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DECOLONIZING PERSIAN HISTORY

Review of the British Museum's *Forgotten Empire, The World of Ancient Persia*

Touraj Daryaee, Ph.D.

Iranian.com, December 6, 2005

The *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* exhibition at the British Museum and the subsequent publication of the volume with the same name is a welcome addition to the study of Achaemenid civilization. With this work J. Curtis and N. Tallis have made an effort to bring balance to the realities of the ancient world, demonstrating the immense importance of one of the greatest empires in antiquity. The exhibition was followed by a conference that brought to light the various aspects of Achaemenid religion, politics, and the arts. The conference papers represented some of the best-known scholars in the field of ancient Persian studies, such as the most important historian of that period, P. Briant, and M.W. Stolper, who is the expert on the Elamite language. It was heartwarming that two Iranians have contributed to the volume on religion and burial customs (Sh. Rasmjoui), and the legacy of ancient Persia (V. Sarkhosh Curtis, whom I imagine is one of the main reasons why the British Museum has paid so much attention to Ancient Persia in the past decade or so).

Ancient Persia and its history are rarely discussed on their own terms and importance and, when done, it is usually as only an appendix or a footnote to Greek history. This is true of the textbooks in the grade schools to the universities in the United States, and I suspect in most other countries. The reason for their marginal role in history books is that most of the sources that have remained provide a skewed vision of the ancient world. Unfortunately for the Persians, most of the evidence for their history comes from Greek sources, which tend to be hostile, setting the Greek way of life against that of the "Oriental," or "Barbarian." It is noteworthy to mention that this paradigm was basically revitalized in the West in the modern period and shows its ugliness in such works as S. Huntington's *Clash of*

Civilizations. While this bipolar view of the world may have existed in antiquity (among Greeks), its continued existence today is certainly uncalled for and indeed a tragedy.

A piece that came out from the British newspaper *The Guardian* by Jonathan Jones summed up the typical Western view of the "Orientals," in this case the Persians and their empire's art. How should we react to such an article? For some it has been outrage and dismay that even as there is an effort by the West (thanks to the curators of the British Museum) to understand the world of Ancient Persia, someone again gives voice to the antiquated and formulaic Eurocentric verbiage on the Persians. I, too, was dismayed, but withheld my commentary, although asked by friends to write something. As a historian who deals with Mediterranean world as well as the Persian world, it was not entirely out of the ordinary to see this warped view of the past.

The reason for the lateness of my response is that, even among those who deal with the Persian Empire, this colonial, bipolar and Eurocentric view continues to exist. Consequently, I was not surprised at what was happening. As late as 1983 in J.M. Cook's *The Persian Empire*, one saw an "Orientalist" in action when he writes in conclusion: "Clearly they [Persians] were not a people that we should call intellectual. They do not themselves seem to have had an inclination towards literature, medicine, or philosophical and scientific speculation."

He goes on to say that "The Greeks judged the Persians by comparison with themselves; and historians in modern times have tended to follow them...." This antiquated and Orientalist view of the Persians is even more sad because it was expressed by the individual who had written the most up-to-date history of the Achaemenid Empire in the past century

and who was commissioned by the Cambridge History of Iran to write the chapter on the political history of that empire. I do not blame the ancient Greeks for this view because Persia was hostile toward them, and the Greeks saw the entire East set against them. Even so, some Greek authors had the fortitude and interest to explore Persia in an unbiased way, according to ancient standards. But, what about our modern historians of the ancient world? What about J. Jones who blindly mimics what has been said by some of the ancient Greeks, couched in the guise of modern world divisions? One sees in the title of Jones's article, "the Evil Empire," and in Mr. Bush's "axis of evil" echoes from the reservoir of sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious Orientalism.

Another scholar, the late H. Sancis-Weerdenburg, who recognized this bias among modern historians stated: "It is not so much the facts that distort historical reality as the outlines into which they are fitted," and of course here the outline is that the Persians are wholly different from the Europeans and remain so because they have remained unchanged for the past 2,500 years. This view very much resembles a colonial and imperialistic view of the East, and although we live in an allegedly post-colonial world (although some see recent military actions as the continuation of colonial policies) or a post-imperial world (although some see recent military actions and the idea of the New World Order as continuation of imperialistic aims), still this line of thought continues to exist and continues to be propagated from academia to the media. Thus, what is needed is a decolonized approach to the history of Ancient Persia.

One can easily find a different perspective on the Greeks and the Persians. I do not wish to give a long list, but a few examples suffice to suggest that the Greek history is also reworked and mythologized to fit Eurocentric ideals. While Mr. Jones in his article portrays "free Greece" as the bastion of democracy and contrasts it against the "slave nation" of Persia, it is worth mentioning that democracy (literally, rule by the people, from Greek *demos*) was but a brief experiment in Greek history. Some estimates suggest that when Greek democracy was at its height in 431 BC, less than 14% of the members of this society were allowed to participate in this "government by the people." Not only was the vast majority of the population excluded from policymaking, but nearly

37% lived in actual slavery. This is the Greek elitist "democracy" onto which the modern West mistakenly projects its own version of democracy.

In the context of the Greco-Persian wars we usually get the bizarre view of the "free" Greeks fighting the "slave nation" of Persia, while in fact things are quite the opposite. A recent study has demonstrated that slaves played an important part in the very same Greek armies which the West perceives as made up of free "citizen-soldiers," while the Persians employed paid mercenaries. Autocratic or hegemonic rule is not a uniquely "Oriental" characteristic as some in the modern West like to believe. The battle of Thermopylae (480 BCE) has been recorded as the last stand of 300 Spartans who died to the very last man to protect free Greece, and is a myth held up by the modern West as a symbol of resistance to the East. It is quite probable that in this battle each Spartan had seven slaves (who also fought to the death) with him in battle, bringing the total to 2400, plus another 2,000 non-Spartan Greeks (Thespians and Lacedaemonians) who also died in this battle. It should also be noted that when Athens became the absolute power (Greek hegemon) in parts of Greece, it behaved in a quite undemocratic fashion: the city-states that resisted were punished by having their wealth confiscated or their populations enslaved.

The phobia of Eurocentrists is best captured in the subtitle of a recent book on naval battle in antiquity, Barry Strauss's *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter that Saved Greece – and Western Civilization* is a good book, where the author himself negates the very same idea that is presented in the subtitle. I wonder how much the publisher was involved in the creation of this title to sell the book to an audience in bookstores across America.

On the other hand, ancient authors such as Herodotus, whom I believe to be an exceptional man who has been misunderstood in the East, especially in Iran, provides us with some very interesting anecdotes about Persian intellectual and philosophical outlook. For example, the earliest Western political theory is expressed in a debate at the Persian court on the best forms of governance (Herodotus Book III.80-2). Three Persians discuss their favorite forms: democracy, oligarchy and monarchy, citing their virtues and vices. Otanes proposes democracy as the best form of governance for Persia, while Megabyzus suggests oligarchy and

criticizes democracy, and Darius chooses monarchy and criticizes oligarchy. But the monarchy that Darius proposes is a constitutional monarchy! This and other positive characteristics attributed to the Persians by Herodotus were the causes of his later fall from grace among the Roman intellectuals who saw nothing positive about the Orient. Consequently Herodotus was called *philobarbaros* (Barbarian-lover) and was demoted from "Father of History" to "Father of Lies" by the Romans; and the modern Iranians blindly mimic this formula without ever really understanding Herodotus.

When it comes to philosophy, Persian influence seems to be looming over the pre-Socratic philosophers. The second half of the sixth century BC was the time of Persian dominance and the time of the eminence of pre-Socratic philosophers in Anatolia. In his important and controversial book, M. L. West attempted to demonstrate the amount of knowledge owed to Persians and Zoroastrianism by the pre-Socratic philosophers. The identification of Time with a primeval god in Pherecydes, the identification of fire with Justice (Greek *dike*?) in Heraclitus, Anaximander's astronomical ideas, and the Hippocratic view of the human body likening it to the world, all suggest Persian influence. The Persians hired explorers such as Scylax of Caryanda who traveled the Indus River and the sea route to the Suez, which was later opened by Darius. It should also be noted that Greek craftsmen and architects who traveled to the East brought the idea of the Persian garden (Greek *paradeisos*) to the Mediterranean.

