Habib Levy

Comprehensive History of
The Jews of Iran
The Outset of the Diaspora

Abridged and edited from the Persian by **Hooshang Ebrami**

Translated by **George W. Maschke**

The Outset of the Diaspora

The history of the Jews of Iran is one of the most important chapters of Jewish history, yet it is also among the most obscure, as so little of it has been published. Considering the vastness of the Persian Empire during ancient times, Iran must be reckoned second only to Israel in importance to the study of Jewish history.

After the Assyrian onslaught, the ten lost tribes were forcibly moved to the east, toward the Persian Empire. Babylon, the former hub of Judaism, was an Iranian province for more than a thousand years, including the period during which the Talmud was written. Indeed, Iranian cultural influences are manifest in the Babylonian Talmud, which is, in essence, an "Iranian Talmud."

Iran, where the Jews have been living for over 2700 years, is the land of the outset of the Diaspora. Based on historical evidence, the first Jews exiled from their homeland settled in Iran and from there to other countries such as India, China and Russia

Iran is the birthplace of the Karaite movement in Judaism, which spread throughout the world. During the Middle Ages, Iranian Jews were active contributors to the scholarship of the Islamic world—an important factor in the European Renaissance.

This book, the first comprehensive source on an important topic, not only describes briefly the history of Jews in ancient Iran (Persia) but covers all periods, particularly the 19th and 20th centuries. Dr. Habib Levy's book is the *only* source cited by *Encyclopaedia Judaica* for these critical two centuries.

Jacket design by Farzaneh Foroughi

Comprehensive History of THE JEWS OF IRAN

(The Outset of the Diaspora)

by

Habib Levy

Edited and Abridged by
Hooshang Ebrami

Translated by
George W. Maschke

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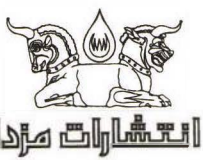

Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran

Contents

Acknowledgements xiii

Introduction xv

Translator's Foreward xviii

List of Abbreviations xix

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION (1300–550 B.C.E.) 1

1 Who Are the Jews? 3

The Promised Land, Jerusalem, Judea, and Israel 13

2 The First Jewish Settlers in Iran 23

Khorasan of Yore: Present-Day Afghanistan 32

PART TWO

THE ACHAEMENIDS (550–330 B.C.E.) 41

3 Iran: Pioneer of Freedom among Nations 43

4 Cyrus, God's Anointed 52

Haman's Conspiracy Against the Jews 64

The Prophet Daniel's Service in the Court of Darius the Great 71

Ties of Two Jewish Leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah, to Iran 74

PART THREE

SELEUCIDS AND PARTHIANS (330 B.C.E.–226 C.E.) 83

5 Iran's Encounter with Greece and Rome 85

6 Five-and-a-Half Centuries of Obscurity 93

Iranian-Roman Alliance during the Fall of the Second Temple 106

Final Analysis 112

PART FOUR

THE SASANIANS (226–642 C.E.) 117

7 Religious Fever in Iran 119

8 Beginnings of Religious Minority Suffering 129

Composition of the Talmud during the Sasanian Period 132

Ups and Downs in the Jewish Community 138

The Peak of Sasanian Persecution of the Jews 147

PART FIVE

ADVENT OF ISLAM AND RULE OF THE CALIPHS (642–847 C.E.) 155

9 Iran in the New World of Islam 157

10 The Factious Jew 165

Abu 'Isa al-Isfahani and Yudghan Hamadani 172

The Worldwide Karaite Movement 175

Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism 180

The Key Role of Jews in the Advancement of the Sciences in Islamic Iran 184

PART SIX

TAHIRIDS, SAFFARIDS, SAMANIDS, DAYLAMITES, AND GHAZNAVIDS (847–1038 C.E.) 193

11 Iran, Battlefield of Nationalists 195

12 Silence in the Storm of Rebellion 200

Transfer of the Center of Judaism from Babylon to Spain 203

PART SEVEN

SELJUQS, MONGOLS, AND TIMURIDS (1038–1502 C.E.) ... 215

13 Iran, Abattoir of Monotheists 217

14 New Ups and Downs 224

Benjamin of Tudela on the Jews of Iran 226

The Advent of David Alroy, "the Iranian Messiah," during the Crusades 230

The Profound Influence of Jewish and Jewish-Born Statesmen on the Iranian State Apparatus 241

Shahin, Amina, and Other Prominent Jews in Science, Literature, and Philosophy 250

Jews during the Timurid Period 254

PART EIGHT

THE SAFAVIDS (1502–1722 C.E.) 257

15 Iran, Circus of European Spies 259

16 The Climax of Anti-Semitism 269

Foreign and Domestic Factors in the Flood of Anti-Semitism 281

Climax of Anti-Semitism
during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas II 288

Jewish Poetry, Literature,
Scholarship, and Art during the Safavid Period 297

17 The History of Baba'i ibn Lutf 302

The Vengefulness of Mullah Mordecai Lari,
Who Became Known as "Abu al-Hasan" 304

Abu al-Hasan Lari in Kashan 306

Abu al-Hasan's Trip to Shiraz 308

The Jews of Farahabad and Abu al-Hasan Lari 310

Shah 'Abbas and the Runaway Gazelle 314

Simantub Follows in Abu al-Hasan's Footsteps 315

Intensification of Anti-Semitism
during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas II 318

The Loss of the King's Dagger
and the Riot Against the Jews 319

Exile of the Jews of Isfahan 320

Forced Conversion of the Jews of
Kashan and Natanz to Islam 324

Persecution of the Jews of Hamadan 326

Khalil Khan Lor in Khansar and Golpayegan 328

Plight of the Jews of Lar and Shiraz 329

The Advent of Obadiah 330

Continuation of the Story of the Jews of Isfahan 332

The Jews of Farahabad
during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas II 333

Plight of the Jews of Qom 335

Continuation of the Story of the Jews of Golpayegan and Khansar 335

Unpleasant Situation of the Jews of Yazd and Kerman 337

Shah 'Abbas II's Travels to Kashan and His Love for a Jewish Youth 337

The Miserable Plight of the Jews of Kashan 339

The End of Muhammad Beg's Anti-Semitic Deeds 341

PART NINE

AFSHARIDS AND ZANDS (1722–1794 C.E.) 345

18 The Short-Lived Dynasties 347

19 Unending Storms 351

Jewish Life in Hamadan 358

PART TEN

THE QAJARS: FROM MUHAMMAD KHAN TO MUZAFFAR AL-DIN SHAH (1794–1907 C.E.) 365

20 Fall of the Cradle of Freedom 367

21 Fears and Hopes 376

Travel of Jewish Envoys to Iran 378

Revival of Anti-Semitism during the Qajar Period 381

Mullah Agha Baba or Muhammad Reza, the new-Muslim 386

The Upright Clerics' Quest for Justice 389

Huntsmen of Faith 391

Decline of Judaism in a Decadent Society 396

22 Travelers' Viewpoints 401

Extract from the Travelogue of Rabbi David d'Beth Hillel 404

Selections from the Travelogue of Benjamin II 413

Note on the Travelogue of Ephraim Neumark 421

23 Tabriz, Mashhad, and Tehran 426

The Bloody Tabriz Incident 426

The Mashhad Riot 430

Atrocities in Tehran 434

The Benevolent Ezra Ya'qub, Victim of a Reactionary Mullah 435

The Tehran Ghetto 438

24 Riots of the Spiteful Sole Contenders 443

The Riot of Mullah 'Abdallah in Hamadan 443

The Riot of Sayyid Rayhanallah in Tehran 445

The Riot of Shaykh Ibrahim Qazvini in Tehran 448

25 The Alliance: A Star in the Darkness 451

Meeting Between Alliance Leaders and the King 456

Opening of the Alliance School at Tehran 466

PART ELEVEN

CONSTITUTIONALIST REVOLUTION AND THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY (1907–1979 C.E.) 471

26 Iran Between Two Revolutions 473

27 On Freedom's Threshold 483

The Constitutionalist Revolution and Jewish Emancipation 488

28 Persistence of Anti-Semitism 495

Simitqu's Revolt in Tabriz and Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi's Riot in Tehran 503

29 Gravitation toward the Holy Land 508

Reorganization of the Iranian Zionist Association 516

30 Shemuel Haim and Loghman Nehurai 523

Disunity in the Jewish Community 532

31 Resurgence of the Jewish Community 540

The Children of Tehran 544

History Repeats Itself: Friendship between Iran and Israel 548

Glossary 553

Select Bibliography 555

Index 565

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Introduction

THE BOOK you have in your hands, although having a geographical name in its title, is, in fact, the first chapter of the worldwide history of the Jews. Iran, according to the Bible and based on reliable historical facts, is the land from where the Israelites set out on the longest road ever known in the entire world: the road of the Diaspora. The borders of Iran during ancient times, when it was called the Persian Empire, extended far beyond its present-day frontiers. The first Jews were either exiled to or sought refuge in this large territory, which extended from Ethiopia to India and comprised 127 provinces, as the book of Ester indicates (1:1-9).

One hundred thirty-four years before the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E., with the Assyrian onslaught to the north of the Holy Land, the ten lost tribes were forced to go to the east, toward Persia. Babylon, the former hub of Judaism, was an Iranian province for more than a thousand years, including the period during which the Talmud was written. Indeed, Iranian cultural influences are manifest in the Babylonian Talmud, which is, in essence, an "Iranian Talmud."

Apart from Cyrus—the Iranian king referred to in the Torah as "God's anointed"—there are many other biblical references to relations between Iran and Israel. Leaders and prophets, such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel, are testimony to the important role played by the Jews in Iran. The Jewish-Iranian queens, Esther and Shushandokht, and the Jewish grand viziers, Sa'd al-Dawlah and Rashid al-Din Fazlallah Hamadani, bespeak the influence of the Jewish community in Iran.

The Persian Empire at the outset of the Diaspora welcomed the Jews, who migrated from this vast land to other parts of the world, such as India, China, Russia, Armenia, Turkey, Greece and Afghanistan, and then, from these countries to other lands. Interestingly enough, despite all the events, good or bad, which transpired in Iran in the last 2,700 years, the Jewish community, large or small,

has continued living in this country, which must be reckoned second only to Israel in importance to the study of Jewish history.

Centuries ago, Iran was the birthplace of the Karaite movement in Judaism, which spread throughout the world and which, to this day, has adherents. During the Middle Ages, Iranian Jews translated Greek works into Arabic and were active contributors to the scholarship of the Islamic world—an important factor in the European Renaissance.

The history of the Jews of Iran is one of the most important chapters of Jewish history, yet it is also among the most obscure, as so little of it has been published. While numerous books have been written about the European Jews, Western Jews remain largely ignorant of the history of the Jews in Iran.

Habib Levy (1895–1984), the great Jewish-Iranian historian and scholar, realized while studying in Paris that there was little published information about the Jews of Iran, even in the works of Graetz and Dubnow. After completing his academic studies, Dr. Levy returned to Iran and spent over four decades extensively researching Jewish-Iranian history. His studies encompassed a 2,700-year period and included not only the territory of present-day Iran, but also neighboring lands which had, at various times, been provinces of the former Persian Empire. At the time of his writing, no reference had been published on the subject in Persian or in any other language.

The research methodology used by Dr. Levy in his unique endeavor was scientific and unbiased. He did not accept the validity of all accounts. With a critical eye, he sought to establish historical facts about the Jews of Iran. He traveled to many countries and searched libraries and archives. He traveled to Iranian cities and towns and collected data unavailable in libraries. He interviewed Jewish elders and worked night and day until he had gathered the necessary materials. He spent four more years reviewing, organizing, classifying, writing, and re-writing his documented information. Finally, he published his classic three-volume *Tarikh-e Yahud-e Iran* (History of the Jews of Iran) in 1960.

Dr. Habib Levy's book is the only source cited by *Encyclopedia Judaica* for Jewish-Iranian history in the 19th and 20th centuries. This work was written in Persian, and no translation has been available to Western readers—until now. However, the original edition of Dr. Levy's classic work, for all its positive features, was too voluminous and in some passages, provided too much detail. From the time of its first publication in the Persian language, there have been recommendations by distinguished personalities, such as Itzhak Ben-Zvi, the second President of the State of Israel and an eminent historian, that the Persian text be translated into English and published for a Western audience. Before this step could be taken, it was necessary that the original Persian work should be edited and abridged. Responsibility for accomplishing this task fell to me. Two principles I have chosen to follow in revising Levy's work should be mentioned here:

1. For each historical period, I have added a brief political history of Iran to familiarize the reader with the atmosphere of the time.
2. I have attempted to write in a style suitable for both academic and general audiences.

It is my hope that the English edition of this book will fill a gap in Western literature on Iranian Jewry.

Hooshang Ebrami, Ph.D.
President
The Habib Levy Cultural Foundation

Los Angeles
August 1998

Translator's Foreward

In translating Dr. Hooshang Ebrami's edited and abridged edition of Dr. Habib Levy's three-volume history of Iranian Jewry, I have attempted to provide as literal a translation as possible within the confines of English usage. In some cases, editorial changes were made after the publication of the Persian edition, and thus some passages in this English edition will differ slightly.

I made a conscious decision to avoid the use of a specialized transliteration font for Persian, Arabic, and Hebrew proper nouns, based on the rationale that it would not be particularly helpful for the reader who is not fluent in these languages and that such transliteration will generally be unnecessary for the reader who is literate in those languages. However, I have used a turned comma (') to represent the Persian letter *'ayn* (ع) and an apostrophe (') to represent the Persian letter *hamzeh* (ء) when the *hamzeh* appears in a medial or word-final position. Transliteration of Arabic and Persian names is based loosely on the Library of Congress method, with the notable exception that in Persian names, short vowels are represented by "a," "e," and "o" rather than "a," "i," and "u."

In the original Persian, many quotations of English and French language sources are paraphrased. Whenever possible, I located the original source and provided a precise quotation, translating the French to English. These verbatim citations tend to be longer than the paraphrases in the Persian edition. In the case of Hebrew sources quoted in the Persian, I have directly translated the Persian.

All biblical citations are from the Jewish Publication Society of America's edition of 1917. All translations of Persian verse are my own.

I have provided Gregorian equivalents to some Islamic and Hebrew dates mentioned in this book. For Islamic dates, I used the software program "Taqwim: A Multi-Calendar Display, version 1.0" for Macintosh, by John Woods, Mark Woodworth, and Paul Pomerleau.

For Hebrew dates I used "Jewish Calender 2.0" for Macintosh by Frank Yellin.

List of Abbreviations

EB *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*
EJ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
JE *Jewish Encyclopedia*
TN Translator's Note

George W. Maschke

The Hague
4 November 1998

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION (1300–550 B.C.E.)

Chapter One
Who Are the Jews?

This question is prefatory not merely to this discourse, but to history itself—to a time when Man did not know the one God and was caught up in wizardry and black magic. He knelt before countless gods—some of them wrought by his own hand—and sacrificed his children to them. In times such as those, how would this question have been answered? Who were the Jews? What did they say? At the dark dawn of history, what role did they play in the precipitous course of mankind's history?

We who wish to study the history of the Jews in a corner of the world that has been one of the most important in the life of this nation, whether we are Jewish or not, will undoubtedly need to review the Jews and their beliefs and aspirations before their arrival in Iran. We must know of which Iranian people's history we are speaking. What people are these Jews, who have always been a minority in this cradle of civilization? What are their roots, and what is the source of their precepts and beliefs?

The Jewish faith appeared at a time when mankind—from a moral standpoint—was passing through dark and gloomy times. Idol worship had spread among humanity like an ill-omened contagion, and each nation and tribe endeavored to increase the number of its gods. Mothers, by sacrificing their children to various idols, debased the motherly instinct to such low levels as are unseen even among the basest of creatures. There was no law of any kind. Sexual intercourse was for the most part animalistic, and sometimes took place in the gods' temples. The temples of Marduk in Babylon and Astarte in Phoenicia were witness to shameful acts between men and women. The Assyrians believed that the more they delivered the people of outlying lands to their deaths and the more they expanded their borders by conquest, the greater would be the glory of their god, Ashur, and in their slaughter of others they knew no bounds. Tyranny and injustice reigned in Egypt, whose pharaohs had entered the

ranks of deity. Prisoners built great palaces and edifices under the scourge of the whip.

It was in such times that the Israelites—from amongst all the other lost nations and tribes—became the pioneers of monotheism. A wonderful revolution was brought about in the world. The children of Jacob, the sons of Israel—a small nation lacking military prowess but armed with law, justice, and equity, with the battle cry of humanity, with faith in monotheism and, as a result, faith in the oneness of Man—came to the fore. They became mankind's guides, and without any expectation that human society would one day reward them for their moral message, they began treading the hard and treacherous road to understanding law, liberty, justice, equality, and true humanity.

The Jews said that God is one, and that his servants are equal in his eyes. They said that one should love others as one's self. They believed that society's helpless must be helped, that slavery and bondage should be abolished, and that innocent children should not be burned in sacrifice to false gods. They held peace to be sacred and extended a hand of friendship to the enemy.

It is apparent that in such a time when—from a moral standpoint—mankind was in a period of decline, such passionate beliefs were electrifying and left others bewildered. The proclamation of this humane message—though it ended up costing the Jews dearly, as vengeful enemies turned their brightest day into darkest night—bestowed upon them a place of honor for all eternity. As history bears witness, the moral and social revolution of the Israelites and their pioneering monotheism also carried a heavy price. They suffered mortal blows for centuries on end, yet they never succumbed: from the beginning they entrenched themselves in the impenetrable fortress of faith in the truth. The Jews do not yet consider their mission complete, for they see that those who believe in the one God still stain God's earth with each others' blood and do not refrain from committing fratricide.

Still, from a historical standpoint, an intriguing point is this: how was this nation—which was for centuries bound hand and foot in the chains of bondage—capable of speaking of freedom, liberty, concord, order, law, justice, love, solidarity, and friendship among men rather than becoming vengeful, cruel, and bloodthirsty?

The answer to this question must be sought in the fundamental nature of the Jewish faith.

The first historical Jewish figure is Abraham ben Terah, who lived in the second millennium B.C.E. He was born in the city of Ur, not far from present-day Basrah, near the Persian Gulf. He was a restless, well-travelled man. In his youth he went to Haran, and at the age of 75 he migrated to Canaan. Along the way lived in each city for a time. He arrived in Canaan in the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. In those times, the bloody wars between the Elamites (the former inhabitants of Iranian Khuzestan and Luristan) and the Sumerians and Akkadians (the former inhabitants of Iraq) were at their hottest. There was no religion in the world save polytheism and idolatry. Although the peoples of the East had a more advanced civilization than those of the West, they were nonetheless at the same level as far as religion was concerned. Superstition, belief in ghosts, genies, and fairies, the worship of various animate and inanimate objects, and other unfounded beliefs played the role of religion throughout the world. Equality and brotherhood had no meaning. Slavery was universally practiced. Men preyed upon one another and took each other captive in hand-to-hand combat. The rule of the strong over the weak was common at all levels of society.

It was in these times that Abraham, the father of the Israelites, spoke of a single God for the first time in the history of the world. It was he who discountenanced the practice, then current, of sacrificing children to idols. It was he who recognized God and took the first step in making him known to others. Isaac, Abraham's second son, followed in his father's footsteps, and Jacob (also called Israel), son of Isaac, also followed this path. The twelve sons of Jacob, each of whom was the patriarch of a tribe, propagated the House of

Israel. Jacob's sons, the Children of Israel, were the ancestors of a nation which spread the light of knowledge and the worship of God, and which throughout the ages has produced incredible marvels.

In the middle of the second millennium B.C.E., the Israelites entered Egypt following a famine and drought, and for a short time found respite there and multiplied. It was not long before the Israelites, through perseverance and hard work in agriculture and herding, became materially prosperous. When the new pharaoh of Egypt saw this, he burned with jealousy and treated the Jews harshly. In short order, anti-Semitic violence in ancient Egypt reached the point where the pharaoh decreed that first-born Jewish sons should be killed and the Jews delivered into bondage. Moses' mother, fearing for his life, placed him in a basket and released it upon the waters of the Nile. By chance, the basket reached the pharaoh's daughter, and she adopted him as her own son. How remarkable that years later, Moses ben Amram—this imposing figure and great intellect—became the standard-bearer who led his nation to freedom from the oppressive pharaoh's yoke of slavery. In 1280 B.C.E., after years of struggle, he succeeded in delivering the House of Israel from Egypt. The book of Exodus recounts the story of this, the greatest of human uprisings in the struggle for freedom.

Some historians hold that the Israelites dwelled in Egypt for 210 years. In chapter 15, verse 16 of the book of Genesis, in the place where the voice of God is heard, it is written:

> And in the fourth generation they shall come back hither;...

However, in chapter 12, verse 40 of the book of Exodus we read that:

> ...the time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.

In any event, based on verses 16–20 of the sixth chapter of the book of Exodus, the life spans of four consecutive generations taken singly—without considering the years of overlap between father and son—when added, come to 430 years:

Levi, son of Jacob, was 70 years old
when he went to Egypt and he lived in Egypt for..... 80 years.
Kohath, son of Levi, lived in Egypt for ..... 133 years.
Amram, son of Kohath, lived in Egypt for ..... 137 years.
Moses (the fourth generation) lived in Egypt for..... 80 years.
And the total for the four generations is..... 430 years.

Moses' uprising not only delivered the Jewish people from bondage, oppression, and tyranny: it also created a nation that led the world to knowledge of God and the Law. In Egypt, the Jews—influenced by their environment—had taken to worshipping idols. They had no leader and were unfamiliar with the Law. Moses' leadership and his fundamental, immutable laws made of the Jews an enduring people. For 40 years, Moses led the people toward the land of Canaan. Along the way, atop Mount Sinai, he spoke with God and bestowed upon the people the tablets of the Ten Commandments. These commandments strictly forbade the people from practicing idolatry and clearly commanded them to worship none other than the one, true God. When Moses departed from this world at the age of 120, on the threshold of the Promised Land, the Jews were a strong and organized people.

It is interesting to note that not all of those liberated from the pharaoh's chains of captivity were Jewish. There were gentiles among them. Moses resolved that his laws were to be applied to all persons uniformly, and that Jew and foreigner should be equal. Moses' law encompassed all aspects of human life. He promulgated instructions in areas such as welfare, punishment, financial transactions, matrimony, morality, agriculture, and judgement. Such was the attention to detail of the Jewish prophet's corpus of law—which became the

foundation of legislation for all mankind—that it even addressed relieving the suffering of animals. How great must his philanthropy and humanity have been for him to declare:

> Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set, in thine inheritance which thou shalt inherit, in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it. (Deuteronomy 19:14)

This command was given at a time when murder was quite common (and indeed it is still quite common several thousand years later amongst those who do not follow God). Rivers of blood muddied prairies, plains, towns, and deserts. Moses said, "Do not lie. Do not accept bribes. Do not molest strangers. Do not countenance the oppression of workers, and return the lost sheep or calf to its owner."

Moses' laws were the foundation of humanity—a call for peace and love between people. Because during his time there was no precedent of obedience to the law among any nation or people, he had no option but to impose harsh penalties in order to compel his followers to obey the Law. The first prophet of monotheism addressed the Jews as God's and mankind's firstborn. He placed a heavy burden upon their shoulders. Moses' world-wide revolution pitted his people, the pioneers of monotheism, against the great godless nations—who were slaves to various idols—and so the seeds of hatred were cultivated in their hearts so that even at a time when many of these countries had embraced monotheism, the hatred and enmity persisted against the followers of Moses.

Shortly after losing their great leader, the Jewish people set foot in the land of Canaan—the Promised Land—and began their hectic life there. This Holy Land, dubbed "the land of milk and honey," had distinctive characteristics even though it lay within an area no more than several hundred kilometers long by a hundred kilometers wide. In this small country, extending from the snow-capped Mount Harmon in the north to the desert sands south of Beersheba—where the heat of the sun burns all vegetation—all climates exist in close

proximity: from the lofty mountains to the lowest point below sea level in the world, the Dead Sea. It is as if the purpose of this people's living upon this expanse of land was to show the world that just as the scorching desert winds and the eternally spring-like coastal plains can be neighbors, and just as depths and heights can be near one another, and sweet water and salt water may be not that far removed from one another, in the same manner all people—all servants of God—whatever their circumstances and whatever their peculiarities, can live side-by-side in a beautiful world created by the hand of the one God.

We stated that Judaism shone in a time when the world was plunged in darkness from the standpoint of morality and social relations. In pursuing this discourse, it is appropriate to note the social environment in which neighboring countries were living at the time of the Jewish people's return to Canaan. Apart from the Philistines, Amalekites, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Phoenicians who lived adjacent to the Promised Land, let us consider the larger and stronger countries, including Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Media, Elam, and Persia, first from the standpoint of religion:

The Egyptians had many gods, and each god had a legend. In these legends, gods killed each other. In their system of belief, Osiris, the great god, entered the body of the cow Apis, which was black with a white star in the middle of its forehead. They worshipped this cow for a period of 25 years. They then drowned it and sought a similar cow. Rams, jackals, lions, and crocodiles were also the objects of worship. Exalted above all of these was the pharaoh, who held the status of god, and whom the people actually worshipped.

The cities of Chaldea and Assyria each had separate gods, and these gods had mothers, fathers, and children. Land had a god; water had another god; and the sky had yet another. The creator of Man and the world was Marduk. He was held to be the greatest god, and it was believed that each year all the other gods knelt before him and worshipped him. When Assyria seized the upper hand over Babylon, another god by the name of Ashur took center

stage. Ashur was a warlike god, desirous of much veneration, which he demanded from the people by force. It was in the name of this god that the Assyrians so ferociously fought their battles. Spiritual and moral bankruptcy were commonplace in Chaldea and Babylon. Black magic, sorcery, and superstition had drawn a black veil across the beliefs of the people. Idolatry had reached an appalling level. The Babylonians held prostitutes to be sacred and engaged in debauchery.

The Hittite (present day Turkey) god, Rad, was a sky god. In Phoenicia, too, countless gods, foremost among which was Baal, were worshipped. The Hittites fashioned gods in the image of lions, eagles, calves, and even flies. The practice of sacrificing children as burnt offerings to the gods was common.

The religion of the Medes and Persians before the advent of Zoroaster (which coincides with the Achaemenid dynasty) is unknown, but it *can* be asserted that they did not worship idols. Zoroaster introduced Ahura Mazda, the god of Good, and Ahriman, the god of Evil, to the Iranians and gave them the *Zend* and *Avesta*.[1]

Overall, the religious beliefs of all other nations were miles apart from the monotheistic beliefs of the Jews. This in itself caused a deep schism between the Jewish people and others and planted the seed of enmity toward the Jews in the hearts of those who did not worship God.

Let us now take a cursory glance at the military and financial capabilities of the Jewish nation's neighboring countries. Egypt enjoyed an elaborate pharaonic system, limitless wealth, and military prowess the full extent of which remains unknown to historians and archaeologists even after several centuries of research. Because of Egypt's uncommon military strength, the countries neighboring the Promised Land, such as Edom, Moab, Palestine, Phoenicia, Ammon, and Aramea, remained under its sway for many years.

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[1]The *Zend* and *Avesta* are Zoroastrian scriptures.

The Assyrians, though they were not possessed of a great civilization like that of the Egyptians, were nonetheless the peers of the Mongols and Tatars. Assyrian brutality and ruthlessness was a curse upon the peoples they conquered. In *Tarikh-e Iran* (History of Iran) it is related that:

> In the spring of each year, the Assyrians attacked neighboring countries to force them to pay tribute and to plunder their prosperous cities. They killed as many as they saw fit, and took the survivors back to their country as prisoners and put them to hard labor whilst they themselves lived a life of luxury...One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Assyrians was their unusual wickedness and cruelty toward the peoples they conquered. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran* p. 35–6)

Regarding Assyrian military power, it is sufficient to note that in 768 B.C.E. Assyria occupied the powerful and prosperous Egypt, compelling it to pay tribute. The Assyrians admitted and even took pride in their atrocities. Ashurbanipal, one of the great kings of Assyria, declares in a stone inscription:

> I swept the entire land of Elam in one month and one day. I denied this land the passage of cows and sheep and even the blessings of music and allowed predatory animals, snakes, desert animals, and gazelles to overrun it. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 42)

The kings of Assyria, who appropriated the wealth of defeated nations through military force and acts of brutality while they themselves lived an opulent life of luxury, were finally brought low by the Medes, their former victims. During the reign of the Median king Cyaxares (633–575 B.C.E.), the Assyrian reign of oppression was brought to an end.

Although the Chaldeans (Babylonians) had a flourishing civilization like that of the Egyptians, from the standpoint of military aggression and the conquest of neighboring nations—especially during the reigns of some of the more oppressive kings—they were on a par with the Assyrians. After the death of Assyria as a political

entity, the defeated officers and soldiers fled to Babylon and put their warrior spirit and blood lust at that nation's disposal.

Media was among those powerful countries which—though not sharing a common border with Israel[2] or Judea—because of their proximity to Assyria and Babylon and their conquests, had for a time a direct effect on the life of the Jews of the Promised Land. The Medes came to the fore in the 7th century B.C.E., that is, after the defeat of Israel by the Assyrians.

The Medes at first lived as tribal clans and had no army. They were attacked by the Assyrians on numerous occasions and paid tribute to them. But Cyaxares, who made peace with Babylon and gave his daughter in marriage to Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, was able to exploit the expanded military power thus created to defeat Assyria and to divide it between himself and Babylon.

In general, thuggery and oppression were customary amongst the great nations of that time, none of which were far from the Promised Land. Aggression against and the plundering of other nations was an accepted practice; respect for the rights of others was not even dreamed of. In this regard, even countries such as Egypt, Babylon, and Persia—which played important roles in laying the foundation of Median civilization—were no exceptions. Such countries as were stronger and more aggressive invaded their neighbors that they might become their masters. The land of the Jews was surrounded by such countries, and the Jews, following the example of their great prophet and other prophets, addressed their coreligionists thus:

> Thou shalt not murder. Neither shalt thou commit adultery. Neither shalt thou steal. Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbor. (Deuteronomy 5:17)
>
> Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. (Deuteronomy 27:17)

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[2]Meaning "ancient Israel," whose capital was Samaria, and which was situated north of Judea, whose capital was Jerusalem.

> ...that innocent blood be not shed in the midst of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee. (Deuteronomy 19:10)
>
> When thou drawest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. (Deuteronomy 20:10)
>
> When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a parapet for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thy house, if any man fall from thence. (Deuteronomy 22:8)
>
> Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates. In the same day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it;... (Deuteronomy 24:14–15)
>
> Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:16–18)
>
> Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him... (Isaiah 58:7)

This sea of humane and lofty teachings is shoreless.

The Promised Land, Jerusalem, Judea, and Israel

The life of the people in the Promised Land continued under Moses' chosen successor, Joshua ben Nun, a capable man of the tribe of Ephraim who became the people's leader in 1240 B.C.E. Under his leadership, the people established roots in the land of Canaan and grew so strong that they became the most progressive nation of that age in terms of humanity. More than five centuries had passed between the birth of Abraham, the Friend of God, and their arrival in the Promised Land. The Jewish people had lost most of their power. But by the light of their prophet and the wisdom of his successor, they had become possessed of an independent land and their own religion and culture. Each of the twelve tribes had settled in a portion of the Promised Land. It was at this time that, finding

themselves masters of the land beneath their feet, they once again took up agriculture and converted the hills and valleys into cultivated fields and orchards of fruit and olives.

