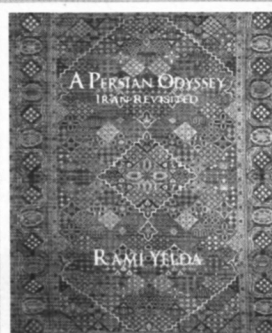




a painting by Nasser Ovissi



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What Fruits & Nuts ... – p. 53



Parvis Shahriari, mathematician

# Persian Heritage

Vol. 11, No. 43

Fall 2006

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

As a routine, for the last eleven years of *Persian Heritage*, the editorial has been the last article written before it is put to press. This issue had to be particularly timely because it coincides with the eleventh anniversary of the magazine. On October 7, 2006 the friends of *Persian Heritage* organized a celebration which will honor the magazine, men and women who have served the Persian and world community. Because of them, our readers, subscribers, advertisers and dedicated employees, this magazine continues to survive. We hope all of you will continue to use *Persian Heritage*, *Gooya Persian Heritage* and our monthly publication, as a tool of communication.

One reason for a slight delay of this issue's editorial was due to the daily events unfolding in the Middle East and the possibility of a decision for someone to push a button that would destroy Iran or endanger their independence and peace. While destructive bombs and missiles took the lives of innocent victims on both sides, destroying their homes and businesses and leaving them homeless and without income, the underlying reason for this war began to fester. Rumors and discussions of the wars purpose as a prelude to an attack on Iran became stronger and more believable. The flames of this last altercation dimmed on August 14, 2006 a few minutes after midnight *Eastern Standard Time*. To date August 17, 2006 both sides have abided and respected the cease fire agreement and removed their artilleries. The flame against Iran, however, remains intense and the propaganda campaign by the leaders in Iran and the West are its fuel. Once again the world fears another military conflict. What will the future bring, how will the next few months play out and what is to be written next?

All Persians regardless of where they live and what religion they practice are nervous and frightened of Iran's future. Interestingly enough despite the negative campaign against the country which has labeled Iran and its citizens as "terrorists and terrorist supporters," on one occasion Iranians were described as historically being generous and humanitarian. WE ARE FAMOUS for being known as "peace loving" and a group, gentle by nature and who thrive on the beauty of poetry and literature. I am puzzled these days, however, is this just a mask and are we really hungry for war?

Iran thinks since it now has large sums of money because of the oil prices that it is equal to other world powers. They are beginning to involve themselves in the cold wars that exist (with North Korea, China and Russia.) Instead of using this surplus money on political warfare wouldn't the better decision be to develop schools and roads, restore factories and farms and bring down unemployment therefore decreasing the level of poverty? Isn't it sad that in a country so rich in resources the income of a handicapped and honorable professor is \$250 (= 250,000 toman) per month. Instead of carrying suitcases of cash from city to city promising to feed the poor for 10 to 20 days, wouldn't time be better spent by supplying sources of lasting income and improving their domestic infrastructure? How much more can the people of this country endure?

Again Iranians are a gentle and peace loving people, despite the harsh eight year war with Iraq which took millions of innocent lives and left millions of its youth disabled. After so many years of mental anguish and physical and emotional exhaustion Iran should be spending their energies and resources on regaining the people's trust and unite its people for the construction of a better future. With every passing day they must support their people, not turn away. The government needs their support in order to keep the integrity and independence of Iran especially when there is imminent danger and desire for Iran to be divided. To build up Iran is the dream of every Iranian. The task is not insurmountable they have the financial ability, the intelligence, and human power that if used in the proper will enable them to keep their integrity.

It is time to learn a lesson from their Turkish neighbors. They are a country with little natural resources. Each day they are benefiting from the turmoil of their neighbors. With the support of the West in the 21st Century they will enter the European Union. To date they have abolished the execution law and given their people more freedom. When will Iran's leaders and others in the Middle East wake up and realize that dignity and power can no longer be won on the battlefield? It is a respect that can only come from reasonable negotiations of all parties and reasonable negotiation is not provided by a



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show of arms and a loss of lives. Look at public world opinion by the citizens of this war, what has either nation gained? Respect of ones leaders is not measured by the number of deaths in battle but rather by true public opinion.

Why are Iran's leaders not putting more energy into developing a form of democracy for its people rather than weapons. Why not provide their youth with the ability to voice their opinion and hold public debate rather than throw them into prison for stating their opinions. People intelligent as Iranians cannot be manipulated through torture and starvation. They want to gain back the prosperity, peace and respect they once held. They want to practice their religion as they please and not be forced to wear or not wear a hajib. Why are the leaders of Iran and other similar nations fearful of democracy? They shouldn't fear the desires of their citizens. If they are truly acting for the good of the nation and their people, they will never be forced from power.

It frightens me that my grandchildren may never have the opportunity to see one of the countries of their heritage. My four year old grandson came to me the other day with a globe in his hand. "Here pappa, show me Iran!" I took his little finger in my hand and we traveled from Teheran to Shiraz then to Mashad, the Persian Gulf and finally to the Caspian Sea. He turned and said "When I grow up will you take me there, pappa?" I looked at him and asked him why he wanted to visit Iran to which he replied that the Iranians are very nice and beautiful and the mountains and the buildings are colorful and beautiful and the music is happy and the food is delicious!" I smiled and asked how he knew this, to which he answered, "Because my mommy and my Bibi (grandma) are Iranian and they are beautiful and my grandma makes me Iranian food and shows me pictures!" I took that little boy in my arms and held him tight. I wanted to shout yes Iran is beautiful as are its people, inside and out, and yes, pappa wants to take you there when you grow up. But I also did not want to make a promise to him that may be impossible to keep and he was too young and innocent to be exposed to the ugly side of reality. Though I tried to conceal my sadness. My tears flowed and soaked his tiny head. "Why are you crying pappa?" I had no answer so I encouraged him to play with another toy. I needed time to compose myself and release my disappointment, sadness, anger and fear I had for the political leaders of the world causing the innocence of so many to be destroyed.

My relief was short lived as yet another television program began to describe Iran and Iranians as "terrorists." Once again the innocent would fall victim to journalistic politics. Without becoming occupied, without becoming a puppet of any other nation Iran could be again a shining star in the Middle East. The elements are all there intelligence, natural resources, pride and a sense of nationalism. These together could support rather than endanger their independence. No Iranian in the world wants to see Iran become another Yugoslavia or lose more of its talented youth.

Though there is so much more I have left to say the space I have in this issue limits me. But I thank all of you for listening to my tortured soul, heart and mind. May our future as a group, may the future of that nation we all once called home be filled with peace and prosperity and may the wonderful dreams we dare to dream become realities.

*Shahrokh Alavi*

## SLOW DANCE

Have you ever watched kids  
On a merry-go-round?  
Or listened to the rain  
Slapping on the ground?  
Ever followed a butterfly's erratic flight?  
Or gazed at the sun into the fading night?  
You better slow down.  
Don't dance so fast.  
Time is short.  
The music won't last.

