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ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY 2013-14

LECTURES

October 15 th	Dr Alam Saleh Ethnic identity and the State in Iran
November 27 th	Mehdi Varzi The oil sector post the recent election
December 19 th	Iradj Amini Napoleon and Persia
January 21 st	Prof. James Allan Highlights of Safavid metalwork
February 20 th	Prof. Lloyd Llewellyn Jones The body and dress of the Achaemenid monarch.
April 22 nd	Prof. C E Bosworth Two European physicians at the court of Nasir ud-Din Shah
May 20 th	Professor Robert Hillenbrand The construction of the Masjid-e Jameh, Isfahan
June 26 th	Dr Oliver Bast German-Iranian relations in the 20 th century

TRAVEL GRANTS

This year two grants were awarded:

James White of Oxford University, to study Nizami Ganjavi's three romances *Khusrau u Shirin*, *Layli u Majnun*, *Haft Paykar* in Tehran.

Robert Bental of Exeter University, to study Persian in Doshanbeh, Tajikistan.

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.

NAPOLEON AND PERSIA.

Lecture given by Iradj Amini on 19th December 2013.

In the eventful history of the French First Empire, Franco-Persian relations seem like a drop in the Ocean. As such, they have often been overlooked by Napoleonic scholars. However, their importance becomes apparent, once you place them in the context of the rivalry which opposed France chiefly to Britain and Russia, throughout Napoleon's reign.

After his victorious campaign against the Austrians in Italy, at the end of 1797, the *Directoire* entrusted General Napoleon Bonaparte with the mission of invading Britain. Realizing that such an enterprise was beyond the reach of the French navy, the future Emperor imagined another plan to humiliate France's principal enemy: an expedition to Egypt. While he was still in Italy, he had written to the *Directoire*: "...the time is no longer distant when we shall feel that, to destroy England truly, we shall have to capture Egypt."

Napoleon and the French fleet left the port of Toulon on May 19th 1798. While they were sailing towards Egypt, William Pitt, the British Prime Minister and Lord Grenville, the Foreign Secretary, were convinced that their final destination would be Ireland. Yet, intelligence had reached Grenville, informing him about the real objective of the French expedition. According to these reports, Bonaparte's "project consisted of first taking possession of certain parts of Egypt; then continuing towards Persia and the Indus river...the rulers of Persia and Afghanistan had committed themselves; measures had been taken with Tipu-Sahib, the Sultan of Mysore, and the troops he needed were to be put at his disposal."

Although these reports would prove to be prophetic, the only member of the government who took them seriously was Henry Dundas, the Secretary of War and President of the Board of Control for India. Consequently, he advised the governor of Britain's Cape Colony to send reinforcements to the British army in India and to dispatch some ships to the mouth of the Bab-El-Mandeb Strait and the Persian Gulf to prevent any communication between Egypt and the Indian continent.

In the meantime, the French Army of the Orient had landed on a beach, a few miles from Alexandria. While it was making its way towards Cairo, Admiral Nelson, who had found out the whereabouts of the French expeditionary force, sailed towards Egypt. On the first of August 1798, he destroyed the French fleet and thus cut off Napoleon from all communication with France.

I will skip the details of the Egyptian campaign and its extension to Syria and confine my remarks to the consequences of those ventures on Persia.

In mid-October 1798, the rumour followed by the confirmation of the invasion of Egypt reached Calcutta. The Governor-General, Lord Mornington, later Marquis Wellesley, wrote immediately to the Secret Committee of the East India Company in London, that "there is no doubt that the invasion of Egypt is connected with the designs that the French have for such a long time had against British possessions in India, and that their hope for success is based on the cooperation they are expecting from Tipu."

He was right. In late December 1798, Napoleon had written a letter to the Sultan of Mysore, requesting Tipu to send a trusted person to Suez or Cairo, so that he may confer with him. This letter was intercepted by the British and eventually led to the invasion of Mysore and the death of Tipu.

Hardly had Wellesley got rid of Tipu when the Afghan ruler, Zaman Shah, threatened to invade India from the north. The British feared that nothing could prevent Napoleon from coming to assist Zaman Shah after forming an alliance with Persia.

Wellesley decided therefore to develop relations with Persia and to negotiate a commercial and political treaty, whose main objects would be: "the exclusion of the French from Persia and the creation of a continual source of anxiety and apprehension for Zaman Shah at the border of his states, so as to dissuade him from any future project of invading India." The man selected for this mission was Captain John Malcolm. He spoke Farsi quite well. In addition, he hated the French, whom he called "those infamous but active democrats."

Malcolm left Bombay on December 29, 1799 and arrived in Tehran in the middle of November 1800. He was received by Fath-Ali-Shah on the 16th of that month. However, since his departure from India, two events had occurred which mitigated the urgency if

not the importance of his mission. Firstly, the Persians had driven Zaman Shah to Western Afghanistan. In addition, the rebellion of one of his brothers had dissuaded him from invading India in the near future. Secondly, the French threat had been dispelled by Napoleon's departure from Egypt in August 1799. Malcolm decided therefore to play down the political aspect of his mission and to emphasize its commercial side.

The negotiations between Malcolm and the Persian Prime minister, Haji Ebrahim Etamad-od-Dowleh, ended in January 1801, with the signature of a commercial and a political treaty.

It is the political treaty which particularly concerns us, for it contains the seeds of Franco-British rivalry in Persia. As expected, its main purpose was to draw Persia into an alliance designed to exclude the French from the islands and shores of Persia.

It must be noted that nowhere in the political treaty was there any mention of a possible Anglo-Persian cooperation against Russia. Yet it was precisely against the designs of that nation that the Persians were seeking the assistance of Britain and would soon solicit that of France. The reason was that Malcolm could not commit his government in writing, because when he left India, Britain and Russia were still allies within the Second Coalition against France. We must therefore presume that in exchange for their pledges against France, the Persians were satisfied with verbal promises.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the second coalition against France came to an end with the defeat of Austria at the battle of Marengo and the negotiations for peace between Britain and France. These negotiations led to the peace treaty of Amiens of 26 March 1802, which although full of promise for the future, broke down a year later over disagreements on the terms of the treaty.

The French government was convinced that Russia, where the pro-British party at the court had got the upper hand after the assassination of Paul I and the accession of Alexander I, would sooner or later join Britain in a new coalition against France. In that case, a policy of friendship with Turkey and Persia was necessary, in order to create a diversion against Russia and to threaten British interests in India.

The state of war which prevailed between France and Turkey, caused by the French occupation of Egypt ended on 25 June 1802,

with the signature of the Treaty of Paris. Therefore, the new French ambassador in Constantinople, Marshall Brune, was directed to "gather information about the different *Pashaliks* and communicate them to the cabinet. He is even to extend his inquiries into Persia."

On 2 October 1803, Talleyrand, the French Foreign minister, instructed Jean-François Rousseau, the Commissioner for Commercial Relations in Baghdad and his counterpart in Aleppo, to provide him with more comprehensive reports about Persia.

At the beginning of 1804, the Russian army seized Ganja, one of the key fortresses of Azerbaijan, and was about to lay siege to Erevan. Fath Ali Shah requested Britain for assistance in accordance with the treaty of 1801. As might have been expected, both London and Calcutta refused, claiming that the said treaty contained no clause guaranteeing Britain's support of Persia in case the latter was attacked by Russia. In fact, the principal reason for Britain's refusal was the prospect of a new Coalition against France.

Since the advent of the Qajar dynasty, the Persian Government had been regularly informed by Rousseau of the exploits of Napoleon in Europe. Fath-Ali-Shah decided therefore to ask the French for assistance against the Russians.

In December 1804, while he was fighting the Russians at the gates of Erevan, he sent a messenger to the French embassy in Constantinople, with a letter for Napoleon, who by that time had been crowned Emperor of the French. In that letter, the Shah proposed a combined expedition against Russia, expressed his pleasure at receiving the agents of the Emperor and requested officers and especially artillerymen to train his army.

In the spring of 1805, Napoleon sent two successive envoys to Persia, each carrying a letter addressed to Fath-Ali-Shah. In the letter entrusted to Amédée Jaubert, a Farsi speaking scholar, the Shah was notably advised to mistrust Britain, which he referred to as "a merchant nation, which in India trades with the life and crowns of sovereigns", and to resist the incursions of Russia. The second letter carried by Alexandre Romieu, an army officer, answered Fath-Ali-Shah's request for military assistance. But for the time being, the only object of both envoys was "to report on the conditions of Persia, the character and power of its sovereign and the talents of its ministers". In addition, Romieu was to assess the qualities, abilities and degree of subordination of Persian officers.

In the meantime, William Pitt, the arch-enemy of France, died in June 1806. The policy formulated by his successor, Charles James Fox, might have ushered in a period of peace in Europe; especially since the Russians, through their plenipotentiary, the Baron d'Oubril, were also seeking a rapprochement with France. But the death of Fox in September 1806, and the Tsar's refusal to ratify the treaty initiated by his envoy, put an end to any hope of peace in the near future.

To give a new impetus to his Oriental policy, Napoleon told General Sebastiani, his new ambassador in Constantinople, that "the invariable object of my policy is to form a triple alliance between myself, the Porte and Persia, aimed indirectly or implicitly against Russia." Furthermore, Talleyrand wrote to Sebastiani: "In the battle that is being organized against the Northern Empire, Turkey must be our right and Persia our far right."

In Tehran, the visit of the French envoys proved to be useful, although Romieu's perception of the interest of a Franco-Persian alliance was not as encouraging as Jaubert's. Anyhow, the Persian government, impressed by Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz in December 1805, was eager to send an ambassador to France. The man chosen for this mission was Mirza Mohammad-Reza Qazvini. He arrived in Constantinople in September 1806, but Talleyrand advised Sebastiani to keep him there until the Emperor had decided on the most convenient place to receive him.

The meeting was finally held on the 26th of April 1807, at the castle of Finkenstein, near Osterode, in East Prussia, now a part of Poland. Napoleon had been there since the beginning of the month, preparing himself for a new battle against the Russian army. He hesitated for a while before agreeing to the conclusion of a Franco-Persian alliance. He was probably hoping that the battle of Eylau would force the Russians to negotiate. However, this bloody battle, far from deciding the fate of the war between France and Russia, cast doubt over Napoleon's military and political strategy. He decided therefore to conclude a Treaty with Persia, in order to create a diversion against Russia.

Under articles 2, 3 and 4 of the Franco-Persian treaty, signed on 4th May 1807 at Finkenstein, France guaranteed Persia's territorial integrity, acknowledged her legitimate rights to Georgia, and "promised to make every effort to force Russia to evacuate Georgia

and Persian territory and to obtain this by the peace treaty to be entered upon." France also promised to provide Persia with arms, as well as officers to help her strengthen her defences and organize her artillery and infantry along European lines.

In return, Persia undertook to declare war on Britain and to suspend all political and commercial ties with that nation. Persia was also to expel all consuls, factors and other agents of the East India Company, to reject any British minister, ambassador or agent who may present himself; to combine with the Afghans and other Kandahar tribes to march against the English possessions in India; and allow the French army to pass through Persian territory on its way to India.

For France, this alliance formed first and foremost a part of her struggle against Britain. On the one hand, it extended the limits of the Continental Blockade. On the other hand, it offered Napoleon a chance of fulfilling his dream of conquering India. As to its effectiveness against the Russians, it would fade after Napoleon's victory at the battle of Friedland and his reconciliation with Alexander I at Tilsit.

The Persians' interest was in the anti-Russian facet of the Treaty. They agreed to the anti-British clauses, merely because the alliance offered benefits in their struggle against Russia.

As minister plenipotentiary in Tehran, Napoleon appointed his aide-de-camp, General Claude-Mathieu de Gardane, whose grandfather had been consul in Isfahan shortly before the fall of the Safavid dynasty. He was instructed in particular 'to investigate Persia's military and commercial resources; to assess the obstacles a French army of 40.000 men would have to overcome in order to reach India; to foster the enmity of the Persians against the Russians; and to arouse the Persians against the British'. Gardane was accompanied by a large suite, including many army officers.

While Gardane was on his way to Tehran, a major event had taken place in Europe. Having defeated the Russians at the battle of Friedland, Napoleon had negotiated the terms of a peace Treaty with Alexander I, which was signed at Tilsit on 7 July 1807. Yet, despite France's commitments, no reference was made to Persia in that Treaty. Napoleon mainly sought to secure the supremacy of Europe, even at the price of giving the Russians a free rein in Asia.

Upon his arrival in Constantinople on 10 September 1807, Gardane received a letter from Talleyrand, informing him of the end of hostilities between France and Russia and the ensuing change of policy towards Persia: "Our treaty with Persia", wrote Talleyrand, "had not yet been ratified by that power. Fath-Ali Shah was not even aware of its contents, and we had no idea of what attitude he would take towards it. In those circumstances...it was natural for us not to complicate the other interests we had to settle with Russia by raising questions about Persia." Gardane's instructions were revised accordingly; he was henceforth entrusted with promoting peace between Russia and Persia and urging the latter to act exclusively against the interests of Britain.

Throughout this period, Britain's policy towards Persia had not remained idle. Harford Jones Brydges, the British consul in Baghdad, had gone to London to plead in favor of a policy aimed at countering the French threat against India. Fortunately for him, Robert Dundas, the son of Henry, was at the head of the Board of Control for India. Dundas was convinced that the overthrow of British power in India was one of Napoleon's chief ambitions. His apprehensions were shared by the Earl of Minto, the new Governor General of India, for whom such a project was not "beyond the energy and perseverance that characterize the present chief of France."

London finally decided to send an ambassador to Persia who, although on the payroll of the East India Company, was to enjoy the dignity and the importance of being appointed by the Crown. Harford Jones was selected for the post against the wishes of Lord Minto, who was strongly in favor of John Malcolm. The Treaty of Tilsit having marked the end of the Anglo-Russian alliance, it was impossible for Harford Jones to travel via St Petersburg. Therefore, he sailed from Portsmouth to Bombay on 27 October 1807, whence he was to go to Tehran by way of the Persian Gulf.

Meanwhile, on his way to Tehran, Gardane met Askar Khan Afshar, Fath-Ali Shah's newly appointed ambassador to France. The latter arrived in Paris on 20th July 1808 and presented his letters of credence to Napoleon on the 4th of September. Contrary to Gardane who, from the outset, disliked life in Persia, Askar Khan, a handsome man in his fifties, loved Paris life. Although not a diplomat by profession, but an army man, he was soon adopted by

the high society of the French capital and even by the court, where he and his Turkish colleague vied for success, especially with women. Askar Khan was also initiated into Freemasonry, becoming probably the first Iranian freemason.

Gardane arrived in Tehran on 4th December 1807 and met the Shah a few days later. During that audience, Fath-Ali-Shah ratified the treaty of Finkenstein and approved the conclusion of a commercial treaty, based on those of 1708 and 1715. He also agreed to cede to France the island of Kharg, this understanding being contingent on the evacuation of Persian territory by Russian forces. Immediately thereafter, Gardane sent out topographers to draw up surveys of the roads leading to India and several officers to train the Persian army in European tactics, and to cast cannon for the Persian artillery.

