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THE IRAN SOCIETY

OBJECTS

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

ACTIVITIES

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

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

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

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

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

JOURNAL

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

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

The year 2011 saw the centenary of the founding of the Persia Society, which in 1935 became the Iran Society. The history of the early years of the society, written by the late Sir Denis Wright, can be read on the website. The centenary was celebrated last November with a dinner held at the National Liberal Club, followed by an erudite and entertaining lecture by Dr Robert Irwin on how the West changed Persian poetry. It was a well attended event, marred only by the attack that morning by a government backed mob on the British Embassy in Tehran and the ransacking of some of the private quarters of the embassy staff. The Society, devoted as it is to the spread of knowledge of the history and culture of Iran, cannot ignore such events. We have to take them in our stride. Our purpose, as always, is to provide lectures so that such events can be better understood.

February 2012 saw the launch of Christopher de Bellaigue's biography of Mossadegh, which we held at the Royal Geographical Society. This was attended by over 400 people and the Society is grateful to the Iran Heritage Foundation for supporting this event. Since we moved to the new office in Eccleston Place we have discovered two boxes of Sir Denis Wright's collected articles on Anglo-Iranian relations, which we published a few years ago. These are available to members for £10 each, including postage. Also unearthed were bound copies of the very first lectures given to the Persia Society in 1911 by, among others, E.G. Browne. Members are welcome to come and have a look at them.

Antony Wynn

Caucasian Christians and the Construction of Safavid Isfahan

Lecture given by Dr Emma Loosley on 20th October 2011, based on research undertaken for her book *Messiah and Mahdi: Caucasian Christians and the Construction of Safavid Isfahan*.

Before Shah ‘Abbas I began his construction of his great capital at Isfahan in 1598 the city was centred on the Jameh mosque and the Maidan-e Vilayet Harun to the north of the current city centre. The proposal to expand this staunchly Sunni neighbourhood was rejected by the bazaaris who were hostile to the increasing pressure from the Safavid ruler to convert to the Twelver Shi’ism he and his family had espoused. ‘Abbas’ response to this hostility was simply to relocate his plans for an imperial capital further south and closer to the banks of the Zayandeh River where he built his glorious new capital radiating outwards from the famous Maidan-e Naqsh-e Jahan. However this construction raises many questions when we consider the opposition of the existing population towards Shah ‘Abbas and his entourage; who did he employ to build his new capital? Who could he trust to run the trade routes that were his main source of bullion? And who was capable and willing to set up workshops to provide the court with the decorative arts and luxury items that were an integral element of court ritual and public display?

The answer to these questions was tied to the long Iranian tradition of mass deportation. In the Sasanian era many areas of the Persian Gulf were briefly Christianised with deportees from Antioch, and this policy had remained a tool of Iranian rulers who sought to pursue a “scorched earth’ policy to disadvantage enemies or who relocated loyal subjects to regions suspected of being less than faithful to the regime. In this case the people who were displaced were the Armenians and the Georgians caught up in the long-running territorial disputes between the Safavid and Ottoman Empires. Many Armenians were consigned to the Caspian region to work on imperial silk farms and swiftly succumbed to the endemic fevers that plagued the marshes there. However there was one particular group that was singled out for personal attention by the

Shah; the inhabitants of Julfa on the Araxes were considered a particular asset due to the strategic location of their home and its role as a pivotal stop on international overland trade routes. The Julfans had a reputation as accomplished merchants with established factories and contacts spreading west into Syria and the Ottoman Empire and onwards into Europe. Europeans preferred to deal with “heretical” Christians rather than with Muslims, and the Armenians were known to be formidable linguists in addition to their skills as accomplished diplomats and traders.

‘Abbas ordered that the population of Julfa be marched in forced stages down to the site of his new capital and between 1603 and 1605 at least 3,000 families were resettled in Isfahan and the Bakhtiyari foothills. Over the next two decades this community became established on the southern bank of the Zayandeh River in their own suburb, which was named New Julfa. One concession to their relatively privileged status was the fact that they were allowed to retain their Christian faith and to build places of worship within the confines of their suburb. On the other hand, other groups were not awarded as much consideration as the Julfans and between 1614 and 1616 ‘Abbas forced approximately 30,000 Georgians to convert to Islam. Safavid policy towards minorities seems to have varied on a case-by-case basis and whereas the Armenians were most useful as part of a widespread trade network, the Georgian aristocracy who ‘Abbas forced to convert were absorbed into the military or the growing bureaucracy needed to run this increasingly stable and unified empire.

The evidence suggests that whereas the Armenians had a strong sense of national identity at this time that was tied closely to the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Georgians did not have such a strongly unifying ecclesiastical hierarchy or sense of ethnic cohesion binding them together. The Georgians were linked by clan loyalties and were culturally more omnivorous having assimilated various elements of Islamic culture into their society; perhaps the most concrete example of this is their national epic, *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*, which incorporates many elements of Sufi belief in the hero’s epic quest for his beloved. The Georgians also had a history of forging dynastic alliances with Muslim noble houses, and whereas in the medieval period we hear of many Armenian princesses being married off to Crusader, Byzantine and Seljuk

princelings, by the Safavid era the Armenian community had a reputation for remaining aloof and choosing only to marry within their own ethnic group. These contrasting attitudes to marital alliances were crucial to the future of the Georgians assimilated into Safavid society; whereas the Armenians remained a distinct and homogenous ethnic and religious group, the Georgians took a more pragmatic view towards both marriage and conversion. A number of Georgian nobles were swift to convert to Islam and, perhaps in recognition for this loyalty, it became the practice for the *darugha*, or governor, of Isfahan to be an ethnic Georgian. Another mode of social advancement for Georgians was offered by entering, voluntarily or by compulsion at a young age, the ranks of the *ghulam* corps. The expansion of the *ghulam* (or 'slave') corps was 'Abbas' solution to the problem of internecine strife within the Safavid family and mirrored the use of Janissaries within the Ottoman Empire. Young people, usually of Christian descent, were taken from Georgia and the Christian Circassian tribes of the northern Caucasus and trained for use within the imperial household. The most beautiful young women were destined for the harem and less attractive girls were given work within the domestic sphere or sent to the imperial workshops to weave or sew. Young men were trained for a military or bureaucratic career depending on their particular talents and it was possible to rise to one of the highest positions of the land through diligence and hard work. The reason that the *ghulam* corps was favoured by the shah was because each *ghulam* swore an oath of fealty not to the imperial house or the office of the shah, but to the current incumbent personally; this meant that their star would rise and fall in the personage of the current ruler for the next ruler might well favour a new group of servants. Therefore the *ghulam* corps had everything to gain by protecting and prolonging the rule of 'Abbas against all threats, interior and exterior, in order to protect their own interests which were inextricably bound to the fate of the Shah himself.

Therefore these two groups, Armenians and Georgians, despite sharing a common Christian and Caucasian origin were treated very differently by 'Abbas and, equally importantly, viewed themselves very differently from each other. Whilst one group remained a tightly knit mercantile and artisanal unit living in the same quarter and following their ancestral religion, the other dispersed across the

Safavid Empire, although a large concentration remained in and around the capital, Isfahan. The Georgians also seem to have followed a personal path with regard to their faith, with the males largely converting to Islam (although more than one appears to have reverted to Christian practice when at home in Georgia) and the women being free to adhere to their existing beliefs as long as their children were raised as Muslims.

It is now time to turn to the material culture of the city to see what, if any, physical evidence these communities left on the capital that they helped to construct. Thus far the majority of research carried out on this subject has concentrated, for obvious reasons, on the Imperial building projects centred on the Maidan-e Naqsh-e Jahan and the architecture of the palace complex itself. There has been relatively little interest in the less exalted domestic architecture of Isfahan that was built to accommodate the city's large mercantile and artisanal classes. This group, from the Sunni bazaaris who initially opposed the redevelopment of the city, to the transplanted Armenians across the river in New Julfa, had considerable financial resources and built themselves large and comfortable mansions to house their families in great style. Naturally, especially given many of the current misconceptions about attitudes to art in Islamic society, it has always been assumed that to a certain extent these Julfan houses would have been substantially different in form and decoration to the dwellings on the other side of the Zayandeh River and, apart from a few notes and images published by Carswell (Carswell, John, *New Julfa: The Armenian Churches and Other Buildings*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968), little, if any, information on Armenian domestic architecture has been published. As with the buildings across the river, many Safavid-era mansions in New Julfa have been demolished to make way for new high-rise buildings or have simply been left to deteriorate to a state where they are beyond repair since the time of the Islamic Revolution. However various agencies are trying to save as many of these buildings as possible and, from those that survive it is possible to tell a great deal about domestic life in the Safavid period and the results are often surprising. The Art University of Isfahan (AUI) has its main campus on a hill overlooking New Julfa and its neighbouring suburbs, but the AUI Faculty of Conservation is housed in two Safavid mansions within New Julfa and much of the University Administration is

housed in a third equally impressive building of the same era. One of these buildings is the Sokiasian House, named after the presumed owner of the mansion and the site of the largest domestic decorative scheme still extant amongst the Armenian mansions.

As mentioned above, it has always been assumed that it would be easy to tell Christian and Muslim dwellings apart as Christian households did not need to be divided into public and private space as rigorously as Muslim dwellings containing a harem. However Christian women of rank were expected to wear a veil in public and in the presence of unknown men, and their husbands were familiar enough with local custom to know that their women should not be present when important business transactions were being undertaken with Muslim colleagues. The honour of a family resting with the purity of its women was as much a Caucasian Christian tradition as it was a Muslim one, and therefore we should not be surprised that Armenian mansions were high-walled dwellings centred on private courtyards and presenting a blank face to the outside world, constructed in the same manner as the Muslim homes across the Zayandeh River. So if the basic construction was the same for people of both faiths, what about the decorative scheme? Surely that would reflect the spiritual preferences of the inhabitants? In this case we can only argue using the evidence from the Sokiasian House as this is, as mentioned above, the only Armenian home from the Safavid era that still maintains extensive frescoes throughout its *ivan*. However, if we can accept the Sokiasian House as being typical (and in the absence of alternative evidence we must suspend disbelief and do so in this instance) then the surprising thing is just how closely the imagery of this home mirrors that of the *Chehel Sutun* in the heart of the imperial palace complex. The conservators from the AUI who have worked on the house have identified three distinct phases of decoration within the *ivan* and the remarkable thing about them is that they appear to all have been carried out within an approximately twenty-year period – suggesting that the building was occupied by an extremely wealthy and fashion-conscious (a fashion victim perhaps?) owner who spared no expense in keeping-up-with-the-Joneses and changing his décor every time the style at court changed.

The three schemes are believed to have been executed between the 1620s and the 1640s and demonstrate clearly the evolution of

Safavid painting. The first level, of which only small fragments remain, show small figures with oriental features redolent of traditional Persian manuscript illumination. The influences of China and Central Asia are clear in these fragments that seem painted on too small and delicate a scale to dominate the chamber behind the *iwān*. The second layer is more typical of Isfahan-style wall paintings in that it perfectly mirrors the style and subject matter of the paintings found in the north *iwān*, smaller chambers and dado of the great hall of the Chehel Sutun. The figures are painted in flowing robes which are often slashed to the waist and all of which possess an androgynous elegance that makes their gender difficult to ascertain. It is only by carefully examining the coiffure of these figures and looking for traces of facial hair that the viewer is able to differentiate male from female. These first two levels of decoration at the Sokiasian House are notable for following the style and subject matter favoured by the court at the Chehel Sutun; there is nothing to indicate in these paintings that the owner of the house was anything other than a prosperous and fashionable bazaari and certainly no visual evidence that would suggest to the viewer that this was an Armenian home as the artists have worked in a purely Persian idiom that suggests they were employed from the other side of the river rather than from within the New Julfan community itself.

It is when we reach the third level that the controversy begins. This cycle is predominantly green and blue in background as the dream-like floating trees and rocks of the earlier style are replaced by European-style landscapes of rolling hills, green vistas and flowing streams and rivers. It is also on this level that we find the first clear indication that the inhabitant of the house was an Armenian with overseas links as the dado around the *iwān* depicts the months of the year and these are clearly labelled in both Armenian and English. However can we merely ascribe these paintings to a desire to emulate European fashions of the time in a manner viewed by later commentators as being far inferior to that of European masters? In the last few decades there has been a re-evaluation of this hybrid style based on the study of wooden panel paintings that Eleanor Sims has described as being painted in a Perso-Georgian manner and in the field of manuscripts Alice Taylor has referred to as an “eclectic style”. Both art historians have

persuasively argued for the assimilation of other artistic traditions into Safavid courtly arts and not all of these influences emanated from Europe. Sims argues for influences from India carried to Isfahan by Hindu traders and others, and Taylor talks of Jewish and Christian elements entering courtly manuscripts due to the cosmopolitan population of Isfahani society. However both Sims and Taylor are clear that Armenian and Georgian elements made their way into the court arts of Isfahan and that Georgian society in particular had a significant effect on Safavid fashion.

This assertion is illustrated by the fact that the majority of figures in this 'third style' at the Sokiasian House, a style that is also found on the south *iwān* of the Chehel Sutun, were dressed in robes based on the martial style favoured by high status Georgians. These robes were tightly cut over the torso and into the waist and both decorated and fastened by elaborate military-style frogging. At the waist they would flare into a wide, open skirt to just below the knee for males and to above the ankle for females. Males would wear breeches beneath this coat and women would wear underskirts. Another element that identified these fashions as Georgian was the adoption, again by both males and females, of clog-like heeled shoe-boots (of a design that is ironically now fashionable today on the streets of London). These boots and frogged robes can be seen in stone carvings and frescoes in seventeenth century churches across Georgia and it is clear that Georgians at the Safavid court had a large influence on the fashion of the day.