My purpose here is not to give a laun-

dry list of Persian influence or to glorify Persia. Rather it is to state that one can find many things in the ancient sources, and what is found depends greatly on what the researcher is looking for and on their political and ethical views. This is an academic affair and practitioners must be trained in the field of history in order to carry it out. I am bewildered when Iranians ask me why one should study history. Writing books on the "glory of Persia" in Persian does nothing to further the interests of Persia or to bring Persian culture to the attention of the West, since Western readers rarely know Persian. And those books written in Persian, with few exceptions, are written by novice historians who know neither the languages nor the techniques of textual criticism needed to evaluate the sources used, nor do they understand the appropriate historical context and philosophical outlook. Thus, anything Greek automatically becomes "bad" and Old Persian inscriptions automatically become "good" sources, while in reality both sources are important and useful as long as one knows how to use them to provide a clear vision of the past.

What the world needs is a critical history of antiquity, where the interrelations and interactions of the people and their cultural contributions are made manifest. What is not needed is a glorification of either side at the expense of the other. If the West prides itself on the ideals of equality, justice, and scholarly study of the history of humanity at large, then it needs to let go of biases about the past. This may be a hard task to perform, but the recent exhibition and publication from the British Museum are important steps in the right direction.

CAN YOU READ THIS?

Olny srmatt poelpe can. Icdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid, aoccdnrig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, is it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig, huh? Yaeh, and I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt!

NIETZSCHE AND IRANIAN CIVILIZATION

Daryoush Ashouri

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), the great German philosopher, is known as a philosopher of culture. His insightful analyses of, and critical views on classical, medieval, and modern European cultures witness his superb knowledge and profound concern with the historical development of human cultures, specifically their moral systems of valuation.

Inquisitive about great Asiatic cultures, i.e., Chinese, Indian, and Persian, he refers to them in his writings on numerous occasions. Nietzsche's curiosity for various historical developments of the human culture produced his unique philosophical understanding of the Oriental cultures and their traditional wisdom in contrast to the modern European culture. Here and there he puts the "Asiatic" wisdom positively in opposition to the modern rationalism, which he views despicably (see *Asien und asiatisch* in SW, "Gesamtregister").

Nietzsche was a brilliant student of classical philology and later taught it at the University of Basel. His vast knowledge of Greek and Roman languages, cultures, and history is reflected in his abundant discussions of, and innumerable references to them throughout his writings. His studies of the classical philology and deep involvement in Greek and Latin literature introduced him to the ancient Persian culture and history, as an Asiatic culture and imperial power challenging Greek city-states. In his collected works, including the bulky fragments left in his notebooks (*Nachgelassene Fragmente*), one finds recurring references to the ancient Persians. Nietzsche's concern with Persia is well reflected in his choice of 'Zarathushtrâ' as the prophet of his philosophy and inscribing his name on his main and most popular work, *Also Sprach Zarathushtrâ* (Thus Spoke Zarathushtrâ). He shows no particular interest in Persian history of the Islamic era, although makes minor allusions to Moslems occasionally, and at least once to the Assassins (*Zur Genealogie der Moral/Genealogy of the Moral*, Part III, Fragment 24). In his notebooks there is only one reference to Sa'di by citing an anecdote from him. But his references to Hâfez and comments on him appears in several occasions (see below).

NIETZSCHE AND ANCIENT PERSIA

There are two references to Persia (Persien) in his *Collected Writings* (SW 1/792, 5/353) and several others in adjectival form (*persisch*, and once *vorpersisch*) that are essentially allusions to, and sometimes analyses of the relationships of the ancient Greek city-states with the Achaemenid Empire, primarily in regard to the Greco-Persian wars and their decisive effects on the Greek world that lead to Peloponnesian War. In addition, there are 28 general references to the Persians (*die Perser*), including fragments fully reflecting his views on Persian people of the ancient times and their culture (SW, 'Gesamtregister', B. 15).

He particularly praises their mastery of archery and horsemanship, their imperiousness and belligerency, and their emphasis on the virtue of truthfulness (SW 7/785; *Thus Spoke Zarathushtrâ*,

Part I, "On the Thousand and One Goal"). These virtues positively correspond to the Nietzschean view of the valuable human life.

But Nietzsche's highest interest and respect for the Persians appears where he speaks about their notion of history and cyclical Eternal Time; a concept that resembles his own concept of the "Eternal Return", emphasizing on the recurrent temporality of being: "I must pay tribute to Zarathushtrâ, a Persian (einem Perser): Persians were the first who thought of history in its full entirety" (SW, 11/53). In this fragment Nietzsche uses the Persian word *hazar* referring to the millennial cycles (*hazâra*) in ancient Persian religious beliefs, "each one presided by a prophet: every prophet having his own *hazar*, his millennial kingdom." In *Also Sprach Zarathushtrâ*, he speaks of the great millennial (*groszer Hazer*) kingdom of his own Zarathushtrâ, as "our great distant human kingdom, the Zarathushtrâ kingdom of a thousand year." ("Das Honigopfer"/"The Honey Sacrifice", Part IV).

In a posthumously published fragment, he deplores a lost historical opportunity: "It was much more fortunate if Persians became masters (Herr) of the Greeks, than the very Romans." (SW, 8/65) In this note Nietzsche reveals, once more, his radical opposition to the Greek metaphysical thought, as developed by Socrates and Plato, which later, by supremacy of the Greek culture inside the Roman Empire, became dominant and then integrated into the other-worldly, 'nihilistic', tenets of Christianity. While, in his view, the dominance of the positive outlooks of the Persians toward worldly life and time would have prevented the prevalence of such a sinister event in human history.

NIETZSCHE'S ZARATHUSHTRÂ AND PERSIAN ZARATHUSHTRÂ

It is interesting to know that Nietzsche used the familiar name of Zoroaster in his early writings. This name, which is of Greek origin, is used in his notes of 1870-71, about a decade before writing *Also Sprach Zarathushtrâ*.

There he speaks with great admiration of Zoroaster and his religion and expresses his partiality for prevalence of Zoroastrianism in Greece (SW, 11/53). And, again, in his posthumously published work of the same period, *Die Philosophie in tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* (*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*), he refers to the story of the studentship of Heraclitus by Zoroaster (SW, 1/806; English tr. P. 29). The name of 'Zarathushtrâ', as such, first appears in *Die froliche Wissenschaft* (*Gay Science*, fragment 342), published in 1882. Nietzsche inserts here the first section of the Prologue to *Also Sprach Zarathushtrâ* (Thus Spoke Zarathushtrâ), i.e. Zarathushtrâ's prayer before the sun, that appears following year in the published text of the First Part of *Zarathushtrâ*.

It is appropriate to enquire why Nietzsche abandoned the familiar name of Zoroaster in favor of the original Old Persian form of it, which was probably known only to the philologists of the ancient Indo-Iranian languages. By choosing the name of 'Zarathushtrâ' as prophet of his philosophy, as he has expressed clearly, he followed the paradoxical aim of paying homage to the original Aryan prophet and reversing his teachings at the same time. The original Zoroastrian world view interprets being essentially on a moralistic basis and depicts the world as an arena for the struggle of the two fundamentals of being, Good and Evil, represented in two antagonistic divine figures. In contrast, Nietzsche's Zarathushtrâ puts forward his ontological immoralism against this view, and tries to reestablish the primordial innocence of 'being' by destructing philosophically all moralistic interpretations. In this way, the ontological immoralism of the

Nietzsche's Zarathushtrâ stands, philosophically and historically, antipodal to the moralism of the archaic prophet and thinker. In the intellectual outline of his life and works, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche describes his reasons for choosing Zarathushtrâ as portent of his philosophy:

"What the name of Zarathushtrâ means in my mouth, the mouth of the first immoralist: for what constitutes the tremendous historical uniqueness of that Persian is just the opposite of this. Zarathushtrâ was the first to consider the fight of good and evil the very wheel in the machinery of things: the transposition of morality into the metaphysical realms as a force, cause, and end in itself.... Zarathushtrâ created this most calamitous error, morality; consequently, he must also be the first to recognize it.... To speak the truth and to shoot well with arrows, that is Persian virtue — am I understood? The self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness: the self-overcoming of the moralist, into his opposite — into me — that is what the name of Zarathushtrâ means in my mouth." (Kaufmann, pp. 327-28)

Nietzsche's Zarathushtrâ, like original Zarathushtrâ according to traditions, goes to the mountain for meditation when he is thirty years old and, like him, descends ten years later to convey his message for humanity.

But second Zarathushtrâ's teachings are reversal of the initial one. The early Zarathushtrâ stands at the dawn of the spiritual life of the humanity proclaiming the early immature human ideas interpreting being on moralistic and religious terms, while the second one appears at the end of the 'spiritual', or metaphysical, history to teach the worldly, life-affirming philosophy. The prophetic mission of the second Zarathushtrâ starts with the announcement of the most dreadful and consequential news for humanity: the death of God. The indispensable fundamental logical implication of this most tremendous event in human history is the impossibility of the moralistic interpretation of being evermore, and erasing eschatological expectations from the horizon of the human life.