As far as his diplomatic mission was concerned, he was in a dilemma. The Persian government, as yet unaware of the turn of events in Europe, was anxious to see France fulfill her promises about ending Russian occupation of Persian territory. But pending news from Paris, Gardane could only satisfy them by departing from his instructions. Therefore, he agreed that the Persians should honour their commitments towards France only when the latter had honoured hers towards Persia.

The slowness of communications between France and Persia frustrated Gardane to the limits of depression. For example, although the Count of Champagne had succeeded Talleyrand as foreign minister since August 1807, Gardane was informed of his appointment only in February 1808. Consequently, he took steps to be recalled to Paris. In the meantime, he proceeded with his mission as best as he could. On the 21st of January, he signed an agreement with Mirza Shafi, the Prime Minister, relating to the sale of 20,000 French muskets to Persia. Mirza Shafi also requested French artisans, such as weavers, painters, printers, glassmakers and watchmakers to help establish those crafts in his country.

At the beginning of February 1808, Napoleon authorized Gardane to intervene as mediator between Persia and Russia, during negotiations to be held in Tehran. Although this initiative was far from the measures he hoped for, Fath-Ali-Shah could not but adapt himself to the wishes of his ally – especially since he was short of trumps to play the French against the Russians.

Sometime later, when it was rumored that a British mission was on its way to Persia, Gardane again disregarded his orders. This time he suggested to Fath-Ali Shah and his ministers that talks be held in Paris between Askar Khan and his Russian counterpart Count Tolstoy, under the mediation of Napoleon.

The Tsar was furious. He summoned the French ambassador, the marquis of Caulaincourt, to his palace on 12th August 1808, and defended Russia's occupation of Persian territory, insisting that the river Arax was the rightful border between Russia and Persia. He concluded: "...The affairs you have with Spain do not concern me, and those I have with Persia cannot interest the Emperor."

There is no doubt that Alexander knew of the French defeat at Baylen in July 1808, and that by referring to Spain in his conversation with Caulaincourt, he meant to hint at the possibility of a new understanding with Napoleon. This was to materialize during meetings between the two sovereigns at Erfurt, between September 27 and October 14, 1808 – a meeting designed to give Napoleon a free hand in Spain.

For a while, Napoleon contemplated looking after Persia's interests at Erfurt. He told Askar Khan that he would go there and settle the affairs of Persia according to the Shah's wishes. Nothing of the sort happened. Persia's interests were sacrificed to those of French policy in Europe, as they had been at Tilsit. In a letter dated 23 February 1809, Champagny wrote to the French ambassador in Russia: "The Emperor has no interest in Persia, and General Gardane's only instructions were, if both parties wished it, to promote communications between the Russians and the Persians, that would lead to peace. General Gardane was made well aware that we are interested only in Russia."

Clearly, because of the slowness of communications between Paris and Tehran, Gardane was in no position to follow the twists and turns of Napoleon's diplomacy. Assuming, no doubt, that hostilities would ultimately break out again between France and Russia, he did all he could to uphold the Franco-Persian alliance. In his last departure from his instructions, he gave a personal guarantee that until replies to his proposal of mediation in Paris arrived from France and Russia, the Russians would not make any hostile move or do anything that might worsen the relations between the two Empires, providing that "the Persian army refrains from all hostile

acts, and that His Majesty discharges faithfully all the clauses in the treaty of alliance with His Majesty the Emperor of the French and King of Italy, and proceeds with the war against the common enemies of both Empires.”

Gardane followed up his guarantee to the Persians by a letter to Field-Marshal Gudovich, the commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the Caucasus, warning him against any infraction of Persian territory.

Unfortunately for Gardane, Gudovich was much better informed than he was about the French attitude towards Persia. Backed up by the Tsar, he first established his headquarters on the line of the Russian outposts, a few miles from the convent of Etchmiatzin, and then occupied much of the Persian territory coveted by Russia.

This offensive naturally caused great surprise in the Persian camp which, in accordance with the promise made to Gardane, was scrupulously observing the truce. Gudovich having finally besieged Erevan, while one of his generals was heading towards Nakhdjavan, Crown Prince Abbas Mirza attacked the latter. But he was driven back, mainly because his French advisers took a neutral stance, as ordered by Gardane.

This development, followed by the arrival of Harford Jones in Bushehr, convinced the Shah that the moment of truth with the French had arrived. However, he was reluctant to let Gardane leave his court. After some hesitation, he agreed, without informing the French envoy, to admit the British mission to Tehran. When Gardane heard the news and threatened to leave Persia if the British ambassador was received, Fath-Ali Shah agreed to hold back Harford Jones in Shiraz until 21st March 1809, pending the arrival of news from France. In the meantime, the pro-British party at the Persian court induced the Shah to receive Harford Jones without more delay. So, Gardane decided to leave Tehran.

Despite the trials he underwent in Persia, Gardane did all he could to promote the interests of France and to honour, if not the letter, at least the spirit of the Finkenstein treaty. He should undoubtedly have had more patience, so as not to leave the British sole masters of Persia's destiny. That is precisely what Napoleon reproached him for. On hearing of the arrival of the British mission in Tehran, the Emperor said that “Harford Jones's arrival should not

have prompted Gardane to leave the Persian capital, leaving a clear field to all Britain's intrigues. All the more so that the Shah of Persia tried to persuade him to stay, and that by accepting the law of necessity he would still have been showing his devotion to the interests of France."

After replacing the French in Persia as privileged allies, the British encouraged the Shah to continue the war against Russia. This policy was the direct result of the reversal of alliances which had taken place in Europe after the conclusion of the Treaty of Tilsit. However, the resumption of hostilities between France and Russia in June 1812, led to a rapprochement between London and St. Petersburg. Sir Gore Ouseley, who succeeded Harford Jones in November 1811, urged the Persians to make peace with Russia and offered his country's mediation.

This sudden change in British policy had disastrous effects on Persia. Abandoned by the British as he had been by the French, Crown Prince Abbas Mirza decided to pursue the fight, despite the numerical and technical superiority of the Russians. This desperate venture led to the defeat of the Persian army on the night of 31 October 1812. A year later, the Gulistan peace treaty sanctioned Persia's loss of a considerable part of its territory, including Georgia.

Thus, Persia became twice the victim of the hazards of European politics. But although British interest in that country was strategical, Napoleon's was tactical. By concluding an alliance with Persia, he wanted merely to intimidate Britain and Russia by turns. However, Persia was on his mind until the very end of his life, although he seems to have forgotten his responsibility in the failure of the Franco-Persian alliance. One evening, in his room on the Island of St. Helena, he looked at a map of Persia and said to his secretary: "I started relations with this country, and I hoped to cultivate them, as well as with Turkey... I lost both of them at the crucial moment; the gold of the English was more powerful than my schemes."

“Beautiful to Behold is the King”: The Dress and Appearance of the Achaemenid Monarch.

Lecture given by Dr. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones on 20th February 2014.

The body of the Persian Great King was carefully and skilfully constructed through text and image as a series of signs to be decoded and read. Placing the Persian royal body within the context of general Near Eastern ideologies of the monarchic body, I shall explore the codified meanings of, firstly, the royal head because the Great King's eyes, nose, beard, and hair are rich in cultural and symbolic meaning. But more than anything it is the clothed body of the king that speaks in a uniquely 'Persian voice'. So I shall also explore how the monarch's clothed body is a site of representation, an emblem of his power, potency, legitimacy, and strength.

Look at any conventional Persian-made image of an Achaemenid Great King, such as that of Darius I carved into the rock face of the mountain at Bisitun (Figure 1), or the enthroned image of Darius (or Xerxes) from Persepolis (Figure 2), and the heroic figures of kings slaying a mythic beast on the doorjambs of the same palace. Notice how perfect the monarch is. His body emanates strength and vitality, his posture encodes military prowess and sportsmanship; his hair and his beard are thick and luxuriant and radiate health and vitality; his face, with its well-defined profile, large eye and thick eyebrow, is as powerful as it is handsome.

These images are state pronouncements. We must read them as codes through which the king's body takes on cultural meaning: it is the manliness, wholeness, beauty, and physical fitness of the monarch's body which guarantee his right to rule. The Bisitun image in particular might be regarded as a 'site of representation' where Darius's maleness is defined in opposition and in contrast to the men in front of him: theirs are the subjugated, bound bodies of defeated enemies, while his is the body of a victorious and virtuous

warrior-king who, for the sake of the deity who hovers above the scene, has destroyed those whose bodies and actions did not accord with the Truth (*Arta*).

But how did the Persian King's body function as a site of representation? I want to explore a diverse corpus of evidence in order to articulate something tangible about the body of the Persian Great King. By placing the Achaemenid materials within the context of an ancient Near Eastern cultural *koine*, we might be better equipped to engage with the cultural ideology of the Persians who created the texts and images which make up our deposit of study materials. The Achaemenids readily embraced many of the artistic and ideological constructions of Near Eastern kingship, and I shall draw on the art and ideology of Egypt and Mesopotamia for the study of the Great King's body. I shall also utilize the Hebrew bible, which is a rich starting point for any analysis of the ancient Near Eastern monarchic body.

The Greeks too were aware of something of the royal ideology surrounding the body of the Persian king, and even if they had their own cultural agenda in representing the Persians in specific (often deleterious) ways, the Greek-made texts still manage to embody some *bone fide* Achaemenid thought-processes and cultural norms and therefore can still offer up valuable information. I shall therefore also utilize Greek texts for the reflections they make on the Persian physique.

The Royal body as Divine Body

At the royal coronation (or initiation), the Persian king took on a new body. Since the lack of basic laws of primogeniture, succession struggles and other forms of harem politics played a role in determining who the heir to the Achaemenid throne might be, it was the coronation rather than the physical birth (or even the death of the previous king) that marked the moment when the king became a different person. Accordingly, it was at the coronation that he was given a different anatomy (and perhaps a different throne name too). Plutarch (in all probability deriving his information from Ctesias who was resident at the Achaemenid court) records some details of the coronation/initiation rites:

“Shortly after the death of Darius [II], the king [Artaxerxes II] went to Parsagade to be initiated into the royal rites [*teletē* i.e., ‘mystery rite’] by the Persian priests. It takes place at the shrine of a goddess of war [Anahita], whom one might liken to Athene. The initiate must enter the shrine, remove his own dress, and put on the clothes once worn by Cyrus the Elder before he had become king, eat a cake of figs, swallow terebinth and drink a bowl of sour milk. If there are other rituals, then they are not known to outsiders..”¹

Here, the new king, having conducted his father’s funerary ceremonies, is transformed into the new ruler having undergone a series of classic rite of passage rituals: the donning of symbolic garments and the eating of specific foods and the imbibing of ritual liquor, followed by his dressing in new garments to symbolize an altered state of being. The drinking of the sour milk and the acts of ingesting humble foods and hallucinogenics confirmed the initiate’s liminal status, as did the new king’s dressing in the pre-monarchic clothing of Cyrus: humility and humbleness were stressed in this *teletē* and only afterwards, when the king donned a robe of state, was his new brilliance, strength, and vitality confirmed and announced. This ritual simultaneously imbued the Achaemenid monarch with sacredness and legitimacy.

Gressmann’s influential work on the concept of ancient sacred-kingship has suggested that in the religious and political thought of the Near East the royal body was generally perceived to have taken on a new form of being at the investiture or coronation, so much so in fact that Gressmann thinks royal body-transformation was part of a region-wide *Hofstil*.² If this is correct then it is logical to see the ancient Persian investiture ritual as part of the same Near Eastern-wide theological system. In Achaemenid iconography, the Great King shares his appearance with that of Ahuramazda, echoing, I suggest, a *Hofstil* which was already identifiable in the Neo-Assyrian period: ‘Man is a shadow of god’, runs one Assyrian

¹ Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 3.1-4. Ctesias was a Greek doctor at the court of Artaxerxes II. Only parts of his *Persiká* have survived in the works of later Classical authors.

² Gressmann H. *Der Messias*. Göttingen 1929.

proverb; 'the king is the perfect likeness of God', it concludes.³ The proverb compares the king to other humans, and contrasts them too, and such a double-layered creed might be corroborated in the teachings of Ahiqar too: 'Beautiful to behold is the king... and noble is his majesty to them that walk the earth'.⁴ Similarly a Neo-Assyrian composition about the creation of mankind stresses that the king's physical being was made distinct from, and superior to, ordinary men:

"Ea (god of wisdom) opened his mouth to speak, saying to Belet-ili (goddess of creation): 'You are Belet-ili, the sister of the great gods; it was you who created man, the human. Fashion now the king, the counsellor man! Gird the whole figure so pleasingly, make perfect his countenance and well-formed his body!' And Belet-ili fashioned the king, the councillor man."⁵

In Near Eastern belief, the gods carefully and lovingly created the monarch's body, and that royal body was specifically crafted to be in a relationship with the gods. In the Hebrew bible the special relationship between the Davidic king and Yahweh is stressed when the monarch acknowledges his creation at the hands of the deity:

"For you created my innermost being;/ you knit me together in my mother's womb./ I praise you because I am... wonderfully made.⁶ My frame was not hidden from you/ when I was made in the secret places./ When I was woven together in the depths of the earth/ your eyes saw my body."⁷

³ Parpola S. *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Vol. I: Texts*. Neukirchen 1970, pp.112-13, Letter 145.

⁴ Lindenberger, J. M.1983. *The Aramaic Proverbs: Ahiqar*. Baltimore, 1983.

⁵ Mayer W.R. 1987. 'Ein Mythos von der Erschaffung des Menschen und des Königs'. *Orientalia* 56. 55-68.

⁶ *Psalm* 139, 13-16.

⁷ *Eccles.* 11, 5.

And with a play on the theme of ‘king as Yahweh and Yahweh as king’, the prophet Isaiah was able to foretell his people that, ‘Your eyes will see the king in his beauty’.⁸

Unfortunately, surviving Achaemenid texts are silent about the physical creation of the king’s body, but it is clear from the iconography that just as the king and the god share close intimacy of space, so, like the Israelite monarch and his god, they too share a physical form; the Great King encodes in his appearance the best physical attributes of the anthropomorphic divinity, Ahuramazda. In the Achaemenid artworks, such as the Bisitun image (Figure 1) or the Persepolis Treasury relief (Figure 2), the Great King and the supreme deity adopt the same hair-style and beard-shape, the same crown, and the same garment; they are, in effect, one another’s doppelgänger. Reciprocity between king and god is guaranteed and thus in an inscription from Susa Darius I can state with confidence that, ‘Ahuramazda is mine; I am Ahuramazda’s; I worshipped Ahuramazda; may Ahuramazda bear me aid’.