It would therefore be a grave mistake to be completely guided by the Armenian and English months of the year on the dado of the Sokiasian House *iwān*. Bearing in mind the earlier schemes and the fact that the home owner or his wife appear to have been slaves to fashion, it seems far more likely that the third cycle of the Sokiasian House was inspired by events at court, perhaps in particular news of the new paintings in the south *iwān* of the Chehel Sutun that are so strikingly similar in subject matter and style to those in the Sokiasian House. Given the fashion for dressing *à la Georgienne* we should not be surprised that the people on the walls of both buildings were dressed largely in this style with only a few figures dressed in an approximation of European clothes. The evidence of these wall paintings for the supremacy of Caucasian fashions is also supported by the existence of a small group of

sixteenth and seventeenth century panel paintings that have appeared in the private art market since the 1970s. It is unclear whether the sitters for these portrait paintings are foreign tourists or native to the city and equally uncertain whether the panels were painted for export or to be displayed in Isfahani mansions; but all show standing figures dressed in Georgian-style robes and shoes in opulent interiors with a curtain drawn back to show a green European-style vista in the background. In one case a female figure is clearly identifiable as an Armenian due to her distinctive Armenian chin-veil, but the identity of the other figures is confused by the inclusion of such non-Islamic items as a piglet and a drinking horn. This has led most commentators to speculate that they can therefore only be representing Caucasians (Georgians, Armenians or Circassians) or European visitors wanting a memento of themselves in native dress to take home.

This demonstrates that there is still a great deal of research to be undertaken into this Georgian-Iranian relationship. As Georgia has been able to interact more with overseas scholars since the break up of the Soviet Union, we now have a greater opportunity to explore the links between these two cultures in the Safavid era. This paper has been just a short extract from my research into the subject, but I hope that it inspires others to explore this fascinating and little-known aspect of Iranian history.



The Chehel Sutun: A Man in “European Dress”.



A comparative image of the same type in the Sokiasian House, New Julfa.



A comparative image on the façade of the 17th century church of Ananauri, Georgia.



Chehel Sutun: A woman in Georgian-style clothing.

Sinbad's Cities: Ancient trade and modern dhows on the Persian Gulf.

Lecture given by Warwick Ball on 19th January, 2012.

The Persian Gulf has been perhaps the costliest theatre of conflict since the Second World War. The Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988 was one of the longest, bloodiest, most vicious wars of the twentieth century leaving over a million dead. This has been followed by the 'Gulf War' of 1990- 1991, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and threats of yet another war loom while the last one still remains unresolved and the body counts still mount. It is also a region which has the most at stake: it produces over a quarter of all the world's oil and holds probably two thirds of all reserves. Out of none of the wars has there emerged any clear victor. But there were many losers. Apart from the million or so dead and the environmental catastrophe, there were ways of life and traditions on the Gulf, unchanged since the days of Sindbad, that have been shattered forever.

But modern development can also wipe out traditional ways of life just as surely as the guns and missiles can – a real conundrum, as we cannot condemn such development as easily as we can the guns and body counts. Well, I suppose outmoded ways of life and the traditions that go with them must inevitably give way to the future. But we can at least mourn their passing.

Despite the publicity, despite the myriad tankers and tanks that hug its coasts, the Gulf remains one of the world's least known waterways. It is also one of the world's greatest aquatic jewels, a little known world of underwater wonders, of staggering landscapes, of ancient ruins. And of traditions. Traditions redolent of the great days of the dhow trade, a place where the history and legends associated with the age of maritime exploration still live in the dhows that ply its waters. Today, it is the modern Panamanian-registered, Japanese-built, Dutch-owned super-tankers with Serbian officers and Philippino crews that dominate the Gulf – a far cry

indeed from the days of Sindbad the Sailor. But the dhows can still be found

The voyage of Tim Severin and his reconstructed medieval dhow, the *Sohar*, focussed much valuable attention onto the traditions of the dhows and their contribution to the history of world navigation. Both he and Michael Palin's *Around the World in Eighty Days* television series also highlighted the fact that the traditions of the builders and sailors of these dhows cling on in only a handful of pockets on the Gulf, their days numbered by the increasing mass-production that has condemned them to, at best, mere curiosities, and at worst, anachronisms of no economic use. Dubai Creek in the Emirates is one such pocket, Sur in Oman is another. But the least known is the jewel of them all: a rarely visited place on the Iranian coast called Kong. Here can be seen a flourishing dhow building centre where the past glories of the Gulf enjoy an Indian summer. The scenes on the waterfront of Kong differ little from the days of Sindbad and the early merchant adventurers who set sail from Basra, Sohar and Siraf to explore the east.

Kong lies far south on the Gulf coast towards the Straits of Hormuz, some 150 miles west of Iran's main port of Bandar Abbas. It is a few miles east of the minor port and administrative centre of Bandar-i Lengeh. The world of the Gulf coast is dramatically separated from the highlands of the Iranian plateau by some of the most precipitous mountain barriers to be seen that, in places, drop almost vertically to the sea. These spectacular mountains are not only a physical divide, but also a cultural one, with the scenes of daily life along the coast more in common with Mombasa or Goa than the great Iranian bazaars of Isfahan and Kerman. Gone are the baggy trousers and felt skull-cap of Persia; the men wear the same flowing robes, or dishdasha, and loose turban that can be seen in Oman or the East African coast, while the women wear a peculiar type of black beaked mask that is found only on the Gulf.



Viewed from a distance, Kong and other Gulf towns have a startling, surreal appearance, as the skylines are crowded with forests of miniature skyscrapers or towers. These towers, situated on the roof of each house, are part of a long tradition of eastern vernacular architecture. They function as traditional air conditioners: wind towers built to catch any slight movement of air in the stifling Gulf summers, deflecting the breeze down into the houses below where they can cause a drop in temperature of up to fifteen degrees.

Once on the waterfront of Kong, the scene evokes images of Siraf in the great days of the merchant adventurers. Drawn up on the beach when I first visited in the 1970s were great wooden vessels in various stages of construction, for Kong was the main centre on the Gulf for the dhow building industry. Indeed, Kong was one of the few places left on the Indian Ocean where the larger, long- distance sea going dhows were still made, as opposed to the smaller coastal vessels – little more than launches – used for fishing and smuggling.

Strictly speaking, the term dhow is a misnomer. It is a word probably of Somali origin, that today is used only in the West as a general term to describe any traditional Arab vessel of the Indian Ocean.



But in Kong and elsewhere on the Gulf, more specialised terms are used to describe each type of vessel: the most common ocean-going type nowadays is the double-ended *boom*, while the slightly larger, square-sterned *baghlah* is less used. Both types were still being made in Kong in the seventies, as were the much more common but smaller *sambuks*, launches only used for fishing or short coastal hops.

This industry still thrived at Kong in the 1970s at the time of my first visit, and one could see all stages of the construction – all carried out by traditional methods that had varied little for a thousand years – from the initial adzing of the timbers to the final embellishments on the great carved wooden sterns. The most favoured wood traditionally used in the construction used to be *aini*, a hardwood with much the same properties as teak from the Malabar

coast in India, but this is no longer so easily available and substitutes from elsewhere in India or Africa often have to be



imported instead. Large baulks of this timber lie on the beach being seasoned, and all cutting, adzing, shaping and fitting of the timbers was carried out entirely by hand. Not a single machine tool could be seen anywhere, only hand tools were used: the bow-drill, the bow-tensioned handsaw, the simple chisel and mallet, the adze – all tools that, in the west, have virtually disappeared from shipyards. Construction began with laying the keel followed by attaching a bare framework, but most of the ribs were only inserted after the planking on the hull was in place, and finally the decks were laid. Until relatively recently – up until eighty years or so ago – the timbers on a dhow were ‘sewn’ together, usually using rope made from coconut husks, but this tradition has disappeared and metal nails are invariably used nowadays (I have only seen derelict sewn vessels drawn up on the beach at Shihr in the Hadhramaut). Resins were used for caulking between the timber, and a preparation of

fish-oil was used as waterproofing, with the hulls below the waterline often receiving an additional treatment of lime (occasionally mixed with fat) to discourage marine growth.

The end result was not only a solidly functional craft, the design of which had withstood the test of centuries, but a very beautiful one: the exaggeratedly high pointed prow, rakish mast and almost feminine curves have an elegance that today is only found on pleasure craft. The sails were invariably lateen, a pattern copied from the Arabs by western ships, upon which all modern yachts still base their rigs. All dhows today however, are fitted with diesel engines, and in and around the coasts only these are used, with the sails only being unfurled when well out to sea – and even then only rarely. The view of a dhow under sail therefore, was even then a rare sight, but when seen is never to be forgotten.

The dhows of Kong went everywhere. Much of the trade was local traffic back and forth across the Gulf, never taking more than a day, occasionally doing a brisk trade in smuggling but more often carrying more mundane cargos of fish, dates and vegetables. Rarer these days are the long ocean going voyages, down the East African coasts to Lamu, Mombasa and Zanzibar or eastwards to Goa, Calicut and the coasts of southern India. Traditionally, imports consisted of such cargos as cloth, grain, rice, hardwoods and sugar from India, coffee from Yemen, spices from Zanzibar, and slaves and hardwoods from the East African coast. Exports were items such as carpets, pearls, dates, tobacco and occasionally livestock. But today the cargos are less exotic. In 1980, Gavin Young in his epic boat-hop out to China was able to take one of these dhows from Sharjah in the Emirates to Karachi, that was carrying a cargo as mixed as cars, washing-machines and second-hand clothes destined for the bazaars of Kabul. However, facing increasing competition from the massive container ships and cargo planes which can undercut even the most impoverished dhow owner, these longer voyages are becoming a thing of the past.



But perhaps not for a while yet. I returned to Kong in the early years of the twenty-first century after an absence of some thirty years expecting to see the dhow construction extinct. To my surprise, I found it was not only still flourishing but had greatly expanded. Indeed, such was the demand for new vessels that the dhow yards had to be moved from the waterfront immediately in front of the town to the beaches down the coast outside to the south-east, where huge dhows in varying stages of construction drawn up on the beach stretched for miles. Vessels were being built to order for clients as far away as the east African coast. There were some changes: the saw-pit and adze, for example, had given way to the chain-saw, and more modern tools generally were used, but overall the basic construction and form of the vessels had not changed in centuries (although none are fitted now with masts: the ubiquitous diesel engine has taken over completely from sail). Furthermore, there was a hugely increased scale of dhow building generally, not only at and around Kong itself, but just about everywhere along the Iranian coast of the Gulf and the adjacent island of Qeshm. Kong,

however, is by far the greatest concentration, and is now probably the biggest centre for dhow construction in the entire Indian Ocean.

To see more of the history and tradition that lies behind the dhow builders of Kong, one must journey up the Gulf coast a further 230 miles to the small fishing village of Taheri. Though only a small settlement today, the ruins of the greatest of all the medieval ports on the Gulf stretch around the bay on either side of Taheri. This was the port of Siraf, an early Islamic port site that reached its height in the tenth century, the legendary home of Sindbad the Sailor and the origin of his and many other fabulous voyages. It was the scene of a major series of excavations in the sixties and seventies by David Whitehouse for the British Institute of Persian Studies.



The site of Siraf itself stretches around a bay between two spits, dominated by the picturesque Shaikh's fort on a crag overlooking the modern village of Taheri. Behind, ridges rise precipitously, leaving only a narrow coastal strip for the ancient city. The characteristic mud-brick construction of the Iranian plateau is entirely absent here: stone and mortar provided a solidity – and

preservation – rare on archaeological sites elsewhere in Iran. Indeed, it is possible to walk around an entire excavated quarter of tenth century luxury merchants' houses, along a paved street and into courtyard houses still standing up to roof level. Other excavated buildings included the huge rambling Friday Mosque (itself built over the remains of a Sasanian fort), a palatial residence up on a ridge, a monumental cemetery of tomb towers, a bath house, a bazaar and more houses. Some remains reflected the diverse nature of Siraf's society: Zoroastrian ossuaries, a Nestorian church, a whale-blubber factory – and a building initially identified as a brothel.



In the tenth century it was a great city, a maritime Samarkand, the entrepot where goods from Africa and Asia would be trans-shipped to the new Arab empires of the Middle East. The surface is littered with fragments of Chinese porcelain, evidence not only of the reputation for immense wealth that the merchants of Siraf enjoyed, but also of the great distances its dhows covered, to the

limits of the known world in search of luxuries to supply an insatiable market at the court of the Caliphs in Baghdad.

When I returned there thirty years later I found more than just archaeological resources and techniques had changed. Siraf and the surrounding region has seen far more radical changes – and is to see far more over the coming years – than almost any site I know. To begin with the site itself. When we were digging there the way of life was probably not much different from that of the period in the tenth century we were digging; when I returned the twenty-first century had caught up. Electricity, clean running water and asphalt roads had arrived, of course, all to the benefit of the local community. But I was shocked by the amount of new buildings from the modern village of Taheri which had been allowed to encroach upon the site: bulldozers were flattening parts of the ancient remains to create new house platforms for further building, and considerable parts of the ancient site are now covered by ugly modern concrete housing. Very soon now this important site – one of the most important early Islamic sites for the Indian Ocean area – will be obliterated with only the excavated remains left as isolated ‘islands’ surrounded by modern housing. The threats to Siraf must be regarded as acute.

The early Islamic remains are not the only buildings of cultural importance at Siraf. The site is dominated dramatically by the splendid early twentieth century Shaikh’s fort of Taheri. Sadly, this building is now derelict and crumbling rapidly. In its day – and it was still occupied and in good condition in the seventies – this fort was one of the finest examples of its kind on either side of the Persian Gulf. Similar forts elsewhere in the region have either vanished or have only fragments left. It is not yet too late to save the Taheri fort, the finest of them all: the building and its decoration were well recorded by the Siraf team and it has since been the subject of at least two academic papers. Restored, it would be ideal as a museum, both for the site and for the region (the need for which has recently increased in the light of what is written below).