After the death of Joshua, it was the judges' turn to rule. They administered the country for a total of 180 years, from 1200 to 1020 B.C.E. Although no documentation other than the Book of Judges is available to historians for this long period, there are some other valuable details which may be of great value to the Jewish people. One of these points is that there is no mention of any oppressive king or leader seeking to establish his sovereignty by force of arms and create a legendary life for himself. The second point is that these were *judges* who were administering the newly founded country of the Israelites, and that the word "judge" immediately brings to mind the rule of law, the enforcement of truth and justice, and the containment of the demons of force, tyranny, selfishness, and vanity. The third point is that the judges did not emerge from a special class of society that was considered superior to other classes. A judge could be a religious leader, like the priest Eli, or a brave champion like Samson, or a strong woman with poetic talent like Deborah. The judgeship of Deborah—the first woman in the world to lead a country and under whose judgeship the people lived in tranquility for years—is indicative of the Jewish people's leadership and tirelessness in bringing about an intellectual and moral revolution in human society. It must not be forgotten that the period of the judges came hundreds of years before other peoples accepted monotheism.

All this notwithstanding, it is not to be concluded that the Israelites lived in peace and tranquility throughout this whole period. Two fundamental factors repeatedly disrupted the order of the land, brewing storm after storm. The first factor was the conflict between the religion of the Israelites and that of their idolatrous neighbors, which kept the flames of bloody conflict constantly burning between the two parties. The other factor was the conflicts between the tribes themselves, who in those days lived under a feudal system,

having strayed from the unity of the days of Moses and Joshua. There is a hypothesis which is hard to discount (whose supporters include Dubnow, author of *History of the Jews*) that each tribe had its own judge, many of whose names are unknown to us owing to the fog of history. The land of the Jews, surrounded on all sides by the enemies of monotheism and humanity, not only faced the heat of their bellicosity, but was also subjected to their misleading proselytization. Because many of the Jewish people were illiterate, they sometimes succumbed to the loathsome beliefs of their neighbors and were drawn into heresy.

After Samson was killed, Philistine transgressions against Israel grew more severe. During the rule of the priest Eli, the fourteenth judge, the Jewish people suffered a great defeat, and Eli was killed. The last judge, the prophet Samuel, was then invested. Samuel was a skilled orator and was able to guide those among the nation's people who had been led astray by venomous beliefs back to the true path and to keep alive the true religious sentiments of the Jews by uniting the tribes.

When the prophet Samuel attained old age, the era of the prophets also came to a close. The people asked him to appoint a king, but he declined on the grounds that with God's presence, he saw no need for a king. He addressed the nation, warning that the king who would reign over them:

> ...will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks; and ye shall be his servants. (First Samuel 8:14–17)

But the leaders of the people continued to insist. Samuel finally acceded to the people's wishes and appointed Shaul ben Kish of the tribe of Benjamin—a brave leader—as king of the House of Israel. Each of the twelve tribes accepted this appointment. Shaul reigned

for sixteen years, from 1020 to 1004 B.C.E., and finally lost his life on the battlefield along with his son Jonathan. Shaul was a brave king, and worked hard to unify the tribes. One of his commanders, David ben Jesse, was betrothed to his daughter Michal. David was a fearless champion, possessed of a keen intellect, and highly talented. His amazing victory over the ferocious Philistine giant Goliath made him one of the enduring legendary figures of the Jewish people.

After Shaul, the leaders of the people chose the 30-year-old David as king. David reigned for 39 years, from 1004 to 965 B.C.E. He was an unrivalled genius. He was at once a first class poet, writer, and musician and also a military leader and statesman whose mastership astounded all. During his reign, the borders of the land of Israel were greatly expanded to encompass the territory between Egypt and the Euphrates. It was David who brought Moses' tablets of the Ten Commandments to Mount Zion and placed them in a tent while he built the glorious Temple. It was he who established the capital of the whole nation at Jerusalem in order to stop the quarreling amongst the tribes and establish brotherhood. It was he who established within the borders of his kingdom a central government without intransigence, selfishness, and oppression. David's personal life was, however, tragic. His son Amnon was killed by his other son, Absalom, who rebelled against his father and lost his life. Because his hands were stained with the blood of his battles, God did not permit David to complete the construction of the Temple. This job was left to his son, Solomon.

Solomon—whose fame is so universal that people other than the Jews have legends about him—reigned for 37 years, from 965 to 928 B.C.E. This period has been considered the Golden Age of Jewish history because there was neither war and strife nor drought and famine. There was instead dignity, purity, peace, security, and military strength which no neighbor dared to confront. Kings of other nations bowed their heads before Solomon, but the Jewish nation, for all its military power, did not covet other lands. Solomon was renowned for his wisdom. Like his father, he, too, composed verse.

His Song of Songs and Proverbs were immortalized when they were incorporated into the Bible. Commerce flourished to such an extent during his reign that it is said that Jewish ships sailed to Ethiopia and Yemen and from the Red Sea to India.

Solomon's greatest honor was the construction of the Temple. Because of this accomplishment, many of his sins—such as his marriage to non-Jewish women, the erection of pagan temples in the Holy Land, and the imposition of high taxes that ultimately caused the division of the Jewish nation—have been overlooked. Construction of the First Temple, which was to house the tablets of the Ten Commandments, took place between the fourth and eleventh years of his reign. Solomon also built a sumptuous palace for himself.

The death of Solomon marked the end of the Jewish nation's glory. A vast country was at once transformed into two separate lands. The northern part of the country, in which ten of the tribes lived, was called "Israel," and the southern part was called "Judea." The Northerners refused to pay high taxes and made the city of Samaria their capital, while the Southerners retained Jerusalem as their capital. The North's conflict with the South reached the point where northern kings prohibited pilgrims from going to Jerusalem and from time to time flirted with idolatry. Society fell into a state of decline. The conflict of the ten northern tribes with the two southern tribes weakened the Jewish people, leaving them vulnerable. It seems that obedience to God's commandments and the laws of Moses retained a place of honor in the South, but that the Northerners had not only become estranged from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, but some of them had also become estranged from their religion. The kings of the North sometimes became so weak in their monotheism that they flirted with the worship of other gods. Ahab ben Omri, who reigned as king of Israel from 871 to 852 B.C.E., married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon. Jezebel undertook the construction of an idolatrous temple and openly urged the people to practice idolatry. The foundations of monotheism were shaken, and some were ensnared. But the religious leaders succeeded in

preserving the Jewish faith in the northern portion of the Promised Land. The land of Judea, which was smaller, was further removed from the danger posed by the enemies of monotheism and remained safe from the stubborn proselytization of the infidels.

From 928 to 698 B.C.E.—that is, for 230 years—19 men ruled Israel, the last of whom was Hoshea ben Elah—the history of whose reign is recounted in the 17th chapter of Second Kings. During his time, the powerful and warlike nation of Assyria found Israel a vulnerable morsel and attacked it with a vast and mighty army. The king of Assyria at that time was Shalmaneser, who had occupied Egypt before attacking Israel. The Egyptian pharaoh played a role in fanning the flames of war between Assyria and Israel. The war lasted three years and after much death and destruction, Israel finally surrendered, and the ten tribes were taken captive by Assyria.

From this point on, the trail of the ten Jewish tribes was lost. Researchers and historians have proposed many theories about their fate, some of which are mere speculation, and others of which are based on evidence.

Shalmaneser's attack against Israel and the capture of the Jews by the Assyrians was much harsher and crueler than Nebuchadnezzar's attack against Judea and the destruction of the First Temple by the Chaldeans, which occurred a century and some decades later. In the end, however, history has preserved the latter, while the memory of the former has been effaced by the whirlwinds of time.

The Assyrian attack against Israel marks the beginning of the Jewish diaspora outside the Promised Land, and recalls Moses' "encouragement-and-punishment" appeal to the House of Israel:

> And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth. And these blessings shall come upon thee...But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command

> thee this day...the Lord shall scatter thee among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth ... (Deuteronomy 28:1–64)

This diaspora began in 720 B.C.E., 134 years before Nebuchadnezzar's attack against Judea and the destruction of the Temple. The storm which carried off the ten tribes was so mighty and fearsome that the most brilliant historical researchers have not been able to precisely determine where the ten lost tribes went and what became of them. It is from this year forward that the Jews of the diaspora—from the Himalayas to the Hindu Kush, Mount Damavand to the Alps, and from the cold regions of Siberia to the burning deserts of Arabia and Africa—have held their eternal book like a beloved to their bosoms. Despite coercion, oppression, and massacre, they have not allowed the blazing torch of mankind's guidance to be extinguished. Although the diaspora has been wearisome and harrowing for them, it has served mankind as an object lesson in steadfastness and belief in God, justice, and law.

Years after the fall of Israel, a similar fate befell the land of Judea. This time, a great and terrible blow was struck which horrified the people, that is, the burning of the First Temple, which in 586 B.C.E. fell to the Chaldean army under the command of the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar. The people of Judea were taken captive to Babylon.

The independence of both Israel and Judea came to an end within a period of 134 years, and once again the Promised Land was out of their grasp. But did this mean the end of Judaism? History replies, "No." For from this time forward, Judaism became more firmly established, and the hand of God supported the Jewish people in a different way. Although captivity and dispersion after a long life in the land of milk and honey subjected the Jews to many corporeal hardships, they became spiritually stronger day by day, and their faith, aspirations, and ideas were effective in the intellectual enlightenment of others. The cruelties suffered by Israel and Judea during a long period perfected the Jews, strengthening them like tempered

steel as they pursued their lofty goal of spreading monotheism and respect for the Law to the rest of mankind. The period of the Jewish captivity in Babylon was a time of awakening during which a nation progressed from infancy to maturity, wisdom, and wholeness. The corruption that was commonplace in Babylon served to show the Jews the value of their moral principles. In the words of Greek historians:

> The Babylonians refrained from nothing to satisfy their lust. Babylonian men, in lieu of fulfilling their given responsibilities, openly encouraged their wives and daughters to become prostitutes. In their celebrations, they drank to excess and in a state of drunkenness committed lewd acts...Even the wives and daughters of leading families considered lewd acts to be within the bounds of decorum. (Pirniya, *Iran-e Bastan,* 2:1397–98)

It was during these years that the Jews saw with their own eyes the ugliness of the lives of those who were estranged from God and truly understood the value of their religious teachings. Life in Babylon became a crucible in which unrefined gold was placed and from which pure gold was extracted. It was during this time that the people's attraction to the land of their forefathers grew and their desire to see Jerusalem burned stronger. They sang:

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept,
When we remembered Zion.
Upon the willows in the midst thereof
We hanged up our harps.
For there they that led us captive asked of us words of song,
And our tormenters asked of us mirth:
'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'
How shall we sing the Lord's song
In a foreign land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.

Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
If I remember thee not;
If I set not Jerusalem
Above my chiefest joy. (Psalm 137)

In this manner, the Jewish nation passed from the crucible of trial and took form. The homeless Jewish nation—whose numbers, excluding Levites, once reached four million during the reign of Solomon—declined greatly as a result of many battles, drought, disease, and captivity. But rather than completely disappearing and being relegated to the ranks of oblivion—as did many other nations of those times—it found new strength and moved forward. This was no longer the grumbling people of Moses' time, and although Moses was no longer at their side, they had his book of law in their hands. Possessing the Bible, they needed no other prophet or leader. Not only in those times, but throughout all successive diasporas, in city and in countryside, in time of peace and in time of war, on days of mourning and on nights of merriment, in brightness and in darkness, they never set the Bible aside. Through their commitment to it, they felt secure in the shelter of an Eternal Guardian. The people's book of law, the Torah, is a light shining upon the dark heart of mankind, and the people—for all their strayings and sins both upon their own soil and throughout this vast world—have been able to find their way by this light and miraculously survive thousands of hardships in a gloomy, bigoted world. The prisoners of Babylon were freed by Cyrus the Liberator. A group of them returned to the Promised Land and erected the Second Temple. Judea was reestablished, but it later fell to the Greeks, and years later, to the Romans. Then it was the turn of the Islamic caliphs. The wars between the Muslims and the Christians for control of the holy city of Jerusalem—known as the Crusades—made the exalted status of the land of the Jews even more manifest. Later, the Ottomans took possession of that land which the Romans called Palestine, and after that, Great Britain became its master. It is amazing that after

all these tumultuous upheavals, God's ancient covenant with the Jewish people has been renewed, and the people have returned to Israel.

Judaism's adversaries have delighted in commenting on the short period of Israel and Judea's independence in centuries past, and have usually regarded the diaspora as evidence of Israel's unworthiness or mortal sin. But a comparison of the lives of other ancient nations with these two Jewish countries shows that any such notion is fraught with error. Assyria, for all its power, conquests, and plundering, lasted but 296 years. Babylon was independent for only 87 years. Media, the great conqueror of Ninevah and Assyria, was independent for 151 years. The independence of the Achaemenid state lasted no more than 229 years. The Elamite state, which was so crushed by Assyria that it never again rose, lasted 100 years. But the states of Judea and Israel lasted for 1,270 years, from the beginning of the rule of the judges until the destruction of the Second Temple, and if the historical existence of the Jewish nation is reckoned from the time of Abraham in 1812 B.C.E. until the restoration of Israel's independence in 1948 C.E., we reach the amazing total of 3,760 years. It is clear that this is not the end, and that with the passage of time the age of this eternal nation will increase.

In short, the Jews were the first people to recognize the one, unique God and to worship him. In those times, when the world was in darkness concerning moral principles and social relationships, the Jews kindled the enlightening torch of Law, and throughout successive centuries they have obstinately struggled to keep alive this magical torch, despite all hardships and afflictions. The Jews are a people who so cherish freedom that they have never sought to convert others to their faith through killing, bloodshed, coercion and threat of force, or to violate the rights of others.

Moses is their teacher, and they are the long-suffering mentors of mankind.

Chapter Two
The First Jewish Settlers in Iran

There is a general belief that the first Jewish settlers in Iran were those held captive at Babylon and liberated by Cyrus, and that instead of returning to their homeland, they accompanied Cyrus' army to Iran, where no Jew had set foot prior to that time. The general public and some amateur historians concur on this point based on indisputable Biblical documentation which recounts in detail the relationship between the Jews and Iran during the Achaemenid dynasty. The prisoners of Babylon were comprised of those who had lived in Judea, including the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. But did not the other ten tribes have some connection to Iran? Did not the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, and Joseph who lived in the northern part of the Land of David, called Israel, set foot in Iran after their defeat and capture?

In the previous chapter, reference was made to the historical fact that after the reign of Solomon, his realm was divided into two parts. The northern part was called "Israel" and the southern part was called "Judea." It was also mentioned that 134 years before Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, bringing Judea to its knees and exiling the Jews to Babylon, the Assyrians conquered Israel, massacred the population, and scattered the survivors of the ten tribes throughout their empire. As a result, ancient Israel vanished, and the ten tribes were veiled by a curtain of obscurity which grew darker with the passage of time.

The prophet Joel said of the Assyrians:

> A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame blazeth; the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing escapeth them. (Joel 2:3)

The question is this: A little more than a century before the Babylonian siege, did not a group of the Jews who were taken prisoner by the

Assyrians and left their homeland enter, either voluntarily or involuntarily, what was then Iranian territory?

It is difficult to give a definitive, documented answer to this question. The history of the ten lost tribes is one of the most uncertain, and at the same time most interesting, chapters of Jewish history. So much has been said and written about this subject that some have deemed it a fable. Hundreds of books and articles about the "ten lost tribes" are to be found, each of which deals with a separate region and identifies a certain people as descendants of one or several of these tribes. In fact, there are fewer countries and peoples to which no relation with the ten tribes has been ascribed than vice versa. From the religious leaders of Japan, known as "shindai," to the inhabitants of Australia, from the American Indians to the blacks of Africa, historical writings have found some link to the ten tribes. From India, the Caucasus, and Yemen to Ireland, Denmark, and America, all nations of the world have made some effort to trace the path of the ten tribes.

The main cause of this confusion is the shocking omission in the holy texts of any mention of the Israelites after the Assyrian victory. Why do these texts not mention the fate of the Assyrian prisoners, at least in passing? Two reasons may be cited. The first is that all of the Jews' sorrow was over Jerusalem, and this city was in Judea, separate from Israel. The other reason is that in Israel there were fewer scholars, scribes, believers, and people concerned with the future than there were in Judea. It was Judea, and particularly its capital, Jerusalem, which had orators and prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, farsighted scribes like Ezra, and capable administrators like Nehemiah, who strove to maintain the spirituality of the people, to bring order to the confusion resulting from two major defeats, and to preserve their history for future generations. Indeed, in the Bible we find ample references to the sacrilege of both the kings and some of the people of Israel, the result of which was the calamitous Assyrian onslaught. The ten northern tribes were unlettered, and thus left no historical records. There were no

religious books among them or men of letters to write their history. Perhaps they are not to be faulted, for they were far from the center of learning, history, and faith, that is, Jerusalem. The loss of literate men who adhered to the faith and were concerned with history created historical impoverishment among the ten northern tribes and invited future historians' speculation about the fate of the ten tribes.

The Assyrian onslaught against Israel was much more savage and ruinous than the Babylonian campaign against Judea, but because the Temple was in Judea, the story of the Assyrian atrocities, unlike that of the destruction and reconstruction of the Temple, was not recorded in the Bible. This added to the historical uncertainty concerning the ten tribes after they fell to the Assyrians. In Second Kings we read that:

> In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maacah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria. (Second Kings, 15:29)

This was the first major Assyrian assault against Israel, which took place from 741 to 739 B.C.E.

It was the policy of the tyrannical king of Assyria to deport the surviving population of conquered lands to other parts of the empire and to settle other conquered peoples in their places so that they would not be able to rise up and seek vengeance. Tiglath-Pileser III's policy of resettling prisoners of war, which helped to maintain Assyrian victories, was implemented more forcefully by other kings. This policy uprooted peoples and relegated them to the annals of history. Many of the peoples of those times of whom no trace remains suffered the same fate. The disappearance of the ten tribes is also a result of this Assyrian policy. One incomplete document from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III bears the names of

thousands of exiles from Galilee, among which the names of figures who appear in the Bible are to be found.[3]

Several years after this terrible assault, in 720 B.C.E., the king of Israel, Hoshea ben Elah, rose up against the Assyrians who had occupied a portion of Israel. The tyrannical king of Assyria, Shalmaneser V, became enraged against Israel, seized Samaria, the capital of Israel, and took control of the whole country. His successor, Sargon II:

> ...brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Avva, and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. (Second Kings 17:24)

This policy was also practiced by his son, Sennacherib.

If the practice of resettling conquered peoples as described in the above biblical verse was in fact implemented, then where were the Jewish survivors of Israel taken? Rather than resorting to concocting fables that are far removed from any historical reality, we should consider the following hypothesis: some of the survivors of the ten tribes of Israel went to Iran.

We will present some credible evidence in support of this hypothesis, although we will not be able to completely prove it (a difficult task which would require extensively detailed research).

The first and most solid piece of evidence supporting this theory is found in the Bible. It is true that because of Judea's learned men and the importance of Jerusalem, many details about the Judean prisoners of Babylon were recorded in the Bible. But the Bible is not completely silent about the Assyrian prisoners. It would suffice to find in the Bible one reference about the forced resettlement of Assyria's Israeli prisoners in Iran and to consider it testimony to the truth of the above-stated theory. This reference is to be found in Second Kings 17:6, which states:

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[3] *EJ*, 6:1034.

> In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away unto Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and in Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

The city of Halah corresponds to the city of Calah, which was the capital of Assyria before Ninevah.

Where were the cities of the Medes? They were cities which at the time of the second Assyrian campaign against Israel were under Assyrian rule. The Assyrians had previously occupied Media, which included the western and northern regions of present-day Iran as far as Mount Damavand and the Kevir-e Lut desert—which they considered to be the end of the world—and resettled their Median prisoners in other occupied territories of the Assyrian Empire. The Gozan River is one of the tributaries of the Euphrates River, and the cities of Halah and Khabur were in present-day Iraqi Kurdistan.[4] It can therefore be said that what was meant by "the cities of the Medes," was a place further away, that is, in present-day Iranian Kurdistan. Documents later discovered in the vicinity of Nimrud and other Kurdish areas, and in particular Hebrew names mentioned in these documents, support the historical truth of the exile of Assyria's Israeli prisoners to western Iran.

The second supporting factor is to be found by examining the path generally followed by prisoners at that time. A study of the civil and military practices of the times clearly shows that captive peoples, either by force or of their own volition, were drawn toward the capturing power. This phenomenon held true even during the reign of Cyrus, who by no means countenanced oppression of defeated nations. A group of freed Jewish prisoners in Babylon, rather than returning to the land of their birth, was drawn to Iran by the magnetism of the conquering power. Clearly, when force is also applied, this attraction becomes all the more intense, and thus it was with the Assyrians who conquered Israel. At that time, they

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[4] *EJ*, 10:1296.

held sway over the entire land of Media, and on this basis, it can be said that some, if not all of the captive Jews of Israel held by the Assyrians, were taken to western and northern Iran, and that gradually, with the passage of time, they dispersed from the northern region toward the east, and by the time Assyria collapsed—before the arrival of the Babylonian captives—Jews were established in a country called "Iran." In fact, the dispersal of the ten tribes within Iran was different from the dispersal of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin who lived in Judea and were captured by the Babylonians. The Jews of Israel went from Samaria to Aleppo, Ninevah, Kurdistan, and Azerbaijan, and thence to Gilan, Mazandaran, Gorgan, and Khorasan, while the Judean Jews went from Jerusalem to Babylon, Elam, Shush, Stakhr, and Pasargadae, and later were drawn to other cities of Iran such as Yazd, Kerman, Kashan, and Isfahan. It might be possible to say that some of the Jews who lived in Bokhara, Samarqand, Kabul, and Khwarazm and also in the Caucasus and Georgia are descended from the ten lost tribes. The roads traveled by the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judea in Iran and neighboring countries were separate. It is probably for this reason that the Jews of Isfahan consider themselves to be of the tribe of Judah and that the Jews of Hamadan believe they are of the tribe of Simeon, most of them having chosen the name "Simeon" for their male children in generations past.

The third factor supporting the notion that the first exiled Jewish prisoners in Iran were of the ten tribes is the historical accounts of travelers and curious historians who, though not having produced complete proof through the touchstone of research, have produced important historical documentation.

Josephus, the renowned Jewish historian of the 1st century C.E., that is, 700 years after the Assyrian captivity of the Israelites, writes:

> ...the ten tribes are beyond the Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude and not to be estimated in numbers. (*EJ*, 15:1004)

The definition of the region "beyond the Euphrates" and whether it includes western Iran is not explicitly stated, but a glance at a historical atlas suggests the possibility that it includes a portion of Iran.

Benjamin of Tudela, the 12th century Jewish traveler who visited Iran about a century before Marco Polo, gives a detailed account of the ten lost tribes in his travelogue, *Sefer ha-massa'ot*. The writings of this traveler, who began his journeys in 1165 C.E. and entered Iran during the reign of Sultan Sanjar, are reliable, and the text of his travelogue has oft been cited. However, nineteen centuries had passed between the Assyrian resettlement of the tribes of Israel in Iran and Benjamin of Tudela's time, and, of course, his account of this subject may merely be the oral traditions of his own times. In any event, Benjamin of Tudela makes reference to the great number of Iranian Jews and provides numbers for the Jewish populations of Gorgan, Samarqand, and Bokhara. He also traveled to the cities of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. Regarding the Jews of Azerbaijan he writes:

> Five days thence [from Baghdad] to 'AMARIA with five and twenty thousand Jews. This congregation forms part of those, which live in the mountains of Chaphton and which amount to more than one hundred, extending to the frontiers of Media.
>
> These Jews are descendants of those, who were originally led into captivity by king Shalmanesser, they speak the syriac [*sic*] language and among them are many excellent thalmudic scholars; they are neighbours to those of the city of 'AMARIA, which is situated within one days [*sic*] journey of the empire of Persia, the king of which they obey and to whom they pay a tribute. This is collected by a deputy and amounts here as well as in all mahomedan countries to one Amiri of gold—equal to one and one third golden Maravedi—for each male inhabitant of the age of fifteen and upwards. (Benjamin of Tudela, pp. 121–22)

In this account, Benjamin of Tudela several times mentions the "River Gozan," along which lay, according to Second Kings, the towns to which Assyria's Israeli captives were exiled. It is interesting that he speaks of the Jews living along the Gozan River once while speaking of Tabaristan, a second time while speaking of Ghazna

[Ghaznin], and a third time while speaking of Nishapur. The cause for this ambiguity, which seems unlikely for a great traveler like him, might lie in this: that because the prisoners of Assyria were given a place next to the Gozan River, in the several places in northern Iran where he spoke of these prisoners and saw that their town was next to a river, he thought that river to be a continuation of the previous river and called it "the Gozan."

The Jewish Encyclopedia states:

> In 1835 Asahel Grant, an American physician, was appointed by the American Board of Foreign Missions to pursue his calling among the Nestorians of Mesopotamia. He found among them a tradition that they were descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes, a tradition which had already been gathered by Smith and White [*sic*] during their earlier mission ("Researches in Armenia," vol. ii.). He found also among the Jews of the neighborhood of Urumiah recognition of this tradition, which he considered to be confirmed by the following facts: they dwelt in the neighborhood to which the Israelites were originally deported, while Josephus declared that the Ten Tribes lived beyond the Euphrates up to his time ("Ant." xi. 5, § 3), and his statement is confirmed by Jerome ("Opera," vi. 780); their language is a branch of the Aramaic; they still offer sacrifices and first-fruits like the ancient Israelites, and they prepare for the Sabbath on the preceding evening; they have Jewish names and Jewish features. (*JE*, 12:250)

According to documents which another Jewish traveler, Baruch Gad, presented to the rabbis of Jerusalem in 1647, he had seen the "Children of Moses" (Tribe of Levi) in Iran, and they gave him a letter to deliver to the rabbis.[5]

Encyclopaedia Judaica writes concerning the Jews of Kurdistan, which includes parts of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey:

> An ancient tradition relates that the Jews of Kurdistan are the descendants of the Ten Tribes from the time of the Assyrian exile. The first to mention this was R. Benjamin of Tudela, the

[5] *EJ*, 10:1296.

> 12th century traveler who visited Kurdistan in about 1170 and found more than 100 Jewish communities. (*EJ*, 10:1296)
>
> The Jews of Kurdistan spoke an Aramaic with insertions of Turkish, Persian, Kurdish, Arabic, and Hebrew words. They called it the "language of the Targum" or *Lishna Yehudiyya* ("language of the Jews"), as well as *Lashon ha-Galut*...The Nestorian Christians who live in this region also speak Aramaic, which they refer to as "Syrian." (*EJ*, 10:1298)

Another traveler, who coincidentally is also named Benjamin and is known in Jewish history as "Benjamin II," went to Kurdistan in 1848. He also supports the view that the Jews of Kurdistan are descended from the ten tribes. He believes that the Nestorians, or Assyrians, of Kurdistan are descended from the tribes of Dan and Naphtali, and notes that although they have changed religion, they still maintain some Jewish customs. They do not mix with other Christians but marry within their community. Many stories relate that descendants of the ten tribes exiled by the kings of Assyria to Kurdistan frequently converted to other religions.

In the middle of the seventh century, after the Arab conquest, a surrender treaty was concluded between them and the Jews of Kurdistan, and thereafter the status of Jews in the region was transformed. Generally speaking, they led a hard life of poverty and want. There was no small number of erudite and distinguished persons amongst them, but most of them were employed in shopkeeping, vending, weaving, dying, carpentry, cobbling, and the like. If they were employed in agriculture, they chose to live in Jewish-populated villages. The Jews of Kurdistan, regardless of their social status, had a reputation for bravery, as did other people of this area. Little is known of them from the time of the Arab conquest until the 16th century, and from that point forward, the numbers provided by travelers indicate widespread changes amongst the Jews of Kurdistan. The number of Jews in the cities of the region fluctuated erratically. This must be attributed to the instability of their financial situation and to their insecurity, as they were constantly moving in search of

bread and security. Anti-Semitic movements eventually drove them completely out of this area. In the mid-twentieth century, after the independence of Israel, many of the Jews of Kurdistan returned to the land of their forebears.

Khorasan of Yore: Present-Day Afghanistan

Another place to which a link with the ten lost tribes has been ascribed in Jewish history is old Khorasan, which includes wide areas of present-day Afghanistan. Again, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* writes on this subject:

> Early Karaite and Rabbanite biblical commentators regarded Khorasan as a location of the lost Ten Tribes. Afghanistan annals also trace the Hebrew origin of some of the Afghan tribes, in particular the Durrani, the Yussafzai, and the Afridi, to King Saul (Talut)...
>
> Medieval sources mention several Jewish centers in Afghanistan, of which Balkh was the most important. A Jewish community in Ghazni is recorded in Muslim sources, indicating that Jews were living there in the 10th and 11th centuries. A Jew named Isaac, an agent of Sultan Mahmud (ruled 998–1030), was assigned to administer the sultan's lead mines and to melt ore for him. According to Hebrew sources, vast numbers of Jews lived in Ghazni but while their figures are not reliable, Moses ibn Ezra mentions (1080) over 40,000 Jews paying tribute in Ghazni and Benjamin of Tudela (c. 1170) describes "Ghazni the great city on the River Gozan, where there are about 80,000 [8,000 in a variant manuscript] Jews..."...
>
> A Jewish community in Firoz Koh, capital of the medieval rulers of Ghur or Ghuristan, situated halfway between Herat and Kabul, is mentioned in *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri,* a chronicle written in Persian (completed around 1260) by al-Juzjani. This is the first literary reference to Jews in the capital of the Ghurids. About 20 recently-discovered stone tablets, with Persian and Hebrew inscriptions dating from 1115 to 1215, confirm the existence of a Jewish community there. The Mongol invasion in 1222 annihilated Firoz Koh and its Jewish community...
>
> The Mongol invasion, epidemics, and constant warfare made inroads into Jewish communities in Afghanistan throughout the

> centuries, and little is known about them until the 19th century when they are mentioned in connection with the flight of the *anusim* of Meshed after the forced conversions in 1839. Many of the refugees fled to Afghanistan, Turkestan, and Bokhara, settling in Herat, Maimana, Kabul, and other places with Jewish communities, where they helped to enrich the stagnating cultural life. Nineteenth-century travelers (Wolff, Vámbéry, Neumark, and others) state that the Jewish communities of Afghanistan were largely composed of these Meshed Jews...The language spoken by Afghan Jews is not the Pushtu of their surroundings but a Judeo-Persian dialect in which they have produced fine liturgical and religious poetry. (*EJ*, 2:326–7)

Another city of Khorasan where individuals from the ten tribes are said to have lived is Nishapur. Sir John Malcolm, the English ambassador to Iran who published his *History of Iran* in 1815, writes about the Jews living between Khorasan and India that many of them believed that they were of the tribes of Israel, and that even some of the emirs of ancient Khorasan considered themselves to be descendants of Shaul and David. After the advent of Islam, a great number of these Jews, particularly those who live in present-day Afghanistan, converted to the new religion. Itzhak Ben-Zvi (Fig. 1 & 2), in his *The Exiled and the Redeemed* (נדחי ישראל), opines that the Jews of northern Iran settled in Afghanistan during the Achaemenid dynasty, probably during the reign of Cambyses. He says these Jews were a mix of Assyrian and Babylonian prisoners, and, of course, the first group is descended from the ten tribes of Israel. Ben-Zvi writes that some of the Muslim tribes of Afghanistan do not deny that they are descended from the ten tribes of Israel. Jewish travelers have spoken since the Middle Ages of the Israelite origins of some of the Afghan tribes who migrated there from Iran. According to Ben-Zvi, the Afghans have a set of laws based on oral traditions called "Pukhtun-Wally," most of which are former Jewish laws. He writes:

> Emir Abdul Rahman, grandfather of the former Afghan Shah Amanallah, stated expressly in his *History of the Afghans* that the Afghans were of Jewish descent. (Ben-Zvi, p. 217)

He thereupon cites S. Menahem Lazar, stating that in the past, many Israelites lived in Afghanistan, all of whom were emigrants from Iran, with their own social administration and religious leaders. Relations between these emigrants and the Iranian Jews were not severed for a long time, and for the most part they communicated concerning religious teachings and regulations. But later, when Islam triumphed in Afghanistan, the status of the Afghan Jews also changed. A number of the Jewish tribes of Afghanistan who converted to Islam nonetheless preserved most of the customs and traditions of Judaism. One of these tribes, the Musa-zay, who live on the border between Russia and Afghanistan and who remained Jewish until the 19th century, are pastoralists with whom fragments of the Torah are to be found. Afghan claims of descent from the ten tribes of Israel have been noted and discussed by most Islamic writers, and some Western researchers have also referred to this relationship. One such researcher, George Moore, traces the identity of the Afghans back to the ten tribes in his *The Lost Tribes.*

Itzhak Ben-Zvi, whose research on the lost tribes of the House of Israel leads to credible conclusions regarding the Caucasus, cites evidence from this same region. He writes that the And, Nawar, and Tsiz tribes, who live in the foothills of the Caucasus and who are today Muslims, as well as the Daghestanis, are descended from the tribes of Israel and Iranian Jewish emigrants, know the Persian language, and have preserved some of the old customs. He also believes that the Jews of Bokhara and Samarqand are descended from the ten lost tribes.[6]

The last attestation that some individuals from the ten tribes were the first Jewish settlers in Iran is produced by the Jews of this land. Although this evidence is not strong from the standpoint of scholarly research, it may nonetheless be useful in a broad and serious study of the ten lost tribes and their residency in Iran. This evidence consists of the following:

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[6]Ben-Zvi, pp. 50–51.

