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Registered address: 1a St Martin's House, Polygon Road
LondonNW1 1QB
Telephone : 020 7235 5122
Web Site : www.iransociety.org Email : info@iransociety.org

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JANG-E GORÂZ: NOWRUZ WITH THE KASHKULI-KUCHEK, MARCH 1969

ANTHONY FITZHERBERT

(This follows the author's 2018 article – **'Incidents in a Shepherd's Life at Shahrud'**)

This piece has been composed from a letter written to my parents dated April 3rd 1969 after returning to Shahrud at the end of an expedition to spend the Nowruz holiday as a guest of Qashqai nomads in the Hengâm valley in southern Fars province. By that time I had been in Shahrud, managing the Azodi sisters' farms for a year and eight months. I had survived two autumns and bitter winters and one full spring and summer, had had a number of adventures, encountered not a few vicissitudes and was just beginning to acquire a little local wisdom.

My letter begins: *"Spring has arrived at last and the weather has been grand of late. So nice to be back in shirt sleeves again. Wonderful blossom this year, and after all the snow and rain we have had it should be a marvellous year. The ewes have almost finished lambing. Only*

another dozen or so stragglers still to go. Better than last year and we should end up with about 98% success. Although all sorts of unexpected disasters can strike before the time comes to sell the tup[1] lambs."

The letter then refers back to ten days before Nowruz (March 21st). I had made a dash to Tehran in the ever temperamental estate Land Rover to pick up some fruit tree saplings (apples, apricots and cherries) from a nursery in Karaj, to be planted out in the garden at Bagh-e Seeneh and a new orchard planned for the hill farm at Farahzad. On my way back from Karaj I called in for lunch with my friends Narcy and Louise Firouz on their Nowruzabad farm to the west of Tehran. Over lunch they invited me to join them, together with Narcy's cousin Mary Gharagozlou on a Nowruz expedition to visit Mary's friends among the smallest of the six clans of the Qashqai confederacy, the Kashkuli Kuchek, in their winter quarters south of Firouzabad. An irresistible invitation! Almost all other commitments faded into insignificance! That was on a Sunday and the expedition was to leave at

[1] The ram-lambs. 'tup' – a north country (UK) term for a ram.

crack of dawn the next Wednesday, so as to make it to Shiraz in one day, if possible. However, with a load of fruit tree saplings tied in bundles to the roof-rack of the Land Rover, to be planted immediately, and the Nowruz wages to pay in Shahrud, these were responsibilities I could not shirk.

I was due to stay overnight in Tehran with friends in the British Embassy. After supper and two hours' sleep in their house, I drove 'like Jehu' through the night along the long, dusty, corrugated road to Shahrud, arriving at the Bagh-e Sarcheshmeh the next morning. Snatching a hasty breakfast provided by Mehdi, my cheerfully lugubrious and faithful cook, I drove without delay to the hill farm at Farahzad where I saw most of the trees safely planted the same day. All hands to the '*beel o kolang*'[2]!

The next day, my letter records, "*…was spent in a whirl of activity: wishing 'Nowruz mobarak', paying wages and Nowruz 'eidi', planting the rest of the trees, 'marking' lambs, giving instructions for the next two weeks and*

[2] Pick and shovel.

collecting 'debts from sales' in the village of Mojen".[3] All this before catching the night sleeper on the Mashhad to Tehran 'express' that left Shahrud at two o clock in the morning. Arrived in Tehran, I met Narcy and Louise for lunch before returning with them to Nowruzabad. We were joined later in the afternoon by the Councillor from the British Embassy, Charles Wiggin, who was bent on having a final Persian adventure before he returned to a desk in Whitehall at the end of his tour. It was pouring with rain and Charles started the adventure by getting his car bogged in the mud on the way to Nowruzabad. Narcy and Louise's sprawling one-storey house lay in the middle of a green oasis of orchards, vegetable gardens, fields of alfalfa, stables full of horses large and small, an enormous Kentucky mule, a manège with jumps, and in addition to their own family, a whole tribe of retainers: house staff, cook, grooms and gardeners and a pack of fox terriers. A culture of open door hospitality prevailed. Nowruzabad

[3] I cannot recall exactly what these 'debts' represented , but they must have been important to have warranted a visit to Mojen, which would have entailed much drinking of *chai* and puffing on a *qalyon* ?

was way off any official road, a mile or so beyond the kite and pye-dog haunted Tehran municipal rubbish dumps. It was while passing that noisome place that Charles's car sank sump deep in the oozing sludge, leaving him to trudge muddily and undiplomatically the next mile or so to the Nowruzabad oasis.

I managed to get a little sleep that night, despite being woken periodically by one or other of the terriers jumping onto my bed to lick my face. We were all up by 4.30 and on the road and breakfasted by 5.15, cosily jammed into Narcy's capacious 4x4 Ford. The party at this stage consisted of Narcy and Louise, their three young children, Narcy's unflappable and multilingual Armenian driver Arvet, Charles Wiggin and myself. At Robat, on the road to Isfahan, we were joined by our expedition guide and leader, the redoubtable Mary Gharagozlou (the 'Gipsy Queen' herself) and her 'good friend' Jahanpulad Kashkuli, her partner in an agricultural venture. They had a Peykan[4], more suited to the main roads. It was indeed a long drive, mostly in the rain with hardly a pause, during

[4] The Iranian version of the Hillman Hunter.

which we took our turns at the wheel, as sleep overtook each of us in turn. We reached Shiraz in the evening and spent the night as guests of the head of the Fars game department.[5]

I remember at one point looking out over the rain swept and, to an English eye, barren '*dasht*' that stretched away and away to the distant mountains and remarking "How good the grazing will be this season." "Well!" replied Louise, "I can see that your eye is growing accustomed to an Iranian shepherd's view of such things!"

The next day, off again early, first to Firouzabad, the Qashqai winter quarters, site of the ruins of Ardeshir's palace and the Qaleh-i Dokhtar (the Maiden's Castle). There we stopped for an enormous lunch in a village a few miles outside the town belonging to one of the Qashqai khans, where beautiful carpets were being woven. The khan himself was away, in exile or at least forbidden by the government to go anywhere near that part of the country. Here we left Mary's Peykan and carried on in

[5] Narcy's brother Eskandar Firouz was head of the Game Department at the time.

Narcy's 4x4 and a jeep provided by Jahanpulad's brothers sent up from Hengâm, which was where we were going to stay. We now set off along a very rough track known locally as the 'Rah-e Khanom Gharagozlou' constructed during the time, in the early 1960s, when Mary had been head of tribal affairs in the government. Her activities had unfortunately left her poorer, but much beloved by the nomad tribes, and '*persona non grata*' with the government.

If the road was rough, the country was spectacular and at times terrifying. At one point we found ourselves driving along a narrow ledge on this very unstable track with a precipitous drop on our right of several hundred feet into the gorge below. After all the rain the country was almost as green as Westmorland, covered in waving grass, decked with wild flowers of many kinds. The rocky limestone hills were carved into fantastic slabs and contorted layers of sedimentary rock, covered with an open savannah woodland of wild pistachio and almond trees, the latter a froth of pink blossom. On and on we bumped and twisted over range after range of hills and

down through narrow defiles until we began to imagine that it all might be some devilish tribal plot to lure us into their stronghold and hold us to ransom. At last, after four and half hours we dropped out of the hills into the wide green valley of Hengâm, scattered across which were groups of black, goat-hair tents, flocks of sheep and goats, horses, donkeys and camels with here and there walled gardens of date palms and orchards of limes. As dusk was falling we finally arrived at our destination, the winter home of the khans of the Kashkuli Kuchek.[6] This consisted of a large plantation of date palms and citrus, in front of which stood a simple mud-brick house, surrounded by black tents. Here we were greeted by our hosts for the next five days, to celebrate the spring equinox. As we arrived, two of Jahanpulad's brothers stepped out to greet us into an evening filled with the scent of lime blossom and the chirping of crickets.

[6] Kashkul Kuchek = The Little Kashkuli. – Kashkuli = People of the Begging Bowl. The Kashkuli Bozurg and the Kashkuli Kuchek are the smallest and traditionally the poorest of the six Qashqai clans, but perhaps the reference to the *'kashkul'* i.e. a *darvish's* begging bowl – is also a piece of deliberate false modesty ?

The Qashqai are a confederation of six nomad clans, five of them speaking a dialect of Turkish – the Amaleh, the Dareshuri, the Shishbaluki, the Kashkuli Bozorg and the Kashkuli Kuchek and one, the Farsimadan, speaking Persian as their mother tongue. In reality all are bilingual in Qashqai Turki and Persian. At the time of our visit in 1969 they were still truly pastoral nomads numbering between 100,000 and 150,000 strong, counting themselves by the number of their tents as family units. The Kashkuli Kuchek, who we were visiting, are the smallest clan, numbering at that time about a thousand tents. Their pastoral year was spent between winter pastures and camps (*qeshlaq*) in the warm valleys south of Firouzabad and summer camps (*yeilaq*) on high alpine pastures in the Zagros mountains north-west of Shiraz, on the slopes of the Kuh-e Dena. Moving between these two locations involved a twice yearly trek of almost 200 miles each way with all their animals, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys and camels plus tents and possessions, men, women and children of all ages. The Hengâm valley where we were visiting them was the main *qeshlaq* of the Kashkuli Kuchek and Nowruz marked the end of their

time spent in these winter quarters. It was a time to celebrate the arrival of spring before setting off on their migration to the Zagros. The timing for this was absolutely critical because they had to move their flocks off the winter pastures in order to allow the grasses and herbs to seed themselves before the animals grazed it to the ground and the weather became too hot. To stay longer would mean the destruction of the pastures and starvation for beast and man when they returned in the autumn. The spring migration was timed so as to follow the best of the spring grass as they moved higher in altitude following the melting snow up to the alpine meadows, where they spent the summer. Likewise, the timing of the autumn migration was critical so as to leave before cold and snow drove them out of the high valleys, and so organised that they would arrive at their *qeshlaq* when the rain had had time to germinate the grass and herb seeds scattered in the spring and freshen up the pastures.

At the time of our visit the threat that the government held over the clan chiefs' heads as a guarantee of their 'good behaviour' was to forbid them to move until given

government authority to do so. This deeply hurt the pride of these independent minded pastoralists, but only a few years earlier they had been very roughly subdued for their rebellious and independent ways.

Historically, the great nomad clans and tribes in Iran had had considerable independence and power and there were occasions when they had even made and un-made kings. But, since the reign of Reza Shah in the 1920s and 30s the heavy hand of central government had increasingly been brought to bear to bring them under control. The deposition of Reza Shah in World War II by the British [7]allowed them to regain much of their previous independence until the early 1960s, when efforts were once again made to settle the nomads and control their migrations. This was fiercely resisted and many lives were lost on both sides, resulting in heavy retribution. In the end, traditionally armed nomads could not stand up to a fully equipped professional army and black tents were no protection against jet planes, high explosive and even napalm bombs. Of the khans who resisted, some fled into

[7] Reza Shah was exiled to South Africa where he died.

exile, some were captured and some executed, their putrefying corpses hung from lamp posts in the streets of Shiraz *'pour encourager les autres*'. The arrogance of some of the khans was also blamed for much of their peoples' ultimate suffering.

On top of all this, natural disaster hit the nomad tribes in the early 1960s in the form of African horse sickness, a disease hitherto unknown in Iran. This led to the loss of thousands of horses, donkeys and mules, without which their pastoral life was impossible. Louise and Narcy, who at that time were farming not far from Shiraz right on the path of the Qashqai migration, described how at one point the roads were littered with the rotting carcases of horses and donkeys. They described how the same families they had seen migrating in all their splendour the previous spring had been reduced to pathetic limping half-starved beggars when they returned in the autumn. The horse plague was brought under control and by the time of our visit they were much recovered.

It was during this time of great suffering that Mary Gharagozlou, who at the time was married to a Bakhtiyari

khan, was given the job of administering the tribes, a job she took very seriously, perhaps too seriously for her own good. She found them starving and moved heaven and earth to feed them and their animals and bring them aid, even at her own expense. In the process she ran foul of the authorities and was eventually dismissed. Although forbidden to visit her old friends, she kept up her contacts and was widely admired and loved. (I myself found out the extent of this affection when a few years later I was managing a sheep project in Khuzistan. Mary introduced me to one of the Bakhtiyari clans, the Babadi, whose winter quarters were in Khuzistan and their summer *yeilaq* in the Zagros mountains beyond Shahr-e Kord, but that is another story.)

Mary had been banned from going anywhere near the tribes and in fact this was her first time back since she had been dismissed some years earlier. It was not made very clear to us if she was still under an interdict or not, but somehow we realised that we were there as her cover and excuse. Certainly, having a senior and highly respected member of the British diplomatic corps with us was

thought to be a help. Mary was particularly fond of the Kashkuli Kuchek and they of her. Hence the visit.

On our arrival at Hengâm we were greeted by Jahanpulad's two elder brothers Heidar Khan and Shir Khan, wearing their characteristic Qashqai round, light-brown felt hats with two side flaps. Two large white canvas tents were put at our disposal,[8] carpets had been spread upon the ground and bedding neatly folded and stacked on one side. After the first confusion of our arrival and the hubbub of greetings over, we all trooped into the house, where a feast was laid out. Shir Khan was our host that first evening, with his magnificent wife Homa Khanom very much in command of proceedings, a real chieftain's wife, dressed in the colourful clothes that Qashqai women traditionally wear, even when they are on

[8] At this time a very successful primary school programme had been introduced for the nomads, developed by a well educated Qashqai called Mohammad Bahmanbaigi, which had been adopted by the Iranian Government. Under this system the teachers who were drawn from the tribes and clans they taught, travelled with the nomads. The school year was organised round their pastoral movements and the school tents were white to mark them out from the traditional black tents. The standard of primary education provided by this system was arguably the best in rural Iran at that time.

the move. A loose blouse and embroidered waistcoat, a full skirt hung on the hips with its hem an inch or two above the ankle, with a multitude of petticoats each of a different colour. The more important the lady, the more petticoats. Homa Khanom was a magnificent figure of a woman. Handsome, immensely dignified and clearly commanding great authority, she presided over the feast, for which she was responsible, without eating herself. A lamb had been slaughtered, as was the case with every meal that we ate over the next few days. It was beautifully cooked and came with mounds of delicious rice *polow* and rich creamy curds (*mast*). Every bit of the sheep was eaten, including the head and the feet. We were tired and that first evening passed off in something of a haze before we were allowed to stagger off rather thankfully to bed.

Looking back over the years, the next five days seem like a dream, but reading again my letter home has brought it all back to life. For a few days, all the normalities of life were put aside, and even the eccentricities of my life in Shahrud paled to the dull and mundane in comparison. Our mornings were spent in idleness, sitting in the sun,

reading, talking, wandering among the black tents or into the gardens, eating fresh limes and watching the female date palms being pollinated.

Here, I should digress and remark on the local sedentary population, the so called *boomi* who did not migrate with the main tribe, but remained living in Hengâm all the year round. The *boomi*, although counted as being Qashqai and speaking the same Turkish dialect, were by descent Africans. Historically the descendants of African slaves, they now lived on terms of complete affability with the pastoralists. Although not migrating with the others, they effectively counted as a sub-clan and were treated with respect. Their job was to look after the agriculture and crops, such as were cultivated in Hengâm, in particular the citrus orchards and the plantations of date palms which brought in good revenue. Date palms are either male or female and of course only female date palms bear fruit. Female date palms must be pollinated by hand by a human being who climbs up the male trees in the right season of the year (in Hengâm - late March) to gather the pollen, which is collected into a bag. The ‘match maker’ then

climbs up each female palm in turn with his bag of pollen and a feather duster to make sure that it receives a dusting in the right place. The *boomi* were brilliantly skilled at both shinning up the palm trees and pollen dusting, which they delighted in demonstrating. Most palms that are planted are female as one male date palm produces enough pollen for quite a number of females. The fertilisation of the palms was the subject of much bawdy humour in which the Qashqai ladies, both married and unmarried, delighted. In fact once we had settled in and were hospitably accepted as Mary's friends, meals in the different family tents were eaten with everyone, young and old, male and female crowding into the tent and joining in the chatter.