Do you run through each day  
On the fly?  
When you ask "How are you?"  
Do you hear the reply?  
When the day is done!  
Do you lie in your bed  
With the next hundred chores  
Running through your head?  
You'd better slow down  
Don't dance so fast.  
Time is short.  
The music won't last.

Ever told your child,  
We'll do it tomorrow?  
And in your haste,  
Not see his sorrow?  
Ever lost touch,  
Let a good friendship die  
Cause you never had time  
To call and say, "Hi"  
You'd better slow down.  
Don't dance so fast.  
Time is short.  
The music won't last.

When you run so fast to get somewhere  
You miss half the fun of getting there.  
When you worry and hurry through your day,  
It is like an unopened gift....  
Thrown away.  
Life is not a race.  
Do take it slower  
Hear the music  
Before the song is over

This is a poem written by a special girl who will soon leave this world due to cancer. This young girl has 6 months left to live, and as her dying wish, she wanted to send a letter telling everyone to live their life to the fullest, since she never will.

Dr. Dennis Shields, Professor

Department of Developmental and Molecular Biology (New York)

# AN AMERICAN WOMAN IN IRAN: THE CULTURE

By Janet Larsen

[www.theglobalist.com](http://www.theglobalist.com)

[www.earthpolicy.org](http://www.earthpolicy.org), Sept. 23, 2005

Images of crowds chanting “death to America” have engrained within Americans the notion that Iranians do not like them. But on a recent trip to Tehran for an international environmental conference, Janet Larsen found that this was not always the case. While there is no love lost between their governments, the Iranian and U.S. people have much more in common than they know.

After the close of the United Nations Environmental Programme conference, several other participants and I piled into a taxi to go to the southern part of the city.

The taxi sped in and out of the harrowing traffic, passing ornate gates partially hiding manicured gardens on one block and rundown houses on the next, a strip of shops bursting with bicycles, an old railroad station, public parks with flowers and fountains and many a tall building adorned with murals of the country’s supreme religious leaders.

From the diverse storefronts, I got the impression that one can easily buy almost anything in Tehran, except perhaps, alcohol. One shop even showcased glamorous sleeveless Western-style white wedding dresses, though it wasn’t clear where one would be able to wear such a revealing ensemble.

## DINING IN IRAN

Our final destination was a traditional Iranian restaurant. We were ushered into the beautifully appointed dining room replete with hanging plants, paintings, musical instruments and platters piled high with fresh fruits and vegetables.

We removed our shoes and sat cross-legged on a raised seated area covered with an elegant Persian carpet. One of the servers brought tea, dates, and almond cookies and offered around a yogurt-based drink called doogh, an Iranian favorite.

## NO DANCING

I graciously tried the salty yeasty concoction, but found its taste to be one that neither I nor most of the other Westerners had acquired.

The former U.S. Embassy was the site of the CIA-engineered 1953 coup d’état that toppled the Mohammad Mosaddegh government.

While we waited for our main course, a band played traditional folk music. Drawn into the energy of the lively tunes, one of the patrons up front bobbed up and down to the beat until a member of the restaurant staff came up behind him and rested his hands on the gentleman’s shoulders, an apologetic expression on his face.

Not a word was exchanged, but the message was clear. One of my dinner



partners, an American who had been living in Tehran for half a year, also caught the interaction and explained that the owner most likely did not mind dancing himself, but that having patrons dance could bring trouble to his establishment.

He thought that forbidding Iranians to dance was tantamount to stopping them from breathing. Apparently, private parties now served as the outlet for those without the constitution to stay still.



Janet Larsen in Iran

## BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

My visit the next day to the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi’s summer residence, now a museum complex, reminded me of a time when dancing was more in political favor.

Inside his White and Green Palaces were finely carpeted rooms and mirrored halls. Outside the White Palace, however, two giant bronze boots were all that remained of an immense statue of the Shah himself that was severed after the revolution.

## THE FORMER U.S. EMBASSY

The grounds around the palaces were immaculately kept, complete with narrow tree-lined drives and aquamarine peacocks. Replicas of dams, canals and water wells used for irrigation — very important for this partly arid country — were displayed outside the museum of water works.

The military museum showcased tools of war, ranging from a primitive wooden warship to a cannon inscribed in both Persian and Greek script to propeller planes and camouflaged tanks. Iranian soldiers patrolling the grounds with their machine guns made the experience all the more authentic.

It wasn’t the last I would see of the soldiers. On my final day in Tehran I paid a visit to the old U.S. Embassy,

now affectionately called the U.S. Den of Espionage. This complex was the site of the CIA-engineered 1953 coup d'état that toppled the Mohammad Mossadegh government — and, for the 25 years following it, was the base of U.S. support for the last Shah.

Then starting in November of 1979, after the March election of Ayatollah Khomeini as the Supreme Leader of the world's first Islamic Republic, the Embassy became the holding center for the 52 American hostages kept for 444 days. The building now houses the Sepah, hard-line revolutionary guards.

### THE MURALS

What they see on entering and leaving the complex, and what people passing by cannot possibly overlook, are the brightly colored murals painted on the high walls around the former U.S. Embassy. Many Iranians seemed embarrassed by the paintings that displayed in no uncertain terms distaste for the United States.

### A CONTRADICTING SIGHT

There was a portrayal of the Statue of Liberty with a skull in place of her face,

a gun painted with the red, white, and blue of the American flag and epithets wishing death to America in both English and Farsi. Many Iranians seemed embarrassed by the paintings that displayed in no uncertain terms distaste for the United States.

The old U.S. seal that had once been proudly displayed at the gate was sanded down until practically illegible. Though I had been warned against taking photos in the area as it was one of the few places where visitors had had cameras confiscated, I didn't need film to record the sight to memory — a sight that contrasted so sharply with the gracious welcome I had received from all I met.

On my last evening in Tehran, I met with Mrs. Mallah, the founder of one of Iran's largest environmental non-governmental organizations, the Women's Society Against Environmental Pollution (WSAEP).

At 85 years old, Mrs. Mallah is still leading tree-planting expeditions into the hills. She and her husband, Mr. Abolhasani, welcomed me into their lovely home on a winding narrow street away from the bustle of the major thoroughfares of

northern Tehran.

### CONVERSATIONS

I sipped tea and nibbled on pistachios and gaz, a nougaty treat from the city of Esfahan, while they displayed photos from WSAEP events. Mrs. Mallah humbly shared some of the successes of her organization's environmental education outreach to children, teens, and adults. Mr. Abolhasani was less tentative about singing praises of his wife and her work. We talked of the environment, politics, literature, history, and gardening. By half past ten at night we were seated around the dining table laden with homemade soup, yogurt, meat, delicious thin flatbread, and a plate piled with radishes and fresh green herbs.