Threats to Siraf's historical remains and the acute need to safeguard them assumes particular importance in the light of the astonishing scale of development in the region. Some thirty kilometres down the coast from Siraf/Taheri is Assaluyeh, a place which I remembered in the early seventies as a fairly typical Persian Gulf village: a tiny community in the middle of a semi-desert coastal plain, a few date palms and goats, the only communication with the outside world being a dirt road by land and the occasional dhow by sea. Assaluyeh is now transformed beyond recognition by being the centre of the new South Pars gas discoveries and associated development. The development is on a simply vast scale: the Public Relations Office claimed it to be the largest industrial development zone in the world, and seeing it one can easily believe it. Already the industrial complex there is as large as a city, stretching for many miles along the coast involving companies from Japan, Russia, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Korea, China, Italy, France, India, Britain and elsewhere. It is geared for even greater expansion: clearly this will shortly become an industrial city on the

scale of or exceeding Abadan (it has been declared a Special Economic Zone with tax and other incentives to encourage foreign investment). There is already a motorway connecting Taheri and Assaluyeh (thankfully passing behind the site of Siraf, not over it) which is being extended to Bushehr in one direction and Bandar Abbas in the other, and another highway is planned up to Shiraz; the existing commercial airport of Assaluyeh (already big enough to take large jet aircraft) is being upgraded to international standard and a deep sea port is under construction; three 5-star hotels are planned, as well as sports, leisure and housing complexes. For a former member of the Siraf expedition in the 1970s remembering a very different lifestyle, the sheer scale of development leaves one reeling.

Assaluyeh is not all. Related development, spear-headed by Shell UK, is planned for the tiny hamlet of Tombak, some ten kilometres up the coast from Siraf. In other words, Siraf will soon become engulfed (pun not intended!) in a gigantic industrial and urban agglomeration stretching for many miles along the Persian Gulf coast. On one level, all this is naturally good news: it will provide much needed income for Iran as a whole and for the local region in particular, for long amongst the most neglected and economically backward in Iran. Historically, it is nothing less than a revival of Siraf itself: it will become once again a major international centre and one of the main focal points of Persian Gulf commercial activity for the first time since the tenth century. On another level, the historical remains, as well as the unique local architecture and life styles are endangered and disappearing fast.

Siraf provides us with a glimpse of a truly great maritime city of the ancient East. The present day town of Kong provides a link with this past, and we can get a hint of what Siraf would have been like. The two together give us a glimpse into the wonderful past of the great sea trades, of the legends and traditions of Sindbad. Even such glimpses however, are rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Soon, even the glimpses will be gone.

AMIDST SHADOW AND LIGHT: CHALLENGES AND NEW WAVES IN IRANIAN ART.

Lecture given by Dr.Hamid Keshmirshakan (Editor in Chief, Art Tomorrow) on 19th April 2012.

Contemporary Iranian art is structurally heterogeneous. On the one hand it draws heavily on the Euro-American paradigm, while on the other hand it has selectively adapted existing art forms. Like Iranian culture as a whole, it has incorporated elements of Euro-American modernity, while adapting a localised contemporaneity. The changing socio-political dynamics of the country presents a number of unique and interesting cases of this new situation, specific to their cultural particularities, but also related to other cultural norms and to a much larger global movement. These contextualised alternatives could be defined as a response to canonical discourses and ideally in turn inscribe new discursive formations in the contemporary era.

Examining Iranian art during the past decades, this paper sets out to explore the basic concepts, mechanisms, strategies, and paradigms of contemporary art in Iran. It further tries to connect these paradigms to a burgeoning “contemporary art” in Iran as a new type of time and space in art historical inquiry.

This paper does not aim to look fully at all the varieties of artistic ideologies. It just tries to address key issues which would help towards an understanding of the current situation – a situation that is made up of a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory ideas in Iranian art.

The late 1980s – after the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) – and early 1990s saw the second phase of post-revolutionary art and culture. The first phase was marked by an Islamic revolutionary and anti-nationalist outlook, in opposition to Pahlavi ideology. This second period, however, saw the issue of national and artistic identity and an art informed by national-Islamic characteristics as an underlying precept, still influenced by the political underpinnings of “westoxication” (*gharb-zadigi*), addressed through a critical interpretation of the works of Iranian intellectuals during the 1960s

and 1970s. These decades witnessed a conscious appreciation of national and cultural identity coupled with a celebration of national art. It was a response to the recurrent debate on the vitality of “national heritage” and its representation in Iranian culture and art (Figures 1, 2). The so-called *Saqqa-khaneh* movement was the main result of this preoccupation. The distinguishing features of this climate, which was led by political elites in the 1980s and early 1990s, were still anti-colonialism, anti-westernism, and a desire to find one’s authentic culture. More specifically, there was a continued preoccupation during those decades with “the West” as a universal model dominating a troubled Iranian “self” and with resistance to a basically imperialist West.

Iranian officials clearly promoted particular values as resistance against the “cultural aggression” (*Tahajum-i farhangi*) and the norms of cultural globalisation. Much of what was considered local – with reference to tradition or, as having the nature of a localised culture – and was proposed as being worthy of preservation in the face of cultural aggression was said to be based on “cultural essentialism”. This general cultural attitude explains why, in official cultural and artistic events, encouragement was given to taking refuge in cultural authenticity, historical specificities and traditional values, particularly of Islam or the so-called Irano-Islamic Shiite traditions as an integral part of that authentic culture (Figure 3). A large body of art works created at this time, which lasted for almost a decade, show the characteristic uncertainty of a transitional era.

However, the post-revolutionary intellectual discourse which was inclined to conform to the West was a phenomenon of the late 1990s. Unlike their intellectual predecessors, thinkers in the 1990s generally tended not to have similar simplifications, such as ideological views that emphasized one factor as central to solving Iran’s problems. Here we see that the implications for the maintenance of those cultural ideals, presented in the ideology and works of those previous generations, have now become problematic – perhaps because these cultural ideals and their presentation carry little weight with those who do not identify with them.

The third phase began in 1997 with the so-called reformism when the new movements paved the way for developing new discourses in Iranian art. During this period (1997-2005), post-revolutionary Iran experienced a period of “cultural thaw” and the

relaxation of restrictions on art led to the emergence of a generation of artists whose main preoccupation was with the idea of contemporaneity. The artist was now defined by the desire to be contemporary, rather than by producing a belated or elevated response to the everyday. Although no comprehensive study is available, it is clear that most of the emerging artists were young and belonged to the “third generation”, which was already a majority in Iranian society. They were educated, middle class, and mostly from central Iranian cities, in particular the capital, Tehran.

The third phase saw the introduction of new means of visual expression like art-photography, video, installation, performance, and the emergence of a new generation whose concern was less with the affirmation of communitarian identity than with their own identity within a society undergoing fast and radical changes. This art could perhaps enable these artists to take the lead in offering alternative visions of Iranian identity in an increasingly globalised world. For them it was a success to have a chance to experiment with new expressions in innovative languages, which were luckily backed by the official art establishments of that period. The artist's eagerness to experiment with new idioms coupled with official promotion of the development of these new languages paved the way for different modes of the so-called “New Art”. Enjoying government patronage, it was now possible for the New Art artists to perform or make their works with the support of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMoCA) which came to be a supportive, encouraging space, and to exhibit their works – both both inside and outside the country – with more respect now for the artist's choice.

An increasing flow of exhibitions testified to the growing interest in experimenting with the new means of art expression. The first comprehensive exhibition of this kind was held at the TMoCA in the summer 2001. A recurring event, it proved to be a turning point in the formation of a movement in contemporary Iranian art. While the sense of experiment about New Art was intense, during the same heady period successive exhibitions at the TMoCA were likewise rewarded with increasingly full attendances. New Art basked in a boom, and its makers found similar levels of enthusiasm when some successfully exhibited abroad. An appetite developed for the new, the unconventional, and, in a word, the contemporary.

Much of the dynamic driving emerging artists in this period sprang from the urge to break down the barriers that could so easily have prevented them from tackling new subjects, materials, ways of working and exhibiting that had previously been considered out of bounds.

However, since 2005 when the reform period ended, government support for this art has shifted to a different level, while trying to re-define the same cultural policy which had been experienced for years before the third phase. Nevertheless, the fourth phase still sees artists continuing the tasks that they had already began in the previous phase. They are now doing so through the private sector and more specifically through foreign networks and exhibitions. In this context, the recent “surge of interest” by the international art market in contemporary Iranian art has inevitably played an influential role, on the one hand through new developments in the art market and on the other by creating “expectations”. The latter has given rise to criticism that the old cultural marginality is no longer a problem of “invisibility” but one of an excessive “visibility” in terms of a reading of cultural difference that is too readily marketable. The fact that non-Euro-American artists are still “expected” to produce either “ethnic” or “political” art, whilst other positions are tacitly ignored, suggests that “visibility” alone has not been adequate to provide the conditions for an independent speaking subject. What we see in the works of particular artists through the use of ironic, sometimes humorous, language has also become a common method of criticising this exoticism and a metaphorical reaction against united sacred values as defined by the officials. Hence many artists have largely showed indifference to the idea of particularism in the sense of imposing a fixed and formulated mode of identity or “monolithic” or “one-view” formulae. Some contemporary works largely represent this concern. These artists use their own voice in expressing the infinite cultural aspects that they grapple with. Their work reveals and questions social limitations, transforming repression into creation, and testing the possibilities of critically addressing social reality (Figure 4). Questioning their own personal identity while criticising what is called “definitive collective memory”, these artists also employ autobiographical images in their works to address the situation of both gender and cultural disorders

(Figure 5). Others, especially in photography, represent a world of silent contemplation and connotations while addressing social sensitivities, criticising power relations and the homogenisation of life (Figure 6). Aspects of cultural life are the main content of these works, which artists try to deal with impartially.

The need for constant repositioning has led to a dynamic development in new forms of expression – mainly in the form of symbolic, metaphorical and poetic traits. The artists respond to the changing cultural climate of their country by creating works that incorporate a personal or collective past, yet depart from it. The works of a number of young Iranian artists ironically criticise the hypocritical aspects of the culture. They draw their main inspiration from Iran's rich classical literature, using its grand themes as allegories for contemporary Iranian social issues. They usually render scenes from this literature with a satirical taste and a caricature-like appearance (Figure 7).

So it is not surprising that the reference made by Iranian artists to traditions and cultural values is expressed in a rather critical, satirical and ironic language. Some examples show ironic interpretations of hybrids between traditional Iranian forms and those of the consumerist and globalised popular culture widespread in Iran. In the light of the current fashion trends among young Iranian women, other works also aim at capturing the aesthetic nuances that shape, reshape and reinvent the identity of the new Iranian culture. Other similar trends criticise the contradictory elements of a culture which is still suspended amidst true beliefs, superstitious and popular life (Figure 8).

Usually the metaphors and allegories of the artwork, offering political irony, are acknowledged to go beyond recognisable forms of cultural representation. In particular, through their artistic discourses, many young artists seek to disengage from the nationalist agenda which has long dominated aesthetic discussions of Iranian art. Instead, they invoke universalising and cosmopolitan discourses on web-sites and elsewhere in order to position their art firmly within a global art scene – something which is often justified in terms of “becoming international or global”. This can remarkably be seen in the works of artists working with different media. Others critically approach societal issues, such as the exploration of highly gendered notions of public space and tradition. Gender questions in

a patriarchal society through their personal life-experience are the favorite themes in these works (Figure 9). They depict despair and depression through their politically complicated works, while in some others social critical hints are being addressed. Other examples identify and celebrate possibilities for mapping contemporary Iranian culture. These possibilities are addressed through several overlapping themes such as the politics of gender and its social corruption, personal narratives revolving around isolation, memory and nostalgia. Thinking about a long unknown grief, the mostly depressing unsympathetic faces are subjects of some recent two-dimensional works such as painting and photography. They demonstrate a visual expression of despair, yet add some humour and a sense of the absurd. From this standpoint, socio-political commentary is one of the inseparable features of their works. Through a personal commentary, another group of artists focus the subject of their art on obsession, bitterness, contradictions and the contemporary realities of their society. Using various unconventional materials, many have also concentrated on social and psychological issues (Figure 10). Some pieces, for example, challenge the clichés of sexual attraction as well as conventional criteria of beauty in art making. Another popular trend chooses unusual themes mostly from the recent history of Iran, what for example could be found in the late Pahlavi period (1941-1979). Romanticising the luxurious scenes of popular places, objects and characters, they imply a nostalgic feeling for viewers familiar with the history of the images.

On the whole, while the work of Iranian artists often grows dark and intensely sceptical, concerned with isolation, fragmentation and dislocation, there is a frequent obsession with the sense of being up-to-date, “of today”; meaning living in and with a perpetual flux. It is perhaps this sense of contemporaneity which has posed options and challenges for Iranian society and will continue to affect art and artistic representations.



Fig.1: Charles Hossein Zenderoudi, *Untitled*, 1962, natural paint on paper mounted on board.

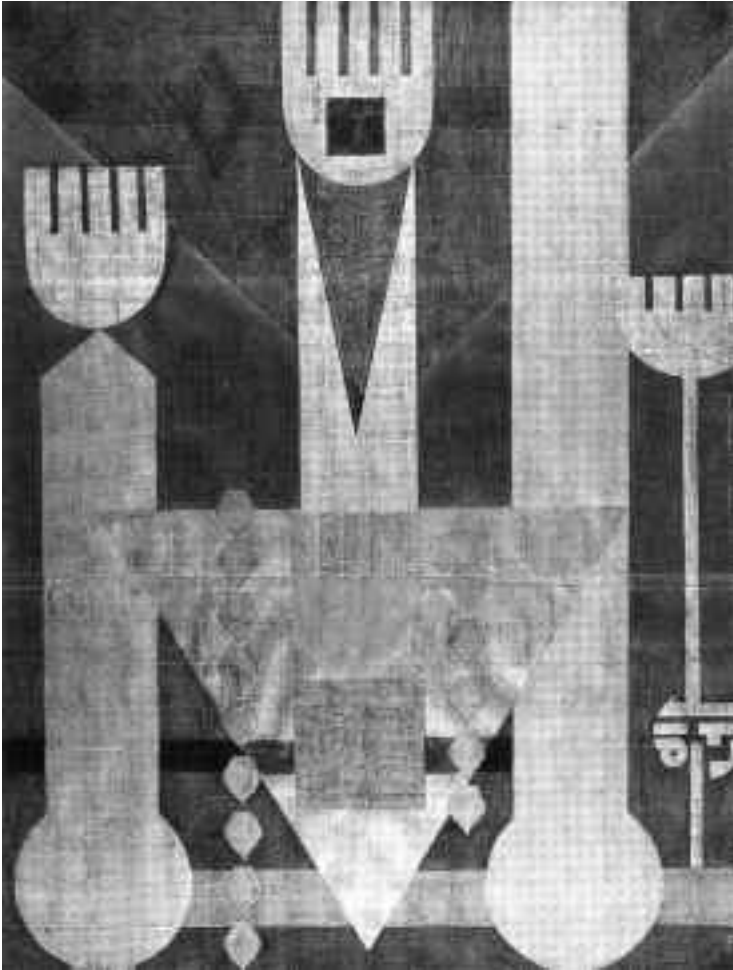


Fig.2: Faramarz Pilaram, *Mosque of Isfahan*, c.1962, mixed media on canvas.