The Jews of Damavand, or Gil'ad, insist that they are descended from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Naphtali and claim that they are descended from the Assyrian prisoners who were exiled to Iran. This belief may be consistent with the actions of the king of Assyria regarding the Israeli prisoners whom he resettled in Damavand, which he thought to be the end of the earth. That is, if the settlement of the Jews in Damavand and its environs coincides with the removal by the Assyrians of the Medes from this region, then more consideration may be given to what the Jews of Damavand say about their origins. According to Pirniya's *Tarikh-e Iran,* the King of Assyria attacked Media in 744 B.C.E., defeated its tribes one after the other, annexed Media to his vast empire, seized over 60,000 Iranian prisoners, and took them to Calah (Halah), the capital of Assyria.[7]

Three years later, in 741 B.C.E., the Assyrians sent tens of thousands of Israeli prisoners to Damavand and the cities of the Medes. The oral traditions of the Jewish people of Damavand, who have not studied the history of Assyria and who are also unaware of their own history as a people, are in accord with the Assyrian policy of resettlement. In fact, in order to crush the spirit of the ten tribes—a brave and courageous people who withstood the onslaught of the bloodthirsty Assyrian army for three years—the Assyrians deported them to the very "end of the earth," the abode of the White Demon,[8] so that they would have nothing to fear from them.

More interesting is the name "Gil'ad," which the Jews gave to this area. We know that Gilead is the name of a region in Erez Israel, a place where some of the ten tribes lived. If we do not allow that the inhabitants of Israeli Gilead were directly deported to this place, then we must suppose that the amazing similarity between the climates of Damavand and Israeli Gilead was so great that the new inhabitants of Damavand recognized in it their birthplace, Gilead.

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[7]Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran az aghaz ta enqeraz-e Sasaniyan,* p. 49.

[8]TN: In Iranian mythology, the formidable "White Demon" (*div-e sefid*) ruled over Damavand before being killed by the epic hero Rostam.

Both places have fertile plains and are well watered. Each plain is surrounded by fairly high mountains, there are many pastures for livestock, and the air is pleasant and pure. About a century and a half after the settlement of the prisoners of Israel in this area, Ezra the scribe, the great leader of the Jews who tried to return the scattered tribes to Israel, during the return trip from Iran to Judea took upon himself the arduous thousand-kilometer journey from Susa, the southernmost point of Iran, to Damavand. He gave a large group of his coreligionists the good tidings of the return to the homeland, and encouraged the former prisoners to return to Israel. But he was not completely successful.

The next point concerns some issues which we encounter in the present age, and again, however small and trivial they may appear, they may help unravel the mystery of the ten tribes, and, as the saying goes, "put the end of the thread in the hand."[9] For example, if, as has been said, the course of the prisoners of Israel took them to the northern areas of what was then Iran, that is, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Gilan, Mazandaran, Damavand, Khorasan extending to Samarqand, Bokhara, Herat, and Kabul, then it is interesting to note that the Jews of northern and western Iran generally call themselves "Israelites" while the Jews of southern Iran call themselves "Jews." This brings to mind that the Promised Land was divided after the reign of Solomon, that the northern part was named "Israel" while the southern part was named "Judea," that the Assyrians, during the time of the Medes, forcefully resettled the people of the country of Israel to northern and western Iran, and that some of the people of Judea voluntarily settled in southern and eastern Iran during the reign of Cyrus.

Also, when Afghan tribesmen are encountered who, despite the fact that they are Muslims, observe some of the old customs of the Jews of Israel, we can consider it support for the view that in the past, the large group of Jews who comprised the ten tribes flowed

[9]TN: Persian: سر نخ را به دست دادن.

into this region. From the reports of two witnesses who travelled to Afghanistan on business in the first half of the 20th century, we learn that the link between the Muslim Afghan tribes and the lost tribes has not been completely severed, and parallels, however faint and partial, may be found in this regard. According to the accounts of these two, one of whom is named "Mehdi-tash" and the other "Ilyas," every man of the Afridi tribe, who make their living through livestock herding and agriculture, has *pe'ot,* locks of hair that faithful Jews grow next to their temples and which hang curled next to the ear lobes. They always keep a long, white cloth draped over their shoulders which they spread on the ground instead of a prayer rug. This cloth was probably the very same tallith which Jewish men drape over their shoulders while praying. On Friday nights, they light lamps and place them under baskets. Although they are Muslims, they consider themselves to be descended from the lost tribes of the House of Israel.

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All in all, the belief that Assyrian oppression led to the complete eradication of the ten tribes of the House of Israel is untenable. What has strengthened this idea is the silence of historical researchers on the relation of historical Iran with the ten tribes. It is surprising that even historians such as Graetz and Dubnow, who have achieved worldwide renown for their general studies of Jewish history and whose works have been used in the preparation of this book, have neither themselves conducted an independent study of this subject, nor have they mentioned the opinions of others. It is this inattention, especially the failure to consider the formerly common principle of scattering prisoners throughout the territory of the conquering empire, that has led some Jewish historians astray, especially those in Europe, and caused them to utter incredible statements about the fate of the Jewish tribes held captive by the Assyrians.

The resettlement of the Jews of ancient Israel by the kings of Assyria is a certainty, and that some of them were moved to "the

cities of the Medes" is even more certain, as attested by the Bible. This is exactly what is recounted in this summary, so that it may become clear that the Jewish prisoners of Assyria came to Iran before the Jewish prisoners of Babylon, and that these were the first emigrants to this land.

It is a near certainty that many people from the ten tribes of Israel gradually mixed with those of the two tribes of Judea in the vast area of the latter diaspora. For example, during the time of Ardeshir III, worship of the goddess Anahita took on a national aspect, and Ardeshir commanded that she be worshipped throughout his vast empire. But the Jews in the land of Judea, which was at that time occupied by Iran, refused to comply with the order. As a result, Ardeshir III exiled many of the inhabitants of Jericho, who were the primary instigators of the revolt, beyond Damavand, and these Jews took up residency in Gorgan. In this manner, Israelites and Judeans commingled in northern Iran. Many times this same kind of commingling occurred in other forms in other places.

The Bible also attests to this national commingling. The prophet Ezekiel, who merits the title "hope-giver of the captives," mentions the "elders of the house of Israel" by the River Khabur in the land of the Chaldeans (Ezekiel 8:12) and also "the elders of Judah" (Ezekiel 8:1). This indicates that the captives of Israel and the captives of Judah came face to face in Babylon and lived together within the space of a century and a half. The prophet Isaiah writes:

> And he will set up an ensign for the nations, and will assemble the dispersed of Israel, and gather together the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth. (Isaiah 11:12)

The prophet Zechariah, who lived at the time of the construction of the Second Temple during the reign of Darius I, in 516 B.C.E., that is, 225 years after the capture of the first of the ten tribes, says:

> And it shall come to pass that, as ye were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you,

> and ye shall be a blessing; fear not, but let your hands be strong. (Zechariah 8:13)

This last verse indicates that the ten tribes of Israel remained alive and well in a fortress of divine law after surviving more than two centuries of the darkest period in their history—the time of blood-thirsty tyrants like Tiglath-Pileser, Shalmaneser, and Sennacherib. The conclusion that they were assimilated amongst the Assyrians or that they forever disappeared is far from the truth.

In short, the ten tribes did not disappear. Nor were they lost. They were dispersed, and some of made their way to Iran. Later, under the protection of the Achaemenid kings, a number of other Assyrian Israelite captives emigrated to "the cities of Media," including Gil'ad of Damavand. In any event, each of the scattered twelve tribes established communities throughout the world and finally returned to the land of their forefathers, Israel. It is clear that during the long years of the diaspora many Jews, whether of the ten tribes or the two southern tribes, were either converted to other monotheistic religions by force or fell by the wayside under the influence of the blind demons of extremism, coldheartedness, and ignorance.

Perhaps those Westerners who speak of "the ten lost tribes" and lead themselves astray imagining that the American Indians, the blacks of Africa, and the aborigines of Australia are descended from these tribes should be told:

> *There was water in the jug, yet we wandered about in thirst*
> *The beloved was at home, yet we searched the world over*[10]

The traces of the ten tribes are not to be found in lands far from the East. Either by compulsion or by choice, they went east and traversed the road from Mesopotamia to the land of the Medes, northern Iran, Khwarazm, ancient Khorasan, and India. They were the first Jews to emigrate to Iranian territory.

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[10]TN: Persian:

آب در کوزه، و ما تشنه لبان می گردیم یار در خانه، و ما گرد جهان می گردیم

PART TWO

THE ACHAEMENIDS (550–330 B.C.E.)

Chapter Three
Iran: Pioneer of Freedom among Nations

Achaemenid Iran was successor to the Medes, who were the first Aryans of the east to set up a kingdom neighboring the Semites living to the west. Although the reign of the Medes from the beginning of the 8th to the middle of the 6th century B.C.E. was short, they nonetheless amassed enough power to rival such warmongers as the Assyrians. After violent encounters in the middle of the 7th century B.C.E., they were finally able, with the help of a treaty of alliance with the Babylonians, to deliver to the Assyrians such a crushing blow that they never recovered. It was after this defeat that the kingdom of Assyria was divided between Media and Babylon. The Medes' power base was in the northwest of present-day Iran, in the areas of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. Their capital city was Hamadan (Ecbatana).

The government of the Persians, another group of Aryan descent, was centered in the province of Fars, in southwest Iran. There is no historical documentation that a king by the name of "Achaemen" ruled Iran, but it is certain that three kings or princes led the dynasty before Cyrus the Great (Cyrus II). The Achaemenid princes were for many years hand-picked by the Median government; they were not independent. But while the Assyrians were engaging the Medes in combat, the Persians, weary of Median supremacy, took advantage of the conflict and declared themselves an independent state.

Although Cyrus was not the first monarch of the Achaemenid dynasty, the glory of the Achaemenids began with his accomplishments. He must be considered the practical founder of an unparalleled dynasty established in Iran in the middle of the 6th century B.C.E. From Herodotus' *History* and Xenophon's *Anabasis* to Olmstead's *History of the Persian Empire* and Frye's *The Heritage of Persia,* much has been said and written about this noble man. Many historians see parallels between his life and that of Moses. It has been written that the Median king Astyages gave his daughter in

marriage to the prince of Persia, and that Cyrus was born of this union. The king dreamt that Cyrus would attempt to kill him and seize his empire, so he decreed that the infant should be put to death. But the person upon whom it fell to carry out the killing instead handed Cyrus over to a shepherd to raise. When he reached adulthood, he overthrew the oppressive king of the Medes. This story is reminiscent of the Pharaoh's decree that firstborn male Jewish children should be put to death and Moses' ultimate triumph over the Pharaoh. In addition to his genius for leadership and administration, Cyrus had a charisma such that the people of his empire recognized him in their hearts as their father and leader. Beyond this, his legendary struggle to break the chains of bondage, his relentless efforts to spread freedom and tolerance, and his abstention from using force to compel other nations to follow specific national and religious beliefs demonstrate that—whether he willed it or not—he held the station of prophet.

After his victory over the king of the Medes at Pasargadae (Mashhad-e Morghab), Cyrus marched north, and in the middle of the 6th century B.C.E., he captured Hamadan and defeated Astyages, thereby ending Median rule and founding the Achaemenid empire. He did not execute the oppressive king of Media, nor did he seek to place Persia above Media. He brought both nations under one flag, and it was not long before he also defeated the king of Lydia in Asia Minor and added that land to Iranian territory.

Cyrus never showed harshness to defeated kings. He was distinguished by his humanity, and his treatment of the kings of Media and Armenia is legendary. He was of noble character—a peerless king. Not all of his conquests, however, were achieved by force of arms. He was a master player in the political arena of his time. His ascension to power and his successive victories struck fear in the hearts of tyrants. In an eight-year military campaign, he expanded the borders of the Iranian Empire to the north as far as the Jaxartes River and to the east as far as the Indus River. The people of Babylon were made desperate by the tyranny of their king, Nabonidus, and

wished to be free. The campaign against Babylon was a formidable task. Babylon was the supreme power of that age, and everyone imagined it to be an impenetrable fortress. The walls of Babylon rendered it invulnerable: they were 80 cubits high and 25 cubits wide, with 150 towers and ramparts. In 539 B.C.E., a fierce battle was fought near Babylon between Cyrus' army and the Babylonians, which ended in the enemy's defeat. Cyrus' political and military genius shone in his campaign against Babylon. He crossed the Tigris River with his army, and at his command, they diverted the waters of a tributary that led to Babylon and were thus able to penetrate the city by following the dry river bed.[11] Cyrus entered the city not as a foreign conqueror, but as a tolerant leader and liberator of the Babylonian captives and people, who were weary of the despotic Chaldean king. The people welcomed his arrival. There was no killing or plundering in the city. Control of Babylon entailed dominion over several other countries, including Judea and Phoenicia. The borders of the Iranian Empire were thus expanded as far as Egypt. Cyrus issued a proclamation in Babylon, the original text of which has been found in excavations of the area. The proclamation, which has attained worldwide fame as the "Cyrus cylinder" and a replica of which is kept at the United Nations building in New York, is the first international charter and the first proclamation of equality and freedom in non-Jewish history. In that proclamation, Cyrus granted freedom to the nations under his rule. In one passage of it he says:

> When I entered Babylon in peace amidst the joyous cries of the people, I entered the king's palace and sat upon the throne. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 71)

Cyrus freed not only the Jewish captives, but all Babylonian captives and the Babylonian people themselves who were, in effect, bondsmen of a pharaoh-like king. After conquering Babylon, the Achaemenid

[11]Is not this act of Cyrus reminiscent of a certain aspect of Moses' leadership?

king returned to Iran and in 529 B.C.E. was killed on the battlefield. His tomb is at Pasargadae. He was a wise king who respected the faiths of all nations and peoples, the standard-bearer of an international moral revolution in the ancient world.

After Cyrus, his son Cambyses, who while his father lived governed Babylon, became king of Iran. He secretly had his brother, Bardiya, who governed Khwarazm, Bactria, Parthia, and Kerman, killed. He further expanded the Achaemenid Empire by conquering Egypt, Libya, Carthage (Tunis), Nabatea (Sudan), and Ethiopia. In these wars, some of his soldiers perished in the parched wilderness, and others were buried in the sandstorms of the burning deserts. According to Herodotus, Cambyses suffered from epilepsy and sometimes committed heartless acts while in a state of madness. He killed his sister Roxana, buried several of the Persian nobles alive and burned the mummified body of one of the pharaohs of Egypt.[12] However, most Western historians attribute Herodotus' claims regarding Cambyses' fits of madness to the Greek historian's prejudice and have found no convincing evidence in support of them.[13] Cambyses was not as respectful of the religious beliefs of conquered nations as his father, and he sometimes imposed national religious beliefs.

Cambyses was king from 529 to 522 B.C.E. In the last year of his reign, while he was away from his capital, he learned that a man claiming to be the "real" Bardiya had declared himself king and had proclaimed a three-year tax amnesty to appease the people. This man, whose actual name was Gaumatha, created a crisis for Cambyses. For this reason, Cambyses killed himself with his own sword upon entering Ecbatana.

At this time, numerous revolts sprang up, and it was feared that the whole Achaemenid Empire might unravel and despots might again establish themselves in each province. But Darius, a prince

[12]Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 75.

[13]*EB*, 21:870.

and military leader, came forward to quell the rebellions. Darius was the son-in-law of Cyrus the Great, having married his daughter, Atossa. A brilliant commander and a strong leader, he returned peace and order to the expansive Iranian Empire. Darius the Great, in the immortal Old Persian cuneiform inscription of Bistun, describes how he toppled the false Bardiya (the pretender Gaumatha) and, being of the Achaemenid line, became king himself:

> Darius the King says "There was no one in Persia, Media, or from our house to re-take the dominion from Gaumatha the Magus. The people feared him...No one dared say anything about Gaumatha the Magus until I came...I sought help from Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda helped me. In the first month of autumn on the tenth day with [several] people I killed this Gaumatha the Magus...I retook kingship from him. By the grace of Ahura Mazda, I became king"...Darius the King says "I brought stability to the country which had escaped the rule of our dynasty." (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran* p. 77)

After establishing order, Darius the Great turned his attention to further expanding the empire. Iran grew both east and west, its borders approaching the Danube River. Darius' ordered government and legislation have immortalized his name. He who faced rebellion at the beginning of his reign was able to bring unsurpassed tranquility to an empire as vast as the ocean.

Darius divided Greater Iran into 30 satrapies, according to the Naqsh-e Rostam inscription. Each satrapy was administered by a satrap and was comprised of several provinces, each with its own governor. The Bible refers to 127 provinces extending from India to Ethiopia. The land of Judea was part of the "Trans-River" satrapy, which extended from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. The satrap commanded each satrapy's military contingent, served as its highest judicial official and administrator, and was also responsible for tax collection. Each satrap was assisted by two representatives from the central government: one for military affairs and

one for civil. Inspectors known as "the eyes and ears of the king" kept the king informed of the satrapies' affairs.

Darius also built many roads linking the cities. Along the roads he established courier posts. Messengers on horseback carried orders from the capital to the first courier post, and from there, fresh couriers carried them on to the next post, and so forth. In this way, messages reached the most distant points in the empire as quickly as possible. The establishment of the Immortal Guards was also among this brilliant king's accomplishments. Darius established equitable laws for the assessment and collection of taxes. To facilitate commerce, he struck gold coins, known as "darics," for the first time in Iran. In 496 B.C.E., during the reign of Darius, Iran became engaged in the Greek wars, and in 486 B.C.E., in the heat of the struggle between Iran and Greece, Darius the Great died. In his time, Iran achieved its greatest territorial extent. In the last passage of the Bistun inscription he says:

> O you who will be king after this, resist the Lie with all your strength. If you are thinking of what you can do to preserve your kingdom, expose the liar through interrogation...Do not befriend the liar and he who does injustice. Reprove them with the sword. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 130)

Xerxes, Darius' eldest son by Queen Atossa, was enthroned in 486 B.C.E. at the age of 34 and reigned for 21 years. Throughout most of his reign, Iran was at war with Greece. His land and sea battles with the Greeks are legendary. He captured Athens and set fire to the renowned Acropolis. During the Irano-Greek wars, Xerxes' army was comprised of soldiers of 46 nationalities, from Persians, Medes, and Parthians to Assyrians, Indians, and Lidians. Although Iran won some of these wars, they had a bitter end, planting the seeds of the Achaemenids' destruction at the hands of the Greeks. After the war with Greece, Xerxes lived a happy and peaceful life until 465 B.C.E., when he and his son Darius were killed in a plot by two of his palace guards, Mithradates and Artabanus.

During the reign of Artaxerxes I, known as "Artaxerxes the Long-Armed," the extinguished torch of war with Greece was rekindled. Xerxes II was king for only 45 days, losing his life in yet another plot. During the reign of Darius II, Iran was incapacitated by unending internal revolts. During the reign of Artaxerxes II, Iran remained at war with Greece and grew internally weaker. Artaxerxes III hastened to put his kinsmen to death so that none might claim the throne. He was a strong king, and had he survived, he might have brought prosperity like Darius the Great, but he was poisoned by one of his courtiers. During the reigns of these kings, the Greek civil wars between Athens and Sparta, which lasted over half a century, posed a challenge to Iran's foreign policy as Iran backed first one side and then the other. During this struggle, in 405 B.C.E., Egypt broke away and proclaimed independence. Philip of Macedon finally succeeded in uniting all of Greece and brought a formidable force to bear on his ancient rival, Iran.

The last Achaemenid king was Darius III, who was satrap of Armenia before becoming king in 338 B.C.E. at the age of 45. It was during his reign that Philip's son, Alexander of Macedon, marched on Iran and burned Persepolis. With the death of Darius III, the Achaemenid dynasty also came to an end.

Iranian civilization was especially illustrious during the Achaemenid period, particularly during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius. This distinctiveness was derived primarily from the humane behavior and high-mindedness of pious Persians. That Iran was the cradle of freedom and tolerance, that none were oppressed, and that 46 nationalities peacefully coexisted is the greatest source of this civilization's amazing splendor.

The languages of the Iranians during this period were as numerous as their many peoples and nations, but Old Persian was the most widespread. Its script, a special form of cuneiform, was developed during the reign of Darius, and by his decree it was used for stone inscriptions. Elamite, which was written on clay tablets, was the language of administration. Aramaic was the third common lan-

guage. Social organization during this period was along feudal lines, and society had three special classes: the nobles, the clergy, and pastoralists or nomads. The title "King of Kings,"[14] which was used in Iran even in the 20th century, is indicative of the centralization and pyramid-structured administration, wherein orders were issued from the top and gradually reached the lower levels. Kingship was a holy office. Researchers disagree regarding the religion of the Iranians during this period. Pre-Zoroastrian Iranian gods were associated with natural phenomena such as water and the sun, or with ideas such as justice and truth. Zoroaster appeared c. 600 B.C.E., but all did not at once convert to his religion. Based on the Bistun inscription, it seems likely that Darius the Great was a Zoroastrian. The kings who came after Darius may have followed his religious lead.

The historical artifacts at Pasargadae, the tombs of the Achaemenid kings, the inscriptions of Bistun and Naqsh-e Rostam, and the imposing ruins of Persepolis all attest to the Achaemenids' architectural advancement. The tile works of that era are testimony to Iran's advanced artistry in those times.

Achaemenid administrative and military organization was the pinnacle of the art of government. The Achaemenids' command center was Susa, while their summer capital was Hamadan. The Achaemenid Empire stretched from the western shores of the Indian Ocean to the Adriatic Sea and from beyond the Jaxartes River to Ethiopia. The people of each clime were completely free in the practice of their religion and customs, but were subordinate to the central government and had to pay taxes and, in time of need, perform military service.

Each province had judges who adjudicated legal matters. The greatest difficulty facing the Achaemenid army was the plurality of languages and nationalities of its soldiers. Were it not for strict discipline, Iran could not have prevailed on the battlefield. The people of the satrapies lived in security and comfort during the Achaemenid peri-

[14]TN: Persian "*shahan-shah*."

od. The people's rejoicing upon Cyrus' triumph over Babylon attests to the Achaemenid leaders' humanity and their support for freedom and the equality of man. It is fitting that the Iran of this period be dubbed the "pioneer of freedom among nations."

Chapter Four
Cyrus, God's Anointed

The history of the Jews of Iran during the Achaemenid period is based upon firm and incontrovertible documentation. On the one hand, the Achaemenid kings have illustrated Iran's status at that time through their inscriptions in the mountains and on edifices such as those at Persepolis. On the other hand, the Jewish people have immortalized this period of their history in their Bible, at times mentioning specific details. More importantly, the tiny nation of Judea was an Iranian possession and considered practically Iranian soil for nearly the whole of its long history, that is, from Cyrus' capture of Babylon until Alexander's capture of Persepolis.

Although the captive Jews taken to Babylon by the Chaldean Nebuchadnezzar were permitted to continue their existence as a people, they wanted to return to their homeland. The prophets of Israel gave them hope that such a day would finally arrive, that the one God would send someone to free them from the shackles of bondage and restore to them the freedom which was the legacy of their prophet Moses. In 538 B.C.E., when Cyrus took Babylon, he issued his famous proclamation freeing the captive Jews of Babylon and allowing them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their ruined temple. Then...

> ...the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying: 'Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord, the God of heaven, given me; and He hath charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all His people—his God be with him—let him go up to build the house of the Lord, the God of Israel, He is the God who is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1–3)

After this edict, a large group from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin who had been held captive at Babylon set out for Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

> Also Cyrus the King brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah....All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when they of the captivity were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:7–11)

Was not Cyrus indeed sent by God to aid the Jews? What commander has ever freed a nation from its enemy's grasp, returned to them that which had been plundered, and paved the way for their return to their homeland? It is for this reason that in the Bible the Jews refer to Cyrus as "God's anointed." The prophet Isaiah says:

> Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus...I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the doors of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and I will give the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I am the Lord, who will call thee by thy name, even the God of Israel. (Isaiah 45:1–4)

The title "God's anointed" in the Bible—which has no room for prejudice in its recounting of history and in which many Jewish kings, including Solomon, the builder of the Temple, were criticized for their sins—cannot be taken lightly. Cyrus' deeds and thoughts and the Bible's praise for and acknowledgment of indebtedness to him elevate him to the status of a great and godly man who received the commandments of the God of Israel. It is in this regard that the nations of Iran and Judea most clearly resembled one another in their hopes and aspirations for the salvation of mankind. Again, in the book of Isaiah, we read God's words concerning Cyrus:

'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure' (Isaiah 44:28)

Cyrus' historical proclamation unconditionally freeing the Jews of Babylon lifted them to unparalleled levels of ecstasy. The 126th Psalm bespeaks some of this joy:

When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion,
We were like unto them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing;

There are various theories about the origin of Cyrus' love for and protection of the Jews. Some hold that the Jews assisted Cyrus during his siege of Babylon and that he sought to recompense them. Others believe that from the outset, Cyrus had planned to march on Egypt and that he sought friendship with the state of Judea in order to have a base near Egypt. As most attacks against Iran came from the West, Cyrus sought a reliable ally in this region, and for this reason strove to strengthen Judea and even helped finance the rebuilding of the Temple. Yet others believe that it is the similarities between the religious beliefs of the Jews and the Iranians that led him to support them. However, the most credible explanation based on historical evidence is that above all, Cyrus was a humane and compassionate king, that he abstained from oppression and bloodshed in all the lands that he ruled, and that he respected the religious freedom of all nations.

Not all the liberated Jews of Babylon accompanied the governor appointed by Cyrus over Judea back to Jerusalem. Some of them decided to remain in Babylon, while others, magnetized by the liberator king of Persia, accompanied his army back to Iran as faithful followers. It is not known whether these followers, especially the several distinguished and learned men among them, were summoned by Cyrus to accompany his army or if they chose to do so of their own volition. But those who returned to Jerusalem were in the

majority. According to the figures provided by the second chapter of the book of Ezra, which lists the number of people from each tribe and family individually, the total number of Jews whose possessions were carried by hundreds of laden horses, camels, and donkeys on the "second exodus" from Babylon to Jerusalem was 49,897.

In this manner, from the outset of Cyrus' conquests and the establishment of the Achaemenid dynasty, the Jews were distributed throughout a large portion of the empire. The Jews of the ten tribes, who had been resettled in Iran nearly a century and a half earlier, the Jews who saw the door opened before them during the time of Cyrus, those who had been exiled by force, and those who had voluntarily emigrated, had all settled in cities of the empire from Jerusalem and Babylon, which were occupied by Iran, to Kurdistan, Khorasan, Susa, and Pasargadae.

The administrative structure of the emigrants after arriving in Judea was as follows:

1. Sheshbazzar: Iranian governor and representative of the Iranian central government.
2. Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel, a prince of the house of David: Judean chief of state.
3. Jeshua ben Jozadak: chief priest and spiritual leader.

During the reign of Darius the Great, the leader of the local priesthood was charged with the governing of Judea. This situation continued throughout the Achaemenid dynasty, during which a priest from the family of Jozadak inherited the leading role. In other words, the people of Judea had their own government as far as religion and religious law were concerned, but politically, persons like Zerubbabel or Sheshbazzar governed them, and in this regard, they were subordinate to the central Achaemenid state.

In the third chapter of the book of Ezra we read the account of the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, which was made possible through

the Persian Cyrus' support. We clearly see the ancient history of the bond between the righteous Iranian and the upright Jew. Here is a sample of that account:

> They gave money also unto the hewers, and to the carpenters; and food, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar-trees from Lebanon to the sea, unto Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia. (Ezra 3:7)

The day the foundation of the Second Temple was laid was one of the most euphoric in Jewish history. On that day, when Judea was part of the Iranian Empire, a momentous ceremony was held as the builders began setting the foundation. The priests, dressed in special purple garments, sounded trumpets, and the Levites struck cymbals while the people sang the songs of David and relived his joy and dancing over the transfer of the Ten Commandments to Mount Zion. Ezra writes:

> But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, the old men that had seen the first house standing on its foundation, wept with a loud voice, when this house was before their very eyes; and many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off. (Ezra 3:12–13)

In the fourth year of Cyrus' reign—as a result of lies and rumors reported by Judea's neighbors to the Iranian central government and also Cyrus' departure from Babylon and Cambyses' governorship over the former Babylonian-occupied territories, including Judea—construction of the Holy Temple was halted. Cyrus, who was busy establishing a great empire, had nothing to do with this matter. It was Cambyses who, lacking his father's political insight, fell under the sway of rumormongers. Ezra writes concerning the troublemaking of the Samarians—a foreign people whom the kings of Assyria resettled in the land of Israel in place of the Jewish prisoners:

> Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a temple unto the Lord, the God of Israel; then they drew near to Zerubbabel, and to the heads of fathers' houses, and said unto them: 'Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up hither.' But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses of Israel, said unto them: 'Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord, the God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.' Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and harried them while they were building, and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. (Ezra 4:1–5)

From this passage it appears that the Samarians may have sought an income from participating in the construction of the holy edifice. The leaders of the people, however, having perfected the religion of Moses during the Babylonian captivity, did not deem it proper that a group of non-Jews should join the people in the construction of the Holy Temple. The Samarians grew vindictive and sought revenge. They attacked the Temple's construction site and hired counsellors to make their complaints known to the Iranian court. One of their missives to the king of Persia stated:

> ...be it known unto the king, that the Jews that came up from thee are come to us unto Jerusalem; they are building the rebellious and the bad city, and have finished the walls, and are digging out the foundations. Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, impost, or toll, and so thou wilt endamage the revenue of the kings. Now because we eat the salt of the palace, and it is not meet for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore have we sent and announced to the king... (Ezra 4:12–15)

Meanwhile, Cyrus was killed in 529 B.C.E. in battle with the Sakas in northern Iran, and Cambyses was enthroned as king. The plots of the wicked bore their bitter fruit, and...

> Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem; and it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. (Ezra 4:24)

The halting of the construction of the Temple is evidence that unlike his father, Cambyses was not an astute political thinker, and that he was easily influenced by the Samarians both as governor of Babylon and as king. He effectively nullified the accomplishments of his father toward the construction of the Temple.

During Cambyses' reign, the leaders of Judea endured many hardships. At the time of the exiles' return, the area was relatively sparsely populated. Farmers who had not been taken captive had fled to other cities, and the enemies of the House of Israel, including the Edomites, the Ashdodians, and the Ammonites, had occupied the land of Judea. The Samarians, who had been resettled there by the Assyrians, also lived in the north. The beliefs, customs, and languages of other peoples had influenced the farmers scattered throughout the Promised Land. The Jewish population faced regrettable circumstances in their own land. All the efforts of the people's leaders to improve relations with Cambyses were in vain. It seems that Cambyses, who was planning to occupy Egypt, preferred to leave Judea in a state of weakness. Perhaps it was with this thought in mind that he advanced toward Egypt from Judea, crossing the Negev in three days to reach the Egyptian border, where he defeated that nation's army and raised the flag of victory in the land of the pharaohs.