### SOUTH TO ESFAHAN

After more inspiring conversation, I thanked the wonderful couple for a lovely evening, tied on my headscarf and slipped on my shoes to head back to the hotel. I caught two hours of sleep before I was to make my way by plane about 400 kilometers (250 miles) south of Tehran, to the ancient city of Esfahan.

## Best Wishes to *Persian Heritage*

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# SIR PERCY SYKES

**K.C.I.E., C.M.G., C.B. (1867-1945)**

PART II

**Antony Wynn**

**M**uhammad Ali Shah was finally pushed into granting a new Constitution. Having succeeded, the Young Persians of Meshed were, however, no angels. They asked a respectable merchant to donate funds to the new Assembly. When he politely asked them how they would spend the money, they shot him. They then tried to force the Governor-General to resign. To prevent Dabizha from taking advantage of all this anarchy, Sykes called a meeting in very dramatic circumstances, at the British Consulate. He gathered all the parties involved: the Governor-General, Dabizha, the two leading mujtahids of the Shrine, and the young revolutionaries, and brought them all to an agreement. It was at this point in his career, more than at any other, that Sykes showed his talent for reconciling apparently irreconcilable parties of Persians. It was a diplomatic triumph and Dabizha had to back down.

In the spring of 1909 the Nationalists forced Muhammad Ali Shah to abdicate. He left Persia for Odessa and was succeeded by his son Ahmad Shah, who was only fourteen at the time. Two years later Dabizha recruited Yusef Herati, "a notorious ruffian", to organize riots in support of the exiled Shah, who was of course a Russian puppet. Muhammad Ali soon landed in Persia and sent telegrams to the Governor-General of Meshed, and the head of the Shrine, telling them to surrender. The worried chief of the Persian telegraph office brought the telegrams to Sykes, who told him not to deliver them. Sykes was tapping the Russian consulate telephone throughout and, in a bizarre twist to the story, discovered that Muhammad Ali had promised Dabizha a large sum of money if he retrieved his throne.

The British government protested to St. Petersburg about Dabizha and the Russian Foreign Secretary told him to stop agitating for the ex-Shah. Dabizha ignored the order and got his man Yusef Herati to collect a huge armed mob inside the Shrine, and they then demanded the return of Muhammad Ali.

The next day, on 31st March 1912, in defiance of any sort of logic, Russian artillery bombarded the shrine, the most sacred site in Persia. The infantry then moved in, shot all those who could not find cover and looted the Shrine of its treasure, its carpets and its priceless manuscripts.

Extraordinarily, there was no reaction from the Persians to this sacrilege. One would have expected them to cut every Russian throat, but they were totally cowed by the scale of the outrage. The motive for the Russian bombardment was a mystery until Sykes's agent inside the Russian consulate told him that Dabizha had done it in a fit of fury at being thwarted in his attempts to restore the exiled Shah. Sykes then discovered that Muhammad Ali had signed a secret treaty with the Russians, agreeing to hand over the whole of Khorasan to them. The Legation refused to believe it

until Sykes produced a copy of it. This finally persuaded the Foreign Office that the Russians had all along regarded their agreement with the British as no more than a piece of paper.

In 1915 Sykes was sent to relieve George Macartney, the consul at Kashgar in Chinese Sinkiang, who had had no home leave for twelve years. Turkish speaking Kashgar was a sensitive listening post between Russia, China and India. During the Great War, Turkey used Chinese Turkistan as a base to stir up the Muslims on the borders of India and in Russian Turkistan. Evelyn, with her siring of small children, saw it as beyond the call of duty to go, so he sent for Ella to come out and keep house for him again.

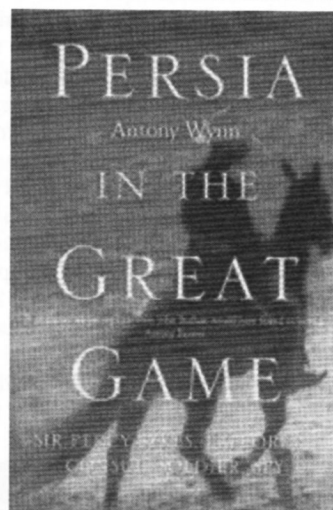
Social life among the Europeans in Kashgar was limited. There were a dozen Russians and some gloomy and teetotal Swedish missionaries. The Russians were extremely convivial, although a trifle trying for Ella to entertain, since their idea of the proper hour to end a decent dinner party was at five in the morning.

It was not long before a party of Turks arrived, heading for Afghanistan. Sykes and the Russian consul, acting together, arranged for the local governor to arrest them. This tiny move in the 'Great Game' amounted to no more than the swatting of a passing fly. Without resolute action it might have led to an anti-British uprising in India. These Turks were not horse traders.

In May 1915 the Russian Cossacks on the border arrested another party of Turks. Two months later the Turks tried again. This time they came to open a religious school, but the Kashgar merchants were against the idea of education that they could not control. They paid the mullas to denounce the Turks and forced the Chinese to close the school. The bazaar seethed with rumours of Turkish plots.

In June of 1915 Sykes took Ella up into the Pamirs, for there were passes into Russia to be mapped. Russia was an ally for the moment but might not always remain so. They travelled in high country. The valley floors were higher than the top of the Alps and there were Marco Polo sheep to be shot. Sykes's stalker was a splendid Kirghiz who took Sykes off for three days and they came back with a pile of Poli strapped to their yaks. Ella was left in camp to search for edelweiss and gentians.

Riding yaks, they went on up to the foot of the glacier of Muztagh Ata, led by their Kirghiz guide. Further than this the guide refused to go, for the Kirghiz believed Muztagh Ata to be haunted by fairy camels of super natural whiteness, and by mys-



terious drummers, which were probably just the sound of rocks shattering in the cold. The guide was keen to get down and led Ella's yak hurtling down precipitous scree to the bottom of the valley. This time the normally imperturbable Ella was really afraid that her yak would fall and hurl itself and her to destruction, but it never lost its footing.

In November the Macartneys returned and the Sykeses made their way back through Russia to England and the war that had broken out in Europe. To his frustration, he was put in charge of troop movements at Southampton. Later, a call went out for interpreters for the Indian troops at the front and he was sent to France, still as a non-combatant. In the following year a call came for him to return to Persia.

In 1908 a Yorkshire man had found oil in the mountains of the south-west of Persia. In 1909 the Royal Navy had converted

from coal to oil, so that when war broke out in 1914 the security of the oilfields of south Persia had become of some importance. About two years before the war, the Germans started plotting with the Turks to stir up an Islamic revolt against the British in India and sent agents into Persia to stir up the democrats and nationalists against the British. Their most effective agent was Wassmuss. In November 1915 Wassmuss got the gendarmes of Shiraz to arrest the entire British colony – Consul, Bank manager and all – and march them down the mountains towards Bushire. He met them at the foot of the mountains, where he was living in a mud fort belonging to the chief of the Tangistanis – a tribe of outlaws who had always resisted any official Persian or British presence in their hills and welcomed Wassmuss's assistance – and there he kept them prisoner for nine months. Something had to be done and the only person with sufficient knowledge of Persia to do it was Sir Percy Sykes.