Fig.3: Khosro Khosravi, *Gul-‘uzari zi gulistan-i jahan mara bas* (A Beauty of this World is enough for us), 1993, oil on canvas.

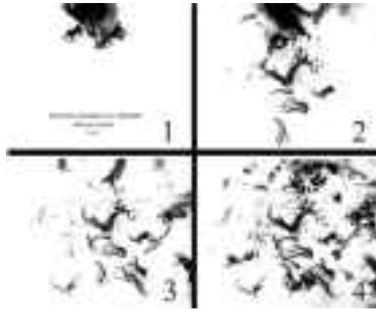


Fig.4: Barbad Golshiri, *What has befallen us?* 2002, stills from video.



Fig.5: Jinoos Taghizadeh, *Messages*, 2006, C-Type Photograph.



Fig.6: Mohsen Yazdipour, *My First Name: Soldier*, 2008, photograph with digital touch.



Fig.7: Rokni Haerizadeh, *Razm*, 2006, acrylic on canvas.



Fig.8: Amir Hossein Bayani, *Untitled*, from the series of *These Day's Brides*, 2007, acrylic on canvas.



Fig.9: Ahmad Morshedloo, *Untitled*, 2007, pen on cardboard, courtesy of the artist.



Fig.10: Nazgol Ansarinia, *Rhyme and Logic*, 2009, handmade carpet.

A Popular Hero: Colonel Pasyan and his rebellion of 1921.

Lecture given by Dr. Stephanie Cronin on 17th May, 2012.

Interest in Colonel Pasyan has recently been rekindled by the publication of *Kolonel* by Mamud Dawlatabadi, and its translation into English. The eponymous *Kolonel* is a rather brooding presence in the novel and the historical context rather obscure, so in this talk I will simply tell the story of Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan and the Mashhad revolt.

First of all, who was Muhammad Taqi Pasyan? What do we know about his early life?

Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan was born in Tabriz in 1892 into a prominent *muhajir* family. His forebears had emigrated from the Caucasus after Iran's defeat at the hands of the Russians in the war which ended with the disastrous treaty of Turkomanchai in 1828. His father and grandfathers were closely connected to powerful officials, including the famous reformer Mirza Taqi Khan, Amir-i Kabir. Like many *muhajirin* the Pasyan family possessed strong military traditions. Muhammad Taqi's uncle was a senior cossack officer and several members of his generation of the family entered the Government Gendarmerie upon its foundation. These included his cousin Haydar Quli Khan Pasyan, later a high-ranking officer in Riza Khan's new army, and two other cousins, Ali Quli and Ghulam Riza, both of whom were martyred in the nationalist uprising against the British at Shiraz in 1916.

In Tabriz, then a centre of constitutionalist thought and activity, Muhammad Taqi received a modern education, studying science and foreign languages as well as Arabic and Persian. In 1907 at the age of 15 he went to Tehran to continue his education and entered the Military College. He studied there for five years and, with one year remaining for the completion of his course, was asked by the

ministry of war to take up a commission in the Government Gendarmerie with the rank of second lieutenant. After two years' service he was promoted to captain but, in his own words, encountered constant difficulties in his work owing to the corruption of the authorities and their failure to provide funds, including his own pay and that of his men. At one point he complained that his men were starving. His subsequent appointments included that of instructor and interpreter at the Gendarmerie school in Tehran, and company commander and interpreter at Hamadan. He saw active service against brigands in Hamadan and Yazd, where he was wounded and decorated for bravery. He then returned to study in the Gendarmerie officers' school at Tehran. Promoted to major, he had just received the appointment of command of a battalion at Hamadan when the Great War broke out.

Cossack Brigade and Government Gendarmerie

Muhammad Taqi joined the Government Gendarmerie, while his uncle was an officer in the Cossack Brigade. What were these two forces? The Cossack Brigade had been established in the early 1880s as a bodyguard of the shah and was led by Russian Cossack officers. It was widely regarded in Iran as merely a tool of Russian influence and was accordingly very unpopular. In 1908 it bombarded the Majlis and suppressed constitutionalism in Tehran and became synonymous with reaction, both domestically and internationally. During the First World War it acted in concert with the occupying Russian armies. The Government Gendarmerie was the polar opposite of the Cossack Brigade. Established in 1910 by the second constitutional regime, it became strongly identified with Iranian constitutionalism and state-building, and officered by a Swedish Military mission, it looked to Germany for support.

The Great War in Iran

The Great War in Iran saw a bitter political and military confrontation between nationalist groups, supported by the Germans and the Ottomans, and the Allied powers, Britain and Russia. In this period the Gendarmerie constituted the military backbone of the nationalist struggle and the officer corps of the force in particular underwent a rapid and profound political radicalization. Gendarme officers played an important role in defending the nationalist

government set up in western Iran, and organized a series of coups in western and southern Iran, capturing the larger towns for the nationalists and expelling Allied officials.

Major Pasyan played a leading role in one such coup in Hamadan in November 1915, as did his cousins, also gendarme officers, in a similar episode in Shiraz. But the nationalists suffered a series of defeats by the advancing Russian armies, and together with their gendarme allies took refuge across the Ottoman border. Pasyan resigned and went to Germany for medical treatment for his wounds. In August 1916 an offensive by the Central Powers enabled the nationalists to install themselves once again in Kirmanshah but their stay was again brief and chaotic, ending in a collapse which was to prove permanent. Pasyan again left for Berlin. Meanwhile Pasyan's cousins Major Ali Quli Khan Pasyan and Captain Ghulam Riza Khan Pasyan, committed suicide by shooting each other after the fall of nationalist Shiraz to a tribal army.

While in Berlin, Pasyan continued his military training, first in the German air force and then in the infantry. He also engaged in a variety of intellectual, cultural and political activities. He wrote an account of his own life, *Sarguzasht-i Yak Javan-i Vatandust*, and of his experiences in western Iran during the war, *Jang-i Muqaddas Az Baghdad Ta Iran*. He translated widely between Persian and various European languages, and developed his interests in poetry and music. On a more overtly political level he was in contact with the Iranian radicals led by Hasan Taqizadah and grouped around the periodical *Kavih*, for which he occasionally wrote articles. In 1920 Pasyan returned to Iran. Still only 28, yet with experience of coup-making, in Hamadan, of active service and high command in western Iran, and of the martyrdom of his cousins in Shiraz, he resumed his position in the Gendarmerie. Promoted to colonel in June he received orders to take over the force in Mashhad and to reorganize it.

The reassertion of government authority 1918-1921

The reorganization and expansion of the Gendarmerie between 1918 and 1920 was part of a renewed effort by the government of Vusuq al-Dawlah, after the chaos of the war years, to restore its control

throughout the country. The province of Khurasan was remote, separated from Tehran by about 545 miles of primitive and dangerous highway crossing the desert. It comprised a huge geographical area, 500 miles in length and over 300 miles in average breadth, and was strategically highly vulnerable, adjacent to the newly established Bolshevik power in the north, possessing a long and notional eastern border with Afghanistan, and with Baluchistan facing British India in the south. The only urban centre of any significance was Mashhad itself, while the countryside was dominated by numerous powerful and well-armed nomadic tribes, Turkomans and Kurds in the north-east, Hazarahs, Taymuris, Barbaris and Baluchis in the south and south-east,

The most important feature of Mashhad itself was of course the presence there of the shrine of the eighth shi'i Imam, which supported a large and generally conservative religious establishment.

The central government was represented in Khurasan by the governor-general who in turn appointed governors to the smaller towns of the province, these appointments frequently merely giving official recognition to traditional tribal and local leaderships, most notably Shawkat al-Mulk of Birjand at the southern periphery of the province and the Sardar of Bujnurd at the northern.

The European presence was provided by the various Belgian officials employed by the Iranian Treasury and the Swedish chief of police, Major Sjoberg and his successor Major Bronikovsky. Mashhad also possessed a British consul-general and a military attaché, the latter responsible for intelligence gathering across the whole of central Asia, although the Russian diplomatic establishment had been completely disorganized by the 1917 revolution.

Between 1918 and 1921 a heightened sense of political insecurity prevailed within Khurasan. Civil war raged in the former Russian Empire while the Jangali rebellion to the west was in full swing, culminating in the declaration of the Soviet Republic of Gilan in 1920. The same year Tabriz fell under the control of the Democrats

led by Shaykh Muhammad Khiyabani. Khurasan faced political uncertainty, military insecurity and economic difficulties.

In 1918 the prime minister, Vusuq al-Dawlah, had appointed his brother, Qavam al-Saltanah (later the famous Ahmad Qavam) as governor-general of Khurasan. At first Qavam looked favourably on the Gendarmerie but by the autumn of 1920 financial difficulties were producing serious friction between Qavam and the Belgian Director of Revenues for Khurasan, Monsieur Léon Dubois. In the midst of this quarrel, in early September 1920, Colonel Pasyan arrived in Mashhad to take over as provincial *ra'is* of the Gendarmerie. Pasyan blamed Qavam for the shortage of cash and threatened to resign if money were not forthcoming. By February 1921, like Dubois, he too was publicly on bad terms with Qavam.

The anti-Qavam coup

At this point the tense situation in Mashhad was subsumed into the national crisis which broke out when Sayyid Ziya and Riza Khan carried out their coup in Tehran in February 1921. Although Sayyid Ziya was tainted by his past associations with the British, nonetheless the avowed nationalist, state-building objectives of the coup-makers, and their determined measures against a discredited aristocracy and higher bureaucracy, aroused enthusiasm and even euphoria among the younger generation of revolutionary nationalists. The coup-makers immediately made sweeping arrests among the elite, announcing the intention of extracting arrears of taxes from them with which to finance a programme of reconstruction, its principal objectives to be financial solvency, administrative reorganization, land reform, development of trade and industry and the formation of a modern army.

Although the hostility between the Gendarmerie and the Cossack Division during the constitutional period and the Great War had been endemic and profound, nonetheless a sufficient measure of cooperation was achieved to make possible the coup d'état of 1921.. Gendarme participation in the preparations for the coup was vital to its success and in return for their support they were rewarded with important posts in the new government and with considerable power in the provinces. Indeed elements within the Gendarmerie, with a

self-conscious mission of national salvation, appear to have been planning a coup of their own which was only just preempted by Riza Khan's action.

On 2 April, a few weeks after the establishment of the new regime in Tehran, Colonel Pasyan took control of Mashhad. He arrested Qavam, who was escorted under arrest to Tehran where he was imprisoned. At the same time many other officials of the Khurasan provincial government, military and police officers, landowners and merchants, were arrested and confined in the Gendarmerie headquarters, in close imitation of the pattern of arrests carried out by Sayyid Ziya in Tehran.

Immediately after his coup Colonel Pasyan began to expand the Gendarmerie and took measures to consolidate his control over the outlying districts of the province, appointing gendarme offices as governors.

Arrests of landowners whose taxes were in arrears had begun on the day of the coup and continued for some time afterwards. The jubilant Dubois assessed Qavam's arrears as amounting to vast sums and began seizing his property. Within a few days of the coup Dubois had, together with Colonel Pasyan, set up a Finance Commission to investigate and assess revenue claims. Another of the colonel's priorities was the reform of the shrine administration, of which he wanted nothing less than a complete overhaul. On the morning of 7 May, on the orders of the prime minister, Sayyid Ziya, Pasyan arrested all the high officials of the shrine, with the exception of the *mutavallibashi*. Pasyan then appointed four committees for the investigation of shrine affairs, including its accounts, its personnel, its lands and buildings and its moveable property.

The fall of Sayyid Ziya: an uneasy truce

Colonel Pasyan's relationship with the central government remained harmonious so long as Sayyid Ziya held the premiership, however the latter's fall and exile at the end of May brought about a crisis for the gendarme regime in Mashhad. For radical nationalists Sayyid Ziya's departure appeared to represent a counter-coup by the old

élite, especially as it was followed by the release of the political prisoners originally arrested by the Sayyid, including of course Qavam. On 30 May, Colonel Pasyan, in a shocking development, received a circular telegram from the shah announcing the appointment of Qavam as prime minister. The next morning orders arrived from Tehran appointing a local notable, Najd al-Saltanah, as the new governor-general of Khurasan and directing the release of all persons in custody, with the exception of outlaws and robbers.

Pasyan, clearly overwhelmed at the news of Qavam's appointment, began to contemplate defying Tehran. He was convinced that the new Prime Minister was actuated solely by the motive of revenge while he himself was consumed with personal hatred for, and fear of treachery by, Qavam. He apparently felt that the only two courses open to him were either to defy Tehran or to leave for Europe. He put forward certain terms for his departure, including safeguards for his followers from reprisals, guarantees for the future of the Gendarmerie force in general, and a safe conduct to the frontier for himself. The crisis was temporarily resolved when, on 2 June, the minister of court requested Pasyan to persuade Najd al-Saltanah to take over the post of governor-general and himself to remain in command of the military forces in Khurasan. The colonel agreed.

The Tehran authorities were very conscious both of the personal prestige and ambition of Colonel Pasyan and of the capacity of the Gendarmerie to intervene in national political life. It was this awareness which dictated their conciliatory attitude during the crisis of late May and which persuaded them of the need to placate the colonel. Riza Khan, now War Minister in Tehran, undoubtedly calculated that he did not yet possess the military strength to risk a confrontation, especially while still engaged against Kuchik Khan in Gilan and while a large part of western Azarbayjan and northern Kurdistan was in the hands of the Kurdish rebel, Isma'il Aqa Simitqu (Simko). In early June Pasyan received telegrams expressing the Tehran authorities' confidence in him and confirming his promotion to the rank of full colonel with the grant of a pension for life in recognition of his services.

