent relatively little time there.

Aqa Muhammad was succeeded by his nephew, Fath Ali Shah, whose character and style of kingship were very different. It was during his much longer reign, from 1797 to 1834, that Tehran really began to make the transition from a modest provincial town to a royal capital. Fath Ali Shah revelled in the role of 'king of kings'. Milder in temperament than his uncle, he sought to impress his subjects and foreign envoys by the majesty of his person and the splendour of his court. He loved to wear jewels and fine clothes and was inordinately proud of his appearance, especially his long black beard and his famous wasp-like waist. He introduced an elaborate court ceremonial, modelled on that of the last Safavid kings, and presided over it in bejewelled magnificence. This display of grandeur was somewhat undermined by two disastrous wars with Russia, which resulted in the loss of extensive territory in the north-west of the country. He was not, however, the commander in the field. After the early years of his reign when he had to fight to secure his throne, he ceased to lead his armies in person, remaining for the most part either in Tehran or in one of the summer palaces he built just outside the city. Wherever he resided, he enjoyed to the full the possibilities of his vast harem of several hundred wives and concubines and sired at least 260 children.

Fath Ali Shah naturally set about making the Gulistan Palace a suitably impressive setting for his grandiose vision of what it was to be an absolute monarch – 'The Shadow of God on Earth' and 'The Pivot of the Universe', as two of his other titles described him. The palace was both the seat of government and the home of the monarch, which meant that like the better-off Persian homes it contained a public and a private area. The Audience Hall was the showpiece of the public area. Fath Ali Shah completed its decoration with carved stone friezes, fine inlaid woodwork, gilded inscriptions and arabesque painting, but above all with glasswork covering much of the surface of the walls and ceiling. This consisted of coloured glass and mirror-glass veneer, into which were inserted oil paintings by court artists of the Shah himself, as well as of hunting and battle scenes. This use of mirror-glass goes back to the Safavids, but it was the Qajars who made it a dominant decorative feature.

Fath Ali Shah had a great marble throne made for the porch of the Audience Hall, where it stands to this day. It consists of a large platform with carved sides and back, supported on the shoulders of grotesque figures representing jinns and divs. The Shah mounted it by two steps at the front and sat at the back of the platform, with a pearl-embroidered cushion behind him to rest on. The throne is made of pale yellow marble from the central Iranian city of Yazd, and was designed by the chief court artist and carved by the master stone-masons of Isfahan.<sup>18</sup>

The Marble Throne is one of three great thrones which Fath Ali Shah had made for the Gulistan Palace. Both the others survive and were also made in Isfahan, where the most skilled craftsmen were to be found. One is the famous Peacock Throne, which is another platform throne and which Fath Ali Shah named after one of his favourite wives who was called 'Peacock Lady'. The other is an upright chair-throne which deliberately recalls the throne used by the kings of Ancient Persia, as shown in reliefs from Persepolis. Known as the Naderi throne – the Persian word 'naderi' meaning 'rare' or 'unique' – it is made of wood, covered with gold and encrusted with over 27,000 jewels. It was used by the last Shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, for his coronation in the Gulistan Palace in 1967.

The Gulistan palace was in the citadel with its rampart and ditch, but only occupied rather less than half of it. In Fath Ali Shah's reign the main access to the citadel was across a drawbridge at the southern end, which was close to the bazaar, and through a gateway into a public square, known as the Royal Square. The square had four gates, one on each side, with the gate on the far side leading into the palace complex, which was surrounded by its own high wall. Qajar gates were ornate affairs, perhaps better described as gate-houses. Their brick surfaces were covered with colourful glazed tiles. We know that one of those in the Royal Square at this time depicted the fight between the legendary Persian hero, Rustam, and the White Div – a famous incident from the Persian epic, the *Shahnama* or 'Book of Kings'.<sup>19</sup> In the centre of the square stood a

<sup>18</sup> Zoka, *Tarikhche*, p.50.

<sup>19</sup> Captain The Hon.George Keppel, *Personal Narrative of a Journey from India to England* (London, 1827), vol.2, pp.139-40.

large cannon on a raised platform, which was another of the trophies taken from the Zand capital of Shiraz. It joined the list of places – some of them, like this one, extremely odd – where people accused of some offence could take sanctuary.<sup>20</sup> Strings of pearls were later hung around the muzzle and it became known as the Pearl Cannon. There was a popular belief that it would make a woman fertile if she passed under it three times.

The gate into the palace grounds was a new one built by Fath Ali Shah. A grandiose construction with an open porch (*talar*) above the entrance, it was called the Gate of Happiness. Like the famous gateway building into the Safavid palace complex in Isfahan, it was also known as the Lofty Gate or Sublime Porte (*Ali Qapu*).<sup>21</sup> Beyond it was a spacious garden with tree-lined avenues. The broad, central avenue had a canal with fountains running along the middle of it, and at the bottom of this avenue was the Audience Hall. Other buildings which made up the palace complex at that time included one housing the state archives; the treasury and wardrobe building; workshops for painters and craftsmen; the Shah's private quarters; and the harem. Also within the citadel and close to the palace were barracks for the guards and the royal stables (traditionally another place of sanctuary). All these have long since disappeared. Apart from the Audience Hall, only one other of Fath Ali Shah's buildings has survived, albeit much altered. That is the Wind Tower, the *Emarat-e Badgir*, which literally means 'the wind-catching building'. This had four towers, one on each corner, which caught the wind through long vertical slits at the top of the tower and drew it down into the building, providing a current of cool air. Such wind towers had long existed in Iran. The building had a large open porch in the centre and was richly decorated in much the same way as the Audience Hall.

<sup>20</sup> Eugène Flandin, *Voyage en Perse de M.M. Eugène Flandin, Peintre, et Pascal Coste, Architecte, attachés à l'ambassade de France en Perse, pendant les années 1840 et 1841*, (Paris, 1851), vol.i. p.232.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Calmard, 'Urbanisation, monuments, cultural and socio-economic life until the time of the Pahlavis', *Tehran*, Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition.

But perhaps the most appealing feature of the palace complex was the gardens, which covered more than an acre.<sup>22</sup> An envoy sent by Napoleon, Amedée Jaubert, was shown around them in June 1806 and left an ecstatic account of the avenues of plane trees interspersed with bushes of roses and jasmine, and ornamented with marble basins in which fountains played; of tulips, narcissi, anemones, and carnations scattered amidst the grass; of a brightly painted kiosk half-hidden by poplars, with gilded trellises which reflected the rays of the sun; and of a little mosque glimpsed through a clump of hawthorn and willows, its minaret rising above the trees. Jaubert was also shown a pavilion in the gardens containing the portraits of all the women who had known how to please Fath Ali. He notes that 'there was a considerable number of them'.<sup>23</sup>

Much of the population of Tehran left the city during the hot summer months for the cooler climate of the villages a short distance to the north, in the foothills of the Elburz Mountains. Fath Ali Shah was no exception. Although he also moved to palaces and encampments further afield, he spent much time in summer residences which he built so close to Tehran that they must count as part of the city, which has long since swallowed them up.

The largest and most imposing of these was the *Qasr-e Qajar*, or Qajar Castle. It was situated on the top of a hill, two or three miles north-east of Tehran. The buildings were of brick covered with white stucco. A series of terraces descended from the principal building on the summit to the palace gateway, which was on a broad terrace with a large pool in the centre from which water flowed into the extensive gardens below. This main building had an octagonal tower at either end which was decorated with enamelled coloured bricks. Behind it was a spacious court shaded by plane trees with a large pool in which the women of the harem were encouraged to bathe while Fath Ali Shah watched from his apartments above. The rooms of the palace were decorated with mirror-glass veneer and a variety of paintings ranging from Fath Ali Shah and the royal

<sup>22</sup> Donald Wilbur, *Persian Gardens and Garden Pavilions* (Vermont/Tokyo, 1962), p.152.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Amedée Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et en Perse fait dans les années 1805 et 1806* (Paris, 1821), pp.207-8.

princes, through various real and mythical kings to an Englishman by the name of Strachey who had accompanied a diplomatic mission and whose striking good looks had made a powerful impression on the Shah. The most splendid room was Fath Ali Shah's bedchamber which, besides the mirror veneer, had delicate frescoes on the ceiling, four portraits of women, and two magnificent doors inlaid with ivory, ebony and mother-of-pearl.<sup>24</sup>

The gardens covered a large rectangle and were surrounded by a wall. They were laid out in parallel walks, bordered by poplars, willows, jasmine, various fruit-trees, and a profusion of rose bushes. In the centre of the gardens was an elegant kiosk, which was adorned with marble columns, pools and fountains. It was the type of kiosk known as 'the European hat', because its appearance somehow reminded Persians of the cocked hat worn by Europeans.