In March 1916 Sykes was sent out to raise a force to restore order in the South and clear out the German agents. The force was to be called the South Persia Rifles (SPR), for it was to be theoretically a Persian force, not a British force. Although the Persian Prime Minister agreed to it, the Democrats and nationalists, who were supported by the Germans, were not surprisingly, opposed to it. Sykes landed at Bandar Abbas, with three British officers, three Indian officers, twenty Indian NCOs and a cavalry escort of twenty-five Central India Horse. With his old friend the local governor he set up a base camp and announced that he was raising an army. The local landowners, who of course all knew Sykes and were fed up with all the tribal raiding, were delighted. Within days they had sent him three hundred men.

Word spread quickly that 'the Great Consul' was recruiting

and the size of the force grew in the telling. The Governor of Bandar Abbas, as he took his pipe of opium in the evening with his friends, multiplied the 300 to 3000, and his son the Governor of Minab up the road multiplied them again to 30,000. It was all a superb bluff and the German agents, who had kicked out the British bankers and consuls from Yazd, Kerman and Bam fled to join Wassmuss at Shiraz.

The SPR was rapidly built up, with supporting troops from the Indian Army, and set off inland. Three months after Sykes had landed, they reached Kennan. The Telegraph, the Imperial Bank of Persia and the Consulate opened their doors again. A large base was established and recruitment to the SPR began in earnest, with a plan to raise 11,000 men. With Kerman secure Sykes was ready to head for Shiraz which was the real trouble spot. But first he marched his force to Isfahan in the Russian zone. And

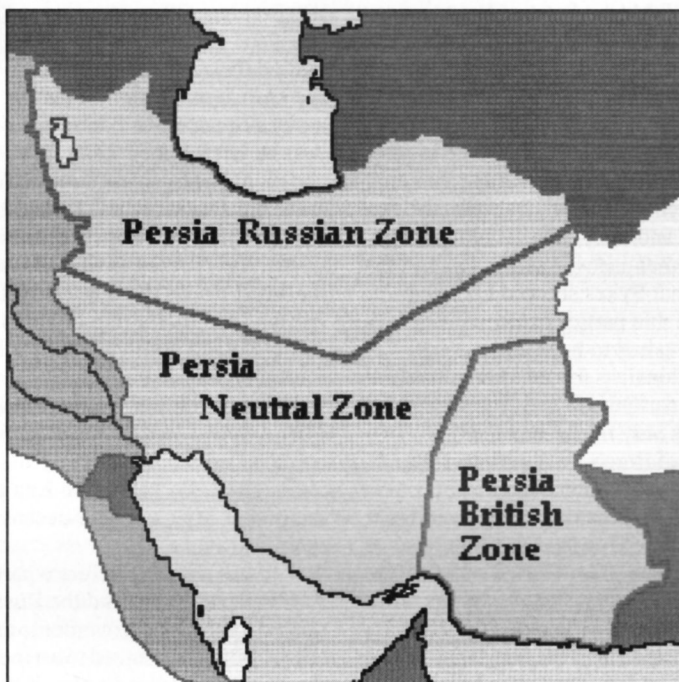
there, in the main square, he held a huge joint parade with the Russians, with spectacular gallop-pasts by the Indian cavalry and the Cossacks. He had a good political reason for this: The Persians had been in the habit of playing the Russians off against the English for years and this was a very public demonstration that the two were now allies.

The British Legation put pressure on the Shah to appoint Sykes's old friend Farman Farma, who was now Prime Minister, as Governor-General of Shiraz. And so it was that in November 1916, after a round about march of a thousand miles from Kerman, and 23 years after their first meeting, Sykes entered Shiraz with Prince Farman Farma once more at his side.

Three problems faced them. The most immediate

one was what to do with the six thousand remaining members of the gendarmerie. They had not been paid for months, were undisciplined, full of pro-German nationalists, and would soon be forced to turn to highway robbery just to live. Sykes took the bold decision to take them into the SPR. The second problem was the German agents in Shiraz. Farman Farma quickly arrested them all, except for Wassmuss, who was something of a Houdini. The third problem was the Qashqai tribe. They spent the winter around Firuzabad, to the south of Shiraz and in the spring they came up through Shiraz to summer quarters in the mountains below Isfahan. They lived by preying on the settled villages they passed through and by exacting protection money from the merchants bringing goods up from Bushire. This road was no more than a precipitous mule track through a series of mountain ranges and was ideal bandit country. The Qashqai chief could call on 5000 armed horsemen and had no interest in either the British or the Persians imposing their law on his territory – and Wassmuss was his friend.

The SPR managed to put an end to tribal raiding over most



Iran's map 1910s

of the province of Fars, but they never got control of the road from Bushire to Shiraz, which was controlled at the Shiraz end by the Qashqai chief Saulat ud-Dowleh. Sykes had to come to an understanding with him and went out to meet him. They arrived at a 'friendly agreement', not unconnected with money, which promised to improve matters. Farman Farma however, was not included in this arrangement and he promptly protested to the Persian Government against Saulat's presumption in dealing directly with the British and at the same time denounced him to the Democrat party as being in British pay. The Persian government then encouraged sedition in the SPR and told Saulat to wipe them out. Wassmuss came up from the coast and went to work on Saulat as well. Nonetheless, the SPR and the Indian troops, albeit at great expense, managed to keep control of Shiraz and suppress tribal raiding in the province, blowing up robber forts as they went. The official history gives the details, but there is one incident which it does not cover fully and is worth recounting, because it shows the importance of having proper local knowledge.

It occurred in May 1918 and it led to full-scale tribal war. There was an SPR garrison, the last post on the road to Bushire, at the village of Khan-e Zenyan, nineteen miles west of Shiraz and it was commanded by one Captain Will. He arrested a small party of passing Qashqai because he thought they had stolen two donkeys from the SPR. The Qashqai khan, according to custom, sent a courteous message asking for their release, but Captain Will, ignorant of local custom, discourteously refused. The Qashqai surrounded the post to rescue their kinsmen. An SPR force came out from Shiraz, killed fifteen of the Qashqai and took thirty-six prisoners, including the khan's two nephews. This was too much for the Qashqai. Saulat moved his camp close to Shiraz and sent five thousand armed horsemen to surround the SPR post. In Shiraz itself the Democrats instigated the mullas to start anti-British disturbances and proclaim throughout the mosques, the tea-houses and the bazaars that the Qashqai had defeated the British. To the south-east, the Sheikh of Firuzabad declared a jihad.

