



# Persian Heritage

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# Persian Heritage

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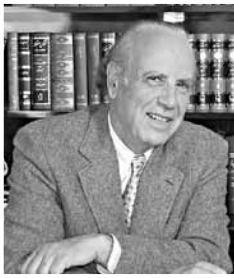
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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

With the summer issue of *Persian Heritage*, I am reminded of the summer 2009 and the Green Movement in Iran. This was a movement in which the Iranian people, young and old, stood and fought to attain equality, freedom, the right to choose their political system, the right to choose their religion, the right to choose their appearances, the right to speak freely, the right of political and social expression, the right to freely publish, etc. Unfortunately, based on the release of a video recording, by the head of the *Sepah* and his admissions, the movement faced a “coup d’etat.” This resulted in the murder of many Iranian men and women and the arrests of several of the movement’s leaders, journalists and intellectuals. As a result the dreams of the youth, who believed there was a real chance for change and freedom were shattered. The glory days of that summer were followed by executions and oppression. After this came days of superficial freedoms and superficial change, provided by the regime. These “superficial” freedoms and changes, however, resulted in additional incarcerations and executions which continue to rise. For many years Iran was in third place in the number of executions, following China and the United States. Today they are number one, certainly not a statistic to be proud of.

Remembering the days of the summer of 2009 I look back at how the use of social media and the news media were used to cover this story. These new forms of instantaneous communication, like an avalanche, brought this movement into our living rooms and to the attention of the world. Sadly, the sudden death of Michael Jackson, during the same month, ended the movement’s media coverage and with that the movement lost the attention and the interest of the world.

Surprisingly, demise of the movement was similar to events that took place during the Carter administration, when President Jimmy Carter beautifully expressed his views to the people of the world, “Iran was an the ocean of tranquility,” a few months prior to the 1979 Revolution. Within months, as if a bomb exploded, the revolution consumed Iran. Isn’t it ironic that President Obama, a few months before the Arab movement, also used similar kind and calming words while addressing the Egyptians in Egypt and Arabs of other nations. He labeled the movement the “Arab spring.” These kind and calming words were used and yet the upheavals continue throughout the Arab nations. What good, I ask, has come from gentle words, destruction of the political systems of Libya, Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and death of so many of their citizens? Throughout history, the Middle

East has been in turmoil. Is it ironic or is their destiny because of their potential natural resources?

Yes, the internet, social media and twitter have brought the people of the world closer together, creating a global community. Despite instant media exposure the leaders in Iran continue, their path of destruction, making the life of the Iranian people more difficult and miserable. Inflation, poverty, lack of medicine, medical access, drug addictions and other social difficulties have crippled the people, especially the lower and working class. These social concerns must be addressed! Remember the down fall of the people will impact their sovereignty and place Iran in a very dangerous situation.

Despite the world’s attention on these issues the Islamic government officers, in the country, continue making the argument that religion is the only way for Iranians to have peace. They insist that religion and their help is the only way to pave a path to heaven.

According to the *Imam Jomeh* of Tehran, it is the responsibility of the political leaders to pave a path to heaven, for its people. He believes that if the Iranian people are given freedom, that they will make the wrong choice, one that will put them directly on the path to hell. I have always believed, or at least thought, that it is the government’s responsibility to pave REAL roads, that lead to REAL destinations and roads that are safe to travel, not FICTIONAL ones that lead to “Heaven!” I have always believed, or at least thought, that it is the government’s responsibility to ensure the health and welfare of its people, not to build a FICTIONAL path to heaven! I have always believed, or at least thought that is the government’s responsibility to create new jobs that allow its citizens to develop new technology, ie: planes, cars, buildings, not to build a FICTIONAL path to heaven! I have always believed, or at least I thought that is the government’s responsibility to provide avenues of education for its citizens, not to build a FICTIONAL path to heaven! I NEVER BELIEVED OR THOUGHT THAT IT WAS THE GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE ITS CITIZENS A PAVED AND DIRECT PATH TO HEAVEN. I BELIEVE THAT IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE JOBS, SHELTER, MEDICINE ETC. TO ITS PEOPLE AND THAT RELIGIOUS GUIDANCE BE TAUGHT, BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, MOSQUES, CHURCHES AND TEMPLES.

Interestingly, the Iranian president himself, while wear-

ing his religious attire, has stated many times “don’t meddle in peoples personal business, allow people to find their own path to heaven, one cannot force people to choose the heavenly path it should be by choice.” Yet the mullah argue with the president’s statement and threatens to use physical force to teach people the heavenly path. I suppose that by convincing and insuring the people that religion will help build a path to heaven for their people, secures their power. But 75 million Iranians young and old, will not listen to them. 75 million Iranians young and old know that their path to heaven is only paved by the freedoms they are denied, by their ability to be educated, by their ability to provide for their families and by their ability to secure a solid and respected place in the world community. 75 million Iranians know where to find God and know how God expects them to live! 75 million Iranians know that the mullah’s use of religion IS NOT a path to heaven, but rather their way of controlling them and staying in power. This reminds me of an old saying, “kindness and mischief the wise ones can control the people like sheep and cut their throats with a butter knife.” Like these words the religious leaders will try to herd their citizens like cows and sheep, to THEIR “promise land.”

This kind of herding brings back a memory of my childhood. It was a time when milk pasteurization was not fully implemented in Iran. The locals would herd their own cows for milk to avoid diseases from outside cows. These cows were well taken care of. Vets would come several times a year to clear them of any disease. I remember we hired a young boy to take out the cow during the summer time to graze the land. Initially I thought it was a great job and initially envied him. I remember the first couple of weeks the boy had a difficult time convincing the cow to leave its comfortable stable. By the third week, much to my surprise, the cow was well trained. The cow simply left her stable, with head pointed straight and followed the boy. I asked him how he accomplished this and he told me by convincing the cow with a bit of a mental and physical beating.

I am in no way trying to compare people to animals. People like animals, however, are also innocent. And, like the innocent cow who gave milk to us, fed us and so kindly took care of us became a slave to our needs, the Iranian people too, so innocent, are becoming slaves to the religious preaching of their leaders. This is very dangerous. I wish my fellow Iranians nothing but peace, prosperity and freedom. God has already given them the gift of kindness and intelligence. It is they who must continue to fight for earthly leadership, that will guide them back into the path of reality. NOT earthly leadership that wants to build a path of control. They must know and believe that with all their wisdom and intelligence they should never be forced or condemned to follow the path paved by someone else, but rather their own path to freedom and respect.

*Shahrokh Ahkami*



Nahid Pourshababan, Iranian Taolu athlete in girls Nan Dao with point 9.22 and won first gold medal for Iran caravan.

**Happy Birthday  
“Persian Heritage”!**

I am very proud of my brother, Shahrokh Ahkami. He is doing such a wonderful job in opening the eyes of our younger generation to Iranian culture and wonderful history... to know and understand Iran’s past , present and future... and for introducing them to Iranian known and unknown artists, scientists, writers, models, journalists, musicians, actors, designers, poets and more and more. Just look at this magazine, Persian Heritage, and be proud of who you are and what you have.

Behzad Ahkami

Persian  Heritage

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**THE SPLENDID JOURNAL**

*Douste Daneshmand va Aziz,*

Just a few words to thank you for so kindly publishing my article on the Azarbaijan Crisis of 1946. It was a pleasure and an honor to have been associated with your splendid journal.

I was interested to read Behruz Boroumand's letter in your latest issue, where he mentions his recollections of our collaboration before the Islamic revolution.

Finally, I am so glad that you plan to get in touch with Ateshah Firouz regarding the Caspian pony and the life of her late mother Louise Firouz (Laylin). Louise's adventure of discovery is truly fascinating and deserves to be more widely known.

Just for your interest, John Laylin (father of Louise) was probably the most prominent international lawyer in Washington in the mid-1940s. My father, as Iranian Ambassador in Washington, retained his services and those of his firm, Covington & Burling, to help in constructing a case at the UN Security Council, against the Soviet Union, which remained in occupation of north-western Iran well after World War II hostilities ceased. This was how I came to be acquainted with John Laylin's children, John, Louise and David, all of whom spent many years in Iran. Louise of course married Nancy Firouz, son of General Mohammad-Hossein Firouz in the 1970s.

*With my renewed thanks and kind regards,  
Fereydown Ala*

**CASPIAN PONY**

Dear Editor:

I read the article about the Caspian Pony, in the Spring edition of your publication. Louise Laylin Firouz was my sister. She is buried on her property at Ghara Tapeh Sheikh, near Kalaleh, in the Turcoman Steppe. Her son, Caren, and younger daughter, Ateshah, have Caspians and were recently invited to judge a Caspian pony competition in Bandar Enzeli.

A book of Louise's memoirs was recently published by Brenda Dalton and is called *Riding Through Revolution*.

*Regards, David Laylin*

**COMMENTARY ON  
DR. MOSSADEGH'S ACHIEVEMENTS**

I am indebted to Mr. Diba's clarification and in-depth historical background on the "Capitulation" issue. Obviously my comments did not go far enough to offer the extent of Dr. Mossadegh's struggle with colonial agents. I am aware of his constant friction with British and other foreign officials who assumed that they had some extraterritorial authority in dealing with Iranian officials.

In a subsequent paper, in progress right now, I will elaborate the factors that nullified early achievements of Dr. Mossadegh at the International Court in Hague, as well as later at the UN Security Council. But the full force of the British government, which still considered herself one of the powers inheriting the benefits of WW II was at work from the very outset stating that they cannot do business with Mossadegh's government. Never in Iranian history had only one man gained so much grass-root and nation-wide support. But the British had decided that they would not succumb to Dr. Mossadegh's demand for full recognition of the law nationalizing the entire oil industry. In the following paper these factors will be discussed: early coalition of forces and its collapse, local agents and their effectiveness in neutralizing the national movements, the destructive role of the communist party, charisma not a substitute for structure and

strategy, the authority is no substitute for penetrating influence Dr. Mossadegh and the Shah.

As a student at Abadan Institute of Technology during 1950-53 and an active participant in the nationalization movement I saw how the communists, under the guise of nationalism, weakened and damaged a natural movement and managed, in the course of time, to subvert a powerful pent up demand for sovereignty.

The rest may appear in the next issue of the Persian Heritage.

*M. Reza Vaghefi, Ph.D.*

**MAGAZINES APPRECIATED**

Dear Editor:

Thank you very much for the magazines, which gave me the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of Negar Ahkami's paintings and the message they carry.

In Vol. 18, no71, page 28 (in English), besides my husband's photography, you put a picture of his master book "Tavalodidigar." This was a very generous idea. However, that edition is unknown to me and is an unauthorized one. It is the work of someone who has made a business out of it, without any consideration for the writer's work. I am not blaming you at all. I just wanted to mention it and let you to know with what we have had to deal with for thirty years, and more as far as I am concerned. Your "sokhanrani" was very interesting indeed.

*Sincerely yours, Claudine Shafa*

**IMPRESSED WITH YOUR GRANDSON**

I was quite impressed with your grandson Ryan. His keen interest in the Persian culture and history is impressive. I have two grandchildren that are much younger than Ryan and I hope to instill the same interest in our culture that you have done with your grandson.

I have a two part response to your Editor's Letter. First, is the beautiful story you shared about Ryan. It concerns me greatly that Persian culture, history and achievements have been lumped in with the Arabs. Ryan's school and teacher are not to blame for this grievous error in the curricula but rather the writers of the textbook must be reprimanded. Yet, it is disheartening to know that our educators and schools are so ill informed. We should contact them with the correct information or we will have no one to blame but ourselves as you point out in your letter.

You have alerted this grandfather to be on the lookout for false information being fed to our children and grandchildren. I hope all the grandparents pay attention to this important lesson.

*Sincerely, David A. Yazdan*

**Mother**

When can I hear  
Your melodious voice  
When can I see Your kind look  
When can I stare at  
Your lovely face  
You That alas!  
Passed away  
Many years ago  
You That are buried



Under tons of soil.....

**Majid Kafai (Ottawa, 11 May 2014)**

## Mohammadreza Lotfi



*The Farewell with  
the Great Maestro of  
the Persian Classic Music  
and Tar Virtuoso*

TEHRAN – Tar and setar virtuoso Mohammadreza Lotfi, who had collaborated with prominent Iranian vocalists Mohammadreza Shajarian and Shahram Nazeri, died of cancer at Tehran’s Pars Hospital May 2nd at the age of 68.

Born in Gorgan, he moved to Tehran and began learning music from masters like Ali-Akbar Shahnazi and Habibollah Salehi at the Academy of Music.

He then completed his studies with other maestros like Nurali Borumand, Abdollah Davami and Saeid Hormozi. Lotfi, Shajarian, and Nasser Farhang came together at the Art Celebra-

tion in Shiraz in 1976 and their joint performances were warmly received at the event.

Shortly afterward, he established the Sheida band along with tar virtuoso Hossein Alizadeh and a number of other musicians to remake some works by Iranian music luminaries.

Composer and santur player Parviz Meshkatian joined the group to set up the Aref Ensemble in 1977. Many analysts believe that the two bands revolutionized Persian music.

They also founded the Chavosh ensemble, which created many memorable works during the 1970s and early 1980s.

Lotfi left Iran to live in

the United States in 1986, and a few years later all the bands broke up. He performed widely in concerts in countries across Asia, Europe, and North America in this new stage of his life.

However, he returned home in late 2006 after 20 years and reopened the Mirza Abdollah Music School and the Ava-ye Sheida Institute recording company.

He also gathered a number of female musicians to found the Women’s Sheida and he struggled to eliminate Iran’s prohibition on solo vocal performances by women.

In addition, he established the Sheida of Restoration band to perform and

record his arrangements of traditional Iranian pieces.

His colleagues and several officials offered their condolences over the death of Lotfi.

“The sage of Iranian music left us,” Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Ali Moradkhani said in a message.

“He made great efforts to create eternal works in Persian music,” he added.

“People of Iran felt grief over the death of their beloved memories and lives,” Hossein Alizadeh said.

“He was one of the sources of Iranian music and a link between the old and new generations of music,” vocalist Alireza Qorbani stated.

**TEMPLE OF MITHRAS**



This amazing ancient Roman temple was accidentally unearthed as part of reconstruction work undertaken on Walbrook Street in the city of London after World War Two.