Every day we visited the tents of different leading members of the clan, scattered up and down the valley, being feasted on each occasion, every family trying to outdo the others in their hospitality. Always we sat on lovely carpets inside beautifully decorated tents, everything in its place and spotless. Certain events and characters stand out. The two eldest khans:- Heidar Khan,

slight and wiry, very much a nomad tribesman and hunter; Shir Khan, intelligent and better educated, the mainstay of the clan in times of trouble. His cousin Habib Khan, a comedian and show-off, spinner of tall tales. A joker, possibly tiresome, but with a role to play as a diplomat with subtlety behind his clowning. Habib's wife, a truly beautiful and self-assured young woman. Her opening remark, addressed to Louise when we dined in Habib's Khan's tent was a question posed without embarrassment or apology and in front of everyone: *"Louise khanom, qors mikhorid* ?" (Louise khanom - do you take the pill?) Though the women did not eat with us, they were always present while we were eating and married and unmarried took a full part in the conversation. As a bachelor - then aged 28 – I found myself the occasional subject of banter and innuendo, accompanied by peals of laughter.

There was another cousin, Lotf Ali Khan, in whose tent we also had a meal. A dapper gentleman with one eye, he was not on speaking terms with Heidar and Shir Khan due to a marriage dispute. There were always numerous members of the khans' families, retainers, servants and

clansmen, giving the impression of a remarkably egalitarian society in which the women played a respected and active part. They were certainly not shut away '*posht-e pardeh*'. There was great beauty, dignity and pride and a conscious sense of how to live graciously.

On our first day we were given a wonderful introduction to tribal life. After a lazy morning spent as described, we went over to Heidar Khan's tent for lunch. Everything was beautifully and simply done in the best traditions. We sat as always on magnificent carpets, the meat and the *polow* cooked to perfection. When we had eaten, sitting back on the cushions with the *qalyan* lit and being passed from hand to hand, various children were asked to recite poetry and sing songs to demonstrate their education.

Then, after lunch the real excitement of the day started – the *Jang-e Gorâz,* 'The Wild Boar War'! This was an event saved up for Nowruz, to be enjoyed by all before setting off on the long spring migration. Our arrival was the excuse, but it was also for their own and the whole clan's entertainment. As well as being a convenient excuse to wreak revenge on a destructive pest, it was also,

significantly, a way of currying favour with the commander of the local government gendarmerie, a little peacock of a man. So the *Jang-e Goraz* was laid on with the co-operation and the participation of the gendarmerie, a necessity because of course it required the use of firearms.

Narcy and I had come armed, each with a rifle and a shot gun, having been told to do so by Mary, who knew what to expect. Although the tribes had been officially disarmed, they still managed to hang on to an assortment of weapons of different kinds and vintages, mainly shotguns of various makes and calibres, some of them automatic, and not a few ancient muzzleloaders. The 'field of battle', as they themselves described it, was a long tangled swampy reed-bed (*neyzar*) running along each side of a small river for perhaps three miles, with rising ground along either flank, with clearings and tracks through the cane-breaks that we were told were crawling with wild pigs. It was an occasion that I would not have missed for the world.

The human forces included what appeared to be almost the entire male population of the Hengâm valley over the age of ten, including the gendarmes armed with their carbines. We, the guests, with some of the khans and gendarmes, were lined up across the reed bed with the idea that the wild pigs would be driven towards us. As the beaters, some of whom were also armed, advanced towards us we were instructed to fall back in front of them. Once it started we did fall back as ordered, like retreating 'red-coats', but after about ten minutes it became clear that all notion of order had been forgotten and it was every man for himself. The noise was incredible. Every ridge and viewing point was by that time crowded with spectators come to see the fun. What with the beaters' and the spectators' shouts and whoops of exhortation, the rattle of musketry and the whine of stray bullets, it soon resembled a real battle in more senses than one. It would have been unsafe to let off a gun in any direction and all I could do was to watch the performance and do my best to avoid being shot myself. So I unloaded my rifle and tried to keep out of the line of fire. Charles Wiggin, who was not armed, remained to the last and on

all occasions very much the ‘British diplomat’. Narcy, a keen sportsman and shooting man himself in more disciplined circumstances, was less sanguine. Not without cause, Louise was anxious for her children’s safety. The children on the other hand appeared to enjoy the whole thing enormously and were constantly mislaid amongst the briars and reeds. In the meanwhile, Mary who had borrowed my shotgun and a pocketful of cartridges loaded with buck-shot, was quietly taken off by her friends and placed in a strategic and comparatively safe position behind a rocky outcrop, at the far end of the reed beds. In all the confusion, possibly the safest of all were the wild pigs themselves.

As the afternoon wore on the noise and confusion subsided somewhat and by the end of the drive the mobs had thinned out and gone home. It was at this point that I was nearly knocked over by a very large boar, who chose this moment to charge out of the cane-brake in front of me. I was unloaded of course, and the boar went crashing on past me towards the rock were Mary was waiting in

ambush, from which she popped up and neatly knocked him over stone dead with one shot.

Later in the afternoon, once order had been restored, we had a little pig drive on our own in a swampy patch of reeds that had been missed earlier. This produced a pig wounded in the first drive, which was quickly despatched, and a huge old tusky boar who like Bre'r Rabbit, had thought it wiser to *'lay low and say nuffin*'. This bristly monster charged out, fortunately past rather than at me and I managed to bowl him over dead – *like a rabbit in a ride* – with my shot-gun, now reclaimed from Mary. In the end the total score was eight dead pigs, although the swamp was reputed to hold at least two hundred, if reports were to be believed. How many corpses porcine, human or otherwise were left among the reeds and briars I do not know, but, no human beings appeared to be missing afterwards.

The following day, our second full day, included another wonderful feast in some outlying tents, followed by a hike up a rocky knife-edged ridge astride which we were

carefully placed in ambush while wild goats[9] were driven to us. An almost futile endeavour it would seem, except that our hosts knew exactly what they were doing. Heidar Khan accounted for two billie-goats, but no one else had a shot. A small group of females with kids crossed in front of me, which I let pass by unmolested. It was a fascinating exercise, if for nothing else other than the skill with which it was undertaken in such an uncompromising landscape.

The remaining days passed in milder if no less pleasant fashion. Picnics were the order of the day, which included all the women, married and unmarried, young and old and the children. One might think that for a people who spend their lives living in tents a picnic would hold few attractions. Not at all! These were joyful occasions spent by favourite springs and beauty spots, much enjoyed by one and all.

Dinner on our last evening was provided by the gendarmerie lieutenant. It was a substantial meal, although marred by the tensions and worries of our

[9] The Persian wild goat or ibex, *Capra aegagrus*

Kashkuli friends, who had not yet received official permission from the authorities in Shiraz to start their spring migration. The season was advancing fast and they had to start moving in the next few days before the weather got any hotter. To everyone's relief, permission arrived as we were leaving the next day, and on the way back to Firouzabad we saw many groups on the move with their loaded baggage animals and their flocks.

Leaving Mary and Jahanpoulad behind in Hengâm to see our friends safely packed up and on the road, we set off back down the Rah-e-Khanom Gharagozlou to Firouzabad and so on to Shiraz. In Shiraz we stayed in the wonderful house next to the Namazi hospital built by Narcy's uncle. Here we were able to relax in great comfort, including luxuriating in a beautiful '*hamam*'. Then on to Isfahan, where we stayed in the Apadana guest house near the Zayandeh Rud, belonging to my Armenian friend Carlyle Minassian who, as usual, refused any payment. So back to Tehran and myself on to Shahrud and my little house in Bagh-e Sarcheshmeh to what had by now become the curious normality of my life.

PLASTER, METAL AND CERAMIC SCULPTURE FROM MEDIEVAL IRAN

DR MELANIE GIBSON, GINGKO LIBRARY

Lecture given to the Society on 2nd October 2018

Sculpture is a significant aspect of Iranian art. Some of the earliest examples date from circa 1400–1000 BCE and come from the region of Marlik near the Caspian Sea, where rulers were buried with animal-shaped vessels made in burnished red or grey terracotta as well as gold and silver vessels with animal reliefs, objects that are likely to have functioned as ritual vessels.[10] The Achaemenid period (550–330 BCE) is important for its use of stone sculpture in a royal context. At the site of Persepolis monumental three-dimensional sculptures as

[10] P. Harper, 'Metalwork', *The Splendour of Iran*, Volume 1, ed. A. Sh. Shabazi, London 2002, pp. 406–7; T. Kawami, *Ancient Iranian Ceramics from the Arthur M. Sackler Collections*, New York, 1921, pp. 134–6, 142–3.

well as shallow reliefs formed part of the palace architecture.[11] A bronze stand made up of three prowling lions found in the treasury gives some indication of the type of sculptural objects in use both for ceremonial functions and interior decoration [Figure 1].

In the Sasanian period (224–651 CE) sculptures made of plaster or stucco, a white substance made of gypsum mixed with lime which could be carved or set in moulds and painted, became commonplace in the decoration of elite Sasanian architectural structures. The use of stucco continued into the early Islamic period and some of the best preserved examples—reliefs and three-dimensional sculpture—are from the bath-house that formed part of the Khirbat al-Mafjar agricultural estate built near Jericho for the Umayyad caliph Hisham b. ʻAbd al-Malik (r. 724–43) or his successor Walid II (r. 743–744). The walls and dome of the entrance were encrusted with an elaborate display of plaster statues, mostly semi-

[11] J. Curtis, J. and N. Tallis, eds. *Forgotten Empire, the World of Ancient Persia*, London 2005, pp. 50–86.

naked women set within vine scrolls and a statue of the ruler which stood in the entrance [Figure 2].[12] Animal forms also continued to be made, especially in metal. A group of ewers with a globular body and tall cylindrical neck are characterized by a separately cast spout in the shape of a bird; the most elaborately decorated piece from this group is sometimes known as 'the Marwan ewer', as it was found at the site where the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II (r. 127–132/ 744–750), was killed by 'Abbasid forces.[13]

It is not possible to draw a continuous line between the metal and plaster sculptures of this first Islamic period and their reappearance in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a time in which the region of Greater Iran

[12] R. W. Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley*, Oxford 1959, plates LV–LVII.

[13] Cairo, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo 9281, B. O'Kane, *The Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo*, Cairo and New York, 2006, pp. 14, 21. There is no actual evidence of a link between this object and the caliph.

which included modern Iran as well as lands further east, was largely under the control of three Turkic dynasties: the Ghaznavids (977–1186) who ruled from their capital at Ghazni; the Seljuqs who took control of central Iran (circa 1040–1157) with important centres at Merv, Isfahan and Rayy; and the Khwarazmshah sultans, vassals of the Saljuqs until becoming independent in 1157. In the art historical record sculpture in plaster, metal and ceramic has become particularly associated with the Seljuqs: no less than one quarter of the objects exhibited at the 2016 exhibition 'Court and Cosmos—The Great Age of the Seljuqs' were examples of plaster, metalwork and ceramic sculpture or high relief.[14]

A residential quarter excavated at Rayy, principal residence of the Seljuq ruler Tughril Beg and his household from 452/1060 until his death three years

[14] S.R. Canby, D. Beyazit, M. Rugiadi, and A. C. S. Peacock, *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016.

later,[15] revealed different sculptural objects made from glazed ceramic as well as plaster reliefs such as a roundel of a bird of prey attacking a duck.[16] Anecdotally attributed to this same city are a large number of almost life-size sculptures made with flat undecorated backs which, like the bird roundel, would have been secured to the walls. Moulded out of plaster and painted with polychrome pigments and traces of gilding, the figures stare out challengingly at the observer. They are mostly male and wear costumes and accessories that indicate high status: their coats are made of patterned fabric with sleeves decorated with *tiraz* bands, they have fine jewellery, decorated caps and crowns, while several are armed with swords or maces [Figure 3].[17] We can

[15] D. Durand-Guédy, *Iranian Elites and Turkish Rulers: A History of Isfahan in the Saljuq Period*, Oxford and New York, 2010, p.76.

[16] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 35.915, S.R. Canby et al, *Court and Cosmos*, fig. 97, p. 241.

[17] Nine surviving figures have been documented to date as well as many fragmentary heads, for a detailed discussion

surmise that the sculptures, representing members of the sultan's closest retinue, were arranged around the palace audience hall.

An account by the historian Abu'l Fazl Beyhaqi (995–1077) describes a ceremony held in 1038 in which the *ghulaman–i khassagi* (elite slave soldiers) dressed in robes of 'Saqlatuni silk, Baghdadi and Isfahani cloth', wearing 'golden belts' and with 'golden maces in their hands' were arranged around the royal *diwan* with even more finely-dressed guards standing on the throne platform.[18] A further indication of the royal context in

see M. Gibson 'A symbolic khāṣṣakīya: representations of the palace guard in murals and stucco sculpture', in *Arab Art, Architecture and Material Culture: New Perspectives. Proceedings from a Workshop held at the Centre for Advanced Study of the Arab World*, ed. M. Graves, Oxford 2012, pp. 86–91; see also S.R. Canby et al, *Court and Cosmos*, cat. 1 a-j, pp. 40–47.

[18] Abu'l Fazl Beyhaqi, *The History of Beyhaqi (the History of Sultan Mas'ud of Ghazna (1030-41),* trans. Clifford Edmund

which the sculptures were arranged is suggested by a more androgynous creature dressed in a flowing cobalt-coloured robe, shown in three-quarters view with the right hand extended.[19] The curved posture and extended arm of this sculpture relate it to the flying genii holding up a canopy suspended over the ruler's head shown in six *Kitab al-aghani* (Book of songs) frontispieces produced in Mosul circa 614–6/1217–19 for the ruler Badr al Din Lu'lu' (r.1233–59).[20] Since none of the

Bosworth and Mohsen Ashtiany, Boston, Mass. and Washington D.C. 2011, p. 217.

[19] Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst I.2658; V. Enderlein, *Museum of Islamic Art: State Museums of Berlin Prussian Cultural Property,* Mainz am Rhein 2003, p. 55.

[20] The flying genii appear in volumes 2, 4 and 11 in Cairo, National Library and Archives, volumes 17 and 19 in Istanbul, Millet Kutuphanesi, Feyzullah Efendi Madrasa, volume 20 in Copenhagen, Royal Library AR Ms. 168 (on loan to the David Collection D1/1990); R. Hillenbrand 'The Frontispiece problem in the early 13th century Kitab al-Aghani', *Central Periphery? Art, Culture and History of the Medieval Jazira*

plaster sculptures have survived in situ it is not clear exactly how they were arranged within an architectural setting. However, a monumental carved plaster relief might give us some idea—apparently also found at Rayy, the panel depicts an image of an enthroned flanked by attendants and below him a line of courtiers or members of the elite guard, each one distinguished by a different attribute. An inscribed band on the base of throne identifies the seated figure as *al-malik* (the king) and a long inscription running along the top of the panel identifies the ruler as 'al-sultan…Tughril', possibly Tughril III (r. 1176–94).[21]

The popularity of sculptural forms extended outside the palace and quantities of metal and ceramic figures datable to the eleventh and twelfth centuries have

(Northern Mesopotamia, 8th-15th Centuries), eds. L. Korn and M. Müller-Wiener, Wiesbaden 2017, pp. 199–227.