The origin and significance of the tradition of the handsome king sharing in the physically perfect attributes of the gods is unclear, although it is probably connected to the connotation that the ruler is superlative in all respects. It was certainly part of a royal ideology promoted across the Near East, from Egypt to Iran. The Greeks too were aware of the belief, although they failed to understand the subtleties of the system. Thus, in the Pseudo-Aristotelian tractate *De Mundo*, the Persian Great King is presented as the antitype of God: ‘invisible to all’ he resides deep within the inner chambers of his tightly guarded palace at Susa or Ecbatana; in his seclusion he nevertheless ‘sees all and hears all’.⁹ He acts only through his courtiers and, like a god, he inhabits, as Ernst Kantorowicz puts it, a ‘celestial Versailles’.¹⁰ This is a king whose foot never touches the ground, who, like a god, is perpetually suspended in mid-air: he alighted from his chariot onto a golden footstool, which a stool-bearer was specially detailed to carry, and he was not touched by anybody’s helping hand. According to

⁸ Is. 33, 17.

⁹ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Mund.* 348a.

¹⁰ Kantorowicz, E.H. *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton, 1957, p. 187.

several fourth-century Greek *Persica*, this king never went on foot outside his palace, and even within its walls wherever he walked, he trod upon fine Sardis carpets, which everyone else was forbidden to use.¹¹ Even when he banqueted with his court, the Great King was concealed behind a curtain, yet able to see all who flocked to his table to enjoy his beneficence.¹² When suppliants approached him they prostrated themselves on the ground and kept their eyes lowered.¹³

The Great King held, by virtue of his office, a position supernatural. He was, if less than a god, still more than a man. In his *Persae*, Aeschylus calls the dead Darius, the father of Xerxes, *isotheos* ‘equal to the gods’, *theion* ‘divine, and *akakos*, ‘knowing no wrong’, and while the Athenian tragedian must not be taken literally on these points, he was capable, nonetheless, of thinking of the Achaemenid dynasty in this way.¹⁴ Even if Persian kings were not gods, they could be represented in that way, and understood in that light too.

The Body Royal and the Image of ‘the Office of Kingship’

Created under imperial auspices for predominately Persian spectators at the heart of the Empire, the Bisitun relief (dated to just before 519 BCE) is a vivid depiction, although not necessarily a ‘portrait’ as we might use the term, of Darius the Great, the Achaemenid monarch (Figure 1). Physical likeness was not necessarily the intention behind portrayals of ancient Near Eastern monarchs; it is the institution of monarchy which is being portrayed and, as we will explore, the coded references to the king’s beard and coiffure, his stance and body-language, and to his clothing make the Bisitun relief, and other images of its type, a ‘portrait of a Persian ruler.’¹⁵ This is why, on the Treasury relief, the Crown Prince, standing behind (that is to say, beside) the royal throne is identical

¹¹ Athenaeus 12, 514a and 514b-c, citing Dinon and Heracleides.

¹² Athenaeus 4, 145a-146a, citing Heracleides.

¹³ Frye, R.N. ‘Gestures of Deference to Royalty in Ancient Iran’. *Iranica Antiqua* 9, 1972, pp.102–07.

¹⁴ *Aes. Per.* 651, 654-5, 671, 711, 857.

¹⁵ Winter, I.J. ‘What/When is a Portrait? Royal Images of the Ancient Near East.’ *Proc.Am.Phil.Soc.*, 2009.

in every way to his seated father; this is a portrait of the longevity of the institution of royalty.

Did the Achaemenid rulers direct artistic policy and did they have a hand in creating the royal image which was clearly so important to them? Occasional references suggest this and show kings and nobles commissioning works of art, like an equine statue custom-made for Aršama the satrap of Egypt, or a bespoke statuette of beaten-gold representing Artystone, which was commissioned by her husband, Darius I. In Assyria, monarchs were certainly active in promoting and commissioning royal art. There is no reason to doubt that the Achaemenid kings did not have a similar hold on the manufacture of the royal image as they had over the ideological texts created for them and in the Persepolis archives we do occasionally hear of specialist craftsmen serving the monarch's needs at the heart of Empire.

In the high-relief sculpture at Bisitun Darius wears a large bag-tunic, the so-called 'court robe' belted at the waist so as to form voluminous 'sleeves'. His beard is thick and curly and well-coiffured, as is his hair, upon which is set a low dentate crown. Darius wears trousers beneath his robe and his feet are placed in shoes without visible fastenings. One cannot fail to notice that Darius places his booted foot on the belly of a recumbent man – the usurper Gaumata – whom he dominates and humiliates. In a trilingual text which accompanies the relief, Darius sets out his lineage and titles and describes his defeat of Gaumata, his rise to the throne, and his successful crushing of a series of rebellions which broke out across the Empire in his first regnal year. The relief compresses the essence of these events into one tableau. Darius, accompanied by two Persian weapon-bearers, treads upon the prostrate Gaumata as nine rebel leaders, securely bound in fetters, approach the king; they wear regional dress and are identified by name. Darius, bow in one hand, lifts his other hand in a gesture of salutation to the god Ahuramazda who hovers over the scene and offers a ring (perhaps representing the kingship itself) to Darius.

At Bisitun, the depiction of the Great King, his Persian weapon-bearers, and even of the defeated prisoners are part of the overall layout of the relief and operate through a code of signs that circulate around the body. By 'code' I refer to the language of semiotics, a sign system in which we read, among other things, symbolism,

metaphor, analogy, signification, and communication. In the ancient Near East, language and art followed a semiotic display, and therefore, in the case of the hand, foot, nose, eyes, and other body-parts, ancient Near Eastern peoples did not necessarily think just of their external form, but of their activity: the power exercised by a strong hand, or the foot on the belly of an enemy, as a gesture of subjugation. In Mesopotamia and Egypt the arm signalled the underlying Sumerian logogram and Egyptian hieroglyph for ‘strength,’ a central attribute of the successful ruler; a king represented with powerful arms was therefore endowed with strength from the god. Large ears, as are frequently depicted in Egyptian and Mesopotamian royal images, thus indicated the judicial attributes of the monarch who was ‘wide of ear’ – just, wise and focussed; a broad chest signified a ruler endowed with strength and energy.

With that in mind, we might ask what are the resonances of Darius’s body-parts? What about his ear, what does it signify? His fingers? His foot? I will limit myself here to making some observations about the depiction of the king’s head: the royal hair and beard, as well as Darius’s eyes and nose. I will then offer a few observations on the king’s stance and the over-all visualization of his body.

Emotion, Beauty and the King’s Head

The head held the highest place in the Near Eastern body’s hierarchy. To be anointed and crowned in the case of the king, it was the seat of life and consequently Near Eastern texts often refer to the head as the ‘life force’ of the individual.¹⁶ Since the head represented the whole person, beheading an enemy gave a dramatic emphasis to the destruction of the opponent’s whole being.¹⁷ Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs frequently show mounds of severed heads of enemies near battlefields, and the head as a war trophy has a long history in western Asia. Perhaps stimulated by reflecting on the function of the physical head in relationship to the body, ancient Near Eastern peoples used the term ‘head’ as a symbol of leadership and authority; the king is thus the head of the body of the state.

¹⁶ *I Sam.* 10, 1.

¹⁷ *Gen.* 3, 15; *I Sam.* 17, 46.

All images of the Achaemenid Great King depict him with thick and luxuriant hair: abundant curls cover his head and a full, bushy, beard falls to his chest (Figure 3); the monarch is represented with the fullest head of hair and the longest and thickest beard – the length of the monarch’s hair must have signalled larger issues such as strength, wisdom, vitality, and potency (perhaps the beard even encoded a certain sacrosanct quality). The Bisitun relief shows Darius with a bigger and better beard than anyone else and even the audience relief at Persepolis (Figure 2) shows the king sporting a beard far superior to any courtier’s (although, standing at his side, his son and heir, the Crown Prince, is granted the privilege of a long beard too).

In the ancient world hair and beards were highly significant, and both were surrounded by rituals and had symbolic undertones; Persian elite men clearly grew theirs long, full, and luxuriant as a supreme mark of high social status. At the most mundane level, hair signalled a person’s state of health or lack of it, therefore men of the warrior-elite carefully grew and cared for their hair to represent their strength and virility, but they were careful to dress it and arrange it too, thereby symbolically ‘taming’ and ‘civilizing’ it. Excessive hair-growth had overtones of the barbaric, so that when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar’s state of mind finally collapsed, his courtiers read the external sign when they observed that, ‘his hair grew as long as eagle’s feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws’.¹⁸

Neo-Assyrian monarchs also took extreme care with the plaiting, braiding, and twisting of their hair and beards into elaborate coiffures of ringlets and curls, and it was this fashion which was wholeheartedly adopted by Achaemenid rulers who carefully had themselves depicted in the artworks with every curl and wave of hair clearly delineated. In reality, the hair and the beard were carefully dressed by skilled hairdressers who twisted the curls into shape and fixed them in position by the careful use of perfumed oil which helped control the hair, in addition to keeping it shiny and fragrant. Anointing the hair and beard with oil was probably a ritual practice for the Achaemenid monarchs as it was for other Near Eastern kings, but it was also a beauty rite for its own sake, and one

¹⁸ Daniel 4.33.

associated too with festivity and hospitality. Great Kings lavished their wealth on costly perfumed hair-oil, and one particular sort, *labyzos*, was even more expensive than myrrh.¹⁹

Egyptian pharaohs had an age-old tradition of wearing carefully dressed wigs and there can be little doubt that Achaemenid kings and courtiers likewise wore wigs and false hair pieces; their images at Persepolis and other palace sites certainly suggest that false tresses could be plaited into natural hair and beards. This fashionable caprice must have made hair expensive, and Strabo notes that hair was therefore a taxable item, while pseudo-Aristotle suggests that the Great King demanded a 'tribute' of hair from provinces of the Empire specifically for the creation of wigs.²⁰

For Persian men a full, well-set, fragranced beard was clearly a potent sign of manhood and a source of personal pride. It was the ornament of their machismo. In Near Eastern cultures generally the beard was symbolically loaded: it was the object of salutation and the focus of oaths and blessings, although, conversely, the beard could also be a locus of shame, since an attack on the beard was an attack on the individual who sported it, and because the beard was the superlative symbol of manhood, it was a great insult to degrade it: prisoners of war might have half their beards shaved off to humiliate them, and Israelite prophets threatened the populace with the promise that the king of Assyria will, 'shave your head and the hair of your legs and... take off your beards also'.²¹ It seems to have been a practice at the early Achaemenid court to shave the heads and pluck off the beards of courtiers, aristocrats, and grandees who had offended the Great King (although Plutarch says that under Artaxerxes I a more symbolic practice was put into operation whereby a courtier's humiliation was enacted upon his headgear, which was torn and shredded.).²²

Interestingly, Ctesias tells a story (which probably has at its core a genuine Iranian version) of the time a powerful court eunuch, Artoxares, attempted to overthrow Darius II and establish himself as Great King; to do this, Ctesias says, he asked a woman (who goes

¹⁹ Athenaeus 12. 514a, citing Dinon..

²⁰ Strabo 15.3.21; pseudo-Aristotle 2. 14d.

²¹ *Isaiah* 7.20; see also *II Samuel* 10.4-5.

²² Plut. *Mor.* 173D; 565A.

unnamed in the text) to procure for him a beard and moustache of false hair, 'so that he could look like a man'. At a time when beards were *de rigueur* for all elite men, eunuchs (who, if castrated before puberty, could never sprout facial hair) must have appeared very incongruous - at best 'half-men', at worse, sub-human and Ctesias's point is to confirm that to rule as a king, one must look the part; the vital accoutrement for the job was the luxuriant royal beard. Preserved here, I think, is a genuine Persian belief that the monarch was the first amongst men and that his ability to rule and to preserve cosmic order was signified through his appearance. Not surprisingly then, given the close association between the beard and physical power and martial ability, the Great King was depicted with the most impressive beard of all; it far outstripped those of his courtiers in terms of length, fullness, and elaboration and it clearly demarcated him as the Empire's alpha-male.

In Near Eastern thought the face was regarded as the most obvious aspect of the true-self; to honour the face was thus to honour the person and since the face was the essence of the person, abuse was directed directly at it.²³ The metaphor of light emerging from the face was a common Near eastern motif: faces are said to beam and glow, while benevolence and happiness dawns and flashes over the face; conversely, a darkened expression is troublesome. The light and darkness read onto a monarch's face was considered the gauge of his mood – and this was important to understand given that life and death depended on the king's expression:

"A King's wrath is a messenger of death,/ and whoever is wise will appease it./ In the light of a king's face there is life,/ and his favour is like the clouds that bring the spring rain."²⁴

Perhaps because the spirit of the body (the breath) comes from the nose, it was considered to be the seat of one's spirit. The nose was regarded a seat of the emotions, and was thought to be heated in anger, reminiscent of the snorting of a war-horse: a Hebrew text has an enraged Yahweh pronouncing that, 'I myself will fight against you... in anger, in fury, and with a nose snorting with rage

²³ *Lev.* 19, 32.

²⁴ *Prov.* 16. 14-15; *Deut.* 25, 9.

(Jeremiah 21, 5), while Sehep-ib-re, Chief Treasurer to the pharaoh Amenemhet III, noted that his master's nostrils 'are chilled when he inclines toward rage'.²⁵

The quality of the nose commands respect and honour, so that when in the Hebrew *Song of Songs* the male-lover's nose is compared to a tower built in Lebanon, it is the strength inherent in the nose, and not the size of it that is referred to.²⁶ Likewise, in the Achaemenid relief sculptures, Darius's nose in no small way defines his looks. It is a haughty, proud nose. But it is also a sexily hooked nose. Darius has a matinee-idol handsomeness – at least if we follow Plutarch on this: "because Cyrus [the Great] was hooked-nosed, the Persians – even to this day – love hooked-nosed men and consider them the most handsome".²⁷ Of course, every Persian prince and monarch aspired to match the standard of masculine beauty set by Cyrus whose aquiline nose set the benchmark of beauty for generations of Persians. Indeed, one cannot help but notice this distinctive physiognomy repeated time and again in Achaemenid art. Of course, there are as many conceptions of beauty as there are cultures,, but in Achaemenid Persia the male nose seemed to have been erotically charged. Needless to say, the Great King's nose was the finest and fairest of all.

In the Bisitun relief, Darius's artists, while conforming closely to conventions of Near Eastern art, nevertheless manage to give Darius a look that resonates with a particular Persian beauty. In Greek texts Great Kings are noted for their valour, handsome demeanour, and their impressive stature; they are all 'the most valiant of men', or 'the best-looking of men' (their wives and daughters are equally beautiful – a 'torment' for Greek eyes no less) - and together Persian kings and queens are habitually tagged as being 'the best looking in all of Asia'.²⁸ Even Plato could not resist commenting on the striking beauty of the royal Persian physique, which he explained by suggesting that infant princes underwent a strict regimen of massage therapy in which their young oiled limbs

²⁵ Pritchard J.B. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton, 1969, p.431.

²⁶ *Song of Songs* 7, 4.

²⁷ Plut. *Mor.* 281e.