NIETZSCHE, SA'DI, AND HÂFEZ (Q.V.)

Sa'di and Hâfez (Hâfis) are the only Persian names of the Islamic era mentioned in Nietzsche's writings. In his notebooks an anecdote from Sa'di is found, which originally belongs to the preface of his *Rose Garden* (Golesta@n q.v.). Nietzsche's source of this quotation is not known (SW, 14/650). The anecdote, according to his citation, says: "From whom did you learn that much, asked Sa'di from a wise man. And he replied: from the blind who never put a foot forward without first examining the ground with their stick."

Nietzsche provides no comments on this story. But on the context of his philosophy, one can say that the anecdote means to him the worst example of the miserable cautious rationality, the rationality of the 'blind', which stands thoroughly in opposition to the Nietzschean concept of the courageous ecstatic life of the deep-sighted man, which involves recklessness. (The 'wise man', in the Preface of *Rose Garden*, is Loqmân, a legendary figure, master of wise sayings in Persian literature.)

Hâfez, however, represents him a prime example of 'Dionysian' ecstatic wisdom, which he extolls so extensively in his philosophy. The number of references to Hâfez (Hâfis) in his writings are considerable. Obviously, Goethe's admiration for Hâfez and his 'Oriental' wisdom, as expressed in *West-östliches Divan*, has been the main source of attracting Nietzsche's interest in this Persian poet. The name of Hâfez, usually in the company of Goethe, appears about ten times in his writings. He admires both as summits of human wisdom. For him Hâfez exemplifies

the Oriental free-spirit man celebrating joys of life as well as its sufferings. Nietzsche commends such an attitude as sign of a positive and courageous valuation of life. There is even a short poem in Nietzsche's *Collected Works*, entitled *An Hâfis. Frage eines Wassertrinkers* (To Hâfez: Questions of a Water Drinker). The poem glorifies the insightfulness of Hâfez and his poetical achievements. At the end, he asks Hâfez, as a 'water drinker', why he demands wine while having the power of making intoxicated everybody (SW, 11/316).

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NOT POLITICAL, BUT...

L. Navian

It is my understanding that *Persian Heritage* magazine was established to educate the youth of America and the world, Iranian or not, on the history, culture, heritage and contributions of Iran to the world. This magazine's goal is to continue to give Iranian youth a positive outlook on life and a sense of pride for their heritage, and to assure them that the magazine will support the freedom of choice — real choice — in their future and destination.

I don't much care about the nomenclature for a country's government: monarchy, democracy, communist, socialist, etc. Frankly I don't much care how one comes to power. What is more important to me is the character of the leader. Does the leader, however elected, truly represent his or her people? Does he or she understand the needs of their people, and does the leader lead with honesty, integrity, fairness, equality, freedom and fairness? Let's face it: there is probably an equal amount of good leaders not elected in a democratic way as there are those elected by a democratic vote.

Recently Iran had an election. It was described as a democratic election, but the results of the election, in my opinion, yielded a leader who, since his election, has exhibited anything but leading a democratic state. Since his election into office, Iran, a country which I have never visited but love dearly, a country which I long to visit, a country which has given so much to the world, a country which was the first to shed tears and extend a hand of condolence after September 11, a country which should be a strong ally to the United States and the free world, has unfortunately taken a few giant steps backward.

It was surprising to me to see someone alienate the world and his young people (whom I might add are 70% of the population) in the first few weeks in office. The outcome of this election bothered me so that I spent many sleepless nights trying to figure out a reason. How was it that Iranian youth, so close to taking a giant step forward, were once again forced to take their ideas and enjoyment to the basements of buildings, to rooms without doors and windows?

I prayed for an answer which came in late December in an editorial in the *New York Times* written by Thomas Friedman and titled "A Shah with a Turban." At first I was annoyed with the title, thinking that once again my friends in Iran were going to be browbeaten, but much to my surprise the sentiments expressed by Mr. Friedman echoed my inner thoughts.

"...King Ardeshir Babakan Sassanid [r. AD 224-241], by conquering Kerman and Bam, killed the Kerm-e-Haftvad ("Haftvad Silk Worm") at the Bam Citadel. The gigantic worm burst with a big bang noise, which rocked the area, completely destroyed the Bam Citadel, and killed most of the inhabitants of the Citadel. King Ardeshir put an end to the rule of governor Haftvad, built the new village of Kolalan/Kojaran (Kurzan; the old Deh Shotor quarter in west Bam), and brought the "seven sacred fires of Bahram" to the new village..." (Book of Deeds of Ardashir Pabagan 1878 [English Tr., original version ca. AD 272]; Tabari 915; Ferdowsi Tusi 1010; and Mostaufi Qazvini, 1340. The entire episode rests on the rationalization of historical events of unknown nature, and perhaps the legendary element could be a possible, mixed metaphoric reference to a "destructive earthquake" or even a "conquering battle" against the ancient city of Bam and its Parthian governor, Haftvad!)

The impact of the Bam urban earthquake of 2003 December 26 (magnitude M_w 6.6) was far more devastating than that which would be expected from a moderate-magnitude earthquake. The event followed a predictable geological/seismological pattern of a

specially clustered sequence of medium- to large-magnitude earthquakes on tectonically related active faults in a region with historic slip deficits along the western margin of the rigid Lut block. The earthquake was accompanied by the coseismic rupture of sub-parallel strike-slip faults in a zone revealing a pattern of temporal clustering of seismicity, loading of adjacent faults, and a southwards progressing trend of earthquakes from the Kuh Banan to the Gowk and the Bam fault systems. As with the Agadir, Morocco earthquake of 1960, and the great Tangshan, China earthquake of 1976, the Bam urban earthquake painfully demonstrated the growing vulnerability of a city built on or adjacent to a seismic fault, unprepared to be tested by nature with the severe ground motion triggered by a medium-magnitude earthquake. Although

an earthquake of this magnitude and the resulting devastation were foreseeable in cities like Bam, earthquake resistant construction codes have been consistently violated since 1967 in both the urban and rural areas of Iran due to: (1) lack of government initiative in enforcing such codes, even for critical facilities such as schools and hospitals, (2) lack of emergency planning, preparedness, and coordination, (3) inadequate response to natural disasters, and (4) mismanagement of the lives and properties of the citizens. The earthquake mitigation plan in this region has been premised on a theory of ignorance and lack of will and muscle, and has never been considered high priority in development plans. The absence of historical seismic records regarding the occurrence of earthquakes in the region or

Iran. Previous urban earthquakes in Iran include the 1930 Salmas (M_w 7.1), the 1978 Tabas-e-Golshan (M_w 7.4), and the 1990 Rudbar-Tarom (M_w 7.3).

Devastating urban earthquakes have also struck cities such as Quetta, Pakistan (1930, with at least 35,000 dead and an economic loss of US \$25 million); Ashkabad, Turkmenistan (1948, with 176,000 dead); Agadir, Morocco (1960; with 12,000 dead and a US \$120 million economic loss); Tangshan, China (1976, with 655,237 dead and a US \$5.6 billion economic loss); Loma Prieta, California (1989, at the south edge of the San Francisco Bay region, with 62 dead and a US \$10 billion economic loss); Northridge, California (1994, at the north edge of the Los Angeles metropolitan area, with 58 dead and US \$44 billion in

damage); Kobe, Japan (1995, with 5,470 dead and more than US \$100 billion in total property loss); and Kocaeli, Turkey (1999, near the city of Izmit along the North Anatolian fault, with 17,127 dead and US \$12 billion in economic loss). Each of these large-magnitude urban earthquakes demonstrated their ability to impact all elements of the urban environment, thus rendering them devastating to both human life and infrastructures. These events also affected how we mitigate the risk of earthquakes.

The moderate-magnitude Athens, Greece urban earthquake of September 7, 1999 (M_w 5.9) killed 143 people and caused severe damage to both residential and industrial buildings in the northern suburbs of the capital city of Athens, with an economic loss US \$4.2 billion. It had a normalized maximum peak ground acceleration in the near field (~5 km) of about 0.60 g (MCEE, 1999). Although all these moderate- to large-magnitude earthquakes occurred in a diverse range of geological environments, each of them delivered the same message regarding the vulnerability of millions of people living on active faults and the vital need for assessing the earthquake hazard in — at the very least — similar geological environments. While the medium-magnitude Bam urban earthquake of 2003 was not an exceptional event in size, it was a poignant example of

THE BAM URBAN EARTHQUAKE OF DECEMBER 26, 2003:

A Predictable Seismotectonic Pattern along the Western Margin of the Rigid Lut Block, Southeast Iran

Part I

Manuel Berberian, Ph.D.

lengthy time spans between such disasters has been erroneously interpreted as a lack of any potential threat for the last 2,500 years in the city of Bam.