This was the worst crisis of Sykes's career. He sent out 1600 Baluchi Infantry and Burma Mounted Rifles, and for fourteen hours they fought the 5000 Qashqai until Saulat retreated. He had lost 200 dead and about 700 wounded, with two British officers and eighteen Indians killed. The SPR garrison at Khan-e Zenyan mutinied and Captain Will and his sergeant were killed. All of this had been over two donkeys! As always in Persia, there are several explanations for this extraordinary incident. Sykes was convinced, almost to the stage of paranoia, that the whole thing had been set up by the Persian Minister of the Interior, who was being paid by the Germans. He also believed that Saulat had engineered the whole affair to frighten the British into paying him an even bigger subsidy.

The truth of the matter, which came out fifty years after the event in an interview with Saulat's son, was quite different. His story was that the Qashqai were on migration with their women and flocks and were clearly not a raiding party. Far from stealing the two donkeys, they had come to return them. If only Captain Will had come to an arrangement over the donkeys and treated the khan with proper respect, there would have been no trouble. But far more serious than the insult to the khan was that the fact that the SPR had laid hands on some of the Qashqai women and Saulat's wife had sworn to divorce him unless he took revenge. The women and the hot headshad pushed him into action, but he could have held them back if only the British had just left him and

his territory alone. He just could not see what business the British had on his territory. The SPR carried on policing and building roads until all operations in Persia were brought to an end by the influenza outbreak of 1918, which wiped out thousands. Everyone was affected and the SPR lost many men. The war had come to an end and the country just collapsed.

The occupation of South Persia by the SPR was controversial and heavily criticised. What had Sykes achieved? He had dispelled the German threat, and highway robbery, which had been a real problem, had been all but eliminated. He had created a disciplined force for internal security, and, in a country where there had been only mule tracks, he had organized the SPR engineers to build one thousand miles of motorable roads. When the war was over, London decided that there was no more need for Sykes so he was recalled. On his way home he passed through Kennan for the last time. The SPR garrison put on a parade for him, but this time the crowds did not turn out. The mood had changed and the nationalists now had the upper hand. It was time for him to leave.

Having made an enemy of Curzon, Sykes found that his career was at an end. He spent the rest of his life in semi-academic pursuits, writing books on history and early travellers in the East, and giving lectures. For a time he took his family to live in Switzerland and France, where life was cheaper. In 1931 they returned to England, where he divided his time between golf and the Athenaeum. He served as Honorary Secretary of the Royal Central Asian Society. In 1940, at the end of a lecture that he had given to a joint meeting of the Society and the East India Association, Sir Michael O'Dyer, an ex-governor of the Punjab, was assassinated by one Udham Singh. Sykes, aged 73, charged at the Indian and floored him, holding him pinned until he could be arrested. The newspapers of the following day gave glowing tributes to his heroism, but he was mortified that he had been unable to save O'Dwyer.

In 1945, on a very hot day, Sykes came up to the Athenaeum from Sunningdale. There were no taxis, so he decided to walk from Waterloo, carrying his bag. Close to his club he collapsed and, a few hours later, died in hospital. He was able to ring his wife and tell her that he was grateful for having had a good life. After his death his family endowed the Sykes Medal in his memory, to be awarded by the Royal Central Asian Society for contribution towards understanding of the East.

Sir Percy Sykes never ceased to profess his admiration for the people and culture of Persia. In none of his writings, whether private or public, did he ever disparage the Persians, as did so many of his contemporaries. On the contrary, he loved Persia. After all, it had given him a home for the best part of 25 years.

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## Interview with **ABBAS MILANI**

Part II

**Shahrokh Ahkami**

*Continuation is there any conspiracy here?*

I do not understand why Alam and Ayadi did not tell the Shah about his illness, nor did a French physician tell him or Safavian (an absentee physician.) In her memoirs his wife, Farah found out about his illness two years later, this is astonishing because these people made a decision for a country.) You can see that their act went against the true culture of Iran.

In Alam's autobiography he stated that he did not tell Farah because she was a woman and women had no place in politics.

*Ayadi later stated that the Shah was mentally ill did Ayadi affect his mental problem?*

I think Alam and Ayadi had the most important responsibility. If they told Farah it was possible that Iran could have had a different outcome. When Ardeshir Zahedi heard about the Shah's illness his first reaction was to tell the public. He felt that Iran's people would never have thrown out the Shah under his condition. The sympathy of the people would have been important! By not telling them the outcome is unknown.

There is another criticism and that is the Shah's first reaction to leave the country. As we know between 1941 and August 1953 (Mordad 25, 1332) the Shah went to Ramsar and Italy. During this period there was a minimum of five more times that the Shah wanted to leave Iran. Evidence of this is contained in documents of England, the United States and in the memoirs of Golshaeaan.

*Is it possible that the Shah*

*did not want to remain in his position?*

I think that you may be correct. I think he lost interest in the power of his throne or to be a king? It is evident especially when the country fell under so much criticism. In 1941 he wanted to go with his father but Golshaeaan and Foroghi convinced him to remain in Iran. Later in the fight with Ghavam in a minimum of two times he stated that he would leave. This same thing occurred with Mossadegh. The first time the people would not allow him to go because they loved him, and the second time his decision was reversed by the ambassadors of England and the United States. In 1961 on the day the teachers went on strike and the cabinet collapsed, Khanali was murdered. The U. S. embassy documents showed that the Shah on that day made several attempts to leave Iran.

When Kennedy became President he pressured the Shah to extend more freedom to the people. In a number of documents I found that the Shah said "if you put me under pressure to make these changes, I will definitely leave." The Shah always walked away from problems and criticisms.

*With this character and the fact that he wanted everything under his control during Hoveyda period this does not make sense?*

When the Shah returned from Italy there was almost an immediate conflict between him and General Zahedi, because Zahedi wanted to become a powerful Prime Minister like Mossadegh. In the following weeks they did everything possible to oust Zahedi from power. Finally he was successful and sent him out of the country.

This clearly showed the Shah's concern about a coup d'etat. This is interesting if in fact Zahedi wanted a coup d'etat he could have done so easily on Mordad 28th 1332 (August 1953).

On the afternoon of that day Zahedi got control of the radio station. He wanted to send a telegram to the Shah telling him that he took the power for the Shah. Zahedi's friends told him that he should not send such a telegram at that time because they felt that the Shah would come to power and throw out Zahedi and his followers. Zahedi however responded that he had already pledged his loyalty to the Shah and immediately sent the telegram to him.

After the Shah received the telegram he returned to Iran where he spoke to the U.S. ambassador at the airport. During the conversation he told the ambassador that he made the cabinet against him and asked why they put Amini as Prime Minister. The ambassador responded to him that he was incorrect in his assumption.

*I think at the airport the Shah protested to Zahedi about his promotion in rank to Nasiri and Bakhtiar?*

Yes, at the airport they had a conflict regarding the cabinet and the ranking of the army officers. They had a daily conflict about Dr. Mossadegh. Zahedi wanted only to exile Mossadegh and not to send him to court because that would give him public sympathy. The evidence shows us that General Zahedi's relationship with Mossadegh was very respectful. When Mossadegh was captured they sent him to the army faculty. Zahedi visited him there and refused to allow Mossadegh to be sent to jail. Unfortunately the people were against Mossadegh and forced the Shah to send him into exile.