The stability and durability of Qavam's new cabinet was most uncertain. It quickly annoyed the British by its apparent friendliness with the Soviet legation and American oil interests, and by its peremptory dismissal of the British officers serving with the Cossack Brigade. As a result of its 'sullen disposition' towards Britain, London decided to cut off all loans from British sources, thus particularly jeopardizing the position of Riza Khan, who desperately needed money to secure his ascendancy within the army.

In Mashhad an uneasy situation now prevailed, with Najd al-Saltanah as governor-general and Colonel Pasyan as military commander. The conflict between Tehran and Mashhad had merely been temporarily submerged and by no means resolved. By July, most ominously for the future, it had also become clear that the central government was intriguing among local tribal khans with the intention of creating counterpoises to the dominance of Colonel Pasyan in Khurasan.

Mashhad and Tehran were now deadlocked. The colonel's attitude to the central government was as yet one of passive resistance, but it was clear that he would have to act soon to resolve the situation. He now distributed small parties of gendarmes along the Tehran-Mashhad road, apparently to arrest anyone who might be sent to replace him.

Colonel Pasyan resumes control: a developing crisis

Najd al-Saltanah, completely unnerved by the political tension, soon resigned and Colonel Pasyan again resumed the governor-generalship of Khurasan, presenting Tehran with the alternative of acquiescing in his retention of power or attempting to unseat him by force. He was being encouraged in these moves by his principal supporters, including the Belgian Dubois and his own second-in-command, Major Isma'il Khan Bahadur.

On 1 August, the situation was again transformed when Mashhad received an announcement from Tehran that the Bakhtiyari tribal khan, Samsam al-Saltanah had been appointed as new governor-general of Khurasan. There was much consternation in Mashhad at

this news, even among elements which were lukewarm towards Pasyan and the gendarme party. Indeed some of those who had been imprisoned by the colonel during the May crisis now wrote to Pasyan offering to unite with him in opposing the appointment. The prospect of the arrival of a tribal chief as governor-general, bringing with him a substantial contingent of armed retainers, was alarming in itself while the specific record of the Bakhtiyari when at Tehran after their victory over the shah in 1909 boded ill for both the political stability of the province and the security of property of the elite. Undoubtedly for Qavam, a strong element of Samsam's appeal lay in his ability to furnish his own reliable armed support, thus ensuring his independence of the colonel when in Mashhad and his capacity to prevail against the Gendarmerie.

The citizens of Mashhad, including deputations of ulama and merchants, sent telegrams of protest both to the central government and to the ulama of Tehran and some took *bast* in the telegraph office awaiting replies. Colonel Pasyan himself entered into negotiations directly with Samsam. The colonel wired to Samsam promising to obey him provided he brought no Bakhtiyari force with him, as this the people would not tolerate, and asking him to retain Dubois in office and to give a general guarantee that the cabinet, particularly Qavam, would keep its promises. Once again, Pasyan offered to leave for Europe provided he was allowed an escort to the frontier of his own choosing and was accompanied by Dubois and Major Bahadur, and guarantees were given for the immunity from reprisals of those who had supported him.

However the prospect of losing their leader alarmed both the civilian and military partisans of the colonel, who feared their enemies' vengeance. Officers in charge of detachments on the frontier telegraphed to Mashhad their intentions to leave their commands if Colonel Pasyan persisted in his proposal to go into exile. A tribal eruption in the east of the province provided evidence of the government's bad faith and further persuaded the colonel that he should not leave but should rather reassert his authority and quell the disturbances.

Since taking over the governor-generalship from Najd al-Saltanah,

and even while conducting negotiations with the government, Pasyan had not neglected to take measures aimed at securing his position and consolidating his support. This time he left alone the shrine, where his previous attempts at reform had engendered powerful opposition, and rather tried to cultivate support among the mullas, who had been unsettled by the prospect of the arrival of the Bakhtiyari. In order to encourage the allegiance of the poorer elements to his regime, he ordered a reduction in the price of bread. The colonel appointed agents to persuade the people of Mashhad of the virtues of his regime and sent similar advocates among the Barbari tribesmen whose chief was simultaneously being courted by the central government. Dubois in particular continued his campaign against Qavam in the local press. The colonel also tried to encourage an esprit de corps within the Gendarmerie. He held meetings for his officers and exhorted them to cultivate patriotism, they in turn pledging him their support, while in Mashhad and Quchan imams administered to the gendarme rank and file an oath of fidelity to the colonel.

Colonel Pasyan had consistently expressed scepticism regarding the sincerity of Tehran's assurances and indeed, notwithstanding the negotiations in which the central government was engaged, Qavam continued to intrigue amongst the tribal chiefs. By early August his attempts to incite the latter against the gendarme regime were beginning to bear fruit. The grievances of the tribes against the gendarmes and the revenue collectors were easy to exploit and their hostility soon broke out into armed conflict. On 11 August the first tribal attack on the Mashhad regime took place.

Tribal unrest in the east of the province confirmed Pasyan's distrust of the government and he immediately moved to crush the disturbances. However Colonel Pasyan also faced tribal opposition in the north of Khurasan from the Sardar of Bujnurd. The central government was now unceasing in its exhortations to Khurasani tribal khans to rally to its support.

Pasyan always rejected accusations that he was a rebel, describing himself always as a devoted servant of the shah and of the state, insisting rather that it was the tribal insurgents who were guilty of

disloyalty to the shah. However couching political activities, however radical, in terms of traditional loyalties, was a common practice. Many of those who came to support Pasyan were evolving a more or less overt republicanism. Nonetheless, Pasyan consistently maintained that his own position was legitimate. He repeated many times that he had always intended to be loyal and would be loyal still but he knew of Qavam's vengefulness. Pasyan's conviction that the prime minister sought his life and that any assurances the latter might give were worthless was a powerful factor contributing to his intransigence at this point. It is striking that, although very much dominant at Tehran, Riza Khan was not particularly prominent or even visible in the struggle between Pasyan and the government. This struggle found its focus rather in the personal hatred between Qavam and the colonel, although undoubtedly the responses of the government were in fact being determined by Riza Khan, for whom the destruction of Pasyan was an essential prerequisite to his own aggrandizement of power.

Pasyan articulated an ideology of secular, purely Iranian, nationalism. He wrote: "I am an Iranian and I not only love Iran but I worship her...If they kill me drops of my blood will trace the word Iran and if they burn me my ashes will form the name Motherland." References to Islam, of any but the briefest and most conventional kind, such as Pasyan's invoking the aid of the eighth Imam upon taking up the governor-generalship in April, are largely absent from his writing. The Iran he evokes is that of Darius and Jamshid rather than that of Islam and the general thrust of the Mashhad regime was aggressively secular, aiming specifically at reducing the power and wealth of the shrine establishment. Pasyan's supporters, however, were not averse to using religion for propaganda purposes, accusing Qavam, for example, of causing the blood of Muslims to be spilt on *Ashura*, in *Muharram*, by their coreligionists and compatriots, so that he might obtain his corrupt desires.

The rise of the *kumitah-i milli-yi Khurasan*

On 22 August, in a radical move, the group which had coalesced in Mashhad in opposition to Samsam al-Saltanah's governor-generalship telegraphed to Tehran that the province had decided to break off its relations with the capital. During September political

life in Mashhad was dominated by the rise of the *kumitah-i milli-yi Khurasan*. The *kumitah*, of which Colonel Pasyan was president, had made its first appearance during the May crisis, had grown stronger as the political situation polarized, and was now the organizational focus for radical nationalism. The *kumitah* issued a manifesto on 15 September and then prepared a proclamation declaring Khurasan a republic, although publication of this was postponed by Pasyan. The *kumitah* was particularly active in pushing Pasyan to take an anti-British stand and urged the establishment of close ties with the Soviet Union. Indeed the *kumitah* sent a mission to Ashkhabad and Tashkent in an attempt to buy machine-guns but without success. The colonel himself also, as his relations with the British deteriorated, made overtures to the Bolshevik authorities in Tashkent, particularly hoping for rifles and machine guns. Although his nationalism had always made him resolutely anti-Russian he now declared that he would violate his conscience and stretch out his hand for help to whosoever would give it to him.

The colonel's personal position in Mashhad remained strong throughout September. The pro-Qavam faction was subdued and leaderless and the colonel appeared able to carry the province along with him. He used various methods to attract the support of different sections of the community. Vis-à-vis the elite he was alternately repressive to demonstrate his power, and magnanimous to demonstrate the advantages of supporting his regime. He promoted all the officers of the Gendarmerie a step and replaced the civil governors of towns such as Sabzavar and Turbat-i Haydari with gendarme officers. He assiduously collected intelligence and sent emissaries to try to gather support.

The Mashhad regime took various minor measures of consolidation. Steps for the inception of a department of education were taken, Colonel Pasyan himself subscribing money in the interests of female schooling.. The possibilities of exploiting the mineral resources of the province were examined, there was some discussion concerning the issue of a paper currency to tide over the financial difficulties and an issue of postage stamps was arranged. The atmosphere in Mashhad was by now fiercely anti-foreign, and the local

newspapers, such as *Bahar*, and *Sharq-i Iran*, were becoming more and more vituperative in their denunciations of the British. Evening entertainments and public meetings were held to raise money, and these provided opportunities for propagandizing on behalf of the regime. The chief star of the entertainments was the poet Arif Qazvini.

Throughout this period of radicalization the Mashhad regime was constantly engaged in operations against tribal forces in the east of the province. There was now considerable discontent throughout the Khorasani countryside. Villages in the civil war area were being forced by the Mashhad authorities to find cash indemnities and to pay one year's land revenue in advance and resentment was intense. The Mashhad regime was now severely overstretched and was experiencing growing difficulties in meeting the tribal challenge.

At the end of September a formidable revolt of the Kurds to the north of Mashhad, in the areas of Bujnurd, Shirvan and Quchan, was successfully inaugurated. The revolt was led by the Sardar of Bujnurd and other frontier Kurd khans, acting under the direct orders of Qavam.

Colonel Pasyan, aware of the urgency of the situation confronting him, hurried northwards with the few officers and men who could be mustered. He encountered straggling bodies of his force strung out along the Quchan road whose officers tried to dissuade him from going forward. He was brought up just north of Quchan, on the Bujnurd road, where on 3 October fighting broke out between his small force of gendarmes and the Kurds. In this engagement Colonel Pasyan was killed, the Kurds cutting off his head. (This explains the description in Dawlatabadi of the Colonel's bleeding neck).

The collapse of the gendarme regime

The death of Colonel Pasyan inevitably resulted in the disintegration of the gendarme regime in Mashhad and inaugurated a period of considerable confusion in both the city and the province as a whole. News of the Kurd advance produced a panic in Mashhad which was only partially allayed by a telegram from Qavam making the gendarme Mahmud Khan Nawzari, temporarily responsible for the

maintenance of order, granting a pardon to all the officers of the Gendarmerie and instructing the Kurds to disband to their homes. The latter obeyed while their leaders began to reap the rewards of their actions. A title was bestowed on each of the khans who had assisted in the downfall of Colonel Pasyan, and one of their number was appointed governor of Quchan.

Meanwhile Major Nawzari, now acting governor-general, opened negotiations with Tehran regarding the terms on which Mashhad would submit to the central government. They were again essentially defensive, concerned with the protection from reprisals of the supporters of the revolutionary regime and the general maintenance of security. Mashhad was still very far from subdued. The *kumitah-i milli-yi Khurasan* remained active and the press was bitterly critical of the authorities while Colonel Pasyan's tomb became a focus of nationalist activity, religio-political ceremonies being held there almost daily. A faction of the Gendarmerie, led by Major Ismail Bahadur, even wished to continue armed resistance. However uncertainty about the future was producing attrition within the force, the officer corps as a whole was uncertain and divided in its allegiance. On 16 October Major Bahadur launched a coup in Mashhad, But his attempt to capture power now met with little popular support in Mashhad and ended in chaos and defeat. A Cossack detachment arrived in Mashhad from Tehran in early November and administrative control of the province was transferred to them.

Meanwhile the northern part of Khurasan was still in the hands of well-armed Kurd khans who had, after their victories over the Gendarmerie, immediately begun to quarrel among themselves and who had, of course, done nothing to organize the frontier posts from which the gendarmes had been expelled. Paradoxically these groups, as a result of their operations carried out at Qavam's request, now represented a much more formidable obstacle to government authority than previously. Full government authority was not to be established throughout the province for some years.

Conclusion

During his lifetime the charismatic Colonel Pasyan had achieved the status of a nationalist hero. Upon his death he acquired and has retained the aura of martyrdom. This has been due partly, no doubt, to his personal qualities, acknowledged even by his opponents, and also partly to the frustrations among the Iranian intelligentsia resulting from the strangulation of constitutionalism and the ambiguous nationalism of the Pahlavi era. Unlike Sayyid Ziya, Pasyan was not tainted by British patronage, on the contrary his nationalist credentials were beyond question or reproach. Clearly the movement which he headed awakened real hopes for the realization of the constitutionalist ideal and for the regeneration of Iranian society.

Yet, however much he was admired personally, Pasyan failed to engage the active support of nationalists elsewhere in the country, most importantly in Tehran itself, his appeals to nationalist and constitutionalist figures in the capital meeting with little response. These elements were already gravitating towards Riza Khan, who himself appeared to promise the realization of the programme of secular nationalism. They harboured a profound fear of the consequences of central political weakness and conflict, inviting as it did foreign intervention and internal disintegration and, although they would have flocked to Pasyan had he successfully installed himself in the capital, yet they would do nothing to encourage a renewal of the turmoil of the constitutional and war years.

The enemies of the gendarme regime are easier to identify and consisted of, first, Qavam al-Saltanah himself and the personnel of his provincial government. By extension, the metropolitan elite were alarmed at the example they saw being set in Mashhad. Large landowners and merchants in Khurasan resented Pasyan's taxation policies, the shrine establishment also disliked being taxed and were angered by the secular character of his programme. Finally and most crucially the tribal khans of the province, Barbaris, Hazarahs and Baluchis in the south and Kurds in the north, were resentful of Mashhad's efforts to tax them and, although inclined to vacillate, were easily turned decisively against Mashhad by a determined central government. Indeed the constellation of enemies engendered

by Pasyan's regime prefigured in many respects the shape of resistance to later efforts at modernization, not just in Iran but throughout the Middle East.