> In the Aramaic papyri discovered at the site of the Jewish colony of Elephantine in Egypt, it is written that when Cambyses conquered Egypt he destroyed all the temples of the Egyptian gods, but did not disturb the Jewish temple there. If this is true, it is evidence that the ancient Iranians respected the religion of the Israelites and that there were similarities between the religious beliefs of the Iranians and the Jewish nation. (Pirniya, *Iran-e Bastan*, 1:506)

Dubnow also acknowledges this point in his *History of the Jews:*

> When, in the year 525, King Kambiz (Cambyses) conquered the whole of Egypt and established Persian domination there, he destroyed the pagan temples of Elephantine but spared the temple of Yahweh, since the Judeans everywhere were regarded as supporters of Persian rule. (Dubnow, 1:369)

It is possible that this ill-tempered king's mild treatment of the Jews and his respect for that which they held sacred may be attributable to Jewish support for his military advances in Assyria, Babylon and Egypt. Cambyses had to cross Judea and the Negev Desert to reach Egypt.

Despite this attitude, it is certain that Cambyses favored the Samarians and did nothing to forward the construction of the Second Temple or to stay the hand of the Samarian enemy. Worse than that were the measures he enforced against the Jews in Iran proper. More than two centuries had elapsed between the migration of the ten tribes of Israel to western and northern Iran and Cambyses' reign. During this long period, the Jews had established roots in Iran and lived a stable and peaceful life there. Their population was greater than that of the Jews living in Judea after the liberation of Babylon. The Samarians, who would stop at nothing in their anti-Jewish activities, turned Cambyses against the Jews living in Iran through baseless allegations. As the king of Iran venerated the goddess Anahita, which the Jews could by no means accept, it became an excuse for Cambyses to exile a large number of Iranian Jews living in northern and western Iran and engaged in pastoralism and agriculture to the far-off mountains of present-day Afghanistan, which was then uninhabited. After the advent of Islam and the Arab conquest, many of these Jews were forcibly converted to the new monotheistic religion. Cambyses' reign, however, lasted only seven years; he committed suicide in 529 B.C.E.

The cessation of the reconstruction of the Temple made the Jews in Babylon pessimistic. The promises of the prophets were met

with skepticism, and they hesitated to return to Jerusalem. On the other hand, life in Babylon, the country which had taken them captive, was unappealing. Therefore, they gradually began migrating voluntarily to Iran. They went to Khuzestan, Susa, and Pasargadae, south of Babylon. During the reign of Xerxes, there was a large Jewish population in Susa.

According to the testimony of the books of Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah, construction of the half-completed Temple resumed during the second year of Darius' reign. In the book of Haggai we read:

> In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying: 'Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is not such a one as nothing in your eyes? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work; for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:1–4)

According to this same book, construction of the Temple resumed on the 24th day of the 9th month of the 2nd year of the reign of Darius. Again, conspiring enemies, namely, "Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai, and his companions the Apharesachites" sent a letter to Darius in which they wrote:

> 'Unto Darius the king, all peace. Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is builded with the great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth on with diligence and prospereth in their hands. Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus: Who gave you a decree to build this house, and to finish this wall? We asked them their names also, to announce to thee, that we might write the names of the men that were at the head of them. (Ezra 5:6–10)

It is likely that the prophet Haggai, the prophet Zechariah, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua the son of Jehozadak were among these names,

because in the very same chapter of the book of Ezra it is mentioned that they were involved in the construction of the Temple. This rumor-mongering of ill-wishers prompted Darius, who like Cyrus was a man of vision, to determine the truth.

> Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the archives, where the treasures were laid up, in Babylon. And there was found at Ahmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a roll, and therein was thus written: 'A record. In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king made a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be builded, the place where they offer sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber, and let the expenses be given out of the king's house; and also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought back unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to its place, and thou shalt put them in the house of God.' (Ezra 6:1–5)

Once aware of this historical fact, Darius' reply was very clear and direct:

> 'Now therefore, Tattenai, governor beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and your companions the Apharesachites, who are beyond the River, be ye far from thence; let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in its place. Moreover I make a decree concerning what ye shall do to these elders of the Jews for the building of this house of God; that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the River, expenses be given with all diligence unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for burnt-offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the word of the priests that are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail; that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savour unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. Also I have made a decree, that whosoever

> shall alter this word, let a beam be pulled out from his house, and let him be lifted up and fastened thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this; and may the God that hath caused His name to dwell there overthrow all kings and peoples, that shall put forth their hand to alter the same, to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with all diligence.' (Ezra 6:6–11)

Darius' decree—which is no less precious to the Jews than that of Cyrus—besides being indicative of this king's distinctive personality, also entails concomitants that must be carefully examined. The king of Iran was the guarantor of truth, justice, and humanity for the state of Judea. Darius the Great did not want coercion and oppression in his dominion. He expected that the Jews would pray for the long life and health of "the king and his sons." The prayers which Jews throughout the centuries of the diaspora have recited on religious holidays for the leader of the country in which they live are probably rooted in this decree. But what is even more interesting is the curse which he wrote in the name of the God of the Israelites: "May the God that hath caused his name to dwell there overthrow all kings and peoples, that shall put forth their hand...to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem."

It is not without cause that many historians see parallels between the religious beliefs and humanitarian ideals of the Jews and the ancient Iranians. After the promulgation of Darius' unambiguous decree and his protection of the Jewish people and their aspirations, the Holy Temple finally...

> ...was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. (Ezra 6:15)

And at the Temple in Jerusalem, a celebration was held, and the captives who had returned to the Promised Land rejoiced. From the events that followed, it is clear that although the enormous temple edifice was completed at this time, the interior furnishings had yet to be completed.

Darius' generous support of the Jews engendered bonds of friendship between Iran and the Jews. The Jews became renowned throughout the ancient world for their friendship toward the Iranians to such an extent that wherever Iran's foes had power over Jews, they oppressed them, considering revenge against the Jews a form of vengeance against the Iranians.

The Jews of the Achaemenid Empire were concentrated in the central cities. A great number lived in Susa. Another city, named "Pars," founded by Darius the Great next to Persepolis in the vicinity of Marv Dasht, was also home to many Jews. This city was destroyed during Alexander the Great's conquest. Many Jews lived in Fars province, especially in Shiraz and Luristan (the first capital and ancestral homeland of the Achaemenids), and also in Hamadan, which was their summer capital. The Jews of Fars outnumbered the Jews of Babylon, and during the reign of Xerxes, some Iranians in the region converted to Judaism. The Jews of Isfahan are also of the tribe of Judah and are descended from the prisoners of Babylon who emigrated to that city from Achaemenid times forward.

From the reign of Cyrus to the completion of the Temple there is no further mention of Zerubbabel in the Bible. Some are of the opinion that because the Iranian state was suspicious of Zerubbabel and feared he would proclaim himself king, it removed him from office. This view cannot be correct, for if it were, such an important event would undoubtedly have been mentioned in the book of Ezra. It has been said that Zerubbabel was ousted because of Jewish disunity, with some supporting him because he was descended from David, while others supported Jeshua the priest. Whatever the reason for Zerubbabel's ouster, it does nothing to lessen his prestige, for it was he who prevailed upon the mighty Achaemenid state to form the Judean government. With the removal of Zerubbabel from the political scene, relations between the religious leaders of Judea and the Iranian court deteriorated. The loss of Jewish statesmen strengthened the hand of the Jews' rivals to such an extent that during

Xerxes' reign, the first widespread anti-Semitic measures were enacted in the vast Iranian empire. Although the widespread conspiracy against the Jews of Iran met with failure, it demonstrated that despite the intrinsic support of the Achaemenid kings, the enemies of the Jews and Judaism in Iran were busy devising their sinister plots.

Haman's Conspiracy Against the Jews

The detailed biblical account of Esther's adventures tells the story of the Jews during the reign of Xerxes, son of Darius the Great. According to one Iranian historian:

> The information provided by the stories of Esther and Mordecai is the same as that provided by the Greek historians. The breadth of the empire from India to Ethiopia is historical. The seven advisors, especially Haman, are the same people whom Herodotus named the "seven imperial judges"...Based on his description, Ahasuerus is the very same Xerxes whom the Greeks described. That is, he was a noble and high-minded person who turned down ten thousand talents of silver.[15] (Pirniya, *Iran-e Bastan*, 1:903)

Likewise, the fact that the book of Esther incorporates some Iranian history must not be overlooked. It describes the glory of Xerxes' court, which was constructed by the same builders who erected the great edifices of Persepolis:

> Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus [Xerxes]—this is Ahasuerus who reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces—that in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan[16] the castle, in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the army of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him; when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty, many days, even a hundred and

[15]A reference to the fact that Haman sought to pay the king 10,000 talents of silver in exchange for control over the Jews, but the king refused.

[16]Susa, the capital of Iran.

> fourscore days. And when these days were fulfilled, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the castle, both great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; there were hangings of white, fine cotton, and blue, bordered with cords of fine linen and purple, upon silver rods and pillars and marble; the couches were of gold and silver, and shell, and onyx marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold—the vessels being diverse one from another—and royal wine in abundance, according to the bounty of the king. And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel; for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.
>
> Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus. (Esther 1:1–10)

This magnificent royal feast, at which the heads of each of the nations under Xerxes' command were present, was held in 484 B.C.E. The book of Esther tells how on the seventh day the king became drunk with wine and commanded his chamberlains to bring forth Queen Vashti wearing her royal crown so that the people might behold her beauty. Vashti, a beautiful queen, was ashamed to do such a thing, and she declined to present herself before the king and his guests. This disobedience made the king burn with anger, and he asked his courtiers for their opinions. They told the king that if the queen was disobedient to her husband, then all women would emulate the queen. Therefore, it was fitting that Vashti should be punished and stripped of her title as queen. Xerxes did this without delay and banished Vashti from his court.

The next day, when Xerxes was again sober, he remembered what had happened to Vashti and saw that the queen's place was empty. He sat in council with his servants, who told him that a beautiful virgin should be chosen from each province and brought to the palace into the custody of Hegai, the keeper of the women, and that the king should choose one in place of Vashti. The king accepted this counsel and decreed that it should be made so. In Xerxes' court there was a Jew named Mordecai ben Jair who was from Jerusalem

and had accompanied the captives brought by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. Mordecai was raising his uncle's daughter Hadassah, who had lost both her mother and father. When the king's decree was proclaimed, Hadassah was also brought before Hegai. Hadassah was so beautiful that she was included without debate among those to be presented to the king. Cosmetic accouterments and seven maidens were put at her disposal. Hadassah did not disclose her relation to Mordecai, at his behest. Mordecai was worried about his cousin, and sometimes strolled by the women's quarters that he might learn news of her situation. Each girl was perfumed with fragrant oils to increase her beauty, and each was then sent before Xerxes. When it was Hadassah's turn, the king instantly decided that this beautiful Jewish girl was to become the future queen of Iran. He gave her the name "Esther" and placed the royal crown upon her head.

> Her real name was Hadassah, but she was called Esther by non-Jews, this being the Persian name for Venus. (*EJ*, 6:907)

At this time, Xerxes had been king for seven years. On the occasion of Esther's selection as queen, another great feast was held.

Two of the king's guards, Bigthana and Teresh, were so angered by the king's choice that they attempted to kill him. Mordecai the Jew, who had been selected as one of the king's guards because of his size and strength, informed Esther of the plot and asked her to relate this information to the king. There was an investigation, the truth of the information was ascertained, and the plotters were punished. These events were recorded in the chronicles of Xerxes.

Some time later, Xerxes appointed a man named Haman the Agagite minister and granted him wide-ranging powers. Whenever Haman entered the court, the guards bowed down and prostrated themselves.

> But Mordecai bowed not down, nor prostrated himself before him. (Esther 3:2)

The guards asked why he did not comply with the king's order. He replied that he did not prostrate himself before others because he was a Jew, and worshipped neither man nor idol.

Haman, who could not comprehend Mordecai's religious beliefs, grew vengeful against this God-worshipping guard. He grew so enraged that he sought to bring about the ruin of all Jews throughout the vast land of Iran. In his mind, the way to do this was through a mass killing of the Jews.

> And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it profiteth not the king to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those that have the charge of the king's business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.' (Esther 3:8–9)

Xerxes took the signet ring off his finger. He gave it to Haman and both granted him the silver and put the fate of the Jews of Iran in his hands, telling him to do with them what he pleased.

Haman was well pleased. He commanded that a decree be written in the script and language of each governor, sealed with the court seal, and carried to each province of Iran by courier. This decree stated that the 13th day of the month of Adar was to be the date of the mass execution of the Jews throughout all of Iran, and that wheresoever a Jew should be found, he should be killed and his property seized.

At this time (474 B.C.E.), twelve years of Xerxes' reign had passed. Fear cast a shadow over the houses of all Jews, especially for the large Jewish population of Susa. When Mordecai witnessed these events, he rent his clothes and cried aloud. As the mass execution order reached each city, Jews gathered in lamentation. They fasted, wept, and wailed. Many lay on sackcloth and ashes and lost all hope. Mordecai sent Esther a message asking her to go to Xerxes and plead for help. Esther nervously replied that anyone who entered

the inner court without permission would certainly be sentenced to death unless the king extended his golden scepter toward him, and that it had been thirty days since she had last been summoned to the inner court.

Mordecai sent Esther another message telling her to hurry and not to suppose that death would spare her in the palace.

Esther told Mordecai to tell all the Jews of Susa to fast for three days. She and her servants would do the same. After three days, she would go before the king, and if she should perish at the king's command, so be it.

After observing the fast, Esther donned her queenly garments and stood before Xerxes in the inner court. When he beheld her, Xerxes was amazed. He extended his golden scepter toward her and asked what had brought her there. He promised to grant any wish, even if she should ask for half his kingdom.

Esther replied that she had come to invite the king and his minister, Haman, to the feast that she was planning for the following night. She said she would inform the king of her request at that time.

The king accepted the invitation and told his minister, Haman, to be present at the feast. Haman, giddy with the scheme he had devised for the Jews' destruction, had ordered the erection of a 50-cubit-high gallows on which he planned to execute Mordecai for his refusal to prostrate himself before him.

That night, the king suffered insomnia and ordered that his chronicles be brought out and some accounts read to him. By chance, a portion read to him that night included the account of his deliverance from Bigthana and Teresh, the two conspirators who had sought to kill him. The king asked what reward had been given to Mordecai, who had saved his life. He was told that no reward had been granted.

By this time, Haman had arrived to tell the king that Mordecai was to be hung the next day from a 50-cubit-high gallows. Before he had the chance to tell him this, Xerxes asked him what was to be done with someone upon whom the king wished to bestow a bountiful reward.

Haman thought that the person to be rewarded must be himself. He replied that such a person must be fitted with a royal garment and mounted upon the king's white horse. A gold crown should be placed on his head, and one of the king's princes should take the horse's reins and guide him through the streets of the city.

Xerxes commanded him to prepare a horse, crown, and garment and, in the same manner he described, to put Mordecai the Jew on the horse and to take him the through the streets of the city.

Haman did this the next day and arrived at Esther's feast even more vengeful than before. The king asked Esther what she desired, promising to grant her wish.

Esther replied that she and her people had been sold and that all were to be slain, although they had done the king no harm.

Xerxes asked what person had the impudence to attempt to slay the Jews of Iran.

Esther pointed to Haman, saying that it was he who was the enemy of the Jews of the king's great land.

Haman trembled. The king became angry, exited the banquet, and went to the palace garden. When Haman saw Esther alone, he went to her to beg for his life. The king returned from the garden and saw Haman before Esther. He was infuriated, thinking his minister had impure intentions toward her. He commanded that he be executed, and thereupon they covered Haman's face, indicating that his execution was inevitable. They hanged him from the very same gallows he had erected for Mordecai.

Xerxes then countermanded all the orders for the mass execution of the Jews. A new order was written to the governors of the 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia, nullifying the order to kill the Jews.

> And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan shouted and was glad. The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honour. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever

> the king's commandment and decree came, the Jews had gladness and joy, a feast and a good day. And many from among the peoples of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen upon them. (Esther 8:15–17)

From this time forward, Jews throughout the world have celebrated the 14th and 15th of the month of Adar as "Purim."

The account of Haman in the Bible ends thus:

> ...Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren; seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his seed. (Esther 10:3)

After Xerxes' death, Esther and her cousin Mordecai went to the Achaemenid summer capital of Hamadan. Their tombs in that city have become a Jewish place of pilgrimage.

The story of Esther and Mordecai is neither fiction nor legend. It is a historical account, presented in the historical style of the Bible in living and tangible form. It raises many questions about the Jews of the Achaemenid period. Whether Xerxes was an intrepid conqueror or a weak-willed hedonist is a separate issue. That aside, the story of Esther, though raising some questions, may answer others. The Bible indicates that the Jews were scattered throughout the 127 provinces of the vast Achaemenid Empire. In their encounters with non-Iranian peoples living in Iran who had shown enmity toward the Jews and Judaism because of their monotheism, the Jews must have stood up and fought back. Despite Cyrus' eternal decree and Darius' unambiguous proclamation, there were people in the Achaemenid court who took steps to thwart the Jews. The conversion of some to Judaism is attributable to the power the Jews gained after Xerxes' second decree. Others converted to Judaism for fear of them. The influence of Jews in Iran to the extent that the queen was Jewish and the Jewish Mordecai was considered the second highest-ranking person in the empire shows that Iranians and Jews were highly integrated at this time.

Despite the vengefulness of enemies like Haman and his ilk, the Jews of Iran were so powerful that, with the protection of the kings, they were easily able to withstand them. On the very day the Jews of Iran were to be massacred, they thwarted their enemies. No doubt, these rivals were neither Persians nor Aryans, but rather those who had been enemies of the Jews in or around the land of Canaan. They included the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, the Moabites, and the Arameans, whose countries were at the time provinces of the Iranian Empire. Clashes with them sometimes led to bloodshed. The Jews of Iran killed some of their non-Jewish enemies...

> ...but on the spoil they laid not their hand... (Esther 9:16)

Beyond this, the Iranian central government and...

> ...all the princes of the provinces, and the satraps, and the governors, and they that did the king's business, helped the Jews... (Esther 9:3)

It is in this tremendous strength that we see the influence of great Jewish wise men in the Achaemenid court. It is not without cause that the Achaemenids are mentioned in the Bible in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Isaiah, Daniel, Haggai, and Zechariah.

The Prophet Daniel's Service in the Court of Darius the Great

The prophet Daniel, famed for his austerity and wisdom, was among the captives taken to Babylon, where Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean tried to exploit his wisdom. Daniel, a skilled interpreter of dreams, was appointed to serve in the enemy's court, yet he remained faithful to his religion. It is because of this faithfulness that stories about his life have sometimes taken on a legendary tone. After Cyrus' defeat of Babylon, Daniel went to Iran and became influential in the Iranian court. It has been said that it is on account of Daniel's virtues that

Darius decreed that the Jews should return to the Promised Land and complete the Temple.

> It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps, who should be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one; that these satraps might give account unto them, and that the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the presidents and the satraps, because a surpassing spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.
>
> Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find occasion against Daniel as touching the kingdom; but they could find no occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. (Daniel 6:2–5)

When a Jew finds such favor in the court of the greatest empire of the day, one can draw conclusions about the status of his coreligionists in that government. But, on the other hand, it must be kept in mind that Daniel's rank, prestige, and influence fanned the flames of enmity to such an extent that his court rivals slandered his religion before the king, compelling him to test Daniel's faith. The story of Daniel being thrown to the lions and his rescue from those beasts of prey through his steadfast faith in the God of Israel attests to this (Fig. 3).

We hear the words of Daniel himself:

> And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to be a supporter and a stronghold unto him. And now will I declare unto thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all; and when he is waxed strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. (Daniel 11:1–2)

Daniel spent the rest of his life in Susa. His tomb in that historic city remains intact (Fig. 4).

After Xerxes was killed and Artaxerxes I—popularly known as Artaxerxes the Long-Armed—became king, relations between the Achaemenid government and the Jewish state worsened. The Jews'

enemies in the region again wrote to the king saying that if the city of Jerusalem were to be built and the Jews to become strong, they would rebel against the Iranians. Because Egypt had recently rebelled and defeated the Iranian army, these endless rumors had their effect upon Artaxerxes I. The king of Iran had no choice but to write:

> '...There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the country beyond the River; and tribute, impost, and toll, was paid unto them. Make ye now a decree to cause these men to cease, and that this city not be builded, until a decree shall be made by me. And take heed that ye be not slack herein...' (Ezra 4:20–22)

During this period, the Jews living in Judea suffered great despair. They imagined that the promises of their prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, which they held near to their hearts, could not be fulfilled. On the other hand, as the Jews dispersed throughout Iran found themselves living in comfort and security, they lost the desire to return to the land of their forebears and established deeper roots in Iran. This was more than three centuries after the migration of the Israeli captives and more than a century and a half after the emigration of the Judean captives. In those days, the Jews in the various cities of Iran had no religious leader, nor was the Bible so widely available that each Jewish community could have a copy so that at the very least, the literate could read and interpret it for the illiterate masses. As a result, the Jews of Iran tended to adopt the language, morals, and customs of the surrounding peoples. Through intermarriage with non-Jews, the large Jewish population of Iran gradually shrank.

During the reign of Darius II, little change occurred in the status of Jews in Iran. As the rebellion in Egypt grew more intense, however, the Egyptians turned against the Jews living in that great province, because they had always supported the kings of Persia. The Egyptians destroyed the Temple which the Jews had erected in the city of Elephantine (Yeb). According to the Aramaic "Strasburg papyrus" found at the Jewish colony at Elephantine, the Jewish soldiers in

Egypt were part of the Iranian army which fought the Egyptians. For this reason, the situation of Jews in Egypt was bleak after Iran again suffered defeat.

Ties of Two Jewish Leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah, to Iran

When Artaxerxes II was enthroned, the war with Egypt had been raging for six years and threatened the stability of the Achaemenid Empire. The Jewish army at Elephantine in Egypt had been scattered in combat with the enemy, and because of their support for Iran, the Jewish temple in that city had been destroyed. Artaxerxes II was of a mind to reward the Jews for their loyalty. By chance, this coincided with the advent of two of the greatest Jewish political and religious personalities—Ezra and Nehemiah—each of whom had a direct link to the Iranian court. The presence of these two men who, like their forefather Abraham, were men of action and spent many years with the Achaemenid kings in Iran, brought about a great revolution in the political and religious status of the Jews. The effects of this revolution were felt not only by the Jews of Achaemenid Iran, but by all Jews for all time. The campaign of these two men to save the Jews from lassitude and indifference had its roots in Iran. Ezra and Nehemiah's movement to breathe new life into the Jewish people enjoyed the support of Artaxerxes II.[17] Although we cannot

[17]Historians disagree over whether Ezra and Nehemiah lived during the reign of Artaxerxes I (425–465 B.C.E.) or Artaxerxes II (360–404 B.C.E.). A detailed examination of the book of Ezra and other evidence renders the view that these two great Jewish leaders lived during the reign of Artaxerxes I doubtful. This group of historians—including Graetz and Dubnow—have supplied the reading "first" because "first" or "second" does not follow the name of Artaxerxes in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In order to prove the historical fact that Ezra and Nehemiah lived during the reign of Artaxerxes II and not Artaxerxes I, it is best to read the following chain of events in the book of Ezra:

- Chapters 1–3

measure the true value of this support, which lies buried beneath the dust of history, it was certainly of great value for all Jews throughout the world in those critical days. It is remarkable that this support was given at a time when Egypt had seceded from Iran and the Jews of Egypt were facing a situation similar to their former bondage. Perhaps this in itself was a factor in Iran's assisting Ezra and Nehemiah to achieve their goal of renewing the strength of Judea, which had always been a military base for countering Egypt.

In the seventh chapter of the book of Ezra, we read that in the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign, which coincides with 397 B.C.E., Ezra set out toward Judea accompanied by Jewish emigrants.

Ezra, who had found a position in the Achaemenid court, holds such a prestigious position in the Jewish religion that he has been called the "second Moses." It was he who undertook to put an end to their dispersion and the decline of Judaism by gathering the Jews and writing down the Bible. Were it not for Ezra the priest and scribe, it is likely that the Jews, like many other ancient peoples, would have completely disappeared. This people was every day becoming further lost in the diaspora. Ezra...

> ...was a ready scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given.... (Ezra 7:6)

In religious learning he had no equal. With ironclad faith, he came forward to reinvigorate the flagging spirit of the Jewish people. He endeavored to convince Jews throughout greater Iran to return to the land of their forebears. At that time, Babylon was part of Iran.

Artaxerxes saw that Ezra's political aspirations were in accord with his goal of strengthening Judea...

- Chapter 4:1–5
- Chapters 5 & 6
- Chapter 4:6–24
- Chapters 7–10

Also, to demonstrate the validity of this view, consult vol. 1, pp. 314–41 of the original *Tarikh-e Yahud-e Iran* (History of the Jews of Iran) in Persian.

> ...and the king granted him all his request.... (Ezra 7:6)

As a result, owing both to Artaxerxes' policy and the presence of a wise leader, the migration of Iranian Jews to the land of Judea began anew. A great many of the priests and Levites...

> ...went up...unto Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. And he [Ezra] came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. (Ezra 7:7–8)

At the beginning of this journey, Artaxerxes gave Ezra a letter and made financial assistance available to him and his followers. The text of this letter in the Bible reads thus:

> 'Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, and so forth. And now I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and their priests and the Levites, in my realm, that are minded of their own free will to go with thee to Jerusalem, go. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king and his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according with the law of thy God which is in thy hand; and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, and all the silver and gold that thou shalt find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill-offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; therefore thou shalt with all diligence buy with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meal-offerings and their drink-offerings, and shalt offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee and to thy brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do ye after the will of your God. And the vessels that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure-house. And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers that are beyond the River, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done with all diligence, unto a hundred

> talents of silver, and to a hundred measures of wheat, and to a hundred baths of wine, and to a hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we announce to you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, the singers, porters, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, impost, or toll, upon them. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God that is in thy hand, appoint magistrates and judges, who may judge all the people that are beyond the River, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye him that knoweth them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him with all diligence, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.' (Ezra 7:12–26)

Emigrants from Susa and other cities camped beside the Ahava River for three days, and from there set out for Babylon and Jerusalem. The migrants continued on their way, leaving Babylon on the first day of the month of Nisan, 397 B.C.E. Four months and one day later, on the first day of the month of Ab, they entered Jerusalem. The emigrants were not molested by enemy attacks or ambushes along the way. The returnees dwelled before the Temple at Jerusalem for three days, and on the fourth day sacrificed cows, rams, lambs, and goats to the God of Israel.

Before Ezra's arrival in Judea, the social atmosphere was inauspicious. Baguas, the commander of the land beyond the River, which included Syria and Judea, had imposed heavy taxes. But Artaxerxes II's edict was so weighty and impressive that after Ezra's arrival, his opponents' hands were tied.

> And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's satraps, and to the governors beyond the River; and they furthered the people and the house of God. (Ezra 8:36)

Affairs in Judea had become completely unraveled, and much work needed to be done to organize Jewish society. Ezra says of the religious decline of the Jews which he observed on his return to Judea:

> ...the princes drew near unto me, saying: 'The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.' (Ezra 9:1)

Many difficult tasks needed to be accomplished: the collection and recording of the holy scriptures; the strengthening of the national spirit; the reinforcement of religious principles; the rebuilding of cities—especially Jerusalem; the interior decoration of the Temple; resistance against Samarian provocations; the spread of the Hebrew language; the establishment of synagogues and schools; the establishment of relations with the Jewish communities scattered in other countries; and constant communication with the court of Artaxerxes II. Ezra made several trips to bring the Jews of Iran back to Judea. On one return trip to the Promised Land, he even went from Susa to Hamadan. Traveling a long distance, which in that day was difficult, he tried to bring the Jews of western Iran to Jerusalem. The presence of Jews throughout Iran in later years indicates that Ezra was not completely successful in attaining his goal.

The German scholar Schaeder is of the opinion that Ezra was an Iranian functionary responsible for Jewish affairs. If this is true, it must be noted that he also had a deep, broad knowledge of religious affairs, and that he was highly regarded in both Jewish and Iranian society.[18]

Another great Jewish leader who served the Jews during this period with the backing of the king of Iran was Nehemiah. He had a reputation in the Iranian court as a reliable man and was responsible for the king's beverages, which he served by his own hand. Ezra the

[18] *EJ* 6:1105.

scribe, facing a mountain of difficulties in Jerusalem, dispatched Nehemiah's kinsman, Hanani, to Susa to inform him of the situation and request assistance. Nehemiah, who was insightful, waited for an opportune moment to bring up Ezra's message with the king. The opportunity finally arrived. It is best that we let him tell the rest of the story in his own words:

> ...Now it came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the castle, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came out of Judah, he and certain men; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, that were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me: 'The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.' And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days; and I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven... (Nehemiah 1:1–4)
>
> And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, when wine was before him, that I took up the wine and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. And the king said unto me: 'Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart.' Then I was very sore afraid. And I said unto the king: 'Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?' (Nehemiah 2:1–3)

The conversation between Nehemiah and the mighty king of Iran is so intimate that it is as if two bosom friends were sitting down to talk. The queen was also present at this discussion. The Achaemenid monarch asked Nehemiah what would lift the burden from his heart.

Nehemiah replied that if the king would send him to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and its fortifications, he would be most glad and grateful.

Thereupon the king inquired as to the length of his proposed journey and his date of return. Nehemiah informed Artaxerxes of the date he would return to the court, and the king agreed to send him to be both governor and his personal representative in Judea, along with some soldiers and horsemen. Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and diligently worked to shore up its fortifications and rebuild the ruins of the city. The administration that he set up made good progress rebuilding the city, but enemies and saboteurs did not sit idly by. Nor did Nehemiah desist from his work. The builders and workers continued to renovate the city with weapon in one hand, and work tool in the other. But when rivals...

> ...heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth; (Nehemiah 4:1)

Nehemiah overcame these problems with the help of Ezra. He served as the Iranian government's governor in Judea for twelve years, and in 372 B.C.E. returned to Susa. After a time, he received the king's permission to return to Jerusalem and continue his comprehensive reforms in Judea. Throughout his entire governorship, he not only received no salary from the state, he even expended his own wealth in furtherance of national and religious aspirations.

During the reign of Artaxerxes II, the situation of Jews in Iran was very auspicious, despite internal difficulties. In Judea, too, in light of the Iranian king's support, the strength of the Jews' enemies was gradually sapped. With the backing of the Iranian court, the nation found new strength and became prepared to administer affairs of state. During this time, many copies of the Torah and other holy scriptures were made by Ezra's scribes for the preservation of Judea and the Jewish communities in other lands. Mosaic law was enforced with greater vigor.

With the complete freedom enjoyed by the Jews of Iran and Judea under Artaxerxes II, they were able to expand their business enterprises throughout all the territories under Iranian suzerainty. As

there was no guarantee that this freedom would continue, and because they lacked farmland, they shunned agriculture. Dubnow writes that through the Jews' continual contact with the Iranians, the Jewish religion incorporated popular Iranian notions consistent with prior beliefs, such as belief in the devil, heaven and hell, and angels with distinctively Iranian names. This point is supported by another authoritative source:

> Under Babylonian and Persian influence there came into Jewish life and thought the notion of angels as identifiable, sentient, but not necessarily corporeal beings, each with his own name: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and so forth. The personification of the evil in the universe as Satan probably owes much to Persia, as do the beliefs in demons and the resurrection of the dead. (*EJ*, 10:389)

By this time, the Torah had been recorded in both the old Hebrew and Phoenician scripts, but the Jews of the vast land of Iran were familiar with a new script known as Syriac. As this script was easier for most Jews to read, the Torah was redacted in it.