***I know that you are in the process of writing a book about the Shah, do you have any interesting points for our readers?***

Actually when I see any part of the Shah's life I try to write about him without any preconceived notion. I have found that everything that has been stated about him and what he was is very different that includes both his good and bad manners.

For example we were talking about Mossadegh. Since 1951 England decided to make a coup d'etat in Iran. I interviewed Mrs. Lambton, the master teacher of Iran's study at London's faculty and she was the cultural attaché of England from 1939-1945. Without question between 1941-1975 when she retired she was the most important expert about Iran's situation in England.

In one document I saw that when she spoke about Iran everyone listened. In 1951 the English went to Mrs. Lambton and asked her about what to do with Iran. She stated that she knew Mossadegh and he was both stubborn and tricky and it would be impossible to make a deal with him. The only way to deal with him was a coup d'etat and she offered to help. I guess this showed the depth of her hatred for Mossadegh. She introduced to the state department a young university member Dr. Zenar. Zenar went to Iran's to work at the English embassy where he started to work towards the collapse of Mossadegh and the destruction of the cabinet. They went to the Shah about this, the Shah did not accept this decision for over a year and refused to authorize this action. He continued to say that he would not make a coup d'etat against the Prime Minister he put in power and that it was better that they find a legal solution. He finally agreed to it after the collapse of the Parliament.

***Why did Mossadegh cause the Parliament to collapse, when he was interested in a democratic state? Was this collapse legal?***

No, it was not legal in my opinion because the right to collapse a Parliament through a referendum does not exist. In fact we did not have the ability of a referendum in our constitution. Many of Mossadegh's advisors told him that this was not a legal action and that if the Parliament collapsed that the king would

have the right to change him. Mossadegh did not believe that the Shah had not have the backbone to get rid of him, but in fact he was wrong and Mossadegh was removed.

In my opinion this referendum was in fact incorrect because as I said it was not part of our constitution. Additionally the vote was split evenly. Remember the vote was open and everyone had the ability to see who voted for and against.

***Is it a correct statement that we truly had two royal courts, one for the Shah and one for Farah? And were they in competition with each other?***

Until 1970 the Queen had limited



General Zahedi

power. In 1970 the Shah gave her the power of the Crown Prince. Step by step she found more power. Her friends and family held very important positions in Iran's media, like Mr. Ghotbi and Lilly Amir Arjmand. These two had a very intellectual group of followers.

If you remember in Alam's memoirs the Shah frequently told the army generals and the ministers to copy Farah on their reports. This meant that the Queen's power was increasing. When the Shah's illness took a turn for the worse, especially during his last two years, her power really took a gain. Also in his memoirs he stated that "mehman bazi" ( he brought some ladies for the Shah) The queen knew about that and she was very angry. Alam also stated that after Farah got angry so he began to

give her power.

In the report of James Biel, the master of Iran's study during one visit the Queen told him about Sansour, the Savak, the Shah's jails and the relationship between the intellectuals and the regime. I have a complete understanding that the root of the revolution came from 1941. When he came into power he made one major change against his father's politics and hoped through the change that he could make up with the religious leaders. The first step was to send Zeinolabedin Rahnama to bring Ayatollah Ghomi. Rahnama was successful in convincing Ghomi to come to Iran. He came and posed his requests from the Shah which were accepted in total, some of which was the separation of boys and girls in school and send the religious people to a religious school which meant that the largest part of the educational system in the country would be under a religious influence. Up until this time there was no religious teaching in the educational books and now Mohammad Reza allowed it in. He allowed the religious influence in because he believed the real threat to Iran was communism and Jebheh Melli, the National Front. This is evidenced by his own words in his last book "Answer to the History."

***Is it true that the Savak brought Mohammad Taghi Shariati to Tehran?***

Mohammad Taghi Shariati was the father to Ali Shariati, who the Savak brought to Tehran.

***In your book "Puzzle of Hoveyda" we discover that Hoveyda's reign as Prime Minister was very stable, what was the reason for this stability was it real or superficial?***

When the Progressive Organization, Kanoon Motaraghi (which was established to compete against The National Front and bring the intellectual, middle class and technocrat bring people to work with the Shah) was stabilized, the American government agreed with the position of the organization which aided its stabilization. Ali Mansour was very proud of his relationship with America and was proud to say that America was protecting his back.

The Progressive Organization actu-

ally brought Iran to a democratic society. Remember that in 1958 prior to Kennedy becoming President, America made the decision that Iran was either going to become a democratic state or there would be a revolution. In 1957 the CIA wrote in a report that a revolution was eminent in Iran and suggested to Jabbeh Melli that it should prevent a revolution but they rejected it.

What is interesting is why Jabbeh Melli, 1957 did not work with Ameni but ended up working the Ayatollah in 1979! With Jabbeh Melli's rejection of America's suggestion America turned and created the Progressive Organization, Kanoon Motarghi to help the Shah and pressure him to bring Iran to a democratic society.

Hoveyda was in love with his position as Prime Minister and would do anything to remain there. Therefore instead of controlling the power of the Shah, as he should have, he instead gave the Shah unlimited power. There is a famous sentence written by Hoveyda, "In Iran there is just one leader and I am the office manager of the king."

In my opinion this was dangerous for the regime.

General Zahedi suggested to the Shah that it was important for him not to have his hand in all affairs, because if the country came into problems they could be removed without any threat to the Shah's position because the people would see that he had no involvement. If however, the Shah got involved and the outcome was negative they would see him as part of the decision making and this could mean the collapse of the kingdom.

In the English concept we have two words, regime and government, but in Iran these words are one. That means that if you want to change the cabinet you must also change the regime because the Shah would make all decisions by himself. Accordingly it is my opinion that all the problems at this time were a result of the Shah having his hand in everything. All ministers etc, had to report to him and eventually he could not handle this responsibility. Eventually the system that worked when all was well failed in the time of dissention. As we know we witnessed four cabinet changes and it proved useless. We had after Hoveyda, Amoozegar, Sharif Emami, Azhari and Bakhtiar. They came but the people were

not interested in changing the cabinet they wanted to change the regime.

During this period the Shah dictated all policies and the people were against this setup. The mix of the regime and government during Hoveyda was like no other in Iran.

*My next question is about the Shah's last speech and the infamous letter that was against Ayatollah Khomeini printed in the newspapers of which no one has to date taken responsibility.*

Well I believe you are referring to the speech where the Shah stated that "I heard the voice of your revolution." This speech was done without any preparation because



Shah, after 1952 coup d'etat in Tehran

it happened the day after he announced his military cabinet. When you name a General as Prime Minister you want to show your power and put the people in their place, not say words that will weaken your position. If you remember the background of this speech was very extraordinary. It was unlike other speeches he gave in his office dressed in military attire. In this speech you saw the Shah in civilian clothes, a white back ground without any facial expressions that showed strength. To look like this did not jive with the newly announced Prime Minister who was not powerful. He came and said in the name of God "people and Parliament must give their vote to the military cabinet." In reality an military cabinet should not need the vote of the people because when the military comes into power it is the last resort to save a regime.