INTRODUCTION

The December 26, 2003 (M_w 6.6) Bam urban earthquake, which occurred at 01:56 GMT (05:26 local time), resulted in an unfathomable death toll and localized structural devastation in the sparsely populated and remote desert city of Bam, the newly built "Fighters Town" (*Shahrak-e-Razmandegan*) east of Bam, the 19th century partially ruined citadel (*Arg/Kohandezh*) of Bam, the town of Baravat, and nearby villages in the Kerman province (ancient *Carmania*) of southeast Iran (Figure 1). It was one of the most disastrous earthquakes in the recorded history of

how a common moderate geological event interfaces with an unprepared society to make a humanitarian disaster.

During the medium-magnitude Bam urban earthquake, approximately 43,200 lives were lost out of a population of 142,376 in Bam and surrounding areas, thus exceeding the death toll of the M_w 7.4 Kocaeli and Izmit, Turkey earthquake of August 17, 1999. Between 30,000 and 50,000 people suffered injuries in the Bam region, which required hospitalization, yet all the newly built hospitals in the area were demolished, as was the case during the 1990 Rudbar-Tarom earthquake in the city of Rudbar. The surviving inhabitants were rendered homeless. (Definitive data are not available. Officially, the initial death toll estimate was 45,000 to 43,200; it was later lowered to 40,000 then 30,000, and finally fixed at 26,500. On March 29, 2004, the head of the Statistical Center of Iran [SCI], Mr. Abbas Alizadeh, announced that some victims were counted more than once in the chaotic aftermath of the disaster, but that the earthquake killed 26,271 people and that 525 people were still missing [irna.ir, news.bbc.co.uk]. However, a few months after the event, local inhabitants estimated a possibly exaggerated death toll as high as 79,000. More than 100,000 residents were trapped under collapsed buildings.)

The head of the Kerman province education department announced that more than 11,000 students (1/3 of the students of Bam), 1,200 teachers (1/2 of the teachers at Bam, subsequently changed to 560 teachers, 1/5 of the teachers), and 200 health professionals perished in seismically vulnerable health centers/hospitals in Bam alone. More than 6,000 children became orphans, and approximately 500 people were permanently disabled (irna.ir; news.bbc.co.uk, 2003 & 2004; AlertNet; calearth.org; IFRC 2004a, b,

& c; megacities; Radix; RCS; reliefweb.int; Tierney et al., 2004; UN; UN/ISDR; World Bank, 2004; and others).

More than 95% of the residential, educational, governmental, commercial, and religious buildings in the city of Bam, the town of Baravat, and at least 10 villages within a radius of a few kilometers of Bam collapsed or were damaged beyond repair

were in buildings that were less than 30 years old (Sanada et al., 2004; Langenbach, 2004). Due to a lack of inherent resistance, the adobe structures in Iran are totally destroyed at VII-VIII earthquake intensity scale. The Bam urban earthquake sadly demonstrated that the recent structures constructed after the implementation of the *Iranian Building Safety Codes During Earthquakes* (1969 and 1988), were as weak as the traditional adobe structures. The earthquake destroyed hundreds of the vital traditional subterranean irrigation systems (*qanat/kariz*), which served as the main source of irrigation water for palm and citrus trees, thus inflicting considerable economic loss in the region. The earthquake severed the economic ties among the city of Bam, town of Baravat, and approximately 400 of the surrounding villages. Many of the Bam earthquake survivors fled to the provincial capital city of Kerman or the capital city of Tehran, while the villagers surrounding Bam migrated into the devastated city.

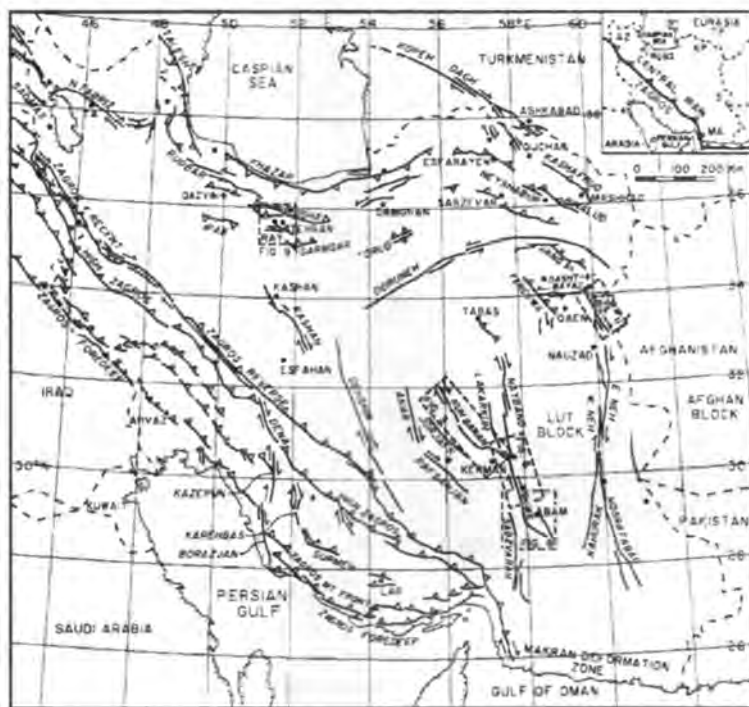


Figure 1. Active faults of Iran and vicinity, modified after Berberian (1976, 1981, 1983a, b, 1995a, b, 1997; Berberian and Yeats 1999, 2001). Reverse faults are shown with teeth on hanging-wall side. Strike-slip faults shown with arrows. Faults without teeth or arrows: sense of latest slip uncertain. Inset: Map of Iran showing boundary with Arabian plate (line with teeth). Az: Azarbaijan; KP: Kopeh Dagh; MA: Makran Accretionary Prism; S: Sistan suture zone. Locations of Figures 3, 5, 8, 9, and 11 are shown by relative dashed line boxes.

(NCC, 2003, 2004; BHRC, 2003, 2004). Three hospitals, a fire station, a police office, a prison, and 300 schools (all less than 30 years old) were completely destroyed. At least 12 million metric tons of collapsed debris needed to be removed from the Bam area (UN OCHA, January 9, 2004). 120 new housing units constructed by the Ministry of Housing for underprivileged families were badly damaged. The poor construction of the modern conventional steel-framed buildings, concrete structures, and traditional masonry buildings has been documented repeatedly during previous earthquakes without any action on behalf of authorities to rectify the problem. Nearly all the fatalities

This paper provides an analysis of the active tectonic setting of the Bam urban earthquake, including a review of the regional earthquake history and seismic pattern of the major tectonically-related fault systems (Nayband, Kuh Banan, Gowk, Bam, and Sabzevaran faults) bordering the rigid Lut block on the west in the Kerman-Bam plateau in southeast Iran (Figure 1). The objective here is to determine: (1) if there was any evidence prior to the Bam urban earthquake that the region was seismically active; and (2) the regional seismicity pattern, which might help prevent future earthquake disasters. The establishment of a long-term seismicity pattern would facilitate a better understanding of the faulting process and the characteristics of segmented faults, which are likely to rupture in an earthquake. It is an important step in the predicting the probability, magnitude, and location of future earth-

quakes in similar geological environments throughout the world.

Misallocation of the Iranian instrumental epicenters is the norm of the region. Hence, in this study reliable macroseismic field data have been used. General epicentral areas of the highest intensities (for large areas such as Figures 3 and 5) are shown with an elliptical shape encompassing the damage/destruction zone and the coseismic rupture, excessively enlarged in the direction of the fault break. This general approach might be consistent with the energy radiation pattern from an ideal, linear, homogeneous seismic source of infinite rupture velocity, but not with an inhomogeneous moving rupture source with directivity and barrier effects. In order to reduce subjectivity, the elliptical damage/destruction zones of earthquakes only cover damages caused by dynamic or inertia earthquake loading. Therefore, damages caused by subjective and misleading secondary, quasi-static after-effects, such as foundation spreading, liquefaction of the ground, slope instabilities (landslides, rockfalls), and after-shocks are not covered.