[21] Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1929-69-1; some areas of the panel, including the name Tughril, may be later additions, S.R. Canby et al, *Court and Cosmos*, cat. 16, pp. 76–77.

survived. Cast copper alloy figurines, sometimes with silver or copper inlaid surface decoration, appear to have been a speciality of the foundries of Khurasan and Transoxiana although some examples, mostly fountain heads, can also be attributed to Umayyad Spain and Fatimid Egypt. Metalworkers in Herat and other centres in eastern Iran were inventive in devising animal elements to attach to lamps and lampstands, incense burners, mortars and ewers using parts of the animal to form a pouring spout, finial or support, with animals in the round serving as finials or attachments.[22] Entirely zoomorphic sculptures were much less common (human depictions in metal have hardly survived at all) and are largely represented by incense burners in the form of felines and birds. The felines, identified as both lions and cheetahs, were cast in a single section, the pierced cylindrical body supported on four legs, each ending in a

[22] For a discussion of metal animal sculptures see M. Gibson 'A menagerie in metal', *Brasses, Bronze and Silver of the Islamic Lands*, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art Vol. XI, London (forthcoming 2019).

wide, hoof-like foot to give the structure greater stability. The heads have pointed ears with rounded tips, almond-shaped eyes, a long flattened nose, a bushy moustache and a large and toothy open mouth through which the smoke would have curled most effectively [Figure 4]. On most examples, the head is attached to the body by a hinge, allowing the aromatic substance to be inserted into the body over a heap of burning coals. An alternative type had a removable drawer fitted into the middle of the chest; this could act as a firebox or as a container.

The inscription on one censer, the largest in scale, gives the name of the patron, 'the just and wise amir Saif al-Dunya wa'l-Din ibn Muhammad al-Mawardi' (*mawardi* means rosewater-seller which might indicate how the patron acquired his wealth), the artist and the year 577 which equates to 1181–82.[23] Bird-shaped censers or

[23] New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 51.56; S. R. Canby, Maryam Ekhtiar et al, *Masterpieces from the Department of*

pomanders were modelled on a small round bird, possibly a partridge. Like the lion-shaped incense burners, these were constructed with a hinged or removable head, or a separate drawer inserted into the chest, the pierced bodies allowing the perfume of the aromatic substance to be released. A second type of bird-shaped figurine had a hinged beak and functioned as a container, dispensing its contents through the opening created by the open beak. A so far unique piece of animal sculpture was cast in the form of a cow feeding her calf with a lion cub on its back its jaws clamped around the cow's hump.[24] The piece functioned as a pouring vessel, with an opening in the lion head to allow the cavity in the body to be filled and an opening through the mouth. The cow, recognizably a zebu in all its physical characteristics, has a bell around its neck with a functioning clapper. It is inlaid with inscriptions

Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2011, pp. 129–31

[24] St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum AZ-225, S.R. Canby et al, *Court and Cosmos*, fig. 89, p. 228.

that give the identity of the patron and the maker and the date Muharram 603/ August–September 1206 around the cow's body.

The manufacture of ceramic figurines became a speciality of the ceramic industries of Kashan in Iran and Raqqa in Syria in the mid-twelfth century. Sculptural ceramics were not a common type before this time and the trigger for production of sculptural forms was a change in body material, from earthenware to a silica-rich stonepaste, which first occurred in the eleventh century. The limited plasticity of the new composite body, with its high proportion of silica in relation to clay, required potters to develop new shaping techniques. Vessels could not be thrown in one piece, but were made up of separately moulded elements bonded with slip, a process that enabled the manufacture of complex shapes with projections that had not been viable with an earthenware body. One outcome of this experimentation with moulds was the production of three-dimensional sculptural objects, made with spouts through the mouth to allow them to be used as vessels, but also as closed

ornamental pieces. A wide range of figure types were produced, including different animals, birds and mythical creatures as well as male and female figurines performing activities associated with court and daily life.[25] Some belong to the genre known as the 'princely cycle' and are engaged in activities such as hunting or drinking accompanied by musicians and other attendants. Equestrian images were modelled to show the horseman as he hunted with a cheetah sitting on the crupper of his horse or as a warrior, equipped with a sword or a bow and arrows.

The cross-legged male figure holding a beaker is an image that had long been associated with royalty. A single ceramic figurine in this posture is dressed in a coat with wide sleeves with *tiraz* bands on the sleeves and a tall, wide turban [Figure 5]. A combination of blue- and

[25] See a range of examples in M. Gibson 'The Enigmatic Figure: Ceramic sculpture from Iran and Syria c. 1150–1250', *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, Vol. 73, London, 2008–9, pp. 39–50.

white-glazed areas distinguish the face and turban from the garment and the details of fabric pattern and physiognomy are overlaid with lustre, a technical feat which is only repeated in one other figurine, possibly made by the same hand. The top of the turban is open so that the object could be used as a pouring vessel. A group of figures, standing to attention and holding a straight lance directly in front of the body, can be identified as the *hajib*, a court official who was head of palace security and controlled the access of visitors to the ruler. Like the seated figure, these were also made as vessels with a short flared lip rising from the conical point of the hat. Such narrow openings would have restricted the flow of liquid to a trickle and indicate that these forms were more decorative than functional.

The most unusual group of human sculptures were modelled as women, sitting cross-legged and cradling an infant in both arms. One breast is uncovered and the child raises its hand to guide the exposed breast into its open mouth in a very realistic gesture. The most impressive example is large and superbly decorated with

two glaze colours and lustre [Figure 6]. The moulding is detailed but only for those parts of the body that are exposed: the infant, left breast and arms stand out in relief but the infant's legs are cut off at the knee where they are hidden by the woman's hair. She wears an open coat with narrow sleeves, fastened by a circular buckle over a shift through which the breast protrudes. Her tiara is attached to a pearl band which sits on the forehead, and long tresses of hair hang down almost to her knees and are gathered into a single strand at the back weighted down by a circular ornament. The face is circular with narrow eyes, high cheekbones and a dimpled chin, the classic moon-face which conformed to the Turkish idea of beauty. All the sculptures of suckling women are hollow, glazed on the interior and have a wide opening at the top. The pointed central element of the headdress made an effective pouring lip and suggests that this form of sculpture was used as a container for liquid, in this case possibly animal or human milk which was possibly believed to acquire apotropaic or therapeutic powers

from the evocative form of the vessel, shaped to evoke the desired outcome of a safe and healthy child.[26]

Seven types of animal figure were made including the lion, bull, camel, elephant, monkey, sheep and goat and many different types of feathered creatures, among them birds of prey, cockerels, pigeons, hoopoes, peacocks and two mythical creatures, the sphinx and the harpy. The animals most frequently reproduced were the lion and

[26] Across western Asia breast-milk was believed to have exceptional curative powers. One Egyptian papyrus dated circa 1550 BCE lists breast milk as an ingredient in cures for various ailments in addition to helping barren women become pregnant. Similar beliefs persisted into the Islamic period and are alluded to in medieval texts: for instance a passage from a Persian cosmography dedicated to Ṭughril III describes a female idol from the region of Lur which dispensed a healing milk-like liquid from its breasts, see O. Pancaroğlu, 'Signs in the horizons: concepts of image and boundary in a medieval Persian cosmography', *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43, March 2003, p. 41.

the bull, both types made to a standard rather schematic design, but varying in size and quality and with a range of surface decoration including lustre and underglaze painting, A large sculpture made of cobalt-glazed, lustre-painted stonepaste consists of the forequarters of three lions supporting a circular drum with figures of musicians attached to the sides [Figure 7]. The object is a piece of furniture, probably a stand now missing the dish which would have been attached to the drum; a closely comparable example, coated in a monochrome turquoise glaze indicates the original form of the object.[27] The innate conservatism of the sculptural tradition in Iran is evident in the thematic relationship between this stand, made in Kashan in the second half of the twelfth century and the bronze stand made in the Achaemenid period some 1500 years earlier [Figure 1].

The art of sculpture is not generally considered a characteristic mode of expression in the art of the

[27] New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 65.54, stonepaste, opaque turquoise glaze, Kashan circa 1150–1220.

Islamic world and yet this brief survey has shown that examples were made in some numbers in plaster, metal, and most of all in ceramic, largely within a two-hundred year span from the eleventh to the early thirteenth century. Although the tradition stretched far back into the Iranian past and in some medieval pieces one can detect a conscious historical evocation, the manufacture of sculptural forms seems to have fallen out of favour in subsequent periods and few examples can be cited before the nineteenth-century revival of sculpture in the Qajar era (1796–1925).[28]

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[28] The Iranian sculptor Parviz Tanavoli considers the Qajar era to have been a golden period for sculpture in Iran and devotes half his book on the subject (*A History Of Sculpture In Iran*, Teheran 2013) to the reliefs and three-dimensional production of this period, see pp. 81–155.

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Figure 1. Stand with three lions, cast bronze, found in the treasury at Persepolis, circa 550–400 BCE. Tehran National Museum, 19. Image Melanie Gibson

Figure 2. Statue of a ruler, moulded plaster with pigment, from the bathhouse at Khirbat al-Mafjar. Palestinian Territories, Jericho, 724–43 or 743–46. Jerusalem, The Rockefeller Museum © Israel Antiquities Authority.

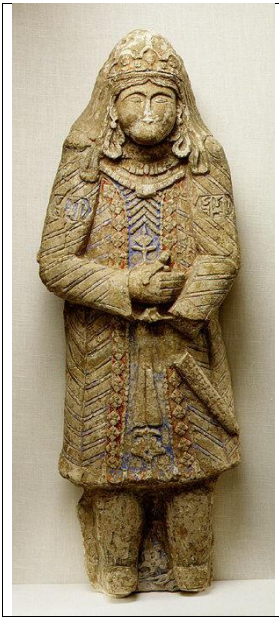

Figure 3. Statue of a royal guard, moulded plaster with pigment. Iran, probably Rayy, circa 1050–1100. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 67.119. Image in the public domain.

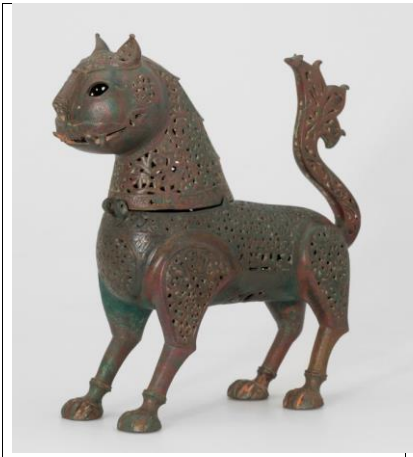

Figure 4 Lion censer with pierced body, cast copper alloy. Greater Iran, possibly Herat, circa 1000–1100. London, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, MTW 1525 © Khalili Family Trust.

Figure 5 Seated male figure, stonepaste, lustre on opaque white and blue glaze. Iran, Kashan, circa 1150–1200. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, T.Ades.5. ©Victoria & Albert Museum.

Figure 6 Seated breastfeeding woman, stonepaste, lustre on opaque white and blue glaze. Iran, Kashan, circa 1150–1200. Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, I. 2622. Image Petra Stüning.

Figure 7. Stand with three lions, stonepaste, lustre on opaque blue glaze. Iran, Kashan; circa 1150–1200. Copenhagen, David Collection 45/1968 © David Collection.

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THE IRANIAN *TA'ZIYEH* CYCLE: KARBALA THROUGH THE LENS OF 19TH CENTURY IRAN

LUCY DEACON

Lecture given to the Society on 19th February 2019

The Iranian tradition of *ta'ziyeh khani* (also known as *shabih khani*) is a Shi'ite genre of passion play and has similarities to the mystery cycles of medieval Europe. The objectives of this short article are twofold. The first is to briefly elucidate for the reader the unique features of this devotional theatre form and its religious importance to those who participate in these events. Secondly, I will discuss the historical trajectory of this tradition focusing in particular on the evolution of the *ta'ziyeh* repertoire during the 19th century, the period of its maximum development, discussing my own research which examines the central plays of the *ta'ziyeh* repertoire from a literary perspective. Despite the vernacular nature of the

artform (the quality of the verse of the plays being thus oftentimes somewhat rough), literary analysis of the repertoire is worthwhile not least in that it provides us with a glimpse of the mass cultural life and preoccupations of 19th century Iranian society.

What is *ta'ziyeh*? – About Karbala

The *ta'ziyeh* repertoire includes an anonymous cycle of plays which are typically performed during the Islamic months of Muharram and Safar to commemorate the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Husain b. 'Ali b. Abi Taleb, at Karbala in the year 61/680. According to the mainstream narrative, Husain's small party at Karbala included not only his brothers but also his sons, women and children. They were besieged in the desert by armies loyal to the Umayyad Caliph Yazid b. Mu'awiya whose legitimacy as ruler was challenged by Husain and his followers. Despite being drastically militarily outnumbered, one by one the warriors of Husain's party fought bravely before being killed. Once the grown men were gone, young boys took to the battlefield. On the 10th of Muharram, after three days of

denial of water, Husain himself was killed and the females and children taken as prisoners to the Umayyad capital of Damascus.

The central plays of the *ta'ziyeh* cycle are dramatizations of these very events. Each play focusses on the fate of an individual member of Husain's entourage. The representation of these events follows a specific order, with the martyrdom of Husain himself always portrayed on the 10th of Muharram, known as 'Ashura. Other religious and even secular stories involving historical, literary and mythological characters are also included in the *ta'ziyeh* corpus. Almost without fail, these plays use a dramatic device called *guriz* (best translated in this context as 'digression') to link the events that they treat to the Karbala narrative.

Religious Importance– Redemptive Tears

In political terms, the mission of Husain and his followers can be conceptualised as a revolution, an uprising against a ruler perceived as unjust and illegitimate. However, from a Shia perspective, Karbala is much more important

that. Husain is the Third Imam of Shia Islam. Within mainstream Shia tradition, it is believed that his martyrdom at Karbala was predestined. Former prophets as early as Adam had been told of Husain's fate at Karbala. It is believed that his martyrdom was necessary in order that he should become an intercessor for the sins of the Muslim community on the day of judgement.[29] It is interesting to note that in this cosmogonic understanding, Husain acts like the figure of Jesus Christ in Christianity, incarnated for atonement.

The shedding of tears for the martyrs of Karbala is believed to have an important redemptive value. Attendance at *ta'ziyeh* is not considered a religious duty. However, the plays provide the service of provoking the shedding of the necessary redemptive tears. The audience come to cry. The plays are typically around three and a half hours long, with the climactic play, *The Martyrdom of Imam Husain* lasting around five hours. Scenes featuring a protracted farewell before a martyrdom, are

[29] For further information see: Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Āshūrā in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 27-36.

common. The focus is not on the battle, rather the emotional agony of those involved. The audience are taken to the very point where the suffering is most intense and are then held there for a considerable time in order for them to cry.

The Plays and their Performance

The plays themselves are essentially stage adaptations of stories from the hagiographical literature. The specifics of the delivery and mis-en-scène both work to draw a clear line between good and evil, friend and foe. The plays are written in verse; the protagonists deliver their lines in song whilst the antagonists shout. The costumes are colour coded with protagonists wearing green, antagonists red. There is often an equestrian element and other animals such as camels are featured where resources allow.

There is little to no pretence at realism in this genre. Props are minimal and are often symbolic. For example, a bowl of water represents the Euphrates and a palm branch a grove of palm trees. The boundaries normally imposed by time, space and death are suspended within the *ta'ziyeh*.