Dedicated to the Persian god of light and sun, temples such as this mithraea were typically built partly or totally underground.

The reason for this is that they were intended to symbolise the cave where Mithras brought down the primordial bull and thus released powers of life and

creativity to the world.

In order to allow reconstruction work to continue the site was excavated, artefacts were placed in the Museum of London and the temple itself was moved.

It was elevated and placed on public view.

The are plans to move the temple from Temple Court, Queen Victoria Street returning it to its original location below ground off the Walbrook River as part of the Walbrook Square development by Norman Foster and French architect Jean Nouvel.

**IRANIAN PRESIDENT DONATES \$400,000 TO JEWISH HOSPITAL**

VOA News,  
February 06, 2014

Iranian news agencies report that President Hassan Rouhani has donated \$400,000 to a Jewish hospital in Tehran. Rouhani was quoted as saying his government will pay more attention to Iran's minorities.

The Dr. Sapir Charity Hospital was founded by and is operated by Jews, but treats all patients and has a large Muslim staff.

At least 25,000 Jews live in Iran. It is the largest Jewish population in the



Middle East outside Israel.

President Rouhani's promise to attend to the needs of Iranian Jews is a sharp contrast to his predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who denied the Holocaust and called for Israel's destruction.

**SOLAR CAR CHALLENGE**

This summer a group of Iranian students will be venturing across America to participate in the American Solar Challenge. It takes place in July and the Iranian team is managed by Professor Beitollah Akbari. The team is made up of 19 students and teachers and their car which is fueled by the sun. The car, known as the Havin-2, or Brilliant Sun was already tested in Iran, in the hopes that it will make the American journey. The car's predecessor, the Havin-1, ranked 17th in the 2011 World Solar Challenge in Australia. In charge of the electronic part of this project is Farkhondeh Naziri, a woman and is from Qazvin Azad University.

"Our young scholars and university students can significantly contribute to Iran's economic growth, particularly in the field of clean energies that can help us reduce dependency on oil. Especially now that our country is in dire need of cutting off reliance on energies derived from oil by all means," said Professor Beitollah Akbari.

Transportation expert Masoud Mohajer said solar energy could potentially be a good investment for the government, given that the country has more than 300 sunny days a year to power the cells.

"As Iran cuts energy and fuel subsidies, solar energy, which is available almost all across the country, will be a good alternative," he said.

## LIVE BELOW THE LINE

Leila Manii

Humbled, grateful, thankful, guilty, blessed: just a few of the sentiments I have felt over the past 10 days while partaking in the “Live Below the Line” challenge. Living on \$1.50 per day for food/water has been quite the experience (two fainting stints included). Hunger hurts, point blank. Over the course of 10 days, I subsisted on tap water, 1 cup of oatmeal (oatmeal bought in bulk and from KMart), and 2 apples each day (bought cheap from the bodegas/street carts outside my office building). Not much at all. This experiment, this experience, was eye-opening to the realities that more than 1.2 Billion people (17% of the world population) live each day.

Many people were confused as to the practicality behind my taking on this challenge: New York City is one of the most expensive cities in the world to live in, after all.

“Surely” the homeless people, the homeless men, women, and children of New York City, do not live under such extreme situations. Whether or not this is true, I cannot factually verify. Homeless people in New York, in LA, in Europe -- in any First World country, might not necessarily live in such extreme situations of \$1.50 per day. However, what about those even less fortunate than the poor at home? As in, those people who live in second, third world countries? Countries that might be overpopulated, under-developed, or both? Chad, India, Mexico, Indonesia, the Congo, and the list goes on.

I did not take on this challenge out of “practicality”. Not being able to take care of your

basic needs or well-being, not being able to take care of yourself, or your loved ones -- these are not “practical” situations. Poverty is not a practical situation. Poverty is Real. I took on this challenge as a means to spread awareness to as many people as possible. Not only to spread awareness, but us all (myself included) to understand the Reality of the situation (these are two very different things).

I initially set out in hopes to raise just \$1000 in fundraising for Global One. At nearly \$2600, I am touched and overwhelmed -- not only at those of you who were generous enough to donate to the cause (for which I am deeply thankful), but also for all of the kind, encouraging words of support

through these 10 days. I am honored to have such amazing, caring people in my life. These last 10 days were honestly really hard -- mentally, physically, emotionally -- to get through. Starving yourself really gets to you. But on that note: I did this by choice. For 1.2 billion people (and rising) -- this is their reality. In whichever way that we have stumbled upon it, we are all “blessed” to have the good fortunes that we do (IE. enough money to provide for ourselves, our loved ones). Definite wake up call that people around the world (outside of our “bubble”) Might have and/or face more serious, fatal problems on the regular day-to-day than we in the First World do (IE: the 4/5/6 metro is delayed again; dry-cleaning is not ready; Starbucks line is too long; et cetera -- I myself am guilty of having complained of such “First World Problems”....)

In the six century BCE and simultaneously with the formation of the Achaemenid Dynasty in Iran many Indians abandoned their homes and wandered as monks into deserts and jungles. Their purpose from such wandering life was to lead a religious life in order to get rid of all the pains that mortals are doomed to suffer. One of these monks was Gautama or Buddha whose real name was Sidarta.

It didn't take a long time for the followers of Buddhism to spread all over India. During the reign of Ashuka, an Indian king of Parsi descent, who ruled the Indian subcontinent from 273 to 236 A.D. he became a convert to Buddhism like Goshtasb the Iranian supporter of Zoroastrian religion or Constantine who laid the foundation of Christianity in Rome. After that Buddhism crossed the Indian borders and the domain of Buddha preachers stretched to Kashmir and Qandehar and Kabul from the Indian northwestern borders. Later on the religion spread to the Jeyhoon Sea and greater Khorassan and Balkh and Bukhara and eventually to the Persian empire. It did not take a long time by the Iranian Buddhist converts to build a magnificent temple in Balkh and many of these temples flourished until the thirteenth century A.H. (19<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).

In a book written by Alexander Polyhistor 80 or 60 years before the birth of Christ he speaks about Buddhism, its relation with Iran and specially Balkh and gives detailed account about Shamans in Balkh<sup>1</sup>.

This reminds us that during the first century A.D. Balkh was famous with Buddhism temples and a large number of Iranian citizens in Balkh were followers of that faith and preached and propagated Buddhism.

In the same manner that the Iranian scholars contributed greatly to the propagation of Islam after its birth, many centuries before Islam they propagated Buddhism in the eastern part of the Persian empire and wrote many books about it.

What we can gather from Chinese text-books proves that the propagation of Buddhism in that country 67 years before the birth of Christ was due to the exertions of Parsi missionaries and monks. One can even see the name of a Parthian prince called An Shi Kao among these missionaries who is said to have been a learned prince and skilled in many branches of science and industry. This Parthian prince was very keen to learn the language and religious books of other nations and after the death of his father, depressed with the life of mortals in a passing world, bestowed the crown to his uncle and sought seclusion and mental contemplation. He then studied the Buddhism doctrines and the mortifications of the monks' ascetic life. In 148 A.D. he arrived in Luïng, the capital of China, and preached the Buddhism religion until 170 A.D. During this time he wrote a book on Buddhism principles and translated the sacred Buddhism books into Chinese language<sup>2</sup>.

An Huvan was another prince from the Parthian tribe who has been praised for his good morals and motives. An Huvan also preached Buddhism in China and grew so famous in virtue that was appointed as a colonel of the cavalry by the Chinese emperor. This Iranian prince became known as Prince An or Colonel An in China. Along with Yen Fo Tao, another Chinese scientist, An Huvan

translated his two books into the Chinese language and bestowed them to followers of Buddha in China.

Besides these two princes, a number of Parthian followers of Buddhism traveled to China from east of Iran during the end of the Parthian period and preached that religion. Among these one can name T. An Wan Ti, an Iranian worshipper of Buddha, who translated several Parthian books into Chinese in 254 A.D. in Luïng.

An Fagin, another famous Iranian Buddhist monk, wrote several books in Chinese language but his books have been lost.

Fagin was another Iranian missionary who preached Buddhism and wrote several books in Chinese of which two books have survived.

As to why these names were not Iranians it was because foreign preachers elected Chinese names in China but affixed the name of their homeland to their Chinese names as a distinction. As we can see the Iranian preachers were called by adding the prefix "An" to their names because the Parthians or Arsacids were called An Shi in Chinese or An Suk in Japanese and since the letter "r" was not spelled out in the Chinese language, the word "Arsacid" or "Ashk" was shortened to "An" in that language.

In the eastern Iranian empire Buddhism greatly influenced mysticism and recent excavations in present Afghanistan have revealed that influence to the world, but it does not prove whether Buddhism influenced the official Mazdian religion in the central, western or southern Iran. Even if it did,

there is no evidence available to that effect today. But as we can clearly see below, Buddhism greatly influenced mystical sects in east of Iran after the birth of Islam. In the same way the influence of Buddhism is visible in Manichaeism, which was considered as one of the official religions of the Sassanid empire for a number of years.

Also we do not know how many Iranians were converted into Buddha worshippers by the missionaries of Ashuka, an Indian king, who was a Buddhist.

But history says that during the reign of Kanishka, the Indian king of Kushan Dynasty, Buddhism reached

its peak and many Buddha temples were built throughout the eastern Iranian borders some of which survived until second, third, and fourth century A.H. It is well known that the giant Buddha statue in Bamian, Afghanistan, which is gravely threatened by fanatic Taliban militia (they destroyed the biggest Buddha statute in the country) was built during the time of Kanishka<sup>3</sup>.

Buddhism which gradually stopped its spread in parts of Transoxiana during the end of the Sassanid Dynasty, for a long time preserved its strongholds in Bukhara, Balkh, Qandehar and Kabul. According to Hodud-ulAlam written in 372 A.H. Kabul possessed an idol temple that Raj Ghanouj visited as a pilgrim from India. Raj Ghanouj used to receive the scepter of his kingship from the monks of that temple<sup>4</sup>. Also during the time of Noshakhi, the chronicler of the History of Bukhara (who died in the year 348 A.H.), Bukhara possessed a market which was known as the idol worshippers district, where idols were sold to customers<sup>5</sup>.

This enraged the Muslims who put the town on fire which burnt for three days and razed it to the ground because until that time Buddhism was the official religion of the citizens of Bukhara.

## RELIGION IN IRAN

# Iranians' Role in Expansion of Buddhism

By: Dr. Ali Asghar Mostafavi



According to Noshakhi many of the idol temples in Bukhara and Bikand and other cities were plundered and burnt by Hojjaj's army<sup>6</sup>.

The gradual advance of Islam in Transoxiana limited the operation of Buddha missionaries and preachers and put a halt to the spread of that religion but the impact of Buddhism principles has survived among the mystic sects and part of Islamic scholars<sup>7</sup>.

Referring to Balkh, the writer of Turkestan Nameh says: "Balkh was the most ancient city in the Amu Darya region. Muslim writers have rightly called Balkh the mother of cities.

Balkh had been the capital of semi-mythological Bactria which was later converted into a western Satrap (Bactrian Satrap) of the Achaemenid Dynasty and during the time of Darius, Marv-ania (or Marv district) was part of that territory."

According to Islamic historiographers Balkh was the residence of one of the four governors of Khorassan during the Sassanid Dynasty<sup>8</sup>.

Malek-ul Shoara Bahar<sup>9</sup> says: "Undoubtedly during the fifth century A.D. and a little after that a great part of Iranian eastern territories were converted into Buddhism. It is therefore not strange for some Buddhist scholars to have said that the religion of Buddha had stretched to Aloub islands, Mecca and Yemen and part of Saebeh and Haranians and Hanfa were followers of that faith. These Buddha worshipers existed until the end of the Sassanid period and early centuries of the Islamic period. Buddhist priests had strong influence in Khorassan and after them the Manichians and later on the Zoroastrians held the majority. The coins surviving from the Sassanid kings of Khorassan descent show that during that time Mani, Buddha and Zoroaster were worshipped in Khorassan province but the Buddhists held the majority."

Baharats or Buddha idol temples which were called Now Bahar in Balkh, and Beit-ul Sanam in Bamian, existed after the emergence of Islam and a long time after that. Each year Buddhist pilgrims from China and Khotan used to visit the sacred Buddha temples in Khorassan and right now the dungeons in Bamian, Afghanistan, point to that period of the history.

Zandbils, the kings of Zabolestan and Sind who have been erroneously called Zanbils or Zantbils in ancient Persian manuscripts (the last of whom was slain during the third century A.H. by Yaqoub, the Safari ruler), were Iranian Buddha worshipers and the remnants of Indo-Sakkidynasty which stretched from Sistan to Punjab. They were Sakkis of Aryan origin who have presently abandoned their former religion, are living in India and are known as Sekkeh or Sikhs. These were Buddhist immigrants who migrated from Sistan to India and after settling in Punjab they called themselves Singe, Segeh, Sek or Sikh.

The residents of Kafarestan state, located southeast of

Takharestan state in present Afghanistan, were Buddha worshipers until the fourteenth century A.H. and were eventually converted into Islam by Amir Abdolrahman Khan (1844-1901) and their state was named Noorestan or the realm of light<sup>10</sup>.

Barmakians were one of the biggest and oldest tribes of Iranian scholars and rulers among whom several dignitaries served as ministers for the Abbassid caliphs. The Barmakian tribe which dwelt in Khorassan were followers of Buddha before the birth of Islam. Because of being the guardians of the well known Now Bahar Temple in Balkh, the Barmakians had accumulated enormous wealth from donations made to the temple and were envied by the caliphs in Baghdad. Their wealth and strength and reputation instigated the caliph in Baghdad to find a pretext to destroy them and confiscate their property. At last they found a pretext to attack them by alleging that Jafar, the Barmakian king had unlawful relation-

ship with the sister of the Abbassid caliph, and under such provocation they massacred the Barmakian tribe and seized their properties.

The term Barmakeh or Barmaki in this tribe is derived from Parmookhia in Sanskrit language which means a head (which is the customary title of the custodians of the Now Bahar Temple in Balkh).