In 332 B.C.E., during the reign of the last Achaemenid monarch, Darius III, whose coronation coincided with the reign of Philip of Macedon, Judea was conquered by Philip's son, Alexander. In 330 B.C.E. all of Iran succumbed to Alexander the Great, and greater Iran and lesser Judea both fell prisoner to the sharp-clawed Greek eagle. With the extinguishing of the radiant light of the Achaemenid dynasty, the status of Jews in Iran also changed.

PART THREE

SELEUCIDS AND PARTHIANS (330 B.C.E.–226 C.E.)

Chapter Five
Iran's Encounter with Greece and Rome

Alexander's burning of Persepolis in 330 B.C.E. marks the dividing line between Achaemenid rule and Greek supremacy in western Asia. After Darius III was killed, Alexander's conquests proceeded even more rapidly. The Macedonian conqueror seized Tabaristan, Gorgan, and Khorasan and advanced toward Balkh. He reached the Jaxartes River and built a town which is known today as Khojand. From there, he attacked India and seized the Punjab. He returned to Iran by way of Baluchistan and went on to Babylon. While in Babylon, he adopted Darius' paradigm of administration to control his vast empire and divided it into a number of satrapies. He tried to create a synthesis of Iranian and Greek civilization and encouraged marriage between the people of the two nations. At the same time, he promoted Greek culture and expanded elements of Greek political and social customs. He himself married an Iranian princess named Roxana (Rowshanak). But with his massacres he planted the seeds of enmity between the Iranian and Greek nations. In the course of Alexander's relentless lightning-fast campaigns, small groups of Greek soldiers took up residence in the cities of Mesopotamia and Iran.

In 323 B.C.E., Alexander became ill and died in Babylon at the age of 32, leaving no heir. Upon his death, war broke out among the Macedonian commanders for control of the empire. These wars lasted for years. In fact:

> ...the greatest empire in the world, which Alexander had suddenly occupied and which he held in his hand like a child clutching a priceless vase, suddenly fell to the ground and shattered upon his death. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 138)

Roxana delivered a son after his death, but the birth of this boy, who was also named Alexander, did not solve the problem of succession. Alexander's empire was divided into several parts, each of which was grabbed by several Macedonian commanders who fought

each other for control. The one who finally prevailed took command of the region.

Seleucus took control of most of western Asia and established the Seleucid dynasty in 312 B.C.E., ruling that portion of Alexander's empire which roughly coincided with the borders of the Achaemenid Empire. He and his son, Antiochus, established two capitals. The father established himself at Babylon, his son in Syria. Little is known about Seleucid Iran. There were no glaring differences between Iranian and Greek life-styles, mores, and customs. They both loved battle and hunting, but their social and religious beliefs were dissimilar.

Seleucus and his successors endeavored to spread Hellenism throughout the Asian continent. They believed that they were racially superior and that their civilization was the most advanced in the world. For this reason, they set up a network in the large cities under their control to promote Hellenism and they elevated the Greek language above others. Nonetheless...

> The people of Iran, particularly those in the upper stratum of society, borrowed nothing from Hellenism but its exterior forms. Even the Iranians who lived in such cities as Seleucia or Susa do not seem to have been deeply affected by Greek ideas. (*EB*, 21:876)

Perhaps it was for this reason that Seleucid supremacy over all of Iran did not last long and that a century after the death of Alexander the wave of victory began to recede. With the rebellion of the courageous Parthians, who hailed from the province of Hyrcania (which encompassed portions of present-day Khorasan and Gorgan), the foundations of Macedonian power in Iran began to shake. The Parthian revolt, which coincided with the emergence of Rome, laid the foundations of a dynasty which was to last for four centuries and seven decades—into the 3rd century C.E.—and which played an important role in shaping the destiny of the world. This revolt struck the most damaging blow against the Seleucids and separated the first province from their realm.

Arsaces (or, in modern Persian, "Ashk"), the leader of the tribe of Parni in Parthia, instigated the Parthian uprising c. 250 B.C.E., the year the Parthians considered the starting point of their history. Their realm was at first limited to Khorasan and Gorgan. As the Silk Road passed through the region and many caravans used the route, highway taxes proved to be a substantial source of revenue for them. The Parthians, renowned for their horsemanship, intrepidness, and gallantry, strongly adhered to patriarchal tradition. The victory of Arsaces and his men arose from their strength of spirit and defiance of foreigners. They never submitted to the Greeks and in the course of their battles with Antiochus III, they exterminated the Greeks living in their vicinity. Before his death in 211 B.C.E., Arsaces founded a dynasty that after him grew gradually stronger and endured for 476 years.

Although each of the kings who succeeded Arsaces I had individual names, in history they are known as Arsaces II and so forth. The last king of this dynasty was Arsaces XXIX. It is for this reason that the Parthians are also known as the "Arsacids." Tiridates, Artabanus, Phraates, and Mithradates—kings who succeeded the founder of the Arsacid dynasty—each in turn expanded the Parthian realm, taking Bactria, Rhagae, and Tabaristan. These victories did not come easily. Each step forward entailed a courageous battle with a powerful enemy. In the battle for Ecbatana, Antiochus III—dubbed "the Great"—destroyed the famous temple of Anahita and delivered a setback to the Iranian forces. The Irano-Greek wars were not of short duration, nor did they always end in victory for the Iranians. Iran was never far from the bitter taste of defeat at the hands of the Greeks. But salient victories during the reign of Mithradates I (Arsaces VI) established the power of the Parthian state. Mithradates I reigned as king of Iran for 38 years, from 174–136 B.C.E., with Ecbatana as his capital. It was during his reign that Iran took Azerbaijan, Media, and Seleucia on the Tigris. He brought Babylon low. He brought Susa, Elam, and Persia under his sway and then marched

on India. The expansion of the Parthian Empire during this period rekindled the memory of the Achaemenid dynasty. Mithradates I:

> ...was the founder of the Parthian state's greatness. During this period, the Seleucids had been weakened by war with the Romans and the Jews. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 145)

It is surprising that these victories—according to some historians—did not eliminate the influence of the Greek language, culture, and arts. The coins of the period demonstrate this attachment to the Greek language and script.

In one of Mithradates I's campaigns, the Greek commander Demetrius was taken prisoner by the Parthians, causing the Macedonians to take reprisals in an attempt to free him. During the reign of Mithradates I's son, Phraates II, the Greek ruler Antiochus VII set out for Iran with a great army to free his brother, Demetrius. In the fierce struggle, Persian warriors—who considered the Parthians foreigners—fought alongside the Greeks. But Parthia prevailed. Antiochus was killed and his son imprisoned in 129 B.C.E. This year marks a turning point in Macedonian history. The Greek fall was hastened by the powerful blow received from Iran. At the same time, the Parthians advanced rapidly eastward. From this time until 30 C.E., the Parthians were at the zenith of their power, and their empire continued to expand.

The reign of Mithradates II (Arsaces IX), from c. 124-76 B.C.E., was the most glorious of the Parthian era. He thwarted the Greeks and cleansed Iran of their presence. He silenced other enemies like the Sacas, who were attacking Iran from the East. He concluded a treaty of friendship with Rome, which was emerging as a great power. He established cordial relations with China and received that country's ambassador in his court. Mithradates II's empire included lands to the east and west theretofore unknown, and for this reason he claimed the title "king of kings." With the Greek government removed from the scene and the Roman Empire growing in pomp and splendor, the basis for confrontation between Iran and

Rome—which sometimes manifested itself in the form of great and bloody wars—was established. These wars continued from the late Parthian period long into the Sasanian period. Iran and Rome were the two superpowers of the world, and other nations dared not confront them.

The first clash between Iran and Rome occurred during the reign of Phraates III (Arsaces XI), who was king during the sixth and seventh decades B.C.E. He thought that peace with the Roman Empire was best, but Rome, wanting to make Iran an ally in its wars and seeing that Iran was committed to peace, resorted to intrigue. It incited Armenia against Iran and shrewdly made peace with Iran's neighbors in an effort to undermine the Parthian state. Finally, during the reign of Orodes I (Arsaces XIII), from 56 to 37 B.C.E., a flash point was reached and the first Irano-Roman war broke out and quickly reached dreadful proportions. Rome completely abrogated its peace treaty with Iran. The Roman commander Pompey crossed the Euphrates and faced the Iranian army at Carrhae. Rome suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Parthians, however, and 10,000 Roman soldiers were taken prisoner. This battle redoubled Parthian prestige and destabilized Rome's position in Syria, Asia Minor, and Judea.

According to the Greek historian Plutarch, the Arsacid monarch Orodes was watching a play of Euripides when the severed head of the Roman commander Crassus was brought before him. It was rumored in Rome that the Parthians planned to attack the Roman Empire. Soon thereafter, Caesar stepped forward to avenge Crassus' defeat.

> The battle of Carrhae is of great importance in Iranian history because theretofore the Romans had been everywhere victorious. This defeat, having cast a shadow on their ascendancy, magnified the name of the Parthians throughout the world. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 155)

The Iranian victories over Rome in two wars during the reigns of Phraates IV and Orodes II compelled Rome to keep its distance from its powerful rival. In one of these wars the famous Roman general Mark Antony, in consultation with the Roman Senate and acting on orders from Caesar, attacked Iran in an effort to put an end to Parthian rule. He was defeated by the Parthian cavalry and, having suffered heavy losses, fled to Syria. Rome dared not attack Iran for a century thereafter. Augustus Caesar proposed a treaty of peace with Iran, and with its conclusion in 25 B.C.E., the Roman prisoners were freed.

The Parthians then moved their capital to Ctesiphon. Among the important events of the reign of Artabanus III (Arsaces XVIII, 17–42 C.E.) was the rebellion of Seleucia and the massacre of the Jews in that city. Seleucia was situated in Iranian territory near the city of Ctesiphon. This period marked the beginning of a phase in Parthian history known as the "anti-Hellenistic period" which lasted from 12 to 162 C.E. The period was characterized by the expansion of Parthian national culture and resistance to foreign culture.

During the reign of Vologases I (Arsaces XXII, 51–78 C.E.), after renewed clashes between Iran and Rome, it was decided that his brother, Tiridates, should be made king of Armenia on the condition that he should travel to Rome to receive the crown from the Roman emperor Nero.

> Tiridates' journey to Rome and his coronation ceremony were very pompous. Three thousand Parthian horsemen accompanied him to Rome. His journey to Rome and return to Armenia took nine months, and the Roman treasury daily paid a handsome sum for his expenses. Tiridates, like the other members of his family, was a pious man, and did not wish to travel by sea. For in the Zoroastrian religion, water is one of the holy elements, and to defile it with filth was forbidden. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 164)

Tiridates entered Rome in 66 C.E. and addressed Nero thus:

> Commander! I am descended of the Arsacids and the brother of Vologases the king. This notwithstanding, I am your servant. I

> have come here to behold and worship you, who are my lord, even as I worship Mithra. From this day, my fate is in your hands. For you are my fortune and my prosperity. (Pirniya, *Iran-e Bastan,* 3:2451)

Then Tiridates received the crown of Armenia from Nero's hand. After Tiridates' return to Armenia, a treaty was signed by Vologases and Nero which called for a half century of peace between Iran and Rome.

Vologases was a religious king and an ardent follower of Zoroaster. He undertook the compilation of the Avesta, which had been lost after Alexander's conquest. Vologases I was the last powerful Parthian monarch. The six kings who followed him presided over Parthia's decline. They not only had to contend with a powerful enemy in Rome, they also faced civil war.

In the first century C.E., the Parthian state gradually lost its central authority and devolved into eighteen separate states, some of which were administered by Arsacid princes, others by local dynasties. The nobility seized high government offices and made them hereditary. The country was quietly crumbling. Babylon and Ctesiphon fell to the Romans. The Parthians once again united, and in the beginning of the 3rd century rose up against the Romans. But with the revolt of Papak and his son Ardeshir and their victory over the last Parthian king, Artabanus V, the Arsacid dynasty came to an end in 226 C.E.

The Parthians ruled Iran for more than 470 years, during which time Iran was very active in international commerce. Goods were carried from China and India to Rome by caravan along long and torturous roads. The Parthians were active in building cities. All in all, they did not display prejudice against the religious beliefs of others. The dynasty can be divided into three periods: the conflict with the Seleucids and the cleansing of Iran of foreigners; the period of Parthia's shining splendor and victories over Rome—the great power of the day; and the period of decline and ultimate collapse.

The borders of Parthian Iran at its zenith were as follows: the Euphrates River in the west, the Punjab and Indus rivers in the east, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Indian Ocean in the south, and the Himalayas, Jaxartes River, Caspian Sea, and Caucasus in the north.

The Parthians had two councils: the council of princes, which had an advisory function, and the council of senior clerics, dubbed the "Moghestan," which had little political influence. The Zoroastrian clerics, or magi, were not only spiritual leaders: many were also doctors, teachers, astrologers, and chroniclers. Nonetheless, state power was absolute. The religion of the kings and people of Iran during the Parthian period was a mixture between the worship of Ahura Mazda and the adoration of Mithra, Anahita, sun, and moon. Toward the end of the period, Zoroastrianism grew stronger, but Iran had no official religion. There were temples in Iran in which statues were placed in emulation of the Greeks. Only one of the Arsacid monarchs, Vologases I, who commissioned the compilation of the Avesta, displayed any religious zealotry.

The popular language of the period was Pahlavi, a language between Old Persian and today's Persian language. Texts were written in the Aramaic script, which is derived from the Hebrew script. But Greek was also very popular. The Arsacid princes were very well versed in the Greek language and literature. No important Parthian relics have survived.

Chapter Six
Five-and-a-Half Centuries of Obscurity

The history of the Jews of Iran during the long years of Greek rule and the more than 470 years of the Parthians—which together span a period of roughly five-and-a-half centuries—is buried in obscurity. Even the history of Iran itself during this important period is not as well known as it is for other periods. Historical sources for the period are few. Many of the accounts of non-Iranian historians are either inaccurate or chiefly concerned with the details of wars. Apart from the few scattered authoritative accounts, it is through an examination of relations between Iran and Judea and their roles in resisting the Greeks and Romans that limited inferences can be drawn regarding the status of Iranian Jews during these centuries. We have no choice but to follow this methodology in this chapter. We will speak more of the friendship or enmity of Iran and Judea vis-à-vis foreigners and of the congruousness or incongruousness of their goals in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the status of the Jews of Iran.

When Alexander attacked the Achaemenid capital in 330 B.C.E., many of the Iranian Jews who lived in Susa and Persepolis fled to nearby cities in fear. The Jewish inhabitants of Shiraz and Lar in the centuries after Alexander's attack must be descended from those refugees. During Alexander's reign over Iran and its territories, the fate of the Jews was the same as that of other peoples. As Alexander bore no animus toward the religious beliefs of others, he naturally took no measures against Iranian Jews. After his death, Egypt and Syria came under the command of his general, Ptolemy, who established the Ptolemaid dynasty in Egypt and sought to annex Judea. The Jews at Jerusalem did not want to open their gates to Ptolemy's army, but one Saturday, as they refrained from fighting, Judea was captured by the enemy. The fortifications built in Nehemiah's time were torn down, and many of the Jews were taken captive to Egypt. But in the aftermath of a war later fought between the Seleucids

and the Ptolemaids, Judea, like Iran, fell under Seleucus' sway. Once again, Judea became part of an empire that also included Iran. Only this time, it was the foreign Macedonians who ruled both nations. During the years of warfare between the Seleucid and Ptolemaid dynasties, exchanges between the Jews of Iran and Judea came to a halt.

When Seleucus' rule became firmly established, the Jews adopted a new calendar whose starting date was 311 B.C.E. It was called the *shetarot* (שטרות) [covenant] year, as Judea committed itself to consider that year as the beginning of its history. The *shetarot* calendar soon became popular among the Jews of Iran and was used in religious marriage contracts and on tombstones. The cemetery at Gil'ad of Damavand, known today as Gilyard, saw *shetarot* calendar years on tombstones through the middle of the 20th century.

According to Graetz:

> Seleucus, the founder of the Seleucidæan kingdom, the centre of which was situated in Persia, had in addition become possessed of the northern part of Syria, where he founded a new city, Antioch, which became his capital. In order to people this city, as well as other newly-built towns, he was obliged to bring inhabitants into them, and among these partly forced and partly willing settlers were many Judæans, to whom Seleucus gave the full rights of Macedonian citizenship. (Graetz, 1:419)

Perhaps this was done in imitation of Alexander, who had encouraged 100,000 Jews to settle in Alexandria so they could contribute to its prosperity. Obviously, such actions did nothing to relieve the Jews' anxiety over the capture of Iran and Judea by the Greeks. The Jews of Iran could no longer in good conscience pray for the king's health—as had been customary since the time of Darius—in their religious ceremonies.

Although the Seleucids did not consider granting Judea any political independence, they allowed the Jews religious freedom at first and permitted the grand priest to remain their leader. Neither the people of Iran nor the people of Judea were of a mind to come to terms

with the Greek government; instead they sought the opportunity to rise up against the Greeks. The successful Parthian uprising occurred in the middle of the 3rd century B.C.E., before the revolt of the Maccabees. With the Parthian victory, the anxiety of the Jews of Iran and Judea was lessened. Judea looked forward to the day when it could re-establish its former cordial relations with the government of Iran. As the young Parthian state grew gradually stronger, the Jews of Iran—who at that time were pursuing mutual Judean and Iranian political interests—established good relations with the Arsacid dynasty with a view to strengthening Judea's position and the rule of the priestly dynasty.

At that time, the Jews of Judea were divided into two factions. One faction supported Greek culture, or Hellenism, and included most of the well-to-do. The other faction, the Hasidim, were violently opposed to the influence of Greek culture. The differences between these two groups were at times so great that it was as though they were not of the same nation and people. It was not long before the Judean rebellion against the Seleucids began. The Greeks were so engrossed in fighting the Romans on one front and the Judeans on the other that the Parthian king Mithradates I was afforded a golden opportunity to expand the Iranian Empire and so firmly establish the foundations of Arsacid rule that the conquerors of Carthage would kneel in submission. As history bears witness, Mithradates I was to some extent indebted to the Jews of Judea for his victories from 174 to 136 B.C.E., for had not they—like the Parthians—risen up against Seleucia, Greece, Iran's arch enemy, would have been able to fight on a single front and might have blocked Mithradates I's advances. It is obvious that had the Judeans dropped out, the great victories of Mithradates I would not have been the same.

Although the Judean revolt against the Seleucids followed the Parthian revolt by seventy-five years, both ended in victory despite impediments. The Judean revolt against the Seleucids forced them to concentrate their military power near the Mediterranean coast.

This helped the Parthian kings to expand Iran's borders and renew the historical splendor of the Iranian nation. The Greeks, who had at first granted the Jews religious freedom, gradually changed their policy. In order to reinforce Greek culture, they applied increasing pressure until it reached extreme levels. When Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the king of Greece, was returning from Egypt, he passed through Judea on the way to Syria. After killing and plundering in Jerusalem, he entered the Temple. Needing funds for his war against Rome, he looted all of its precious furnishings. Then, one of his generals, Appolonius, decreed that the Jews no longer had the right to observe the requirements of the Torah, and that they must sacrifice swine to Greek idols. He forbade circumcision, observation of the Sabbath, and the consumption of kosher meats, sentencing his opponents to death. In the Temple at Jerusalem, he sacrificed swine, sprinkled their blood on the altar, polluted the Torah with their flesh, and erected a statue of Jupiter. The Greeks tried to prevail upon the Jews to take part in their gods' festivals and to convert to their religion, but the Jews fled to the mountains and caves. The enemy showed no restraint. They destroyed synagogues and Torahs. At a time when dread and weakness had overtaken the people and they despaired of any divine blight descending upon the heads of their enemies or the emergence of a new prophet to grant them succor, suddenly, the spark of salvation warmed their shivering hearts: the Maccabees entered the fray.

Mattathias ben Johanan of the family of Hasmonai the priest lived with his five sons in a village north of Jerusalem. In 167 B.C.E., the Greek Appeles entered the village to force its inhabitants to worship idols. When one of the inhabitants of the village stepped forward to sacrifice to the glory of Jupiter, Mattathias, an aged priest, could not stand it. He stepped forward and struck down the man of weak faith. The priest's sons, who were armed, killed Appeles and his retinue as well. The aged priest cried: "Whosoever has faith in the Torah and God's covenant, come with me!"

And he set forth. With each step, his group became larger, and the fire of the Maccabee revolt was fanned. The aged priest commanded that weapons should be gathered. He deemed fighting the idolatrous enemy on the Sabbath a necessity. Mattathias' young son, Judah, became the commander of the partisans. Greek forces advanced, but were defeated and fell back. They advanced once more and were again defeated. The war continued thus. The Maccabee revolt brought pressure to bear on the Jews living under Greek control. The Greeks, who already despised the Jews because of their religious differences, now persecuted them wherever possible because of their brazen revolt. But in Judea, the 40,000-man army of the Greek commander Lysias suffered defeat at the hands of the 6,000-man Maccabean army in 166 B.C.E. A year later, mighty Greece bowed its head in defeat before Judah Maccabee and his forces, and the government of Judea fell to the Maccabees.

What other effect could this victory—which resembled that of the Parthians—have had upon the Jews of Iran but to bring them greater prestige and religious freedom, and to once again make possible the pilgrimage to Jerusalem? News of Judah Maccabee's victory in 165 B.C.E. soon reached the Jews of Iran. The Jews' relations with the Arsacid kings of Iran, which had been cordial since the establishment of the dynasty, grew stronger with the victory of the Maccabees.

Judah Maccabee was nominated as chief priest of Jerusalem. It seemed that a stable peace had been reached between the Seleucids and Judea, and it was hoped that the Judean soldiers would be able to return to their work in agriculture. But the Greeks soon embarked on a new test of strength. On the 13th of Adar, 161 B.C.E., Maccabee and his forces dealt the Greek commander, Nicanor, such a stunning defeat that not one of his soldiers survived. For many years, the Jews celebrated "Nicanor Day." The Greeks came to realize that it was no easy task to sway the followers of Judaism or destroy the Jewish people, for the Jews were both serious and defiant in their

religious beliefs and were distributed throughout many of the nations of the day, including Iran, Babylon, Bactria, Rome, and Greece. Despite all this, the Greeks—considering themselves the equals of great powers of the day such as Rome and Iran—found it difficult to accept their defeat by Judea and tried to overthrow the Maccabean state by any means possible. Both Judah Maccabee and his brother Jonathan were killed in separate battles with the Greeks.

Although many Jews lived in Iran during this period and were esteemed by the Arsacid court, sending aid to Judea seems to have been impossible, because the Iranians were themselves preoccupied with war and conquest. But Jewish Iranians hoped that Mithradates I would soon be able to stop the Greeks.

Rome eventually prevailed over Greece and took control of some of the former Greek territories. In 133 B.C.E., Rome ordered Antiochus Sides not to interfere in Judea or send troops there. Antiochus had no choice but to obey and seek good relations with Hyrcanus, the leader of Judea. But Hyrcanus, knowing that the superficial friendship of the Greeks had no basis, formed an alliance with the Parthians against Antiochus. In order to strengthen his army, Antiochus called up military support from all the nations under his suzerainty. Some Judean soldiers also joined him, and he came face-to-face with the Iranian army. But when the time came to do battle, the Judeans—who for long years had suffered at the hands of the Greeks and loved Iran even as their own homeland—failed to join the fight against the Iranians on the pretext that it was Sukkot. Antiochus VII was killed in the encounter, which took place in 129 B.C.E. With his death, Syria became impotent. The great danger posed by Iran and Judea's common enemy waned, and for a time, while both countries were at peace, they turned their attentions to internal reform. The death of Antiochus VII also marked the death of the Seleucid state, and thenceforward their dominion faded. In 124 B.C.E., when Mithradates II was crowned, bringing tidings of a bright future for the Iranian nation, the members of the Jewish high council in Jerusalem were planning the annual Hanukkah festival for Jews living

outside Judea. Up to that time, the feast had been celebrated only in Judea because of the Maccabees' victory.

As fate would have it, Iran and Judea—which had long-standing bonds of friendship—were concurrently relieved of a common enemy. At the same time both were blessed with competent political leaders. As Hyrcanus was moving to expand his country as far as its historical territorial expanse during the reign of David, Mithradates II was governing a country whose borders extended as far as those of the Achaemenids. As a result of Hyrcanus' battles, Judea had complete sovereignty over the river Jordan, the Mediterranean coast, and the road followed by caravans to Syria and Egypt. During these years, the Jews of Iran lived in peace and tranquility. It is remarkable that the great Judean leader Hyrcanus' victories ultimately brought about a situation similar to that which prevailed toward the end of Solomon's reign. Two opposing politico-religious groups came about: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These two groups gave new life to old quarrels.

During the final years of the reign of Mithradates the Great, Queen Salome Alexandra of the Maccabean dynasty was enthroned in Judea. She was a virtuous, compassionate, and pious woman, and at least for a short time was able to end internal disputes. Without proscribing the Sadducees, Salome supported the majority Pharisees. Such was her political acumen that neighboring states did not even contemplate going to war against her. During her nine-year reign, even the heavens supported her, and the nation's crops were bountiful. Queen Salome struck coins in her name in Judea and appointed her eldest son as grand priest. With the help of Simeon ben Shetah, whom she brought from Alexandria, she implemented reform of the country's civil laws and administrative aparatus. Strict regulations for divorce were set in place during this period, and national and religious holidays were observed with greater zeal. An annual tax of about 2½ grams of silver was levied upon each Jewish person. Jews living outside of Judea also paid this tax. It is said that more religious tax revenues

came from the Iranian provinces of Media and Babylon than from other places, which indicates that the Jewish population of Iran was greater than in any other country and that they had a more comfortable life, because rather than 2½ grams of silver, they paid 2½ grams of gold and even sent separate donations for the Holy Temple.

The death of Queen Salome Alexandra was followed by the decline of the Hasmonean dynasty and coincided with the rise of Rome's iron fist in the East. Beginning at this time, Iran and Judea again faced a powerful common enemy, the greatest and mightiest Western power.

In the 7th decade B.C.E., the Romans brought the nations of Asia to their knees, one after another. They plundered and massacred their opponents. Judea, too, was awaiting this fate. Pompey sought to make Judea either a puppet state or a Roman colony. He seized Judea and took many Jews captive to the Roman Empire, which from that date forward had a sizable Jewish population. Judea's defeat at Rome's hands took place in 61 B.C.E.

The nation of Judea went into mourning, and hatred of the Romans took root in their hearts. Elsewhere, Parthian Iran was among the foremost of Rome's enemies, and Parthian-Roman relations worsened. The Jews of Iran were in contact with Judea and were aware of what was going on in the land of their forebears. In its opposition to the heavy-handed Roman Empire, the Iranian government was aware of the mutual interests shared by Iran and Judea, and doubtless encouraged the Judeans in their enmity toward Rome. The Jews of Judea did not back down, but rather continued their selfless resistance to Rome's steadily increasing power. It is highly probable that the hope that the mighty Parthian army would intervene to suppress Rome helped strengthen the Judean Jews' resolve to resist the Roman legions.

During the reign of Orodes I (Arsaces XIII, 56–37 B.C.E.), when the first battle was fought between Iran and Rome, a window of hope was opened for the Jews.

The celebrated Roman general Crassus and his vast army suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Arsacid king Orodes and his army. Crassus and his son were killed on the battlefield at Carrhae, and of his 100,000-man army, not more than 10,000 survived. The Roman defeat at Iran's hands stirred up the Judeans more so than before. The Judean people aimed to rid their country of the Romans. But the Romans, embittered by their defeat by the Parthians, concentrated their forces to suppress the Jewish rebels.

Herod was appointed by Caesar to govern Judea. He was an obdurate, diabolic Edomite. His first step was to confront Hezekiah, the leader of the national resistance. He arrested Hezekiah and his followers, sentencing them all to death without trial in 47 or 46 B.C.E. Caesar rewarded Herod for this deed. Herod was obsequious to the Romans and tried to expand their power in Judea. Graetz says:

> The Parthians, enemies of the Roman republic, were also violently antagonistic to Herod... (Graetz, 2:82)

In the war between Iran and Rome, the Parthian army, under the command of the Parthian heir apparent, Pacorus, advanced toward Judea, which was held captive by the Romans. Jewish volunteers came from all directions to join the Iranian forces. They were prepared to fight in any battle against the Romans, especially if it concerned the Holy Land. Finally, the vanguard of the Iranian army—comprised of Judeans—entered Jerusalem. As documented by historians, the number of Parthian soldiers involved in this attack was greater than those at the battle of Carrhae.[19] Most likely, Jews of Fars, Media, and Babylon were among the volunteers in the Iranian army. As the Parthian forces approached Jerusalem, the Jewish masses rose up in support of the joint Iranian-Jewish army, surrounded the Hasmonean palace, and appointed the Jewish Antigonus king

[19]Pirniya, *Iran-e bastan*, 3:2342–49.

of Judea. Herod immediately fled with his family to the fortress of Masada (40 B.C.E.), and after crossing the desert, took refuge with Cleopatra in Egypt before proceeding to Rome.

After another war between Iran and Rome which ended in defeat for Iran, Herod was appointed governor of Judea by the Roman senate. He was unjustifiably mad for revenge. He burned five towns near Jericho and besieged Jerusalem in 37 B.C.E. Antigonus and his soldiers sought refuge in the hills around the Temple. They fought the Romans for fifteen days, but were eventually defeated, and the Romans began killing without mercy. Herod refrained from plundering the Temple, but he arrested Antigonus and executed him. Antigonus was the last of the eight rulers of the Hasmonean dynasty, which had ruled Judea for more than a century.

War between Rome and Iran on one front and Rome and Judea on the other continued. The great Jewish teacher and thinker, Hillel, lived in these times. In a time when Roman aggressors were soaking the fields with the blood of men, he said "Love others, for if you do so, you will be closer to the Torah." He endeavored through his teachings to resolve the conflict between the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

Phraates IV (Arsaces XIV) overcame domestic rebellions by making peace with Rome, allowing both countries to reach their zeniths. The Judeans could no longer look to Parthia for support. Likewise, the Jews of Iran could only keep silent and remain patient. Herod, the non-Jewish king of Judea, was a Roman puppet. He gradually became more tyrannical and bloodthirsty, committing massacres on various pretexts and even ordering the execution of his wife, Mariamne. He hired a great many spies to inform on the people. In order to garner the support of the Judean people, however, he expanded and renovated the Temple in 19 B.C.E. Using the improvements to the Temple as a pretext, he celebrated the 20th anniversary of his arrival in Jerusalem. But his murderous lunacy was so great that he ordered that his two sons—of whom he had grown suspi-

cious—be beheaded. In 4 B.C.E., Herod died at the age of 69, having governed Judea for 37 years.

Judas "the Galilean," a staunch opponent of Herod, reorganized the national resistance movement during this time. The goal of this organization—whose members were armed and motivated young men—was to fight Rome.

During the reign of Artabanus III (Arsaces XVIII, 17–42 C.E.), some important events affecting the Jews and Judaism transpired. Tiberius, successor to the Roman emperor Augustus, was vindictive against the Jews because in Rome, a group comprised primarily of women had converted to the religion of Moses and sent offerings for the Temple in Jerusalem. Tiberius ordered that if they did not revert to the popular religion of Rome—the cult of Jupiter—they, along with the other Jews, would be exiled to Sardinia, and that Jewish soldiers would no longer be excused from working on the Sabbath. It might be said that this was the first anti-Semitic campaign in the West.

It was during this same period that Jesus appeared. The Roman governor of Judea, upon hearing of the title "messiah," which means "savior," or, in other words, "king of the Jews," immediately arrested Jesus and, following the customary Roman method of execution of the time, crucified him. The Roman soldiers placed a crown of thorns upon his head and derisively jeered, "Hail! King of the Jews!"[20]

Among the other events of the reign of Artabanus III were the revolt of Seleucia and the massacre of the Jews.[21]

The city of Seleucia, situated along the Tigris River near Ctesiphon, had, like Alexandria in Egypt, many Greek and Jewish inhabitants. The Greeks, who predominated in the city, had irreconcilable political and religious differences with the Jews. Their religion was idolatry, and politically, they were opposed to the Parthian kings and sought to control the administration of the city. The Jews of Seleucia asked

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[20]Matthew 27:29. New International Version.