For example, during his final battle Husain hears a cry for help from two devotees in India and is able to appear there to save them from the jaws of a hungry lion, before returning to Karbala to face his own fate. The besieged party are often visited by relatives from beyond the grave and we see the meeting of historical characters who never lived in the same period. All of this gives the plays what one is tempted to call a magic-realist flavour. However, when we look at the stylistics of hagiographical literature (not only in the Shi'ite but also the Christian tradition) it is clear that in relating the deeds of figures of religious importance, suspension of the boundaries that usually limit the human experience is common. This works towards the over-arching objective of such works, the *ta'ziyeh* plays included, underscoring the fact that the events portrayed are of an importance which surpasses profane time and space. Rather, the venerated figures are important in divine time, stretching from before the creation to beyond the resurrection, their significance transcending all spatial perimeters.

With regards to the *ta'ziyeh* performers, the tradition of professional actors dedicating themselves to this genre has existed at least since the late 18th century and is ongoing. However, it is also common for these plays to be performed by amateur groups within local communities and even a professional cast will always feature several children with even babies being taken on to the stage. Girls under the age of nine can be amongst these children. However, adult female characters are played by veiled males. It is not uncommon for the actors playing females to have beards and for the beard to be visible through the veil. In fact, this is more significant than a lack of regard for realism, as an essential feature of *ta'ziyeh* is a deliberate distancing of actor from character. Due to the sacred nature of the events and characters being portrayed, we are not supposed to believe at any point that the actor really is the character he portrays and various tactics are employed to avoid this. One is that the actors deliberately hold their scripts in hand whilst performing. They also frequently drop out of character and address the audience directly in their own voices, encouraging them to weep for the martyrs.

The Role of the Audience

As for the audience, they play a particularly active role. The extent of this is such that it is more appropriate to call them participants than spectators. We must remember that the aim of these rituals is twofold: to keep the events at Karbala alive in the popular memory and to provoke mourning. In addition to weeping, the audience are well versed in the call and response elements of the performance and are immediately aware of when to begin the rhythmic chest beating lament known as *sineh zani*. In addition to this they are in costume, the crowd a sea of black.

The staging conventions for this genre are simple yet allow for a sophisticated paradoxical implication. *Ta'ziyeh* performances are played 'in the round'. The performance space is typically a circular arena with a round stone platform (*saku*) in the centre. *Ta'ziyeh* can also be staged in the street and without a platform, yet it is always 'in the round'. This is in order to play out an important symbolic function of the audience: to represent the besieging armies. The actors playing members of the

besieged party stay on the stage at all times. There are no wings, there is no 'off stage', the stage is the camp and the audience the legions of the enemy army. The audience literally are the mourners of the besieged party, yet standing in the position of their aggressors their potential grief is multiplied as they are implicated in the culpability for the martyrdoms.

Historical Arc

Thus far, we have seen that *ta'ziyeh* is not only an important popular religious practice amongst Iranian Shi'ites but also that it has unique scenographic features, making it an important part of Iran's cultural heritage. But what do we know about the origins of this tradition?

First, it should be mentioned that there exists a scholar theory that ritual mourning for Husain is an evolution of the tradition of mourning for Siyavosh, a figure not only featuring in Zoroastrian tradition but in older eastern Iranian pagan practices.[30] Whilst the existence of such a

[30] For more information see: Ehsan Yarshater, "Ta'ziyeh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rites in Iran." In *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in*

mourning cult and the idea of it having influenced the Muharram mourning rituals is highly interestin; we have no clear evidence to explicitly connect such a cult with the phenomenon of *ta'ziyeh*. In fact the earliest evidence of performances of this type of devotional theatre belongs to the Safavid period when Shi'ism became the official state religion on the Iranian plateau.

Under Shah 'Abbas I (r. 995-1038/ 1587-1629) during the 16th century, mourning ceremonies for Husain during the month of Muharram received state patronage. However, these were processional rituals, lavish parades as opposed to static theatrical performances. It is believed that the tradition of public recitations from the hagiographical literature, known as *Rawzeh Khani*, fused at some point with the costumes and movement of the Muharram parades to generate the first *ta'ziyeh* plays.[31] By 1123/1711, during the reign of Shah Sultan Husain, *waqf* (endowment) documents show that the Safavids were

Iran, edited by Peter J. Chelkowski, 88-94. New York: New York University Press, 1979.

[31] Peter J. Chelkowski, "Ta'ziyeh: Indigenous Avant-Garde Theatre of Iran," *Performing Arts Journal* 2, no.1 (1977), 31-40.

certainly sponsoring *ta'ziyeh* performances as distinct from eulogy recitals and Muharram processions.[32] Despite the dynastic changes later in the century, spectator accounts suggest that the tradition was strong both in urban neighbourhoods and rural villages, that enactments were staged by non-professional performers and that it was part of the cultural life of the masses. The earliest extant script collection dates to the Zand period (the earliest script being dated 1184/1770). So, we have around 300 years of *ta'ziyeh* history in Iran, if not more.

Qajar Period Patronage: The Emergence of a Professional Circuit

The 19th century was the most important formative period for the *ta'ziyeh* genre. During the early 19th century under the Qajar dynasty, *ta'ziyeh* begun to undergo a transition from being part of the cultural life of the masses to being favoured by the elite. Patronage of *ta'ziyeh* began in the early decades and peaked under Naser al-Din Shah Qajar

[32] Maryam Moazzen, "Rituals of Commemoration, Rituals of Self-Invention: Safavid Religious Colleges and the Collective Memory of the Shi'a," *Iranian Studies* 49, no. 4 (2016), 558-560.

(r. 1264-1313 /1848-1898) in the second half of the century. Until this point *ta'ziyeh* had mostly been performed outdoors, however the newfound interest of the elite saw a boom in patronage of architecture for *ta'ziyeh* in cities across Iran.

The most prominent example of this trend was the construction of Tekiye-ye Dowlat in Tehran, an elaborate royal theatre for *ta'ziyeh* performances with a capacity of several thousand. An important consequence of this patronage boom was the creation of a professional circuit. There are many reports of talented *ta'ziyeh* actors or directors from across Iran travelling to work at Tekiyeh Dowlat and large newly built venues in cities such as Isfahan and Kashan, and indeed moving between these venues. These new *tekiyehs* acted as hubs, centres for exchange between performers and poets. This lively circuit in turn played a role in the development of the content of the main *ta'ziyeh* episodes.

Studying the Plays and their Development

Despite valuable work having been done in the field of *Ta'ziyeh* Studies, scholarship examining the plays of the

repertoire from a literary perspective is scare. Due to their anonymous nature, we have numerous versions of each play which differ in verse and content. I thus need to base my literary analysis of any given episode on at least ten versions of the script. As these versions differ in date, this approach has led me to observe patterns of how the plays have changed through time, taking my research in an important new direction as I attempt to disentangle the development of the central *ta'ziyeh* episodes.

The vast majority of my sources are scripts in manuscript form, belonging to the Cerulli Collection held by the Vatican Library; encompassing the scripts of around 1050 *ta'ziyeh* plays it is the largest such collection in the world. It was put together at the order of Italian diplomat and orientalist Enrico Cerulli, who served as Italian ambassador to Iran during the early 1950s. At that time *ta'ziyeh* had moved out of the large venues of the cities and was mostly performed in rural villages, after the practice having been prohibited as part of Reza Shah Pahlavi's modernisation drive. Cerulli, being interested in cultural anthropology, recognised the scientific value of

studying this unique dramatic form and ordered the collection of as many scripts as his staff could lay their hands on. He later gifted his collection to the Vatican after returning to Italy. The scripts subject to my study range in date from the 1790s to 1950s. This allows me to observe the changes that took place during the 19th century, and whether these changes became permanent. One aspect of this process is to identify and analyse innovations in the content of the plays that took place during this period.

Despite their plots being relatively simple, the central episodes of the *ta'ziyeh* repertoire are far from dry enactments of the Karbala martyrdoms as detailed in historical and religious sources. Rather, this genre's anonymous dramatists continued to embellish the memory of Karbala through time, innovating new narrative content. During the 19th century we see different characters and scenes popping up in the scripts of the central episodes as their content fluctuates. Some of these innovations later disappear yet other, obviously successful, innovations become permanent features of the plays and over a couple of decades we see them being

integrated into versions from across the country. These being performative texts, for a new section of material to be successful, it must have been accepted by both the players and their audience. This was no small matter, as once a scene became a permanent feature of a central episode, it would be played for generations, forming part of the popular memory of Karbala. This speaks for the highly collaborative nature of the development of the repertoire and the fact that while authorship of the plays is usually anonymous, the response of the communities for whom these dramas were performed affected the narrative content, thus implicating the audience in the authorship process.

Women as attendees at *ta'ziyeh* and their influence on the repertoire.

It is beyond the scope of this short article to explore the narrative innovations of the 19th century in detail. However, to provide a simple example of the nature of such innovations and what they can teach us about Iranian society during this period I will briefly touch upon the subject of women. One development which I observe

across a range of the central *ta'ziyeh* episodes during the 19th century is that the roles of the female characters expanded considerably and that a number of new female characters were introduced. Scenes featuring long sections of inter-female dialogue, absent from the plays at the beginning of the 19th century, had become permanent and important features of several of the central episodes by the dawn of the 20th century.

I argue that these innovations aimed to ensure the emotional investment, and to satisfy the expectations, of the female audience members whose tears were (and still are) important to the *ta'ziyeh* ritual as a whole. When we then look at the demographic of the audience who attended the newly-built venues of the 19th century, we find that a large contingent was female. Participation in the Muharram commemorations in these indoor venues which provided segregated spaces, clearly constituting a socially acceptable public activity for women of all classes and being extremely popular amongst them.

The enthusiastic participation of the female *ta'ziyeh* audience is attested to in the memoires of numerous

foreigners who visited Iran during the 19th century. The Muharram performances clearly made a great impression upon foreigners, who tend to describe these events in great detail. Not only is the vocal mourning of the female audience and their loud rebuking of the antagonists recorded, but so is some rather unruly behaviour, demonstrating their fervent desire to participate. Lady Mary Sheil spectated from the seclusion of a women-only box, next to that of the Shah's wives, at the royal *tekiyeh* in Tehran during Muharram of 1266/1849. She records the presence of an audience of several thousand. She describes the pit of the auditorium as filled with, "..women of humble condition, who were present in great numbers."[33] Sheil describes the competition amongst these woman for spaces to have been such that, " They often proceeded to blows, striking each other heartily on the head with the iron heel of their slippers, dexterously snatched off the foot for the purpose and, worse still, tearing off each other's veils." Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin who attended Naser al-Din Shah's *Tekiye-ye*

[33] Mary Leonora Woulfe Sheil, Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia (London: John Murray, 1856), 127-128.

Dowlat in Tehran early 1880s makes a similar observation, "The entire arena, with the exception of a narrow passage around the stage, was absolutely packed with women, thousands on thousands. At a rough estimate it seemed to me that quite four thousand women were seated there cross-legged on the earthen floor." The female participants seem to have been anything but passive, with Benjamin again recording some unrest between them, "Now and again a pair of them would relieve the long interlude of expectancy by a wrangle, which in one case degenerated into a fight, resulting in the wrenching of veils and coiffure and a display of features before the audience".[34] What is certainly clear is that despite the actors of the *ta'ziyeh* being male, females played an active role as audience participants.

Conclusion

So, on one hand we have evidence of highly motivated females, attending *ta'ziyeh* in large numbers. On the other hand we see a trend in the addition of female characters,

[34] S. G. W. Benjamin, Persia and the Persians (London: John Murray, 1887), 386-87.

the development of inter-female dialogues and generally an increase in the treatment of the Karbala tragedy from a female perspective. This, like other trends in the evolution of the repertoire during the 19th century attests the collaborative process by which the *ta'ziyeh* corpus developed, audience reception of these anonymous plays being of the utmost importance and thus the outcome being the result of a symbiosis of actors and audience. A conclusion that can be drawn on a social level is that the ability of the female crowd to influence the content of the plays is testament to their agency, showing them as far from passive spectators.

MEMOIR OF THE ALLIED OCCUPATION OF IRAN IN WORLD WAR I

Extracts from a private memoir written by Captain Bernard Sotham, a civil engineer temporarily attached in wartime to the Royal Engineers from 1914-1920, a great-uncle of one of the Society's members. The papers have just been discovered in an old suitcase.

I was in Tehran in August 1914 when Reuter's telegram service brought the news of the outbreak of the European War. Persia was in its usual state of general insecurity, with roads infested by brigands, a bankrupt and corrupt government and the general situation of affairs offering no inducement whatever to private British concerns to gamble their money on any pretentious enterprises.

The happenings in Persia in those early days of the War had a bad effect on British prestige in Persia, and when Turkey dared to declare war against Great Britain our prestige fell to nothing. The Germans employed clever agents all over the country who gradually turned the sympathy of the people against us. After the fall of Kut in

Mesopotamia in the spring of 1915 the situation of the Allied subjects in Persia was anything but comfortable. By the autumn of 1915 public feeling had gone so much against us that in several provincial towns outrages were committed against British firms. Violence and sabotage were freely indulged in and were openly planned and organised by Persians at the instigation of German agents.

The general situation became so bad in November 1915 that it became necessary to bring in Russian troops to protect the lives and interests of the Allies in Persia. Troops landed at Rasht and moved across to Qom, a march of about twenty days. November 15th 1915 will never be forgotten by those who were in Tehran. When the news of the Russian advance came in the Germans, Austrians and Turks panicked and, led by their diplomats, left Tehran in the morning. They halted at Shah Abdol Azim, about five miles to the south. They pleaded with the Shah and his ministers to leave with them, urging His Majesty to throw in his lot with them and transfer his capital to Isfahan. They waited all day in full uniform for the Shah to join them; they were supported by several

hundred Persian gendarmes under Swedish officers. The bazaar closed and immense crowds gathered in front of the palace watching for the trend of events. Finally, towards sunset, and thanks entirely to the efforts of the British Minister, the Shah announced his intention to remain in his capital. The Germans and Turks, together with the gendarmerie and many of their Persian friends then marched to Qom.

As the Russians advanced the major portion of the gendarmerie, led by some of their Swedish officers, organised reinforcements of irregulars and marched against the Russians, in defiance of orders from the Persian government. The Russians drove these ‘rebels’ as the Persian government called them, before them and entered Qom in December 1915. During January 1916 the Russians advanced on Sultanabad [Arak], which was occupied by rebel troops supported by tribesmen from Luristan. There were of course several Germans and some Swiss and Swedes directing operations. The British bank and the British carpet firm of Ziegler’s were looted until the Russians drove them out.

Other disturbances occurred elsewhere and successful German intrigues and bribing forced the evacuation allied subjects from several towns in Eastern Persia. In January 1916 the British in Yazd [telegraph officials, bankers and medical missionaries] had to make their way the 300 miles to Tehran on donkeys, through the harsh winter weather and harried by brigands. The winter of 1915-16 was remarkable for the lack of rain and snow, which led to a shortage of water all over the country and a poor harvest. Food became scarce.

The Germans used Isfahan as a base to turn the Kuhgiluyeh Bakhtiari, Qashqai and Luri tribes against us. Englishmen were openly insulted in the streets and an attempt was made on the life of the British Consul-General.

Meanwhile, the Russians had advanced on Hamadan and actually crossed the frontier into Ottoman Mesopotamia, but only for a short time. They were ill equipped and did not even have sun helmets. Heatstroke forced them back up to the high ground in Persia, pursued by the Turks as far as Hamadan, where the Russians held out until January

1916, when they fell back to Avaj, on the Qazvin road, leaving Tehran exposed to a Turkish cavalry advance. The Allied women and children in Tehran were hastily driven in lorries to Enzeli on the Caspian, safely in Russian hands. Contingency plans were also drawn up for the remaining men to ride through the Alborz mountains to another port on the Caspian.