In his Albaldan, IbneFaqid-Hamedani says: "Before turning to feudal the Barmakians enjoyed high position and reputation and were idol worshippers. The citizens of Mecca had told them about the custom of the Qoraish tribe and Arabs in Mecca who worshipped the idols in Kaaba. This induced the Barmakians to build a rival giant idol temple in Balkh. They called this temple the Now Bahar Temple or the new temple. They respected the temple and presented gifts to the temple and adorned it with silk and ornamented the dome with flags. The dome of the temple was 100 x 100 gaz (one gaz is about 93 cm) in size. 360 nasegays (cells) were constructed around the temple in which the temple's servants and guards dwelt. Each day one servant served the temple and thus in one year 360 servants served

the temple by turn so that each servant worked one day in the year. The grand custodian of the temple was called Barmak or a custodian from Mecca or ruler of Mecca. Thus those who were appointed as the custodian of the Now Bahar Temple were called Barmaks."

The kings of China and Kabul also worshipped idols and whenever they traveled to the Now Bahar Temple they worshipped the grand idol. Thus all the properties surrounding the Now Bahar Temple and seven hundred villages in the Takharestan region known as Zavan which was 8 x 4farsangs in size were owned by the Barmakis. All these villages were ruled by Barmaki headmen. Their sway continued until the time of Othman, the caliph, when Khorassan was conquered by Ibne Offan.

When Khorassan was taken the grand custodian of the Now



Bahar Temple was Barmak, the father of Barmak and grandfather of Khalid.

According to Masoodi Now Bahar, the giant temple in Balkh was called Mah Bonyad during Manouchehr Shah<sup>11</sup>. At that time the custodian of the temple was greatly respected by the kings and all the citizens obeyed his orders and presented much property and money to that idol temple. As we said the custodians of the temple were called Baramakeh and Khalid Barmak was the last custodian of the temple. This was a very lofty building and adorned by spears on which green silk was hung.

YaqootHamavi (539-626 A.H.) relates a lengthy story from Omar Iibne Azraq Kermani about Now Bahar<sup>12</sup>. Qazvini and Mohammad Ibne Mahmoodibne Ahmad Toosi have also described the temple like that written by Hamavi.

The following inscription was written on the gate of the Now Bahar Temple: "Buddha says the courts of the kings need wisdom, patience and money." Under that inscription an Arabic script says: "Buddha is in the wrong because a man who possesses one of these qualifications would never agree to be a vassal in the court."<sup>13</sup>

The second part of Hamavi's chronicle depicts other aspects of Iranian influence on Buddhism and the impact of Buddhism on the Iranian civilization.

"The religious custodian of the Now Bahar Temple was called a Barmak and the Barmakians descended from these priests and inherited the title from generation to generation. Now Bahar Temple was constructed to compete with the Kaaba in Mecca. Its walls were adorned by precious jewels and covered by gold embroidered curtains. On many occasions and especially during

spring the temple was adorned with beautiful flowers. For that reason the temple was called Now Bahar. It was in that season that pilgrims flocked to the temple from all over Iran. The temple was capped with a dome called Asten that was 100 gaz (nearly 93 meters) high and was adorned by flags. Many pilgrims from Kabul and Indo-China visited the temple, worshiped the idol and kissed the hands of the Barmak or the grand custodian of the temple."<sup>14</sup>■

#### FOOTNOTE

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2. Pashts, Vol. 2, by Professor Poor Davood, p. 31.
3. Iran in Ancient Times, by JavadMashkoor, pp. 377 and 315.
4. Hodud-ulAlam, p. 2393.
5. The History of Bukhara, p. 29.
6. The History of Bukhara, p. 62.
7. The History of Iranian People Before Islam, AbdolhusseinZar-rinkub, p. 159.
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9. Mehr magazine, first year, 3rd. issue, p. 227.
10. Al-baldan, by Ibne-ulFaqidHamedani, translated by H. Masood, p. 172.
11. Rooh-ulMazaheb, translated by AbolqasemPayandeh, vol. 1, p. 589.
12. Ma'jam-ulBaldan, Beirut edition, 1957, vol. 5, p. 307.
13. Ajayeb-ulMakhlooqat, edited by ManoochehrSotoodeh, p. 279.
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\*\*\* Note: This article is the courtesy of CAIS at SOAS.

# How Social Stress Affects Immigrants to the United States

By: Hassan Bakhtari, Ph.D.

## INTRODUCTION:

The topic of stress and its effect on human behavior has only recently become a topic of interest to researchers. Until the mid-1970s, research on stress was essentially confined to its effect on health and was conducted by individuals in the medical profession. In recent years, stress has become a social phenomenon, which impacts peoples' health as well as behavior. This phenomenon becomes more compounded by the amount of relocation, movement and changes mandated by today's social, political and economic situations. People involved in these situations seek alternatives and, for the most part, relief. While they work to achieve their goals, a series of unplanned and unexpected events can occur which can result in added tension, stress and anxiety.

Obviously, residents of the most industrial countries, such as the United States of America, are more exposed to stress and tension. It is believed that stress is less severe in non-industrialized countries.

## BACKGROUND:

Historically, the United States of America has been regarded as "the land of immigrants." Regardless of recent economic, political and social changes, the United States of America continues to admit millions of people from other countries every year. The United States is by far the world's leader as a destination for immigrants. A total of 39.9 million immigrants represented 12.9% of the total U.S. population in 2010. Immigrants to the United States include a variety of categories such as immigrants, refugees, political asylees, visitors and students. The

recent wave of immigrants to the United States, which began with the passage of border-opening legislation in 1965, has been dominated by arrivals from Latin America (about 50% of the total) and Asia (27%). Each of these individuals, even those who visit as a tourist, experience some type of stress and tension.

The following is the composition of U.S. immigrants by region: (as reported by the United States Census Bureau in 2010, expressed in million):

Asia	11,284
Africa	1,607
Europe	4,817
Latin America & Caribbean	21,224
All Other	1,044
Total	39,976

The following are the top five countries where immigrants to the U.S. come from: (as reported by the United States Census Bureau in 2010):

Mexico	11,798,258
Puerto Rico	4,623,716
China	2,422,970
India	1,855,705
Philippines	1,814,875
Vietnam	1,253,910

The form, duration, and severity of stress on people who relocate to the United States of America varies, and is largely considered unavoidable. The problem becomes more serious when those individuals have already experienced other forms of stress totally unrelated to their relocation. Often, the separation of those two events becomes difficult. Those immigrants must deal with a new culture as well as their own cultural impediments, which usually results in more stress and tension.

## PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY:

The purpose of this study is to review, examine, and identify those elements (stressors), which cause stress to immigrants in the United States of America.

## RESEARCH METHOD:

A combination of personal interviews and a questionnaire forms the basis of this study. The questionnaire is formatted into two parts. Part A is designed to collect relevant personal data such as gender, age, country of birth, and marital status. Part B aims to collect data regarding the elements that have resulted considerable stress to the immigrant. In the interview process, the interviewee is requested to identify at least five (5) events or situations which caused him/or her most stress.

## QUALIFICATION AND EXCLUSION:

Immigrants from Mexico were excluded from this study. The main reasons for this exclusion are twofold:

A: The sheer number of Mexicans living in the United States of America. It is reported that at least over 20 million Mexicans (legal and not authorized) are living in the United States. In 2010 Mexican immigrants represented 29% of all U.S. immigrants, which equaled to 4% of the United States total population. Therefore, any statistical analysis and conclusion will be dominated by immigrants from only one country.

B: The geographical proximity of Mexico to the United States. Mexico shares thousands miles of borders with the United States, which makes the travel and movement less stressful. Long borders with states of California and Texas, in particular, enable Mexicans to travel and emigrate to the U.S. with a less tension compared with individuals traveling from other countries who sometimes wait for a US visa for many months and years.

## DATA COLLECTION:

A total of 62 immigrants were interviewed or received the questionnaire. The data analysis is broken in two categories: Personal Data and Stress Data. Table A summarizes the collected data. Out of all stress factors provided by the study subject, 11 categories were common in all respondents. Table B summarizes the result of responses in order of importance.

Table A: Personal Data

Category	Number of Individuals	% of Total
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	38	62
Female	24	38



<b>Age</b>		
18-25	14	23
26-39	26	42
40 & Over	22	35
<b>Region of Origin</b>		
Middle East	26	42
Asia	20	32
South & Central America	14	23
Europe	2	3
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	34	55
Single	16	26
Divorced/Separated	12	19
<b>Level of Education</b>		
High School	16	26
BA/BS	22	35
Graduate	24	39
<b>Skill Classification</b>		
Administrative	16	25
Technical	40	65
Managerial	6	10
<b>Years in the U.S.</b>		
0 to 3 years	6	10
4 to 7 years	10	16
Over 7 years	46	74

Table B:

**Stress Data**

**1st column: Stress Factor (Stressor),**

**2nd column: No. of Responses,**

**3rd column: % of Total**

Language Barrier	31	22
Different Culture	27	19
Loneliness	16	11
Racial Discrimination	13	9
Going to School	11	8
Homesickness	10	7
Felt Poor	10	7
Fear of Deportation	8	6
Transportation Problems	6	4
Getting a Job	5	3
Uncertain Future	6	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>100</b>

**DATA ANALYSIS:**

Although the sample of data collected is relatively small in quantity, Tables A and B provide important information about the challenges that immigrants face in the United States. The population selected, though small in quantity, covers a variety of elements and disciplines.

The personal data is self-explanatory.

The focus below is on analyzing the stress data. The stressors, which were common with most immigrants will be reviewed and analyzed in order of importance. As applicable, direct statements, quotations, and memories of immigrants collected in the interview process will be briefly presented.

**LANGUAGE BARRIER:**

The language barrier is considered the most stressful factor for immigrants. This stressor consists of two parts: knowledge of the English language and knowledge of the American accent. Immigrants from India, Europe, and Australia experience more difficulties with the American English accent than immigrants from other countries. Immigrants from the Middle East and South America, on the other hand, may lack basic knowledge of English. They are particularly weak in grammar. Immigrants from Asian countries are generally weak in pronunciation.

Most immigrants felt embarrassment frustration and stress in dealing with this factor. A lack of understanding American accent and challenges in communicating with Americans, on both personal and professional levels, created anxiety with most immigrants. To remedy this stress, a number of immigrants tried to find their countrymen to communicate and socialize. This action often prolonged their learning process to the point that they learned little or no English.

The number of immigrants who learn English through formal education or in specialized language institutions is less than immigrants who learn English through working and living in American society. Nonetheless, they are under continuous tension.

A Nicaraguan high school student in an interview stated “when I went to school, other students laughed at me whenever I wanted to express myself. Some called me stupid, and some made fun of my accent.”

Quarrels over bilingualism have resulted in many states, counties and cities passing laws that officially designate English as the official language for their residents. These laws added more tension and stress, particularly for Spanish speaking, immigrants.

**DIFFERENT CULTURE:**

Living in a different culture, or “culture shock”, as viewed by a many immigrants, was the second major stressor. Middle Easterners, especially after Sep-

tember 11, 2001 felt ‘un-welcome and isolated.’ This group felt the cultural difference more than other groups living in the United States.

Immigrants from Europe and Central America seem to be somewhat familiar with American culture and appears to cope better with this problem. An Iranian immigrant stated “culture shock was very stressful. By culture shock, I mean a drastic change in way of living and doing day-to day routines.” Most immigrants stated that dealing with the culture differences was more difficult than dealing with challenges associated with learning English language. A few immigrants maintained that “learning English was achievable” whereas understanding American culture seemed impossible.

Most immigrants, however, agreed that the fact that Americans are friendly and accommodating helped them to deal with the cultural differences and helped lower their tension and anxiety.

The tension and stress was much greater on immigrants who arrived to the United States as refugees than on those who planned and studied American culture before arriving. The levels of stress and tension on individuals who came to the U.S. as refugees and social or political asylees were much acute than other groups of immigrants. In some cases, the tension and sense of hopelessness resulted in suicide or experiencing severe mental and physical illnesses.

Ironically, the common practice in the United States of referring one’s supervisor at work, or one’s teacher/instructor in school, by his/her first name was considered a stressor by some immigrants. This is an example of a seemingly insignificant, yet important hallmark of cultural differences between American culture and other cultures. Although this practice is common in the U.S. it is considered impolite and disrespectful behavior by most immigrants surveyed. An Iranian immigrant remembers, “whenever I had to call my supervisor by his surname, as I was trained to, I felt embarrassed. My supervisor constantly reminded me that I should call him by his first name. That was stressful for me.”

**LONELINESS AND HOMESICKNESS:**

For the purpose of this analysis, loneliness and homesickness stressors are combined as both categories are interrelated.

Immigrants from Middle Eastern countries particularly felt this element more than other immigrants. The culture and customs of Middle Eastern countries place a strong emphasis on the family, unity, closeness of family members, and friendship. Arriving in another country with no other family member or friend was viewed as a major stressor.

The stress caused by loneliness and homesickness is more pronounced in younger immigrants. In some cases, younger immigrants experiencing severe tension and anxiety attempted suicide. Nervous breakdowns, severe depression, and even physical illness have been reported by this group. An Egyptian immigrant said “the most stressful thing for me was that I did not know anybody. I was alone in a foreign city for a long period of time. I did not have anyone to talk to, and that was most frustrating for me.”

Homesickness was experienced more in female immigrants than male immigrants. Ironically, the interviews revealed that immigrants with technical occupations, such as engineers and Information Technology technicians, were less homesick than the immigrants with administrative and managerial occupations.

**RACIAL DISCRIMINATION:**

The most negative and emotional stressor identified by the immigrants surveyed was racial discrimination. Immigrants from South America and the Middle East were heavily exposed to this stressor. The events of September 11 significantly exposed immigrants from Middle Eastern countries to this factor. Statements and speeches made by government officials who referred to Middle Easterners as “terrorists” “extremists”, and “evil-doers” exacerbated this tension even more. Many average Americans viewed those



statements and speeches as an affirmation of racial intolerance and discrimination against this group of immigrants.

An immigrant from India told the interviewer, that “the most stressful thing for me was racial intolerance.” Another immigrant said “white is right attitude was a killer!” An immigrant from Philippines stated “in the first two years of my employment as a financial analyst I felt my coworkers always looked down on me and treated me as second class citizen. I cannot get away from this feeling even after living in the U.S. for over 8 years.”