[21]Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 162.

for the right to participate in the self-administration of the city, but the Greeks refused. As a result, a revolt broke out which dragged on for seven years. During that time, many of the Jews of Seleucia—which was situated within the Parthian Empire—were slain by the Greeks.[22]

Another reason for the conflict between the Jews and Greeks of Seleucia was that the city was located near the border between Iran and Rome. The Jews feared the city might fall to Iran and Judea's mutual enemy and that they would lose the protection of the Parthians. The Greeks of Seleucia sought to exploit the weakness of the Iranian government to wrest the city from Parthian control and to separate it from Iran. But the Jews, who supported the central government, opposed this plan. During this period, there was dissension and factionalism among the Iranian ruling class, and there was no hope of aid reaching the Jews of Seleucia. In the heat of the rebellion, Artabanus went to Izates,[23] the king of Adiabene[24] (who had been converted to Judaism by Anania in 22 C.E.) because the Moghestan had disagreed with his political views concerning other matters. This in and of itself fanned the flames of conflict. In any event, after much warfare and bloodshed, the Greeks of Seleucia were in 40 C.E. able to declare themselves independent of the Parthian state. But this independence was short-lived. After the death of Artabanus, Seleucia—having succeeded in asserting its independence by slaughtering the Jews—was again besieged and came back under Iranian suzerainty. In these times, news from the ancestral

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[22]*EB*, 21:880.

[23]Born in the first year of the common era, he lived for fifty-five years. His mother Helen, whose stay in Jerusalem coincided with a famine and drought, gave considerable aid to the people.

[24]Adiabene, in present-day Kurdistan, was situated within the Parthian empire.

homeland was not reassuring. Rome's oppression of Judea steadily increased. Some zealous youths had taken up arms for the salvation of their country.

At the same time, Hasinai and Hanilai, two militant youths from a Jewish-populated town near Babylon, gathered a group of youths around themselves and set out for a border town between the two branches of the Euphrates. They demanded tolls from caravans and travellers. The governor of Babylon attempted to drive the two brothers out but was defeated. Artabanus summoned them to his court and appointed the elder brother, Hasinai, governor of Babylon. He remained in this position a total of fifteen years, ending in 34 C.E.

The reign of Vologases I (Arsaces XXII, 51–78 C.E.) was—as history bears witness—a period during which the Jews suffered great misfortunes. Vologases was a bigoted king—hostile to all but the followers of Zoroaster. During his reign, the Jews of Iran had no comfort or security. Vologases' father, who had formerly been governor of Media, reigned as king for a short period of time. He had three sons. "Vologases, [who] was borne by his Greek concubine,"[25] early on turned his attention to the king of Adiabene, who had converted to Judaism. He resolved to put an end to his reign. But before a war could be fought, the Jewish king of Adiabene died. In about 54 C.E., his remains were interred in the family's ornate marble crypt, which his mother had built in Jerusalem.

The situation of the Jews in their ancestral homeland progressively worsened. Despite the brutalities and massacres perpetrated by the Romans, the people resisted by all means possible. Meanwhile, the Romans committed more and more atrocities in the Holy Land. At the same time, Nero had begun his deranged deeds in Rome.

The despair of Iranian Jews increased in conjunction with these events. There was no hope of support from Vologases, a religious fanatic nursed at the breast of a Greek woman. Indeed, he may well

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[25]Pirniya, *Iran-e bastan*, 3:2425.

have aided and abetted the enemies of the Jews. Solidarity between Iran and Judea no longer existed. The Parthian king was at peace with the Romans, which was tantamount to being against the Jews. In Judea, anyone claiming to be a savior met with the same fate as Jesus and was crucified. There remained but one solution for the people of Judea: national uprising.

The uprising against the brutal Roman soldiers was no easy task. Once, when Caesar's soldiers tried to plunder the Temple and found that the people resisted, they killed thousands of Jews. The blood of the young Jewish patriots was brought to a boil. The Holy Temple became the Jewish rebels' rally point. After seven days of clashes, the patriots gained control of Jerusalem. They burned the palace of the Roman governor and the office of the tax collector and drove the Roman soldiers from the city. The rebellion spread throughout Judea. In every corner of the country a group was formed to resist the Romans. Shortly before 70 C.E., the Roman army—feared throughout the world—was defeated by the Judeans. In commemoration of this victory, a coin was struck bearing this inscription: "In Memory of the Freedom of Jerusalem." But this was not the end. In most parts of the capital, people were busy forging weapons in preparation for anticipated Roman attacks. They rebuilt the ruined walls and increased the number of fortresses. Youths conducted military exercises, and Jewish volunteers from other countries arrived in Judea.

Iranian-Roman Alliance during the Fall of the Second Temple

Whereas the nation of Judea had rebelled against Iran and Judea's common enemy and brought the mighty Roman commanders to their knees, the Parthian king Vologases discredited Iran by sending his brother Tiridates to Nero and recognizing the mad epicurean emperor's divinity. Because of his enmity toward the Jewish religion, Vologases did not take advantage of the golden opportunity afforded

him by the Maccabee revolt to strengthen his dynasty and increase the prosperity of the Iranian people. Rather, he paved the way for later Roman encroachments against Iran during the Sasanian period. Perhaps it is because of this lack of wisdom that historians consider his actions to be responsible for the fall of the Parthians. Those of the Parthian dynasty who ruled after him deemed him the last powerful Parthian monarch. It is clear that after defeating Iran's most loyal ally, Judea, fighting against Iran would be easier for Rome. Vologases' friendship with Rome during this critical period and his protection of that bloodthirsty state as it strangled Judea ended up costing Iran dearly.

The defeat of the imperial Roman army—in fear of which the world trembled—at the hands of a group of patriots from a small nation such as Judea endangered Rome's reputation, and it was feared that the revolt would spread to other Roman territories. Therefore, Nero chose his finest general, Flavius Vespasian, to fight on the Judean front. In the winter of 67 C.E., the general set forth from Greece, the cradle of anti-Semitism, while his son, Titus, departed Alexandria for the Holy Land with the Vth and Xth legions, renowned for their savagery. A bloody war of reprisal ensued. The Roman army began its attack from Galilee. Thousands of Roman soldiers armed with heavy chariots, ample weaponry, and siege engines attacked Judea from north to south, burning everything in their path. They killed and captured many until they reached the walls of Jerusalem.

The battle for Jerusalem and the fierce struggle between the Judeans and the bloodthirsty Roman warriors is one of the most painfully moving chapters in Jewish history. The death of Nero in 68 C.E. contributed to Judea's undoing. Vespasian, who aspired to become emperor of Rome after Nero's death,...

> ...sent an ambassador to Vologases, the king of Iran, and promised that his empire's former pact with his country would remain in force. (Pirniya, *Iran-e Bastan,* 3:2454)

In the summer of 69 C.E., Vespasian declared himself emperor, and the Roman legions in Judea rendered him elaborate honors.

Finally, Vespasian's son and heir apparent, Titus, resolved to take Jerusalem. For the Romans, it was a stain upon their honor that four years had passed since the beginning of the Judean uprising and that even with the support of the Parthian Vologases, the Roman army—which had occupied all of Europe, Asia Minor, Egypt, and northern Africa—had not been able to take the Judean capital. The new emperor's reputation and the continuity of his reign depended upon the capture of Jerusalem. However, the more warlike Titus became, the stronger grew the Judeans' bravery. Volunteers from Adiabene, most of whom were Kurds who had converted to Judaism, sacrificed their lives in these clashes. Titus crucified prisoners, or in some cases cut off their hands and ears and sent them back to the city to generate fear. Finally, the city walls crumbled and the towers were toppled. The Romans penetrated into the heart of Jerusalem, where they burned and razed the majestic Holy Temple.

That day was the 9th of Ab.

With the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., the independent state of Judea came to an end. Thenceforward, the Romans called the territory "Palestine" as part of the psychological campaign which they implemented against the Judeans in the aftermath of their butchery. The war cost the lives of over 1,000,000 Jews. The princes of Adiabene who fought in the ranks of the Jewish patriots were taken as hostages to Rome, while hundreds of young Jewish prisoners were carried off to become food for the starving lions of the Roman circuses. Other prisoners were sold to slaveholders in the Roman colonies of Europe.

In honor of Titus' victory, a triumphal arch (which still stands) was erected in Rome. For many long years, the Romans considered the conquest of Judea to be their greatest victory. The Parthian king Vologases—raised by a Greek mother—sent an ambassador to Titus

with a congratulatory golden crown. Titus cordially received Vologases' ambassador and held a reception in his honor.[26]

Vologases' policy toward the Jews and his backing of Rome may have been intended primarily to insure against a Roman attack and secondarily to secure Roman support in case of need. Not only did he fail to exploit the opportunity to drive the Romans from Asia Minor and Syria and to reclaim former Iranian colonies, he even allied himself with the Romans in opposition to the Jews. Soon afterwards, in 75 C.E., the Alani descended from the Caucasus and threatened Azerbaijan and Armenia, which were governed by Vologases' brothers. Vologases looked to his ally, Rome, for assistance, "but Vespasian did not deign to provide this support."[27] Finally, the Alani occupied Armenia and took Vologases' brother, Tiridates, prisoner. Azerbaijan also fell, and Vologases' other brother, Pacorus, fled to the mountains.

With the fall of Judea, many Jews from that region migrated toward Arabia and Mesopotamia. The Jewish diaspora encompassed all lands from East to West. The Jews who fled to Arabia took up residence in Yathrib, which later came to be known as Medina.

The Arsacid dynasty slipped into decline after Vologases I. This in itself had a direct and deleterious effect on the fortunes of Iranian Jews as well as Jews scattered throughout other countries. Internal clashes on the one hand and Roman designs against Iran—for that Western power had become even more ambitious after defeating Judea—on the other, shook the foundations of an empire which in its golden age had been the friend and ally of the Jews. In 101 C.E., Rome resumed its campaigns against Iran and exploited dissensions that it had fostered there despite the treaty of friendship. The Roman emperor Trajan "sought to annex Parthia to Rome."[28] He advanced upon Mesopotamia—an Iranian possession—from two directions.

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[26]Pirniya, *Iran-e bastan*, 3:2455.

[27]Pirniya, *Iran-e bastan*, 3:2461.

[28]Pirniya, *Iran-e bastan*, 3:2474.

He first attacked the area between the Euphrates and the Khabur, and then Nisibis, whose entire population was Jewish. On that day—more than seventy-four years after the destruction of Jerusalem—the Jews of Nisibis resisted the Roman army as best they could, but they eventually succumbed, and the Roman soldiers harshly chastised them. It was not long before the Romans also took Babylon, Seleucia, and Ctesiphon, the western capital of Iran. The result of Vologases' ill-advised policies became apparent to the Iranian nation. Khuzestan and Media were also occupied by Rome. Obviously, the status of the Jews in each of these subjugated lands completely changed. People who until then had lived in peace and comfort were now face-to-face with their enemy. Sadly, there is no account of the hardships suffered by the Jews of Iran during this period, but to some small extent, their unhappy situation may be inferred from what happened in Iran in the aftermath of Parthian Iran's feebleness vis-à-vis Rome.

It is remarkable that at a time when the Romans' power was so great that they entertained thoughts of occupying India, the Jews did not abandon their resistance. Jews rebelled against Roman authority both in Judea and the Roman-occupied territories. One of the acts of the Jewish rebels in Alexandria was to drag their Roman prisoners to the circus and throw them to the lions, just as the Romans did to their prisoners. The constant rebellions and obstacles which the Jews placed in Trajan's path on his way into the Iranian heartland so irritated him that he ordered his general to kill all Jews in his jurisdiction. This notwithstanding, scattered rebellions—particularly the rebellion in Judea—compelled the Roman emperor to withdraw from Iranian territory and hasten toward Syria.

During the reign of Vologases II (Arsaces XXVI, 149–191 C.E.), Rome—which had once again gone to war with Judea and emerged victorious—turned to its ultimate objective: the Parthian Empire. "During this time, the Parthian state was in a condition of weakness

and decline."[29] In 161 C.E., as the Romans were preparing for their assault on Iran, the Parthians resolved to take advantage of Judean support. But alas, this was as futile as administering an antidote to a dead man, for Judean power had waned in those trying years. When the battle commenced, the Parthian army advanced into the Syrian heartland. The people of Syria had been under Roman rule since the time of Pompey. It had been two centuries since they had last seen Parthian horsemen on their soil. Won over by the Jews whom the Romans had driven from Judea to Syria, the Syrian populace received the Iranians as liberators. This attack was so swift and lethal that a panicked Rome fielded a vast army against the Iranians and drove them out.[30]

During the reign of Vologases IV (Arsaces XXVII, 191–208 C.E.), the Roman general Severus led his army across the Euphrates to the Jewish-populated city of Nisibis and established his headquarters there. Historians write that many Romans settled there and established a Roman colony. If this is true, then it can be said that the Roman army eliminated many of the Jews living in the city and settled Romans in their place. Having crossed the Tigris, Severus attacked Adiabene (Kurdistan)—some of whose inhabitants, in emulation of their leader, had converted to the religion of Moses. Despite the fierce resistance of the populace, Severus subjugated the region.

During the reign of the last Parthian king, Artabanus V (Arsaces XXIX, 208–226 C.E.), hit-and-run warfare between Iran and Rome continued. The Roman emperor, cognizant of the fact that many Jews lived in the vicinity of the battlefront, proffered friendship in an attempt to clear an obstacle from his path, but the Iranian Jews ignored his calculated gestures of friendship. Gamiel, the leader of the Jews, said:

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[29]Pirniya, *Iran-e bastan*, 3:2495.

[30]*EB*, 21:881.

> ...Act cautiously in all your relations with the (Roman) powers that be, for they only flatter you to further their own purposes; they are your friends when they can derive any benefit from your friendship, but they never stand by you in trouble... (Graetz, 2:467–68)

In 226 C.E.—at a time when the Jews of Iran had some hope of brighter days as a result of the Roman withdrawal and the conclusion of a peace treaty between the Roman emperor and the Iranian king—Artabanus was killed in battle with Ardeshir Papakan on the plain of Hormoz in Khuzestan, and the Arsacid dynasty came to an end.

Final Analysis

It would seem that, compared to the Achaemenid period, there is little historical documentation regarding the Jews of Iran during the Seleucid and Parthian periods. But some hints of the truth can be inferred from other evidence. During the Seleucid period, both Iran and Judea were under Greek rule and influence. Considering that the Greeks were the first to raise the standard of anti-Semitism because of the Jewish people's monotheism, it can be concluded that the Jews were not without disquietudes. As regards cultural influence...

> ...it was probably under Greek influence that the doctrine of immortality of the soul came into Judaism. The doctrine of the resurrection also established itself, possibly at the time of the Hasmoneans when young men were dying for their religion, so that the older solutions to the problem of suffering, in terms of worldly recompense, became increasingly untenable. There are no doubt indications of this belief in the earlier period, but it had not at that time obtained a complete foothold in the faith. (*EJ*, 10:389)

The principles of the immortal soul and resurrection also entailed the concepts of heaven and hell.

During the Parthian period, too, because of the paucity of sources it is necessary to glean information indirectly from the level of Irano-Judean ties. It must not be forgotten that one of the factors in the establishment of Parthian power during the reigns of Mithradates I, Phraates II, and Mithradates II was that the Maccabees in Judea brought the Greeks—Iran's most stubborn enemy—to their knees and by their protracted war with the Greeks created the most valuable window of opportunity for the Parthian Empire. Additionally, while the Romans—who in their brutality and savagery made the Assyrians look blameless—attacked Judea and burned the Second Temple, the Parthian king Vologases extended a hand of friendship to Rome, playing a pivotal role in the downfall of Judea. On this basis, it can be asserted that when Iran supported Judea, the Jews of Iran lived in comfort and were respected, whereas when Iran turned its back on Judea, the plight of Iranian Jewry was distressing.

According to one Iranian historian,...

> ...The Parthian kings displayed the same characteristic Aryan attitude of tolerance toward foreign religions, and there were no religious wars during this period. The Parthians were especially kind to the Jewish nation, and protected them from the Romans. The Parthians looked upon the Christian religion and upon all religions with indulgence. Such was their tolerance that the spread of foreign religions in Iran was not prohibited. Only Vologases I is reported to have been fanatic and to have frowned upon the spread of foreign religions within the borders of Iran. He did not support the Jews and indeed wanted the Parthian cavalry to help the Romans in their war [with Judea].[31] (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 178)

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[31]Elsewhere, the same author writes:

...During the Parthian period, the Jews of Babylon, Nisibis, and other places had complete freedom in the practice of the Mosaic faith. It may well be that the Parthian kings did not look unfavorably on the spread of this religion. Many people in Adiabene, Kharaks, and elsewhere converted to the Mosaic faith. (Pirniya, *Iran-e bastan*, 3:2689).

During part of the Parthian era, political and commercial relations between Iran and Judea were cordial. Undoubtedly, the increasing Roman pressure on the Judean populace forced political refugees to head to Iran. For this very reason, the number of Iranian Jews continually increased from the time of Cyrus forward. The growth of the Jewish population continued until the time of the Mongol invasion. The closeness of Irano-Judean relations was facilitated by their geographic proximity. The western border of Iran during the Parthian period was the Euphrates River; the two countries were therefore not far from one another. Susa, Ecbatana, Gil'ad, Mesopotamia, Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Nishapur, and Bactria were among the areas with large Jewish populations.

During the Parthian period, the Jews of Iran organized a council which was recognized by the Iranian state. They lived mostly in cities with Jewish majorities. They established a public fund and sometimes sent monetary assistance along with several thousand men to Jerusalem.[32] The Parthian government backed the Jews against the Greeks and Syrians.

There was no corner of the two great empires of the day, Rome and Iran, where a Jewish community had not formed. Many Jews resided from the banks of the Nile to the Tigris and Euphrates to the Danube. But in the Iranian Empire, the Jewish population was greater than anywhere else. In Mesopotamia and Babylon, there were centers where the entire population was Jewish, and during this period the Roman government sent a number of Jews to establish colonies in western Gaul (France) and Spain. To some extent, the Jews exercised a sort of local independence in their affairs. A leader known as the *resh galuta* (ראש גלותא) presided over the Jewish-Iranian community. Even after the fall of Jerusalem, some Jewish scholars, including seven of Rabbi Akiva's students, emigrated to Iran and settled in the cities of Nisibis and Nehardea, which set the stage for their becoming centers of Jewish scholarship.

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[32]Josephus Flavius, *The Jewish War*, 18:9.

For all the favor and support bestowed upon the Jews during the Parthian period, it was during these days that they experienced the greatest, most bitter event in their history: Rome put an end to Judean independence. During those dark times, when no law governed relations between nations, Jews throughout the world looked hopefully to Iran. Had the Arsacid Vologases been a realistic policymaker, and had he recognized the importance—in terms of Iranian interests—of Judean independence, then neither would the Parthians have fallen from greatness nor would Judea have lost its independence. Jewish devotion to Iran and the Parthians was so great that Jewish religious leaders declared "Our savior the Messiah may appear from any land where Iranian soldiers set foot."

It was this same optimism and the cordial relationship between the two countries that induced the Jews to participate in the Parthians' wars. During the Parthian era, the Jewish inhabitants of western Iran, Mesopotamia, and environs suffered heavy losses. Jews were subject to pillaging and massacre by the Romans in Khuzestan, Azerbaijan, Hamadan, and Kurdistan—the provinces with the largest Jewish populations. Nonetheless, because of the flight of Jewish refugees to Iran and the security of the Jews in the provinces of Fars, Khorasan, and central Iran, the Jewish community saw remarkable growth. In those days, a large number of the Jews in Azerbaijan, Damavand, Gorgan, and Mazandaran were pastoralists.

With the end of the Arsacid dynasty, the continual rebellions of the people of Judea and the Jews of the western provinces of Iran, Mesopotamia, and Adiabene also came to a halt. In other words, with the end of the Parthians, the Jews also abandoned their struggle for independence and freedom.

PART FOUR

THE SASANIANS (226–642 C.E.)

Chapter Seven
Religious Fever in Iran

The founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardeshir Papakan, who led the people of Fars to once more rule Iran, confronted the Romans with renewed vigor upon assuming the throne. He joined religion and politics immediately upon gaining power. In order to stir up national sentiment in support of his policies, he declared Zoroastrianism the official religion of Iran. He backed the Zoroastrian magi, granting them extensive authority. He rekindled the extinguished fire temples and completed the compilation of the Avesta, which had commenced during the reign of Vologases I. He bestowed the title *mobadan mobad* (magus of the magi) upon the senior Zoroastrian cleric and elevated him to high government office. The magi, frustrated by the confessional freedom and religious indifference of the Parthians, lauded Ardeshir's new policy and enjoined the public to follow the religion of Zoroaster. Ardeshir propagated the idea that state and religion are intertwined, and one without the other cannot endure. Thus began a new 400-year dynasty in which official recognition of the majority religion was far greater than during the preceding two dynasties.

Ardeshir's grandfather, Sasan, was a prominent Zoroastrian priest who had played an important role in the propagation of the Zoroastrian faith and had erected the celebrated fire temple of Istakhr. But the beginnings of the popularization of Zoroastrianism, which was the closest to a monotheistic religion Iran had seen, must be reckoned from the time of Ardeshir. In short order, the power of the magi became so great that every locale had a magus. The magi were organized into a hierarchy of various grades and offices like a military rank structure. The *mobadan mobad* became so important that he played a direct role in the most sensitive affairs of the kingdom, including the designation of the king's heir. As the magi were the only people who knew how to read and write and were thus autho-

rized to interpret religious law, they exercised complete authority over the country's judicial affairs. Both legislative and judicial power were in their hands.

According to the Zoroastrian religion, the material world is derived from two sources: Light and Darkness, or Good and Evil. The embodiment of the Good is Ahura Mazda, and the manifestation of Evil is Ahriman. Lies, greed, death, and darkness all belong to Ahriman, while truth, light, and life are the creations of Ahura Mazda. The essence of the religion of Zoroaster is the battle between Good and Evil, or the conflict between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. The angels are all servants of Ahura Mazda. The highest-ranking angel is not the sun god (Mithra), but holy Fire, which is kept alive by the magi.

The magus who keeps the fire holds his breath while tending it so as not to pollute the Holy Fire with his exhaled breath. The earth is not to be polluted with the corpses of the dead. For this reason, cadavers are placed in the mountains or atop towers to become food for vultures. Cleanliness, both physical and spiritual, is one of the foundations of the Zoroastrian faith. The religion asserts the immortality of the soul and maintains that the soul of the follower whose thoughts are good, whose speech is good, and whose actions are good will go to Paradise, whilst the souls of the wicked are condemned to Hell. The Zoroastrian faith holds that Ahura Mazda will ultimately prevail.

During the reign of Ardeshir, not only was Zoroastrianism the official religion, but followers of other religions were considered to be "polluters of the world." Their ways were considered a serious offense to Ahura Mazda.

> It was the duty of the believer to combat and destroy the unbelievers and the heretics. In short, the tolerance of the Achaemenids and the indifference of the Arsacids were gradually replaced by religious intolerance and persecution. (*EB*, 21:885)

Tansar, a renowned magus during the reign of Ardeshir, played a historic role in the interpretation and propagation of the Zoroastrian faith. His *Tansar-nameh* (Book of Tansar) is one of the most prominent works of the Sasanian period. Another, even more prominent magus, Kartir—whose stone inscription still stands—prided himself on persecuting the adherents of other faiths. He said:

> ...and Jews, Buddhists, Brahmins, 'Nazoreans,' Christians...were struck upon...the heretics [*ahlomog*]...who in the Magus estate did not attend to the Mazdean religion and the services to the gods with discrimination, I struck them with punishment and I castigated them... (*EB*, 21:885)

Shapur I was crowned in 242 C.E. In his third battle with the Romans, he captured the emperor Valerian (253-260), along with many Roman soldiers. In an inscription discovered in 1938 on an Achaemenid edifice known as "Ka'beh-ye Zartosht" he declares:

> He (Valerian) had with him (troops from) Germania, Rhaetia...[follow the names of some 29 Roman provinces], a force of 70,000 men. Beyond Carrhae and Edessa there was a great battle between the emperor Valerian and us. We made the emperor Valerian prisoner with our own hands; and the commanders of that army, the praefectus praetorii, senators and officers, we made them all prisoner, and we transported them to Persia. We burned, devastated and plundered Cilicia and Cappadocia...[follow the names of 36 cities]. (*EB*, 21:883)

It is said that while mounting his horse, Shapur I planted his foot upon the Roman emperor Valerian's back. Shapur sent the Roman prisoners to Shushtar and put them to work building bridges and dams.

The cities of Shapur in Fars, Nishapur in Khorasan, and Gundishapur in Khuzestan are among the cities he founded. Without a doubt, the victories of Shapur I elevated the Sasanian dynasty to its zenith and solidified the foundations of one of the two great powers of the day. Along with his military victories, Shapur also expanded the religious infrastructure of Iran and erected great fire temples.

Each one of these fire temples was consecrated to the memory of one of Shapur's ancestors or fallen generals. Shapur's empire, which extended beyond the territorial boundaries of the Parthians, was administered by the *mobadan mobad* with the assistance of members of the royal family and high-ranking officials who answered directly to the king. Shapur claimed the title "King of Kings of Iran."

One of the most important events of Shapur I's reign was the advent of Mani, who proclaimed his new religion to the world on the day of Shapur's coronation. Mani was born in a village near Babylon. He was forty-five years of age when he claimed to be the last and greatest of Jesus' disciples. For centuries, the precepts of the Manichean religion remained unclear because of the unavailability of documentation. But the religion has become better understood with the discovery of Manichean texts in Turkestan in the early 20th century. Mani's teachings were mostly of a philosophical and mystical nature. His new religion combined the ideals of Zoroaster and Jesus. Mani said that evil has always existed and that it always will. He did not accept the validity of the Torah, and believed that the entire world would ultimately burn in Hell. "Mani was an accomplished painter, and his book of paintings was known as the *Arzhang*."[33] Mani gained many adherents in Iran, and his religion soon spread abroad. Mani was received at the court of Shapur I, and according to Abu Rayhan Biruni, Mani presented Shapur with his book, the *Shabuhragan*. Shapur was influenced by Mani's teachings, but it was not long before the Zoroastrian magi stepped forward and uncompromisingly resisted his influence. Mani was arrested and executed. His disciples, who were scattered from Samarqand to Rome, were persecuted in Iran.

Christian clerics displayed implacable enmity toward Mani and Manichaeism, and Muslim clerics later dubbed the followers of the religion "atheists." During the Sasanian period, the flames of religious bigotry—the ugly nature of which has been established by histo-

[33]Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 259.

ry—were fueled by internal conflicts. During the reign of the seventh Sasanian monarch, Narseh, who assumed the throne in 293 C.E., "[the people of Armenia] did not accept the Sasanian princes because of their fanatic attachment to the Zoroastrian faith."[34] For this reason, Armenia revolted. The rebellion turned out to be most advantageous to Iran's old enemy, Rome. It ended in bitter defeat and the conclusion of an armistice with unprecedentedly unfavorable terms for Iran. By the terms of the armistice, the Tigris River became the boundary between Iran and Rome, and Iran pledged not to interfere in Armenia's affairs. Armenia had been an important factor in the war between Iran and Rome. Thenceforward, religious conflict pitting the followers of Jesus against the followers of Zoroaster would become more prevalent.

Shapur II, or Shapur *Zu al-aktaf* (Lord of the Shoulders), reigned for 70 years. During this period, the most significant event in Europe was the Roman emperor Constantine's (306–337 C.E.) conversion to Christianity. In his Milan proclamation, he declared Christianity the official religion of Rome. Following this proclamation, Rome arrogated to itself the role of "protector of the Christians of Iran." Religious antagonism was thereby added to the old enmity between Rome and Iran. In the latter half of the third century C.E., Christianity had found a foothold among the Aramaic-speaking peoples in the vicinity of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Christian evangelical councils descended upon Iran one after the other and had some success converting people to that religion in the western regions of what was then Iran. Before the Roman Empire adopted Christianity, the status of Iranian Christians was similar to that of other non-Zoroastrians. But as soon as Rome turned to Christianity, the Iranian Christians became the most persecuted religious minority in Iran.

From that time forward, religion became an important factor in Iran's foreign policy. The Christians of Babylon and Mesopotamia gravitated toward Rome, and considering that Armenia also leaned

[34]Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 188.

toward Christianity, the balance of power shifted against Iran in favor of Rome. On the other hand, the Zoroastrian faith was growing deeper roots in Iran. During the wars of the period, Shapur II, who was called "Shapur the Great," was able to regain the territories that had been lost during the reign of Narseh under the terms of the armistice with Rome. Shapur II died in 379 C.E.

Yazdegird I, crowned in 399 C.E., tried to ameliorate the intense religious bigotry and grant other religions a modicum of freedom. But his initial measures toward tolerance of Christians and Jews met with the disapprobation of the Zoroastrian clergy. The magi, considering their privileged status to be endangered, declared Yazdegird a sinner. The appellation has stuck with the king, and he has been known throughout history as "Yazdegird the Wicked," even though he was a peace-seeking and humanitarian king. Under pressure from the Zoroastrian magi, Yazdegird was compelled to discontinue his support for religious tolerance. Despite this, upon his death in 420, the Zoroastrian clergy opposed the accession of each of his sons until finally, one son by the name of Bahram gained their grudging approval.

Bahram V, or Bahram Gur, was the fifteenth Sasanian monarch.

> As the Greek historians wrote, [the reason for his war with the Eastern Roman Empire] was the misfortunes of the Christians living in Iran who fled from the fanatic magi to Byzantium. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 200)

The armistice ending the war—which began in 421 C.E.—stipulated that the freedom of the Christian faith in Iran would be observed, but that article of the armistice was never enforced owing to the objections of the magi. Bahram Gur died in 438 C.E. During the reign of Yazdegird II, the people of Armenia embraced Christianity, and warfare broke out between Iran and Armenia. In the aftermath of these wars, Iran's policy toward the Christians became much harsher, in light of the fact that they were considered Rome's allies. The Christians were forced to pay a heavier poll tax and were called

upon to renounce their Christian faith and convert to Zoroastrianism. The Christians stood firm, and as a result, Iran grew more heavy-handed and ordered the destruction of churches.

The reign of Peroz, which began in 457 C.E. and lasted 26 years, brought with it drought, military defeat at the hands of the Hephthalites, and worst of all, the kindling of religious fanaticism.

Kavad I, the twentieth Sasanian monarch, ruled Iran from 487 to 531 C.E. During his reign, three important events occurred. One was Kavad's war with the Khazars, a nomadic people who lived along the western shores of the Caspian Sea and raided neighboring countries. Kavad killed a great many of the Khazars and seized much booty.

The second important event was the advent of Mazdak, the founder of a new religion who caused Sasanian religious fever to burn hotter. Mazdak was a cleric of Nishapur whose sayings and beliefs were similar to those of Mani. Like the Manicheans, he forbade bloodshed and the slaughter of animals. Mazdak said that the world was comprised of three elements: Water, Fire, and Earth. Good and Evil were combinations of these elements. He believed that in order to...

> ...eliminate contrariness and hatred, both of which are of darkness, that their source must be determined. The source was women and property, and in order to overcome these evils, these two sources had to be collectively possessed. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 261)

Although Anushirwan later scattered the Mazdakites, they survived until the 10th century and were known as "those of the cheerful religion."

The third important event of Kavad's reign was the continuation of the war with Byzantium, which had also taken on religious overtones. Kavad revoked the freedoms which had been granted to Iranian Christians in Bahram Gur's day. Thenceforward, Iran's wars with

the Romans weakened Iran with increasing rapidity, paving the way for the later Arab victory.