I found the handwritten notes of this speech which show us that two people were involved in its writing, Reza Ghotbi and Sayyed Hossein Nasr. Neither of them accepted to be interviewed by me. I sent a

message to Mr. Ghotbi telling him I found the letter and wanted him to verify his handwriting, he never responded. I also spoke to some people about a letter from Shojaaldin Shafa to the Shah's bodyguard. They were with the Shah on the day of the speech and with him twenty fours hours of the day. Without any doubt the Shah had no interest in reading the speech they provided. And, I am sure that Shafa had no part in writing this letter. I found a sixteen volume series of the all of the Shah's speeches. This is a very interesting story because the Post Office in Iran would not allow my friend to send it to me as it was "The Shah's Speeches." Accordingly he had them rebound and renamed in order for it to be mailed.

I studied all of these speeches. There is much repetition in his speeches. The ones written by Shafa are obviously different from other authors. As I said earlier all the evidence shows that the Shah did not write this speech nor did he have an interest in reading it. This comes from two very valuable sources. I never heard this from the Queen because she did accept my invitation to be interviewed from two sources that the Queen suggested the Shah read this speech. It is believed that the speech was written on the Queen's advice. At the end of this speech it was evident that the regime was ready to collapse. In actuality I believe the Shah lost his interest to continue to fight for the regime.

Now turning to the letter about the Ayatollah, we can say 100% that there were two people involved in its composition. When Mostafa , the Ayatollah's son died in Najaf before the revolution the Ayatollah wrote a very strong letter against the Shah and Iran. The Shah said to the Savak (Nasiri) go and write a letter against Khomeini. So Nasari brought the Ayatollah's letter and the Shah's order to Sabeti. He believed this order to be very dangerous and he would research the matter. This order to write a letter against the Ayatollah was also given to Hoveyda. At that time Hoveyda was the Royal Court Minister. Hoveyda then told to my sources, who were working as media advisors in Hoveyda's office. They wrote the letter as soon as they received the order and showed it to the Shah who approved the letter. Hoveyda then sent the letter in a yellow envelope of the Royal Court to Darioush Homayoon. Without reading the

letter he sent it to the *Kayhan* and *Ettelaat* newspapers. They would not print the letter because they also believed it was dangerous. Homayoon told them that this was the Shah's order and then he spoke to Mr. Amoozegar. Amoozegar, without reading the letter, stated that if this was the Shah's order then print it.

*Ettelaat* printed the letter. What is astonishing is that none read the letter before printing it. The part of the letter that deals with the historical points is correct. Other parts of the letter were untrue such as Ayatollah Khomeini being labeled as an agent for England. It is true that his parents came from India, his brother Ayatollah Passandideh verified this point.

### THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW BUT PROBABLY DON'T

1. Money isn't made out of paper, it's made out of cotton.
2. The Declaration of Independence was written on hemp paper.
3. The dot over the letter "i" is called a "tittle".
4. A raisin dropped in a glass of fresh champagne will bounce up and down continuously from the bottom of the glass to the top.
5. 40% of McDonald's profits come from the sales of Happy Meals.
6. 315 entries in the 1996 edition of Webster's Dictionary were misspelled.
7. The "spot" on 7UP comes from its inventor, who had red eyes. He was albino.
8. On average, 12 newborns will be given to the wrong parents daily.
9. Warren Beatty and Shirley MacLaine are brother and sister.
10. Chocolate affects a dog's heart and nervous system; a few ounces will kill a small sized dog.
11. Orcas (killer whales) kill sharks by torpedoing up into the shark's stomach from underneath, causing the shark to explode.
12. Most lipstick contains fish scales (eeww).
13. Donald Duck comics were banned from Finland because he doesn't wear pants.
14. Ketchup was sold in the 1830s as medicine.

## COMMON ENGLISH AND PERSIAN WORDS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MAGI

BY DR. NASSER M. TEJARATCHI

In the summer 2004 issue of *Persian Heritage*, I read an article entitled "English Words of Persian Origin," which listed an interesting group of words. While most of these words were English of Persian origin, some were not. A few were originally Arabic (such as altar and bulbul). The words common in English and Persian consist of two groups. One group encompasses the English words of Persian origin whose number is significant but limited. The other group consists of the words of common origin from the mother tongue of Indo-European languages, which are immeasurable. One such word mentioned in said list is the word "god" of English-Germanic origin and "Khoda" of Persian origin.

Among the words which have entered English from Persian is the international word "check". When one reads the book of *Shahnameh* (which was written over a thousand years ago) one is surprised to see the word "check" – a word which one would have thought is an outcome of modern banking. However, this word, which appears in the section pertaining to the Sassanid and Roman wars and armistices, is actually an alteration of the word "shah" which after entering Arabic as "shag" re-entered Persian as check. In the game of chess, "checkmate" means the king (or Shah) is dead.

Another interesting word in the aforementioned article is "magi" which is the plural of "magus" (or "mogh" in modern Persian). According to the Christian story of The Magi, three Zoroastrian priests (the Magi) named Balthassar, Melchior, and Gaspar, went to Bethlehem, guided by a bright star (maybe a comet), to pay homage to the infant Jesus. This association with stars indicates that the Magi were interested in astronomy.

While Zoroaster, who founded the first and original monotheistic religion, may be the only prophet who did not claim to have performed miracles, the Magi found it necessary to perform magical acts in order to impress the public. According to Herodotus, the Magi were a clan originating from Media. They gradually formed a powerful group influencing the government so that Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire, had to curtail their power. During the Sassanid period, the Magi gained excessive power over the government as well as the public. Their strict control over people's behavior and activities may have caused hardship and may have contributed to the unfortunate fall of the Sassanid Empire to the Arabs.

It has been said that in order to impress the public, some high-level Zoroastrian clergy would stand in front of the fire altar during certain religious ceremonies and talk to the "sacred fire" and receive replies from it. The parishioners didn't know that in front of the altar, facing the priest, there was an opening connected to an underground cell where an aide was hiding and answering the priest with an unusual but impressive tone. This kind of performance was the origin of the word magic and magician. Some Magi migrated westward, settling in Greece and then in Italy. For more than a century Manichaeism a branch of Zoroastrianism, was the largest single religion in Rome, in which Magi were largely involved. Interestingly, the Christian clergy's garments, such as the robe and headdress (called tiara), have had their roots in Zoroastrian costume. The word "tiara" is believed to have derived from the Persian word "tadj" meaning crown. The influence of Zoroastrian religion in other religions has been extreme, such as the idea of paradise ("paradis" in Persian) and hell, and the final day of judgment. The lighting of candles in Christian churches might as well be an influence of the sacred fire in Zoroastrian temples.