Most immigrants felt discriminated against more in the work place than any other social setting. A sense of “low self-esteem and lack of confidence” was more serious in immigrants of ages 40 and older. Tension resulting from inequality in wages and benefits, and most importantly less opportunities for advancement, was shared by most immigrants who work in administrative positions.

**OTHER ELEMENTS:**

Among all other elements of stress identified by the immigrants (Table B), getting a job, fear of deportation, and uncertainty of future were shared commonly.

Getting a job was particularly stressful for immigrants from Middle East and India. This group wanted to obtain a job commensurate with their education and specialized profession. They were more stressed when, due to financial necessity, accepted unskilled job or a job completely unrelated to their education and training, such as working as a taxi driver or construction worker. On average, most immigrants to the U.S. could not secure an employment during their first three years of living in the U.S.

The stress and fear of deportation was mostly experienced by the immigrants from the Middle East and Asian. Also, students with student visas were mostly affected by this factor.

A Chinese student stated “every time I had bad grades on my exams I was most depressed not for my record, but for possible deportation to my homeland.” An Iranian student said “in the first few months of my arrival in the U.S. almost every night I had a nightmare. I pictured myself to be arrested by the college security officers and deported to my country for bad grades and failing in my school assignments.”

Dealing with cultural difference, on one hand, and attempting to achieve their

goals, on the other hand, make the future of most immigrants living in the U.S. uncertain, unclear and ambiguous. A few of immigrants surveyed stated that believed “they will not make it in the U.S.”. Most immigrants felt obligated to change their prior plans and goals after living in the United States for a short period of time. This uncertainty, coupled with forced re-planning and adjustment, often result in anxiety, tension, and fear of unknowns for immigrants living in the U.S.

**CONCLUSION:**

Stress on immigrants is an unavoidable fact. Each immigrant, regardless of his/her place of origin, gender, age, religious beliefs, and level of education feels pressure, tension, and anxiety from the moment they arrive in the United States of America. Acquiring wealth and financial comfort, ironically, does not diminish such stress. Even people visiting the U.S. for a short period of time have expressed stress and fear from the moment they landed. However, although the severity of their stress is variable, it is not inevitable.

The stressors for immigrants seem to be much the same no matter where the immigrants come from and do not seem to be preventable.

Much of stress stem from the fact that immigrants to U.S. must deal with a new culture as well as their own cultural issues (colloquially referred to “cultural baggage”). Some immigrants, especially ones arriving to the U.S. as refugees and political asylees carry pain, emotional and sometimes physical illness often result from genocide, war, and the destruction of their countries. They may have suffered through imprisonment, torture, and loss of family. From the moment of their arrival, in addition to their own anxiety and tensions, they face a language barrier, loneliness, and new customs, among other factors discussed earlier.

As indicated by most of the interviewed immigrants, the amount and severity of this stress tends to decline between two to three years after immigrant’s arrival. However, this stress does not completely disappear, even after living in the U.S. for decades. As one immigrant eloquently stated, “this is the price we pay for living in the United States.”■

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## REVIEWS

## MOON AT NINE

Deborah Ellis



A riveting novel set in Iran, where sexual orientation can have deadly consequences. At a time when issues of homosexuality and human rights are making headlines around the world, Pajama Press is proud to stand behind internationally acclaimed author and humanitarian Deborah Ellis and her groundbreaking new novel *Moon at Nine*. Based on a true account, *Moon at Nine* is the gripping story of two young teenaged girls who are arrested for being gay in Iran—a country in which homosexuality is considered so abhorrent that it is punishable by death.

## UNDYING DREAMS



The New action film “Undying Dreams” is a dramatic story of the fight for democracy in the Middle East

“Undying Dreams” is the gripping story of Mike, an Iranian-American man whose American wife Christine is kidnapped in war-torn Iraq where she is volunteering as a pediatric nurse. Instead of heeding the advice of his Iraqi contacts to go back home, Mike embarks on a dangerous mission to find Christine.

The movie started four years ago in 2009 and is the result of a huge effort by Ashkan Kohan and his team. It is entirely self-financed with no backing from any studio. It has more than 40 speaking roles and was shot in Los Angeles and Palmdale, California and Amman, Jordan. Even though the film crew did not encounter any problems, the fear of retaliation against Americans filming a sensitive subject was always a concern.

“Undying Dreams” also covers the 2009 Iranian youth protest against the results of the Presidential election that lasted for several months. While “Undying Dreams” is not a documentary, it is a narrative feature film showing this part of history of Iran and Iraq.

“Undying Dreams” is a timely example of the currently popular type of independent movie-making where the filmmaker has total control of the product and tells a story that is not manipulated by outside influences.

During the selection of footage for “Undying Dreams”, Ashkan Kohan watched over two thousand videos shot by insurgents during their training and preparation for attacks or while carrying out attacks on civilians, Iraqi forces and the coalition forces in Iraq. This is a side of the reality of war in Iraq, which has not been shown by mainstream media and movies coming out of Hollywood.



The following list of achievements was compiled by Firouzeh Mirrazavi (Deputy Editor of Iran Review). *Persian Heritage* extends a grateful thank you to Ms. Firouzeh, for her work on sharing this information with the Persian community.

### **NASA Kepler Telescope Confirms Iranian Professor's Predictions**

The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Kepler Space Telescope has confirmed the predictions of Iranian professor over black holes and white dwarfs. Sohrab Rahvar, a professor of Sharif University of Technology Physics Department in an article published in 2011, predicted that the black holes and white dwarfs are some types of compact objects in the space that are not directly observable. The researchers of the University of Washington also have experimentally observed the predictions of the Iranian expert after examining the Kepler Space Telescope data.

### **Nader Engheta Receives Balthasar Van der Pol Gold Medal**

Nader Engheta, H. Nedwill Ramsey Professor of Electrical and Systems Engineering, is the recipient of the Balthasar van der Pol Gold Medal from the International Union of Radio Science (URSI) for "groundbreaking contributions and innovations in electromagnetic theory and applications of composite materials, metamaterials and nanoscale optics, bio-inspired imaging and sensing, and material-based optical nanocircuitry." The van der Pol Gold Medal is one of the highest awards URSI gives and is awarded only once every three years. The Medal is awarded to outstanding scientists for career achievements with evidence of significant contributions within the most recent six-year period. The award honors the memory of Balthasar van der Pol, a physicist who was closely associated with URSI for many years.

### **Iranians, Finns Devise Model to Decipher Nanocomposites**

Iranian researchers from Isfahan University of Technology, in association with Finnish researchers from Alto University, have presented a micromechanical model that can predict mechanical properties of various types of polymeric and metallic nanocomposites. Taking into account the malfunctions of nanocomposites, the model is able to present an appropriate and ideal method for the production of a nanocomposite with the best mechanical properties, Fars News Agency reported. The method has applications in various industries, including aerospace, automobile manufacturing and medical engineering.

### **UCLA Iranian Professor Mona Jarrahi Wins Presidential Early Career Award**

Mona Jarrahi, an associate professor of electrical engineering at the UCLA Henry Samueli School of Engineering and Applied

Science, has received a Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE) — the highest honor bestowed by the U.S. government on science and engineering researchers in the early stages of their careers. Jarrahi, who is working to develop ultra-fast optoelectronic technologies for use in health care, telecommunications, remote sensing and other applications, joined the UCLA Engineering faculty in 2013. She is one of 102 scientists and engineers to receive a 2013 PECASE. "The impressive achievements of these early-stage scientists and engineers are promising indicators of even greater successes ahead," President Obama said in announcing the awards. "We are grateful for their commitment to generating the scientific and technical advancements that will ensure America's global leadership for many years to come."

### **Mashhad University Professor Awarded in Geneva**

A Mashhad University of Medical Sciences Professor, Dr. Ehsan Soltani has been awarded a gold medal at the 42nd International Exhibition of Inventions, in Geneva. Soltani, who is specialist in general surgery and a lecturer, won the prize for design and manufacture of device for blood exchange transfusion for infants with severe neonatal hyperbilirubinemia. The International Exhibition of Inventions of Geneva was held 1-7 April with inventors from US, France, Germany, Korea Republic, Russia, Switzerland, Thailand, Spain, and Iran in different fields.

### **Iran's Ershaqi Joins US Engineering Academy**

An Iranian petroleum engineering professor, Iraj Ershaqi, has become a member of the US National Academy of Engineering (NAE). Teaching at the University of South California, Ershaqi has been selected as a member of the NAE, ISNA reported. Ershaqi holds a BS in petroleum engineering from Tehran University. He also holds an MS and PhD in petroleum engineering from the University of South California. The Iranian professor has made innumerable contributions to the university over the past four decades. In 2012, he received the Society of Petroleum Engineers' highest distinction, the Honorary Member Award, and in 2010, the John Franklin Carll Medal.

### **Iranians Help Produce Hydrogen as Green Fuel**

Iranian researchers from the Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences studied the thermodynamic stability of layered components of manganese oxide and compared them to other manganese oxides. Conducted in association with the University of California, the researchers showed layered manganese oxide had vindicator properties with high performance in oxidation reactions, Fars News Agency reported.

The research can result in designing and producing more effective catalysts for the oxidation of water and production of hydrogen as a green fuel. In this research, various concentrations of potassium permanganate were dissolved in water, and manganese acetate and calcium acetate were added to it in the alkaline media. In the next stage, the obtained solid was strained and dried. It results in the synthesis of a number of layered oxides with various characteristics.

### **Iranian Helps Discover Molecular Shift in Brain**

An Iranian scientist Mahsan Mobser, along with his col-

leagues at the University of British Columbia, identifies an important molecular change that occurs in the brain when we learn and remember. Published in *Nature Neuroscience*, the research shows that learning stimulates our brain cells in a manner that causes a small fatty acid to attach to delta-catenin, a protein in the brain, ISNA reported. This biochemical modification is essential in producing the changes in brain cell connectivity associated with learning, the study finds. "More work is needed, but this discovery gives us a much better understanding of the tools our brains use to learn and remember, and provides insight into how these processes become disrupted in neurological diseases," says co-author Shernaz Bamji, an associate professor in UBC's Life Sciences Institute. It may also provide an explanation for some mental disabilities, the researchers say. People born without the gene have a severe form of mental retardation called Cri-du-chat syndrome, a rare genetic disorder named for the high-pitched cat-like cry of affected infants. Disruption of the delta-catenin gene has also been observed in some patients with schizophrenia.

### Iran and Spain Study Nanostructured Steel

Iranian researchers from Sahand University of Technology, in association with researchers from the National Center for Metallurgical Research in Madrid, Spain, studied microstructural changes of nanostructured bainitic steel at low temperature and succeeded in its thermal stabilization during low-temperature thermal operation. Microstructure stability is very important in low-temperature nanostructured bainitic steel to identify its limitations and to resolve them, Fars News Agency reported.

### Iranian Helps Overcome Antibiotic Resistance

A group of researchers at the University of Notre Dame, led by Iranian scientist Shahriar Mobashery, have discovered a new class of antibiotics that can treat antibiotic-resistant infections such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA.

The group was led by Shahriar Mobashery and Mayland Chang. The study was published in the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* titled "Discovery of a New Class of Non-beta-lactam Inhibitors of Penicillin-Binding Proteins with Gram-Positive Antibacterial Activity," ISNA reported.

### Iranian Scientist Heads Team for Lab-grown Organs

Researchers of the Royal Free Hospital headed by Alexander Seifalian have succeeded in growing various body organs such as nose and ear using stem cells. The hospital is affiliated to UCL (University College London). Various laboratories worldwide seek to produce transplantable lab organs using stem cells.

According to Professor Seifalian, head of the research team, the method for growing lab organs is like baking a cake. Various organs are grown in different moulds using stem cells. The polymer products are put in a special machine to grow these organs. The researchers made a laboratory-grown nose for a patient who had lost his/her nose due to cancer.

### Iranian Lens Tests Blood Sugar, Helps the Blind

An Iranian scientist working for Google Company, Babak Parviz, along with his colleagues, has designed an eye lens for checking blood sugar. The contact lens can also provide hope for millions of blind people. The ingenious invention contains a tiny

computer with a "super zoom" feature that can magnify objects allowing users to "see", according to ISNA.

A built-in camera can process images while a super-smart microchip analyses the data to inform the wearer of any approaching objects. The concept is in its early stages, but intellectual property blog Patent Bolt believes the smart contact lens could one day be used to benefit the 180 million people worldwide who are blind or visually impaired.

They said: "A blind person wearing Google's contact lens may want to cross the road. The analysis component of the lens can process raw image data of the camera to determine if a car is approaching." Google also said the lens will be able to detect faces and its wireless capabilities can link it up to mobile phones and other devices. It comes after Google developed a smart contact lens for diabetics, which analyses tears to warn users if their sugar levels are low. Announcing their breakthrough last month, founders Babak Parviz and Brian Otis said, "We hope this could one day lead to a new way for diabetics to manage their disease." Parviz's project dubbed Bionic Contacts was listed as one of the top 50 inventions in *Time* 2008.

### Partovi Twins Quietly Emerge as Top Silicon Valley Angel Investors

Ali and Hadi Partovi may not be household names, but the twins have quietly helped launch some of Silicon Valley's biggest startups of recent vintage. Hadi co-founded Tellme Networks, which Microsoft bought for a reported \$800 million. Ali co-founded Internet advertising pioneer LinkExchange, which Microsoft bought for \$265 million; he later became one of the first investors in Zappos, the online shoe retailer launched by LinkExchange co-founder Tony Hsieh. Amazon bought that one for about \$850 million. The Partovis also snapped up early stakes in Dropbox and Facebook. And while they're both still active angel investors, they've gotten increasingly involved in philanthropic work, including founding Code.org. The nonprofit, which encourages kids to learn software development, made a splash last year with a video that featured tech celebrities such as Mark Zuckerberg, Jack Dorsey and Bill Gates.

### RETIREMENT OF FARIDEHTEHRANI From Preservation Librarian, June 2014

Born in Shiraz, Iran, Farideh studied at Pahlavi University (now Shiraz University), where she received a BA from the School of Arts and Sciences. She received a Certificate for Accelerated Training in Medical Librarianship from the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, and her MLS from the Pratt Institute, Graduate School of Library and Information Sciences. After further study, Farideh received a DLS from the Columbia University, School of Library Service in 1987.