Anushirwan the Just, who reigned from 531 to 579 C.E., was a fanatic Zoroastrian. At the beginning of his reign, the Mazdakite creed had gained adherents throughout Iran, and there were violent encounters between Mazdakites and non-Mazdakites. With the backing of the magi, Anushirwan arrested and executed Mazdak and the leaders of his sect. He thereupon inaugurated a massacre of the Mazdakites so great that no one dared speak publicly of that religion. The few surviving followers of Mazdak clandestinely maintained their faith for many long years until they eventually died off.

Realizing that the popularity of the Mazdakite religion was rooted in social injustice, Anushirwan strove to establish social justice for the people, and it is for this reason that he was called "the Just." He lowered the tax rate, sent judges to the provinces, and gave agricultural lands to farmers. Apart from his war with the Romans, Anushirwan also fought the Hephthalites, Huns, and Khazars, who raided Iran from the east and north. He killed thousands from those nations and seized much booty. Anushirwan is considered the greatest king of the Sasanian dynasty.

Khusrow II, dubbed Khusrow Parviz, was the twenty-third king of the dynasty. A victorious conqueror, he brought glory and splendor to the Sasanian dynasty and amassed vast treasures. In 613 C.E., he took Antioch and Damascus, and "after that, with the help of 26,000 Jews captured Jerusalem."[35] In 619, he conquered Egypt, and brought Byzantium to its knees through his conquests. Finally, in 623, in a war of reprisal, the Byzantines attacked Iran, raided its western cities, and burned down the fire temples. Khusrow Parviz died in 628.

The last Sasanian monarch was Yazdegird III, crowned in 632 C.E. During his reign, Arab offensives which had begun some time earlier

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[35]Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 222.

became more intense. After the final battle in 642 C.E.—the Battle of Nehavand—Iran fell to the Arabs, and the Sasanian dynasty became history.

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Religion was one of the most controversial social issues of the Sasanian era. The importance of the religions and sects that developed in Iran during the period is so great that in a history of world religions, an important chapter would have to be entitled "Iranian Religions." Besides Mithraism and Zoroastrianism, other religions such as those of Mani and Mazdak came into existence and attracted many followers throughout the world. During these times, Christianity from the West and Buddhism from the East found their way to Iran. Buddhism became so popular in Afghanistan—then part of Iran—that magnificent monasteries were erected in that province.

The Iranian historian Pirniya asks:

> The question arises as to whether the evolution and progress of the religious beliefs of the Iranian Aryans came from themselves, or through the influence of foreign religions?...The sole religion that could have had an influence on the religious progress of the Iranian Aryans was that of the Israelites, which was based upon strict monotheism. It must be realized, therefore, that the development of the religious beliefs of the Iranian Aryans was influenced by the religion of the Israelites, or else it had other reasons. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, pp. 264-65)

During the Sasanian period, the people of Iran were divided into four castes: clerics, soldiers, administrators, and peasants and merchants. Each had a leader, and each leader had accountants and inspectors. These castes were further divided into sub-levels. Peasants could not change their places of residence or their lords.

> The Sasanian state's revenue derived from two kinds of taxes: firstly, a land tax, and secondly, the *gazit*—a poll tax known as

> the *jizya* during the Islamic period...Those who did not own property paid the poll tax (*gazit*), as did the Christians and Jews. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 243)

The magi had vast land holdings in Iran, especially in Azerbaijan. The people also sent them tithes and donations. Commerce flourished during the Sasanian period, as the only route between Greece, Rome, Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia on the one hand and China, India, and Central Asia on the other, passed through Iran. Brocade, cloth, gold embroidery, silk, carpets, cosmetics, paper, medicines, and gemstones went back and forth by caravan.

During this period there was an artistic renaissance in metallurgy and the production of mosaics, golden chalices and jewelry. The most renowned remnant of the period is the palace at Ctesiphon, the Taq-e Kisra. During the Sasanian period the Greek language gradually fell by the wayside. Books were instead written in the Pahlavi language and script.

> The Pahlavi language included two dialects. Northern Pahlavi, or Parthian, and Southern Pahlavi, or Sasanian....The languages that are presently spoken in Iran, such as modern Persian, Kurdish, Baluchi, Lori, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Gabri, Sivandi, and the dialect of the Iranian Jews are derived from [this language]. (Pirniya, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 278)

Chapter Eight
Beginnings of Religious Minority Suffering

During the 400-plus years of the Sasanian dynasty, the Jews no longer enjoyed the broad freedoms of times past. Yet the restrictions and harsh treatment were not evenly distributed throughout the period. If a king succeeded in reining in the power and influence of the Zoroastrian magi, then the severity of religious persecution was lessened. The truth of the matter is that because of Zoroastrianism's official status, the Jews became part of a religious minority for the first time in the history of this land. But it was not only the Jews who experienced the pain of minority religious status. The followers of Jesus, Mazdak, Mani, and Buddha also fell into this category. In the end, because of the continuing wars with Rome and the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the Christians frequently came under greater pressure. Christensen writes:

> The Zoroastrian clergy was intolerant, but its intolerance was motivated foremost by political reasons...The Jewish communities of Babylon did not threaten the power of the Zoroastrian church or the existence of the Iranian state. It is true that Ardeshir I showed little good will toward the Jews, who missed the tolerant regime of the Arsacids, and during the first period of the Sasanian epoch they were sometimes subjected to persecutions...but in general they were able to live in peace under the protection of the great king. The situation of the Christians was very different. (p. 266)

This may have been true during the reigns of some of the Sasanian monarchs, but during other stages of the Sasanian era the Jews were viciously persecuted.

During the Sasanian period, the Jews—from a political standpoint—maintained to some extent the organizational framework whose foundations had been laid during the Parthian period. The Jewish community had a leader they called the *resh galuta*.[36] Non-Jews

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[36]The literal meaning of this expression is "Chief of the Jews of the

called him the "Prince of the Jews."[37] The *resh galuta* collected taxes, appointed and removed judges, and administered all important affairs. He also taught and disseminated the law of Moses and the Jewish oral and written traditions. But during the Sasanian period, because of religious bigotry, this structure lost some power. It sometimes became so weak that the position of "Prince of the Jews" lost its official status, while at other times religious bigotry was suppressed, and for political reasons—including gaining Jewish support in the fight against the Romans—the leader of the Jewish community was officially recognized by the Iranian government. During the reign of Shapur I, when the Jews of Iran lived in relative safety because of the conflict with Rome, the *resh galuta,* who was usually the senior rabbi of the day, had a good relationship with the king of Iran. In one of his audiences, Shapur told him that in all his battles with the Romans, he was always vigilant not to spill the blood of any Jews. Whenever unrest was stirred up through sectarian instigation or encumbrances were placed upon the Jews by religious fanatics or government officials, the chief of the Jewish community took measures to calm the unrest and remove the encumbrances. For example, during the reign of Shapur II (309–379 C.E.)...

> Shabur appears to have oppressed the Jews of Babylonia in no less degree, for Raba was obliged to expend considerable sums of money in preventing persecution. (Graetz, 2:591-2)

Although many Jews lived in Khorasan, Gorgan, Mazandaran, Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Gil'ad, and Damavand, because western Iran was the focus of Jewish scholarship, religion, literature, and politics, the *resh galuta* resided in the state of Babylon. At the outset of Sasanian

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Diaspora" or "Chief of the Jews in Galut." In the political organization of Iran, this position was tantamount to "Chief of the Jewish Community" or "Leader of the Jews." In this book, the same title is used.

[37]Such structures continued more or less up to the time of Muzaffar al-Din Shah. Mullah Ebrahim, the son of Mullah Agha Baba, was the last powerful Jewish leader in Iran.

rule, the Jewish government had power over internal affairs, but in other matters, particularly the payment of taxes and land tenancy, they were subject to Sasanian law. But, as was previously mentioned, the situation was in a state of flux. Babylon, which was on the strategic boundary between Iran and Rome, at times came under savage attack from Iranian religious fanatics and at times from the foreign enemy, and its centers of scholarship and administration were pillaged. During the reign of Kavad (487–531 C.E.), "when Jews and Christians were persecuted,"[38] in the aftermath of the revolt of the exilarch Mar Zutra II, he and his grandfather, Huna V, were arrested and executed. The position of *resh galuta* remained unoccupied until the reign of Khusrow I (531–579 C.E.).

Encyclopaedia Judaica[39] lists the names of the leaders of the Jewish community during the Sasanian period up to the time of the execution of Mar Zutra II:

Mar Ukba I	210–240
Huna II	240–260
Nathan I	260–270
Nehemiah	270–313
Mar Ukba II	313–337
Huna Mar I & Huna III	337–350
Abba	350–370
Nathan II	370–400
Kahana I	400–415
Huna IV	415–442
Mar Zutra I	442–455
Kahana II	455–465
Huna V	465–470
Huna VI	484–508
Mar Zutra II	508–520

[38] *EJ*, 6:1027.

[39] *EJ*, 6:1024.

Composition of the Talmud during the Sasanian Period

The unconditional freedom which the Achaemenids granted the Jews became indifference during the Parthian period and was lost during the Sasanian period. It is remarkable that there was no correlation between the great national achievements of these three periods and Jewish freedom or lack thereof in Iran. It is true that the Holy Temple was rebuilt during the Achaemenid period. But it was destroyed during the period of Parthian indifference when Vologases I shook the hand of friendship with Rome. During the reign of the Sasanians—a time when Jewish freedoms were sometimes severely limited in a province which throughout this entire period belonged to Iran—the most timeless of religious works was composed, perfected, and presented as a legacy to the Jewish world. This work was the Talmud, whose composition and compilation in Babylon during the Sasanian period spanned several centuries.

The *tennaim* were those who commented on the Torah and wrote the Mishna. Following them, the *amoraim* were scholars who clarified the commentaries of the Mishna and wrote the Gemara. The Talmud combines both the Mishna and the Gemara. The Talmud compiled in western Iran became the second most important Jewish religious text after the Torah. The Talmud is not merely a commentary on religious law; it is also a treasure trove of wide-ranging information on the subjects of jurisprudence, medicine, hygiene, agriculture, astronomy, commerce, customs, and even "superstitions of both the Jews and non-Jews."[40]

The Jerusalem Talmud was completed in the fourth century and the Babylonian Talmud in the late fifth century.

> Both the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds are in essence the fruit of the discussions and elaboration of the Mishnah of R. Judah ha-Nasi by the *amoraim*. The Babylonian Talmud, as its name implies, was compiled in Babylon and the Jerusalem Talmud

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[40] *EJ*, 15:762.

> in Erez Israel, though not in Jerusalem as its name would imply; (*EJ*, 15:772)

In view of the facts that the Babylonian Talmud was composed on Iranian soil and that the religious scholars involved in it had relations with the government of Iran, some of them having never even travelled to Jerusalem, the Babylonian Talmud might be considered the "Iranian Talmud."

The dates of the start and completion of the Babylonian edition cannot be precisely determined, but roughly speaking, it was begun during the lives of two great religious leaders, Mar Samuel and Abba Arikha, known as Rav, in the first half of the third century of the common era, that is, during the reign of Shapur I (240–271). It was completed toward the end of the teaching career of Ashi, known as Rabbana, in 499, during the reign of Kavad.

The most important yeshivas, or schools, in which scholars and students engaged in study and commentary were in the cities of Nehardea, Sura, Pumbedita, Mahoza, Narsi, and Mata Mehasya. All of these cities were situated near Ctesiphon in western Iran, and the number of Jewish communities there was strikingly large. Not only did the Jews of those cities achieve great progress in manufacturing and commerce, they also made such tremendous strides in the religious sciences as to leave the religious schools of Judea in the dust. The migration of Jews to the region had continued since the time of Nebuchadnezzar, and Nehardea, a little over a hundred kilometers north of Shiraz, was considered the regional "Jerusalem."

> Since the deportation under Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews had multiplied in Babylon and Mesopotamia, where they occupied themselves in commerce, agriculture, and trades of all kinds. ...The famous school at Sura was founded at the beginning of the third century, and thenceforward the *amoraim*, a body of Jewish scholars, occupied themselves with the study of the sciences and began to assemble the corpus of traditions and instructions of all kinds known as the Talmud. (Christensen, pp. 38–9)

The school at Sura, which remained an important center of Jewish scholarship until the 10th century, was founded in 219 C.E. The students at the schools of higher religious education were required to work in agriculture or other fields and devoted several hours a day to their studies.

Because of political pressures, the religious atmosphere, and military clashes between Iran and Rome, the primary center of scholarship moved from city to city. For example, after the death of Samuel in 259 C.E., Nehardea fell into ruin, and was only rebuilt years later. The centrality of these schools of higher learning also hinged upon the prestige of the teachers who directed them. The most prominent of the early teachers were Mar Samuel at the old Nehardea school and Rav, the founder of the school at Sura.

Mar Samuel, or Samuel Amora, was born in Nehardea. It is said that by sending medicine to Judea, he healed the eye of Judah ha-Nasi, the architect of the Jerusalem Mishna. To secure the welfare of the Jews:

> ...The agreement of Samuel and Shapur I, summarized by Samuel's teaching that "the law of the government is law," was closely adhered to by the Jewish regime, which enjoyed a secure position, with few, brief interruptions, for the next four centuries. (*EJ*, 6:1025)

Samuel issued his famous decree calling upon his coreligionists to uphold the law of the land in which they live even as they uphold Jewish law. This decree has had a profound effect not only on the Jews of Iran, but also on Jews throughout the diaspora. Samuel had a deep understanding of medicine and discovered a salve for the eyes which was named after him. His knowledge of astronomy led him to have frequent contact with non-Jewish scholars, including the Zoroastrian Avlet. But he is best known as "the hard-working Torah scholar." Samuel never traveled to the land of his forebears, the Holy Land.

Abba Arikha—known as Rav, or the "Teacher of the Diaspora"—was the founder of the academy at Sura. He was one of Judah ha-Nasi's best students in Jerusalem. After becoming a cleric he returned to Babylon. In Nehardea, he found himself in disagreement with other scholars and commentators. He had no option but to establish in Sura his own school of higher learning, which soon had 1,200 students. Rav was one of the Resh Galuta's counselors.

> Although there is evidence that he was in some contact with Artabanus V, the last of the royal Arsacid dynasty, unlike Samuel, he did not maintain close relations with the authorities or with non-Jews, his chief activity being directed to internal affairs, to the religious welfare of the members of the Jewish community. (*EJ*, 13:1577)

After Mar Samuel, the secondary school at Nehardea was directed by Huna, Judah ben Ezekiel, and Nahman ben Jacob. After the destruction of Nehardea, Nahman moved the school to Pumbedita and worked hard to improve it. The social and cultural institutions that Huna established during his forty years as exilarch endured for seven centuries. With Huna's death in 297 C.E., the last cultural link between Iran and Judea was broken. In the year 309, which coincided with the first year of Shapur II's reign, Rabbah bar Hana, a religious leader who had emigrated to Iran, became the director of the Pumbedita academy. Because hundreds of his students refused to pay taxes, he was sought for questioning by officials of Shapur the Great. Shortly thereafter, he died in hiding in Iran.

At this time, life was tumultuous for Iranian Jews. Joseph ben Hiyya (also known as Sinai) succeeded Rabbah as director of the secondary school at Pumbedita. Sinai translated the Torah and the Book of the Prophets into Aramaic. After him, Abbaye (also known as Nahmani), was chosen as director of the Pumbedita school in Babylon. The two schools at Pumbedita and Mahoza competed with each other to delineate and advance the sciences of the times. The period of Jewish cultural progress in Iran was reaching maturity.

Abbaye's successor was Rava bar Joseph bar Hama. Some of this Jewish scholar's epistles comprise a portion of the Babylonian Talmud. After the fall of the city of Mahoza to the Roman army, another yeshiva was founded in Narsi, near the city of Sura. It was directed by Bar Hannan, who held that position until 375 C.E.

Up until this time, most of the epistles of the Mishna and their exegeses had been transmitted orally from generation to generation, and writings and notes were likewise unorganized. The political and social atmosphere of the period, in addition to endless clashes between Iran and Rome and sectarian upheavals—aggravated by the savage attacks of the Huns and the successive defeats suffered by other countries—dictated that the laws which the Jews possessed should be written down and codified. The Jewish clerics of Iran undertook this task.

The foremost leader of this movement was Ashi, who for 60 years served as director of the Mata Mehasya yeshiva near Sura. He was born in 352 C.E. during the reign of Shapur the Great and died in 427 during the reign of Bahram Gur. Ashi is the last of the renowned *amoraim,* and he played the most important role in completing, codifying, editing, and compiling the Talmud. With the assistance of a group of religious scholars, he collected and wrote down the oral tradition which had been handed down over the centuries as the Mishna and Gemara.

> Ashi's activities and influence were not limited to the yeshiva or to his colleagues and students. Through his personality and abilities he attained a position of unusual prominence as the spokesman and leader of his generation, enjoyed the high esteem of all sections of the Jewish people, and possessed great wealth (MK 12b; Ned. 62b). Even the exilarch, Huna b. Nathan, accepted his authority (Git. 59a; Sanh. 36a). Ashi apparently had access to the Persian royal palace (Ket. 61a), and there is possibly a personal reference by him to this in Shabbat 156a. His contemporaries held that "never since the days of R. Judah ha-Nasi were learning and greatness combined in one person as they were in Rav Ashi." (*EJ,* 3:710)

He possessed great scholarly talent. It was by virtue of his enthusiasm that the Jewish corpus of law, the Babylonian Talmud, was composed on Iranian soil. Throughout Jewish history, it had been forbidden to transcribe the oral law. But because of the growing insecurity of the day, Ashi disregarded this taboo. Fearing that the unwritten portions of the Talmud would be forever lost, he recorded the Gemara. Indeed, Ashi did the same with the Mishna and commentaries as Ezra did with the Torah and the books of the prophets. The compilation of the Talmud and its rescue from the sandstorms of time had a profound effect upon the fate of world Jewry, for the Christians accepted the Torah in its entirety, and it is likely that had the Jews lost the commentaries, the Jewish faith would have gradually disappeared. The compilation of the Talmud is one of the great achievements of Jewish history. Compilation was completed toward the end of the 5th century, a time of increasing Jewish misfortunes in Sasanian Iran.

The last director of the religious academy at Sura was Rabbina, who held that office until 499 C.E. Yose was the last director of the Pumbedita academy, and served in that capacity from 471 to 520. These two men of distinction considered the compilation of the Talmud to be complete in the year 499, during the reign of Kavad. They declared that the collected discourses, decrees, and edicts were final and that nothing was to be added to them. These two wise men were the last of the *amoraim.* In completing the Talmud, Rabbina and Yose were assisted by several Jewish scholars who lived in Iranian provinces other than Babylon.

> A characteristic mark of the Babylonian Talmud is the intellectual sharpness and ingenuity with which it analyzes a text or a subject. In analyzing the text every word or phrase is carefully weighed. (*EJ,* 15:759)

The Talmud comprises roughly 2,500,000 words. One-third is Halakah (law) and two-thirds is Haggadah (traditions and stories).

> While there are two Talmuds—the Babylonian and the Jerusalem—the former almost immediately upon its conclusion was accepted as the authoritative one. The authority of the Babylonian Talmud was never really accepted formally but grew in authority in the course of time. It was studied assiduously in all the communities, while the Jerusalem Talmud was neglected. (*EJ*, 15:766)

The twelve-volume Talmud, though a source of Jewish pride embracing illuminating passages, has not escaped criticism from the Jews, for in some passages, reference is made to concepts foreign to Jewish beliefs which were borrowed from the popular beliefs of non-Jews during the Sasanian period; for example, the power of demons and proverbs and commentaries that run contrary to the teachings of the Torah and the prophets of Israel. Over a period of more than 500 years, the writings and sayings of Jewish leaders were collected in the Talmud after detailed review. Of course, as a result of contact with other nations and peoples during this long period, in some rare instances non-Jewish ideas have also influenced it. This notwithstanding, there is no doubt whatsoever that the Talmud is a citadel that, after the Torah, has safeguarded Judaism throughout the world during the successive centuries of the diaspora.

Ups and Downs in the Jewish Community

With the Sasanian monarchs' proclamation of Zoroastrianism as the official state religion of Iran—all diplomacy and restraint notwithstanding—eight centuries of cordial Iranian-Jewish relations unavoidably soured. J.H. Iliffe in *Legacy of Persia* writes:

> ...As a State Church Mazdaeism possessed a supreme head and a powerful clergy, the Magi, whose word was law...At first, under Shapur I and Hurmuzd I, other religions were tolerated or even encouraged, e.g. Judaism, Buddhism, Mazdakism, Manichaeism, and Christianity. Persecution of both Manicheans and Christians, however, followed later... (p. 31)

When news of the death of the last Parthian king reached the exilarch, who was his friend, he bitterly replied, "The bond is broken,"[41] by which he meant the treaty of friendship between Iran and the Jews. A source of even greater anxiety was the fear that Rome would exploit the turmoil in Iran to seize control of the empire and that the Jews of that vast realm would be subjected to the same restrictions as were imposed in Judea. The Christians of northern Mesopotamia were the first minority group to fall victim to the excesses of Zoroastrian fanaticism. The Jews were also a target of hatred, but during the early years many of them were able to circumvent disagreeable situations.

> ...In the first intoxication of victory the neo-Persians deprived the Jewish courts of the criminal jurisdiction which they had been permitted to exercise until then; the Jews were admitted to no offices, and were not even allowed to retain the supervision of the canals and rivers, but they do not seem to have complained very bitterly of these measures. They were even compelled to submit to restraints upon their freedom of conscience. On certain festivals, when the Magi worshipped light in their temple as the visible representation of God (Ahura-Mazda), the Jews were not suffered to maintain any fire on their hearths, nor to retain any light in their rooms. The Persians forced their way into the houses of the Jews, extinguished every fire and collected the glowing embers in their consecrated braziers, bringing them as an offering to their temple of fire. They also dug the corpses out of the graves, because, according to their notion, dead bodies lying in the bosom of the earth desecrated this "Spenta Armaita" (holy soil). (Graetz, 2:524–25)

Thus was the plight of the Jews during the reign of Ardeshir I. As Zoroastrianism reached its climax, those in power were willing to do anything to spread their religion.

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[41]This expression indicates that there was a treaty between the Jews and the Parthian kings, and that Jewish resistance to Rome, apart from its religious and national aspects, also had another impetus, which was the alliance with Iran.

Solayman Kohan Sedegh writes in his notes:

> Because of these same pressures, considering that the Jews of Iran were unwilling to emigrate to Judea and subject themselves to Roman rule, many during this period had no choice but to emigrate to India and China to find the freedom to perform their religious ceremonies.

When during the reign of Shapur I (242-72 C.E.) Iran defeated Rome, chaos ensued in the eastern Roman territories. A commander by the name of Odenathus arose from the city of Palmyra with a group of marauders and raided and massacred the Jews of Mesopotamia and Judea. In 261, he razed the "Iranian Jerusalem," Nehardea. He considered himself heir to the Roman emperor's throne in Asia. Odenathus—at first ignored by the Iranian government—gradually became so strong that he was able to drive the Iranian army back as far as Ctesiphon. Rome had become so weakened that in 264, the emperor invited Odenathus to share the throne with him, but shortly afterwards, Odenathus was killed.

In the early 4th century, Christianity spread rapidly in the Roman Empire. The number of persons converting to Christianity increased daily. Revolts sprang up in all the Roman protectorates. Uncivilized tribes such as the Goths, Franks, and Vandals seized Roman territories. With the fall of the Parthians, the nation of Judea lost hope of regaining its freedom and independence. For several centuries Rome had thwarted their national and religious aspirations. They had hoped that Iran would arise once again so that with Iranian backing they might free themselves from the enemy's clutches. During the Parthian era, it seemed on several occasions that this aspiration might be fulfilled, but after the advent of the Sasanians and the policies enacted by that dynasty's first king, this hope was abruptly transformed to deep despair. Judea no longer afforded even religious leaders the means of making a living. The agricultural lands were held by foreigners, and there were no means to secure a livelihood. The nation's fortunes gradually declined, and some religious scholars,

followed by commoners, had no choice but to quit their homeland and emigrate to western Iran, which had a concentrated Jewish population and whose limited security and freedom still surpassed that of Judea. Poverty in Judea, both material and cultural, was crushing. Before that time, people had gone from Babylon and Mesopotamia to Judea to pursue religious studies; now that course was reversed. Judea declined, and western Iran, with its yeshivas and secondary schools founded by religious scholars, become the world center of Judaism. There was tremendous financial backing from the people to promote culture and support Jewish-Iranian students. With the presence of the *resh galuta,* they felt that they had not only a religious leader, but also a national leader, and that on Iranian soil, a "Jewish prince" was their protector.

During the reigns of several weak kings after Ardeshir and Shapur I, the Romans—despite the turmoil and weakness which plagued them—attacked Iran and created many problems for the Jews in the western part of the country. But they later withdrew in the face of counterattacks. The Jewish émigrés were generally concentrated in the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This was a very vulnerable position, because during the wars between Iran and Rome, the boundary between the two empires was usually the Euphrates and sometimes the Tigris River. In the thirty-seven years between the death of Shapur I and the beginning of the reign of Shapur II, the status of Iranian Jews was generally untroubled, except in the western territories. However, in the provinces of Armenia, Adiabene (Kurdistan), and Mesopotamia—that is, the entire western border region of Iran, which was a battlefield, exceptional crises beset the Jewish nation. The Romans knew well that the Jews were the faithful old friends of Iran, and for this reason, in each of their campaigns against these provinces they treated the Jews as they would their most hated enemy. Because warfare was a daily occurrence in the border region, life was naturally difficult for the Jews. Despite all of these factors, Jewish emigration to Iran continued.

During the seventy-year reign of Shapur II, or Shapur the Great (309–379 C.E.), Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire. The heavy burden of tyranny, repression, and intimidation was lifted from the backs of Roman Christians. But the Roman religious conversion did nothing to lessen their hostility toward the Jews, even though Christianity was rooted in Judaism. The cauldron of hatred boiled with new false pretexts. The new Roman authority strove under the banner of Christianity to efface all remaining traces of the Jews from Judea and redoubled its repressive measures. Thus, Judaism once again had no refuge save Iran, Rome's stubborn Asian rival. It was for this very reason that while Jewish culture was fading in Judea, it was reaching its zenith at Babylon in western Iran thanks to the diligence of Jewish scholars. Meanwhile, Christianity was gaining in Asia Minor, especially in Armenia, and even within Iran.

The wars between Iran and Rome, rooted in five centuries of history, took on a new dimension: religion. The Iranian government doubled taxes on Christians, who were excluded from military service. They were persecuted, and in 339 C.E., a number of them were executed in Susa. The more the Christians of Iran were persecuted, the more the Romans repressed the Judeans. Such was the anger of the Judean people under the burden of oppression that they revolted, despite their economic weakness and lack of military force. The leader of the rebellion was Netrona, whom the Judeans considered their messiah, or savior. The movement began in Sepphoris, which was home to a yeshiva, and spread thence to Tiberias. But the insurgents were dealt a crushing defeat, and Sepphoris was razed.

On the whole, Shapur II did not concern himself with the Jews. If he did not persecute them, it was for two basic reasons: first, he knew that this nation nurtured an implacable hatred for Iran's enemy, Rome, and second, his mother supported the Jews. Shapur himself was a fanatically faithful Zoroastrian and shunned other religions. Toward the end of his reign, he increased persecution of Jews and Christians.

During this king's reign, the Romans captured and burned the city of Peroz Shapur. It is not known what became of the Jews who lived in that city. But the people of Mahoza, a Jewish suburb of Ctesiphon, stubbornly resisted the Roman army in 363 C.E. Five years later, at the conclusion of Shapur's victorious campaigns in Armenia and Georgia, 7,000 Jews from those provinces were resettled in Susa and Isfahan.[42] These Jews had either been taken to those provinces as captives or had voluntarily emigrated to the region after Herod came to power, especially after the demolition of the Second Temple. No reason is mentioned in Jewish history for the transfer by Shapur II of this large number of Jews to Iran's two greatest cities. One can surmise that it was not for the Jews' benefit, but that it served Sasanian political interests. No historical evidence indicates that the Jews offered any resistance to Shapur II's campaigns against Armenia and Georgia, nor is there any indication that Shapur undertook any massacre of Jews. On this basis, one might conclude that Shapur was highly concerned with his nation's progress and prosperity, and having seen with his own eyes in Mesopotamia how much the Jews could do to make a region prosper, summoned them to Susa and Isfahan to increase those two cities' prosperity.

Prior to the resettlement of the Armenian and Georgian Jews, an incident occurred which led government officials to crack down on the Jews of Mesopotamia. The exilarch, who resided in Babylon, decreed of his own accord that a Jewish man who had had relations with a Zoroastrian woman should be flogged. After being punished, the man complained to the government authorities. This situation caused such an uproar that the exilarch was stripped of office and forced into hiding, and his property was seized. Other Jews were also in danger, but Shapur's mother, Ifra-Hormoz, prevailed upon

[42]Some historians believe that the resettlement of the Jews of Armenia and Georgia took place during the reign of the Jewish queen of Iran, Shushandukht, the wife of Yazdegird I. Historians also disagree over the number resettled.

him not to persecute them. She herself sent a contribution to the Jewish academy and even sent a sacrifice for the God of the Jews.

During the long reign of Shapur II, the Jews of Iran and Judea suffered various fates and survived several ups and downs. Shapur II created many encumbrances for the Christians, but he bore the Jews no animus. It may be said that without his mother's intervention, Shapur the Great would have been more prone to take measures against the Jews. During this king's reign, although the Jews of western Iran suffered loss of life as a result of war with Rome, this was offset by the immigration of Jews from Asia Minor. Likewise, even though two great Jewish academies closed during the reign of Shapur II, the establishment of several other secondary schools not only filled their places, but also further expanded Jewish cultural, religious, and scholarly activity in western Iran.

During the reign of Yazdegird I (399–420), known as Yazdegird the Wicked, the western Roman Empire quickly collapsed in the face of the onslaughts of the Huns and Goths. But the eastern Empire, whose capital was at Constantinople, endured until 1453, when it fell to the Turks. In the days when the western Roman Empire—Iran's staunchest enemy—was disintegrating and its people perishing due to war, hunger, and pestilence, Iran abided in a cradle of security, and the Jews of Iran lived in relative comfort. Yazdegird I was a peace- and freedom-loving king. He put an end to the persecution of the Christians, and his relations with the Jews were also cordial.

Three Jewish-Iranian representatives from Sura, Pumbedita, and Nehardea were a part of Yazdegird I's court, and the exilarch Huna was a confidant of the king. During this period, the Jews in all of the Jewish towns made great progress. They had appreciable freedoms, and constituted a large population.

Despite all the miseries of the Sasanian period, the reign of Yazdegird I was reminiscent of the good old days under the Achaemenids. It is remarkable that this king married Shushana, the daughter of a prominent Iranian Jew, Mar Kahana—one of his close confidants and director of the Pumbedita academy. As in the Achae-

menid period, Iran once again had a Jewish queen. Shushana, who came to be known as "Shushandokht," is the reputed founder of the city of Shushtar.

In *The Exiled and the Redeemed,* Ben-Zvi writes:

> ...Kwarezm City was originally established at Khiat by Narses, the son of a Jewess, a name identified by most scholars as Vahram or Bahram-Gor, son of Yazdegird I (399–420 CE). His mother was the famous Queen Shushandukht, who is known in Jewish history for her efforts to consolidate Jewish communal life in Persia....Both Jewish and Persian traditions hold that she was the daughter of a Jewish Prince of the Exile...It is known that Khwarezm, like Ispahan and Hamadan, had its Jewish community ever since its foundation in the fifth century C.E.... (pp. 247–48)

The security and freedom of Iranian Jews and the presence of a Jewish queen, coupled with the decay of Rome and the slaughter of Romans in the empire that had defeated Jerusalem and destroyed its temple, created a great stir amongst the Jews. It was said that the nation's Savior would soon appear.