ACTIVE TECTONIC SETTING

The Iranian Plateau, characterized by active faulting, active folding, recent volcanic activities, mountainous terrain, and variable crustal thickness, has been frequently struck by catastrophic earthquakes resulting in the massive loss of life. By rendering large masses homeless and disrupting their agricultural and industrial lifelines, these disasters that have been historically documented (Figures 1 and 2) have resulted in the country's resources going to waste throughout the

long history of the Iranian civilization (Berberian 1995a, 1996).

During the twentieth century, the Iranian people have experienced at least one earthquake of greater than 7.0-magnitude every seven years, and one 6.0-6.9-magnitude earthquake every two years, culminating in an immense death toll with an average rate of 1577 persons per year (Figure

developing countries including Turkey, India, Algeria, China, and Morocco. The oasis city of Bam and its inhabitants were buried in a matter of seconds, as was the case in the oasis city of Tabas-e-Golshan nearly 25 years ago (September 16, 1978, M_w 7.4; Berberian, 1979a, b, 1982), and the three cities of Rudbar, Manjil, and Lowshan 14 years ago (June 20, 1990, M_w 7.3; Berberian et al., 1992).

The aerial view of these cities resembles the aftermath of a nuclear bomb blast. Although scientists, engineers, architects, planners, and builders have gleaned significant data from each of the recent Iranian earthquakes that are invaluable in understanding the national and international earthquake hazard, the record (Figure 2) clearly shows that no steps were taken by the Iranian authorities to minimize earthquake hazards in the country.

Active tectonics in Iran is related to the convergence of the Eurasian and Arabian plates. Indentation of the Arabian plate into a composite system of collision-oblique transpressive fold-thrust mountain belts has resulted in the lateral escape of central Iran towards the Lut Block, with lack of a through-going high slip rate strike-slip fault like the San Andreas or the North Anatolian. Older global plate models that used a combination of Afro-Eurasia and Arabia-Africa motions to estimate the overall Arabian-Eurasia convergence show N-S shortening at rates of ~30 mm/year at longitude 50° N and 40 mm per year at longitude 60° E (Jackson, 1992; DeMets et al., 1994;

Jestin et al., 1994; Chu and Gordon, 1998). While much of this shortening has been expressed in earthquakes and mountain belts of the Zagros (in the southwest), the Alborz (north) and the Kopeh Dagh (northeast), some has also been accommodated in central Iran, which includes the Kerman-Bam

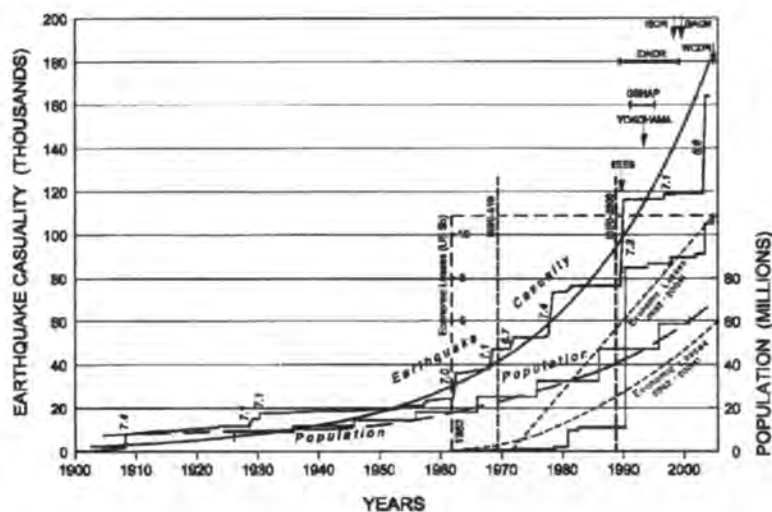


Figure 2. Cumulative diagram of large earthquake casualty and population explosion in Iran since 1900, with the available minimum uninsured economic losses in original values since the September 1, 1962 (M_w 7.0) earthquake. The italic number on cumulative death toll diagram denotes earthquake moment magnitude. Population data taken from the SCI (2004). Earthquake death toll taken from Berberian (1979b, 1996, & the comprehensive catalogue of the Iranian earthquakes and seismic faults, in preparation). Important Iranian (ISIRI 519 & 2800) and International hazard minimization milestones are added to the diagram with arrows. IRISI-519: the 1969 Iranian Building Safety Code During Earthquakes. IRISI-2800: the 1988 Iranian Code for Seismic Resistant Design of Building. GADR: Global Alliance for Disaster Reduction (2001 onward). GSHAP: the UN/IDNDR/ICSUC Global Seismic Hazard Assessment Program (1992-1996). IDNDR: the United Nations International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction (1990-2000). IIEES: International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology (Iran; 1989 onward). ISDR: International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (1999). WCDR: World Conference on Disaster Reduction (January 18-22, 2005). Yokohama: Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World, Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness, and Mitigation and its Plan of Action, UN (1994). Between 1993 and 2001, about 600,000 dwellings (5% of Iran's total housing stock) were severely damaged or destroyed, causing US \$10 billion in damage. From 1999 to 2001, government subsidies to homeowners affected by disasters exceeded US \$1 billion (1.3% of GDP).

2). Since 1900, at least 164,629 people were killed by earthquakes in Iran. During this period, no large-magnitude earthquake has impacted the metropolitan area of Tehran or large provincial capital cities (Figure 1). Similar casualties and destruction have been recently documented in other

plateau (Figure 1), and in the Makran subduction zone of southeast Iran (Berberian et al., 2001; Walker and Jackson, 2002, 2004). More recent global models, constrained by GPS, suggest that these earlier estimates were too high, with only ~26 mm/year of shortening at 60° E (Sella et al., 2002; McClusky et al., 2003). The present day deformation of Iran deduced from a GPS experiment (Vernant et al., 2004), which is in agreement with McQuarrie et al. (2003) in giving a constant rate of ~20 mm/year over the last ten million years, shows that ~10 mm/year shortening was in the Zagros fold-thrust belt of southwestern Iran. The rest was partly in the Alborz and the Kopeh Dagh (~8 mm/year) and east Iran (~16 mm/year). The GPS experiment suggested only 14-mm/year motions in the Bam region (Nilforoushan, et al., 2003).

Central Iran (Figure 1) is a mosaic of various tectonic blocks once separated by ocean basins (Berberian and King, 1981) that started to close in the Middle Tertiary period. Much of the broader collision zone, however, was not defined until the Middle Miocene-early Pliocene (F. Berberian, et al., 1982; Berberian 1983a & b, 1984, 1989; Dewey et al., 1986; Mc Call 1996). In particular, major deformation of the Zagros fold belt, South Caspian Basin, and central Iran did not appear to begin until the early Pliocene (~five million years ago), when the final closure of the remaining ocean basins commenced, along with the onset of intracontinental shortening (Stocklin, 1968; Falcon 1974; Berberian, 1983a & b, 1984, 1989; Devlin et al., 1999; Jackson et al., 2002). A recent magnetostratigraphy study of the Miocene-Pliocene Zagros foreland deposits (the Agha Jari Formation) indicated that the onset of the deformation started 8.1-7.2 million years ago during the Tortonian (Late Miocene). The angular unconformity at the base of the Bakhtiari Formation indicates that the growth of the Zagros frontal folds ended after 2.5 million years ago around the Pliocene-Pleistocene boundary (Homke et al., 2004).

In this study, the Bam urban earthquake is discussed in the context of spatially clustered sequence of earthquakes on the several tectonically related active fault systems on the west side of the Lut Desert (*Kavir-e-Lut*, literally "Bare", "Void of Vegetation and Life") east of the Kerman-Bam plateau (Figure 1). The low elevation (+400 m above mean sea level [amsl]), lack of recent folding (Stocklin, 1968), thinner crust (Dehghani and Makris, 1983), and apparent lack of seismicity in the Lut Desert, suggest that the Lut Desert

is a relatively rigid block within the Iranian distributed deforming zone; hence as its name suggests, it is "void of vegetation and life" as well as "void of seismicity and deformation"! Some of the roughly N-S right-lateral shear between central Iran and Afghanistan (the Hirmand rigid block; a Eurasian promontory) occurs on the long N-S strike-slip faults of Sistan (Kahurak, Nosratabad, Neh, and Abiz fault systems; see Figure 1) near the Iran-Afghan border (Berberian et al., 1999, 2000; Walker and Jackson, 2002, 2004), but a portion is also on right-lateral faults striking N-S to NNW-SSE on the western side of the Lut block, which includes the Nayband, Gowk, Bam, and Sabzevaran fault systems (Figure 1). There are no reliable estimates of slip rates on these strike-slip systems.