Farideh settled in the United States and became head of lending services at William Paterson University in 1988. She came to the Alexander Library as Head, Access Services in 1992 and was tenured in 1996. In 2006 Farideh became Preservation Librarian and liaison to Middle Eastern Studies. In this role she developed a skilled staff responsible for the repair of more than 7,000 volumes of the circulating collection, while overseeing the remediation of more than 4,000 moldy volumes.



## An Overview of the Historical Circumstances that led to the Revolts of Babak Khorramdin

Dr. Kaveh Farrokh



The Arabian conquests of 637-651 CE destroyed the Sassanian empire, terminated the independence of Iran and subjugated it to the Caliphates. The actions of the conquerors as recorded by historians, left their imprint upon the population. Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanian Empire, was systematically looted by the Arabs: up to 40,000 Iranian women were sold into slavery in Arabia. According to Benjamin, every Arab soldier was able to appropriate 12,000 Dirhams worth of goods (1888, p.278). The Arabs also captured Persia's cultural icons, notably the ceremonial swords of Kavad, Bahram Gur and Khosrow II. The crown, jewels and royal garments of Khosrow II as well as the sword of Heracles (captured earlier by the Sassanians) also fell into Arab hands (Tabari, XIII, p. 247). Newark has noted the following: "*The barbaric behaviour of the victorious nomads shocked the more refined Persians. The Arabstore up priceless carpets studded with jewels and shared them among each other. Dogs were fed off gold platters and aromatic substances were mistaken for food spices and tipped into soups*" (1988, p.91). The regal symbol of the once-mighty Sassanian Spah (army), known as *Drafsh e Kaviani* (Standard of Kaveh) was also sold as booty in Arabia for thirty thousand Dirhams (Benjamin, 1888, p.278). Mackie has documented acts

of vandalism by the Arabian conquerors at Persepolis, the capital of the ancient Achaemenid dynasty (559-323 BCE) (Mackie, 1996, p.47). Even Persia's ancient tradition of learning was attacked, with the Arabs destroying massive libraries housing ancient texts in the name of religion.

Zarrin'kub (2002) has noted that the Ummayyad Caliphate (661-750) instituted a number of discriminatory anti-Iranian policies to eliminate the Persian language and wider Iranian culture, as substantiated by Islamic sources describing of punitive policies meted against Persian-speakers (Al-Isfahani, Vol 4, p.423). The Caliphates also banned the Persian language in Iran for nearly three centuries (Abivardi 2001, p.468). Arab sources report of severe punitive measures taken against any citizen who dared speak Persian in public. According to Clawson the Arabs applied a system of "...ethnic stratification that discriminated against Iranians" who then "chafed under Arab rule" (2005, p.17). Al-Baladhuri for example reports of the Ummayyad Caliph Muawiyah (602-680) stating "...never treat them [Iranians] as equals of the Arabs" (trans. Hitti, p.417; Bahar 1381/2002, p.82; Qomi 1361/1982, pp. 254-256). Muawiyah's letter to Ziyad Ibn Abih declared the Caliphate's Iranian Muslim subjects to be (trans. Hitti, p.417; Bahar 1381/2002, p.82; Qomi 1361/1982, pp. 254-

256): 1. prevented from undertaking all frontier guard duties 2. granted lesser jobs and lower pensions 3. openly discriminated against during prayers when Arabs were present (i.e. Iranians were not to stand in the first row or lead prayer congregations) 4. barred from marrying Arab women (Arab men however were allowed to marry Iranian women) and 5. Iranian Muslims were forbidden from dressing in Arab clothing (Goldziher 1889-1890, Volume II, pp.138-139). Among other discriminatory policies were declarations that only persons of "pure Arab blood" were worthy to rule the Caliphate (Momtahan 1989, p.145). Mackie has noted that the Arabs considered non-Arabs as an inferior race (1996, p.51) which helps explain why the Caliphates discriminated not just against Iran's ancient Zoroastrian faith and Persian language but also against Iranian converts to Islam.

The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) that succeeded the Ummayyads failed to ameliorate the anti-Persian discriminatory policies and rising Iranian discontent. Resentment

against the Abbasid Caliphate was especially strong in eastern Iran (Khorasan) after the Abbasids executed the east Iranian leader Abu Muslim Khorasani in 755 CE. The Abbasids had utilized Abu-Muslim and the Khorasani in their quest to overthrow the Umayyads. The Iranians had supported the Abbasids, only to witness their political aspirations ignored once the latter had seized power. Seated firmly in Baghdad, the Abbasid Caliphate now viewed Abu Muslim and his Iranian followers as expendable. Abu Muslim was executed, possibly in part for his potential ability in rallying the Iranians in a new anti-Caliphate rebellion.

Nevertheless, though conquered, Persian language and cultural traditions such as the Nowruz (Iranian New Year) continued to endure (Axworthy, 2006, p.107). Ettinghausen corroborates this by noting that Iran had "...lost its independence, though not its cultural identity" (Ettinghausen, 1972, p.1). While Arabic had spread throughout ancient Egypt, North Africa, Syria, Mesopotamia and even Arab-

occupied Spain by the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Iranians resisted cultural assimilation. In contrast to other regions assimilated by the Arabs, the Iranians engaged in a number of revolts against the Caliphates (Umayyad and Abbasid). Arab historians, notably Ali Ibn Ahmad Ibn Hazm's (994-1064 CE) *Al Fasl fil Milal Ahwz n Nihal* have recorded the Iranian rebellions. According to Ibn Hazm "the Persians...were greater than all of the people... after their defeat by the Arabs, they [the Persians] rose up to fight against Islam...among their leaders were Sunbadh [Sindbad], Muqanna, Ustasis, Babak [Khorramdin] and others...". The defeat of these rebellions did little to dampen negative Iranian sentiments against the Caliphate's forced Arabization policies. This is seen as late as the 11<sup>th</sup> century in the epic *Shahname* [Book of Kings] by Iranian poet Ferdowsi (940-1020 CE) who quotes an Iranian general fighting against the invading Arabs as having declared "Damn this world, damn this time, damn this fate, that uncivilized Arabs have come to make me Muslim" (Mackie, 1996, p.63).

### Babak Khorramdin's Origins

Khorasani's legacy would be evoked just six decades later after his execution by Babak (from *Ardashir Babakan* founder of the Sassanian dynasty) *Khorramdin* (Persian for "those who follow the joyful religion") (795-838 CE) who led the Iranians in their most determined revolt against the Abbasid Caliphate for two decades in 816-837 CE.

Lewis states "... The memory of Abu Muslim himself was...frequently invoked by Iranian rebels who claimed to be his heirs and avengers against the Caliph who betrayed him... By far the most serious of these movements was that of Babak (816-837

CE)" (2002, pp. 109-110).

Primary historical sources are clear that Babak was a Persian. One of these is medieval Armenian historian Vardan Areweltsi, approx. 1198-1271 CE (Muyldermans, 1927, p.119). The full history of Babak's career is derived from Waqed bin Amr Tamimi's (now lost) *Akbar Babak* that was quoted by Ibn al-Nadim's *Al-Fehrist* (Flügel, 1869, pp.406-407). The sources however are more divergent with respect to Babak's familial origins, notably with respect to the name and background of Babak's father. Waqed (the most reliable source) reports Babak's father as having been a cooking-oil merchant named *Abdullah* from Madain (formerly Ctesiphon, capital of the former Sassanian Empire) who had migrated to the village of Belalabad in Azarbaijan (Flügel, 1869, p.406). Tabari however cites Babak's father as a drifter named *Matar*. However even the notion of Babak's humble class origins have been challenged. Sadighi for example has suggested that Babak may have hailed from the Iranian nobles (1938, pp.239-241). Babak's mother, *Mahru* (Persian: Beautiful; lit. moon-faced one) was a native of Azarbaijan. Waqed then states that shortly after Babak's birth, his father Abdullah was on his way to the Sabalan region in Azarbaijan when he died as a result of a bitter altercation. Babak was then raised by his now-widowed mother Mahru who worked as a wet-nurse. Babak worked as a cowherd as a child until the age of twelve, to then variously work as a servant and fruit seller. He then returned to his native Belalabad from Tabriz when he was eighteen.

Babak also learned to play the *tanbur* (most likely a Sassanian-style stringed instrument or Lute) while he was in Sarat/Sarab. He then

played the *tanbur* and sang for the people as he sold fruits in Sarat/Sarab (Abu'l-Ma'ali, 1962, p.299). There are also records of an interesting legend portending Babak's sense of destiny. The *Al-Fehrest* reports of a legend in which Babak's mother saw her son asleep and naked one afternoon under a tree covered by blood on his chest and scalp; Babak then woke up but there was no trace of blood on his body, leading his mother to assert "I know that my son has a great task ahead" (Ibn al-Nadim, *Al-Fehrest*, 1871, p.406).

### Babak and the Khorramdin Sect

The Khorramdin sect in Azarbaijan had built a strong following during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The *Khorram-dinan* (Persian *xorramdinān*: those who follow the Joyful religion) sect was an Iranian movement that based its teachings upon the pre-Islamic Iranian religion of Mazdakism (Madelung, 2009, pp.63-65, Goldschmidt & Davidson, 2005, p.81, Whittow, 1996, pp.195, 203 & 215). Some researchers describe the Khorram-dinan as a "neo-Mazdakite" movement (Zarrinkub, 1343/1964, p.544; Amoretti, 1975, p.503; Madelung, 2009, p.64). Mazdak (d. 524 or 528 CE) had been the spiritual leader of a reformist Zoroastrian movement during the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE which had based its theology on the egalitarian teachings of the ancient prophet Zoroaster (Farrokh, 2007, pp.158, 221-223). The Khorram-dinan held a number of pre-Islamic Iranian beliefs such as the idea that all religions, despite their apparent doctrinal differences, were all essentially truthful in worshipping the same great spiritual entity (Yarshater, 1985, p.1008).

The Persian term "*Khorram-din*" or the "Joyous religion" supports the multitude of sources confirming the move-

ment as having been a derivative of Mazdak's original religion in which joy was seen as an fundamental element of the universe. The Khorram-dinan however were also sternly loyal to the memory and legacy of Khorasani. It is also possible that the movement had been founded in part by Sindbad, another past Iranian rebel in Khorasan province who had been a close associate of Abu-Muslim Khorasani.

The Khorram-dinan or neo-Mazdakites were not restricted to Iran's Azarbaijan province. There were Khorram-dinan sects in Hamedan (northwest), Gorgan province (in the north) and even Rayy (near modern Tehran). There were also strong pockets of Khorram-dinan in the southern Caucasus, especially Armenia and Albania/Arran (modern Republic of Azarbaijan since May 1918). Just one century after the Arab conquests of Sassanian Iran, a Khorram-dinan or neo-Mazdakite rebellion had broken out in Gorgan in 778-779 CE. This led to serious battles with Amr bin Ala, the Caliph Muhammad ibn Mansur al-Mahdi's (744 or 745-785 CE) delegate in Tabaristan (roughly corresponding to modern-day northern Iran comprising Gorgan, Mazandaran, Rasht and parts of Talysh). The Gorgan rebels had fought alongside another group of Iranian rebels known as the *Bateni*. These also followed pre-Islamic Iranian cults and flew the red banner as their symbol. The caliphate did succeed in containing and suppressing the northern revolts, but as events in Babak's time soon demonstrated, anti-Arab independence movements among Iran's northern population had been far from destroyed. Another serious revolt by the Khorram-dinan broke out during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786 - 809 CE) in Iran's interior and northwest, especially in Isfah-

an, Hamedan and Rayy. The Caliph's delegates, Abu Dolaf Elji and Abdullah bin Malek brutally suppressed this rebellion (Amoretti, 1975, pp.504-505; Madelung, 2009, p.64). Just eight years after the death of Harun al-Rashid, Babak and the most Khorram-dinan would lead the most serious anti-caliphate Iranian rebellion from their base in Azarbaijan.

Prior to the rebellion, two men were vying for the leadership of the Khorram-dinan in Azarbaijan's Bazz mountain region: Javidan bin Shahrak and Abu Emran. Mahru (Babak's mother) had welcomed Javidan into her home as the latter sought shelter in the village of Balalabad after having travelled through the bitter winter snows in Azarbaijan. Javidan met the youthful Babak in Mahru's home and was soon impressed by the young man's intellect and charisma. Javidan then asked permission from Mahru to take Babak with him to serve as his property manager. With Mahru's permission Babak accompanied Javidan. It is generally believed that it was at this juncture when Babak joined the Khorram-dinan movement. An important branch of the Khorram-dinan was named after Javidan. This sect was known as Javidaniin 807-817 CE and it was during this time when Babak became Javidan's student (Sadighi, 1938, p.107; Ibn Khaldun, pp. 256-262).

In the meantime the question of leadership of the entire Khorram-dinan movement in Azarbaijan had not been resolved. Tensions came to a head by 817 CE when Javidan's rival Abu Emran decided to permanently settle the leadership question and end the rivalry for good. Abu Emran rushed down with his fighters from their mountain strongholds to combat Javidan. After a brief but bitter battle, Javidan slew Abu Emran. Javidan's victory proved short lived. He soon

succumbed to his wounds and died just three days later. One day after Javidan's passing, his widow Banu informed Babak that she would announce to the Khorram-dinan congregation that Babak would now be their leader. There have been suggestions that Banu had been in love with Babak; this is certainly possible as Banu married Babak shortly after Javidan's death (Sadighi, 1938, p.244). Banu also declared to the congregation that Babak would revive Mazdak's doctrines and liberate them from the rule of the Caliphate. The seeds of Babak's rebellion were now in place.