²⁸ Strabo 15. 3.2.1; Hdt. 7. 187; Plut. *Art.* 1.1; Plut. *Alex.* 21.6. 11.

were twisted into perfection by their doting eunuch slaves.²⁹ Accordingly, Pierre Briant has noted that, ‘a man did not become king because he was handsome...; it was because of his position as king that he was automatically designated as handsome’.³⁰

In the Bisitun relief’s accompanying inscription, the tall, regal, and handsome Darius boasts of his triumph over the ambitions of the Median pretender Fravartish: “[He] was captured and brought to me. I cut off his nose, his ears, and his tongue, and I tore out one eye, and he was kept in fetters at my palace entrance, and all the people beheld him”.³¹ Eventually his head was hacked off and displayed on the palace walls. In his mutilation of the heads of prisoners, and in particular the hacking off of the nose and the gouging out of the eyes, Darius is consistent with a general Near Eastern practice which regarded mutilation as the lowest type of degradation that could be inflicted upon an individual’s body. A text by Ashurnasirpal II recounts how, “I captured many troops alive: I cut off some of their arms and hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears and extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops.”³² Xenophon recalls that, as he marched through the Persian Empire, he often saw along the roads people who had lost eyes because of some crime against the Great King’s law.³³

As perhaps the most expressive single element of the face, eyes are essential for non-verbal communication, but they also served as a symbol for the physical and spiritual wholeness of an individual. People believed that the eyes emitted power and had a life-force of their own; thus in a Nineteenth-Dynasty hymn, the Egyptian god Re notes that, “I am he who opened his eyes, so that light might come into being, who closed his eyes, so that darkness might come into being”.³⁴ But the power of the eye is also enshrined in the effectiveness of the gaze: “You have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes,” sings the beloved in *Song of Songs*; “Alluring

²⁹ Pl. *Al.* 121d; see also Pliny 24. 165.

³⁰ Briant P, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, Winona Lake, 2002, 225-26.

³¹ DB Column II §32.

³² Luckenbill D.D. 1989. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*. II Vols. London, 1989, Vol. II, p. 380.

³³ Xen. *Anab.* 1.9.11-12.

³⁴ Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p.13.

was his figure, sparkling the lift of his eyes” lauds the Babylonian creation epic of the god Marduk.³⁵

In the conventions of Near Eastern two-dimensional art, prominence is laid on the power of the eye because only one is ever depicted; it is often over-large and highlighted with carefully delineated eyelids and make-up lines and set beneath an impressive eyebrow. The Achaemenid artists follow the same conventions for the representations of Darius and his heirs; in the relief images, the eye of the Persian Great King dominates his face and serves the double-purpose of making the eye both a powerful force and a beautiful entity in its own right. Since the eye was the focus of beauty in Near Eastern thought, artificial enhancement of the eye with make-up (especially *kohl*) was meant to define its power and attractiveness (and, indeed, the attractiveness of power). Thus, the Persian vogue for using *kohl* is well-attested in Achaemenid iconography, where make-up lines are clearly delineated. Persian courtiers shared a love of cosmetics with many courts of the Near East, and like Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian rulers, the Achaemenid kings employed a stratum of specialist slaves who were trained as beauticians, some of whom could become influential at court – no doubt because of their close proximity to the Great King or his family.³⁶ The biblical text of Esther records that new recruits into the royal harem at Susa underwent six months intensive beauty therapy as they were massaged with oil of myrrh. Xenophon’s Cyrus understands the benefit of a good makeover too: he saw the beauty of ‘Median’ dress and he comprehended the effectiveness of cosmetics in enhancing the appearance (the story goes that Cyrus especially admired his grandfather Astyages’s use of eye-liner, rouge, and wigs).³⁷

It is clear that the various components of the head created a rich symbiosis of significant codes through which emotions and status were expressed. Darius’s head and face could be read as a signifier of his creativity and procreative power, his emotions, and even his potent sexuality. The king’s head crowned the body royal.

³⁵ Song of Songs 4, 9; Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 62.

³⁶ Xen. *Cyrop.* 8. 8.20.

³⁷ Xen. *Cyrop.* 1. 3.2-3.

‘That My Body is Strong’: Royal Muscle

In an Old Persian inscription on the façade of his tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam, near Persepolis, Darius I confirms that his Empire was won by military prowess: “the spear of a Persian man has gone far; then shall it become known to you: a Persian man has delivered battle far indeed from Persia.”³⁸ This is the logical conclusion to the first text of Darius’s reign contained on the Bisitun monument in which his fight for Empire is inscribed. His tomb contains another statement, but this time it focuses on the strength of the king’s body and is the most verbose Achaemenid text in existence in which the military achievements of the monarch are portrayed through the strength of Darius’s body:

“This is my ability: that my body is strong. As a warrior, I am a good warrior. At once my intelligence holds its place, whether I see a rebel or not. Both by intelligence and by command at that time I know myself to be above panic, both when I see a rebel and I do not see one. I am furious in the strength of my revenge, with both hands and both feet. As a bowman I am a good bowman, both on foot and on horseback. As a spearman I am a good spearman, both on foot and on horseback. These are the skills which Ahuramazda has bestowed on me and I have had the strength to bear them.”³⁹

Always measured and rational, never hasty or unconsidered, Darius’s force of personality ensures sound judgment and learned leadership for the Persians; but while ethical qualities are central to the ideology of the tomb inscription, physical muscle and brute strength are stressed too. Darius’s body is strong enough to endure the hardships of campaigning on horseback and on the march, and his arms have strength to draw the bow and wield the lance. His skills, he says, come from Ahuramazda, re-echoing the interdependence of the bodies of the god and the king which he articulated in his inscription from Susa.⁴⁰

It is the strong body of the king which is eulogised too on the Bisitun monument. Here the relief sculpture depicts Darius’s body

³⁸ DNa §4.

³⁹ DNb §2g-2i; later repeated verbatim by Xerxes: XPl.

⁴⁰ DSk.

in sharp contrast to the bodies of his enemies while the texts which accompany it tell how each rebel was pursued, captured, and killed. As the rebel leaders fall before Darius, they offer him their necks. For it is they, not he, who are men of violence; it is they who are followers of the Lie (rebellion), so that the moral ambiguity of warfare and internal strife vanishes in the face of the legitimate Great King of Persia. The enemy bodies are therefore justifiably abased, mutilated, and killed and the king chains them by their necks, steps on their bellies, and then orders their executions; the upshot of this makes Darius the undisputed head of all lands.

To add strength to this image it should be noted that in the Bisitun relief the bodies of Darius's fellow-Persian arms-bearers (one holding a spear, the other a bow) are inactive. They hold the weapons which bring about Darius's victory, but do not wield them with any degree of military vigour; in fact, to make them active in any way would only weaken Darius's action. After all, Darius does not lead an army here, and the image suggests that he defeats the rebels single-handedly. While this is obviously a fiction (and the text confirms that armies mobilised by loyal commander were at the forefront of the campaigns), the relief scene does serve to place his body in the foreground.

For its part, the Bisitun relief derives much of its iconography from three principal areas: firstly the great victory stele of Naram-Sin (c. 2254-2218 BCE), taken from Sippar by the Elamite ruler Šutruk-Nakhunte (c. 1165 BCE; Figure 4), who erected it on the acropolis at Susa, where it was discovered by Jacques de Morgan. Naram-Sin's triumphant pose, bow in hand and with his foot raised onto the chest of a fallen enemy (with others dying before him), is an unchallenged figure of vigour and manliness and his position, high on a mountain top and close to the stars – the symbols of the gods – as well as his horned helmet articulate the notion that the king's body emphasizes the transient flow between the body divine and the body politic.

Second, created in the mode of the Stele of Naram-Sin, the Sar-i Pol relief of the Elamite king Anubanini from Luristan (Figure 5), some 100 kilometres east of Bisitun, depicts the victory and investiture of the Elamite warlord who similarly stands on one of his captives in his role as a military hero (he wields a battle-axe and bow). The goddess Ishtar, proffering the ring of kingship, leads nine

naked and bound prisoners before the victorious sovereign. Darius's emulation and adaptation of the third millennium rock relief of Sar-i Pol is clear, and it is even probable that Darius knew too of its Old Akkadian ancestor, the Naram-Sin monument, which was almost certainly on display in Susa during Darius' lifetime.

Finally, Darius's artists show considerable awareness of the Neo-Assyrian manner of representing kings (and, more generally, the Assyrian nobility and military). The Bisitun image is a reworking of the Mesopotamian and Elamite relief-images, reworked in a style reminiscent of Neo-Assyrian carvings and although the question of the Assyrian influence on early Achaemenid relief sculpture has been questioned, most scholars recognize the dependence on earlier models (Figure 6).

However, the Bisitun image of Darius lacks the physical momentum of movement and the obvious force of the body which is such a common feature of the portrayals of Sumerian, Assyrian, Elamite, and, for that matter, Egyptian monarchs in warfare or sport; when Ramses II is shown shooting at Hittite enemies from his chariot for instance, the artist makes a great play on the tension (and beauty) of his musculature as he effortlessly draws his bow and fires a volley of arrows. Likewise in Ashurbannipal's lion hunt scenes, the king's musculature appears to almost throb with force as he dispatches lion after lion with his spear and sword.

Naram-Sin is defined by his physique. His torso is naked and his well-muscled chest is displayed frontally for maximum visual impact; the king's legs are uncovered too, and sinewy, and toned. On the Sar-i Pol relief, Anubanini is portrayed with a naked torso and a well-defined physique, including powerfully muscled legs and full pectorals, in a typically southern Mesopotamian style of royal representation. Neo-Assyrian royal bodies too are heavily muscled, so much so that in the art works their legs and biceps are artificially pumped to bursting-point; even in repose, the Assyrian monarch's developed and toned body is stressed (Figure 6): an arm lifted in a gesture of prayer still betrays the strength of the monarch's body. The images encode one message: *here is the body of a strong and capable monarch*.

Contrasting with the muscled Mesopotamian bodies, on the Bisitun relief Darius's body lacks definition. His arms are entirely devoid of muscles and are smoothly rounded, decorated with fine

bracelets, and for the most part concealed within the robe's 'sleeves'. Darius's fingers are long and curved, and schematically rendered (it is perhaps better to look more for an Egyptian influence here than a Neo-Assyrian one). Nonetheless, we still see here a body in motion, its parts perfectly suited for activity (the most important movement is that of Darius's leg, lifted up onto the stomach of Gaumata). The text of the Bisitun inscription leaves no room to doubt that the decapitation of the king's enemies is the result of Darius's own body-strength and in the relief that accompanies the inscription the display of his victorious body over the rebellious traitors is accentuated by the display of the rebels lining up in front of him awaiting their execution.

So in the Bisitun inscriptions the King's body is an active body, but the *image* accompanying the text does not necessarily confirm this. There Darius's body is a curiously inactive body and his gesture of reverential greeting to Ahuramazda, coupled with his raised leg with its foot resting on Gaumata's prone figure is all that physically happens. And even then, Darius's body is at ease. Why is this? Probably because the image is fixed on showing the restoration of order brought about by Darius in the immediate aftermath of his successful play for the throne; while the texts give us plenty of dynamic action, the image represents a 'mission accomplished' scenario – the Lie has been vanquished and Truth (that is, Darius's *version* of the Truth) is once again restored. The scene shows the aftermath of war and terror, the moment when chaos is overthrown and harmony reigns supreme. Action is no longer needed.

At Bisitun the image of Darius dominates the relief. Given that the monarch was the select vessel of the god Ahuramazda, the Persian artists, no doubt carefully working through the throne, have tried to depict this quality simply by making Darius's body bigger than any other individual represented. Yet when compared with the visualization of monarchs in other Near Eastern societies, there are significant oddities in the iconography of the Achaemenid Great King. The body of Darius not only lacks muscle, in sharp contrast to the boast that his body 'is a strong body', but is also conspicuously covered so that only his forearms and face are left exposed; the belted robe, trousers, and boots render his flesh invisible. Even his face is essentially masked behind the luxuriant growth of his beard and hair.

This masking of the king's body is surprising given the Near Eastern prototypes commonly assigned to the Bisitun relief and I find it interesting that at Bisitun, the first official depiction of an Achaemenid monarch eschews the standard Near Eastern artistic vocabulary of bodily display – chests, forearms, biceps, calves, thighs – and opts instead to concentrate upon the king's body shrouded within clothes. Is this a reflection of the Achaemenid concept of the invisible king? Perhaps. But given the absence of even a glimpse of the royal flesh, I suggest that our focus has to be drawn to the royal garments themselves.

Concealing the Body: the Royal Robe

Clothing was a crucially important element of ancient Persian court culture. Its significance could be physical, economic, social, or symbolic and the function of clothing was multiple: clothing could protect, conceal, display or represent a person's office or state of being.

Persian identity was defined through its clothing: members of the Achaemenid court wore two distinct types of clothing. The first sort can be called 'riding dress' or 'cavalry costume' which was made up of five items of clothing – a felt cap, a sleeved coat,, sleeved tunic, trousers, and footgear. The Greeks erroneously called this 'Median dress' although there is no evidence for it being limited to the Medes. Interestingly, Achaemenid iconography never depicts the king wearing the riding habit, although it is probable that in reality he did so. Indeed, four groups of Iranian delegates are represented at Persepolis bringing coats, tunics, and trousers to their ruler, and the message is clear: the Great King is an Iranian horseman as well as the foremost Persian courtier.

The second form of Persian clothing is known as the 'court robe'. Constructed from a huge double-square of linen or wool (or perhaps cotton or even silk), and worn over baggy trousers, the tunic was tightly belted to form a robe with deep folds which created an overhang resembling sleeves. This was the costume of the Great King *par excellence*, and he is represented wearing it repeatedly, whether sitting on his throne or actively fighting in battle or killing an animal (mythic or otherwise). In reality the court robe was a highly impractical garment for any form of active combat, so the

choice to depict the monarch wearing it with such regularity can only be explained by the fact that it was symbolically important. The court robe represented Achaemenid royal power.

In the ancient Near East the clothed body was a powerful body and that is why gods as well as kings were portrayed in clothes; nudity was not ordinarily the standard form for gods and even the Hebrew god Yahweh shared in this anthropomorphic aspect of divinity, for he was regarded as ‘wrapped in light as with a garment’ and ‘clothed with honour and majesty’.⁴¹ Dress was viewed as the hallmark of civilization.

If clothes make the civilized man, then they demarcate the king as a man above all men. Creation myths and hymns tell of the gods’ special care in clothing the royal body in garments of power and majesty. Thus, in a Sumerian hymn cycle to Inanna, a king rejoices in the fact that,

“[Ninurta] placed the heavens on my head as a crown./ He put the earth at my feet as sandals./ He wrapped the holy *ba* garment around my body./ He put the holy sceptre in my hand.”