Figure 1

## LUXURY ARTS OF THE SILK ROUTE EMPIRES

**Ann C. Gunter**  
Associate Curator of Ancient Near Eastern Art  
*Smithsonian Institution (copyright 2001)*  
*Freer Gallery of Arts and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery*

Two thousand years before today's "c economy," an exchange network linked the continent of Asia via the Silk Route. Between the first and eighth centuries of the common era, the empires and states of Asia often came into conflict as they competed for territory and other resources or sought to dominate their neighbors in religious and political arenas. Yet the sea and overland routes between China and the eastern Mediterranean—the Silk Route, or Silk Road—also fostered peaceful interaction, both cultural and commercial. Merchants, ambassadors, and pilgrims transported crafted goods and raw materials acquired from distant realms: spices, precious metals, musical instruments, rare medicinal herbs, objects used in worship and ritual. Silk, the most famous of these long-distance luxuries, reached southwest Asia by the first century B.C.E. from production centers in China.

This period, too, witnessed the expansion of Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Islam over vast regions of Asia as well as Europe and Africa. Religious beliefs sometimes divided people (and empires), but they could also bring devotees together in places of pilgrimage, and they forged common ground among widely diverse cultural traditions. Leaders and followers of these great faiths often required new ways to express concepts of divinity visually, as well as appropriate settings in

which to house images, enact rituals, and assemble worshippers.

At Kizil (Qizil), a center of Buddhist worship and learning in northwestern China, cave temples decorated with brightly colored wall paintings and sculptures reflect sources in India, Central Asia, and China. Further west along the Silk Route, this colossal head, which once belonged to



Head  
Afghanistan, 300–400  
Stucco with traces of paint. Height: 53 cm.  
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

an image of a bodhisattva (enlightened being), would have been part of the sculpted tableau in a Buddhist monastery. It was made in Gandhara (present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan). Here, artists created styles of Buddhist art that combined local traditions with Greek (and later Roman) influences, which had initially been introduced with the conquests of Alexander the Great (died 323 B.C.E) in the late fourth century B.C.E.

Armies and artisans, missionaries and merchants all used these routes, which also served as channels through which luxury arts created for secular and religious purposes could travel extraordinary distances. Astonishingly, some still inhabit their original homes. The Shosoin Treasure House, an eighth-century repository in Nara, Japan, stands in its original location with its contents practically intact. This wooden building was constructed to store the objects dedicated in memory of an emperor to the Todaiji monastery, associated with the Buddhist temple of the same name. Its thousands of objects, including furniture, clothing, musical instruments, weapons and armor, were made not only close by in Japan and in neighboring China and Korea, but also in Central Asia and perhaps even farther west. The treasure dramatically illustrates how far prized articles traveled, and what exalted levels of society acquired them. Examples of textiles and other perishable items occasionally survive from burials in certain arid regions of Central Asia and northwestern China. Most numerous today, however, are the objects made in more durable materials—chiefly metal, ceramic, and glass—which were often buried in tombs or hoards and have been unearthed in modern times through accidental discoveries, scientific excavations, and deliberate looting.

One of the most sophisticated and



Ewer with lion-shaped handle  
China, Tang dynasty (700–900)  
Porcelain with colorless glaze and  
copper repair

reserved for royal use, artisans created opulent vessels for the Sasanian nobility to use in dining and banqueting. A silver ewer used to pour wine, probably made in Iran and inscribed by its Iranian owner, combines a shape that was also popular in the Roman and Byzantine Empires with images of dancing females, who may personify a Zoroastrian concept of the soul.

Sasanian silver also stimulated the production of precious metal and ceramic luxury arts in Tang dynasty China. Silver vessels made in the Sasanian Empire and locally crafted versions have been found in the tombs of wealthy individuals in northwestern China. In some cases, artisans may have traveled along with traders or in search of employment, and in so doing, they brought their craft traditions and styles with them. New fashions in metalwork encouraged artisans in China to develop their own industry in gold and silver vessels, introducing foreign shapes, subjects, ornament, and techniques. Metalsmiths often combined local and foreign forms on a single object. On the back of a Tang dynasty mirror, a separate sheet of silver is decorated with traditional Chinese creatures—a winged horse, a dragon, and two phoenixes—set among floral scrolls from peony blossoms. This style of ornament, consisting of floral scrolls inhabited by animals or human figures, was created centuries earlier in the Medi-



Ewer  
Iran, Sasanian period, 400–600  
silver and gilt  
Hammered, repousse, chased, and gilded

widely admired of luxury arts was nurtured by the Sasanian dynasty, which emerged in the early third century as a political power from its homeland in southwestern Iran. Until 651, the Sasanians ruled a vast empire extending over present-day Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Positioned strategically between the Byzantine Empire to the west and the kingdoms of Central Asia and Tang dynasty China (618–907) to the east, they fought wars, engaged in trade, and exchanged diplomatic missions with neighbors as well as those in distant realms. Artisans in the Sasanian Empire created magnificent silver vessels, often with gilt decoration, which enjoyed enormous prestige both within the empire and beyond its frontiers. They often sought inspiration for shapes and decoration among a range of artistic traditions: southwest Asia, the Mediterranean, and Central Asia. In turn, these vessels influenced the forms, manufacturing techniques, and ornament of luxury metalwork and ceramics produced in other kingdoms along the trade routes linking China and the Mediterranean world.

Initially, Sasanian precious metalwork primarily served as royal propaganda. Court artisans fashioned silver into works of art embellished with royal images, which the king gave as gifts to high-ranking officials and heads of state. Later, when silver supplies were no longer



Bowl  
Iran, Sasanian period (250–300)  
Silver and gilt  
Purchase F1957.20

A few silver bowls from the Sasanian period (224–651) are decorated with portrait busts of a ruler or other high-ranking individuals. Among the earliest types of Sasanian silver vessels, they were probably inspired by Roman glass or silver vessels with portrait busts of prominent individuals.

terranean world and traveled east along with other forms of ornament.

The prestige of silver and gilt vessels even inspired potters to create new shapes and styles of decoration. Many white stoneware and porcelain vessels made during the Tang dynasty were intended specifically to imitate the shapes and reflective surfaces of silver vessels. These sumptuous articles must have appealed to their owners in large measure for their markedly foreign character. Viewed from a different perspective, they also demonstrate vividly that elite preferences in the design and decoration of luxury tableware and personal ornaments often transcended immense geographical and cultural distances, two thousand years ago.

Figure 1  
Fragment of a wall painting  
China, Kizil (Qizil), 300–550  
Gypsum plaster with pigment, 23.6 cm. (H) x  
50.4 cm., (W); (9 1/8 x 20 3/4 in.)  
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; long term loan  
from the National Museum of American Art