In its increasingly radical and uncompromising defiance of the central government the Mashhad regime was also undoubtedly caught up in an apparently irreversible dynamic which unfolded after Pasyan's fateful arrest of Qavam. The elevation of the latter to the Prime Ministership encrusted political divergence with bitter personal hatred, while Qavam's appointment of Samsam al-Saltanah as governor-general of Khurasan was a key factor unifying much of the provincial elite behind Pasyan. Overarching these conjunctural episodes was of course the determination of Riza Khan to destroy personal rivals, eliminate regional autonomy and establish his own personal ascendancy over the military forces. Often appearing to be the victim rather than the arbiter of events, the demands put forward by Pasyan during the crises of May and August were defensive in character, centreing on safeguarding the Gendarmerie and protecting his subordinates from reprisals, although his more radical supporters seem to have understood more accurately the ultimate inevitability of confronting Tehran. In fact had Colonel Pasyan marshalled his forces, appealed to his brother officers in the Gendarmerie and his admirers in the capital, and made a determined bid for state power in the summer of 1921, there would have been little to stand in his way.

Pasyan and Riza Khan, although mortal enemies, nonetheless had much in common. Ideologically they were in many respects similar. Both were nationalist, secular, even anti-clerical, and shared a profound detestation of the old elite. Both were charismatic leaders, with a soldier's dislike of political squabbling and factionalism, and located themselves within a state-building, nationalist tradition. Indeed Pasyan's experiment in Mashhad mirrored the modernizing, centralizing policies of the Pahlavi era.

The destruction of the gendarme regime in Mashhad was a key episode in Riza Khan's establishment of his personal ascendancy in Tehran. Pasyan, remaining obdurate in Mashhad after Sayyid Ziya's fall and exile, presided over a prolonged period of tension, between

the central government and provincial radicalism, between the opposing military and political agendas of the Gendarmerie and the Cossack Division, and between the personal ambitions of Riza Khan and Colonel Pasyan, which was only resolved by the physical liquidation of the gendarme regime in Mashhad. Pasyan's destruction freed Riza Khan to adopt unchallenged the mantle of nationalism among the military and to fashion the army in his own image.

Fuchsia Hart's Account of her Visit to Iran in 2011.

Last year I was fortunate enough to spend 3 months in Iran thanks to a travel grant from the Iran Society and an academic support grant from The Queen's College, Oxford. As an undergraduate studying Persian and Old Iranian languages, I am expected to spend the second year of my course abroad, preferably in Iran. Unfortunately, due to the fact that I am a British passport holder, it was not as simple as that. It was over two years since a British student studying at Oxford had managed to secure a visa for study in Iran and he was subsequently unfairly expelled from the country after only a few months there. This did not bode well for me. Initially I went to Damascus to study Persian, as I was discouraged from even applying for the visa from the Iranian embassy in London, in case my application was rejected. Whilst in Damascus I applied for a visa and 7 months later the process was nearly complete. Regrettably, it was around that time that I had to return to the UK due to the rapidly worsening situation in Syria. After an unexpected term spent back in Oxford and many a trip to the Iranian embassy in London, with a lot of luck, I finally made it to Tehran in September 2011.

My original plan was to remain in Iran for just 7 weeks, to allow me to complete a language course and then return to Oxford in time for Michaelmas term. Needless to say, I was not happy at the prospect of having to leave Iran so soon and after some frantic last-minute emailing, my tutors agreed that time spent in Iran would be more beneficial than a term in Oxford and I was allowed to stay for a couple of months more and I am very grateful for that decision.

Whilst in Tehran I was given accommodation by The British Institute for Persian Studies in their building in the north of the city. Situated on the residential compound of the British embassy, BIPS was both secure and very comfortable, with an outstanding library.

I attended daily language classes at Dehkhoda, the department of the University of Tehran which provides Persian language tuition. The teaching was excellent and improved all aspects of my knowledge of the language. I think the greatest improvement was in my ability speak, although that may be due to the hundreds of conversations I had with Tehran's very curious taxi drivers, rather

than the hours spent in class. I was also fortunate to have regular tuition from the head of the literature department of the Great Encyclopaedia of Islam. I will be forever grateful to him for introducing me to Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. Together we read the story of Rostam and his son Sohrab, which was a great achievement for me and a pleasant change from the media Persian we so often read in class.

I also took a course in *khosh-nevisi*, or calligraphy, and had music lessons to learn to play the daf, a traditional Kurdish frame drum. On free afternoons and weekends spent in Tehran, I paid visits to its historical monuments, parks, museums and galleries and, of course, ate at many of its restaurants.

After I had spent 7 weeks inhaling the exhaust fumes of Tehran's ancient taxis, some respite was greatly needed and I decided to take a train south to Isfahan. I spent 4 days there and saw some of the most beautiful examples of architecture Iran has to offer. I visited the spectacular mosques on *naqsh-e jahan* square, was taken to a *zurkhane* (a traditional gymnasium where ancient ritualised exercises are performed to the chanting of poetry and the beating of a drum), walked across the iconic *si-o se pol* in the evening, and scrambled up a very steep hill on the edges of the city for a superb view from the ruins of a fire temple.

My other main trip out of Tehran was, reluctantly by plane, to Shiraz. The city was beautiful, and the sight of the tomb of Hafez, arguably one of the greatest poets ever, surrounded by fountains, roses and cypress trees was idyllic. I saw many things but the highlight was a visit to Persepolis and nearby *naqsh-e rostam*. As I study the Old Persian language and also Sasanian history, this visit was particularly exciting for me but I would be surprised if anybody could find the vast tombs of the Achaemenid kings, carved into the rock face, anything less than magnificent.

During my 3 months in Iran, I was also able to travel to the Caspian coast a couple of times, went skiing in the mountains north of Tehran and paid a visit to the holy city of Qom and the shrine of Hazrat-e Masumeh there.

Much to my sadness, my trip was suddenly cut short by the raiding of the British Embassy on 29th November. Thankfully I was not in BIPS at the time but worried phone calls from friends told me what had happened. Returning to the compound that evening, I

found it evacuated and surrounded by military personnel. After a couple of days of uncertainty, both the FCO and the Oriental Institute recommended that I return to the UK, as diplomatic relations reached a very low point, with the closing of our embassy in Tehran and the Iranian embassy in London. It was a stressful and frustrating time but at no stage did I feel threatened. Iranian friends were quick to make sure that this would not be my lasting impression of Iran and assured me that the actions of this small group were not representative of the feelings of all.

My time spent in Iran not only greatly improved my Persian language skills but helped me to understand Iran in a way that no class in Oxford possibly could. I learnt so much about life in Iran, its people, their culture and also about the history, religion and political situation of the country. Everyday was an adventure. Even though I had been studying Iran and its language for over two years, I was not sure what to expect. As my flight landed in Imam Khomeini International Airport, I was understandably slightly nervous. However, I quickly learnt, as I had hoped I would, that Iran is nothing like the country which is depicted in much of the western media and as fantastic as the food, art and historical sites were, it is the people I met that I will remember longest. Now I hope the awful political situation can be solved peacefully, not only so I can return to Iran as soon as possible, but so that such a wonderful country does not have to suffer another war.

Zep Kalb's account of his visit to Iran in 2012.

[While he was there Zeb Kalb studied contemporary Iranian advertising. He will be giving a lecture to the Society on this subject on 22 January 2013]

This summer I stayed six weeks in Tehran. The purpose of my trip was to attend an intensive Persian language course. The Iran Society's Travel Grant allowed me to combine this course with an interesting personal research into the art of advertising in Iran. Living in Tehran brought about a wave of new impressions and experiences for me. Staying with a host family opened up plenty of opportunities to get to know many locals. This was an opportunity few Westerners have had as I drenched myself in everyday Tehrani life. The most flabbergasting realization was the paradox between the Iran as portrayed in the West and how Iranian society presented itself to me.

For quite a while, I had been eying the intensive summer Persian course at the Dehkhoda Institute, a top class language school affiliated with Tehran University. The institute is tucked away nicely behind towering plane trees on the northern end of Valiasr (ex-Pahlavi) Avenue.

The Dehkhoda Institute was the centre of the international face of Tehran. With many tourists scared away this summer by the threat of an Israeli attack and international trade crumbling in the face of US-imposed sanctions, Dehkhoda sets itself up as the main attractor of foreigners. Amongst the students at Dehkhoda were many diaspora Iranians interested in their own language and culture, journalists keen to learn Persian, a few North Koreans and Venezuelans for political reasons and Western students (like me) desperate to explore Iran and its people. Surprisingly however, by far the largest group were the Chinese, representing well over fifty percent of the students and driven by the recent surge in trade between these two countries.

Against the unromantic grandeur of Tehran, my host family's house was relatively close to the institute. They lived in Shahrak-e Gharb (literally 'Western Complex'), an affluent neighbourhood

marked by its many high rises ('*borjha*'). We lived on the top floor. Getting out of from there into the street was a fascinating experience. Iranzamin, the main street of Shahrak-e Gharb, was a hub for *dokhtar bazi*, or pick-up dating. Everyday around six in the evening until *Iftar* (sunset and the end of the fasting), Iranzamin saw the arrival of at least three hundred monster-sized sport utility vehicles, stuffed either with young men or women. As the drivers were circling endlessly around Iranzamin, they would drive alongside a car of the opposite sex, trying to get their telephone numbers. No law could prevent the young and rich from having fun!

Every morning I waited on Iranzamin for my *savari*. A *savari* is a taxi which drives between two designated points and waits until four passengers have gotten in. From the moment I stepped in the *savari*, my heartbeat would speed up by the sight of the insane traffic. For me, the traffic was definitely one of the landmarks of the city. *Ta'arof*, the form of civility so prominent in Iranian culture and social interaction, is virtually absent on the road. This is every one for himself, as fast as possible! Pushing and wrenching, the *savari* would plough its way through the system of highways that marks the city. The infrastructural planning, although by now showing its cracks, has for a long time been one of the main symbols of the city's modernity. As Tehran started to expand significantly from the sixties onwards, the newly arrived immigrants found themselves living in a strict grid plan, resembling modern American infrastructural design.



This is a picture I took from the super-tall radio tower, the *Borj-e Milad*, overlooking the prosperous neighbourhoods of Sharhak-e Gharb (at the front) and Sa'adat Abad (closer to the mountains). The grid plan is especially prominent.

The simple days of school/home/hanging out were complemented by weekends that offered me an escape from the city. One weekend, Iman, the son of my host family, had organized a trip with a group of friends to *Kuh-e Sabalan*. *Sabalan* is an inactive volcano about 5000 meters high in East Azerbaijan province. I most enjoyed the bus trip to the base camp. A group of forty Iranians (plus me) was divided between three minibuses. As soon as we took off, the curtains were closed and the headscarves taken off. Before I even realized this, the driver had turned on the music decibels. Straight away the whole bus started to dance to Iranian and Hollywood music hits. *Susan Khanom* by underground techno group Barobax was definitely one of the favourites. I wonder if I will ever get it out of my head. I shied away in a corner and only clapped along as my traditional Iranian dancing skills are virtually non-existent. When passing a police check point, the headscarves would swiftly be put on and the bus returned to obedient silence in no-time. This process went on for the hours it took to get to the base camp, with no

unpaved road too wobbly to dance on. The actual climbing of *Sabalan* was hard because of *kam havai*, or thin air. Iman and I were stricken by intense headaches. Finally at the top, we fell asleep at once. To my surprise, the Azeri visitors from the area seemingly had no difficulties climbing the mountain. They went up singing local songs and I even saw a pair going up smoking their *qalyun* (waterpipe). As shown below, I quickly took a picture of it.



For the Qalyun: look closely at the man to the far left

Time flew by. In retrospect, I am particularly surprised that during my stay in Tehran, I never had the feeling of a culture shock, or a *verfremdung* from local life and practices. Tehran is a highly modern and individualized city, with interesting political and cultural debates going on amongst students and the Westernized upper classes. The paradox that makes Tehran such an exciting city is that within the context of a constant stigmatization of Iran in Western media as a hostile Islamic society, Tehran appears as hospitable, accessible and modern. I am deeply grateful to the Iran Society for giving me such an opportunity. I hope to return in the near future to continue exploring the endless secrets this city offers.

Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan.**Rudi Matthee, I.B.Tauris, Hb, 2012, 371 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84511-745-0*****Reviewed by David Blow.***

“After the death of Shah Abbas, Persia ceased to prosper.” In recent years this famous comment by the French jeweller, Jean Chardin, who spent many years in Iran in the second half of the seventeenth century, has been subject to much scholarly criticism. The very notion of a Safavid decline has even been called into question. The criticism has naturally embraced Laurence Lockhart’s “The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia”, published in 1958, which up till now has been the major work in any language on the Safavid “decline”.

Rudi Matthee, one of the foremost scholars today of the Safavid period, is in no doubt that there was a decline, although it was not as abrupt as the comment by Chardin suggests. Indeed, Chardin himself testifies to continuing prosperity, as in his description of the condition of the Persian peasantry which he compares favourably with that of Europe. But Rudi Matthee provides a far more comprehensive and nuanced study of the nature and causes of the Safavid decline than Lockhart. He is well-equipped for the task, possessing an enviable command of the languages necessary for fully exploiting the primary and secondary sources, not least the invaluable records of the Dutch East India Company.

Rudi Matthee argues that from the outset the Safavids faced a daunting task in establishing and maintaining an effective central government, because of the peculiarly unfavourable geopolitical conditions of Iran. These included the general poverty of a country marked by extreme aridity; the difficult communications which made for economic isolation and entrenched local loyalties; the ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, and the presence of warlike nomadic tribes that accounted for up to a third of the total population. Given these inherent difficulties, Rudi Matthee finds the relative longevity of the Safavid dynasty, which endured for more than two centuries (1501-1722), more surprising than its demise. Indeed, it remains to this day the longest-lived regime the country has known since the Arab conquest over thirteen hundred years ago.