### Babak's Goals and the Legacy of Abu-Muslim Khorasani

Babak's early 9th century CE anti-Caliphate rebellion in Azarbaijan (northwest Iran) was both anti-Muslim and anti-Arab (Tabari, III, p.1226; Sadighi, 1938, pp.265, 275; Amoretti, 1975, p.509). Babak embodied the aims and ambitions of the Iranian population, especially in his goal to restore Iranian independence and her pre-Islamic religions (especially Zoroastrianism and Mazdakism). There is also a possibility that Babak had some form of family relationship with the late Abu Muslim Khorasani. Dinavari has stated that "*What seems to us to be true and proven is that Babak was a son of Moṭahhar, the son of Abu Moslem's daughter Faṭema, and that the Faṭemiya group of the Khorramis took their name from this Faṭema, not from Faṭema the daughter of God's Prophet.*" (As cited from Yusofi "Babak Korrami", Encyclopedia Iranica).

While the thesis of Babak-Khorasani family ties can be debated, it is possible that Babak may have claimed such ties for political reasons. Like previous anti-Arab rebels, Babak's claims may have

been intended to gain support from an Iranian populace still retaining memories of Abu Muslim Khorasani (see Yusofi, 1966, pp. 175-78, 165). What is known is that the Khorram-dinan of Azarbaijan led by Babak were known for their reverence for Abu Muslim Khorasani (Nezam-al-Molk Tusi, 1969, pp.359, 367-368).

The connection with Khorasani is indicative that Babak's anti-Caliphate revolt represented the entire Iranian realm. It is noteworthy that Babak had originally joined the Khorramite sect known as the *Fatemiyeh*, which had been named after *Fatemeh*, who had been the late Khorasani's daughter (Amoretti, 1975, p.503).

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*Thank you for granting this interview with Persian Heritage magazine. Can you tell us where you grew up?*

I grew up in Norouzabad on my parents' farm on the back of a Caspian Miniature Horse. As children, our lives centered around these horses. Our games always revolved around Caspians and on the weekends we were usually to be found at the racetrack or the show jumping grounds of *Khargoosh Dareh*.

*When did your mother first discover the Caspian horse?*

My mother, Louise Firouz, had discovered this little horse in 1965 on a trip to the Mazandaran. She acquired a few mares and stallions and started a breeding program. There was much demand for this talented, agile, well mannered horse as the perfect child's mount. As the breeding program took shape and more Caspians became available, sporting events such as races, gymkhanas, show jumping competitions and three day events were organized.

*Your mother's interest in the Caspians went beyond owning a few, how else was she involved?*

Louise was very curious about the horse's unique characteristics. This led her to carry out extensive research in collaboration with scientists throughout the world. These horses are now thought to be the ancestor to the modern horse.

*Can you tell us about the horse itself?*

The Caspian is native to the Gilan and Mazandaran provinces of Iran and looks like a perfectly shaped little horse. They have a silky mane and tail, with almost no feathering around the fetlocks. They have very strong, dense hooves that rarely need shoes.

Over the years, Caspians were exported to the UK, Australia and New Zealand, America and many European countries. Estimates for their numbers range from 2500 to 5000 with the biggest numbers outside of Iran in the UK and America. They are used for show jumping, pony games, racing, driving and are very successfully crossbred to produce a large pony.

AN INTERVIEW WITH

## ATESHE FIROUZ

Breeder and Protector of the Caspian Horse

Persian Heritage



Louise Firouz

*Your mom passed away but you still remain interested in the horses, what activities are you involved in?*

I have always been a passionate horsewoman. I was very involved in show jumping both in Iran as well as in Europe. After moving to Europe in the early 1990's I took up dressage and traveled to Hirosham in 1994 as part of the Iranian delegation to the Asian Games. Since I have competed extensively in Europe. I teach riding as well as train horses. My daughter, Leyla Larsson has competed for the Belgian Dressage Team for the past 5 years. She was the Belgian Champion in 2011.

We have a small Caspian breeding operation in Belgium and have bred and competed many ponies in both the show jumping and dressage arenas.

*Have these horses ever been cross bred with other horses?*

I have in fact successfully crossed a Caspian with a Holsteiner to produce a beautiful, talented sportspony who was very successful in the show jumping ring. He also performs very high level dressage

movements.

*Do you think that the Caspian's population in Iran will continue to increase or is it headed for extinction?*

The Caspian Horse is very well known in Iran and is flourishing thanks to the efforts of many enthusiasts. There are also many breeding operations in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. However, the current economic crisis has affected many breeders as well as sales. Breeding operations suffer as well from lack of sufficient bloodlines.

*I am aware of a Caspian horse festival in Iran, what is that about?*

A yearly Festival of the Caspian Horse is held in Rasht, an event which attracts participants from all over the country. Classes such as show jumping and conformation classes are held. There is also a Caspian riding school in Tehran which provides riding instruction of a very high quality to children.

*What efforts are being made to protect this beautiful animal?*



We are working hard to establish the future of the Caspian through on-going projects. Efforts are being made to set up a gene bank to safeguard all known bloodlines, and registration is being streamlined to ensure an accurate record of all known horses. Next year is the 50th anniversary of the rediscovery of the Caspian Horse. We are working on a special calendar depicting the breed throughout the world. The calendar will be sold to raise funds for ongoing projects designed to safeguard the future of this unique animal.

*In the United States where is the best place to see the Caspian?*

One of the largest breeding operations is in Texas but there are other Caspians in other parts as well.

### **Backsplash by Negar Ahkami**



Today we're featuring a brand new to 20x200 artist, painter Negar Ahkami. As a first-generation American born to Iranian parents, Ahkami's work is heavily influenced both by Persian-Islamic traditions and Western notions of the individual, personal emotions and experimentation. Her first collaboration with us, Backsplash, is powerful, wonderful and impossible to resist.

*Backsplash by Negar Ahkami*

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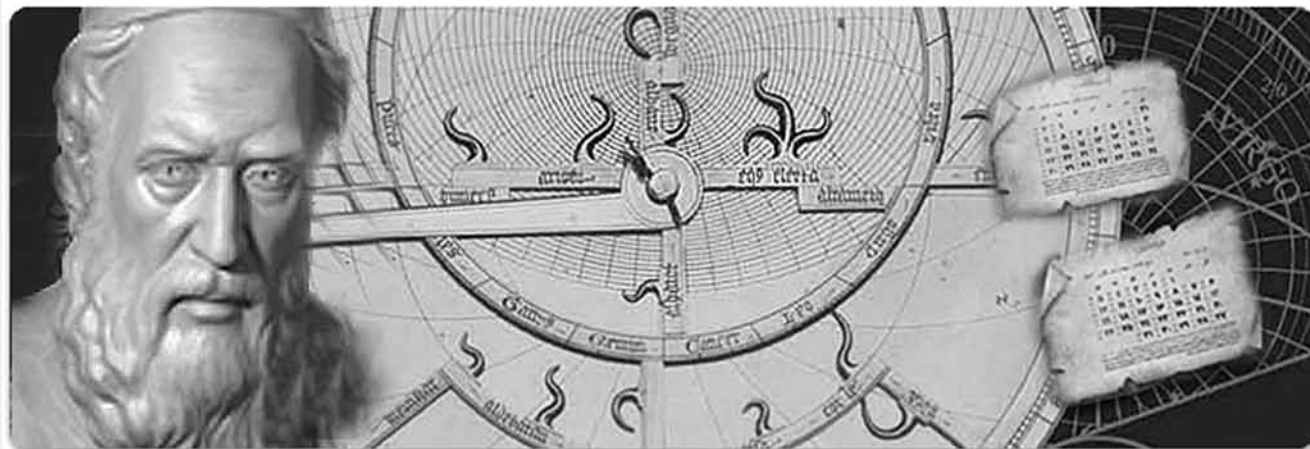
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# A Perpetual Paradigm on the Concept of Time, Calendar, and Norouz

part two

DAVOOD N. RAHNI



Again, recognizing the green warming season vs. the dry chilling season, early humans learned to plant crops at certain autumnal periods in order to optimize the growth output; germinations also coincided with the birthing period of many domesticated and wild animals. In other words, the importance of the spring season as the period during which birth and rebirth (survival) of vegetation and animals is at a maximum (presumably for evolutionary reasons) was recognized, and most probably celebrated. That in and of itself provides the strongest evidence of the vernal equinox, now March 21, as the commencement of a New Year in subsequent calendars that were developed in the Mesopotamian region, Iran and beyond. Once again, this might have as well been tens of thousands years ago but who exactly knows; nonetheless, we have no record of it, only circumstantial evidence and speculative extrapolation back in time. Calendars developed by the various peoples of Mesopotamia, as far back as 6,000 years, are among the first calendars known to-date. The eighth century British *Bede* in his book *History*, computed the day of the creation to be “exactly” March 18, 3952 B.C.E., another indication of the importance of the beginning of spring! In fact, spring *vernal equinox* as late as the eighteenth century, was the first day of European Common New Year. Have you ever wondered why the current so-called western months of **September** (7), **October** (8), **November** (9), **December** (10) necessitates January to be the 11<sup>th</sup> and February as the 12<sup>th</sup>, and thus March the first month of the subsequent New Year?!

The term “Kalends” as the precursor to the word “calendar” for tracking times and events, is Latin, meaning the beginning of the month. Professor W. Sayce in an 1874 article in the *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* writes, “The standard astrological work of the Babylonians and Assyrians was one consisting of seventy tablets, drawn up for the Library of Sargon, the King of Agane, in the 16th century BCE. This date is however, revised recently to date this back to 3,800 BCE. The Accadian calendar was arranged to suit the order of the zodiacal signs.

Nisan, the first month, resonated to the first zodiacal sign. From as far back as 4,698 BCE, when the sun entered the first point of Aries at the vernal equinox in the time of Hiparkhus and before then, New Year was observed by the Accadians based on zodiacal observations. Nisan was the first month of the year. The earliest evidence support the fact that the first Accadian Calendar dating back to 6,000 BCE, had originated when the winter solstice, perhaps the time of planting seeds for germinations to appear early in subsequent year and not the vernal equinox, coincided with the sun’s entry into the constellation Aries; this was later moved to Nisan, the first month of spring. The Accadian months were: Nisannu (Barzig-gar in Accadian), Airu, Simjannu, Duzu, Abu, Ululu, Tischritu, Arah-samna, Kislimu, Tebitu, Sabatu, Adaru<sup>2</sup>.

Barzig-gar in early Pahlavi and perhaps in Proto-Indo-European languages meant the season for seeding. In fact, in Persian, the word “Barz” refers to crop seeds, and “Gar” is a subjective suffix referring to one’s propagating profession similar to “-smith” in English. The word Barzgar is still used in Iran and the surrounding countries, synonymous to a farmer who spreads and cultivates crop seeds. In the northern valley of Karkas (Vulture) Mountain (altitude: 4,200 meters) located in Natanz the provincial town between Kashan and Esphahan in Iran and my ancestral hometown, there is a fertile oasis village called **Barz**. It is located in the vicinity of Abyaneh, another historic village (registered by UNESCO as a historical community) where the inhabitants still speak a middle Pahlavi dialect, and where the religion was Zoroastrian until presumably as recently as 18th century in the Safavid era. In fact, the Zoroastrian temple and the mosque co-exist side by side today, a few miles north Deh Zireh, where the Natanz Nuclear facility is located.

Professor M. Hommel of the University of Oxford in the 1899 March volume of the *Proceedings of Biblical Archaeology* calls attention in his Assyriological anthology to the name “Assara Mazas” appearing among the Assyrian Gods; its similarity with the Persian God Ahura Mazda is hard to miss. The

older Persian word in the Kassitic *Surias*, “sun”, later became Ahura and Hvarya. In Sanskrit, Asura and suria are of the highest importance for the history of Aryan languages. In the same Kassitic period, between 1,700 and 1,200 BCE, the Assyrians most likely borrowed the Iranian God Assara-Mazas. Asura in the Vedic literature means Spirit, or simply “the wise”.

The Dionysian year commenced with March 25<sup>th</sup> that being the date usually assigned to the “Incarnation of the World”. The earliest Roman calendar had ten months – January and February had no place and March was indeed the first month of the year, which was confirmed by the ceremony of rekindling the sacred fire in the Temple of Vesta. Macrobius recorded the practice of placing fresh laurels in the public buildings. Such observation and the sacred treatment of fire were Zoroastrian rituals adopted from Persia. A closer re-examination of the current Western Gregorian calendar reveals that the suffixes Sept-, Oct-, Nov-, Dec-, refer to the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> months of the year. That in turn makes January, named after the two-faced god Janus, and February named for the cloak of the goddess June (februa), which naked men wore during the very important Lupercalia fertility festival held at that time of the year, were added in the first century CE as the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> months of the year. This was yet another indication of March as the first month of the year and mid-March as the turning point of the New Year<sup>3,12</sup>. At the time when Christianity was being introduced, two religions, Graeco-Roman and the Mithraic faith of Persian-Hindu origin, were the dominant religions in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. For Persian Mithraism December 25, *Dies Natalis*, the date that invincible Sun God (Sol *Invictus*) was born, and, for the Roman Saturnalia December 17, named after Saturnus the later defied first King of *Latinum*, were the two most important festivals in their calendars. The Christians, however, had very few holidays of their own that they could unanimously agree on the dates at that juncture: the Jewish Passover (Pesakh), the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

Besides, these Christian holidays were very somber. So, they adopted the pagan *Dies Natalis* (God’s Birthday), i.e., December 25 for the birth of Jesus, in essence to mask the preceding pagan celebratory ritual. That would in turn make January 1, the Day of Circumcision of the baby Jesus according to the Jewish faith as practiced by Mary and Joseph, where the eighth day after birth a boy had to be circumcised in order to be a “Son of the Covenant” (Ben Brith). So, once again, the indirect contribution of Persian Mithraism to Western civilization and the global observation of January 1 as the New Year become evident.

While at one point the ancient Romans in pagan times, began January 1 as the “New Year’s Day”, most others including the Hebrews, Persians, and others in what is now misnamed as the Middle East observed the spring *vernal equinox*. The Greeks observed the summer solstice, the Egyptians observed the harvest or the Nile flood time<sup>4,5</sup>.