But the summer palace which Fath Ali Shah most enjoyed was the *Negarestan*, or 'Picture Gallery', on account of its remarkable paintings. It was only half a mile from the city and the Shah often used to walk there from the citadel to enjoy a few hours of relaxation. Like Qajar Castle, but on a smaller scale, the Negarestan buildings were approached through a rectangular garden with a kiosk in the middle. The Audience Hall of the Negarestan is described by the English artist and traveller, Sir Robert Ker Porter, who spent two years in Persia from 1817 to 1819, as 'nearly circular, full of elegant apartments, brilliantly adorned with gilding, arabesques, looking-glasses, and flowers natural and painted, in every quarter'. He adds that 'the carpets and nummuds of these apartments were of the most delicate fabric, and literally, as we moved, we felt treading on velvet'.<sup>25</sup> The principal room contained a great mural painting at one end of Fath Ali Shah and his twelve eldest sons, while along the sides of the room were long panels depicting the Shah surrounded by his ministers receiving the rival French and English ambassadors who arrived at his court seeking his alliance during the Napoleonic Wars. What particularly

<sup>24</sup> Tancoigne, *A Narrative of a Journey into Persia*, (London 1822), p.183.

<sup>25</sup> Sir Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, etc., during the years 1817, 1818, 1819 and 1820*, (London, 1821), vol.i., p.338.

fascinated Europeans, however, was an underground octagonal room within the harem precincts. Discreetly lit by a partially glassed dome, this contained a circular pool of water and a highly polished marble slide down which the Shah's women would speed into his waiting arms.

Fath Ali Shah's building work in and around Tehran was not confined to palaces. He also built a number of mosques and *madrasas* or religious colleges, reflecting his constant concern to keep the increasingly influential Shiite clergy on his side. The most important of his mosques was his Royal Mosque – now renamed the Imam Khomeini Mosque. He built it immediately south-east of the Gulistan Palace and next to the bazaar, which was traditionally a centre of clerical influence and strong religious sentiment. Laid out on traditional lines, it consists of a square court with a single storey of arcades running around the four sides, each of which is punctuated in the centre by a vaulted recess. In the centre of the court is a large pool for religious ablutions. The mosque is built of buff-coloured brick, much of which is covered with polychrome tiles with foliage motifs. In common with many early Qajar mosques, it had no minarets, but two, together with a clock tower, were added in 1890 by Fath Ali Shah's great-grandson, Nasir al-Din Shah.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to these religious buildings, Fath Ali Shah built a north gate into the bazaar and added two new gates to the city, one in the north and one in the south, bringing the total to six.

During Fath Ali Shah's reign, the presence of a large and splendid court in Tehran brought about a sharp increase in the population, which grew to around 60,000 in winter, falling to around 10,000 during the summer migration. Royal patronage was not confined to the artists and craftsmen who worked on his buildings but was also extended in large measure to poets who were bringing about a major literary revival – and this began to turn the city into a cultural as well as a governmental capital.

Fath Ali Shah died in October 1834 and the Crown Prince, Abbas Mirza, having died shortly before, he was succeeded by his grandson, Muhammad Mirza, who ruled as Muhammad Shah until

<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Scarce, 'The Arts of the Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries: Architecture', *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol.7, p.913.



1848. The new Shah was dominated by his Sufi prime minister, Hajji Mirza Aqasi, to whom he looked up as a disciple to his Sufi master. As a result, the modest further development of Tehran was as much, if not more, the work of Aqasi as of Muhammad Shah. There were no additions to the Gulistan Palace as Muhammad Shah spent much of his time in a new palace he built for himself just beyond the northern wall of city, called the Muhammadiya Palace. Within the citadel, however, an arsenal was built, and also a circular theatre, known as a *tekiye*, for the performance of the Shiite passion play commemorating the death of Husayn, the Third Shiite Imam, at the battle of Karbala in 680 AD. Elsewhere in the town a new mosque and shrine were built, and a new quarter developed which was settled by immigrants from territories lost to Russia. Hajji Mirza Aqasi also improved the water supply for the growing population by digging new underground water channels and by building a 42-kilometre canal to divert waters from the Karaj River to Tehran.<sup>27</sup>

The reign of Muhammad Shah saw Persia drawn into the growing rivalry between an expansionist Tsarist Russia and a British Empire alarmed by the threat this posed to its Indian possessions. The two powers competed for influence at the Persian court and in an attempt to avoid excessive dependence on either of them, Muhammad Shah and his prime minister set a pattern that was followed by subsequent Qajar and Pahlavi rulers of turning to other Western countries for advisers equipped with modern skills. Muhammad Shah was the first Persian ruler to come to the throne with some knowledge of a European language, having been taught French by a certain Mme. Lamarinière. He employed two French doctors at his court while Hajji Mirza Aqasi tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to obtain irrigation and engineering experts from France. During his reign the growing European influence was reflected in the abandonment by the court of the traditional long robes in favour of frock coats and trousers.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Calmard, 'Urbanisation, Monuments, Cultural and Socio-Economic Life until the Time of the Pahlavis'.

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer M. Scarce, 'The Royal Palaces of the Qajar Dynasty', *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, eds. Edmund Bosworth & Carole Hillenbrand, (Edinburgh, 1983), p331

Anglo-Russian rivalry and interference in Persian affairs increased sharply during the long reign of Muhammad Shah's son and successor, Nasir al-Din Shah, from 1848 until 1896. So too did Persia's exposure to European influences. Like his father, Nasir al-Din Shah learnt French as part of his education and this now became the norm for Qajar princes. French also became and long remained the main foreign language of the educated classes. But Nasir al-Din Shah broke new ground by becoming the first Persian ruler to visit Europe, making three state visits in 1873, 1878 and 1889 and keeping a careful account in his journal of his experiences.

Nasir al-Din Shah showed his interest in learning from Europe early in his reign, in 1851, when he supported his reforming prime minister, the Amir Kabir, in founding a European-style polytechnic in Tehran. The *Dar al-Funun* ('House of Sciences'), as it was called, was built on the north-east side of the citadel, beyond the Gulistan Palace. Staffed by European instructors, it was the first educational institution in Persia to teach a European curriculum of sciences and humanities. It began modestly, but forty years after its creation it had over two hundred pupils and its extensive buildings covered a wide area.<sup>29</sup> In the following century it was absorbed into the newly established Tehran University, where a part of the original buildings can still be seen.

Nasir al-Din Shah was responsible for the final and most far-reaching stage in the development of Tehran as the Qajar royal capital. His first efforts were modest in scope, beginning in 1851-2 with some redevelopment around the citadel and the bazaar, including the renovation of the Royal Square.<sup>30</sup> Then in 1864-5 he commissioned two new buildings – one in the palace grounds that was to be five storeys high and called the Sun Palace (*Shams al-Emareh*) and the other a grand new *tekiye* in the south-east of the citadel, just outside the palace grounds, for the performance of the Shiite passion play, replacing the one built by his father. The Royal Square was redesigned, but more importantly, and a portent of the more ambitious changes that were to come, a new thoroughfare was

---

<sup>29</sup> Docteur Feuvrier, *Trois Ans à la Cour de Perse*, (Paris, 1906), p.158.

<sup>30</sup> Zoka, *Tarikhche*, p.29

opened up which ran from the bazaar in the south, along the eastern wall of the palace, where the outer ditch had been filled in, to a new prosperous suburb which had grown up beyond the northern wall of the city.<sup>31</sup>

The major redevelopment, however, began in December 1867, when Nasir al-Din Shah ordered the old walls of the city to be torn down and new ones built much further out. The population could no longer be contained within the confines of the old city. It had grown from 60,000 at the end of Fath Ali Shah's reign in 1834, to between 80,000 to 100,000 on Nasir al-Din Shah's accession in 1848. It had continued to grow rapidly in the following years until almost all the gardens and orchards, which had long been such a feature of the city, had been built over and new settlements had begun to spring up outside the walls. Outbreaks of cholera were frequent in these crowded conditions and took a heavy toll on the population. In addition, the old walls and ditch provided no defence to flood waters which swept down onto the city from the lower slopes of the Elburz Mountains, following heavy rain, in May 1867.<sup>32</sup> But it also seems very likely that Nasir al-Din Shah was drawn to the idea of a major redevelopment of Tehran by reports of Baron Haussman's transformation of Paris, as well as of the redevelopment on European lines that was getting under way in Istanbul and Cairo.

The work on the walls, which was completed in 1874, was carried out by a French military engineer, General Alexandre Buhler, who was an instructor at the Dar al-Funun. He built new fortifications with a steep outer ditch and bastions, modelled on the system of fortifications developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the great French master of the art, Vauban. Whereas the old walls had been four miles long, the new fortifications extended around the city for eleven miles in the form of an octagon. The number of gates was doubled from six to twelve. They were adorned with pinnacles and towers and faced with colourful glazed tiles depicting contemporary Persian soldiers as well as the legendary hero, Rustam. Guarded day

<sup>31</sup> John D. Gurney, 'The Transformation of Tehran in the Later Nineteenth Century', *Téhéran, Capitale Bicentenaire*, (Paris-Tehran, 1992), p.64.