HISTORICAL SEISMICITY

Earthquakes in the Iranian plateau show a nonuniform distribution concentrated within the active fold-thrust mountain belts surrounding the relatively aseismic, undeformed rigid and stable blocks. There have been roughly 164,629 deaths attributed to approximately 100 medium-to large-magnitude earthquakes that have occurred in Iran since 1900. Since the September 1, 1962 Bo'in Zahra (M_w 7.0) earthquake in Iran, there have been about eight earthquakes of magnitude greater than M_w 7.0, and the minimum economic losses of the Iranian earthquakes have exceeded US \$10.6 billion (Figure 2). These destructive earthquakes represent a mix of urban and rural events in different geological environments, with levels of documentation regarding actual loss estimates, socio-economic, and financial impacts varying from one earthquake to another. Unfortunately, such documentation is not available for most Iranian earthquakes.

Like many urban areas in the devel-

oping countries, earthquake risks have increased significantly in Iranian cities since the last major earthquake in the region (Figure 2). Until possibly the early 1960s, the rate of investment in large urban and industrial developments in Iran was minimal at best. Although during the first 60 years of the twentieth century, earthquakes had taken a toll of more than 24,750 lives, damage in economic terms had remained relatively low (Figure 2). However, with the massive investments of the last four decades in new urban and industrial centers, future earthquakes in Iran are likely to result in serious economic loss. There has been a 3.5-fold increase in the Iranian population since 1956, and a two-fold increase since 1976 (SCI, 2004) (Figure 2). The population growth has concentrated in the mega-city of Tehran (apparently with accepted mega-risks by the authorities!) and the large provincial capital cities throughout the country (Figure 1).

The long-term seismicity of the Iranian plateau has been reviewed by Ambraseys and Melville (1982), Berberian (1981, 1995a & b, 1996, 1997), and Berberian and Yeats (1999, 2001). The earliest earthquakes reported in the Kerman-Bam plateau were in 1854. The lack of earlier records is due to the fact that the region is sparsely populated and is located in a remote desert environment west of the Lut Desert in southeast Iran (Figure 1). Although the Bam region shows active geomorphologic features, apparently no historic seismic record has survived, since the area is located directly at the western margin of the Lut Desert, and the local historical records such as *Bamnameh* ("the Book of Bam"), possibly compiled by Tahir al-Din Bami, were presumed to be lost or destroyed (Vaziri Kermani, 1876).

(continued)

HOW SMART IS YOUR RIGHT FOOT?

This is so funny that it will boggle your mind. And you will keep trying it at least 50 more times to see if you can outsmart your foot. But you can't!!!

1. While sitting at your desk, lift your right foot off the floor and make clockwise circles with it.

2. Now, while doing this, draw the number "6" in the air with your right hand. Your foot will change direction!!!

I told you so.... And there is nothing you can do about it.

FIRST GIRLS' SCHOOLS IN IRAN

Manouchehr Saadat Noury, Ph.D.
IranDokht, April 28, 2005
www.IranDokht.com

INTRODUCTION

Women's challenge for an improved lifestyle in general and to obtain a better education in particular has a long history. The Industrial Revolution (IR) of the 18th and 19th centuries and the introduction of machinery to the workforce sparked the women's movement in Britain. In the 19th century the IR spread throughout Western Europe and North America, and it eventually impacted the rest of the world. In fact, the excuse of the physical difference between male and female was no longer legitimate and women could easily enter the workforce. This was a turning point for women's socio-political, educational, and cultural roles. The financial independence resulting from this development led women to gain more confidence in society and created a condition for breaking the barriers towards freedom and a more advanced lifestyle. Those social changes of the IR, together with the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in October 1905 and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran during 1905-1911, had a great influence on the history of the women's movement for a better status in Iran.

EARLY EFFORTS

In 1848, American Presbyterian missionaries opened one of the first girls' school in Orumieh, the capital city of West Azarbaijan (a northwestern province of present-day Iran), and the religious minorities, mainly Christians, attended the school. Similar schools had opened in Tehran, Esfahan, Tabriz, Mashhad, Rasht, Hamden, and other cities of the country. Muslim girls, however, were not allowed by the religious authorities and public pressure to attend the missionary schools. Coincidentally, these girls' schools were established in Iran almost at the same time of the Declaration of Sentiment (DS) in the USA. (The DS is

a document signed in 1848 by sixty-eight women and thirty-two men, delegates to the first women's rights convention, in Seneca Falls, New York, now known to historians as the 1848 Women's Rights Convention. The Sentiments followed the form of the United States Declaration of Independence. The principal author of the Declaration of Sentiments was Elizabeth Cady Stanton).

Apart from those schools opened by the missionaries, there was not any systematic schooling in Iran until Mirza Taghi Khan-e-Amir Kabir, the premier of Iran during Nasser-e-Din Shah (the



fourth Shah of the Qajar dynasty) founded the educational institution of House of Sciences (Persian *Darolfonoon*) in 1851. In those days, until the establishment of relatively modern primary-school (Persian *Dabestan* or *Madresseh*), Iranian girls and boys used to attend the Learning Traditional Centers (Persian *Maktab Khaaneh*) where pupils between 4 to 14 years old could sit next to each other on the floor (sometimes covered by rug or mat) and listen to the teacher. There was not any age limitation for boys. Girls were only allowed to attend these centers till age 7. They then had to stay home to help the family or get a private female mentor to continue their educations. In the course of the Constitutional Revolution some Iranian reformists started to open separate schools for girls and boys in different

cities of Iran. These reforms were led by a couple, Tooba and Hassan Roshdieh. The first *dabestans*, using blackboards, instruction books, and maps, opened in Tabriz in 1887 and in Tehran in 1898. Some documents also reveal that in 1902 Tooba Roshdieh opened a girls' school in her own house in Tehran and named it Training School (Persian *Madresseh-e-Parvaresh*). This school lasted for only four days and it was closed upon the order of some clerics. Similar schools in other cities were also closed. The radical fraction of clerics considered these schools as undermining Islam, and the schools were routinely attacked by thugs dispatched by the clerics — burning and destroying the books and supplies and shutting down the schools. It is documented that in 1902 Zainel-Aabedin Taghizadeh, an Iranian businessman in Tabriz and Baku and possibly a friend of the Roshdieh family, sent one of his employees to Najaf (in Iraq) to ask if Iranian Muslim girls could enroll at the newly established schools. High spiritual authorities there, after a long four-day

discussion, issued a positive religious verdict (Persian *fatwaa*). Upon this positive verdict, the establishment of the new schools became popular among a certain segment of urban households, notably the middle classes. A group of radical clerics who were against the Constitutional Movement were also against the establishment of the new schools. Shaikh Fazlullah Noorie issued a *fatwaa* saying that girls' schools were

against religious laws and regulations (Persian *Shar-e-Yat*). Another cleric, Shaikh Shushtari, organized protests against women's education, which included women from the least privileged classes, and distributed a leaflet entitled "Shame on a Country in Which Girls' schools are Founded!"

NEW GIRLS' SCHOOLS

Disappointed with the outcome of the Constitution (since it did not support the right of women to vote or facilitate the establishment of girls' schools), Iranian women decided to organize on their own, and the issue of education became the priority. On January 20, 1907, a women's meeting was held in Tehran where ten resolutions were adopted, including one that called for establishing girls' schools and

another that sought the abolition of dowries (Persian *jahaaz*) so that the money could be spent on educating the girls instead. In 1907, Tooba Roshdich opened a girls' school in Tehran and named it Chastity School (Persian *Efaaf*). Also in 1907, Bibi Khanom-e-Vazir Zadeh, who was one of the intellectual women of the time, opened a girls' school and named it as Mademoiselle School (Persian *Madresseh-e-Dooshizegan*). At the same time, Tooba Azmoodeh opened a girls' school in her own house located in Hassan-Aabad Square of Tehran, and named it as Chastity School (Persian *Madresseh-e-Namoos*). Despite threats and abuse by the mobs and some clerics, the efforts continued. The opening of another girls' school, named Chastity and Modesty School (Persian *Madresseh-e-Ef-fatieh*), by Safieh Yazdi, the wife of the pro-constitution cleric Mohammed Yazdi, in 1910 encouraged other women and more schools were opened. In 1911 Maahrugh Gohar Shenass started Progress School (Persian *Madresseh-e-Taraghi*). In the same year Maah Sultan Amir Sehei opened Training School (Persian *Madresseh-e-Tarbiyat*).