In the earlier discussion of the royal investiture it was noted that the new Achaemenid king went through a symbolic rite of separation and reincorporation; this was especially signified through the use of ceremonial clothing as the ruler stripped off his fine garments, put on the humble garb that Cyrus II had worn before taking the throne, and was then re-clothed in a robe which signified both his illustriousness and his right to rule. The imagery of undressing and dressing is usually symbolic of bigger issues, and in the case of the Achaemenid investiture ritual, the transference of clothing harked back to Persia’s humble beginning (and in a sense, by donning Cyrus’s clothing every subsequent Great King became a Cyrus) while simultaneously celebrating its current glories. As the new king puts on his royal robe, so he dons the power to rule.

Like much else about Persia, the Greeks had a polarized view of Persian dress. They actively constructed a vision of the Persian outfitted in a tight-fitting, all-concealing garment (best seen in Attic vase painting of the period c. 485-460 BCE). These images had only

⁴¹ *Psalm* 104, 1-2.

one reading: the Persian clothed body was unmanly and uncivilized. The Greeks prided themselves on the display of ('heroic') nudity (in controlled situations - at the gymnasium and sporting events, even on the battlefield), so that to conspicuously cover the body *à la perse* was categorically cowardly. However, Greek texts also speak of the beauty of 'Median' dress, considering it to be stately and becoming.

According to Ctesias, the robes of the Persian king were especially admired for 'their beauty [and were] a source of awe (*thaumaston*) for the Persians'.⁴² Whilst the Greeks generally regarded Persian dress as luxurious and expensive, Ctesias's use of *thaumaston* suggests that the royal robes were even more than that – they were 'other worldly', perhaps even worthy of veneration. It is probable that the royal robe donned at the climax of the coronation ritual was an Achaemenid 'court robe' since we know that it was richly dyed and beautifully worked with exquisite designs.⁴³

Given that the coronation ceremony was a significant rite of passage in which the ruler underwent a metamorphosis, the royal robe worn by the king was thereafter imbued with religious symbolism. Curtius Rufus notes that it was purple, white, and gold and decorated with the 'motif of gilded hawks attacking each other with their beaks' – no doubt his interpretation of the winged Ahuramazda symbol.⁴⁴ It was this ensemble which, Ctesias notes, struck the Persians with almost religious awe.

The Great King's robe was a talisman; it protected and demarcated his semi-divine body. As Plutarch's description of Artaxerxes II's coronation relates, when Cyrus the Younger plotted to kill his royal brother, he refused to strike the death blow while the king was wearing this sacred garment.

Even when ripped or tattered the king's robe possessed extraordinary powers: one courtier of Artaxerxes II, Teribazos, managed to get hold of one of the king's old cast-offs and wore it openly but he escaped the death sentence which naturally accompanied such a rash act because of the king's benevolence and

⁴² Aelian, *History of Animals* 4.46, citing Ctesias..

⁴³ Xen. *Cyrop.* 8. 3.13-14; Curtius Rufus 3. 3.17-19.

⁴⁴ Curtius Rufus 3. 3.17-19.

because Teribazos was prepared to debase himself by playing the fool so that he would be automatically exonerated of treason.⁴⁵

Garments played an important part in the wider culture of Achaemenid court society, and in particular the act of a superior (especially the ruler) bestowing a robe on a subordinate as an indication of special favour and as a rite of investiture has a very ancient pedigree in the Near East. The act served to sustain courtiers' loyalty as the robe-giving ceremony was held publicly at court or in the provinces. Those honoured with the gift of a royal robe would proudly show it off.⁴⁶

Conclusion

It becomes clear that in their creation of a royal image, the Persians regarded dress and covering the body as playing a vital role in the articulation of the power of monarchy. It is the clothed royal body which disseminates the picture of Persian imperial supremacy.

Royal governance takes place through bodies. Bodily functions – from eating to intercourse, from defecation to fighting, from mourning, to parading about – constitute the stuff of which Persian kingship is made. The successful king was the king who mastered these bodily functions and modes of physical display in ways that his society thought appropriate. Understanding kingship in ancient Persia necessitates understanding the royal body and the disparate bodies of evidence. Admittedly, much remains to be done on the construction of the Achaemenid royal body, but it is fair to say that the Persian Great King was constructed to be an impressive, overawing, figure: his head, face, hair, and beard were all codes of signs through which his status and majesty were expressed. But more than anything, it was in the dressing of the royal body that the semi-divine cogency and dignity of the throne was best expressed. In ancient Persia the powerful monarchic body was a clothed body.

⁴⁵ Plut. *Art.* 5.2.

⁴⁶ Plut. *Art.* 15.2; *Es.* 6. 11



Figure 1

Darius I's relief and inscription at Bisitun. The king, bow in one hand, raises his other in adoration of Ahuramazda who hovers above him. Rebel leaders, chained and fettered are led before the king (he steps upon the belly of Gaumata). Darius is accompanied by courtiers holding weapons as emblems of their courtly offices (author's photograph).



Figure 2

Recreation of the Treasury Relief, Persepolis. On a raised platform, Darius I (or possibly Xerxes) is seated on his high-backed lion-legged throne, his feet resting upon a footstool. He is accompanied by the Crown Prince, courtiers, and guards. Incense burners in front of the king purify and sweeten the air and a canopy decorated with a winged disk, striding lions, and a tassel border demarcates the royal ceremonial space (courtesy of Persepolis 3d.com).



Figure 3

Detail of the head of Darius I from the Bisitun relief. The King's beard and well-set hair is abundant and elegantly coiffured. The king's profile is striking, his eye large and outlined with kohl (line drawing based on Madhloom 1970).



Figure 4

Possible restoration of the victory stele of Naram-Sin, with a detail of the monarch. The king wears a short kilt, but his legs, arms, and chest are bare and openly displayed. He sports a long beard, reaching to his chest, and his hair is worn long and thick. Naram-Sin's horned crown associates him with the gods (Line drawing based on Westenholz 2000, fig. 1 with additions by the author).



Figure 5

The Elamite king Anubanini from a rock-relief at Sar-i Pol, Luristan. The monarch, bow in one hand, axe in the other, stands in front of the warrior-goddess Ishtar and receives the bound and naked bodies of prisoners. He places his sandaled foot on the belly of a fallen captive (line drawing after Llewellyn-Jones 2013b, 213).



Figure 6

King Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria raises a libation bowl; in front of him is his 'Turtan', a high-ranking military and administrative official, who clasps his hands in prayer. The arms of king and courtier are thickly muscled even though both are at repose (line drawing based on Madhloom 1970, pl XXXIV)

TWO WESTERN MEDICAL MEN IN NASIR AL-DIN SHAH'S IRAN.

Lecture given by Professor Edmund Bosworth on 27th April 2014.

Until the 19th century, medical knowledge in the Islamic world remained essentially that of the great mediaeval writers in Arabic, scholars like Avicenna and Fakhr al-Din Razi, who mediated knowledge that went back to such Greek masters as Hippocrates and Galen, the basis of this being the idea of the balance, or imbalance in the case of illness, of the four humours of the body. The early Ottoman sultans had Christian Greek physicians, but these medical men were unaffected by the great advances in medical knowledge, of anatomy and physiology, stemming from 16th and 17th century Italy, France and England, and it was not until the early 19th century that Western medical knowledge gradually found its way into such lands as Turkey, Egypt, Syria and Iran. Before that, what little of such medical lore as percolated into the Islamic lands cannot have been much more advanced than that of the indigenous Islamic tradition. In a recent book on travellers and explorers of the Middle East and lands beyond, I have written about the Scotsman George Strachan, born around 1572 in the Mearns in eastern Scotland (what is now Kincardineshire) and died around 1630 somewhere between Mughal India and Safavid Iran, where he had been working for the East India Company. He deserves posthumous fame primarily for his role as pioneer collector of Arabic manuscripts, which he managed to send back to Italy via the traveller Pietro Della Valle so that about half of them survive today in the Vatican Library and at Naples. But another interesting point about Strachan is that from around 1615, he spent two years as personal physician to the powerful Amir who controlled the Syrian Desert region, Fayyad b. Muhammad of the Bedouin Abu Risha family, having cured the Amir of a minor ailment. Strachan had studied in Western universities like Montpellier and had acquired some knowledge of the medical pharmacopeia from a Flemish physician at Aleppo, but this cannot have been very profound, and it may be that Strachan

acquired his medical reputation amongst the Arabs more by bluff than detailed knowledge.

At all events, it is not until the 19th century that some genuine Western medical knowledge reached a land like Iran, at first through freelance physicians like the Frenchman Louis-André-Ernest Cloquet (1818-55), who was personal physician first to Muhammad Shah Qajar and then after 1848 to his son and successor Nasir al-Din Shah for the opening years of his reign. Nasir al-Din got Cloquet to tutor some private students in medicine, but a decisive event here was the foundation in 1851 by the Shah's chief minister, the Amir-i Kabir Mirza Taqi Khan, of the *Dar al-Funun* in Tehran as an institution for training young Iranians of the upper classes and court circle in Western sciences and techniques, military ones such as artillery and gunnery and cavalry warfare, and scientific and technological ones like mining, mathematics and medicine. The appropriate instructors for these were recruited in Vienna since, unlike Britain or Russia, the Austrian Empire was regarded as a disinterested foreign power with no designs on Iranian territory or resources. As instructor in medicine and surgery at the *Dar al-Funun*, Jacob Eduard Polak was designated. He stemmed from the Jewish community of Bohemia, and was of the second generation of Jews to benefit from the Emperor Joseph II's reforms of 1786 admitting Jews to the liberal professions and to study at colleges and universities. His skills included gynaecology and obstetrics as well as general medicine and surgery. At first he lectured to his Iranian students in French, with an interpreter, but finding this unsatisfactory, started to learn Persian and soon acquired fluency in it, this also enabling him to read books on traditional Islamic medicine. He was then able to write for his students textbooks on medicine, devising when necessary a vocabulary of terms from Arabic or Persian, what he calls a *vocabularium medicum*. He wrote the first modern textbook in Persian on anatomy, the *Kitab fi tashrih badan al-insan*, lithographed at Tehran in 1854, and a textbook on surgery, including eye surgery, the *Kitab-i jarrahi va yak risala dar kahhali* (1857). He was the first surgeon in Iran to operate on the eye and to remove bladder stones using a general anaesthetic, at a time when the use of chloroform and ether was still a new practice in Europe; the first attempt to use ether at the Vienna School of Medicine took place only four years before Polak came to Iran. He

was likewise the first in Iran to perform an autopsy, on a dead Austrian colleague, at a time when Muslim Iranian physicians could not, for religious reasons, do this. On an organisational level, he also established what we would call an out-patients' clinic at the *Dar al-Funun*, taught students how to write prescriptions, and arranged for some of them to get practical experience at a military hospital in Tehran, with the most promising students being despatched to Paris for specialised training and research, some of whom returned to Iran. One can thus say that Polak was the inaugurator of modern Western medical practice in Iran.

In 1855 Nasir al-Din Shah's physician Cloquet died and Polak was invited to take his place, with a Dutch physician taking over his duties at the *Dar al-Funun*, and Polak was to remain in royal service for five years till another French physician, Tholozan, took over in 1860. During this time, Polak not only looked after the Shah's health but also tutored him in such subjects as history, geography and the French language. His position also meant that he travelled throughout the Iranian lands and was an acute observer of all that he saw in the country and its people, making copious field notes and collecting specimens of plants, geology, items of historical and archaeological interest, etc. He actually got himself painted by the amateur artist Nasir al-Din Shah.

Back in Vienna, he lived on for another 30 years till 1891, practicing there at the General Hospital, *Allgemeines Krankenhaus*, acting as a mediator between Iran and Austria-Hungary, and writing copiously on a wide range of medical, scientific, public health and ethnological subjects. He was a founder member of the Anthropological Society in Vienna. The epidemic of cholera that affected much of Europe in 1863 led him to study epidemiology. He found time in the 1880s to teach Persian language and literature at Vienna University, and just before he died composed a German-Persian conversational dictionary. Polak thus represents very decisively the spirit of scientific enquiry and progressivist thought of the Darwinian and post-Darwinian period in Europe.

Most important however, for persons like us interested in Iran in general was his *magnum opus* of 1865, the two-volume *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner. Ethnographische Schilderungen* "Persia, the Land and its People. An Ethnographical Description", which ranks with Curzon's *Persia and the Persian Question* in its

size and scope, though it has a much more profoundly scientific basis. It is less known here than it deserves because it has never been translated into English, though a Persian version appeared in 1982. In his book, Polak notes *inter alia* the indigenous diseases of the land, with a prevalence of skin diseases, leprosy, malaria, typhoid and syphilis (tuberculosis, however, was rare), and he has a chapter on the drugs and medicaments used by traditional Iranian physicians. Concerning slavery, he notes that possession of large numbers of slaves (*nawkar*) – the Grand Vizier might ride forth with a retinue of two or three hundred of them – was a manifestation of luxury and conspicuous consumption rather than an economic force in domestic or in agricultural and industrial work. On the whole, slaves were well treated. Except for a few Turkmen and Baluch slaves captured in warfare on Iran's eastern frontiers, the majority of slaves were black, with the lighter-skinned Habashis from the Horn of Africa, i.e. Ethiopians and Somalis, prized above the dark Zanjis from the East African interior imported from places like Zanzibar to Muscat in Oman and thence across the Persian Gulf to Bushire and the cities of Iran. Polak has much to say about eunuchs, noting that the supply of white eunuchs from countries like Georgia had virtually dried up since Iran's control over the eastern Caucasus had been pushed back by Russia in the earlier part of the 19th century. The last white eunuch at the Shah's court died in 1856 during Polak's stay there, and he states that almost all the court eunuchs were now black, commanding high prices because so few of them survived emasculation.

In the 30 years or so of his remaining life (he died in 1891), Polak played a prominent part in the scientific life of Vienna, with varied interests in medicine, public health, geology and ethnology. He was a founding father of the Vienna Anthropological Society and was active in securing Iran's participation in the 1873 World Exposition in Vienna, acting as an intermediary between Nasir al-Din Shah and the Austro-Hungarian government whilst the Shah was in Vienna for the Exposition during the first of his three European visits.

Polak's Iranian experience was centred on Tehran and the northern parts of the country, whereas that of the British physician Charles James Wills spent a total of some 15 years mainly in the south and west of Iran, in places like Shiraz, Isfahan and Hamadan.

He was recruited in London in 1866, being a newly-qualified doctor, for the medical care of personnel of the Indo-European telegraph Department of the Government of India, since the cable connection between Europe, the Ottoman lands and India passed through Iranian territory from Khaniqin on the Iraq frontier to Bushire on the Gulf and then joined the line to Bombay. Knowing nothing whatever about Iran, Wills was given a copy of James Morier's 1824 classic, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, to acquaint him with the land and peoples, this classic being regarded, through much of the 19th century, as the sovereign account of Iranian manners and customs. During his Iranian years, Wills found Shiraz particularly congenial, with a more relaxed and cheerful people than those of the north of the country. Even though he considered it a rather unhealthy place, with endemic malaria, typhoid, dysentery, guinea worm, smallpox, ophthalmia, emphysema caused by excessive *qalyun* or hookah smoking, etc., and there were regular cholera epidemics, during which the Department's office and premises had to move out from the city to the healthier countryside till the outbreak was over. Shiraz was, of course, famed in Persian lore for its wine and wine-drinking, and the atmosphere in the city seems to have been relaxed regarding this provided that outward decorum was maintained. At any rate, with the help of a local mullah, Hajji 'Ali Akbar, who was obviously no rigorist and wanted some wine for himself, Wills purchased 35 loads of locally-grown grapes and set up a winery in his house. In the first of his two books, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, he gives an account of his wine-making activities and records that, in the end, he had about 1,300 bottles stored away and 1,000 cleared and filtered for immediate drinking, a pleasant alternative to the bottled stout imported by the Telegraph Department for its employees. Eventually, he auctioned off what remained of his cellar and made a handsome profit on it. He mentions that "It had then been nine years in bottle, and was very like a virgin sherry, very astringent and light to the taste, but very powerful".