The question arises, though, as to how the three great pre-Islamic dynasties of the Achaemenids, the Arsacids and the Sasanids all managed to survive for so long – and in the case of the last two, for very much longer than the Safavids.

The Safavids succeeded in making Twelver Shi'ism, which they imposed on Iran, into a powerful unifying factor, despite the fact that sizeable ethnic groups on the periphery of the country remained Sunni. But in religion, as in politics, the Safavid kings were careful for most of the period, as Rudi Matthee shows, to remain inclusive and to keep all the various religious, ethnic and tribal constituencies within the Safavid tent, while not allowing any one constituency to gain excessive power and influence. Thus Shah Abbas I gave favourable treatment to domestic Armenians and various Roman Catholic missions in part to keep the Shi'i clergy in check and greatly enhanced the role of the royal ghulams or military "slaves" to provide a counter-balance to the Turkmen Qizilbash tribesmen who had brought the Safavids to power. The Safavids also made astute use of inter-marriage and divide-and-rule tactics to maintain their control over the various constituencies of the state. One of the main causes of the Safavid decline was the abandonment of this careful balancing act, more through negligence than deliberate policy, by the last two Safavid rulers, Shah Sulayman (1666-1694) and Shah Sultan Husayn (1694-1722). This opened the floodgates to a destructive factionalism that fatally weakened and paralyzed the state, and to an intolerant Shi'ism that antagonised the religious minorities.

A constant problem, which contributed to the Safavid decline and which is particularly well dealt with by Rudi Matthee, was money. There was never enough revenue to cover state expenditure, which was much inflated from the latter part of the 17th century onwards by royal extravagance. The Safavid shahs and their grand viziers tried various solutions to bridge the gap, all of which proved harmful in the longer run. The principal one was to cancel administrative fiefs and to farm out the lands in question to the highest bidder. This led to extortion of the peasantry who responded "by engaging in fraud, passive resistance, and ultimately flight". Rudi Matthee adds that "since agriculture accounted for some 70 percent of GDP, the negative effect of this change in landholding patterns must have been substantial". It also meant that the local

military forces were not maintained as they had been before. Other more short-term measures included imposing extra taxes on the minorities, in particular the Armenian and Hindu merchant communities, and reducing the weight or silver content of the coinage. The increasingly heavy tax burden caused some wealthy Armenians to take their money abroad, while the tampering with the coinage was harmful to commerce and drove good money out of the country, despite repeated attempts to prevent this. Military spending was also cut following the Peace of Zuhab with the Ottomans in 1639, which left the army dangerously weakened.

The money problem was in part a consequence of the unfavourable conditions the Safavids inherited. Iran was not a naturally rich country like Mughal India. It also lacked significant deposits of gold or silver and was dependent on its trade surplus with Ottoman Turkey and Russia for supplies of bullion and coinage – supplies which could fluctuate due to events beyond its control. Furthermore, much of this bullion immediately left the country to cover a large trade deficit with India. However what the Safavid shahs and indeed the Safavid élite can rightly be blamed for, as Matthee makes clear, is taking money out of circulation and hoarding it. This was a further consequence of putting whole provinces in the hands of tax farmers. Instead of the revenues raised being spent and circulating locally, they were now stored in the royal treasury. Shah Sultan Husayn was also responsible for a haemorrhage of scarce bullion by encouraging pilgrimages to Mecca and to the Shi'i shrines in Arab Iraq, which lay in Ottoman territory – something Shah Abbas I had sought to avoid by promoting Shi'i shrines within Iran.

Right up into the last decade of the 17th century European travellers were reporting favourably on the condition of Iran, which has encouraged the view that there was no real Safavid decline until the very end. But Matthee argues that “appearances did not necessarily correspond to underlying realities,” and goes on to illustrate this with a thoroughly illuminating study of individual regions: Shirvan in the north, Fars in the south, Kirman in the centre, and Bandar Abbas and the Persian Gulf coast. As he says, this “reveals complex conditions in which enduring stability might exist side by side with deepening poverty and where an extortionate governor might be succeeded by a benevolent one, even if the

general trend was towards greater oppression in the face of an increasingly ineffective central government.”

Ultimately, Chardin was right in regarding the growing inadequacy of the Safavid rulers after Shah Abbas I as the main cause of the decline and fall of their kingdom. Rudi Matthee traces a fatal trajectory in the course of the 17th century from a peripatetic warrior monarchy, patrolling the realm, accessible to the people, and feared and respected for its justice, to a sedentary monarchy that no longer fought battles, no longer inspired fear or respect, and was immured in the harem and isolated from its subjects.

“Persia in Crisis” presents a picture of Safavid decline that is persuasive and rich in compelling detail. It will undoubtedly remain the definitive study of the later Safavid period for many years to come.

***Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a very British coup.* Christopher de Bellaigue, Bodley Head, 2012, Hb.310 pp. ISBN 978 1 84792 108 6. £20.**

***Iran and the CIA: The Fall of Mossadeq Revisited.* Darioush Bayandor, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp.247, Hb. £20.99, ISBN-13: 978 0 230 57927 9.**

***The Shah.* Abbas Milani, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, Hb. pp.488, £15.99, ISBN 978 1 4039 7193 7; 2012 Pb.10.99. ISBN 978 0 230 34038 1**

Reviewed by David Blow.

If there is one thing that the Iranian prime minister, Muhammad Mossadegh, had in common with his royal opponent, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, it was an unshakeable belief that the British were forever working away behind the scenes, manipulating Iran's internal affairs to their advantage. As Christopher de Bellaigue argues, this conspiracy theory has been widespread in Iran at least since the then British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, secretly negotiated with Iranian leaders the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, which would have turned Iran into a virtual British protectorate, had it not been rejected by the Iranian parliament. Mossadegh was studying in Switzerland at the time, and Bellaigue quotes his son Ahmad as recalling that his father wept when he heard the news. This may have laid the foundation of Mossadegh's Anglophobia, which, when he later became prime minister, was a major factor in his intransigent stand towards the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Muhammad Reza Shah, who was insecure by nature, constantly sought the approval of the British while fearing that they might at any moment unseat him as they had his father. After the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79, he was convinced that they had helped to do just this through what he regarded as inflammatory broadcasts by the BBC Persian Service.

Bellaigue characterizes this belief in what Iranians call "the hand of the English" as a "well-founded paranoia". It was well-founded not merely because Britain interfered in Iranian affairs to protect what it saw as its vital interests – British India and later the

Anglo-Iranian Oil Company – but because it did so by using its influence behind the scenes. As Bellaigue points out, there was no such paranoia in former British colonies, where the relationship had been clear-cut. It was, as he puts it, “in the poisoned ambiguity of a relationship that was never defined, and in which the British were automatically assumed to be hiding something, (that) mistrust became a pathology”.

Mossadegh is an iconic figure for many Iranians – a patriot who tried to free Iran of foreign interference once and for all and whose overthrow in an Anglo-American inspired coup was not only unforgivable but a terrible setback to the cause of secular democracy in Iran. Bellaigue broadly shares these sentiments, without being blind to Mossadegh’s weaknesses and to the mistakes he made in dealing with the crisis over the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. He characterizes Mossadegh as “a moral force”, enjoying widespread popular support on account of his integrity and incorruptibility, his opposition to monarchical despotism and his firm commitment to securing Iran’s independence of foreign interests. But Bellaigue says that this made it difficult for him to achieve a negotiated settlement of the oil dispute with Britain, because he feared that any compromise would undermine his moral standing and with it his authority. Bellaigue believes, however, that Mossadegh had such prestige that he could have sold a compromise deal to the Iranian people – and he calls it a tragedy that he never tried to do so. He particularly criticizes him for rejecting a deal in the spring of 1953 which Bellaigue says would have preserved “the essence of nationalisation, not merely its form.” (The text has ‘privatisation’, which must be a misprint.) Bellaigue calls it “as grave a failure of leadership as any in his premiership.”

But Mossadegh’s Anglophobia is likely to have been an even greater obstacle to a compromise settlement. This at least was the view of George McGhee, President Truman’s assistant secretary of state, who was involved in the American efforts to mediate a settlement. Bellaigue dismisses too easily McGhee’s retrospective comment that Mossadegh’s Anglophobia may have “doomed from the start our efforts to facilitate a deal.” Bellaigue himself lays considerable emphasis on Mossadegh’s Anglophobia, writing that “his hatred for the British as a malignant force in his country’s affairs, and his intuition for what he regarded as the Anglo-Iranian

Oil Company's essential evil, was profound." In his eyes, Iran could not be truly independent until every last vestige of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had been removed. It was also Mossadegh's perceived Anglophobia and the conclusion that this made it impossible to do business with him that persuaded the Foreign Office to use covert means to unseat him – although American pressure compelled them to hold off and give a chance to negotiations.

Bellaigue is damning on the failures of British government and Anglo-Iranian officials. They were blithely dismissive of the new mood of nationalism that was sweeping the country after the Second World War, they underestimated Mossadegh and, when they made concessions, what they offered was usually too little and too late. All too often too, as Bellaigue shows, they were arrogant and contemptuous in their attitude towards the Iranians. Nonetheless, they did eventually come to accept nationalisation, an equal sharing of profits and a smaller role for the company. Bellaigue says that Mossadegh became so absorbed in domestic turmoil that he "may not have appreciated fully the distance that the British government had travelled to meet his demands." Bellaigue also notes that some senior British officials remained opposed to covert action "and for a while, at the beginning of 1953, these sceptics were in the ascendant."

Bellaigue's sub-title, with its reference to "a very British coup", is a reminder that the groundwork for a coup was done by British agents. The Americans came in and took charge later, after they had concluded that there was a real risk of the Iranian communist party, the Tudeh, seizing power with support from the Soviet Union. The British encouraged this fear on the part of the Americans in order to get them on side. However, Mossadegh unwisely gave it greater credibility by using the communist threat to try to pressure the Americans into providing him with financial aid and by becoming increasingly reliant on Tudeh support during the latter part of his premiership.

A curious omission in Bellaigue's otherwise well-researched work is any reference to the recent reappraisal of the coup – or more accurately coups – by the Iranian historian, Dariush Bayandor. There were in fact two coup attempts – one on August 15 that failed and another four days later that succeeded. The CIA coup-master, Kim Roosevelt, claimed later that after the failure of the first coup

attempt he came up resourcefully with a “Plan B”. Bayandor, however, argues persuasively that the CIA did not orchestrate this second coup, which was the work of internal forces, notably clerical leaders. According to Bayandor, when the Shah fled the country after the failure of the first coup, senior clerics feared the establishment of a secular republic and a drift towards communism, so they brought their supporters in Tehran’s vast bazaar onto the streets to demonstrate for the Shah and when royalist military units learned of this they joined them.

This is not the Shah’s preferred story of a “national uprising”, but nor is it the story long dear to supporters of Mossadegh – and repeated by Bellaigue – of a rent-a-mob of thugs and prostitutes paid with American dollars and military rebels acting according to a pre-conceived CIA plan.

In retrospect, it is hard to quarrel with Bellaigue’s cautious statement that “had there been no coup.....it is likely that Iran’s history would have been much happier than it has been.” But it needn’t have turned out the way it has and Abbas Milani’s perceptive biography of Muhammad Reza Shah deals comprehensively with the wrong choices and lost opportunities that led to the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79. The Shah’s fundamental mistake was to reject the role of a constitutional monarch in favour of an absolute one and in doing so to exclude the country’s modern middle class from power. The umbrella organisation formed by Mossadegh, the National Front, was in many ways representative of this modern middle class. Milani relates how, in the early 1960s, the Kennedy administration put pressure on the Shah to bring the National Front into the political process, because the administration believed there could be no long-term stability without democracy. But both the Shah and the majority of the leadership of the National Front opposed any reconciliation – and both ended up paying the price. Only at the very end, when the Shah was staring into the abyss, did he turn in desperation to the National Front and appoint one of its prominent figures, Shapour Bakhtiyar, as prime minister. But by then it was too late.

***Days of God: the Revolution in Iran and its Consequences*, James Buchan**, John Murray, 2012, 464pp, 40 illustr, maps, endnotes
ISBN 9781 8485 40668 £25

Reviewed by Antony Wynn.

Last September it was reported that the president of Iran had accused the Americans and the British of interfering with the weather to cause a drought in Khorasan. In the aftermath of the Islamic revolution there were those who said that one had only to lift the beard of an ayatollah to find the words 'Made in Britain' branded on his throat. The history of the last hundred years of Iran is laced with such beliefs, which border on religious doctrine, and history takes second place to legend. Taking us calmly and dispassionately through British, American and Iranian records, many of them only recently opened to the public, Buchan establishes facts and dispels nonsense. Having worked in Iran as a teacher in the 1970s and visited both Iran and Iraq a number of times since the revolution, he is well qualified to do so.

The Iranian revolution defied conventional analysis. Commentators and occidental potentates at the time were nonplussed, transfixed like rabbits in the stare of a stoat, incapable of reaction. How could this have come about? A proper study of history might have made events less of a surprise to them.

Buchan starts by dissecting the Pahlavi regime, beginning with the rise of Reza Khan. The distance of time enables him to be detached about the achievements, the failures and the inherent weaknesses of the regimes of the two Shahs, whose fatal error was not to establish any proper political institutions, democratic or otherwise. This left only the mosque, which had always had a hold over the people.

Coming to the coup against Mossadeq, still generally believed to have been the result of a CIA/SIS effort, Buchan shows that their efforts in fact failed and that they called off the operation. The mobs which then emerged to topple Mossadeq and restore the Shah were inspired by the clergy and paid by the bazar merchants, an aspect to

the story which, unsurprisingly, does not feature in current Iranian school books. The Tudeh party, with their 600 members in the military and their sympathisers on the streets and in the university, were waiting for the order from Moscow to move, but it never came. Without access to the Soviet documents, Buchan has left it for others to tell that story.

Iran without oil was a civilisation; with oil it exchanged the pen for the sword and became a power. The story of oil is well covered, as are the details of why both Reza Shah and Mossadeq considered that the British were not paying anything like a fair price for it, and how Mohammed Reza Shah ensured that they did.