When the sizeable Armenian community heard the news they panicked and sold all their belongings and there were many wonderful bargains to be had. They all left for the Caspian ports in carriages, on horses or donkeys, and many just on foot. Shortage of transport stopped the Turks advancing any further, giving time for the Russians to send up reinforcements, enabling everyone to return. The Russians then retook Hamadan.

The winter of 1916-17 saw a famine in parts of Persia. It was particularly bad in parts of the Kuhgiluyeh Bakhtiari country, down to Mohammerah [Abadan]. I witnessed some truly pitiful spectacles on this journey: the roads and tracks were strewn with dead and dying mules, donkeys and camels. The condition of the people was not much

better; they kept themselves alive on leathery bread made from acorn flour and goat milk. I carried my own tinned rations by shooting something every day. It might not be out of place, nor without its significance, to mention that whenever I was the guest of the various chiefs, their castles were the acme of luxurious comfort, with plentiful good food, while in some of the villages the poverty was so great that even clothing was scarce. The war had put a stop to almost all imports of cotton and wool cloth, pushing prices beyond the reach of these tribespeople. I noticed that whenever we struck a particularly poor village the men were always pretty well dressed in patched up clothes, while the women were much worse off, and sometimes almost naked. We often came into a village almost buried in snow, to be at once surrounded by half-naked women imploring us for clothes, money and food.

For some months the Russians and Turks once a week exchanged desultory fire at Sultanabad until the recapture of Kut by the Allies on 20th February 1917, when the

Turks retreated from Persia, at their leisure, untroubled by the Russians.

The Russians behaved very badly towards the Persian peasants; they looted and ill-treated them disgracefully, treating it as a joke. They were ill-disciplined and their rifles and equipment were nothing but scrap.

The rains failed again that winter, which led to more famine. No attempt was made by the Persian government to alleviate it; on the contrary. Most of the rich Persians began speculating b buying up and cornering all available wheat and barley. By December 1917 starvation prevailed and the Persians were dying in thousands. An epidemic of typhus broke out. It is quite beyond me to describe the horrors and miseries of that winter; suffice it to say that streets of Tehran, in spite of the efforts of the police, were never clear of dead bodies. Dead camels, mules and donkeys were immediately seized and devoured raw as they lay where they had fallen. I saw a dead camel lying some four miles away from the town. The smell of its putrefying body had evidently reached the noses of the starving, for it was surrounded by some twenty or thirty

people tearing at its rotting flesh and eating it raw. Cannibalism also took place, particularly in the west, but I don't want to go on any more.

In February 1918 the British opened a soup kitchen in Tehran, feeding some 250,000 people up until May. They opened similar kitchens in other towns.

During the winter of 1917-18 the safety of Allied subjects again became dangerous. Following the Russian revolution, their troops had mostly disappeared from Persia and Germans and Austrians had reappeared, while the Persian Cabinet was now openly hostile to the Allies.

Some excitement was caused in January by the first successful landing at Tehran of a British aeroplane from Baghdad, which did something to raise British prestige. Some years previously a Russian attempted to give a flying show; he flew about a mile and then crashed.

A large force of German equipped *Jangali* fighters, so called because they hid out in the Caspian forests, congregated at Rasht. The Turks came down through the Caucasus to Tabriz, which had to be evacuated by Allied

subjects. In the early spring the British Consul at Rasht and a British officer on his way to Tehran[35], as well as the manager of the British bank were captured by the Jangalis, who then advanced as far as Qazvin. The position in Tehran was desperate until an advance column of a British force [Norperforce, under General Ironside] made its way up to Qazvin in May. The arrival of some British troops persuaded the Persians that there was some truth in the stories of Allied victories over the Turks in Mesopotamia, though few believed in the capture of Baghdad. The arrival of a British General with his staff in Qazvin boosted the morale of the few Persians who were still friendly to Britain. It had long been extremely dangerous for any Persians to be openly friendly to the Allies and many had paid the penalty at the hands of assassins paid by enemy agents.

Abundant rains and snow fell during this winter throughout the country but, because of the scarcity of seed corn, not nearly enough grain could be sown to meet

[35] This was Captain Connolly, who later murdered Sir Walter Barttelot at Qolhaq, as depicted in the Society's Christmas party dramatic reading of the story.

normal requirements. The seed sown on unirrigated land in 1917 had failed to germinate for lack of rain and remained dormant in the ground for two years, finally germinating in 1918. This, I imagine, was an extraordinary occurrence.

This small British force of a few officers with a sprinkling of NCOs, equipped with a few machine guns and armoured cars had moved up from Baghdad in mid-winter over 400 miles of almost unknown country in Ford motor cars. The absence of roads was the least of their difficulties. Rivers had to be crossed, bogs and marshes negotiated, mountains nine thousand feet above sea level crossed and fifteen-foot deep snowdrifts cleared. The Military Mission, by describing their victories over the Turks, succeeded in persuading the Persian chiefs and landlords to offer their support to the British. Even a regiment of levies was raised to police the roads and many anti-British agitators and undesirables in the western towns were rounded up and removed from the scene, or cleared off on their own accord. In the process much information was gathered about the numerous and almost

unheard-of tribes in Persian Kurdistan, some of whom were friendly to us and others hostile.Meanwhile, the Engineers did an enormous amount of work to make the track from Baghdad to Hamadan passable to the motor vehicles of the main force moving up to stop the Turkish advance from Tabriz. Permanent positions were established at Bijar and Zanjan.

The Turkish advance led to the sudden evacuation of Urumiyeh by the Armenians and Jehlu, who had been fighting the Turks for months, and were aiming for safety in Hamadan. This was bad news, as we were now saddled with some 80,000 refugees who all needed feeding, when we were hard put to it to feed ourselves in an already famine-stricken country. It was a very clever move on the part of the Turks. Things looked so black that one heard whispers of a plan being made to evacuate all of northern Persia. A small force of British was sent north to try to persuade the Armenians to return to their fight with the Turks. They met at Bijar, but there was no reasoning with the panic stricken mob in their tens of thousands. They had been constantly attacked by Turks in the rear and

Kurds from the flank all the way down. It took twelve days for the whole column to pass Bijar. We managed to supply them with enough rations to last them as far as Hamadan.

To describe the awful sufferings of the people on this march is very difficult; it was a case of the survival of the fittest. Typhus and smallpox raged among them. Our small medical facility at Bijar did what it could for them. Women as well as men had been obliged to fight their way along and many arrived with bullet wounds ten or twelve days old. I drove past this column on my way to Hamadan from Bijar. The road was strewn with dead and dying people and animals. Little children dead and partly devoured by wolves lay everywhere, while others lay dying, raising their heads pitiably on hearing the sound of the motor. I remember seeing a woman lying by the road, having just dropped dead from exhaustion. A small child, still living, was in her arms while another lay dead a few yards away. Anyone dropping out from exhaustion either died at once or was mutilated by marauding Kurds in the most horrible manner.

During this awful march, all sense of civilisation and decency was lost. Just one instance of this: we had stopped by a stream to fill the car radiator as the refugees passed by us. Riding a worn out mule was a young woman, almost devoid of clothing. Close to her rode a strong looking young lad clad in a fur overcoat. One of our Tommies, enraged, asked him why he did not give the woman his coat. “Well, Sir,” he replied in English, “you never know, I might need it myself tomorrow.”

When they reached the country below Bijar, where Kurds were not numerous, mounted parties of Jehlu and Armenians set off to take revenge on the Persians, looting and killing the defenceless villagers. For the last sixty miles not a village within three or four miles of the road escaped them. Not a living thing remained in these villages. It was no easy task rounding up and disarming these bandits when they reached Hamadan. The survivors, about 35,000 or so, were sent either to Baghdad or to Armenian villages between Sultanabad and Isfahan. The result of these predations was that the British consul at Hamadan was besieged by Persians appealing to us for

compensation, though it was not clear why they thought we were responsible.

Although it cannot be denied that Persia suffered considerably from the war, nevertheless it has to be said that wherever there were British troops, they had to be supplied. Nothing was commandeered, everything was liberally paid for, such as firewood, rice, meat, fats, charcoal and many other things. Roads were constructed on a large scale unheard of in Persia. This brought money into the pockets of the peasants working on the roads. Tens of thousands of men, women and boys were employed in this way. This work was a godsend to people who had been through three years of famine. These roads meant that the journey from Tehran to Baghdad, which before the war took twenty-five days by horse or mule and was full of robbers, could now be done by motor in four or five days and was safe. Caravans of merchandise can now be seen camping in the open, something unthinkable before the war. Brigandage, looting and murder had been replaced by peace and security.

The remaining pages of this memoir are missing.

STUDENT TRAVEL REPORTS

The following reports come from SOAS undergraduates who received grants from the Society.to assist them in their studies of Persian while at Mashhad University.

Charlotte

Firstly, I would like to begin by thanking the Iran Society for the generous contribution towards my funds. As a result I was able not only to travel considerably, but also to extend my stay for an additional four months. These extra months allowed me time to see more of Iran itself, as well as life and traditions through the summer period, when fortunately there is a lot of holiday time for the universities. I have been privy to the celebrations of Nowruz and the tradition of *azâdâri*, travelled from Hormuz Island to Chalus, but most significantly, I had the opportunity to be a part of Iranian culture and in particular Iranian youth culture as it exists today. It was only with sadness that I said goodbye to my friends and teachers, and if I could close my eyes and be transported back today, I would eagerly go!

When we think of Iran our minds naturally drift to the imagined historical Iran - the Iran of the Zoroastrians, the Great Persian Empire - with marvels such as Persepolis, masters of poetry, philosophy and spirituality such as Hafez and Mowlana. We also think of Iran now, as it exists in its more current historical depiction, from its representation on news channels surrounding its political policies and relationships with the world. As language students, having spent time abroad previous to this, we were already aware that preparing mentally for life abroad, in a culture different from your own is impossible. It is best to limit expectations and imaginations, though of course reports of other experiences, films, music and media do tend to work against this. Even on a subconscious level you cannot help but get out to your intended destination to have a jolt of 'Oh, this is not what I thought' followed closely by the observation that you had not realised that you had held any ideas to begin with. But of all my experiences abroad, it has been my time in Iran in which this jolt was felt the most, from the very first day of arriving to Mashhad, to all of my experiences that followed. I was told by a friend prior to leaving that in

Iran I would fall in love, but I could not have anticipated how much real contentment I would experience during my time there and how much genuine connection I would find. Thus, I will be sharing just a few of the aspects which I most enjoyed and I hope through sharing these observations and memories I will be able to give a snapshot of Iranian youth culture as experienced through the eyes of another.

The biggest initial difference for me In Iran was the amount of time I spent alone - practically, never. If I had chosen to spend the day alone it would neither start nor end in this way, and it was rare for me to eat alone. As someone who spends a considerable amount of time alone back in the UK, the idea of spending almost all hours of the day in close company with others would have been in itself exhausting - and at first it was. Life in Mashhad was incredibly social - and being a foreigner certainly enhanced people's interest in meeting and hanging out. Surprisingly though, as someone who has always craved personal space, this dynamic quickly became normal and even desirable.

My Iranian friends, I found, were not tiring company but instead energising and engaging - they brought us into their group with ease – eating, napping and studying and heading out for fruit juices and ice cream - without the dreaded 'awkwardness' which seems to be so ever present in many of previous interactions. During one breakfast with a dear Tehrani friend of mine, we were discussing this concept of awkwardness. There is no real translation in Persian. I observed how over the months I had been in many social interactions in which there really seemed no point to the interaction other than just the passing of time together, and at times with people very unfamiliar to me. However, despite this I had always relaxed very easily and even felt quite rested in these situations (especially when being sent off for a nap). My friend laughed and admitted that when spending time with friends or family she did not particularly feel pressure to make sure they had a good time (although she did admit that now in dating this feeling certainly exists).

Whilst they might not feel so much pressure to entertain, let it not be said that my Iranian friends did not know how

to have a good time - I was privileged to enjoy a considerable amount of '*tafrih'* and quickly lost my routine of 'early to bed for an early start.' During my time in Mashhad and Tehran I regularly spent relaxed evenings walking around and chatting in the many beautiful parks or lakes such as *Park-e Mellat, Kuhsangi* park, *Ab-o Atash, Chitgar* lake and S*hahr-e Bazi* where many families would be out picnicking until late. During gatherings at home, song and dance was a big part of the night. With surprising regularity my friends would share beloved childhood songs, teach Iranian dance or quote at random one of their favourite poets. From '*Ta bahar-e'*, to old lullabies written and sung by shepherds when alone in the mountains, it was a genuine delight to have had so much shared with me of their feeling of heritage and identity with their culture and history. It too, was wonderful to be witness to their current active and creative community. I heard rap in Tajrish, found classes for contemporary dance and aerial yoga and more via Instagram, went to many markets which sold so much unique and beautiful handmade jewellery, pottery, paintings and all other sorts of nicknacks.

Travel and spending time in nature is a large part of life in Iran too. Aside from mountain hiking, rock climbing and skiing in Mashhad and Tehran, I also travelled a lot. In Chalus, I spent a day of '*âb-bâzi'* in the sea with a friend and camped several nights next to a very large and beautiful lake, an hour's drive up the mountains. On Hormuz Island too, I camped the night next to the sea, went to the caves late at night experiencing the most darkness and silence I have ever encountered before, and had my first experience of Bandari music and dance when we came across a local boat party one evening. In Yazd, we were invited by a very friendly and lively group of Tehrani tourists on a tour to visit a Zoroastrian temple, a preserved *yakhchal*, a traditional pottery workshop and most importantly, they introduced us to the most delicious sugary crispy bread known as *nan-e yazdi*.

Additionally, we visited Nishapur, Shiraz and Isfahan, and my final trip with a couple of Tehrani friends was to Varzaneh, where the Zayandeh Rud disappears into a marsh. There we visited the salt lake before making *jujeh kebab* and camping together in the desert. Waking up

early, I had my first experience of sand boarding down the dunes - the most enjoyable morning I've had to date!

I could write many pages more. I have had an incredible experience, in a country with such diverse nature, rich history and welcoming, engaging and energetic people. It has been an experience ultimately of connection and easy acceptance, therefore conveying this succinctly and without being completely sentimental would be impossible. Many thanks once more to the Iran Society who helped support this experience.

Christina

The four months that I spent in Iran have left a deep and lasting impression. Following a year of intensive Persian language study at SOAS University of London, I was fortunate enough to be awarded a travel grant from the Iran Society to study at Ferdowsi University in Mashhad. The grant enabled me to book flights at short notice after the delayed granting of my visa and facilitated my ease of travel across the span of the country during my time there, something to which I owe a large debt of gratitude. It is a

country that is so full of richness of culture and history, it was impossible for me not to come away with my mind transformed and my perspective on the world widened.

Upon arrival, I received an unexpected significant cultural introduction, landing in Mashhad airport at 4am on the morning of 22nd Bahman (11th February) and walking around the university campus to orientate myself, I felt as if I were in a deserted city. The silence resounded through the campus, and the lack of cars and pedestrians was unsettling. The anniversary of the Islamic Revolution is celebrated as a national holiday, where prayers are led at the Shrine or *Haram*, of Imam Reza and families gather in their homes to celebrate the night before. An invitation to a university-hosted 'Celebration of the Nations for the Islamic Revolution' introduced me to the extravagance and illustriousness of the celebration. That was to be the first of a number of ceremonies in which I was invited to participate, each providing a telling insight into the workings of the university hierarchies and introductions to distinguished visitors.