His medical work was most varied. He found that the mass of indigenous Persian *hakims* practised traditional medicine based on bleeding, purging and the use of herbal medicaments, but also found the local *hakims* in Hamadan jealous of his European-style medical

methods, since the locals started to desert them for the novelty of European medicine. He writes,

“The Persian would always prefer gratuitous physic with the additional ‘tamasha’ (show) of a European doctor, to paying those who practised medicine strictly as taught by Aflatoon (Plato), Abu Senna (Avicenna), Galenus (Galen), and Pocrat (Hippocrates). This state of things was naturally intolerable to the profession in Hamadan, and my pseudo-friend, the Hakim-bashi, with the rest of his brethren, took steps to frighten me, in order to make me cease my obnoxious system.”

The *hakims* stirred up a mob that invaded the courtyard of Wills’s house and started hurling stones, necessitating punitive measures against the rioters by the governor of Hamadan. When subsequently stationed at Shiraz, Wills enjoyed the protection of the powerful governor of southern Iran, Nasir al-Din Shah’s son, Mas’ud Mirza, the Zill al-Sultan, having been able to sew up a fearful hand wound when a gun had burst whilst the Zill al-Sultan was out hunting. It brought him the reward of being decorated with the Order of the Lion and the Sun, which, technically, Wills, as a British government employee, could not receive without official permission, but of course in the circumstances he could not refuse it.

Wills did not have the profound general scientific background or the intellectual curiosity and spirit of enquiry which characterised Polak, and the book which he later wrote after his return to Britain about his 15 years’ life in Iran, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun or Modern Persia* (1883), sheds light on Iranian life and attitudes in general rather than on specific scientific and medical matters. It nevertheless makes interesting reading, and gives information on certain contemporary happenings there. Thus from his stays in Shiraz and Isfahan, he noted the firmness of the beliefs of the Babis and their willingness to embrace martyrdom for these. On various occasions Wills encountered dervishes, but had no high opinion of them, considering them to be work-shy spongers and exploiters of the credulous. He describes the tenth of Muharram ceremonies and the Shi’ite passion plays, the *ta’ziyas*, having been invited by the Zill al-Sultan to witness these enacted in his palace garden, where a huge tent without walls had been erected for the annual performance

by a semi-professional group of players from Isfahan. He records the miserable existence of the local Armenians, such as those of New Julfa at Isfahan, whose only good quality he thought was thriftiness, and that of the Jews. Speaking of the latter group, he writes,

“As to the Jews, their position is terrible. Probably in no country in the world are they treated worse than in Persia. Beaten, despised, and oppressed, cursed even by slaves and children, they yet manage to exist, earning their living as musicians, dancers, singers, jewellers, silver- and gold-smiths, midwives, makers and sellers of wine and spirits. When anything very filthy is to be done a Jew is sent for.”

He was informed that one of the occupations of the Jews of Hamadan was the fabrication of ostensibly ancient coins, which were exported to the great cities of the Middle East and sold to ignorant and unsuspecting Europeans as genuinely ancient.

Wills describes what was to Europeans the savagery of much of Iranian life. He witnessed at Shiraz men being executed by being shot from a cannon and highway robbers walled up in mud-brick hollow pillars, and at Tehran, he heard of a slave being rolled up in a carpet and trampled to death. Use of the bastinado, *chub khwurdan*, was near-universal for all classes of malefactors, and Wills was told by the Zill al-Sultan's physician that he had seen 2,000 sticks broken over the feet of a criminal, who managed however to survive. Nevertheless, at the end of his 15 years' service, Wills, like Polak, pronounced a surprisingly favourable verdict on the Persian people: their hospitality and honesty, respect for the aged, generosity to dependents and the poor, their cleanliness (he contrasted this with the Armenians' apparent aversion from washing themselves) and neatness of dress. Their defects – habitual mendaciousness and exaggeration, their procrastination on a heroic scale– he found amusing rather than matters for condemnation

Wills returned to England, and seems to have pursued a medical career in the London region, dying in 1912. But as well as this book revolving round his professional medical life in Iran, in 1886 he published a further book, *Persia as It Is: being Sketches of Modern*

Persian Life and Character, the justification for which he describes as the fact that

“Most sojourners in the East rarely penetrate the veil which hides one-half of the population; the fact of my being a hakim (or physician) gave me the opportunity of doing so. I may have been a Goosha-nisheen or “dweller in a corner”, but my eyes have been ever open to see, not only the nakedness of the land, but also the large measure of good, and the many pleasant memories that deserve to be recorded..”

This second book surveys in some 30 chapters various themes of life, society and governance, from the Shah and the Zill al-Sultan downwards, including socio-legal topics, the status of women, Persian cuisine, medical practice and the public aspects of life and death. The book is less profound than Polak’s one, but the length of Wills’s stay in the country perhaps enabled him to take a longer view of his subject, and both his books can be said to make entertaining and informative reading.

Report by Travel Scholar, Nathaniel Rees.

As a student of Persian and Islamic history at the University of Oxford, I was struck by the stark periodization that separates the historiography of Qajar and Pahlavi Iran. In particular, I was drawn to the decade and a half between the Russian suppression of the second Majles and the establishment of Pahlavi autocracy. Most accounts gloss over the interim as years lost to chaos and political disarray, after which Iranians, or at least their elite, gratefully abandon the constitutional struggle for the strong hand of Reza Khan. It seemed an abrupt shift. As I approached my fourth year, and the time to choose a dissertation topic, I decided to investigate this period more closely. I felt the existing literature was over-reliant on (mostly British) diplomatic sources, and being keen to put my language skills to good use, I began looking for Iranian documents to shed new light on these years. Fortunately for the historian in me, the Constitutional Revolution's vibrant political press survived into the 1920s. Though they underwent periods of suppression, newspapers continued to play an important role in reflecting and shaping public opinion. I hoped that they would offer an original perspective on the politics of the day; one not coloured by the specific interests and biases of foreign observers.

My search began in Oxford's Middle East Centre. I had a tip-off that it held, buried somewhere deep behind the issue desk, the Majles Library's DVD collection of digitized Iranian newspapers. Once located it gave me an interesting first look at some 1920s Iranian newspapers, but little more than that. As well as frequent gaps in its sequences it was missing a large number of titles completely, including all of those that I had earmarked as potentially interesting. To find a more complete collection I would have to travel to Iran. After several months of wrangling and a trip to Istanbul to collect my visa, I finally got there in December of last year.

I had spent my year abroad studying in Iran, but was apprehensive about returning without the other foreign students I had been there with, my apartment on Meydan-e Felestin or the strictly timetabled classes of the International Centre for Persian Studies. Eighteen months had passed and Iran had a new president,

but life in Tehran seemed much the same. A favourite old haunt, Café Prague, had closed, and Persepolis still languished mid-table in the Persian Gulf Cup, but the weather was milder than over the winter of 2011 – 2012 and foreign currency went much further. Taking the good with the bad, I settled in quickly. My first research foray, to the archives of the Majles Library, ended abruptly with the purposeful closure of a security barrier in front of me. Intimidated by the air of brusque officialdom I decided to argue my case later, and retreated to the Library's more visitor-friendly shop around the corner. Fortunately, it was not a wasted trip. The Majles Library has published a vast array of documents in print and on CD, which I spent almost an hour browsing (using a dictionary to decipher some of the titles, to the shopkeeper's bemusement). Digital transcriptions of Majles proceedings and collections of historical Kurdish-language newspapers particularly caught my eye but, haunted by the thought of my return flight's luggage allowance, I settled for the DVDs I had seen back in Oxford.

My second and more productive research destination was the Institute for Contemporary Iranian Historical Studies. Situated in leafy grounds in Elahieh, it was just a short walk from my accommodation. My first visit, on Christmas day, was fairly brief. I was shown the library, and spoke to the director, who seemed happy to have a foreign visitor and asked me to return with a letter of introduction from my university. This done, I was introduced to one of the Institute's historians, who offered me detailed recommendations of primary and secondary sources. This advice was extremely helpful. With the period's press almost totally ignored by Western scholarship, I would have been embarking on my research blindly without it. Armed with this knowledge I began my reading, first of the Institute's books and journals (including the invaluable Mosaddeq-era 'History of Iran's Press and Publications'), then its broad collection of newspapers. The 1920s language and orthography of the latter took some getting used to, but that achieved the publications were fascinating, and began to offer very different perspectives on Reza Khan's rise from the diplomatic correspondence and the literature based on it. I had access to an almost unlimited amount of material, but with just a few short weeks in Iran and a 15,000-word limit for my dissertation, I had to narrow my focus. It would have been impossible to provide

a comprehensive survey of the period's press, so instead I focused on what was possibly the period's greatest political struggle, and certainly Reza Khan's greatest setback, the 1924 movement to establish a republic. Its defeat has conventionally been attributed to the conservative opposition of the ulama, but some more recent research, particularly the contributions of Stephanie Cronin and Vanessa Martin, have argued convincingly that opposition to republicanism was political rather than religious, and rooted in the Tehran street rather than the Shi'ite institutions of Qom or Iraq. They have tended to concentrate on the role of the Tehran ulama, and particularly the preeminent parliamentarian Sayyed Hassan Modarres, but I wanted to examine the views of secular constitutionalists. Their participation has been widely overlooked, perhaps because as the men who shaped Iran's Fundamental Law, and who had no reason to fear republicanism's secularist associations, they do not mesh well with the dominant conception of opposition to Reza Khan as simple reaction.

The first of two titles I based my argument on was Mirzadeh Eshqi's *Qarn-e Bistom*. Despite Eshqi's renown as an innovative nationalist poet, and the obvious significance of the 30,000 mourners at his funeral (from a Tehran population of around 150,000) chanting anti-government slogans and causing days of unrest, nowhere in the Western literature did I see textual references to his newspaper. Its final issue, published after a state-enforced hiatus of several months, came out after the defeat of the republican movement, and is dedicated entirely to lambasting it. But the criticisms it makes, through prose articles, humorous poems and caricatures, are not conservative ripostes to the concept of republicanism. In fact, Eshqi does not engage with republican ideology at all, and takes pains to refer to 'our republicanism', 'false republicanism' or 'republicanism in Iran'. His primary objection is his perception that the republican movement, and Reza Khan, are merely tools for Britain's continued imperial domination of Iran. This idea is encapsulated by the striking drawing on the newspaper's cover. It depicts John Bull guzzling down the syrup that represents Iran's wealth, while riding 'the donkey of republicanism' to hide his footprints. Elsewhere in the issue Reza Khan is denounced for his violent, dictatorial methods, and his allies for their mercenary, self-serving support. Nowhere is any

enthusiasm for the Qajars or religious sentiment in evidence, and Eshqi in fact appeals to the symbols of pre-Islamic Iran in a manner associated with aggressively secularist nationalism and, ultimately, the Pahlavis themselves.

The second title I examined was Shaykh Ahmad Bahar's Mashhad newspaper, *Bahār*. Though a less well-known figure than Eshqi, Bahar is also an interesting character. Another newspaper man and poet, Bahar was exiled for his opposition to the 1919 Anglo-Iranian agreement, and returned to Mashhad just in time to become a leading press supporter of Colonel Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan's radical gendarme regime there. He was briefly imprisoned when Pesyan's challenge to the authority of the central government (and Reza Khan) failed. As a cousin and admirer of the more famous Mohammad Taqi Bahar, the poet laureate, leading light of the Constitutional Revolution and close ally of Modarres, from whom he took his name, I expected Ahmad Bahar to be an opponent of republicanism. I was mistaken. In an example of the constantly shifting and hard to fathom political configurations of the time, by 1924 Bahar had broken with his cousin and was a supporter of Reza Khan. But vitally, the arguments made for republicanism in *Bahār* do not describe constitutionalism as failed, or advocate dictatorship. Instead it praises the struggles of the constitutionalists, and describes republicanism as a minor modification, calling for a president elected for fixed terms. 'In this republican system', one article explains, 'the president would do the tasks of the king, and otherwise it is much the same as constitutionalism.'

Of the two prominent publications I considered for my dissertation, one opposed Reza Khan for respectably progressive, constitutionalist reasons, and the other supported him out of the same principles. I would argue that the conventional historiography, which holds that by 1921 constitutionalism was fully discredited and Iran's modernisers were crying out for one man's strong, even dictatorial rule, is a simplification based on too narrow a range of European sources. I believe this has significance beyond the years of Reza Khan's rise, because both veterans of the Constitutional Revolution, such as Mohammad Taqi Bahar and Modarres, and the political leaders of later years, such as future prime ministers Ahmad Qavam and Mosaddeq, were central to events. Shaykh Ahmad Bahar, for his part, went on to serve as chief of staff to the

two latter men. If we overlook the period between the end of the Constitutional Revolution and the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty as lost to chaos and historically irrelevant, the impression emerges of an Iran that was dominated by autocracy in the first half of the 20th century. If we give these years their due, the diversity and endurance of the political struggle comes across much more clearly. Carrying out my research was a novel and exciting experience that taught me a great deal. I hope it also unearthed some interesting insights. Without the generous support of the Iran Society it would not have been possible, and I am extremely grateful to its council for giving me such a fantastic opportunity.



Report by Travel Scholar Rob Bental, Undergraduate of Exeter University.

Summer in Tajikistan

It was with some trepidation as well as excitement that I travelled to Central Asia for the first time. Arriving at Dushanbe airport, I was struck first by the world's tallest flagpole, which was clearly visible flying over Dushanbe, as well as by how green everything was. It was still the beginning of June. Snow capped the mountains, green fields fringed the city, and trees lined the streets. It was a very pleasant far cry from the heat and dust I had naively expected. While the country certainly dried out over the summer, I was very impressed by the parkland and the natural beauty of Tajikistan.

After a few days of orientation, during which I gave a Tajiki police officer by the Ismail Somoni monument in the city centre dried apricots instead of the pounds sterling he inexplicably assumed I had on me (repeated pleas that I did not have British currency on me because it was useless in Central Asia fell on deaf ears) and ate too many samsas (Tajik samosas) to count, I woke up one night to feel the room I was in shaking. After quickly checking with my roommate whether this was normal here, I groggily realised that we were in the middle of an earthquake. Staying on the sixth floor as I was at the time, the quake luckily finished after about thirty seconds. Still, I decided that staying so high up might not be the wisest idea.