Shii political discourse is still imbued with the language of 7th century political disputes. Buchan takes us neatly through the background of these and leads us through the seminaries of Najaf and Qom to the careers of Khomeini and other prominent ayatollahs and political philosophers, including the Islamic Marxists, who resisted the Pahlavi reforms. Iranians imbibe the story of Kerbela with their mothers' milk and nothing about Iran can be understood without knowing it. It would have been interesting to have been told more about the sources of the ayatollahs' funds, for the piper's tune has to be paid for. Receipts were not given, or asked for.

Could the armed forces have saved the Pahlavis? Buchan says that by 1979 their morale had been destroyed, not least by the failure of their officers and their supreme commander to give decisive leadership. To explain why this happened, Buchan takes us through the disastrous campaign of 1828 against Russia, the new army of Reza Shah and the grotesquely extravagant force of the 1970s, which drained the budget, with some good personal sketches of the leading figures.

Having painted a picture of the tottering structure, Buchan follows with a blow by blow account of the lead up to the revolution. There is a harrowing account of the real story of the Abadan cinema fire, the spark that ignited the revolution, which at the time was widely believed to have been the work of Savak, but later turned out to have been the work of some young would-be Islamic revolutionaries who did not know what they were doing. Another omission from the school books.

The chapter on the war with Iraq shows how the previously inept army achieved some remarkable victories against the Iraqis in

the first part of the war. Buchan concludes with the end of the war and the death of Khomeini

A number of books have been written in English about parts of the revolution by retired diplomats and journalists, but this is the first one to round up all the accounts and make sense of them. Above all, it is abundantly clear that, in the year preceding the revolution, all the huffing and puffing of the statesmen, generals and diplomats made not a whit of difference to the outcome. They were like Molla Nasreddin searching in the sunshine for the key that he had lost in his cellar. When asked why, he replied that it was too dark to see anything there and there was more light out of doors. All the while, a huge Islamic pike, unseen below the surface, where it had been feeding and growing over the years, suddenly rose in a great boil to devour the unsuspecting ducklings above, who never knew what was happening to them until it was too late.

What Buchan does so well is to invoke history and show how so much of it is repeated, almost wilfully. As the life and death of Christ were dictated by the knowledge of the prophecies of Isaiah, so the events of 1979 are reflected in the events of 1829. The attack on the Russian legation in Tehran and the murder of the envoy Griboyedov of that year inspired the students to attack the American embassy in 1979. Fath Ali Shah had to pay heavily for Griboyedov's murder. The Americans have yet to extract their full revenge for the huge slight to their prestige.

This book is about a series of reforms, some more successful than others. Many were overturned, and some of the more recent ones may yet be overturned in turn. As Buchan so brilliantly puts it, the French diplomat Gobineau remarked in the 1860s that the Iranians do not like reformers, but regret them when they are gone.

An Iranian researcher in the National Archives at Kew remarked to me once that the British were the possessors of Iranian history, since the Iranians never dared to record what had really occurred. What would be really interesting would be to see the same story told from the revolutionary side, with Buchan's detachment, but that is unlikely to happen. Nevertheless, Whitehall and the Beltway would do well to keep this book on their shelves and force their Iran deskers to read it and be examined on it before being allowed to utter any policy recommendations.

Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz: Introduced and Translated by Dick Davis, Mage Publishers, 2012, 364 pp, Hb, ISBN 978-1933823485, \$45. Distributed in the UK by Gazelle Book Services Ltd, White Cross Mills, Hightown, Lancaster, LA1 4XS. £37.50.

Persian Poems by 20 poets over 1,000 years, Rendered into English verse by Robert Maxwell; Selected, translated and annotated by Bruce Wannell, published by Robert Maxwell, 2012, 144 pp, Large format soft cover, ISBN 978 0 948021 04 6.

Reviewed by David Blow.

Iran has one of the finest traditions of poetry in the world and making it more widely known through translation is a very desirable undertaking. Translating this poetry into English, however, presents particular difficulties. Until the 20th century when Iranian poets began using free verse, metre and rhyme were essential elements of Persian poetry. As Dick Davis explains in his stimulating introduction to “Faces of Love”, these are very difficult to imitate in English. There are many rhyming words in Persian but relatively few in English, and the poetic metre in classical Persian poetry is based on the length of the syllable, as in Greek and Latin verse, whereas in English poetry it is based on syllabic stress. The difficulties are compounded when the Persian poetic form is the *ghazal*, which accounts for the great majority of the poems in these two collections. The *ghazal* is a lyric poem of seven to twenty lines which uses the same rhyme sound throughout and contains long lines that are divided into half-lines or hemistichs – the first two half-lines rhyming, with only the full lines rhyming thereafter. In Davis’s and other translations, each Persian line is treated as a verse. In many *ghazals* the poet is addressing or referring to someone superior to himself, but it is not always clear whether that person is a human beloved, God, or the poet’s patron. If it’s a human beloved, there is the further question of whether it’s male or female, since Persian pronouns and possessive adjectives are gender-free. As the title of Davis’s book implies, there are many kinds of love.

Davis focuses on three poets who were contemporaries at the court of Shiraz during the 14th century CE. The first and foremost of these is Hafez (ca.1315-90 CE), who is the supreme master of the *ghazal*. The other two are Jahan Malek Khatun (b. after 1324, d.after 1382) and Obayd Zakani (ca.1300-70). Jahan Khatun was a princess of the Inju dynasty of Shiraz and is one of the rare women poets before modern times. Obayd Zakani is described by Davis as “Persian literature’s prime ‘privy/lavatorial poet’”. He wrote much obscene and sexually explicit verse, but was also a powerful satirist. Besides the *ghazals*, Davis includes a few *rubai’s* (quatrains) by all three poets and the well-known satirical poem, *Cat and Mouse*, by Obayd Zakani, which parodies the epic *masnavi* form of the *Shahname*. Poets were able to flourish in Shiraz at this time because the city was spared the terrible devastation inflicted on so many other Iranian cities first by the Mongols and then by Timur (Tamberlaine), and because two of its rulers, the Inju Abu Es’haq and the Mozaffarid Shah Shoja, provided generous patronage. Together with Sa’di who died in 1292, they earned Shiraz the title of “the city of poets”.

In his discussion of Hafez, Davis addresses the question of how far his poetry is to be understood as an expression of Sufi mysticism. He believes that the mystical element has been exaggerated and that “the wine in his poems is just that, literal wine”, and not an allegory for mystical “intoxication”. Davis notes that in his poems Hafez dismisses Sufis as just another lot of hypocrites, which implies that whatever involvement Hafez may have had with Sufism had ended by then. He recognizes that strong religious feelings are present in his verse, but says these are unspecific and that Hafez himself “insists that they cross the boundaries of particular faiths.” Davis makes the intriguing suggestion that Hafez deliberately chose this pen-name (his real name was Shams al-Din Muhammad), because it had two meanings – not only the more familiar meaning of “one who has learnt the Qur’an by heart”, but also “one who has a knowledge of musical technique”. He says that in medieval Iran a professional musician, especially a singer, was commonly given the nickname of “Hafez”, and that, in contrast to reciters of the Qu’ran, musicians were considered a disreputable lot. This fits with the frequent references to music in Hafez’s work and his reputation for having a fine

singing voice. So Davis sees the name as “a constant pun, one that evokes both the serious and the scandalous, the exaltedly religious and the sexily secular, that moves between both worlds, as Hafez’s poems do”.

The ambiguity of gender is particularly acute in the *ghazals* of Hafez and in his translations Davis uses “he” and “she” for the human beloved in an even but, as he admits, quite arbitrary manner. Another problem common to many *ghazals*, but especially those of Hafiz, is that there is no obvious connection between one line and the next, which is why Sir William Jones (1746-94), the first translator of Hafez into English, called them “Orient pearls at random strung,” Davis says they are best understood as “meditations on a theme”. Like Jones, Davis compares Hafez to the Latin poet Horace, but also to the troubadours of medieval Europe and to Bob Dylan.

Jahan Malek Khatun is a revelation in more senses than one. She had been virtually forgotten until her complete poems were published for the first time as recently as 1995. E.G. Browne in his *Literary History of Persia* only mentions her in a footnote as the object of a scurrilous attack by Obayd Zakani, although this may have been falsely attributed to him. Browne comments that she was a poetess and that he possessed a manuscript of her poems, “the only copy I ever met with”. Now in the Cambridge University library, it was one of the three manuscripts used in compiling the 1995 edition – the other two being in Paris and Istanbul. There are none in Iran.

Jahan Khatun suffered personally from the dynastic conflicts that periodically shook Shiraz. Her father, Mas’ud Shah, was the Inju ruler of the city and was murdered in 1342 when Jahan Khatun was in her mid-teens. She was then taken care of by her uncle, Abu Es’haq, who became king the following year and is thought to have encouraged her to write poetry, which he was passionate about. Davis points out that women poets were relatively rare in those days, as it was considered an immodest occupation for a woman. Jahan Khatun married one of her uncle’s drinking companions, about whose behaviour she appears to complain in this verse from one of her *ghazals*:

*You spend all night asleep or drunk, and give
No thought at all to sleepless, weeping, me –*

*And what use are my tears, since all you live
For's to be spiteful and act thoughtlessly?*

After ruling for ten years, her uncle was driven out of Fars and later executed by the Mozaffarid, Mobarez al-Din, a brutal religious fanatic. Some of Jahan Khatun's poems suggest that she suffered imprisonment and forced exile until, five years later, Mobarez al-Din, was overthrown by his son, Shah Shoja, who re-established a convivial court where poets were once again esteemed and patronised. Jahan Khatun then returned to Shiraz, along with Hafez and Obayd Zakani both of whom had voluntarily gone into exile. Like them, she seems never again to have left Shiraz, where Shah Shoja remained on the throne for the next twenty years, with one brief interruption.

Davis describes the main theme of Jahan Khatun's poetry as "a sense of lost happiness". Her *ghazals*, unlike those of Hafiz, are clearly heterosexual, and Davis makes some interesting observations about the paradoxes that are set up by the fact that she is a woman using the conventional male rhetoric of the *ghazal*. He writes that she plays "with these paradoxes constantly, and the reader often glimpses her appearing to get a heady kick out of the game."

Stylistically, Jahan Khatun was much influenced by Sa'di and Davis notes that "she consciously strives for his clarity and elegance". She also uses many of the same rhymes, metres and metaphors as Hafez and it is generally assumed that the two poets influenced one another. But by comparing their poetry, Davis shows how "what are basically the same conventions....can produce poems that speak to us with such distinctly disparate, individual voices"

Nothing could be further from the refined poetry of Jahan Khatun than the obscene and satirical verse of Obayd Zakani. Davis compares him to Rabelais in his ability to be "simultaneously coarse and learned", to Swift in his "vituperation and satirical fantasy", and to François Villon in "his unabashed boasting about begging his way through life on the fringes of society". A complete edition of his works with all the obscene words included (rather than replaced by dots) was not published until 1999, and then in New York; it has yet to be published in Iran. Obayd was obviously bisexual and sings the praises of the male and female genitalia in equal measure. He is also quite open about the pederasty that was common at the time

and which is likely to make readers today a little uncomfortable. But he can be engagingly witty and self-deprecating, as in this quatrain which stands alone on the opening page of Davis's translations of Zakani:

*In arts and sciences, don't try to be a master,
Unless you want to be, like me, a big disaster;
To catch the eye of princes, just suck up to them,
Sing silly songs, fuck boys – and you'll get on much faster.*

As a poet as well as a scholar of Persian, Davis has made informed and imaginative use of the possibilities of English rhyme and metre “to convey at least something of what reading a poem in its original language is like”. This contrasts with the more literal translations preferred by Robert Maxwell and Bruce Wannell in their beautifully produced volume entitled *Persian Poems by 20 Poets over 1,000 Years*. Of the two, the translations by Davis fall more easily on the ear, at least for this reader. This, however, involves some loss of the original imagery which Maxwell and Wannell have been anxious to retain. In his short introduction Maxwell, who was the English versifier in the partnership, says he has resisted “any temptation to substitute a familiar image for a surprising one” and cites as an example of a surprising image this verse from one of the *ghazals* of Hafez:

*When spring brings life to the meadow's edge, you sweet bird
Will draw the rose's parasol to shield your head. So do not grieve.*

The same verse in Davis's translation runs as follows:

*Sweet singing bird, survive until the spring, and then
You'll tread on grass again, deep in the flower's shade
-- do not despair*

Davis has replaced the surprising image of “the rose's parasol” with the purely descriptive “the flower's shade”, although both translations achieve an effective rhythm. It should also be said, perhaps, that “sweet singing bird” is a more accurate translation of

“*morgh-e khush khān*” than Maxwell’s “sweet bird”. The reference is, of course, to the nightingale, which features so prominently in Persian lyric poetry. Its eloquent song made it a symbol of the lover, forever hopelessly courting the beloved, symbolised by the rose.

The poets chosen by Maxwell and Wannell are mostly well-known names drawn from the entire period of classical Persian poetry, beginning with Rudaki (d.940), the first major poet of New Persian after the Arab-Muslim conquest of Iran, and ending with Bahar (1886-1951), the last great practitioner of the forms of classical Persian poetry. Rumi, Sa’di and Hafez have three poems each, the rest only one. Both Jahan Khatun and Obayd Zakani are among the poets omitted, which cannot be considered a fault in what is only a selection. But it is amusing to learn from Bruce Wannell that while he was working with Afghan refugees in Pakistan he learnt that Obayd Zakani was a favourite poet of the mujahedin.

Maxwell and Wannell’s book, with its charming cover of roses and birds (notably the lovelorn nightingale), will appeal particularly to readers of Persian, since the Persian text is printed on the facing page of the translation. There are also very useful notes at the back. These explain the various poetic forms and metres, as well as giving the form and metre of each of the poems translated, together with brief information on the poet and explanations of any obscure references. Davis also provides explanatory notes as well as indexes of both the Persian and English first lines of his translations, enabling readers of Persian to find the original version with ease. Both these books should appeal greatly to anyone interested in Persian poetry.