In 1912 Banoo Attaeay and Mozayanol Saltaneh opened Sun School (Persian *Shamssol-Madaress*) and Adorned School (Persian *Madresseh-e-Mozayanieh*), respectively. (Mozayanol Saltaneh was the daughter of Dr. Razi Khan Tabatabaa-e-Semnani Raissol Atteba. In 1915 she published Blossom (Persian *Shokufe*), the first illustrated daily publication dedicated to women.) By 1915 there were nine women's associations and 63 girls' schools in the city of Tehran and about 2,500 students were enrolled. The curriculum of these schools consisted of Persian literature, foreign language, sport and physical education, music, painting, calligraphy, sewing, knitting, cooking, history, geography, mathematics, Holy Book of Koran, jurisprudence (Persian *feqh'h*), and religious laws and regulations. Among the interesting things about these schools were the speeches delivered by students and teachers during the examination periods and other occasions. In the text of the speeches, the role of girls' schools in educating those mothers of future who will bring up and train zealous and patriotic female and male Iranians was highly emphasized.

TWO SPECIAL SCHOOLS

During Reza Shah's reign (1925-1941) several girls' schools were founded by some Iranian Christians, and among them two should be recalled:

1. Yelena Avedisian, an Iranian citizen known as Madame Yelena, opened a School of Dance, first in Tabriz and then in Tehran in 1927. She was actually born in Istanbul, Turkey, on January 25, 1910. She then emigrated from Turkey to Armenia, and after her marriage in 1927 she moved to Iran to settle in the city of Tabriz. She established her own school of dance that many girls attended. She moved to Tehran in 1945 and started her new school of dance, which was officially recognized by the country's Ministry of

during her 65-year teaching career. Here are a few lines that one of the students wrote about her: "I remember a lady who was simply called Madame Yelena. She affected our lives with her natural grace and encouraging attention, which prepared us for our future artistic careers."

2. Bersabeh Huspian, a Christian lady born in Chahar-Mahaal-e-Bakhtiari (a southern province of Iran), established Bersabeh Kindergarten (Persian *Koodakestan-e-Bersabeh*) in 1930 in Tehran. Later, the kindergarten was expanded to a complex including primary and high schools where all Iranian girls, regardless of their faiths, could be admitted. The official language of Bersabeh complex was Persian and its curriculum was similar to the

schools already mentioned. Bersabeh Huspian closed her educational premises and emigrated from Iran to the United States when the Islamic Republic took over in 1979. (She died there in 2000). Shireen Bakhtiar who attended the kindergarten described how she was doing in that school: "I walked to my kindergarten, Bersabeh, in the early morning sunlight. Bersabeh was an old walled palace that now was my kindergarten, across from the iron grill-gated Parliament (Persian *Majlis*) ... Bersabeh would stand on the second floor balcony and look down on us, always dressed in black like a black bird watching over her flock. In the sewing class we embroidered handkerchiefs with colored silk thread pulling the needle into shapes of roses, violets, and knots of bluebells."

In contemporary Iran, governed by a system that legally permits sexual apartheid and misogyny, women are still seeking their human rights of equality and respect. Many women in Iran now get caught, regrettably, in a web of conflicting forces as their looks, activities, and behavior become closely monitored. The momentum of the demographic changes that are taking place in the country, however, strongly suggests that the situation may alter in the days to come. After all, approximately two-thirds of the population is under 30, and more than half the country's university students are now females. If and when they become politically active, these educated women could wholeheartedly struggle to effect substantial reforms. ■



Culture and Fine Arts. A large number of graduates of Madam Yelena's School of Dance followed in her footsteps by teaching dance at various schools. At the same time, several other graduates established their own dance schools in Tehran. In 1979, shortly after the Islamic Republic took over, Madame Yelena emigrated from Iran to the United States and resided in California. (She passed away on July 2, 2000 in Glendale, Los Angeles). It should be noted that Madame Yelena was one of the eminent dance teachers in Iran and trained more than thirty thousand dancers

Interview with
**DR. MAHVASH
AMIR-MOKRI**



Shahrokh Ahkami

The following interview is about a person who I had the honor of knowing while in medical school. Dr. Mahvash Amir-Mokri not only excelled in her profession as a physician but was recognized by her peers as an outstanding student. Her outside beauty equaled her internal beauty. She truly loved her profession and humanity. Unfortunately when we graduated we lost track of one another.

It was not until 1996, with the birth of *Persian Heritage* that we came reacquainted, when she submitted an article to the magazine for publication. When I read her submission I was not surprised to see that, in addition to her accomplishments as a physician, she was also an excellent writer.

When we were able to catch up I was happy to see that her success also included a wonderful marriage with children who were also the pride of her life.

I thought it appropriate that we interview her for this issue of the magazine and share her views with you.

Please tell us about your childhood, primary and secondary schools, and your studies at the University.

I was born in Ardebil on February 7, 1939, a few months after the start of World War II. At that time my father, a physician, was serving his obligatory mission in that province. A few months after my birth, our family returned to Tehran and settled in the northwest of Tehran, at the time a developing neighborhood around Tehran University. During the war, even as a child I could feel the effects of war. Many days I watched the Indian soldiers passing by. Occasionally American military, while I was walking the street with my parents, lifted me up into the air

and with kindness gave me some candy. Older children of our neighborhood were getting small packages of dates from the Indian military. People had to stand in long lines for bread. People were worried and unhappy about the war, occupation of the country and escalating prices. I might have been about three or four years old, when, one day coming back home with my mother, I heard a huge explosion caused by an improvised device that killed our neighbor's twenty-one-year-old son. This type of event was not only painful for the community but seemed to be indicative of the more ominous influence of the Soviets on our youths.

At age seven, I was registered at Ferdowsi primary school on avenue Takht-a-Jamshid. The school was quite close to our house. I could walk to school and was able

to hear the school bells from our house. To me, this school was like a shrine. The building was beautifully constructed with modern facilities. Its structure consisted of two symmetrical buildings, separated by a courtyard with a roof. There was a round pool at the center of this courtyard surrounded by flowerbeds and pillars. There were three classrooms on the first floor and three on the second floor in each building. The first, second and third grade classes were on the first floor and the second floor was for the fourth to sixth grades. The right side of the building was for the girls and the left side for the boys. There were no walls to separate the two. All classrooms were sunny, each with three large windows facing the sun. The blackboard and teacher's desk were one step above the classroom level. Each building had a library and lunchroom. The building of the school was about twenty steps higher than avenue Takht-a-Jamshid, but the large front yard was at the level of that avenue. This front yard was used by the students during breaks for playing and running around. On each side of this yard, there were about fifteen toilets, on the right side for the girls and on the left side for the boys. The school furniture was made thoughtfully and beautifully, with sizes proportional to the average size of the students in each class. In the north side of the school building there was a large garden with many trees, and a sports field at the back of the large garden. The theater building was situated in the west end of the garden and was used for plays and at times for final exams. This beautiful school was loved by most students as if it were their shrine.

Shortly after the conclusion of WWII, there came the events in Azerbaijan that thanks to the political skills of the prime minister of the time, ended peacefully with good results.

My secondary school was Nour-bakhsh, its name changed to Reza Shah the Great later. This school was also constructed during Reza Shah's reign, for girls. The building was beautiful, similar to Ferdowsi school, but to a larger scale.

Following success at the entrance examination, I entered medical school at Tehran University. In my last school year I married Dr. Ebrahim Amir-Mokri and at the conclusion of my internship, we came to the United States with our son Cyrus, then four months old.

Why didn't you pursue studies

in the United States to specialize?

A: While my husband was continuing his education I felt the need of my children to have their mother at their side. This feeling was so overwhelming that I was unable to leave the care of my children to a stranger. I have never regretted my decision. Five years later, when we went back to Iran, five-year-old Cyrus spoke Persian as well as English; as you know this is not the case for the vast majority of Iranian parents raising their children in the United States. Mina, who was two years old, spoke mostly Persian.

Tell us about your life when you returned to Iran.

After five years in America, it was an absolute delight to be among family and friends. On our way home from the airport, when we passed through avenue Shah-Reza, the ugly new south gate of Tehran University caught my attention. I asked what happened to the old classic gate that was in complete harmony with the iron fences that were constructed on top of the low gray stone wall. I was told that a well known architect has come up with the new design. Seeing this anomaly made me worried about the fate of other buildings, and this prompted me to visit my other favorite places like Ferdowsi and Nourbakhsh. Unfortunately those beautiful structures were not spared. All the land around those buildings was used to put up new, generally ugly structures giving rise to a crowded and crammed architectural mess. I have always wondered why the architecture of those old schools was not used as a template for construction of new schools as was originally intended.