In the months that I was studying while based in Mashhad I had the opportunity to visit many varying parts of Iran, make friends all over the country and experience first-hand the open-hearted generosity of the Iranian people. A Nowruz trip which began in Karaj then saw me northwards to Rasht, back to Tehran and then onto Yazd, Bandar Abbas and a few days on the islands of the Persian Gulf. The 22-hour bus journey returning to Mashhad provided ample opportunity to improve my more discursive vocabulary while engaging in a disagreement with a fellow traveller about whether we should keep the window open or closed.

I passed the Nowruz holiday with some Iranian friends and their family in Karaj. After the fullness of the Nowruz evening, visiting different parts of the family, we drove the five hours northwards to Rasht. There we stayed in a hut in the middle of some rice fields for five days near the Caspian Sea and cooked our food over a fire. Upon my return from Rasht I went for a weekend of skiing in Dizin with two ice climbing instructors who I had met through a friend in Tehran and got to know their wider friendship

group of outward-bound explorers who habitually travel around Iran to go on expeditions. They gave me great advice on the areas which I had to visit and helpful details ofhow to get there. As we skied down the mountains, one of my guides, Moslem, called out verses by Nima Yushij:

Âb mighorrad dar makhzan-e kooh - Kooh-ha ghamnâk-and

Water thunders in the depths of the mountain - The mountains are sad.

This was one of the first introductions I received to the deep integration of poetry with Iranian culture. I had read and lightly studied a few Persian poets before travelling to Iran, beginning with Hafez and Mowlana, but it was not until the days over that holiday that I realised what an integral part of life poetry is, ancient and contemporary, and with what pride and esteem it is held. I realised that I would not be able to leave Iran without having immersed myself further in this aspect of life, so I endeavoured to visit the mausoleums of great poets alongside the Iranian travellers we met.

From there I travelled to Yazd where I joined a local tour group and we toured along a path of pilgrimage taken over thousands of years by Zoroastrians in Iran. We visited *Chak Chak* where one of the ever-burning flames is located and learnt about the spiritual significance of the site for the pilgrims who journey there and heard the moving legend behind it. The tour also included a visit to a caravanserai to see cotton *zilu* loom weaving and pottery, to the ancient dove house, the underground aqueducts and water tanks, the Narin Castle in Ardakan, the prison of Alexander the Great and the old town of Yazd. Buying some beautiful copper jewellery, I was intrigued by the enthusiasm of the jewellers who animatedly sold to us the physical and mental health benefits of wearing copper, an opinion we encountered regularly while in Yazd.

Venturing from Yazd to the southernmost coast, I had many fascinating conversations with the locals I met to understand more of the historic mix of cultures and influences that make the area so different from other provinces of Iran. We learnt some Bandari dances and we

were invited to stay with contacts of my Iranian friend with whom I was travelling. The distinct culture of the region, expressly highlighted in the music, food and dress, opened our eyes to the years of intertwined history between the southernmost parts of Iran and particularly the eastern coast of Africa. The geography of the islands with the multicoloured earth, sparkling sand, Valley of Stars and salt caves was exquisite. We were told passionate stories of revolt from the fishermen who came together to stand up against large trawlers who were depleting the fish resources of the Persian Gulf causing great unemployment.

A few weeks later, accompanied by three other students from my class, I visited the beautiful cities of Shiraz and Esfahan. We were unfortunately only able to visit these cities during Ramadan, but this meant that the contrast between the night and the day was remarkable. Upon hearing the *Azân* signifying the breaking of the fast, the restaurants opened their doors and people poured into the streets and parks. But the *Naqsh-e Jahan* square in Esfahan, even in the apex of the day's heat was humming

with activity. Seeing the numerous stalls selling *sofreh*s and copper jugs and vases enamelled with turquoise boasted myriad colours and walking around the market, I felt a small sense of the tradition and history of the area which has been a centre of trade and commerce for generations.

On our visit to Shiraz, were also inspired to visit the archaeological sites of Persepolis and the Necropolis, where Kings Xerxes, Artaxerxes and Darius are buried. To have had the opportunity to experience this immensely significant archaeological site is a privilege to which so few people have access. It was truly splendid. We returned to Shiraz and, in addition to the iconic *Masjid Nasir-ol-Molk*, we also visited the tomb of Hafez, where we were struck by the intense emotion stirred in those around us while visiting this important place.

I had heard many wonderful things about Kashan, so towards the end of my time in Iran, I decided to take a long weekend to stay there and see the surrounding villages. Aside from one dramatic afternoon which including me misplacing my passport and money on a bus

and consequently being reunited with both, it was one of the most peaceful places I visited. While there I walked around the numerous traditional houses, I discovered a few enclaves of local artists and musicians who were displaying their work in disused buildings.

A few Kashanis whom I met were proud to explain that their town's number one export was a carpet specifically designed to be placed at the foot of the driver in a car, but those who were interested in expanding my horizons recommended that I take a trip to Niyasar and watch the rosewater production. I arrived just in time, a few days before the end of the rose harvest. Walking from the main production houses where the rosewater was being distilled to the top of the hill overlooking the plain by the ancient Zoroastrian temple, I had a beautiful view of Kashan. There my guide recounted stories of the poet Sohrab Sepehri from the early years of his childhood; he had taken inspiration from the stunning scenery surrounding Kashan as much of the inspiration for imagery in his poems such as '*Seda-ye Pa-ye Âb'* or 'The Footsteps of

Water' where his opening verse is '*Ahl-e Kashan-am*' (I am from Kashan).

From Niyasar I took a taxi to visit the step village of Abyaneh and went hiking in the mountains surrounding the village to better view the surrounding scenery. It was a challenge to understand the regional accent of Abyaneh but there were so many tourists from other parts of Iran I was not short of people to speak to. After leaving the village we drove to the salt plains and desert close to the town of Arak, just another exquisite example of the varied geography of the country

The capital of Iran, as with the appeal of many capital cities, drew me back time and again. Tehran is a city so different from Mashhad and the other places we visited. The busyness of it and the relentless traffic made it not dissimilar from London. But the people whom I encountered retained the same open-handed generosity and willingness to help as had been my experience in almost every other part of Iran. Over the course of a few visits, I ventured around the city to the Golestan Palace, the Azadi tower, the jewellery museum, the numerous

parks, and one private collection of ancient artefacts which had just been opened to the public, a poetry reading performance and the Negarestan Museum Garden. It was a bustling metropolitan jungle, even in the month of Ramadan. My closest friends were those I met in Tehran and they accompanied me for a few of my trips around the country.

Due to the fact that my studies were based in Mashhad, much of my time in Iran was spent in and around the Khorasan region. At different intervals, I was able to go to Neyshabur, Shandiz and Fariman to see a few of the most historically and culturally significant sites. The tombs of Ferdowsi, Khayyam and Attar were beautiful, as were the turquoise markets surrounding Neyshabur. Life in Mashhad, in comparison with other Iranian cities, moved slowly. After returning from a trip, I began to appreciate the peacefulness of the familiar roads and views, the steadiness of the daily routine and the distinctive Mashhadi accent. But it was through a visit to the *Haram* of Imam Reza, where I began to grasp the magnitude of significance which this city of pilgrimage

holds for all Iranians, both devout Muslims and nominal believers. The expansive complex with its collections of museums, teaching centres, mosques and catering facilities surrounding the Haram provide an encompassing experience of prayer and meditation.

Having returned to England, I have been asked to summarise my experience of Iran on numerous occasions. It is often expected that I will describe the political and religious oppression felt by the population or the difficulties of having to wear a headscarf. While many aspects of life are challenging in Iran, largely due to the economic situation, lack of freedom of movement and some strict societal expectations, I found the reality to be far from the presumptions presented in our media. It is hard to explain how firmly the experience is imprinted on my memory and how much I consider myself transformed by it. The more time I spent there, an awareness of my own ignorance grew, not only about Iranian society, but also about the spectrum of political opinions held by many Iranians. I hope that I will one day be able to return and continue on this path of learning and discovery.

Kate

I have travelled to many different countries and seen some incredible places; however, I can honestly say that Iran is the most beautiful country that I have ever been to.

I arrived in Iran at the beginning of March 2019. I had submitted my visa application over seven months before and had been waiting anxiously for it to arrive. When I did finally collect my visa, I rushed home and booked a flight for the following day. Thanks to the Iran Society this was actually possible, and I was able to book an expensive flight at such short notice. After a 13-hour layover in Doha I arrived in Iran at what felt like the middle of the night - it was actually only about 9pm.

I spent last year studying Persian grammar at university in London and had a pretty good knowledge of the language before arriving in Iran. However, I had spent my time waiting for my visa studying Arabic, and so when the time arose for me to speak to my taxi driver at the airport, the only word I could remember was *salam*: 'hello'. This

experience was quite different to when I left Mashhad to return to London, speaking fluently with my taxi driver and discussing the current political situations in both of our home countries.

When I say that Iran is the most beautiful country that I have been to I mean this in a few different ways: the landscape and architecture, the people, and the lifestyle. I did struggle with the weather though!

What amazed me about Iran was how diverse the landscape was. I have to admit that I knew only a little about Iran before this year and so I was surprised at all of the different areas of Iran. I spent my first few weeks in Iran to the north of Tehran, in the mountains skiing. It was such a breath-taking experience – figuratively and literally, since this was my first time skiing. I then ventured to the centre of Iran and experienced the dry and humid desert climate of Yazd. To top it all off, I visited the towns surrounding Mashhad - Torghabeh, Shandiz, and Neyshaboor. These luscious green and blossoming towns were a world apart from the cold of the mountains and the heat of the desert. I felt as though I had travelled

to multiple countries during different seasons of the year. The architecture was also truly astounding, some favourites of mine were *Naqsh-e Jahan* in Esfahan and *Masjid-e Nasir ol-molk* in Shiraz. The detail and vibrant colours of each building made visiting and exploring each city quite a magical experience.

I can only say good things about all of the different people I met during my time in Iran. The hospitality and friendliness towards me was quite overwhelming. Before arriving in Iran, I was quite nervous of being in a new place with no connections, but I quickly learned that this was nothing to be afraid of. I think the one place that stuck out to me the most would be the trains. Although it sounds strange, one of my favourite places in Iran was on the sleeper trains. It wasn't just the fact that the beds on the trains were more comfortable than the beds in the dormitory. I often found that I would be travelling with much older ladies in my little four-person cabin, and these ladies would just want to look after me as if I were their own granddaughter. These train journeys were never less than twelve hours long, and when you are sat facing three

other women for this long, it would be rude not to talk to each other! With each train journey I found myself playing a game: how long would it take for my travel companions to realise that I was not from Iran. As my Persian improved, so did the time it took others to realise I wasn't Iranian. I was never hungry on these journeys, as I was always fed and looked after by my travel companions, and always offered a place to stay on arrival at our destination. The kindness of these complete strangers made me love Iran even more than I already did.

Having previously lived in different countries in the Middle East I was accustomed to the lifestyle of not stressing about everything, and taking time to enjoy each day, unlike life in London. I found that I was able to get more work and learning done because I wasn't so stressed out about all the small things that we worry about on a daily basis in England. My time in Iran has impacted the way I approach daily life, especially since moving back to London.

Whilst I did spend a lot of time travelling, I also attended Persian language classes at Ferdowsi University in

Mashhad. I especially enjoyed my calligraphy class, as well as my writing class. Since we were learning at an advanced level, this allowed us to delve into some complex topics and voice our opinions, in Persian, about current events and situations occurring not only in Iran, but around the world.

I also found that one of the most effective ways to learn Persian was to stay in the dormitories on campus. I spent four months living with around 140 girls from all over Iran. This meant that whether I was preparing food in the kitchen, walking up and down three flights of stairs, washing my clothes or just sitting in my room I was constantly learning new things both in and about Persian. Although living with so many people was quite out of my comfort zone, I am definitely glad to have been there, as I not only learned a lot more, but made many friendships. I also found that on returning to England, not having to share a room was quite a strange and weird experience.

I was sad to leave Iran after only four months as I wish I could have stayed there longer, but I would love to return again. I left from Mashhad airport with a suitcase which

was twice as heavy as it was when I arrived – packed full with saffron, *nabat*, *sofreh*s, copper pots, clay pomegranates, and over 20 books in Persian. On my way back to London, before boarding my flight to Doha, I was stopped and asked to empty the contents of my bag. I had bought an extra backpack to accommodate all of the books that I wanted to bring back home with me. Seeing a bag with nothing but books caught the attention of the staff at the airport and they were curious as to why I had such a heavy bag full of so many books. I explained that, as an avid Harry Potter fan, and as someone eager to learn more and read Persian poetry, I just had to buy all of these books and try and carry them back to London!

Upon my return to the UK my family told me that they had never seen me so happy and relaxed. My time in Iran has been one that I will not forget and has resulted in a passion for learning more about the language and culture of Iran, and some lifelong friendships around the country. I have also started studying Persian poetry, and I have so much more of an understanding of the poems having experienced the culture and lifestyle of Iran. I am so

grateful that I was able to live in a country with such a rich culture and environment.

Philip

After an initial flight to Istanbul, I soon found myself in the company of a plane-load of Iranians, and it was at this early stage that I already found myself acquainted with some of those contradictions which define this most complex and puzzling of countries. Judging by the attire of most of my fellow passengers, we might have been heading to the Costa del Sol! It was difficult to imagine that we were in fact on our way to the holy city of Mashhad. However, rest assured, by the time we landed, hijabs and chadors had magically enveloped all the women whilst a lot of the young men's vests and shorts seemed to have grown into t-shirts and trousers. The airport immigration and arrivals building was long and bare, feeling more like a military hangar (perhaps it had been), and was dominated by the customary giant and unsmiling photos of two elderly gentlemen.

Over the next few weeks I did my best to ignore bad news stories relating to British citizens, ships in the Strait of Hormuz and generally ominous diplomatic rumblings,

Commented [FH1]: I totally appreciate your sentiment here but, for your own sake, I would avoid putting statements like this into print!

and focus on improving my language skills. Ferdowsi University has some brilliant teachers, who I also found to be kind, warm, generous people whose classes I came to really look forward to. Given that I was only in Iran for the summer, and had only signed up for six weeks of classes, it was imperative that I make the most of my short time there. The university's administrative department perhaps left something to be desired but as is so often the case in Iran, whilst the system can seem beyond painfully inefficient, you can usually find one or two people who can quite literally move you by their willingness to go above and beyond for you.

Iran really is a very different society, which does require adjustment and acculturation. How does one cross the road without dying? Is there literally no queuing, anywhere?

Khorasan-e Razavi, the province of which Mashhad is the capital, is home to a wealth of places to see and visit. It doesn't boast some of the world-famous monuments of Esfahan or Yazd but it has more than its fair share of natural phenomena, picturesque villages and historic

architecture. The secluded village of Kang for example, set alongside a verdant valley, complete with a refreshing waterfall and charming wooden houses is a good example. A visit to Kalat, near the Turkoman border, is worth it for the journey alone. As one heads north from Mashhad, the landscape changes dramatically, the temperature drops and before long you are faced with the first cloudy skies you have seen in weeks. By the time you are half an hour away from Kalat, and you twist and turn around breakneck bends you are in a completely different world of rocks, cliffs and mountains. Upon reaching the town, which is only accessed via a tunnel which runs through the mountain chain, you can truly appreciate Kalat as the natural fortress it is. No wonder Nader Shah, who hailed from these parts, reputedly stashed all the loot from his Delhi campaign in the hidden recesses of this inaccessible place. Some have suggested that the pink sandstone Khorshid Palace he commissioned there was for that very purpose.