<sup>32</sup> Gurney, 'The Transformation of Tehran in the Later Nineteenth Century', pp.60-62.

and night, they were closed from two hours after sunset until an hour before sunrise.<sup>33</sup> None of this would have withstood an attack by a powerful enemy and was not intended to. George Curzon, who visited Tehran in 1889, noted that there was no masonry work upon the new fortifications and they were not defended by a single gun. He rightly observed that their main practical service was to facilitate the collection of taxes on merchandise entering the city.<sup>34</sup>

The new walls increased the enclosed area of the city from about three square miles to seven and a half. It was some time before all this newly created space was utilised. After entering the gates, Curzon found himself 'again in the open country, for on most sides the city has not yet grown up to its new borders, which embrace a large extent of bare, unoccupied desert'.<sup>35</sup> The main further development took place in and around the citadel and to the north of it, where two large squares and a number of broad, straight avenues suitable for carriages and lined by trees and water channels were laid out.

The finest of the two squares was Artillery Square (*Maydan-e Tupkhaneh*) which was directly north of the citadel. The square was 270 yards long and 120 yards wide and paved with cobblestones. When Curzon saw it in 1889, the longer northern and southern sides were occupied by barracks for the artillerymen and their guns, the western side contained the Arsenal, while on the eastern side 'a fine building with an ornamental façade' was tenanted by the British-owned Imperial Bank of Persia. In the centre of the square was a large rectangular basin of water with a big gun at each corner.

Six major thoroughfares led into Artillery square through monumental gateways, making it a central hub. It quickly became the social centre for the better-off classes of the newly developed city, situated as it was in the fashionable northern quarter. Foreign legations, the European community and Persian notables all established themselves in the area. This marked the beginning of

<sup>33</sup> Houtum-Schindler, 'Tehran', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (1911 edition)

<sup>34</sup> George.N.Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, (London, 1892), vol.i, p.305.

<sup>35</sup> Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, p.306.

that division of Tehran, which was later to become much more acute and which is still present today, into a wealthier and more Westernised community in the north of the city and a poorer and more traditional one in the south.

One of the avenues that met in Artillery Square was called the Avenue of Diamonds (*Khiyaban-e Almasieh*). As its name suggests, it was the smartest and most elegant of the new avenues, with its shops and cafés and rows of poplars interspersed with rose bushes, apricot and peach trees lining the avenue. Laid out in 1878, it ran from Artillery Square to a new northern gate into the Gulistan Palace, from the top of which flew the royal standard of the Lion and the Sun when the Shah was in residence. The Lion and Sun motif had been used occasionally by the Safavids, but under the Qajars it became firmly established as the emblem of the monarchy – and was retained as such by the Pahlavis.

The other new square was a short distance to the north-west of Artillery Square. It was a vast parade-ground, over a quarter of a mile in length, called Drill Square (*Maydan-e Mashq*).

A symbol of royalty that drew caustic comments from Europeans was the band of musicians who greeted the sunrise and the sunset with a noisy outburst on huge horns, kettledrums and various wind instruments. The performance took place not only in Tehran, but also in former royal capitals, in the so-called Drum House (*Naqqareh-khaneh*). The Drum House in Tehran was on the balcony on the inside of the entrance gate to the old Royal Square, at the south-west end of the citadel. Curzon says that he ‘used to listen with a sort of horrified fascination’ to ‘the sonorous and portentous discord which is evoked every evening by the band of brazen-lunged youths’.<sup>36</sup> That inveterate traveller, Isabella Bird, who was in Tehran shortly after Curzon, found that, as the horns overpowered all the other instruments, the effect was ‘much like that of the braying of the colossal silver horns from the roofs of the Tibetan lamasarais’.<sup>37</sup>

Over a period of twenty-five years from 1867 to 1892, Nasir al-Din Shah extensively remodelled the Gulistan Palace. He pulled down or drastically altered much of Fath Ali Shah’s legacy,

<sup>36</sup> Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol.i, p.310

<sup>37</sup> Isabella Bird, *Journeys into Persia and Kurdistan*, (John Murray, 1991), vol.i, p.205

replacing it with buildings displaying varying degrees of European inspiration. The Sun Palace (*Shams ul-Emareh*) and the Tekiye – the Shiite passion-play theatre – were the first of the new buildings, being completed in 1868.

The Sun Palace, which was the Shah's private quarters, was situated by the south-eastern wall of the palace. Nasir al-Din Shah had it built with two five-storey towers at either end so that he and his wives and concubines could enjoy the view over the city. This was unusually high for a Persian building and is one reason why it has generally been regarded as the first building to show a European influence. The towers had balconies on the two upper storeys and were topped by little turrets and there was a clock tower in the middle. Persian monarchs had long been fascinated by European clocks – and Nasir al-Din Shah was no exception. The building faced onto a large lake and the Gulistan garden. This was reached by a flight of steps from a central open porch which was supported by two columns. The windows – there were none on the back of the building by the palace wall – contained much stained glass and the exterior surfaces of the building were covered with the polychrome ceramic tilework of which Nasir al-Din Shah was so fond. The most notable contents were two Gobelins tapestries representing the Crowning of the Faun and the Triumph of Venus, which were given to Muhammad Shah by King Louis-Philippe of France. In Curzon's view, the Sun Palace was 'a very creditable specimen of the fanciful ingenuity that still lingers in modern Persian art'.<sup>38</sup>

Nasir al-Din Shah's Tekiye was a much grander affair than the modest building provided for the same purpose by Muhammad Shah. It was called the State Tekiye (*Tekiye Dawlat*) and its circular form and tiers of boxes are said to have been inspired by pictures of the Albert Hall in London. Inside, a circular stone stage was surrounded by five tiers of stone seats, above which were three tiers of boxes, some of them with moveable lattice screens through which the ladies of the harem could peer without being seen. The walls were covered with coloured tiles with geometric designs. Nasir al-Din Shah was as anxious as his predecessors to retain the support of the Shiite clergy and the Royal Tekiye was clearly intended as a demonstration of his piety. He invited his French physician,

<sup>38</sup> Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol.i, p.326.

Dr. Feuvrier, to sit next to him for a performance of the passion play, which went on for four hours. Dr. Feuvrier, whose knowledge of Persian was limited, found parts of it ‘interminable’, but he says that ‘the Shah watched the spectacle with great interest, as if seeing it for the first time’.<sup>39</sup>

Nasir al-Din Shah destroyed all of Fath Ali Shah’s buildings with the exception of the old Audience Hall with its Marble Throne, and the Wind Tower. But he altered the appearance of both these buildings, covering the façade of the Audience Hall with tilework which deprived it of its gracefulness, and substantially remodelling the Wind Tower. He held his own coronation in the Audience Hall and continued to use it for the more formal occasions, such as his appearance at the start of the Persian New Year festival on March the 21<sup>st</sup>. But for less formal audiences and receptions he had another much larger edifice built at the north end of the palace complex. Lacking the traditional deep porch, with audiences and receptions being held instead in an upstairs room, and with its tall windows and classical columns it was much more European in style than anything that had gone before – an impression that was strengthened by the addition of an Orangery (*Naranjestan*). It is generally believed that the Shah sought to replicate some of the features of the grand buildings he saw during his visits to Europe in 1873 and 1878.

Nasir al-Din Shah again indulged to the full his passion for colourful tilework on the exterior surfaces of the building. But it was two big rooms on the first floor which attracted most attention. One was the Hall of Mirrors, which was decorated almost entirely with glass – great glass chandeliers, and mirror veneer and mirror mosaic all over the walls and ceiling. The other was the Museum, a name which was also attached to the building itself. This was designed to house the Crown Jewels and all the varied assortment of gifts the Shah had received from European crowned heads as well as items he had collected himself. Swiss musical boxes were placed in glass cases next to Persian antiquities. Curzon characterises the room with its contents as alternately resembling ‘an Aladdin’s palace, an old curiosity shop, a prince’s wardrobe, and a municipal museum’.<sup>40</sup> The most astonishing object was a jewel-encrusted terrestrial globe

<sup>39</sup> Feuvrier, *Trois Ans à la Cour de Perse*, pp.127-31.

<sup>40</sup> Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol.i, p.314.

which Nasir al-Din Shah had had made and which consisted of seventy-five pounds of pure gold and more than 51,000 jewels. The sea was composed of emeralds, England and France of diamonds, Africa of rubies, India of amethysts, and Persia of turquoises. It was looked upon, says Curzon, 'as the artistic *chef d'oeuvre*' of the Shah's reign'. It is still one of the great attractions for tourists visiting Tehran.