At the beginning Tajiki was a bit of a baptism of fire. Even basic phrases which I had been familiar with in Farsi ended up different when wrapped around a Dushanbinskoye tongue. I had to get used to 'che khel,' 'naghz' and 'rahmat' instead of 'hale shoma chetore?,' 'khub' and 'mersi.' When I stayed with a Tajik host family, I asked them to open the 'panjere,' which unfortunately implied that I thought I was in prison, as in Tajiki rather than being the word that means a generic window, 'panjere' means one that has bars on it. I was soon corrected!

Gradually the language began to slot into place. I still need lots more practice, but I began to be able to speak at some length in both

Farsi and Tajiki, which is exactly what I was hoping for in travelling there. Even so, I must admit that some of the southern Tajiki dialects remain pretty impenetrable to me – clearly I am not a Kulyabi at heart!

In addition to studying the local language, I was able to learn something about Tajik culture. As well as the reverence for the classical Persian poets that they share with the other members of the Perso-sphere, I discovered some quirks. The Central Asian respect for bread took some getting used to. I had to adjust to putting bread only face-side up, and not throwing it away. And as a twin, learning that there were special names that multiple births usually got was interesting to hear, while I struggled with the extra Tajik names for all the different family relations. Clearly large family sizes mean that calling someone ‘my father’s younger brother’s son’ can be useful and descriptive. Having neither a father’s younger brother’s son, nor even a father’s younger brother, the terminology felt slightly overwhelming, I must admit!

To begin with, I studied Farsi at the Bactria centre in Dushanbe, as it was a respected institution. My lessons with Mehdi were excellent and my spoken language fluency improved markedly after a week or so. We talked a lot about the similarities and differences between life in Iran and life in the UK; Mehdi seemed amusingly sceptical as I often mentioned talking to my female British, German and Tajik friends – I think he suspected shenanigans.

I quickly realised that some study of the Tajiki dialect of Persian would be extremely useful to me. So I got in contact with a teacher who has been recommended to me. While my Cyrillic letters remain wonky, I found that after a few basic adjustments I was able to speak more Tajiki than I had thought. My teacher Umed was patient with my Iranianisms and suggested that the most important phrase for getting around in Tajikistan with young people was ‘hameh khareh-ay’ (everything is donkey). Why everything in Tajikistan was donkey was never really clear, but I was not about to make an ass of myself questioning it too closely.

After six weeks study, my visa was due to end, so I headed to Uzbekistan, primarily to see the Tajiki-speaking cities of Samarqand, Bukhara and Shakhrisabz. Any mention of the cities in Tajikistan was the cause of much wailing and gnashing of teeth due to their separation from Tajikistan during the Soviet period. I was

struck that large numbers of people I met in Tajikistan claimed to be from Samarkand and Bukhara even though they had never set foot there – their forefathers emigrated during the time of the Soviet Union. After crossing the border near Tursunzade, site of one of the world's largest aluminium factories (I discovered that in a nice quirk of Soviet planning, Tajikistan had no aluminium ore of its own), I arrived late in the evening at Samarkand. I had first heard about the city in my early teens, and the stories of the Silk Road and the romance of the Islamic architecture made a strong impression on me. Despite my enthusiasm having been later somewhat tempered by reading about Timur's brutality, arriving there was fulfilling a bit of a childhood dream. Happily, I realised that I was able to speak to most of the locals, who all seemed completely bemused and happy that I was trying to speak to them in the local language, rather than Uzbek or Russian. I assume it would be like a Brazilian turning up in Bangor and only speaking Welsh rather than English. Visiting the amazing mosques, medresehs and mausoleums with an Uzbek friend I had met while doing battle across the board with a local chess genius was great fun. A day trip to Shakhristabz through the hills to see the ruins of Timur's birthplace just showed the scale of the man's colossal ambition – even the entrance archway of his palace was enormous. Shakhristabz was also where I had the best laghman (soup noodles) of the whole trip.

I had heard several of the jokes told about Hodja Nasreddin (under his various aliases) throughout the Middle East, though in Bukhara I saw more enthusiasm for him than anywhere else I had been before. The statue of him and his donkey in the central square led me on a three day hunt for a book of Nasreddin jokes, which I finally found on my penultimate day. The founder of the Naqshbandi Sufi order is also buried near Bukhara, so I visited there to see the shrine; the horsehair that adorns Sufi tombs in Central Asia and the tree that was supposed to increase fertility if you ducked under it were really interesting to me as examples of regional devotional practices. I discovered that in the Tajik-speaking parts of Uzbekistan, there was yet another way of saying 'how are you?' – 'shoma naghz hastid?' One day I hope to get all of these dialects down...

After a few days hot-footing it across Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan via what is quite possibly the world's oldest Qur'an in

Tashkent, I arrived in Bishkek, got a second visa and returned to Tajikistan to do some more studying. My Tajiki teacher was leaving to begin university in America, so I was recommended to ask at the Iranian Cultural Centre in Dushanbe. Muhammed and I met daily next to the National Library, and ate so much ropey plov and drank so much green tea together there that I felt at times as if I would be buried on a bed of oily rice and undercooked carrots. In amongst that, we had some interesting classes where he encouraged me to present my views about marriage, dangerous animals and of course the hot topic of the summer: the causes for the underperformance of the England football team at the World Cup.

I spent my last night in Tajikistan singing karaoke with a Tajik friend of mine while sipping a Baltika beer. Belting out a duet of 'Let it Be' to a room of tipsy Tajiks was certainly not the ending I had expected to my time in Central Asia, but it seemed suitably bizarre. I had very few preconceptions of Tajikistan before I visited, but I found a slightly eccentric country with spectacular landscape where almost everyone I met was incredibly hospitable, friendly and kind. As well as all of the Central Asians whom I met, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Iran Society for contributing towards the funding of my Persian language and cultural studies and say that, the current research difficulties there notwithstanding, Tajikistan is an overlooked country that definitely deserves a visit.

***The Palace of Darius at Susa: The Great Royal Residence of Achaemenid Persia*, edited by Jean Perrot with an introduction by John Curtis. Translated by Gérard Collon. I.B.Tauris, 2013, 507 pp, ISBN 978-1-84885-621-9.**

Reviewed by David Blow

The Achaemenid palace of Susa lies in south-west Iran on the edge of the Mesopotamian plain. It was one of the royal residences, sometimes referred to as capitals, which included Persepolis, Pasargadae, Ecbatana and Babylon. It is the setting for the Book of Esther in the Hebrew Bible, where it is referred to as 'Shushan the Palace', and of the play, *The Persians*, by Aeschylus, in which the news of the Persian naval defeat at Salamis is brought to the Queen-Mother, Atossa. Almost all of the palace complex was built by Darius I, although some of his work was completed by his son, Xerxes, and another, smaller palace complex was added later by Artaxerxes II. One of the surprising conclusions of this very comprehensive study of the palace, which seems to have been the only royal palace known to the Greeks, is that Susa was little used by the Achaemenid kings for most of the 5th century BCE. Jean Perrot, the book's editor, says that from 480 BCE, when Xerxes became more interested in Persepolis, until 400 BCE, shortly after the accession of Artaxerxes II (404-359 BCE), "Susa gives the impression of being an empty shell".

The excavations at Susa have been carried out almost exclusively by French and later Iranian archaeologists, so it is no surprise that the contributors to this magnificent volume are overwhelmingly French specialists like Jean Perrot, who was in charge of the excavations from 1967 until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. It was, however, a British geologist and explorer, William Kennett Loftus, who first identified the site of Susa in 1850 and carried out the first excavations there under a firman from Nasir ed-Din Shah. With the help of up to 350 workers, mainly local Lurs,

Loftus uncovered the remains of a great columned hall and discovered from inscriptions on some of the column bases that it was built by Darius I, was burnt down under Artaxerxes I and rebuilt by Artaxerxes II. He also found fragments of glazed brick with various motifs which he rightly concluded had been used to ornament the palace. The excavations were being supervised on behalf of the British Museum by Henry Rawlinson, who had earlier deciphered the great inscription of Darius I at Bisitun and was now British Consul in Baghdad. Surprising though it may seem, Rawlinson was unimpressed by the results and in April 1852 the excavations were terminated. Nicole Chevalier, one of the contributors to this volume, notes that Loftus's "pioneering work" was "underestimated for many years".

It was more than 30 years before excavations were resumed – this time by a French civil engineer turned archaeologist, Marcel Dieulafoy, who soon showed how wrong Rawlinson had been. Between 1884 and 1886, Dieulafoy uncovered quantities of glazed bricks. These he reassembled to form the two great friezes of lions and archers which are among the prize possessions of the Louvre. Dieulafoy, like Loftus, had a firman from Nasir ed-Din Shah authorising his excavations, but a treaty signed in Paris in 1900 granted France "exclusive and perpetual rights to excavate over the whole of the Persian Empire" and permitted its archaeologists to take back to France whatever objects they found. This French monopoly was ended in 1927 and finds were to be divided equally between France and Iran until 1968, when it was agreed that they would all remain in Iran.

Susa consists of three mounds or tells covering an area of 70 hectares. Two rivers flow past it to the west and east. The mounds were created by the remains of previous occupations going back to around 4000 BCE, for much of which time Susa was a capital city of the Elamite empire. But Elamite Susa was in a state of considerable decay when Darius began building his palace there in 519/520 BCE, at the same time as he started work on Persepolis. In the view of Jean Perrot, the attraction of Susa was that it provided a stopping-place half-way on the long route between Fars and Babylon, an administrative centre for the Susiana satrapy, and, given its prestigious past, "a place where power could be properly

exercised when the King, with his court, would choose to stay there”.

This book provides a fascinating insight into the way the archaeologists gradually pieced together a picture of the palace complex, often coming up with hypotheses that then had to be abandoned in the light of new discoveries. Their findings to date have revealed that the principal buildings were on the northern mound, known as the Apadana. These included a monumental gateway, a royal residence and a hypostyle or audience hall – the columned hall first found by Loftus. The gateway had a square central room with four columns and long rooms on either side. A more than life-size stone statue of Darius – albeit headless – was discovered there in 1972 and is believed to have been one of a pair of statues flanking the exit from the gateway. This led onto an artificial terrace on which stood the royal residence and the hypostyle hall. The residence was built around a series of courtyards and contained apartments for functionaries as well as for the king and his family. In 1912, the archaeologists discovered in one of the courtyards a large tablet inscribed in Old Persian cuneiform in which Darius gives a detailed account of the building work. The Foundation Charter of Darius, as it has come to be known, is one of the most important Achaemenid texts. The hypostyle hall was square, with six rows of six stone columns and could accommodate 1,000 people. It was flanked on three sides by porticoes with two rows of six columns. Before rebuilding this audience hall, Artaxerxes II built another smaller one as well as a new residence on the right bank of the nearby Shaur river, opposite the palace of Darius, with a bridge probably connecting the two palaces. Jean Perrot observes that the hypostyle halls “were very symbolic of royal establishments” and “appear to have been indispensable to the exercise of power.”

Of the other two mounds, the one to the south, called the Citadel or Acropolis by the archaeologists, was protected by a thick mud-brick wall. It is thought to have been where the governor of the province of Susiana, the garrison and its commander were stationed, and where a store was kept for valuable objects. The other mound, to the south-west and called the Ville Royale, is believed to have been the location of the treasury. Excavations have also revealed a covered passageway flanked by two columned porticoes which led

across a brick causeway to the Apadana mound. All three mounds were surrounded by another thick mud-brick wall, but the only gate in this wall found so far is on the eastern face of the Ville Royale. It was a rectangular building with two long rooms and two columned porticoes. The archaeologists have named it ‘The Artisans’ Gate’ because, explains Jean Perrot, it “gave access to the local population who had been forced to leave the tells, and to the encampment of the foreign workers brought to Susa by Darius”. Darius expelled the inhabitants of the Elamite city of Susa, thought to have numbered several thousand, in order to build his palace complex. They established a new settlement to the east which the archaeologists have called ‘The Tell of the Artisans’.

There are illuminating chapters by the French experts on the construction of the palace, the finds made there, its broader architectural context, and on Darius himself. As Susiana is a land of earth and water and the nearest stone quarries were at least 50 kilometres away in the Zagros Mountain to the east, the main building material was brick. Stone was used sparingly, so that apart from the hypostyle hall many of the columns were of wood on stone bases. Three of the book’s contributors – Daniel Ladiray, Annie Caubet and Noëmi Daucé – explain how the various types of bricks were made by Babylonian workmen who were the experts in this field. The scale of the work is revealed by Ladiray who writes that “just for the Residence, several hundreds of thousands of baked bricks and several million mud bricks were necessary”, while Noëmi Daucé estimates that “there were over 100,000 decorative bricks used in friezes and on panels on walls across the Residence”. Annie Caubet observes that Susa is “unique in the Persian world due to the variety and extent of its fired art techniques – the industry of vitreous materials,” which created such marvels as the glazed brick friezes of archers and lions. Interestingly, she also draws attention to the Egyptian influence in small devotional statues and amulets found at Susa. Jean Yoyotte tells how the great statue of Darius was made in Egypt and originally placed at “an important customs and police post” on Darius’s canal linking the Nile to the Red Sea, before being brought to Susa. Yoyotte draws attention to the combination of Egyptian and Persian ideologies in its inscriptions and incised figures. Rémy Bouchardat discusses the defining features of Achaemenid architecture and compares Susa with Pasargadae and

Persepolis. All the contributors provide plenty of food for thought, but perhaps none more so than François Vallat who corrects an alleged mis-translation of the Elamite text of the Bisitun inscription to demonstrate that Cyrus the Great belonged to a junior branch of the Achaemenid family and seized the throne of Persia from Darius's grandfather, Arsames, so that when Darius later seized the throne in his turn he was merely restoring the rightful line. Vallat also provides a different translation of another passage of the Elamite text to support his claim that Old Persian cuneiform was not created under Darius, but already existed under his great-grandfather, Ariaramnes, if not earlier. These new interpretations of Achaemenid history are highly controversial.

This comprehensive study of Susa has been well translated from the original French and beautifully produced, with many valuable illustrations. Anyone with an interest in ancient Persia will want to own it.

***Perceptions of Iran: History, Myths and Nationalism from Medieval Persia to the Islamic Republic*, edited by Ali M. Ansari, I.B.Tauris, 2014, 239pp. ISBN**

Reviewed by Hugh Arbuthnott

“Perceptions of Iran” is a collection of essays by scholars from European and American universities based on papers presented at a conference held at the University of St Andrews in 2009 on the theme of “Historiography and Iran in Comparative Perspective”. Historiography is the study of history writing and these essays look at the way in which European and Persian historians have written about Persian history. They provide us with plenty of examples of the difficulties, when studying history, in establishing “what really happened”, particularly in the period of “pre-modern history”, that is up to the late eighteenth century. Until then, historians combined descriptions of what later were considered to have been true events with stories which later were considered to be myths.