Norouz, the first day of Spring on or about March 21 when the *vernal equinox* crosses the equator and makes the days and nights equal in length in the northern Hemisphere, has been celebrated for millennia by the Iranians, Babylonians, Assyrians and Chaldeans (900 BCE) on the Persian/Mesopotamian plateau. In fact, Norouz is observed by well over a dozen nations, from

Xingjian’s western China, central Asia to the Caucasus region, Iran, Iraq and west to Turkey and Asia Minor. Norouz occurs as the sun enters the zodiac sign, Ram, when the constellations of Leo and Taurus at their zenith, coincide with the spring equinox. Celebration of Norouz reaffirms the interconnectedness between humans and nature. In Persian mythology, “Uncle” Norouz is an old humble man, an emblem of benign authority and wisdom. Year after year, he is expected to appear from the invisible world at the time of the Persian New Year, when an old woman having cleaned her dwelling and worn new clothing, has set up ceremonial display and special offerings, the Haft sins, but misses him by falling asleep right before he arrives<sup>6</sup>. During her sleep she dreams of renewal and rebirth, a reflection of the myth believed by all people.

The “Poem of Creations” on the seven tablets, dating from the ninth Century BCE, was recited in the course of the Babylonian festival at spring. It tells of the victory of Marduk, the sun-god, who also symbolized the forces of spring. These hymns of creations were revered by the people who inhabited Mesopotamia- the Sumerians, the Semites, and the Indo-European Iranian stocks; they can be viewed as a precursor to later celebrations like Passover, Good Friday, Easter and Norouz<sup>7</sup>. The figure “seven” became a mystical number when the seven celestial objects, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn became the precursors to the names of the seven days of a cycle: the week<sup>16</sup>.

In practice, the Norouz celebration begins from almost a week to thirteen days before the New Year and ends thirteen days thereafter, called *Sizdeh Bedar* (April fool’s Day). Water (continuity, dynamism, passing), green sprouts (rejuvenation, birth, growth), and fire (energy) all strong components of nature, play preeminent roles in observing the celebration. *When the New Year Came in March* is a 1940’s American children’s novel based on true story of a family who crossed the Atlantic Ocean in the 1630’s to come to North America. The story is narrated by Humphrey, a small boy who frequently talks about specific stories revolving around March 25, the New Year. A whole chapter is allocated to the [Common] New Year, commencing about March 25 when the spring arrives. Archery, i.e., arrow shooting and convening of planing crops were the main events of the day<sup>8</sup>. Archery and horseback riding are among the most historical sports by the peoples of southwest Asia (Iran) that have found their way into every epic and national story in Persian mythology! This further supports the notion of celebrating the New Year at the commencement of spring hat has its root in Persia and Babylonia.

As the third Christian millennium has arrived, it is timely to present yet an anthology of various calendars, their epochs, their promoters, etc. A comparative presentation of the names of the zodiacs, days of the week and the names of the months, would demonstrate the amazing commonality among such seemingly divergent calendars and cultures. One could inextricably conclude that the inter-cultural communications among various cultures from South Asia to Central Africa must have been much more deeply rooted in the prehistoric era than once was even imagined possible<sup>9</sup>. It is noteworthy to mention that the English friar free thinker, Roger Bacon, despite being chastised by Rome, was the first to have noticed that the solar calendar was a month faster

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every 120 years. It almost took many decades before the Catholic Church ultimately recognized the leap year correction anchored on logical reasoning and not misconstrued as heresy. There is an old prayer in Iran that one wishes another Good Samaritan to outlive live 120 years. In antiquity especially before the 11th century Jalali calendar by Omer Khayyam, they added one month to every 120th year in order to retroactively correct for the thirty days of preceding leap years!

A comprehensive explanation of calendars, mostly ancient as well as newer ones are as follow:

Historical: Babylonian, Era of Nabonassar, Macedonia, Hebrew, Selucid, Zoroastrian, era of Antioch, Olympiad era, the era of tyre, Roman, Armenian

South/west: Iran, Islamic, Fasli (Soor san), Yezdezred, Jalali, Afghanistan, India, Akbar, Fasli,

Asia: Deccan, Parasuram, Burmese, Arakanse

Far East: Chinese, Tibet

Africa: Egypt, Coptic, Ethiopian

Central Am: Mayan, Aztec, Inca

Western: Early Northern European, Julian, Gregorian, Christian ecclesiastical Saints, and the French Revolutionary era, and the former Soviet Union Republics.

### **BABYLONIAN CALENDAR**

A lunar calendar was used in the “Middle East” in early recorded history. Its influence spanned from Egypt and Greece, through the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, Persia, and India to the Himalayas. This calendar was the plausible precursor to the Hebrew calendar still used to-date. It had 12 months of 29 or 30 days. The day began with sunset, which gave an uneven

length of daylight and dark. The year apparently began on the new moon nearest to the vernal equinox, presumably in March. The first Babylonian month was called Nisanu, which in early Aramaic languages meant spring. The months were as follows: 1 Nisanu, 2 Aiaru, 3 Simanu, 4 Duzu, 5 Abu, 6 Ululu, 7 Tashritu, 8 Arahsamnu, 9 Kislimu, 10 Tebatu, 11 Shabatu, and, 12 Addaru.

Although we don’t know how the months were divided, it is highly probable that a month was divided in “*Decans*” of ten days each with the last decan either 9 or 10 days, a reflection of the number of fingers on both hands. The vernal equinox was the New Year day. The origin of the *Decan* is based on the numbers of fingers, the first calculator there ever was. Though we have no clear record of the number and dates of holidays, one could, nonetheless, infer that new year, the anniversary of the ruler’s ascension to the throne, the winter solstice, new moons, planting and harvesting festivals were among special “holi-“ days.

Although Babylonians used the lunar calendars for religious and daily purposes, a solar based calendar for astronomical purposes had also been devised; the latter was also used by Assyrians and Chaldeans, based on 12 months with the day beginning at 6:00 am (dawn). It is quite clear that the Babylonians invented the Zodiac. The sun determined the length of the year by passing through the 12 signs, and the moon passed through them all in about 29½ days. Our horoscope is the direct descendent of the Babylonian Calendar. The Babylonian epoch is March 23, 625 BCE.

### **ZOROASTRIAN CALENDAR**

The Zoroastrian calendar epoch is the birth of the prophet Zoroaster on March 3, 389 BCE. It was a vague solar calendar of 365 days, 12 months each comprised of 30 days, with five days added at the end of the year. It didn’t have a leap year as it was more aligned with the sun than the moon, nor did it divide the months into decades or weeks. Each of the 30 days of the months had its own proper name carried in much the same way as we use a number for a day in a month today. The Zoroastrian months were: Furvurdeen, Ardibehesht, Khordad, Tir, Amerdad, Sherever, Moher/Mehr, Aban, Adur/Azar, Dey/Deh, Bahman, Aspanadamz/Esband.

The names of the days in a month are: Hormazd, Bahman, Ardibehesht, Sherevere, Aspundad, Khordad, Amerdad, Depadur, Adur, Aban, Khurshed, Mohr, Tir, Gosh, Depmhel, Meher, Serosh, Rashne, Furvurdeen, Behman, Ram, Guvad, Depdin, Din, Ashasang, Ashtad, Asman, Zamiad, Maharesphand, Aniram. The five extra days at the end of the year are: Ahnuvud, Ushtuvad, Spentamud, Vhi-Kashusthra, and Vashisstrusht. The names of the months and zodiacs are then used to denote the names of the days of the months.

The most important celebration for Zoroastrians was the observance of the New Year, Norouz on March 21, at the spring **vernal equinox**. There is also Mehregan, the harvest celebration in early fall, and the winter solstice celebration called, Yalda (means birth), and finally the summer solstice, Tirgan/abrizan. Whenever the names of a day coincided with the name of that month, it was also celebrated as well.

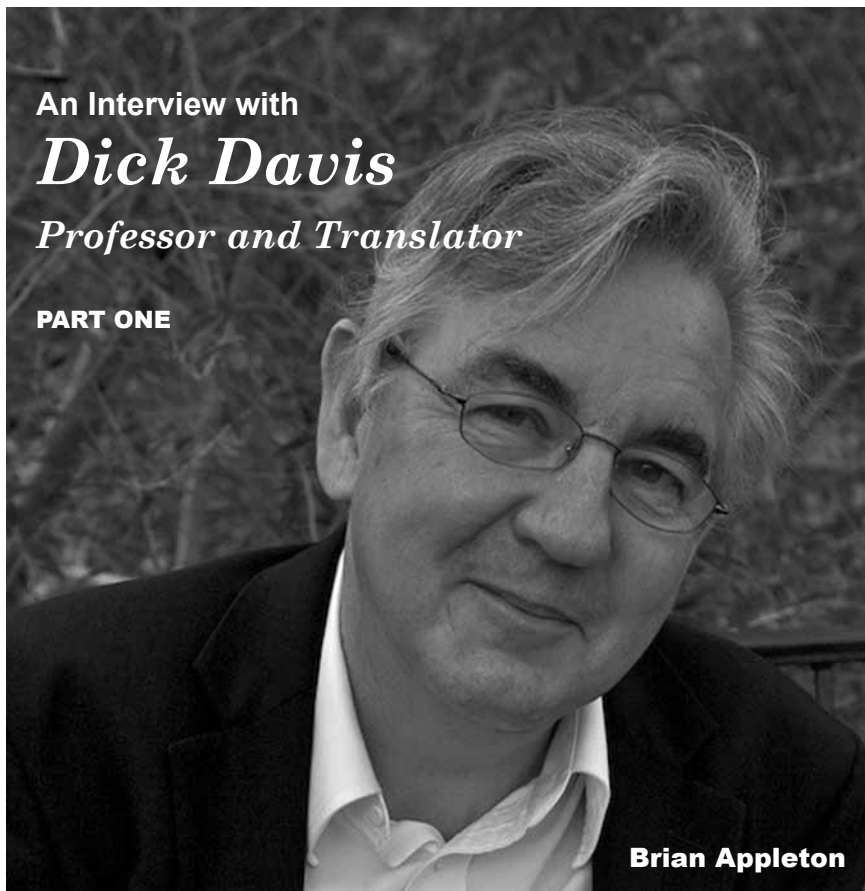
The Zoroastrian calendar was well established all over Persia and Asia Minor by 300 BCE, nonetheless, it continues to be used by the people of Zoroastrian faith in Iran, India, and elsewhere. The Persians, have however, used a modified version of it since 7<sup>th</sup> century ACE called, the calendar of Yezdezred.

*to be continued*



An Interview with  
*Dick Davis*  
Professor and Translator

## PART ONE



Brian Appleton

*Tell us about your childhood, perhaps a unique incident or experience that influenced you in your career path and did you have a role model or someone who had a large influence on you? Which of your parents was Italian and where did you grow up?*

I was born in Portsmouth, on the south coast of England, in 1945. We moved around quite a lot when I was young, but I spent much of my childhood and adolescence in Yorkshire, again on the coast. I love the sea, and miss it, living in the mid west as I now do. A very important person in my life was my high school English teacher. It was fairly unthinkable for someone from my kind of background to go to Oxford or Cambridge at that time, but he strongly encouraged me to try, and to my and I think everyone else's astonishment I got a place at King's College, Cambridge. This literally changed my life, mainly by the way it so vastly broadened my sense of life's— in particular my life's— possibilities. I'm still in touch with that

English teacher. His name is John Gibson; he's in his 80s now, and like me he moved to the US. He lives in Indiana, and we see each other once or twice a year. In a way I owe him everything "professional" that has ever happened to me, as those things certainly wouldn't have happened if I hadn't gone to Cambridge, or they wouldn't have happened in the same ways. Obviously I'm extremely grateful to him for all he did for me.

Neither of my parents was Italian. My mother's mother came from near Bellinzona, the border area between Italy and Switzerland, and culturally she was wholly Italian, so my mother was you could say half Italian. My grandmother was brought to England as a teenager to be a chambermaid in a hotel, before the First World War; she was virtually sold in fact, by her parents. It was a sad awful story, and her presence in my childhood was a very dour dark fraught one, through no fault of her own of course. Only after her death did I begin to realize what she must have gone through, the violence that had been done to her psyche and the way this had affected her whole sad life.

The most important event of my early life was the suicide of my brother when I had just turned 21; he was 19. It was mainly because of this event that I left England as soon as I went down from Cambridge – I just couldn't bear to be there. And leaving at that age meant that a life out of England seemed to become more or less inevitable for me. I feel a stranger when I go there now. As I do in the US too of course. I'm English, wholly so I think, but my England is the England of my adolescence, so not I'm not English as England now is.

*What attracted you to Iran and Persian culture? Did the national past time of poetry have anything to do with it? What makes Persian culture different from that of other nations?*

I went to Iran serendipitously. I had a friend who was working there on an archaeological dig, and he absolutely loved it. He suggested I come out for a year and that we share an apartment and both teach English somewhere; it was fairly easy to get a job doing that then. So I found a job at Tehran University, sponsored by the British Council, and went. After the year was up my friend went back to England, but I stayed, mainly because by that time I had met the person who later became my wife.

The importance of poetry in Persian culture was certainly something that I found extremely attractive once I discovered it; it was one of the many things that held me there. As for characterizing Persian culture, this is terribly hard to do in a sentence or two without stereotyping and caricaturing, which of course we emphatically don't want to do. I can perhaps say that I'm constantly struck by the cultural parallels between Italy, where I also lived for a while, and Iran. Both cultures have extremely chaotic pastspolitically, with foreigners periodically marauding over the country and grabbing bits of it; both cultures are the heirs of great empires in antiquity and aren't going to forget that fact; both have the most marvelous artistic heritage of which they are very conscious and very proud; the cities of both cultures have a wonderfully vibrant street life, full of jokes and put downs and spectacle; both cultures have elaborately distinctive cuisines and a love of good food; both cultures have a very powerful religious

establishment that spreads its authority into almost every aspect of life, public or private, but is still shrugged off by large sections of the populace; both cultures place great importance on not losing face, in appearing admirable before others; both cultures have a rather obsessive sense of honor centered on the family; both cultures love conspiracy theories, and so on, and so on. And if anyone feels that there has never been in Italy anything like the early years of the Islamic Republic in Iran, I recommend that he/she read about the (thankfully brief) ascendancy of Savonarola in 15th century Florence, or the activities of the Roman Inquisition from the 16th to the 18th centuries.

***What caused you to take such an interest in the medieval period? Is there something romantic or nostalgic about the pre-industrial age when fealty and chivalry were of paramount importance and mysticism flourished?***

I've always, from early childhood on, been fascinated by the past, in the sense of wondering what people's lives were like "then". How like us were they, and how unlike us? I think a lot of children feel this (Whatever were our parents like before we were here? That kind of thing).