Nasir al-Din Shah's last additions to the Gulistan complex were new accommodation for the ladies of the harem and a building known as the White Palace (*Kakh-e Abyaz*). The harem was moved in 1882 from behind the old audience hall to a rectangular enclosure around a garden court at the northern end of the palace complex. A very European-looking two-storey building where the Shah would spend the night, known as the *Khabgah* (Sleeping Place), was built a little later in the centre of the garden. The White Palace got its name from the white European-style stucco and white marble stones which covered its hall and staircase. It was built in 1891 to house precious gifts sent to the Shah by the Ottoman Sultan, Abdulhamid. Soon, however, it was being used as the prime minister's office and cabinet meetings were held there until 1954. Since 1968 it has been used to house the Museum of Ethnography.

As in Fath Ali Shah's day, it was the Gulistan or Rose Garden itself which most enchanted European visitors. Nasir al-Din Shah had it completely made over by a French gardener. Curzon's description well captures its charm:

'This great garden is divided by paved avenues and gravel paths into flower beds, tanks, and extensive lakes. Magnificent pines and cypresses, as well as the more familiar plane and poplar, line its alleys and create a pleasant shade.....Little iron bridges cross the numerous channels, often lined with blue tiles, down which the water runs in perpetual motion; the pools are alive with fish and decked with swans and waterfowl; elegant kiosques are seen amid the trees.'<sup>41</sup>

Nasir al-Din Shah built new summer palaces in the Elburz foothills north of Tehran, rather than use the existing ones of his predecessors, which were either pulled down or allowed to fall into decay. They have been described as 'the apogee of Qajar secular

<sup>41</sup> Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol.i, p.322.



architecture on the grand scale'.<sup>42</sup> A novel feature of two of them – *Eshratabad* and *Sahib Qiraniyya* – is that the ladies of the harem were accommodated in chalets rather than in a single building surrounding an enclosed court, as in the Gulistan palace. At Eshratabad ('The Abode of Pleasure'), which was built in 1888 just below the Qajar Castle of Fath Ali Shah, there were seventeen separate chalets around a circular lake. These are no longer to be seen, but what remains is the building containing the private apartments of the Shah, the *Khabgah*, which stood next to the chalets. It is a four-storey brick building, the first three storeys of which are covered with tile panels of flower sprays and life-size figures of soldiers, while the fourth storey has an open colonnade all around it. At *Sahib Qiraniyya* ('The Place of One Born at the Time of the Conjunction of Two Happy Stars'), which was built on the site of a former palace of Fath Ali Shah, there were about forty chalets in the middle of a park of giant plane trees. Each chalet had a large veranda and at least three rooms.<sup>43</sup> The principal two-storey building where the Shah held his receptions survives, but without its central south facing porch. It has been described as designed 'in a style of architecture imported from Russia'.<sup>44</sup>

Sultanabad was another summer palace built at the same time as Eshratabad, but above Qajar Castle. According to Dr. Feuvrier, it was the largest royal palace outside Tehran. Two buildings remain: a five-storey *Khabgah* in the form of a polygonal tower, and a rectangular building with a colonnaded porch on all sides which was the Audience Hall. A modern authority on the Qajar palaces has described the most notable feature of the audience hall as 'a superb reception room with painted ceiling and dado of polychrome tiles whose range of motifs varying from traditional Persian subjects to whimsical copies of Europeans are unequalled'.<sup>45</sup> Curzon was much

<sup>42</sup> Jennifer M. Scarce, 'The Royal Palaces of the Qajar Dynasty', in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, eds. Edmund Bosworth & Carole Hillenbrand, (Edinburg University Press, 1983), p.341.

<sup>43</sup> Feuvrier, *Trois Ans à la Cour de Perse*, p.202.

<sup>44</sup> Wilber, *Persian Gardens*, p.170.

<sup>45</sup> Scarce, 'The Royal Palaces of the Qajar Dynasty', p.341.

taken by what he refers to as 'Persian frescoes of European, and particularly English scenes, among which may be noticed the Lobby of House of Commons, the interior of a fine London restaurant, and the nave of a cathedral; showing that His Majesty has most accurately discerned the three leading influences in the lives of Englishmen'.<sup>46</sup>

Mention should also be made of the palace of Doshantepe, built on the top of a small hill to the east of Tehran where Nasir al-Din Shah kept a menagerie. This consisted of a large monkey, four lions and lionesses, three tigers, three panthers, a leopard and five bears. Apart from the monkey, all the other animals were native to Persia. A visitor entering the palace complex climbed a road enclosed between walls with false arcades, which concealed the eunuchs' quarters and the harem buildings, before arriving at the Shah's pavilion. This had a terrace and a belvedere with a view over Tehran. At Doshantepe, as at all the summer palaces, there were also buildings to accommodate the considerable entourage which accompanied the Shah.<sup>47</sup>

Nasir ud-Din Shah devoted considerable attention to the maintenance and adornment of shrines to the descendants of the Shiite Imams, including the shrine of Shah 'Abdul 'Azim, just outside Tehran.<sup>48</sup> But he contributed little to the religious buildings of Tehran itself, apart from his Royal Tekiye. He had no hand in the construction of what remains to this day the most impressive mosque in Tehran, the Sepahsalar Mosque, which was built between 1879 and 1890 in the north-east of the city, in the area opened up by the new walls. It is named after the prime minister and *sepahsalar* or commander-in-chief of the army, Mirza Husayn Khan, Moshir al-Dawla, who was chiefly responsible for its construction. The mosque includes a madrasa and is on a grand scale. Its most striking features are the large number of imposing minarets and the colourful tilework, which mixes Persian and European motifs.

<sup>46</sup> Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol.i.,p.341-2.

<sup>47</sup> Fuevriier, *Trois Ans à la Cour de Perse*, p.190.

<sup>48</sup> Jennifer Scarce, 'The Arts of the Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries; Architecture' *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol.7, p.923-4

Modern amenities came to Tehran in a limited way during the latter part of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign. The first innovations came in 1880 with horse-drawn trams and street-lighting with oil or gas. Electrification was introduced in the Gulistan Palace in 1887, but was not extended to the city for another twenty-one years, and then only to a few areas; oil lamps remained the main source of lighting until the 1920s. The first steam railway, was opened in 1893 between Tehran and the shrine of Shah 'Abd al-Azim, a mere six miles to the south. Anglo-Russian rivalry prevented the construction of a proper rail network until the 1930s.

Nasir al-Din Shah did more to develop Tehran as a royal capital than any other Qajar monarch. But his efforts were confined to his palaces, both within and around Tehran, to the citadel and the quarter to the north of that. Elsewhere European visitors entering the city were confronted by 'untidy vacant spaces, and the shabby mud hovels which fringe them..... the alleys with broken gutters in the centre, the pools of slime or the heaps of dust according to the weather, and the general shabbiness of blank walls of sun-dried bricks'.<sup>49</sup> This did little to change the generally negative impression which the city – but not the palace – had made on Europeans ever since it became the capital. Curzon, who provides one of the fullest accounts of late nineteenth century Tehran, is rather the exception in his positive reaction to the city. He liked the way, as he saw it, that Tehran was 'being Europeanised upon Asiatic lines', and that 'while surrendering to an influence which the most stolid cannot resist, it has not bartered away an originality of which the most modern world would not wish to deprive it'.<sup>50</sup>

Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 and none of his three successors added much to the development of Tehran, although his son, Muzaffar al-Din Shah, built a new palace at Doshantepe, which is said to have been modelled on the Trocadero in Paris.<sup>51</sup> As rulers, they proved incompetent or worse, and the Qajar dynasty finally came to an inglorious end in 1925 when the last representative, Ahmad Shah, was deposed. The former

<sup>49</sup> Isabella Bird, *Journeys into Persia and Kurdistan*, p.183.

<sup>50</sup> Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol.i., p.307.

<sup>51</sup> Donald Wilber, *Persian Gardens and Garden Pavilions*, p.157.

commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade, Reza Khan, who had effectively wielded power since carrying out a coup three years earlier, became the first ruler of a new Pahlavi dynasty, with the support of a docile parliament – a new institution created as a result of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-06.. He was crowned as Reza Shah in the Gulistan Palace of the Qajars in April 1926 and ruled until 1941 when an Anglo-Russian invasion, prompted by his pro-German sympathies, forced him to abdicate in favour of his son who occupied the throne as Muhammad Reza Shah until 1979, when the Islamic revolution put an end to the monarchy.