The most celebrated of the Persian histories of this type was the *Shahnameh*. Ali Ansari argues that Ferdowsi was writing to keep alive the idea of the great civilisation and empire that Iran had been and that the myths were just as valuable as the facts. Anyway, as Ali Ansari says, in Ferdowsi’s description of the ascent of Iranian civilisation, myth continually “spills over” into history and “the boundaries are never clear”. The medieval Persian historians who followed Ferdowsi, and who also tried to absorb the consequences of the Arab conquest and the conversion of Iran to Islam, continued to mix myth with history because it kept alive the tradition of Iran as an ancient, powerful and widespread empire.

Thus the thread running throughout this collection of essays is the uses made of history to bolster preconceived ideas or political ambitions. The essay by Elisa Sabadini points out a change in attitude by Italian travellers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries who were complimentary about Persian culture and the kindness and tolerance of the Persians; and travellers of the

seventeenth century who began to take on the “orientalist” attitude towards Persia, that attitude of superiority with racial overtones. Indeed, everything written about the history of Persia, whether by European or Persian historians, has not only an unconscious bias but much of it also has a conscious bias towards proving a political or social or religious point. Thus Touraj Daryaee argues that the Sasanian king and court had a monopoly on historiography in order to legitimise their rule and history was given a Zoroastrian orientation just as Christians and Muslims wrote history in the context of religion, the working out of the Divine will, as they saw it. Persian “occidentalists” in the 19th century wrote in praise of western political and economic achievements but later Persian writers saw the west as responsible for all Iran’s ills. The Aryan myth is given by Farhang Jahanpour as another example. European scholars in the late 18th or early 19th centuries, basing themselves on Darius’s claims in the Bisitun inscription, argued that Europeans were descended from Aryans who had migrated from east to west. Later writers, particularly Nazis, claimed that the Persians were members of the Aryan race from northern Europe whose blood had been tainted by intermarriage with the Jews. In similar fashion, Persian writers of the late 19th and early 20th century thought that Arab blood had diluted the pure Aryan blood of the pre-Islamic conquest.

An important element in the historiography of Persia has been the role of Cyrus the Great. Robert Bartlett shows how stories about Cyrus, originally told by Herodotus, had filtered through to medieval historians like Hugh of Fleury writing in the 12th century before Herodotus had been rediscovered in western Europe. Lynette Mitchell describes how Herodotus saw Cyrus as a champion of Persians’ freedom. Ali Ansari writes that in the beginning of the 20th century, Cyrus was seen as a source of inspiration for a renewed Iran under a constitutional monarchy. I think also of the use made of Cyrus by the Shah in the celebrations for the 2500th anniversary of the Persian monarchy as part of his and his father’s efforts to recreate Iran’s glorious (and pre-Islamic) past. One could cite the loan of the Cyrus Cylinder by the British Museum to the National Museum of Iran in 2010-11 as a demonstration of the power of history to affect the present.

This collection of papers will be chiefly of interest to academics but the issues they raise about the way history is written concern us all. Do we ever know what really happened? Or why it happened? The further back in time we go, perhaps we never do and never will. Even the closer we get to the present day, historians don't necessarily agree about events and their causes as is evident from the arguments about the origins of the First World War during the anniversary year of its start. There are plenty of modern examples of the distortion of history for political reasons, some of them mentioned in this book. It is not therefore just because events have happened before anyone writing about them has direct experience of them; historians, like the rest of us, are also conditioned by the places in which they live, their upbringing, the people around them, their own temperaments and the demands or expectations of their rulers. In any case, as is so often demonstrated, eye-witnesses of the same events often give wildly differing accounts of them.

If it is impossible to know what really happened, is it worth going on writing history or reading the works of historians? Well, there are historical records which are reliable; examples are account books which show what people did by showing what they spent money on; or buildings excavated by archaeologists which show where and how people lived. However, in order to interpret these apparently dry records, imagination still has to play a major part in historical writing and make it readable. Personal accounts of what went on, even if unreliable, cannot be ignored and can bring to life dull statistics about taxes or grain yields. Historiography has to point out the context in which historians have been working, test the hypotheses which their imagination has suggested and finally, most importantly, examine the motives they might have for taking up the positions they do ("we see the world from where we stand and there is nothing else we can do" as Farhang Jahanpour puts it in his essay). This book seems to an amateur to carry out all the right tests but the question remains: "Quis custodiet ipsos custodies"? Who will question the history of the historiographers?

The Political Economy of Iran under the Qajars, Hooshang Amirahmadi, David Patrikarakos, I.B. Tauris, 2012, 319pp. ISBN 9781 84885 672 1

Reviewed by James Buchan

The work under review is a specimen of a type of historical enquiry I had thought extinct: a Marxian analysis of the forces that shape and govern history, in this case that of Iran in the nineteenth century. From its sources and historical-materialist language, the book seems to have been composed about thirty years ago. Certain hobby-horses, such as freemasonry, evoke the Pahlavi journalism of twenty years earlier.

Hooshang Amirahmadi, a professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey, sets himself this question: Why has modern Iran, for all its resources, failed to develop economically, become a democracy, and establish a positive relationship with the outside world? He finds his answer in the period of the Qajar monarchy, from 1796 to 1926 (or rather, 1925), where a 'natural course of advancement in agriculture, commerce and industry (in that order) was altered by the colonial-imperial powers and the feudal state'. A transition from what Prof. Amirahmadi calls 'pseudo-feudalism' to capitalism, which should have been complete by about 1920 was not achieved until the 1960s by which time Iran was thoroughly dependent on foreign powers. The rest, as they say, is history.

Another answer to the question, which draws on observation rather than Karl Marx, is that rich, democratic and sociable nations are not inevitable but, on the contrary, rare at all periods. It seems to me perverse to belabour history, like a village *akhond* whipping a lazy schoolboy, for not doing as it is told. It is as if the Revolution of 1979, which showed the folly of a determinist approach to the story of Iran, had not been heard of in New Jersey.

As is usual in the Marxist school, Prof. Amirahmadi sees the origins of the Qajar state, its organisation, its beliefs and recreations, in the material conditions of ordinary lives. Beginning with landlord

and peasant, he passes on to the revenue and the army, the Babi uprising, the attempts at reform under Amir Kabir and Mirza Hosein Khan Moshir od-Douleh, the era of foreign Concessions, the agitation against the Tobacco Regie in 1891-92, the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 and the chaos of World War One. He is learned, good-natured and interesting.

His complaint is that Iranian feudal or 'quasi-feudal' landlords, merchants, bureaucrats and divines on the one hand, and the Russians and the British on the other, kept Iran in a stagnant condition, beggared the peasantry and blocked the development of industry, and thus of a working class conscious of its historical destiny.

Was Qajar Iran so unsuccessful? The most reliable measure of material welfare at remote periods is population. Most writers agree that the Iranian population rose in the nineteenth century which is more than can be said for British India. Tehran doubled in size and other cities, such as Isfahan, recovered from their near derelict state. Luxuries such as tea, tobacco, sugar and opium spread into the countryside. Imports of cheap Manchester goods demolished the handloom cloth industry, but foreign and domestic capital established a world-class carpet trade (not mentioned by Prof. Amirahmadi) while cash crops such as opium (barely mentioned) made fortunes for merchants, landowners and clergy. Foreign visitors became more pessimistic towards the end of the century but largely because Iran had slipped behind the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. None the less, the Qajars preserved Iran within its ancient frontiers.

It is true that the Qajars, like the Capets in France, were perennially short of money. Unable to reform an old-fashioned revenue system and venal bureaucracy, they could neither establish a modern administration and army, nor build the roads, bridges and ports that might support manufacturing industry. Having seen new industries fail by reason of high freights and lack of water in the 1890s, Iranian merchants were naturally reluctant to invest in manufacturing. Reza Shah Pahlavi complained in the 1930s that he had to act as 'factory owner and bathhouse attendant' to the entire country.

As the crown lost ground, so foreign investors and domestic interests came into competition. Foreign influence is, as so often,

exaggerated. The Concessions were either cancelled (Reuter, tobacco, lotteries) or ineffective and loss-making (the Karun steamer service). The exception was the D'Arcy oil lease of 1901, but the Iranian petroleum industry became important only with the Great War and does not enter this story. Iran's foreign debt was not particularly onerous by the standards of Egypt and Turkey.

Even so, a bazar which had gained in prosperity and a clergy shaken to the core by the Babi schism, saw a threat to their interests from foreigners and the dynasty that admitted them. They appealed to both patriotism and religious feeling against the British tobacco syndicate in 1891, the Russian loans of 1900 and 1902 and the Belgian customs regime. Intrigued by notions of the rule of law and the franchise that had come into Iran with those Manchester stuffs, they established a Parliament and constitutional monarchy. They pushed at a door and it fell open.

If that, in essence, is the story of the Iranian nineteenth century, it can only be muddled by alien and mysterious terms such as 'feudal', 'proto-capitalist' or 'national bourgeoisie.' The argument is not helped by several misprints, mathematical slips, mislabelled tables and mistransliterations. For example, the word *mojahed* does duty both for 'volunteer fighter' and 'senior doctor of the law' (properly *mojtahed*). The book ends with a theoretical chapter of such abstraction that, in certain passages, one might be reading not Marx but Molla Sadra.

Iranian history has too much theory. In a land where historical truths are so much contested, what is needed is not theory but hard fact. The harder the better.

Envoy – A Diplomatic Journey, Nicholas Barrington, The Radcliffe Press, London 2014. pp xi + 536. Illus. Hb £29.50. ISBN 978 1 78076 799 4.

Reviewed by Antony Wynn.

Sir Nicholas Barrington's long memoir of his diplomatic career begins with his Persian language training under Professor Lambton at SOAS, followed by nine months in Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan, where he had the good fortune to be taught by men who gave him a taste for Persian poetry. His first posting was as Oriental Secretary in Kabul, where his ambassador only once set foot in the chancery offices. He worked in his study, where a concealed step would lay low anyone who entered too hastily. Further postings took him to Brussels, Islamabad, Tokyo and Cairo before his posting to Tehran as head of the British Interests Section of the Swedish Embassy in 1980.

This arrangement meant that the British, although denied a full embassy, could operate from the same building but under the Swedish flag. His description of the embassy before its ransacking in 2011 will be familiar to many members of this society. What will be less familiar is the absence of official entertaining during his time. Although he and his staff could visit officials in their offices, they would not accept invitations to embassy receptions. Very few private individuals dared to come to the embassy socially; those that did come did not care about the risk. Untypical of most British diplomats, Barrington, with his colleague the late Christopher Rundle, a Persian specialist, took great pleasure in attending evenings of readings and discussion of Persian poetry.

Diplomatic memoirs by their nature reveal nothing but incidentals, but there was no shortage of incidents in embassy life in Iran at this time. Of particular concern was the treatment of Anglican Christians and their hospitals in Isfahan and Shiraz, as well as the Bahais. While sympathetic, the embassy could do nothing to help them.

Much embassy time was taken up by the case of Andrew Pyke, the manager of a Dutch helicopter supply company. Pyke had refused to employ a well connected young man who had forged his qualification documents. The young man denounced the unfortunate Pyke as a spy, and he was locked up for seventeen months. Without reference to London, Barrington decided to delay all visa applications to the UK, stating that his small consular staff were too busy on the Pyke case to attend to other matters. The matter was settled and Pyke was released.

An episode of real drama was the defection of a junior Soviet consul to the British embassy. This official walked in while his superior was out of the country and requested asylum. Arrangements were made to get him out of the country and he supplied much useful information about Soviet connections with the Tudeh party.

Barrington is critical of the hard line US approach towards Iran, coloured as it is by the embassy hostages. Although he admires and likes Persian poetry, his spectacles are clear-tinted and his approach is realistic. In his last dispatch he argued for a constructive dialogue with Iran, accompanied by commercial engagement, whereby tensions could be reduced. Writing in 2013, he is critical of the Blair government and its successors for assuming a self-appointed role as leader of a coalition against Iran.

The career continued with postings in New York, Tokyo, Hanoi and London before Barrington became High Commissioner to Pakistan. His tale, though interesting, lies beyond the scope of this society. However, his concluding comments on mistakes in foreign policy, particularly towards Iraq and Iran, are worth reading and remembering and should be nailed to the door of No 10.

***Tales of Iran*, Feridon Rashidi. Lightning Source UK Ltd 2014. (Self-published, available from Amazon and main bookshop websites) Pb/E-book £8.99. ISBN 978 1 62921 166 4**

Reviewed by Antony Wynn

Rashidi, who now lives in England, has self-published this book. It is written in impeccable English, yet retains an authentic Persian flavour, for which it deserves attention. *Tales of Iran* is a collection of short stories spanning about a hundred years. The characters in it are true to life and the tales are neither nostalgic nor rosy-hued, nor yet depressingly pessimistic and introspective. Unlike conventional western tales that demand a conclusive ending, these ones fade out, unresolved, as in life.

He begins with the story of the daughter of a poor but ambitious village headman from Hamadan, who has plans to get elected to the town council. The khan can arrange this for him, but his price is the girl. The contract is arranged by the mulla... Moving on, we meet a young man, entertaining and good company but feckless and dissolute, whose proposals of marriage to girls of wealth are turned down by fathers concerned for the welfare of their daughters. His own father packs him off to Baku to trade in rugs, and there he meets a startling young beauty...

The third tale, full of the atmosphere of the street, of strong-arm thugs and high class whores, takes place at the time of the fall of Mossadeq. A gendarme takes some of the dollars that were being handed out and stands by while the mob does its work...

There follows a series of tales about popular religion, *ta'zieh* plays, *Ashura* processions, the ritual of cursing the caliph Omar, the Night of Power and Zulfiqar, the sword of Ali. The tales show the depth of popular beliefs and the way in which these beliefs are manipulated.

Away from religion, we meet boys flying kites from the rooftops and a touching account of a devout young man who is

persuaded to attempt to deflower himself in *Shahr-e Now*, the old brothel quarter in the south of Tehran. This rite of passage negotiated, military service comes up, with all the brutality of the induction of poor peasant lads, who can barely tell their left foot from their right.

A careless Haji in the bazaar has inadvertently, in a fit of drunken temper, divorced his wife for a third time. To be allowed to remarry her he must first engage the service of a *mohallel*, a 'legaliser', to lie with his wife for a night before he can have her back. A good looking but jobless young man earns his living by performing this service of social cementing, until things go wrong.

The final tale is of a young lad with a good voice who is asked to sing both at drinking parties and at solemn religious ceremonies. Sometimes he forgets where he is and belts out a bawdy song at a funeral. After the revolution he is taken up by the new people and made to sing patriotic songs, albeit he lapses into debauchery with his old friends from time to time.

Rashidi does not judge these people. They are what they are, for fate has delivered them their lives, which they live as best they can to survive. The tone is that of a humorous acceptance. Much has been written about the lives of the makers of Iranian history. This is a refreshing look at life at the bottom end of Tehran and out in the villages, in all its humanity and acceptance of its lot, and it is remarkably well written.