Upon our return to Iran, my children were older and I had the luxury of having my dear mother to look after them, so I decided to continue with my education. I always liked the social and public health aspects of medicine; therefore I entered the School of Public Health at Tehran University and after graduation, took a position in the Planned Parenthood section of the Ministry of Health.

I started research projects in the field of Planned Parenthood and its implications in the control of undesirable population growth. My work was appreciated by the international community and I was invited to international conferences in Turkey, Lebanon and Hawaii for the presentation

of my papers. One of my findings was the rate of literacy in Iran. My findings showed the literacy rate of about 20% and this was at odds with the "official" rate trumpeted by the government agencies that claimed 50% for women and 60% for men. For some time I could not explain this discrepancy. Later I realized that rates and figures have a tendency to grow as they are reported to the higher levels of the government. For example, the report of establishing 14 new clinics to the Shah would ultimately become 1400 as it passed through several levels of superiors under the Shah.

Despite my enthusiasm, none of my superiors showed any interest in scientific work. Therefore they were not willing to support those who were interested in serious social research. I remember the time that I took one of my projects to the undersecretary of the ministry that required a detailed map of Tehran. This had to do with research on the location of family planning clinics in relation to the population concentration and socioeconomic status of the population. I was told that the project is sound but the ministry does not have a detailed map of the city and you must go to the office of mapping of the army to get the map. I was told by the army that your ministry has to request the map officially and the ministry refused to do so. Interestingly enough, when I complained, my colleagues told me that I should take it easy because all of them started enthusiastically but learned later to sit back and do little.

This was most painful to me as I knew that without knowledge about population growth and its control the consequences could be dreadful. Now that Iran's population has grown over two times in thirty years, with 50% of the population below the age of 20, social problems such as providing education, jobs, health, and shelter have grown which in turn have caused additional problems such as addiction, prostitution and despair.

What I regarded as an unhealthy work atmosphere in the ministry prompted my resignation. Because of my husband's very successful practice in pathology and laboratory medicine, I decided to follow that line of study to be of some help to him. By the time I finished my residency, the revolution had started, our children were abroad and we had to join them in the United States.

What made you interested in***studies in Persian culture and history?***

Following the revolution, for me, like many other Iranians a disturbing question remained unanswered; that question was: how did a country with such a rich culture and history regress and deteriorate so quickly — culturally, socially and economically? To find a possible answer, I started studying Persian history and culture. Meanwhile I decided to study Western culture and English literature by enrolling in Rosary College (now Dominican University). At this time, my children were students at the University of Chicago and this gave me access to the library of that university with a huge inventory of books about Persian history, literature and culture. I must say that I was always interested in Persian culture and literature. Although my father was a physician, his friends were literary scholars, poets and historians and this kept me interested in those subjects. I became interested in understanding the true meaning of most difficult poems and tried to read the metaphors and so-called "unwritten verses." I participated in many Persian poetry reading sessions and my constant objection was why we only read the poems and did not try to understand the poet in the context of his or her life and times.

Tell us about your book, NoeRooz, and the motivation in writing it.

After returning to the United States, I soon realized that Iranians were more eager than the past to celebrate NoeRooz. I must say similar enthusiasm was observable in Iran. I think after the revolution Iranians felt the danger of losing this most important cultural heritage. I participated in some NoeRooz celebrations and in a short time realized the fact that I knew very little about the origin and history of this celebration. Other Iranians that I had contact with did not know more on this subject either. At times the information floating around was wrong or misleading like the name of *Haftseen* (seven "s") being called *Haftsheen* or even *Haftcheen*.

At this time there was activity among Iranians in Illinois to have NoeRooz officially recognized as an Iranian holiday. I was asked to write an article about this celebration and its importance for Iranians. With the efforts of Mr. Normandi,

this booklet was published in English and Persian. This was followed by the official declaration of NoeRooz as an Iranian holiday by the governor of the State of Illinois.

Through this study, I realized that many of us are not well informed, if not ignorant, about our historical past and culture. The information available was scattered and fragmentary and not readily available. This prompted me to collect as much information as I could about Iranian social culture and festivities in the form of this book.

Tell us about the characteristics of NoeRooz.

If your question could be answered in a few sentences, I wouldn't have bothered to write a 450-page book. For people interested in details regarding this subject, I refer them to the book *NoeRooz*. At the present time the book is hard to find and apparently out of print. I am in the process of publishing its English version and hopefully after that will reprint the Persian version.

Tell us about your critical reviews and writings about Jamalzadeh and others, and the reactions of your readers.

About my critical writing I must say that I do not know any of the writers and translators personally and have only dealt with their writings, therefore my criticism is only about their writings and is not personal. I did not find it fair to publish a translation of poems by Hafez in such a way as to lose the poems' true meaning and make it sound very superficial or even ridiculous to an English reader, who could then conclude that there is no meaning or depth in Persian poetry. In my article "Iranian Poets from the Point of View of Several English Speaking Scholars of Eastern Culture," I criticized those scholars who do not have a good command of the Persian language and, with their incomplete knowledge of Persian culture and history, attempted to translate poems by Hafez, Khayyam and others. Since they were unable to understand the true meaning of the verses, they concluded that Iranian poetry is superficial and has no meaning. It never occurred to them that it takes much knowledge to understand a culture and the expression of that culture through poetry. In fact the invention of

"Islamic Culture" by these scholars demonstrates their lack of understanding of vast differences between Persian and Arab culture. The question comes up: why not use "Christian Culture" instead of English, German, French and... Culture?

In my article "The Effect of Culture in the Nomenclature of Months of the Year," I have referred to an example of cultural differences between Iranians and Arabs.

When a Middle Eastern scholar with limited knowledge of the Persian language and culture concluded that the story of Rostam and Sohrab is a representative of Persian culture in which fathers devour their sons and considered it as one of the main reasons for the backwardness of Iranian society, and unfortunately this concept was echoed by an Iranian writer, I felt a responsibility to point out and clarify their mistakes.

I wrote a critical article about the book by Jamalzadeh, *Kholghiat-a Ma Iranian* (Manners of Us Iranians). I must say that I always liked and enjoyed all the short stories and other works by Mr. Jamalzadeh, who I believe is one of the greatest short story writers of 20th century Iran. In fact this book was not available to me before and, as I read it lately, I could not believe that it was his work because he was not known as a sociologist and a great story writer such as him would not allow himself to write about social matters without any study and only rely on the comments of a few foreigners who had limited contacts with few Iranians. I had written this article while Mr. Jamalzadeh was still living. Unfortunately it was not published before he passed on.

This book was censored in Iran when the Shah was in power, but was frequently used in broadcasting against Iranians during the time when Abdol Nasser was the leader in Egypt. Because the majority of Iranians have not seen this book, I felt my article would be useful in presenting the facts about the book. I am pleased that the majority of Iranians who have read the article expressed their approval. A few, who found the article inappropriate initially, either had not read all three sections or had heard of it from others. However, after reading the article completely, they changed their minds and I have not heard anything but kind words from them.

Tell us about your husband and children.

Upon return to Iran, my husband pursued a private practice in his specialty of laboratory medicine with a group of specialists. In the meantime he took a part time teaching position in the Medical School of the National University. He developed a very successful practice that required very long hours and he could not spend much of his time with the family, therefore, I had to carry all the responsibilities regarding the care for children and the household.

Our children were studying in an international school where they were studying in Persian and English with French as their third language. After the Islamic revolution and the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War, the outlook for their education became grim therefore we decided to send Cyrus and Mina, who were fifteen and twelve respectively, abroad to the same international school which after the revolution had moved to the southern Spain. A year later, they left for the United States and two years after that, despite all the difficulties that were imposed on the physicians who were trying to leave the country, we succeeded in joining them in the United States.

In the United States, my husband was employed in one of the hospitals in the northwest of Chicago and after two years, he became the director of the laboratories of the hospital, a position he still holds.

Our children attended private school and after graduation entered the university. Cyrus received his Doctorate degree in history and graduated from law school and Mina graduated from law school and received her Master's degree in accounting. At the present time they both practice law, Cyrus in New York City and Mina in Chicago.

What is your wish for Iran and Iranians in the future?

Freedom, because only with freedom based on their great historical and cultural heritage can they achieve the social and cultural progress that they deserve.

Do you have any message for young Iranians living in Iran and abroad?

Work hard, increase your knowledge and do well in any field you have chosen. Never forget your cultural and historical heritage and never lose hope. ■