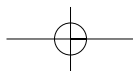
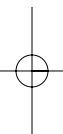
Both Reza Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah were impatient modernisers and Westernisers, though they had no truck with Western-style democracy. Both of them destroyed much of the Qajar legacy in Tehran. Reza Shah was particularly brutal in seeking to impose a grid pattern of straight streets on the old city, sweeping aside anything that stood in the way. But he was also a nationalist who harked back to the glories of ancient, pre-Islamic Persia. His desire for new public buildings which reflected this led for the first time to the employment of foreign architects, some of whom had worked as archaeologists and were better able to combine the modern and the ancient than the traditional mason-builders of Iran.<sup>52</sup> The results could be impressive. A good example is the Museum of Ancient Iran, completed in 1936 after a design by the French archaeologist and architect, André Godard (1881-1965), who produced a clearly modern building inspired by the Persian tradition of intricate brickwork, with a great arched entrance modelled on the famous arch of the ancient Persian palace of Ctesiphon, near Baghdad. But at its worst this eclecticism justified the accusation of the Persian writer, Sadiq Hidayat, that the architects of his day had ‘apparently lost good taste as well as the sense of fitness’. Each part of the building, he complained, was a separate entity – Greek pillars, Persian arches and English windows. ‘The impression created’, wrote Hidayat, ‘is that they are about to fall to pieces and one wants to take the structure in one’s arms to prevent them flying apart.’<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Mina Marefat, ‘The Protagonists who Shaped Modern Tehran’, *Téhéran, Capitale Bicentenaire*, (Paris-Tehran, 1992), pp.102-04.

<sup>53</sup> H.Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, (Cambridge 1966), p.99.

However, eclecticism soon gave way to a purer modernism championed by a group of Iranian architects who had trained in Europe, mainly in France. Prominent among them was an Armenian from Tabriz, Vartan Avenessian (1896-1982), who designed a rigorously modern palace for Reza Shah at Sa'dabad in the same foothills of the Elburz Mountains north of Tehran where the Qajars had had their summer palaces.

Under Muhammad Reza Shah, modernisation and Westernisation advanced at an ever more furious pace. Property speculation and an exploding population, largely driven by migration from the countryside, helped to turn Tehran into a sprawling metropolis of some five million inhabitants by the end of his reign. It has since risen to over eight million. The Shah himself succumbed to megalomania as he bestowed on himself the title of 'Light of the Aryans' and in 1971 celebrated a somewhat fictitious 2,500 years of monarchy with extravagant and vulgar pomp at Persepolis. In Tehran he commissioned what was intended as a lasting tribute to monarchy – and more specifically to his own reign – in the form of a soaring tower of white marble, fifty metres high, called the *Shahyad* or King's Memorial Tower. Eight years later he fled the country. However the monument he left behind, the last royal contribution to the appearance of Tehran, instead of being destroyed has become the striking symbol of the city under its new name of the Freedom Tower.



## THE *SHAHNAMEH* AND BRITISH PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II

By Antony Wynn

During World War II Iran, although nominally neutral, played an important part in the Allied effort against Nazi Germany. In order to provide a route for delivering military supplies to the Soviet Union, in 1941 British forces occupied the south of Iran, while the Soviets occupied the north. Although there was a serious shortage of vessels, a stream of ships delivered goods to the port of Khorramshahr, at the head of the Persian Gulf, for onward delivery by the new railway, completed in 1939, to Bandar Pahlavi on the Caspian. This supply line was known as the Persian Corridor.

As in World War I, much of Iranian public opinion was on the German side, in the hope that Germany would relieve Iran from the long British and Russian domination of their country. In the early part of the war, not surprisingly, many Iranians were convinced that Germany would prevail. As part of the effort to persuade Iranians to take the Allied side, the psychological warfare office in London turned to the Persian scholar, Dr (later Professor) Arthur Arberry of Cambridge University, with a view to designing propaganda posters. Arberry, in turn, sought the advice of Mojtaba Minovi, who was at the time working for the BBC Persian service and editing a pro-Allied newspaper, *Ruzgar-e Now*. Minovi persuaded the authorities that, rather than the usual flamboyant 'victory' posters, it would be more persuasive to use an adaptation of the *Shahnameh*. His point was that it would be far more effective to appeal to Persian nationalist pride than to attempt to inspire a pro-Allied feeling with western images. In a letter to Arberry he wrote that the Persians were a subtle race, used to indirect communication, who for centuries had been accustomed to putting new interpretations to ancient and familiar quotations.

Minovi's advice was to take the story of the tyrant Zohhak and Kaveh, the blacksmith liberator. Not only was this story taught in school but at that time almost every town in Iran had tea-houses where it was recited, along with other stories of the *Shahnameh*, by professional *naqqals*. Every Persian, whether literate or not, was familiar with the principal stories of the epic.

In the *Shahnameh*, Zohhak presents himself as a saviour of the Iranian nation, which had been suffering under the rule of the arrogant Jamshid. Zohhak is then turned by Satan into a monster, with a pair of snakes sprouting from his shoulders, which have to be fed daily on human brains. Zohhak, to Persian nationalists of the eleventh century, represented the Arabs, who had invaded and destroyed their ancient civilisation. Minovi's idea was to create a contemporary version of Zohhak, portraying him as Hitler. The two snakes would represent Mussolini and Tojo, the Japanese commander-in-chief and prime minister, while the devil, who inspires Zohhak, and is disguised as a cook in the *Shahnameh*, was to be portrayed as Goebbels. The parallels were obvious.

The person chosen to create the posters was Kimon Evan Marengo, known as Kem, a Greek-Egyptian political cartoonist who, during the war, produced over 3,000 propaganda cartoons for the British Ministry of Information. Kem prepared the six posters between March and October 1942. One can imagine that they were distributed around the bazaars and to the tea-houses where people gathered. To coincide with the Tehran Conference, held at the end of November 1943, the posters were reprinted as a booklet of postcards. At the conference, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin, aside from other matters, signed a Declaration on Iran that committed the three powers to Iran's independence.

The first card shows Iblis, the devil, disguised as a cook but with the face of Goebbels, in front of Zohhak, who has the face of Hitler. The two snakes sprouting from his shoulder have the faces of Mussolini and Tojo, the Japanese commander-in-chief. The onlookers are all wearing swastikas on their sleeves. The *Shahnameh* verses read: On Zohhak' shoulders two serpents grew by magic and destruction was rained down on the people.

The verses on the second card, which shows Zohhak's victims being executed, read: 'The laws of the wise became hidden and the desires of madmen became widespread; the hand of government grew long in evil purpose; goodness was only heard of in secret.' Curiously, the iconography here is based on the execution of the socialist and anti-clerical Mazdak and his followers, from a much later story in the Shahnameh.

The third card shows the nightmare of Zohhak, in which he dreams of three warriors coming to attack him. Here they are given the faces of Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt. Then, from the palace of the emperor, he saw three warriors suddenly appear.

The fourth card shows Kaveh, the blacksmith, with his leather apron banner, the symbol of liberty: 'He cried and raised his hand before the Shah, "O Shah, I am Kaveh in demand of justice. There must be a limit to oppression; oppression must always have a just cause."'

The fifth card shows Zohhak (Hitler) tied on a horse, dragging Satan (Goebbels) by its tail, escorted by the three Allies, while Kaveh leads the way with his symbolic apron of liberty. The onlookers, seeing Zohhak's defeat, have taken off their swastikas. 'Strongly he tied his two hands and waist, so that his fetters could not be broken, even by a raging elephant.'

The final card in the series shows Zohhak imprisoned on Mount Demavand. Again, the swastikas have gone. 'Swiftly as a post-messenger he brought Zohhak away and bound him to Mount Demavand and, when the name of Zohhak became as dust, the world was cleansed of his evil.'

In addition to Kem's posters, a similar poster was produced in Isfahan in 1943 by the artist Musavver ul-Molk. This one shows



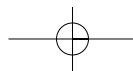
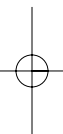
Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo being pursued by Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt. Mussolini has fallen from his horse, shot by an arrow fired by Churchill, showing the surrender of Italy. In the border are stirring verses from the *Shahnameh*, in which the hero Rostam is described fitting eagle's feathers to an arrow and shooting it at his enemy. This poster was commissioned by the son of Sir Percy Sykes, erstwhile British consul in Kerman and Mashhad and founder of the South Persia Rifles in World War I. The younger Sykes had been sent to Isfahan in World War II with the mission of encouraging the Bakhtiari tribes to resist the Germans in the event that they succeeded in breaking through Stalingrad and invading Iran.



Musavver ul-Molk

It is impossible to tell how effective this propaganda was, or whether it succeeded in turning the hearts and minds of the Iranians. Doubtless, with its references to Iranian independence in ancient times, it touched their hearts, but their minds, it is safe to assume, remained unaffected. As it happened, the Soviet defeat of the German forces at Stalingrad rendered all these efforts unnecessary.

[The story of the Kem posters is told in depth by Valerie Holman, "Kem's Cartoons in the Second World War," *History Today*, March 2002. The postcards are reproduced by kind permission of The British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent, Canterbury.]