The shrine complex of Imam Reza in Mashhad is truly a spectacle to behold, a bewildering sequence of various

buildings, open and enclosed spaces all packed and heaving with people. However, it must be said that the site like many has suffered from heavy restoration work in places, the excessive state patronage is a little suffocating and for me at least makes the whole experience feel a little contrived and sterile. Those hoping for a more timeless and evocative sense of a pilgrimage site need not despair however. The small oasis of Qadamgah particularly comes to mind. The landscape between Mashhad and Neyshabur in the height of summer, whilst evocative, is rather barren and monotonous until one is struck by a cluster of green nestled between the motorway and the yellow beige hills in the background. Leaving the main road and approaching this cluster leads one into a small town, a bustling network of just a few streets but overflowing with the coming and going of busy people, a small market of sorts, a cacophony of sights and sounds, a pulse of life in the middle of the desert. The main street seems to lead one up a slight slope, through an arch or two and you suddenly find yourself in a long garden, a stream of running water coming down towards you from a small but attractive domed building. People throng to and from

this small shrine, but there also seem to be a lot of people who are just there, enjoying their time in this exceedingly pleasant space. The entire perimeter wall of this garden is stuffed with small cells like those in a caravanserai and all of them were occupied by families, some chatting, some eating, parents napping, children playing, the place buzzed with a kind of pious vitality.

After my classes finished, for about a month I tried my best to cram in as much of the country as possible. In this limited space I struggle to disentangle the many memories and emotions which well up when I try to make sense of this unique country, its cultures and people. Esfahan stands out in my mind. The wealth of beautiful and unique historic monuments speaks for itself. Beyond that I found Esfahan to be far more pedestrian friendly than many other Iranian cities and the bazaar with its abundance of expert artisan products with years of tradition behind them is truly remarkable. Perhaps some of my fondest memories are from trips more off the beaten track, to various smaller towns and villages close to Esfahan which boast invaluably precious Islamic architecture, such as

Pir-e Bakran, Natanz, Ardestan or Zavareh. Furthermore, my experiences with some of the people in these places are amongst those which still resonate with me most strongly. A friendly and curious boy in Natanz who wanted to practice a little English and speak to probably the first foreigner he'd ever seen. The old man in Zavareh who showed me the Friday mosque and famous Seljuk mihrabs who led me carefully away from the lads in the Huseiniyeh to show me black and white footage on his phone of when the Shah and his wife visited these priceless sites. ‘Do you remember this? Were you there?’ ‘Yes, of course, I was a school boy, I remember well’, he replied.

The kindness, patience and generosity shown in some of these encounters can truly move you. When I arrived in Na'in, mainly for the purpose of visiting their 1100 year old 'Arab style' mosque I had also heard of the famous wool-weaving cave workshops of the nearby village of Mohamadieh. Especially well known for their sheep and camel wool traditional shepherd cloaks I had already decided I would get one as a kind of novelty present for

my father. Having walked there from Na'in, to which I'd arrived quite late in the day, I was disappointed to find that all the caves were closed. All except one, I quickly discovered, and met Mr Abedini who after briefly showing me how to operate a kilim loom and showing me his scrapbook of friendly comments from visitors all round the world insisted on me accompanying him on the back of his old motorbike. I was swept out into the village's nearby agricultural fields to see an ancient tree and have freshly picked pistachios and cotton stuffed into my hand. Although the villagers are now all Muslim, Mohamadieh has an ancient Zoroastrian heritage and many of the people still speak a rather archaic form of Persian. I was whisked to a beautiful mosque which from its rather strange layout and position of the mihrab had perhaps once been a Zoroastrian temple of some sorts. We then went to a graveyard which turned out to house the entrance to Rigareh water mill, and I was soon deep underground crawling through tiny passages getting a good up-close look at the ancient *qanat* waterways. When we finally went back to Mr Abedini's workshop I explained that I was hoping to buy a traditional cloak.

Unfortunately this being the height of summer, he didn't have any ready made ones. He did however have the right quantity of material and so once again we were back on the bike heading to a friend's house who would hopefully be able to tailor this material and turn it into a cloak overnight. Mr Abedini then dropped me off at my hotel and the next day, not only was the cloak ready but he also took me on a tour of Na'in itself, introduced me to many people and organised my journey onwards to Yazd. This encounter perhaps more than any stays with me and I am still moved by the time and energy that was warmly and generously spent on me even though I showed up late one evening, unannounced and stayed less than 24 hours before moving on. My father is also happy with his cloak.

Due to my love of history and Islamic architecture there were many places I had only dreamed of visiting for years. Indeed one of the highlights of this trip was finally being able to visit places such as Gonbad-e Kavus in Golestan, Soltanieh near Zanjan or the Safavid shrine in Ardabil which had always captivated me but seemed impossibly far and inaccessible. Perhaps the most ambitious visit of

this nature was on my very last day in the country. On Google Maps, the Kharaqan towers, 11th century tombs of two Seljuq princes, did look quite far off the main road between Zanjan and Tehran, although it was difficult to tell how far. I had to get to Imam Khomeini Airport by that evening for a flight in the early hours. The risk seemed worth taking, and although the towers were probably a good three hours off the main road and were a massive detour, it was definitely time well spent. The towers stand in a windswept plain, lonely, evocative and largely forgotten and yet still a marvel to behold. Like a lot of Seljuk architecture, there is an interplay between the relatively stark simplicity of the overall design and complex geometric brickwork. The two sit there, squat yet mysterious, in the barren landscape like barrows or kurgans on the steppe, part of the half forgotten memories and histories of the local countryside. Yet the long journey to reach these sturdy custodians of this ancient landscape is a spectacle in itself, taking you through a world of little villages, open countryside, grape fields, winding roads and stunning scener,y all whilst meeting only three or four

other cars. It is a world few foreigners, and even few Iranians ever see.

I wish to thank the Iran Society for its support, without which this trip simply would not have been possible. Iran is an amazing country, and I could say much more but I have already gone on for far too long. For those who have not had the good fortune to visit Iran, I hope this account sparks their interest somewhat and for those who have been, I hope I have succeeded in stirring some warm recollections of this strange and wonderful land.

Sarah Stewart. *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran. Oral Texts and Testimony*. Vol. 1 Urban Centres.
Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2018. Pp. 440. Notes. Bibliography. Index. €77

Based on a variety of personal testimonies, this work seeks to portray the political position of Zoroastrians in the past century, and their personal views of their religion from the point of view of the faith and its texts, religious practice, historical events, and political organisation. It also covers their relations with each other and with other religious groups, especially Muslims. As to doctrine, there has been a debate over whether Zoroastrianism is a dualistic or monotheistic faith. Ahura Mazda or Ohrmazd is the Wise Lord and Creator of All, but there exists a destructive outside force, Angra Mainyu, which opposes a good life-giving force, Spenta Mainyu. The question is whether Angra Mainyu is separate from, and opposed to, Ahura Mazda, which would imply dualism, or whether the two forces struggle with each other apart from him. The Achaemenid kings (c. 550-330 B.C.) and the Parthian kings (c. 248 B.C. – 224 A.D.) were probably

Zoroastrians, but under the Sasanians (224-651 A.D.) Zoroastrianism became the state religion of Iran. From the time of the Arab conquest of Iran in 651 A.D., Zoroastrianism was a minority religion under state pressure, and its adherents had inferior rights to those of Muslims. However, Islam perceived it as monotheistic, and its sacred texts, including the Yashts, collectively known as the Avesta, as being a book. Therefore, along with Christians, Sabeans and Jews, the Zoroastrians were granted a special status: ahl al-Kitab, or 'people of the book. This gave them the status of Zimmi, or 'protected persons', as well as certain rights under Islamic sovereignty and within the legal system. Since that time Zoroastrian communities have had to adapt to the constraints imposed on them by an Islamic state.

Suffering like other Iranians from the country's decline in the mid-eighteenth century, Zoroastrians migrated to India, in particular Bombay. By the beginning of the Qajar period in Iran (1779-1924) the Zoroastrian population numbered less than 10,000. In 1854 the Parsee Amelioration Society of Bombay sent a representative to

report on the state of Zoroastrianism in Iran. He ascertained that Iranians there had become influenced by the dominant Muslim culture and were practicing the sacrificing of animals at religious ceremonies, and polygamy. A movement for reform consequently began in Bombay, and Iranian Zoroastrianism was duly restored to orthodoxy by the twentieth century. The Constitutional Revolution provided the Zoroastrians with a representative in the Assembly in 1906, which gave them for the first time a public voice in affairs. Under the even more secular regimes of the two Pahlavi Shahs from 1921 to 1979 the Zoroastrians were appointed to posts in government and the armed forces, and their growing prosperity saw the opening of new schools. Secularism in turn permeated the Zoroastrian community with a decline in investment in religious activities and a growth of modern schools, where they mixed with people of other religions. Opportunities opened up for women with the new schools, and with them roles in public life.

The Zoroastrians adopted modern style organisation in the form of councils (including one of priests) and

associations (*anjomans*) in contact with their M.P., and were thus integrated into the political system. After the 1979 Revolution the status of the Zoroastrians was once again subject to Islamic religious law, which meant that though they did not suffer persecution, they were regarded as inferior. As a result, they were excluded from high office and interreligious marriage was forbidden. Despite their disadvantaged position, Zoroastrians remained patriotic Iranians and willingly fought in the Iran- Iraq war of 1980-1988. Gradually, with the relaxation of fundamentalist practice, and the growth as elsewhere of the influence of the internet, Zoroastrians have returned to a position of greater integration into society and politics, and of a shared sense of ethnicity and history, particularly in reading and learning the Shahnameh. In most places, a modern economy has provided them with more variety of employment opportunities, though they still feel disadvantaged in terms of appointment selection.

This book is largely composed of interviews with Zoroastrians in five centres, Kerman (from where many elsewhere originate), Tehran, Ahvaz, Shiraz and Isfahan,

with similar questions being posed at each place. In Tehran, which developed only from c.1800 as a capital, and Ahvaz, where their presence largely grew through oil and mechanized agriculture under Reza Shah, their history is relatively modern, though they had a presence in Khuzestan from the time of Cyrus the Great until the nineteenth century. Ahvaz being a cosmopolitan city, the Zoroastrians are on good terms with the other religious communities. Zoroastrianism was established in Shiraz in Sasanian times, but declined in the nineteenth century. The approximately 200 current residents have developed a substantial library. It was Shah Abbas who brought Zoroastrians to Isfahan as labourers, but they were treated harshly and forced to live outside the city wall. There remain 150 today, mostly descended from migrants from Kerman and Yazd. These latter cities have the most significant populations, apart from Tehran, in the modern period. They were not subject to the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century and therefore became a place of refuge for Zoroastrians from elsewhere after the destruction of their other centres of learning.

There has been a decline in the number of priests coming for training, deriving largely from the greater financial advantages of other occupations. In 2009 female priests were finally allowed, and there are 57 of them today. Their principal festival, as for other Iranians, is Nowruz. For the Zoroastrians it is a time for the lighting of fires on roof tops and complete house cleaning. The birthday of Zoroaster is another important festival.

One of their main preoccupations has been migration. On the one hand Zoroastrians are leaving small towns and villages, and moving to the towns, especially Tehran where the majority, 10,000 to 15,000, of their population live; on the other, a growing number of young Zoroastrians are migrating, especially to America, leading to a decline in the numbers of their religious community. The young are also losing interest in Zoroastrian customs, creating a culture gap between generations, which is reinforced by their greater familiarity with technology.

Asked what they considered to be the essence of their religion all interviewees placed an emphasis on truthfulness and the need to fight deceit. Being a

Zoroastrian, according to one respondent, had nothing to do with rituals, but was about good thoughts. According to another view, the religion should be seen as always evolving and influenced by Zoroaster's advice, 'Listen to what I am saying and do what is good for yourself'. Fire also has a place in Zoroastrianism as giving psychological warmth, and is perceived as having intellectual and philosophical connotations in addition to, as with all humans, a kind of pleasure and happiness.

There was a debate in the interviews on whether the deceased should be placed on a *dakhmeh* (tower of silence, traditionally built away from the town) where their bodies would disintegrate or be consumed by vultures (now much declined in numbers), or whether they should be buried. One interviewee thought burial was more sanitary and offered the consolation of a grave and veneration of the dead; another considered that a *dakhmeh* allowed the bereaved to let go. In practice, urban growth has rendered the erection of *dakhmeh* impracticable nowadays. Zoroastrians have their own shrines, but one in

particularly, the Shahverahram Izad in Kerman, is visited by Zoroastrians, Muslims and Christians.

Currently more religious freedom is now allowed than in the past, and prejudice has declined. According to one interviewee, her father had to swallow his money when he travelled to Yazd so as not to be robbed as a Zoroastrian, and barbers had to hide their religion otherwise they would have had no customers. Attitudes have changed over time, and the education policy of the Islamic Republic has evolved and is currently working in favour of the Zoroastrians. Previously, children did not attend religious classes and were not graded, but they could now attend classes in their own religion and be graded, so one interviewee considered that his children's knowledge of their religion was better than his own.

Zoroastrians set a high value on education. In Kerman, after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, they had trouble building a school because of local opposition, but it was gradually overcome, and designated a national school. It was then given to the city, so that children of other schools came to be educated there, but there were

currently issues with the Ministry of Education over costs. One interviewee in Tehran had to attend a Muslim school nearby, but was not required to attend religious classes. However, he used to sit in on many of them.

On the whole, residents of Tehran tended to be more open-minded on individual choice, considering, for example, that their children should be free to marry whom they wished, including someone from another religion. Interreligious marriages were, however, rare, and one interviewee considered that 'marrying out' was a form of disloyalty in such a small community. Zoroastrians have also suffered from the same emerging problem as elsewhere, namely, that where both parents are working, they have fewer children.

The volume makes a considerable contribution to knowledge of Zoroastrian doctrine, ritual and practice, details of which are outside the scope of this review. Overall, as the product of carefully organised and structured interviews, the book provides a vivid and detailed picture of Zoroastrians' lives, their view of their religion, and how, over time, they have organised to deal

with the state and to survive the political vicissitudes of the country since the early twentieth century. It is at once scholarly to a high standard and engaging to read.

Vanessa Martin

Moya Carey. *Persian Art*: *Collecting the Arts of Iran in the 19th Century*, V&A Publishing, 2017. pp 272. Illus. Notes. Index £40 ISBN 9 781 85177 933 8

The Victoria & Albert Museum, which opened as the South Kensington Museum in 1857, that year of Victorian triumphalism, was founded to show the best examples of decorative arts design from which British designers could learn, and to lift the dismal design standards of the period to a higher aesthetic level. Orientalism, emanating from Empire, was coming into fashion as a form of escapism from the straitjacket of conformity. A small number of enlightened souls took it upon themselves to acquire the best of Persian art to show the way out of dullness and mediocrity. The collection that they formed in a very short space of time became the best public collection of Persian art anywhere. Moya Carey, erstwhile curator of the Persian collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum, now translated to the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, has produced this lavishly illustrated volume that tells the story of how the collection was gathered.

The principal procurers for the museum were Caspar Purdon Clarke, who had been sent to Tehran to design the new British Legation, and Robert Murdoch Smith, who was based in Tehran working for the Indo-European Telegraph, which ran from India through Iran to London. Purdon Clarke, a freemason, in exchange for teaching the use of gelatine moulds for plasterwork to the guild of *ostads* working on the Legation, obtained a fabulous set of architectural drawings directly from the great *ostad* Mirza Akbar, showing his designs for plasterwork and tilework. The architect James Wild, also working on the Legation, then learned a better gelatine formula from these master craftsmen.

Over two periods, 1873-78 and 1883-89, Robert Murdoch Smith, as a sideline from his work on the Telegraph, set about collecting ceramics. His main supplier was Jules Richard, a Frenchman who had made Iran his home. He worked unpaid at the court of Naser ed-Din Shah and made his money from art dealing. At one point he was the subject of a moral scandal, whereupon he took refuge in

the shrine of Shah Abd ul-Azim in Rey and became a Muslim with the name of Mirza Reza.