And then the further back the question takes you, the more mysterious, and for that very reason the more fascinating, the lives become. As a child the only language I could read was (of course, in my case) English, and the furthest back you can go reading English is to the medieval period; there isn't English before then. And so the medieval period became quite an obsessive interest early on, and it's just stayed that way for me. Later I learned other languages, or tried to anyway, and read translations, and my horizons widened, but the medieval period has always been where I've felt the strongest tug of intellectual, empathetic, interest (although most medieval societies must have been, for most people, really appalling – "nasty, brutish, and short" as Hobbes says - to live in, by our standards and expectations), and all this comes from my childhood I think. My favorite poet in English, for example, by a long way, is Chaucer. And as I grew up this interest in medieval England morphed, as it seemed naturally, into an interest in non-English medieval societies and literatures.

***How is it that you did not take an interest in translating contemporary Persian poets like Forough Farrokhzad or Akhavan-Sales?***

I mentioned my love of the past, and especially the medieval past. Coupled with this, I fell in love with poetry very early on, and because so much of my mental life as a child was taken up with pre-modern things it was pre-modern poetry I mainly read and learned by heart and, when I started to write verse myself, imitated. Of course as an adolescent I learned that free verse existed, and I duly read a lot of it – the canonic authors as it were (I was a total nerd as a young person, I was always, always, always reading) and even tried to write a bit of free verse when I was about 17 or 18, but I quickly realized, "This is not for me". It seemed so thin and meager, and also so narcissistic, compared with the richness of the poetry of the past. The urge to be like one's peers, and unlike one's predecessors, is one I've never really shared in any deep way, although like all young people I flirted with it for a while. The notion that you can't write in a particular way because it is unfashionable / old-fashioned, or that you must write in a particular way because it's fashionable / avant-garde, has always seemed silly to me. Equally silly to me has always been the notion that poetry is most interesting when it breaks pre-existing rules. It's the easiest thing in the world to break a rule; it's far harder to keep to one and still do something that seems real / true to you, and which is, perhaps, authentically "you". "The fascination of what's difficult", as Yeats says. You write, and translate, the kind of thing you want to read, and free verse wasn't what I was interested in reading. Most contemporary Persian poetry, like that by the two poets you mention, is in free verse, so it doesn't really attract me. I'm less doctrinaire about this than I used to be, and there is some (not a lot, but some) free verse that I can now read with pleasure, but it's not at all where my heart is.

***Did you feel that the world was largely ignorant of classic Persian literature and poetry and were/are you on a mission to educate the world in that regard?***

Well, if by "the world" we mean the

Western world, or even just the English-speaking world, it's obviously the case that it's, as you put it, "largely ignorant of classic Persian literature and poetry". In a way, that's ok, because there are an awful lot of cultures in the world and one can only take on board so much – given how long we tend to be here, there just isn't time to read all the major works by all the major authors of every culture. But if you become interested in a culture's literature, and its great works seem to you to be really marvelous, easily equal to anything in your own culture's literature, naturally you want to proselytize for them a bit. When I was young I devoured Arthur Waley's translations from Chinese and Japanese; I thought they were wonderful, and they opened up a whole new, enchanting (and largely medieval...) world for me. They are much criticized now, but his achievement in drawing attention to literatures that were hardly known in any depth in the English-speaking world is unassailable. He made available to us an astonishing and very beautiful world we'd barely heard of, and later scholars may quibble and nuance what he did, but his achievement was a great one. When I started my PhD in medieval Persian my advisor asked me why I wanted to do this, and I answered, "I want to be the Arthur Waley of Persian literature". I'm not of course, or anything like it, but his achievement has remained a kind of beacon for me, an unattainable model.

***You are one of a handful of British Persophiles starting with Edward G. Brown an amazing individual. Do you have any thoughts or insights about him? What about Richard Burton? About the Shirley brothers....***

Every English speaker who is seriously interested in Persian literature is profoundly indebted to Brown, who really established Persian literature as an academic subject in the English-speaking world. Given the excessively jingoistic period in which he lived, his sympathy for non-European cultures, and for Persian culture in particular, is a truly extraordinary act of sustained, life-long intellectual and emotional empathy. And his multi-volume History of Persian Literature is the bedrock text on the subject, at least in English, even though much of its scholarship has been revised by subsequent

scholars, and some of its judgments can seem a bit eccentric (bravely eccentric, like his dislike of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, but still eccentric). But, as the adage has it, "if we see better it's because we stand on his shoulders." He was at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and I'm lucky enough to have been shown round his rooms there; I was delighted to learn that his rooms had previously been the Cambridge home of the poet-scholar Thomas Gray (the Elegy in A Country Churchyard Gray), who was equally averse to jingoism and sympathetic to non-English cultures and literatures; a nice coincidence of minds across the centuries in that cozy little wood-paneled space.

There were people before Brown of course, though none, with perhaps one exception, as distinguished as him. For example, there was quite a lot of translation done from Persian into English throughout the 19th century, mostly by people with connections to the British Raj in India. The exams for the Raj included papers in Persian, and so anyone who wanted to do well in that world had to learn at least a modicum of the language, which meant that you get lots of bored army officers and Indian civil servants translating the odd Persian text in their spare time, of which some of them seemed to have an inordinate amount. And then there's Edward FitzGerald, someone for whom I have enormous affection, in so far as one can have affection for someone dead long before one was born, who put Persian poetry on the map in England, popularly at least, with his 1859 publication of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

You mention Richard Burton; it's a moot point whether he knew any Persian at all, and probably he didn't. The one translation from Persian published under his name, a version of Sa'di's *Golestan*, was in reality done by another scholar, Edward Rehatsek. It was probably published under Burton's name to boost sales, as Burton's works were known to include lots of titillating sexual details about the cultures he was concerned with, often in his footnotes. Rehatsek didn't do this, so there were probably some very disappointed buyers of "Burton's" *Golestan*.

The one scholar before Brown, whom we can perhaps put on a par with him, is the 18th century linguist Sir William Jones – the first man to postulate the existence of an Indo-European family of languages – who published the first Persian grammar in English (following the

precedent of such works in Persian, all the grammatical examples he gives are taken from medieval / classical poetry, which makes it a very charming read). One of my most treasured possessions is a first edition of Jones's *Persian Grammar*. The Shirley brothers are, I agree, absolutely fascinating – and Bravo! that you got to act one of them in a movie! One of the longest of my own poems is a monologue by Teresia Shirley, who was more or less a present given by Shah Abbas to Sir Robert Shirley, to be his wife. As you know, she was an extraordinary woman, and against all odds, as we might think, the marriage was apparently a very happy one; after Sir Robert's death she became a Catholic nun, and died in Rome. An incredible life! It's true there haven't been that many rabid Persophiles from England, but in general they're an interesting bunch, who've led interesting lives.

***Which of the medieval poets or authors is your favorite and why? Which is your favorite work?***

This is a very hard, perhaps impossible, question to answer. The works I know best are naturally enough the ones I've translated (there's nothing like translating a work to ensure that you know it very thoroughly indeed, or at least you should if you do your job properly) and to choose between those would be like asking a parent to choose between his children. It's

especially hard because I only translate works I really love (I don't see any point in translating things I feel half-hearted about, especially when there's so much I feel whole-hearted about). But if I absolutely have to choose one, I must say that I have a special affection for Gorgani's *Vis and Ramin*. This is not an especially admired work in Iran itself, but for me it is an absolutely extraordinary poem, unique in its beauty and charm, and one of the truly great love stories of the world. I have never felt so close to an author as when I was translating Gorgani's poem; almost as if he were spookily in the room with me at times, particularly when I was translating in the silence of the night. But then there is marvelous, ungraspable Hafez – a poet who, as a friend has phrased it, "remains always just out of reach". If I had to characterize the difference between my relationship with Gorgani's work and with Hafez's, I feel that Gorgani perhaps welcomes me, and does so with a kind of complicit affection, but that Hafez is a perpetual, very fascinating, tease; indeed part of the great allure of Hafez's poetry is that so much is shown, but that so much is also withheld. He is absolutely not going to be pinned down.

***What are your thoughts on Sufism? Tell us about translating Rumi, Attar, Hafez and El Ghazali and what you think of them....Nizami's Divan.***



Another very difficult question! When I was young, before I ever went to Iran, I was interested in medieval European mysticism, and read a fair number of its most famous texts (The Cloud of Unknowing, Dionysius the Areopagite, that kind of thing ...). When I started to learn Persian it didn't take me long of course to realize that a great deal of Persian poetry has a Sufi / mystical tinge to it, and some of it is all-out Sufi, as it were. My interest in mysticism continued after my wife and I left Iran, at the end of 1978, and I even edited a little volume of the poems of the 17th century mystical poet Thomas Traherne, whose work I really admired very much (and still do). My wife Afkham and I decided to translate Attar's *Manteqal Tayr* mainly because we thought it was a text that could appeal to people from very different backgrounds, but also to some extent because we found its Sufi content very attractive.

Over time I became rather weary of mysticism, both in its Christian and Sufi forms, and I now think of myself more or less as an atheist. When I read mystical verse now it is really the poetry that I am interested in, rather than the Sufism. Still, a kind of respect for the spiritual seriousness of someone like Attar (or Traherne) has remained with me, and in fact has begun to increase again over the years I think. That seriousness is just so humanly moving, and even an avowed atheist cannot wholly discount, I feel, the wisdom gained by living a life with that kind of focus and intensity. So I'm very drawn to, and really respect, what I take to be authentic (a very loaded word, but it will have to do) spiritual exploration / commitment, but I remain outside it; it's not the world in which I live, or in which I think I could live.

Of the other writers you mention the one of whom I have read the most, apart from Hafez, is Rumi. I have problems with Rumi. Both Attar and Hafez are poets who admit ignorance, who say constantly (especially Hafez) "I don't know, we can't know", and this is one of the things that makes me trust them, and makes them sympathetic to me (because I don't know either, and like Hafez I really doubt anyone can truly claim to "know" about spiritual matters, though some might be further along, as it were, than others). Now Rumi is very sure he knows, and by God he's going to tell you and you'd better listen and take his word for it. He hectors his audience; I really don't like to be hectored.

He's more than a bit of a bully, in spiritual terms, and this can occasionally leave me cold or irritated. Also his reputation in the West as a kind of catch-all-welcomer of travelers on all spiritual paths really ignores important aspects of his writings (I think he himself would be appalled by it, could he know how he is seen nowadays by most of his western readers).

His major work, the *Masnavi*, has a number of passages condemning other religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism (which, like most medieval Persian poets, he confuses with Hinduism) and their adherents. Now you might say that this is just par for the course for his time, what do you expect? But Attar doesn't say such things (Attar is explicitly sympathetic to other religions, and in the Valley of Insight section of the *Manteqal Tayr* he says that each person reaches truth following his own path, and this is fine, – "Our insight comes to us by different signs / One prays in mosques and one in idols' shrines ..." etc). Neither does Hafez condemn other religions; he too explicitly says that, if the heart is "true", there is an equivalence between faiths. I think this is partly to do with the personal backgrounds of the poets, and partly to do with poetic genres. Rumi was trained as a theologian and, despite everything that is said to have happened with Shams-e Tabrizi, he has retained that sense of the importance of dogma in his writings; neither Hafez nor Attar were people whose profession was the religious life, and dogma means much less to them.

The genre question is interesting; a lot of lyric poems in Persian celebrate a kind of come-one come-all mystical religiosity, and Rumi has a number of such poems (and his popular Western reputation largely rests on moments in poems of this nature, and what we might call their new-age extrapolation). But his didactic poem, the *Masnavi*, has far fewer moments like this, and it includes moments when dogma is quite scathingly exclusive of other faiths. In the *Masnavi* ignorance can be forgiven (as in the lovely story of the shepherd who wants to comb God's hair and catch his lice etc., who is reproved for his blasphemy by Moses, and then God reproves Moses for his reproof), but adherence to the "wrong" faiths cannot.

It's partly poetic genre that dictates such a division; Persian lyric poems traditionally were fairly latitudinarian about religion, but long didactic / dogmatic poems, like the *Masnavi*, were not; they

were, precisely, dogmatic. Now, whether Rumi "really" believed in the kind of open come-one come-all sentiments of some of his lyrics, or in the dogmatic exclusiveness of some parts of his *Masnavi*, is hard to say, and perhaps it's an irrelevant question. (We can see a similar kind of genre-driven content in medieval Persian love poetry; narrative love poems are about heterosexual pairs of lovers, lyric love poems are taken to be about exclusively male couples (unless there is internal evidence to the contrary, which is very rare); some poets write both kinds of poem, and what their own sexual preferences were seems largely irrelevant, the gender of the lovers is decided by the genre in which the poet happens to be writing at a given time). Given this it's very hard to say whether Rumi "really" believed in the latitudinarian mysticism of his lyrics or in the much more dogmatic, Islam-centered, mysticism of his *Masnavi*, but my own feeling is that if he had to decide he would probably come down on the side of dogma (he's much more specific when he talks about dogma, as if the details of belief matter to him). For someone who doesn't share the dogma this is a barrier, one that isn't there in the work of either Attar or Hafez. Don't get me wrong, Rumi is obviously the most marvelous poet, a truly great poet; but he's less sympathetic as a poet for me than either Hafez or Attar – I can find both his tone in many passages, and his didacticism, antipathetic (as one might acknowledge that Tolstoy is the most marvelous novelist, though still frequently finding both his tone and his preachiness very off-putting).

I've hardly read Al-Ghazali, and the bits I have read don't do a lot for me. He's an argumentative so-and-so, and I don't read literature to be argued with. He's not really writing literature, he's writing theology and philosophy, sometimes thinly disguised as a sort of quasi-literature. I admire Nezami, but he takes an awfully long time to say anything, because his poetry is so extraordinarily self-consciously decorative (he's quite like the British Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser in this way); his poetry is very charming, but it's very much, for me, an incidental often rather glittery charm (one is more impressed by an image's brilliance than by what is actually being said). I may well be wrong of course. I have a feeling I should give Nezami more time, as so many people whose judgments I trust think so highly of him.

*to be continued*