The British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent

*Top panel (from right to left):*

*Hitler, embodying Zohhak, sits on a throne, with a blossoming tree in the background.*

*Hitler exults in the conquest and punishment of his enemies.*

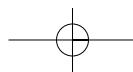
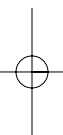
*Hitler anxiously dreams of the arrival of three saviours on horseback.*

*Lower panel (from right to left):*

*Kavah waves his leather flag before Hitler. Kavah represents the spirit of revolt, and his flag represents the triumph of good over evil. The tree is now in full leaf.*

*Kavah, holding aloft his flag, leads a weary horse bearing a bound and crownless Hitler, while the three-horsed saviours ride alongside.*

*Hitler imprisoned on Mount Demavand.*



## FROM THE TEHRAN PRESS

By Antony Wynn

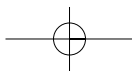
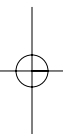
While researching for my book on the Oriental Carpet Company I came across some old copies of the *Journal de Téhéran* at the bottom of a suitcase full of old files and photographs. These little snippets give a flavour of the time.

*25 October 1938:* 11 cinemas in Tehran were offering foreign films. The first stone of a new Armenian church was laid. Cables were being laid for street lighting in the main avenue of Hamadan.

*19 February 1940:* The Khiaban Shahreza and the Old Shemran Road were being asphalted. Prizes were awarded after a skiing and luge competition held at Lashgarak. Mme Vartitière announced to her 'honorable clientèle' that, after her stay of two years studying haute couture in Paris, she had returned to Tehran and could offer them the latest models and creations of Paris. Cinéma Iran was showing *L'Espionne de Castille* with Jeanette Macdonald and the charming star Dorothy Lamour (the goddess of the jungle) in 'the most terrifying film ever made' – *Hurricane*, 'better than the Mutiny on the Bounty'. Cary Grant and Douglas Fairbanks were in Kipling's *Gunga Din*, 'better than *The Three Bengal Lancers*.'

*21 February 1940:* The army placed an announcement inviting the *corps diplomatique* to a parade celebrating the anniversary of Reza Khan's coup in 1921.

*22 February 1940:* The Iranian college in Baghdad put on a show of athletics, poetry reading and song. The Hotel Khayyam was offering a *Thé Dansant* and Mme Cornelli was offering lessons in modern dancing, including the Lambeth Walk, the waltz and the tango. The Iran Club announced a *Bal Costumé Masqué*. A racecourse was to be built at Jalalieh.



## CALLIGRAPHY IN IRANIAN ART

**By Iante Roach, who was one of the Iran Society's Travel Scholars in 2010.**

I have just returned from a three-week trip to Tehran, sponsored by the Iran Society. The trip has provided a stimulating start to my fourth and final year reading Persian and Arabic at Wadham College, Oxford University. I focused my research on the use of calligraphy by visual artists, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. In Tehran I met many formal and graphic artists, gallerists, and art historians who helped me to develop my research. I visited a number of interesting galleries, museums, and libraries. It would be impossible to mention all of them within this brief memoir, so I will simply recall a few in order to re-create an impression of my trip.

In Tehran Dr.Hamid Keshmirshekan kept track of my work, as well as sharing many valuable opinions and introducing me to a number of important individuals. He has written extensively on neo-traditionalism and neo-calligraphism in modern and contemporary Iranian art. He holds a PhD from SOAS and a Post-Doctoral research project completed at Oxford University's Khalili Research Centre. He is also chief editor for a new bilingual (English and Persian) quarterly art magazine, 'Art Tomorrow'/'*Honar-e farda*'.

I began my research by acquainting myself with the works of a great number of young Iranian artists who make use of calligraphy, as well as with those by more established artists. Mrs.Rozita Sharafjahan, artist and curator of Tehran's Azad Art Gallery, helped me enormously in this task. Although I found many of these works extremely interesting, particularly those by artists such as Farhad Moshiri and Amir Hossein Bayani, who look at their artistic tradition in a satirical, de-mystifying way, I decided I would like to re-trace the journey of calligraphy into art. It is still too early to assess adequately the work of artists of the young generation.

Although my line of research had changed somewhat, I was lucky enough to visit a couple of visual artists. Of these, Sadegh Tirafkan is a very well-known visual artist whose primary mediums are photography, video art and installations. Calligraphy is present

in his photographic series 'Body Curves' (2001-2) and 'The Secret of Words' (2002). For him, calligraphy is simply one of the various elements of traditional Iranian art, alongside carpets, miniatures and seals, which he uses to challenge Iranian tradition and history. He believes that *nastal'iq*, the flowing Persian script, imitates the forms of the body. In the earlier series he intended to show how some letters of the alphabet are based on the human shape, and how it is possible to write certain words along the curves of the human body.

Aydin Aghdashlou is a very famous painter and art historian. He has been working on the series 'Memories of Destruction' since the early 1970s. He is also an accomplished, self-taught calligrapher. As he explained to me in his stunning downtown studio, "When I realized I could not afford to buy works by great calligraphers such as Mir Emad, I decided to paint them myself!" Conversations with him and with Dr Semsar from the Centre for Iranian and Islamic Studies (*Da'irat al- Ma'aref-e Bozorg-e Eslami*), who is also Senior Consultant for the Golestan Palace Museum, allowed me to appreciate better how in the mid-nineteenth century as the importance of print grew steadily and that of traditional calligraphy consequently decreased, the practice of *siah-mashq* increased dramatically. New scripts, such as the *khatt-e golzar*, were devised. A series of painters, most notably Esma'il Jalayer, fused calligraphy and figurative painting. According to Mr. Aghdashlou, works by these artists had a great impact on Reza Mafi and other painter-calligraphers ('*naqqashan-e khatt*'). However, as Dr Semsar pointed out to me, the script in the Qajar era paintings was still readable and was at the heart of the artworks. Instead, in the works of Reza Mafi and his followers, the words are repeated and painting, not calligraphy, forms the essence of the art. It is thus unimportant whether the meaning of the words can be understood (i. e. read) or not.

Various artists of the *Saqqakhaneh* movement in the 1960s used calligraphy in their paintings among other popular forms of art. They sought to create works with an Iranian identity which would cater to a modernist perspective. Theirs was a populist movement, as its name implied.

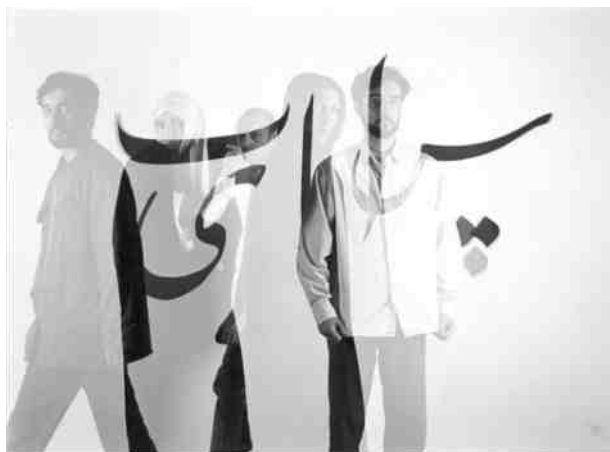
I visited the recently opened Gallery 66, located on Somayyeh Street. It is owned by the painter Sadegh Tabrizi and run by Ali Bakhtiari. The upper floor hosts a permanent collection of paintings



and sculptures by important artists of the *Saqqakhaneh* school such as Hossein Zenderoudi, Faramarz Pilaram and Sadegh Tabrizi, whereas the bottom floor hosts temporary exhibitions by emerging artists. Sadegh Tabrizi was present when I visited, and an interesting conversation ensued. Mr Tabrizi claims to have been the first to use calligraphy in a purely aesthetic way. In his words, "I realized that I could liberate the beauty of the letters from their meaning". However, according to Dr. Keshmirshakan and others, the true inventor of this trend was Zenderoudi, and there is no reliable material to support Mr. Tabrizi's claim.

On one of my last days I met Mohammad Ehsaii, possibly Iran's leading calligrapher and painter-calligrapher. He showed me a large selection of his works and explained to me that he performs his ablutions before painting religious texts and classical poetry alike. He believes that it is unfair to expect the traditional levels of excellence in the work of contemporary calligraphers, who have to cope with the all the problems of the modern world.

Initially I planned to look into the evolution of the function and perceptions of calligraphy in 20th century Iran. However I soon realized that this broad topic would require extensive sociological research and interaction with a great number of people. I thus decided to restrict my field to the presence of calligraphy in art. I was fortunate to be able to talk about my original ideas with people who gave me a much deeper insight into the matter, so if given the opportunity I would be delighted to explore this research topic in more depth in the future. Likewise, the contemporary Iranian art scene is worthy of greater scholarly and non-scholarly consideration than it has received thus far. I sincerely hope to be among those who will go on to undertake this challenging, and greatly stimulating task.



Amir Hossein Bayani from the series 'Brides of Our Time'.

***Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left***

**Edited by Stephanie Cronin, Routledge/BIPS Persian Studies Series, Pb, 2009, 316 pp, ISBN 978-0-415-57344-3, £23.50; Hb, 2004, 328 pp, ISBN 978-0-415-33128-9, £85.**

**By James Buchan**

The history of the socialist and communist Left in Iran is one of frustration and failure. Persecuted with enthusiasm by both the monarchy and the Islamic Republic, detached from the broad mass of the population and prone to catastrophic misjudgment, the Left as an organised force in Iran is all but extinct.

Yet at four distinct periods in the twentieth century, the Iranian Left seemed poised to emerge from its corner: in the defence of the Constitution against Qajar absolutism in 1908-09; between the Russian Revolution of 1917 and Reza Pahlavi's rise to power in 1921; from the Allied invasion of 1941 to the restoration of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1953; and just before and just after the 1979 Revolution. All were false dawns. In this collection of essays, which first saw the light at a conference at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London way back in 2000, a group of Iranian and foreign scholars examines the causes of this failure.

Arising as it did in the industrial conditions of the Russian Caucasus, socialism was always alien to Iranian custom and thought. In an essay on the Armenian social democrats in the Constitutional period, Janet Afary quotes a letter from Vram Pilossian to Taqizadeh, the founder of the Democrat Party: "Do you have a Persian or Arabic word that would mean 'democrat'?". Other contributors write that Marxist categories of thought were unsuited to Iran, which has barely embraced the division of labour even today. What Marxists like to call capitalist relations were not widespread till after World War II. Reza built his railway on a tax on the people's only luxuries, tea and sugar.

Apart from the Tudeh, under the wing of the Red Army after 1941, the Left made next to no converts in the small industrial working class or, again with the exception of the Tudeh in that period, in the armed forces. There were few secular Leftists in the bazaar or the slums. The peasantry, dispersed for lack of water in tiny villages miles apart, were no sort of material for insurgency outside the rainy woods of Gilan, where a Soviet Republic flickered into existence in 1920.

Because of its origins in the Russian empire, the Left was associated in Iran with an overbearing and unpopular neighbour and subject to the requirements of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Soviets threw in their lot with Reza, who crushed the Gilan uprising. The late Fred Halliday quotes a Comintern envoy in Gilan, Yakov Blumkin: "One day we had a telegram from the Central Committee: "Cut your losses, revolution in Iran now off." The Tudeh, founded as a popular front party in 1941, came to be dominated by the CPSU and lobbied for a deeply unpopular Soviet oil concession in the north.

In reaction, many Leftists adopted a quasi-Islamic ideology which left them vulnerable to a better organised, less dogmatic and much more practical turbaned clergy which between 1981 and 1983 obliterated them. As Afshin Matin-Asgari writes, the Islamic Republic "accomplished what the Shah had failed to do: an entire generation of Marxist and Muslim Leftists was decisively destroyed."

Halliday argues that the Iranian Left was not alone. Leftist movements of much greater strength, for example in Indonesia and Chile, suffered comparable defeats in the 1960s and 1970s. He warns against attributing the establishment and restoration of Pahlavi power merely to foreign powers, and not to the poisonous divisions within the leftist and nationalist camps as in Chile in 1973. Homa Katouzian quotes a 1949 article by Khalil Maleki, founder of the Third Force, against the Leftist Iranian passion for conspiracy theory: "They have turned the British Empire -- which is in a process of decline, and is losing her bases one after the other -- into an omnipotent, supernatural and irresistible power."

There is much of interest on the early days of Iranian Leftism: by Pezhmann Dailami on the First Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku in 1920, on the poet Lahuti's eleven-day Soviet in

Tabriz in 1922 (by the editor) and, by Touraj Atabaki, on the liquidation of the Iranian Communists in the Stalinist purges. In an essay on the guerrillas of the 1960s and 1970s, Maziar Behrouz argues that such actions as the Siahkal attack in 1971 shook the image or aura of the Pahlavi state, and gave the Left a seat at the revolutionary table. Alas! The Left became enthralled by Khomeini's mass appeal and anti-imperialist rhetoric. Ali Mirsepassi quotes a suicidal sentence from the Tudeh party organ, *Donya*, in 1979: "Only the united actions of all revolutionary organisations and institutes under the proven and wise leadership of Imam Khomeini will be able to complete this great task!"

The contributors are as one in arguing that the true achievement of the Iranian Left was unintended: to give Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters a selection of radical themes and slogans, an anti-American rhetoric and a suspicion of liberal democracy that has lasted to our day. In a short but elegant essay, Ervand Abrahamian traces this achievement to the inky pens of Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-69) and Ali Shariati (1933-77).

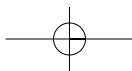
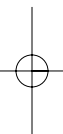
It is all very well for Halliday, from his vantage in heaven, to call those men "mediocrities in any comparative intellectual context." Principally, they are mediocrities in an Iranian context. What Al-e Ahmad, Shariati and their like managed was to adjust a selection of Leftist notions to the ritual and symbolism of the Shia so that they no longer set off those sirens and alarm-bells that had done for socialist ideas in the Constitutional Revolution and 1953.

That the Shariatist Left would also come horribly to grief was foretold by Bizhan Jahani, founder of the Fedaiyan, in a passage quoted by Abrahamian. Such reckless exploitation of Islam, this Cassandra wrote, was a Damocles sword in the hands of the turbanned clergy. They duly employed it in the evil summers of 1981 and 1988. Abrahamian, writing at the time of the first Khatami presidency, notes how the religious Left has rediscovered liberal constitutionalism in part to protect religion from the compromises of the Islamic Republic.

Haideh Moghissi, a former fedaiyeh, holds the Left up to task for failing to support women at the time of the protest against the Hejab decree in March, 1979. For Ms Moghissi, the socialists of the time were as reactionary in their attitudes to women's dress, manners and sexual conduct as any hedge-molla, "claiming national and

cultural identity at the expense of the female citizenry". This lack of political gallantry -- a sort of historical-materialist *ya rusari, ya tu sari* ('cover on the head, or a blow to the head') -- blinded the Left to the reactionary character of the Khomeinists.


This book was prepared long before the June days of last year. Here a superannuated national ideology, which preserves as if in aspic the campus slogans of the 1960s, confronted a revival of Constitutionalism decked out in the most flattering green. That the revolt was crushed reminds us that many, possibly most, Iranians support the Islamic Republic. For what it is worth, I imagine that any revival in political thought in Iran will begin in the seminary rather than in the faculty of sociology.



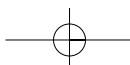
***The Persians: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran***

Homa Katouzian, Yale University Press, Pb, 2010, 448 pp, ISBN 978-0-300-169324, £14.99; Hb, 2009, 448 pp, ISBN 978-0-300-12118-6, £30.

**By David Blow**



Homa Katouzian has devoted many years to the study of the political, social and cultural history of Iran, with an emphasis on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The general conclusions he has arrived at are set out in a compelling and thought-provoking introduction to this history of the Persian people from Cyrus the Great to Ahmadinejad. They are not very encouraging. He finds that the political history of Iran has tended to move in a rather depressing cycle from absolute and arbitrary rule, through weak arbitrary rule to revolution and subsequent chaos, and then back again to a reassertion of absolute and arbitrary rule. Katouzian blames this state of affairs on 'a fundamental antagonism between state and society', with the state exercising arbitrary rule and society regarding the state as illegitimate and forever ready to rebel against it as soon as it showed weakness. Lacking the support of a social class – Katouzian is at pains to stress that Iran never had a European-style feudal system – the state was excessively dependent for its survival on its coercive power and the personality of its ruler. Katouzian points out that the lack of any rule of succession was a serious source of instability and one that was aggravated by the ancient Iranian belief in the *farr* or Divine Grace bestowed on the 'just' ruler. He shows how this belief, which persisted into Islamic times, effectively legitimised any successful seizure of power, since it was assumed that the *farr* had been automatically transferred to the victor. Katouzian notes that the death of a ruler invariably threatened civil war and chaos until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the succession of Qajar crown princes from Muhammad Shah in 1834 onwards was guaranteed by Britain and



Russia, the imperial rivals who had come to dominate Iran. He is equally convinced that Iran would have fallen into chaos after the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, had the country not been occupied by British and Russian forces. Katouzian also argues that arbitrary rule and the alienation of society from the state have encouraged both the well-known addiction to conspiracy theories and what he calls 'short-termism', with Iranians seeking quick returns from an office or a financial investment because they have no confidence in the future.

Katouzian illustrates these and other insights in the course of a lively historical narrative which is heavily weighted towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus the Safavid dynasty, which endured for more than two hundred years (1501-1722), is disposed of in nineteen pages, while ninety-four pages are devoted to the thirty-seven year reign (1941-1979) of the last shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, and the Islamic Revolution which overthrew him. Most readers, however, will no doubt welcome such a full account and analysis of what led up to and what has followed a revolution which is compared in importance with the French and Russian revolutions.