There was no open market for antiquities, but armies of *dallals* [brokers] knew who had items to sell, whether aristocrats short of cash or mullas in need of money for mosque repairs or charitable works. Many tiles came from Rey, south of Tehran, where they could be picked up off the ground but, as demand grew, if they had not fallen off, tiles were lifted from mosques and shrines. The *dallals* scuttled between the sellers and Jules Richard or Murdoch Smith until deals were done. The actual sellers were known only to the *dallal*, which made provenance vague. In the absence of banknotes and with gold and silver in short supply, ceramics were a fungible repository of wealth. As demand grew for antique pieces, skilled artisans repaired Safavid pieces or created new ones from assorted fragments.

In 1876 the Museum's collection moved on to Qajar brasswork and contemporary ceramics, which were considered inferior to earlier work. The Museum commissioned copies of Safavid works, as did Iranians;

both Victorians and Qajars shared in a spirit of retrospection. From 1884 Murdoch Smith commissioned new ceramics from one Ostad Ali Mohammad Isfahani, at the same time persuading him to write up his technical processes. Going back to architecture, Murdoch Smith commissioned reduced-scale painted canvases representing segments of the tile designs from domes of a number of Safavid monuments, which were produced in long slivers, broad at the base and pointed at the apex which, when repeated, would reproduce the whole dome. All this for the benefit of architects at home.

From ceramics the collection moved on to illuminated manuscripts, the most intriguing of which is an exquisitely illuminated Persian translation of Queen Victoria's Highland Diaries.

Finally, to carpets. The magnificent Ardebil carpet, woven in 1539 for the shrine of Sheikh Safi at Ardebil, with 676 knots per square inch, takes pride of place. Part of the money for it came from the museum, the balance from public subscription. It has been much copied; one copy, woven in 1903 but with a cochineal ground rather

than indigo, was made for the British Legation dining room. Many other carpets were acquired, even fragments of carpets – cheaper than intact pieces of high price – for the particular purpose of improving the dreary designs of English carpets. William Morris was heavily influenced by many of these pieces.

The book is beautifully written and copiously illustrated. Looking at the collection in the museum one would have no idea of the dramas attached to its acquisition. Now that travel to Iran has become problematic, a day in the V&A is a good substitute for going there, but read this book first to appreciate it all the more.

Antony Wynn

Hadi Maktabi. ***The Persian Carpet: The Forgotten Years, 1722-1872,*** Hali Publications Ltd., 2019

The post-Safavid period has long been maligned as a period of downfall and decline, both politically and artistically. In particular, the arts of the Qajar period have been dismissed as being derivative and degenerate. They have most notably been described as 'unimportant', being 'cheap imitations' of both Safavid and European arts and, most scathingly 'almost hilariously bad'. However, thanks to the efforts of a small number of scholars in recent times, this stance has begun to soften. Most recently, the Louvre Lens held a rich and varied exhibition of the arts of 19th century Iran – *L'Empire des Rose*s – which was accompanied by a catalogue rich in details of and appreciation for the art of modern Iran.

In a similar vein, the study of carpets suffers from scholarly bias. As objects, carpets do not fit easily into the wider canon of the Islamic Arts, or Persian Arts more specifically. Long the domain of the market and museums, the academic field of Islamic Art has been slow

to see the potential of carpets as a source of historical interest.

Hadi Maktabi provides a welcome corrective to both of these lacunae in the history of the arts of Iran. Addressing carpet production in Iran during what he terms 'the Forgotten Years' – 1722 to 1872 – Maktabi resurrects this period, and the carpets produced during it, from the scholarly scrapheap. Just as the period following the fall of the Roman Empire, formerly largely referred to as the Dark Ages, has recently been shown to have been far from 'dark', post-1722 Iran was not just a story of death, destruction, and cultural degeneration.

The three groups of primary sources on which Maktabi's research is based – written accounts, artistic depictions, and existing carpets – are knitted seamlessly together to give a coherent and rounded picture of carpet production and use during this period. The documentary evidence is addressed first. The evidence from these sources is then reflected in the depictions of carpets presented in chapter three. Designs are studied in chapter four, while chapter five presents the carpets themselves. The last two chapters

address, in turn, the social and economical roles of these carpets.

From this multi-faceted approach, the work succeeds in painting a vivid and detailed picture of carpet production during this period. Just one example is the so-called ‘lattice carpet’. A circa 1845 depiction of a figure sitting on a lattice design carpet, executed in lacquer on the interior of a mirror case provides one piece of secondary evidence for this typology. As a primary source, we can turn to a carpet in the National Museum of Tehran dated 1172 (1758-59) and attributed to Kerman, providing material evidence for the production of lattice carpets even earlier during the 18th century. This story is also supported by texts which provide further evidence for the production of carpets in Kerman during this period, which attests to the city’s significance as a centre of weaving. Oliver St John, who was working on the telegraph line in Iran in the 1860s left a very useful description of carpet production in Kerman. He wrote: ‘The carpets are made entirely on cotton, woven in by fingers into the upright web. Their manufacture is tedious in the extreme, but they

are beautifully soft and durable'. From Jesuit priests to East India Company staff, we are introduced to a rich tapestry of textual primary sources, as well as to the carpets themselves.

However, it is not only carpets that Maktabi discusses but other related objects too. Felts are featured frequently. The early painting of Fath-'Ali Shah (r.1797-1834) in blue robe and turban now in the British Library will be familiar to many. What might not be so familiar is the glimpse of a felt underneath the carpet on which Fath-'Ali Shah kneels. From underneath the pearl embroidered fabric on which he sits emerges a felt, with some decoration, folded in two underneath him. This helps us to understand that the pearls on which he sits are likely to be sewn on to a thinner textile, rather than a thicker woven fabric. Further evidence of this kind can be gleaned from the presence of *mir-e farsh*, or floor weights, in a number of Qajar paintings. These doorstop-like weights are much more likely to be placed on a textile, liable to fly away or ruck up, rather than on a heavy pile carpet.

Mir-e Farsh
Zinc alloy inlaid with brass and silver
Height.18 cm Diam:21.1 cm
17th century, India (attrib.

The Persian Carpet: *The Forgotten* Years is a lavish tome, featuring hundreds of colour images. It is just one of the many important monographs published by Hali Publications in recent years, produced to the high standard that we have come to expect from this publishing house. The transcriptions and translations of inscriptions on the carpets, presented using gold ink, are particularly welcome and useful for both the specialist and non-specialist reader. But not only does this book look and feel superb, it is of great importance for the study of carpets, as well as for the arts of the 18th and 19th centuries in the Persian, and wider Islamic, world.

Fuchsia Hart

OBITUARIES

Dr Mohammad Ali Ala

Dr Ala (Mike to his friends) was for many years a member of council of this society. He had been associated with the international oil industry for more than 45 years, as an exploration geologist, a consultant and within the field of education and training. He obtained a BSc in Oil Technology and an MSc, PhD and DIC in Petroleum Geology, all from Imperial College, an institution he came to think of as his home from home.

In 1973 he joined Seagull Exploration and was involved in exploration studies and prospect evaluation in Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, the Caribbean and South America. In 1976 he became the company's General Manager in London, responsible for North European and Middle Eastern operations. After Seagull, he joined the academic staff of the Earth Science Department, at Imperial College in 1981. He found the role fulfilling and this was reflected in him rising to the

post of Director of the internationally recognised MSc Petroleum Geoscience Course in 1994. Mike was much admired by several generations of students, both for his personable and supportive nature, the wealth of professional industrial experience he provided, as well as his lecturing skills and dapper dress sense.

Mike published over 60 research and review articles covering the Middle East and Africa. However, his primary interest remained the petroleum geology and the oil industry of his native Iran, a topic he was fluent in. He was on the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Petroleum Geology and Editor in Chief of *Seventy-Five Years of Progress in Oil Field Science and Technology*, published in 1990. He was the author of an Introduction to Petroleum Geoscience, a text book, published by World Scientific / Imperial College Press in 2017 which, he would have hoped will continue to influence and inform future generations of students for years to come.

Since 1982 he had been involved in organising and presenting numerous training programmes in Europe, throughout Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia

for a number of large corporate and academic institutions, allowing him the chance to enjoy one of his other favourite past times, travelling.

Beyond geological evaluation, he was also engaged with the commercial aspects of the oil industry, as advisor and non-executive director on the boards of a number of international oil companies. Outside the oil industry, Mike was a key and active member of the Iran Society, which was founded by his uncle Mirza Ali Khan, Iranian Minister to London, in 1911.

Hormoz Nafici

Dr Leonard Lewisohn

Leonard Lewisohn, known to friends and colleagues as Lenny, died in California on 6 August 2018 at the age of 64. Lewisohn was a well-known and internationally respected scholar in the fields of Sufism and classical Persian literature. Latterly he taught in these specialisms at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies in Exeter, at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral level. He had a wide knowledge of Iranian culture and history, and of world literature, especially poetry.

After finishing his schooling in Barcelona, Lewisohn went to art school in Connecticut in 1970, where he met his future wife, Jane. From there they went travelling, eventually settling in Shiraz in 1973 to study Persian literature and history. This was a happy period in the Lewisohns' life, to which he often referred in later years. He and Jane left Iran reluctantly in December 1978, when revolutionary anti-American hostility began to make conditions untenable.

Over the next few years he continued to study Persian literature and Arabic at Harvard and at UCLA, before starting his PhD at SOAS in 1984 with Turkhan Ganji - *A Critical Edition of the Divan of Maghribi*. Over the same period he produced several translations of works on Sufism for Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications. After 1988 he was an associate editor of the journal *Sufi* for some years, and did some teaching in Oxford, before becoming a Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London in 1998, where he compiled an anthology of esoteric traditions in Islam, taught Persian language courses and a course on Sufism, along with a variety of other projects. In 2004 he was appointed as the Iran Heritage Foundation Fellow in Classical Persian and Sufi Literature at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, as Senior Lecturer.

In his teaching he was diligent beyond the normal level of even the most conscientious academic staff; the notes for guidance at the beginning of courses, and the handouts he gave for each session were copious and he spent a lot of time in preparation to make them as helpful and

comprehensive as he could. He gave his doctoral students a huge amount of help and support, devoting a lot of time to reading through drafts and making suggestions, especially in the run-up to thesis submission.

Lewisohn published a series of important books. He wrote *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: the Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari* (London 1995*),* and edited *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi* (London1994), the huge 3-volume *Heritage of Sufism* (Oxford: Oneworld 1999 – the third volume with David Morgan), *'Attar and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight*, with Christopher Shackle, (London 2006), *The Angels Knocking on the Tavern Door: Thirty Poems of Hafez* (New York 2008 – edited and translated with Robert Bly), *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry* (London 2010), and *The Philosophy of Ecstasy: Rumi and the Sufi Tradition (*Bloomington, Indiana 2014). He also published over 60 academic articles and chapters in edited volumes including journals like *Iranian Studies, Islamic Culture, Iran Nameh, Iran, the Temenos Academy Review, Sufi: A*

Journal of Sufism, *African Affairs* and the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*; as well as for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and the *Encyclopedia of Islam.*

Lewisohn had a deep love of Iran, Iranians, Iranian culture and language. One of the achievements of which he was most proud was the establishment of the Mawlana Rumi Review in 2010, for the publication of which he was responsible, as editor. He also travelled widely in response to invitations to lecture. A theme he often returned to was the longstanding hostility between Sufis and the ulema in Islam.

He was often out of sympathy with the university as an institution, and particularly with the contemporary fashion for presenting the university as a business, but his colleagues and friends all appreciated his integrity and his commitment to the highest academic standards. He wrote, not to fill out a list of publications or to game the metrics for assessing academic performance, but to set forth knowledge he had discovered for the benefit of others, and to give others the benefit of his personal exploration toward the truth. His approach to teaching was based on

the same principles. For pupils and others who knew him, he exemplified, in his own way, an academic ideal.

Written in 2018 by the late Michael Axworthy.

Michael Axworthy

Axworthy read History at Peterhouse, Cambridge before moving on to a successful career at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; he met his wife Sally while they were both working at the British Embassy in Bonn. He subsequently headed the Iran Desk at the FCO between 1998 and 2000, crucial years when a thaw in Anglo-Iranian relations became a very real possibility. He always retained a passion for scholarship and eventually decided to leave the FCO for a career as a writer and academic, combining at this stage, his growing – and undiminished – love for Iran, with his natural historical curiosity. It was a bold move which was to yield spectacular results. His first book, *The Sword of Persia*, a new biography of Nader Shah (2006), drew on his intimate knowledge of military history to provide a fascinating and nuanced perspective of the conqueror and the consequences of his rule for Iran. This was swiftly followed in 2008 by his single volume history of *Iran – Empire of the Mind* – which again perfectly encapsulated and exhibited the fluency of his pen and his ability to collate and analyse vast amounts of information, presenting them in an accessible and

entertaining manner and thus reaching a wider readership beyond the confines of the academy.

By now Axworthy had secured a position at Exeter University where he headed its new Centre for Persian & Iranian Studies, to be followed by an award of a PhD by publication by his alma mater. His new responsibilities slowed but by no means stopped his tenacious capacity for producing books and in 2013 he published his study of the Islamic Republic, *Revolutionary Iran*, which was again exceptionally well received. Further important contributions to the field were to follow including, *Iran: What Everyone Needs to Know*, published in 2017, synthesizing much of his long accumulated wisdom about the country, followed in 2018 by the edited volume, *Crisis, Collapse, Militarism and Civil War: The History and Historiography of 18th-century Iran*, arising from the conference he organised in Exeter in 2013. More recently he had returned to policy-orientated work with his Westphalia project for the Middle East, which he convened with his old college Peterhouse.

Michael Axworthy retained his passion for Iran through thick and thin; he was in every sense,‘Irandoust’.

Ali Ansari

Bruce Wannell

An autodidact polyglot, translator, aesthete, writer, pianist, gardener, traveller, sought-after dragoman and an inimitable boon companion, Bruce devoted much of his life to studying, exploring and promoting the Persianate world – particularly Iran and Afghanistan – as well as India, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Mesopotamia, and East Africa.

After taking his degree at Oxford he spent an unhappy two months working in the Inland Revenue before embarking on a largely penniless life of letters and Ibn Battuta-like travel. As would a medieval man of learning and culture, he would turn up anywhere between the Highlands of Scotland and India, to be made welcome in palace or village hovel. Duchesses and dervishes were all one to him. He would entertain his hosts with poetry, music and slightly salacious gossip and move on after three days or, if they were blessed, would honour his hosts for three years. On the rare occasions that he came into money through inheritance he would blow it all on a grand house party for his benefactors in a villa in Tuscany.

Bruce loved, and knew his Persian poetry well. He contributed to a guide book on Iran, but his most notable work is *Persian Poems: Selections, Renditions, and Translations*, written with Robert Maxwell, from which they both read extracts at the Society's Christmas party of 2012. Bruce's long introduction to this privately published book, in which he discusses the interpretation and metre of Persian poetry, is exemplary. He also translated many Persian sources for William Dalrymple's books on India and Afghanistan.

Bruce learned Persian while teaching English at Isfahan at the time of the Revolution, after which he spent some years working out of Peshawar on aid projects in Afghanistan, where he converted to Islam. He went on to work for the BBC Pashto and Dari programmes in Islamabad, indulging his mischievous genius by scripting racy soap operas.

Anywhere in Iran, in places grand or obscure, it was sufficient to mention Bruce's name for many doors to be opened. Unburdened by wife, children or even a job, Bruce was able to devote himself to a life of culture and

friendship. The nearly two hundred souls from many walks of life who gathered to celebrate his life at York are testimony to his gift for making and keeping friends.

Antony Wynn