For someone who has dedicated one of his books to the memory of the nationalist Prime Minister, Dr. Muhammad Musaddiq, Katouzian writes fairly and perceptively about the last shah. He dismisses the view widely held by opponents of the shah during his reign that he was a mere puppet of the British and the Americans, citing the shah's readiness, on oil pricing, to act contrary to the wishes of even his most supportive American president, Richard Nixon, and his paranoia where the British were concerned, which was every bit as great as Musaddiq's. In the end, the shah firmly believed that his overthrow was the result of an Anglo-American conspiracy. Katouzian describes him as a modernist and a nationalist, who was embarrassed by Iran's underdevelopment and entertained 'lofty dreams for her rapid modernization'. He finds him 'able in some respects', but with 'a limited intellectual capacity'. As Katouzian makes clear, two failings above all contributed to his downfall. The first was the shah's ultimately successful drive to concentrate all power in his own hands. As Katouzian puts it, he began as a constitutional monarch, became a dictator after the 1953 coup against Musaddiq and then, from 1964 onwards, an absolute and arbitrary ruler. In this way he forfeited the



potential support of a growing educated and modern-minded middle class. His second major failing was one of character, in that he lacked self-confidence. This made him mistrustful of any able and effective minister, arrogant when things appeared to be going well, but indecisive in a crisis. Katouzian believes it was this temperamental indecisiveness, rather than his cancer which he says was then under control, which accounted for his confused reaction to the swelling protest movement of 1978. He points out that the shah had behaved in the same way during the Musaddiq crisis.

But Katouzian is constantly aware that things could have turned out differently. For both Musaddiq and the shah, their eventual fate was not inevitable. Musaddiq could have survived if he – or perhaps, more importantly, his supporters – had been prepared to accept a compromise settlement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. However, another of the conclusions which Katouzian has drawn from his study of Iranian history, is that compromise (*sazesh*) is ‘the dirty word of Iranian politics’. ‘When Iranians let loose their passions,’ he writes, ‘they cannot be easily appeased even though they may stand to lose rather than win. Moderation is not an Iranian virtue.’

Equally, there was no inexorable process leading from the overthrow of Musaddiq in 1953 to the overthrow of the shah in 1979. Katouzian argues that the shah consistently made the wrong choices and that even in the last two years of his rule he might have saved himself and the monarchy had he acted differently. He points out that the initial protest movement was not dominated by Khomeini and was aimed at liberalizing the regime, not at overthrowing it. Katouzian believes when the Shah sought to appease his critics in August 1977 by dismissing his long-serving prime minister, Amir Abbas Hoveyda, he might have averted ‘a full scale revolution’ if he had appointed ‘someone like Ali Amini’ – his reformist prime minister of 1962 who initiated the Land Reform programme and dared, to his cost, to question the excessive size of the military budget. But the shah disliked independent-minded men like Amini, however loyal, and appointed instead Jamshid Amuzegar, a technocrat whose attempt to cool an over-heated economy without cutting the military budget merely added to the discontent. Then, in November 1978, the shah made a television address in which he acknowledged past mistakes and promised to

meet virtually all the original demands of the protest movement. 'Had the shah made and carried out even a tenth of such pledges six months before,' observes Katouzian, 'this would have gone a long way to defuse the situation.' Now, however, there was an unstoppable tide of revolution and just over two months later the shah and the empress left the country for ever.

Katouzian sees another Iranian characteristic in their almost constant desire for change ('the more drastic the better') and their invariable disappointment when change comes and fails to meet their expectations. This was the case after the Constitutional Revolution and seems to be the case for an increasing proportion of Iranians – perhaps even a majority – as they look back on the high hopes of the Islamic Revolution. As Katouzian puts it, 'Combining a highly idealistic outlook in public life with a very pragmatic attitude in private behaviour is an Iranian trait which is unlikely to be matched by many other people.' Such insights make this one of the most stimulating histories of Iran to have appeared for a long time. The publishers, however, should be rapped over the knuckles for their poor standard of proof-reading which has resulted in a quite unacceptable number of misprints.

***Among the Iranians: A guide to Iran's Culture and Customs*** Sofia A.Koutlaki, Intercultural Press. 2010, 236 pp.  
**Pb: ISBN 978-1-931930-90-1, £14.99.**

**By David Blow**

Sofia Koutlaki's *Among the Iranians* is a very comprehensive account of the manners, customs and general culture of the Iranian people today. It also offers valuable advice on how foreigners should conduct themselves in the company of Iranians. All this is based on a great deal of personal experience. Sofia Koutlaki, who was born and brought up in Greece, is married to an Iranian and has spent many years in the country. It should be added that she is equally at home in Britain and is clearly at least trilingual in Greek, Persian and English – the book in question having been written in English. It is a most useful book for anyone unfamiliar with Iran and planning a visit either on business or as a tourist travelling independently. It will help them avoid embarrassing *faux pas* and explains much about Iranian manners that might otherwise appear puzzling. But it is also well worth reading by anyone interested in getting behind the headlines on contemporary Iran and learning more about the way of life of ordinary Iranians.

Sofia Koutlaki is particularly interesting on the collectivist nature of Iranian society, on the importance attached to maintaining 'face' and on rules of politeness, including the peculiarly Iranian concept of *ta'arof*, which she defines as 'ritual politeness'.

The collectivist outlook is reflected in the way in which an Iranian is defined by membership of a support group, such as the extended family or a circle of friends, acquaintances and professional colleagues. Koutlaki also found that Iranians value most highly those character traits on which the survival and strength of the group depends, such as a sense of duty, self-sacrifice and blending in. Helpfully, she provides the Persian words for these concepts, which are respectively *vazifeh shenasi*, *fadakari* or *khod-gozashtegi*, and *hamkhani* or *hamrang budan*. And all relationships,

Koutlaki emphasizes, are divided into the 'intimate' or *mahram*, which is confined to close blood and in-law relatives, and the 'not intimate' or *namahram*, which is everybody else. This recalls the division of the traditional Iranian house into an *andaroun* or inner area, to which only the former category had access, and an outer or *birun* area where others could be received.

Koutlaki argues that maintaining 'face' is an especially serious matter for Iranians since it affects not just the individual but also the group to which they belong. 'Face', she explains, has two key elements. One is the individual's character, self-respect and social standing, which is the result of education and upbringing. The Persian word for this is *shakhsiat*. The other element is the due respect and politeness one is expected to show to others and to receive in return. This is known as *ehteram*. She offers three main causes of loss of 'face': if information a person would rather keep secret about their private life becomes known, if a person behaves in a way not in keeping with their *shakhsiat*, and if they are not treated with the *ehteram* due to them. Koutlaki provides amusing illustrations of the way the authorities exploit the concern of Iranians to safeguard their *shakhsiat*, one of which is the following sign she saw on the back of a bus: 'The timely submission of your tax return is an indication of your social standing (*shakhsiat-e ejtema'i*).'

An Iranian fulfils the obligation of showing the respect or *ehteram* due to others by observing traditional rules of politeness, which Koutlaki says follow three principles: deference, humility and cordiality. Forty or fifty years ago it was still normal when addressing an adult one did not know well to refer to oneself as *bandeh* (slave) and to the other person as *janab 'ali* (the lofty side). These terms now seem to have fallen out of use and deference, humility and cordiality are probably best illustrated in expressions of ritual politeness or *ta'arof*. This is an Iranian speciality in which offers, refusals, apologies, compliments and so forth are made which are not intended to be taken literally. Koutlaki describes *ta'arof* as 'a tool for negotiating relationships'. She concedes that it 'may sometimes be seen as an empty formality', but argues that 'going through the *ta'arof* motions convey's respect and enhances the face of both speakers'. She gives some good examples of *ta'arof*, of which one of the more bizarre to anyone unfamiliar with the practice

is this exchange between a host and his guests at the end of a visit. The host says, 'Sorry you've had a bad time [with us]', to which the parting guests reply, 'Sorry for the trouble we've given you'. Koutlaki explains that in nominally apologizing in this way, the host is showing deference towards his guests and humility towards himself.

Koutlaki does not omit to draw attention to a number of negative aspects of Iranian culture. She deplores the continuing emphasis on rote learning in the education system and comments that many Iranians regard learning and memorizing as the same thing. This is no doubt connected with the long-established religious practice of memorizing as much as possible of the Koran. It is also one reason, she believes, why very few Iranians read books for enjoyment: they 'have generally come to regard reading only as a means of rote learning.....and they have not learned to derive pleasure from it'. She also notes that the artistic Iranian films which have won so much acclaim abroad are rarely shown in cinemas in Iran and that 'the vast majority of Iranians have never been to a live theatre performance'.

Only a few short passages in the book deal with the politics of the Islamic Republic and these are clearly written in such a way as not give any offence to the present leadership. This is perhaps understandable given that the author has made her home – or at least one of her homes – in Iran. For the rest, Sofia Koutlaki, has provided a valuable guide to the often baffling perplexities of Iranian manners.