A Jew who claimed to be the messiah of the age went to Crete and claimed that the Jews—as in Moses' time—could cross the dry seabed on foot to the Holy Land. A number of naïve Jews believed this and enthusiastically quit their livelihoods and distributed their property to the poor. On the appointed day, they all gathered before their "messiah" on the crest of a precipice overlooking the sea. They cast themselves into the sea, hoping the waters would part after their diving in. They and their leader all drowned. The great Jewish teacher, Ashi, fought against this type of thinking.

Yazdegird I, apparently under the influence of the *mobadan mobad,* began to strongly promote Zoroastrianism and embarked upon a campaign of persecution of Christians. However, there was no change

in his policy vis-à-vis the Jews. The sons of Yazdegird I were Bahram, known as Bahram Gur, Shapur, and Narseh, his third son by his Jewish wife, Shushandokht.[43]

After the death of Yazdegird I, Bahram Gur (421–440) ruled Iran. The Jews of Iran lived in safety while he was king. During his reign, his brother Narseh "ruled during his absence."[44] The Jews were not oppressed or molested, and historians of the times referred to the western Iranian province of Babylon as a "Jewish province."

Bahram Gur continued his father's persecution of the Christians, and, as a result, many fled to Byzantium. The security of Jews and the persecution of Christians in Iran led the Byzantine emperor Theodosius, under the influence of Christian religious leaders, to retaliate and persecute the Jews within his realm. One of his measures was to revoke the authority of the spiritual leader of the Jews of Judea. Over the course of the 300 years leading up to this time—that is, since the time of Hillel—a succession of fifteen religious leaders had governed the religious and social affairs of the Jews and strengthened their national spirit and hope for salvation. The last of these leaders was Gamaliel.

From this time forward, Christian religious bigotry and hostility toward the Jews increased. As a result, many Jews in Asia Minor and outlying areas headed for Iran. With the migrations to Iran from Armenia during the reign of Shapur II and from Alexandria during the reign of Yazdegird I, the number of Jews in Iran doubled. In his notes, Kohan Sedegh writes, "Bahram knew many languages, including Hebrew," which he may have learned from his brother Narseh, who learned it from his mother.

During the reign of Yazdegird II (438–457), because of the inordinate influence of the magi, persecution of Christians—especially in Armenia—became more severe, and the security of the Jews in Iran also ended. The influence of the magi, combined with the absence

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[43]Christensen, p. 274.

[44]Christensen, p. 230.

of any Jewish statesmen with connections to the king, upset the previous balance. Iran, which had been the Jews' sole refuge and their second home, suddenly changed its policy. The emperors of Rome and Byzantium had pledged fealty to the popes, and Iran took orders from the senior magi. The Jews were confronted on both sides by a boiling sea of religion. In 456, one year before the death of Yazdegird II, a decree was issued which rescinded the right of the Jews to observe the Sabbath.

The Peak of Sasanian Persecution of the Jews

During the reign of Peroz (457–483), the son of Yazdegird II, the Christians applied the technique which they had learned from the Greeks of spreading unfounded rumors against the Jews of Iran, thus providing the magi an expedient pretext for a massacre of the Jews. Extremist religious leaders who had influence over Peroz wanted to start a religious riot. They spread the rumor that the Jews of Isfahan—the city with the greatest Jewish population—had slain and flayed two magi. Obviously, the Jews, having no great foreign power or religious group to support them, were in grave danger. As a result of this unjust accusation, a decree ordering a massacre of the Jews at Isfahan was issued, and more than half the city's Jews were killed. Many children were kidnapped so that they might be converted to the official state religion. It was not long before this type of slaughter spread throughout Iran to include the western province of Babylon. Vicious persecution of the Jews continued throughout Peroz's more than twenty-five-year-long reign. Schools and synagogues were razed, and centers of Jewish scholarship came under attack. The destruction of Sura, whose academy was the center of Jewish research, took place during this same period. The religious majority's persecution of the Jewish minority reached the point where Jewish religious leaders who attempted to stop the violence by standing between the Iranian government and the Jewish community ended up sacrificing their lives. Schools and yeshivas were

closed. Jewish associations were proscribed. Jewish judges, who up to that time had jurisdiction over internal affairs, were unseated. Jews were forced to forswear their faith. Under such circumstances, many Jews could no longer remain in their "second homeland." In small groups, they packed up their belongings and fled the country.

The Jews of Mesopotamia and Babylon set forth on the road to Arabia—carrying with them their most prized possessions: the Torah and the Talmud. The Jews of eastern Iran, bringing their holy scriptures, made their way to India. A large group of emigrants from Mesopotamia, under the leadership of Joseph Rabban, crossed the Persian Gulf to India. During this treacherous seafaring journey, some of the Jews drowned at sea. The King of India received the group and bestowed privileges upon Joseph Rabban. These emigrants linked up with other Jews who had fled to India during the reign of Ardeshir I.

During this same period, a number of Iranian Jews sought refuge in China. Most of them settled in the city of Kai Feng Fu. Some also sought asylum in Afghanistan, Bokhara, and the Caucasus. These emigrations did not put an end to the magi's attempts to forcefully convert non-Zoroastrians, however, and in 481 C.E., Christians in Armenia and Georgia rebelled against religious tyranny. A civil war ensued in which Armenia and Georgia were defeated.

Peroz died in 483 C.E. During his reign, the material, moral, and military strength of Iran was dissipated through continuous persecutions of the Jews and Christians. Iran was raided by the Hephthalites for two years. All of these misfortunes were brought about by the intolerance of the Zoroastrian clergy, who would suffer the existence of no other religion in Iran.[45] The magi's persecutions extended not only to the Jews, but to all who did not adhere to the official religion. The king's tyranny afflicted all.

> During that corrupt time, the religious establishment—who were responsible for the nation's affairs and intervened in all mat-

[45]Christensen, p. 266.

> ters—were so oppressive that the whole populace became weary of the state-religious apparatus and hoped for change. (Malek-zadeh, 1:31)

The social stratification of the times did not allow movement between social castes. This left many in abject poverty and misery, without any hope of elevating their stations in life. It also kept the upper class living in the lap of luxury, unconcerned for those less fortunate. This situation caused frustration amongst the populace. It was during this time that Mazdak—purportedly to enforce social justice—advanced new ideas, saying that both property and women should be communally shared by all, "even allowing promiscuous intercourse among those related by ties of consanguinity."[46]

Kavad (487–531 C.E.), frustrated by the influence of the magi, was attracted to Mazdak's religion and granted official recognition to the new faith. An extraordinary state of disorder ensued. The poor attempted to confiscate property, and the rich endeavored to acquire women. The confiscation of minorities' property and the violation of their women became the norm. The Jews could tolerate the loss of their property, but they could not abide the violation of their wives and daughters. For them, marriage was a pure and sanctified matter—so incalculably important that there were dozens of strictures governing it in Mosaic law. There was no way to counter this new threat but to take up arms. The rebellion, centered in Mesopotamia, was led by the twenty-two-year-old Mar Zutra II, the son of Rab Huna VI, who became exilarch after the death of Peroz. The young Mar Zutra at first mustered only 400 brave Jewish youths to defend against Mazdakite depredations. But he gradually attracted more supporters and became strong enough to repulse the forces which Kavad sent to quell his rebellion.

Mar Zutra resisted the Mazdakites for seven years, but was finally defeated by a large force dispatched by Kavad to eliminate him. In the year 520 C.E., he, his grandfather (the former exilarch), and

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[46]Graetz, 3:1–2.

some other Jewish leaders were executed. In the aftermath of this defeat, the city of Mahoza was pillaged. Some were killed, some taken captive, and yet others fled to Jerusalem. During Kavad's reign, the plight of Jews in Iran was grim, especially in Babylon. Kavad's conversion to Mazdakism precipitated rioting and chaos, adding to the sufferings of the Jews. In the end, the magi seized and imprisoned Kavad. But with his wife's help, he succeeded in escaping from prison and fleeing Iran. With the support of the Hephthalites, he returned and once again assumed the throne. But he refrained from supporting Mazdak and, consequentially, from oppressing the Jews. During his reign, Jewish immigration to Iran was suspended, and emigration abroad rapidly increased. At the same time, because of the spread of Christianity, Judea was gradually transformed into a Christian country, and the only city which retained its Jewish character was Tiberias.

Kavad's son Khusrow I, or "Anushirwan the Just," whom the Arabs called "Kisra," ruled Iran from 531 to 579 C.E. He realized that the new religion of Mazdak, rather than eliminating oppression, increased it. Thus, at the outset of his reign, he arrested and executed Mazdak and the Mazdakite leaders and initiated a massacre of his followers. This has led some historians to question how "just" he was. Although Anushirwan was himself a Zoroastrian, he did not succumb to the extremism of the magi, and the Jews lived in security during his reign. Jewish schools reopened and resumed their activities. Giza and Simeon, two Jewish religious leaders who had fled Babylon during the reign of Kavad, returned to western Iran. The former became director of the academy at Sura, while the latter was appointed director of the academy at Pumbedita. During this period, which was after the time of the *amoraim,* the number of students grew and Talmudic studies became more popular. It was time for Talmudic law to be properly understood and enforced.

Anushirwan's campaign against Asia Minor and Antioch was a miraculous event for the Jews of that region. The emperor of the day, Justinian, intervened in Jewish religious affairs to the point

that he even forbade the Shema confession of faith on the grounds that it was inconsistent with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. He went so far as to send observers to the synagogues during prayer recitations to ensure that his order was enforced. But the Jews recited the words of the Shema in their hearts.

Anushirwan went to war with Byzantium several times and prevailed. His strength was coupled with justice. Through fair taxation, he filled the treasury's coffers. In his taxation of the Jews, he exempted children and the elderly. He assisted farmers and encouraged marriage to increase the country's population. He secured roads and highways and patronized the sciences. It is probable that some of the Jews who fled to outlying areas during the reigns of Peroz and Kavad returned to Iran.

During the reign of Anushirwan, Justinian closed the schools of Athens. As a result, seven eminent Greek scholars presented themselves at the Iranian court. Anushirwan granted them protection and...

> ...from them the science of grammar was communicated to the Syrian Christians, these in turn roused in their Jewish neighbors the spirit of emulation in the investigation of the Scriptures, and this led to the adoption of vowel-points and accents. (Graetz, 3:7)

There is no doubt that there were many Jews among the students of these new academies.

This period saw a remarkable growth in Talmudic studies. Some Nestorians, who considered themselves closer to the Jews than to the Christians, were interested in the study of the Jewish scriptures. Because the Hebrew script of that day lacked vowel markers, it was difficult to read unless the reader was fully familiar with the topic at hand. For this reason, a number of Jewish scholars whose names have not been recorded by history decided to surmount this shortcoming. The system they developed of vowel markings placed above and below letters made the reading of Hebrew very simple. As a result, study of the Holy Scriptures spread amongst the Jews. It also

became easier for non-Jews to learn Hebrew and study the Bible. Thus, the vowel system provided a great service in promoting Jewish civilization, culture, and mores. Additional notations were developed to mark the ends of lines and sentences. All of the markers developed during this period clarified the meaning of the religious texts.

As previously mentioned, the status of Iranian Jewry fluctuated during this period. Anushirwan's son, Hormozd IV (579–590 C.E.), took a different approach toward the Jews than his father had.

> At first, this king was unwilling to subject himself to the will of the magi, but later, as witnessed by most historians, he changed his mind and diverged from the path of righteousness. (Razi, p. 78)

King Hormozd was a weak-willed man, and the Zoroastrian clerics were able to bring him under their sway and induce him to persecute the Christian and Jewish minorities. Hormozd was an oppressive king. In those days, when philosophy and religious studies were flourishing in Iran, he thought that he could strengthen the foundations of the Zoroastrian faith by persecuting the followers of all other religions. With this false belief he directed all his wrath and fury toward the Jews and Christians. He closed the schools at Sura and Pumbedita. His harshness led to renewed Jewish emigration from Iran. In the year 581 C.E., a number of them emigrated to Arab-populated areas. War with Rome, which sometimes ended in victory and sometimes in defeat, continued unabated.

An anecdote concerning Hormozd's attacks against Jewish-populated towns survives. It concerns a buried treasure chest upon which was engraved a Hebrew inscription. The history *Nasekh al-tavarikh,* in the chapter on the fall of Adam, writes concerning the reign of Hormozd:

> In a palace, there was an urn in each of the four ends, and each urn rested upon an ingot of gold. Upon the door was a copper plate with a Hebrew inscription stating that this was Feridun's treasury. Hormozd seized those urns, which were full of lustrous

> pearls, and divided them amongst his soldiers and gained the approbation of the populace.

This fabulous tale may have its origin in Hormozd's confiscations of Jewish property and the plundering of the home of a wealthy Jew.

Khusrow Parviz, the son of Hormozd, reigned from 590 to 628 C.E. In order to counter his rival for the throne, Bahram Chubin—to whose army the Jews flocked and to whom they provided financial backing—he secured a temporary treaty of friendship with Maurice, the Byzantine emperor. With his help, he removed Bahram Chubin from the scene. It seemed that a bitter plight awaited the Jews of Iran, for they had strongly supported Bahram Chubin. But Khusrow knew that their support for Bahram derived from their sufferings under his father, Hormozd. For this reason, he did not seek revenge, but rather granted them limited freedom in their cultural and scholarly endeavors. The Messenger of Islam[47] embarked upon his mission during the same year of Khusrow Parviz's reign, 601 C.E.

Khusrow Parviz married the emperor Maurice's daughter Mary. During this emperor's life, relations between Iran and Byzantium were cordial. Maurice created no difficulties for the Jews of Asia Minor and Judea. But when Maurice was killed in a coup d'état, the clock was set back, and the old rivalry and warfare between Iran and Byzantium began anew. In 611 C.E., Khusrow Parviz's army, descending from Lebanon, quickly advanced on Jerusalem. The Jews of Asia Minor, Judea, and Iran were filled with hope that after the passage of centuries, the sons of Cyrus would once again emerge as their liberators, breaking the chains which held Judea captive and routing the Byzantine soldiers and fanatical Christians who for centuries had murdered and plundered them. Hoping that freedom and independence were at hand, they volunteered to join the battle with their age-old enemy. They placed their entire savings at the disposal of the Iranian army, and able-bodied Jewish youths from

[47] TN: Muhammad.

Tiberias, Nazareth, and the mountains of Galilee joined Khusrow Parviz's army.

Finally, in 614 C.E., after the passage of nearly five-and-a-half centuries, Jerusalem was freed from the Byzantines' grip and fell to the Iranian forces. During this period, some of the Christians in Judea converted to Judaism. "During the course of 14 years, the Persians held sway in Palestine."[48] But the results that the Jews had hoped for from the Iranian victory at Jerusalem did not materialize. Even during this fourteen-year period, Judea did not enjoy complete independence. At the end of this period, after the death of Khusrow Parviz, Byzantium and Iran concluded a treaty of peace, and it was agreed that the Iranians should evacuate the land of the Israelites. In 628 C.E., the Byzantine emperor Heraclius triumphantly entered Jerusalem. The Christian priests in the city asked him to massacre all the Jews in Judea. Heraclius agreed. Jews unable to flee to outlying lands, to the mountains, or to Egypt were killed. The priests, in atonement for this act, fasted on the anniversary of the massacre, and this custom was practiced by the Christians of Judea for centuries.

Yazdegird III, the last Sasanian king, was crowned in 634 C.E. His reign was marked by chaos and anarchy. The magi, heedless of what was transpiring in Arabia, continued their persecutions of Jews and Christians. Acting upon the instructions of the magi, Yazdegird...

> ...proscribed the Sabbath ceremonies, prohibited synagogues throughout Mesopotamia, and decreed that Jews could only build synagogues and pray outside the cities. (From Kohan Sedegh's notes; extract from *Otsar Israel*, 3:49)

In 642 C.E., with the defeat of Iran at the hands of the Arabs at the battle of Nehavand, the Sasanian dynasty came to an end.

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[48]Dubnow, 2:217.

PART FIVE

Advent of Islam and Rule of the Caliphs (642–847 C.E.)

Chapter Nine
Iran in the New World of Islam

The advent of Islam is usually prefaced by an account of Arabia and the life of the Messenger of God. We will make reference to both of these in this summary.

The Arabian peninsula is a dry land—devoid of water and plant life. Most of the terrain consists of sand dunes moved about by the scorching winds and burning plains where the air is so hot that it shimmers. Very little rain falls in Arabia, and only animals that do not require a constant supply of water, such as snakes, lizards, and camels, are able to survive there. Its magnificent cloudless night skies are full of stars that stir the imagination. Because of the climate, most of its people live a nomadic life. Both cities and city dwellers are few in this land.

According to the Jewish Bible, the scarcity of water in this land is believed to be associated with Ishmael, the son of Abraham, who dwelt in Arabia, and the multiplication of his descendants among the Arabs. It has been said, "According to a story in the Torah, the prophet Abraham settled his son Ishmael near the well of Zamzam."[49] This linkage is based upon this portion of the Bible:

> Wherefore [Sarah] said unto Abraham: 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.' And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son. And God said unto Abraham: 'Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall seed be called to thee. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.' And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away; and she departed, and strayed in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under

[49]Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 14.

> one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot; for she said: 'Let me not look upon the death of the child.' And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her: 'What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast by thy hand; for I will make him a great nation.' And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. (Genesis 21:10–19)

The Arabs were an idolatrous people. Even after coming in contact with the star-worshippers of ancient Chaldea and Babylon, Zoroastrianism, and the Jewish and Christian religions, they continued in their idolatry. Before the advent of Islam, the Kaaba was the greatest idol-temple in Arabia.

The most-inhabited parts of the Arabian peninsula are Oman, Yemen, the Hejaz, and the west coast. Before Islam, a great many Jews lived in Yemen and Yathrib (Medina), which is situated in the Hejaz.[50] It is written that there were more than twenty Jewish tribes living in Medina when the Messenger of Islam began his mission. These were emigrants who migrated to the area in the aftermath of great disasters suffered by the Jewish nation such as the destruction of the first and second Temples. There may be some doubt as to whether the Jews founded Medina, but there can be no doubt that they were a key element in making it a prosperous town. They were experienced farmers and guided the Arabs in most matters. The Jews came to be known by the Arabs as the "People of the Book." In 520 C.E., that is, eighty-one years before the mission of the Messenger of Islam, the people of Yemen, following their leader Dhu Nuwas, converted to Judaism. But later, as a result of attacks upon Yemen by Ethiopia, they disappeared.

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[50]TN: Yathrib was renamed "al-Madinah" (The City) by the Prophet after his *hijra* (exodus).

In the forty-first year of the reign of Anushirwan the Just, 571 C.E., a boy was born in the city of Mecca to whom was given the name "Muhammad." He was not yet two months old when his father, 'Abdallah ibn 'Abd al-Mutallib, died. When he was six years old, he lost his mother, too. His grandfather became his guardian, but after two years, he too passed away. From the age of eight he was raised by his uncle, Abu al-Talib. A reputable merchant of the tribe of Quraysh, Abu al-Talib gave Muhammad responsibility for some of his affairs. This young man's righteousness and reliability earned him the sobriquet "Muhammad the Trustworthy." In his youth, Muhammad married Khadijah, a wealthy woman who was his senior.

It was in the twentieth year of the reign of Khusrow Parviz that Muhammad the Trustworthy embarked upon his mission as Messenger of Islam. Khadijah was the first person to accept the new religion. The Messenger called upon the great tribe of Quraysh to embrace Islam, but after three years, only eight had become Muslims. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Messenger's cousin, who was at that time a young boy, Abu Bakr, and 'Umar were among them. The Messenger of God made many enemies in Mecca and encountered numerous difficulties. The infidels did not believe his words, but his followers gradually grew in number. He faced such great pressures in Mecca that he emigrated to Medina. This journey, known as the *hijra* or "flight," became the starting point of the Islamic calendar.[51] From that point forward religious conflict took the form of warfare.

All told, the Messenger of Islam and his followers engaged in twenty-seven battles against those who did not accept his message. According to a contemporary Muslim historian:

> Other than the tribe of Quraysh, there was another people in Arabia who opposed the Messenger of Islam and his followers: the Jews—who were especially numerous at Medina and who were usually in conflict with the Aws and Khazraj tribes for control of the city. Until the second year of the *hijra,* the Messenger of Islam lived in harmony with the Jews, but when this people turned

[51]TN: 622 C.E. = A.H. 1.

> against the Messenger because of religious bigotry and contradictions between the new Islamic law and their law, the Messenger also became enraged against them. He therefore commanded that the Muslims should change the direction of their prayers from Jerusalem, which was the focus of Jewish prayer, to Mecca. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 36).

The Messenger of Islam also clashed with the Christians. For example, he sent several thousand Muslims on a jihad against Syria, which was part of the Byzantine Empire and administered by Arab Christians. But the Byzantines and the Christian Arabs defeated the Muslims. In this battle, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib and several other Islamic leaders were killed. After being defeated by the Christians, the Islamic army retreated. Sometime thereafter, in the same vicinity, the Muslims were again defeated in battle. Although years later, Islam completely obliterated Byzantium, at this stage Christianity was growing daily stronger and repressive acts against Jews by Christian fanatics began. We may say that this marked the onset of the long dark centuries of the Middle Ages and the currency of the poisonous rumor of Jesus' death at the hands of the Jews.

When the Messenger of Islam went to Medina and encountered the Jewish people, this rumor soon had an impact upon the city's affairs, all the more so because Muhammad had fled Mecca on account of persecution by the unbelievers of the Quraysh tribe. The Jews' enemies at Medina constantly murmured about their purported conspiracies, and as a result, the three great Jewish tribes of Medina were brought down one by one.

The Banu Qaynuqa tribe—who were goldsmiths and armorers, unlike the other Jews, who made their livelihoods in agriculture and animal husbandry—were the first target. They worked in the center of town, and their clients were mostly members of the Khazraj tribe, who did not accept Muhammad's message. They were besieged and surrendered. They were given the choice of either converting to Islam or quitting the city unarmed within three days, leaving all

their property behind. Some converted to Islam, while others made their way toward the Persian Gulf.

The following year, in August 625 C.E., the Islamic army was in poor spirits after suffering a defeat at the hands of the Meccans. The Messenger of God, needing funds to support the war, met with leaders of the Banu Nadhir tribe and sought their support. They invited him to eat with them. The Messenger of Islam, fearing that they were conspiring against his life, fled. The members of this tribe, who made a livelihood in the palm date trade, met with the same fate as the Banu Qaynuqa. Some of them converted to Islam, whilst others left Medina, forbidden to take anything with them.

> What God has bestowed on His Apostle (and taken away) from them—for this ye made no expedition with either cavalry or camelry... (Quran, 59:6)

But the end was most bitter for the third of the great Jewish tribes of Medina, the Banu Qurayza. Their forefathers were Jewish religious leaders, and they considered themselves priests. For a time, they remained neutral. But the Arab tribe of Aws joined with them to fight against the followers of Islam. However, the leader of the Aws tribe, Sa'd bin Muaz, a longtime enemy of the Jews, intrigued with the Messenger against them. After several days of fighting, the Banu Qurayza surrendered and were offered the choice of conversion or death. Only four of them converted to Islam. The fate of the others was sealed. They were forced to dig trenches, and the men, who reportedly numbered between 600 and 750, were beheaded one-by-one next to the trenches. The women and children were sold into slavery. Tabari's authoritative *History* provides a detailed account of this episode.

Iqbal writes:

> From the fourth to the eighth year of the *hijra*, that is, from the episode of the trench until the conquest of Mecca by the Muslims, the Messenger conducted several other raids against the infidels and the Jews, the most famous of which was the raid at Khaybar

> in the middle of the month of Muharram in A.H. 8. During the Khaybar raid, the Muslims engaged in several fierce clashes with the Jews, capturing several of their strongholds, seizing much booty and many prisoners, and killing some of their leaders. Among those killed was Marhab of Khaybar, who was killed by 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Because of their particular loathing of the Jews, they showed this tribe no mercy and put them all to the sword. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 39).

Despite all this, "...other minor Jewish clans which had maintained neutrality were allowed to remain in Medina unmolested."[52]

After the capture of Mecca, the Messenger of Islam commanded that all the idols in the Kaaba should be destroyed, and that the call to prayer should be announced from atop it. In 632 C.E., the Messenger of God died. After his death, an argument ensued amongst the Muslims as to who should succeed him. Some considered 'Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, to be his rightful heir, while others supported his father-in-law, Abu Bakr. Finally, the aged Abu Bakr was chosen as caliph.[53] During the twenty-nine years from 632 to 661, a succession of four caliphs succeeded Muhammad as leader of the Muslims. These four, collectively known as "the Rightly-Guided caliphs" were Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

The caliphate of Abu Bakr lasted only two years, from 632 to 634 C.E. During this period, several people made claims to prophethood, but 'Umar put them in their places. Abu Bakr's greatest achievement was to begin compilation of the Quran, a task completed during the reign of 'Umar. Abu Bakr feared that if the verses of the Quran were not written down, they would become forever lost or corrupted. For this reason he commanded that, "The reciters and writers of the revelation should write down all of the verses they have recorded on animal hides or palm fronds."[54] During the caliph-

[52]*EJ*, 12:511.

[53]TN: The English term "caliph" is based on the Arabic title *khalifa*, which literally means "successor."

[54]Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, pp. 44-45.

ate of Abu Bakr, the first attack against southern Iran was launched under the command of Khalid bin Walid.

'Umar was caliph from 632 to 644 C.E. He was a conqueror: it was during his reign that Iran was dealt relentless, mortal blows by the Arabs. After several battles, all of Iran finally fell to the Arabs following the battle of Nehavand in 642. The Arabs called this battle the "Victory of Victories." The Sasanian dynasty was completely extirpated. There were two prime factors that motivated the Arabs in their battles. The first—a spiritual reward—was the prospect of martyrdom in the way of righteousness and the promise of Paradise. The second—a material reward—was the promise of plundering the unbelievers. Since the Arabs had heard of the riches of Iran, this second motivation was stronger. During these same years, 'Umar, a skilled warrior, greatly expanded the Islamic Empire by sending fresh troops to conquer Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. By the end of 'Umar's reign, the foundations of the Islamic Empire were firmly established. 'Umar, the second of the Rightly-Guided caliphs, was murdered while reciting his prayers at the hands of an Iranian by the name of Firuz.

'Uthman was caliph from 644 to 656 C.E. During his reign, the Islamic conquests continued to spread, encompassing parts of northern Africa. Because of his wrongdoings, 'Uthman became the object of Muslim opprobrium. Some revolted against him and killed him in his house.

After 'Uthman, the position of caliph passed to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, who reigned until 661, a total of five years. From that point forward, those Muslims who considered 'Ali to be Muhammad's rightful heir diverged from the others, and the Shi'i sect was born. The others are known as Sunnis. 'Ali was the first Shi'i imam and made his capital at Kufa. During his caliphate, many revolts arose amongst the Muslims, and he was ultimately killed by one of his opponents. 'Ali's son, Imam Hasan, was poisoned in a plot conceived by his enemies only five months after becoming caliph.

After the Rightly-Guided caliphs, it was the turn of the Omayyid caliphs, who were of a different lineage, to rule. They reigned from 662 to 753 C.E. and made Damascus their capital. The first was Mu'awiyah. Because his grandfather was named Omayyah, he and his successors are called the Omayyids. Fourteen Omayyid caliphs ruled the Islamic world—which included Iran—for a total of ninety-one years. Yazid, the son of Mu'awiyah, killed Husayn, second son of 'Ali and the third imam of the Shi'is. From that point forward, a deep-seated animosity grew between the Shi'is and the Sunnis. During the Omayyid caliphate, the borders of the Islamic Empire were again expanded. In 713 C.E., Spain, too, was occupied by the Muslims.

Some of the Omayyid caliphs were arrogant and oppressive. They persecuted the Iranians, who supported 'Ali's family, and it was during this period that the first anti-Omayyid movement began in Iran under Abu Muslim of Khorasan. Abu Muslim's uprising had no religious overtones; rather, it was rooted in the oppression of the Omayyid caliphs, who not only demanded a heavy poll tax, or *jizya,* from Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, but also demanded that newly-converted Iranian Muslims send onerous annual tax payments to Damascus. Abu Muslim's rebellion played a crucial role in toppling the Omayyid state and establishing the Abbasid caliphate, but this courageous Iranian commander was killed in battle with the enemy.

The Abbasid caliphs, who made Baghdad their capital, came to power in 753 C.E. The most famous of the Abbasid caliphs is Harun al-Rashid, whose sumptuous palace was legendary. During the Abbasid period, Iranian civilization lifted its head like a flame from beneath the ashes and exerted extensive influence on the Islamic world. The Barmakites, a full-blooded Iranian family, held high administrative offices in the Abbasid caliphate, and political movements seeking Iranian freedom also sprung up during this period.

Chapter Ten
The Factious Jew

Once again, the hand of fate brought together the great nation of Iran and the tiny nation of Judea, this time under Arab rule. The Arabs now ruled both Iran and Judea, both of which had lost their independence and freedom.

The effect of the Arab invasion on Iran was deeper than that of any other invasion. Twelve centuries of Iranian independence came to an end. The social, political, religious, and cultural fabric of the country was turned upside down when Iran became part of the great Islamic Empire. The expansive empire of yesteryear was now administered from Kufa, Damascus, and Baghdad by the Rightly-Guided caliphs, the Omayyids, and the Abbasids. A flood of Arabic words entered the Persian language, and even the alphabet in which the language was written changed. Islam took the place of Zoroastrianism as the official religion of the country.

Such revolutionary changes had a profound effect upon the religious minorities of Iran, especially the Jews living in the Iranian province of Babylon. The legal and political standing of Iranian Jews changed completely. They, along with the Christians living within the Islamic realm, were classified as *dhimmis* (non-Muslim subjects), denied social and political equality, and relegated to the status of second-class citizens. In exchange for the *jizya* (an exorbitant annual poll tax), they were granted "protection" and permitted to continue living among the Muslims and to engage in certain trades.

Islam's treatment of Jews outside Iran began with some painful incidents. From the time the Messenger embarked on his mission in 601 C.E. until the death of Imam Husayn at Karbala in 680, the Jews in the Hejaz, and particularly in Medina—where there was a large Jewish population—were forced to either convert to Islam or to surrender their property and be exiled, or, in the event that they stood firm in their faith, they saw their menfolk killed and their womenfolk and children sold into slavery. Some of the Arabian

Jews migrated to Judea, Iraq, and Iran, and—as in all perilous journeys of those days—some died along the way. In the first years of Arab supremacy over Iran, the Jews faced even more severe persecution from the Zoroastrians, who considered the Muslims—from whom they faced relentless attacks—to be of the same creed as the followers of Moses.

In the beginning, Islam considered the Jews and Christians to be "People of the Book" and in exchange for heavy annual taxes granted them the right to life. But this situation did not prevail throughout the entire Islamic period. The sea of religious paradox was at times calm and at other times stormy. It sometimes happened that the same caliph treated Jews differently in different situations. Such was the case during the time of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644 C.E.), the second of the Rightly-Guided caliphs, during whose reign Iran surrendered to the Arabs.

The people of Babylon—the most important province of western Iran—made desperate by the oppression and massacres of the last days of the Sasanian period, warmly received the conquerors of the province, which thenceforward, along with Mesopotamia, was known as "Iraq." 'Umar received the *resh galuta,* Bustanai ben Haninai (618–670 C.E.) and gave him the daughter of Yazdegird III, Izdundad, in marriage.[55]

On the other hand, the same caliph put restrictions (known in Arab history as the *shurut* [conditions] or *'uhud* [contracts]) on religious minorities which became the rationale for later anti-Semitic acts. It was 'Umar who would not permit the Jews to continue living in the Hejaz. In the fourth year of his reign, Jerusalem fell to the Arab army. He erected the Mosque of 'Umar on the same grounds upon which the Holy Temple had stood and drove the Jews out of Jerusalem. 'Umar did not permit the construction of new synagogues or the rebuilding of old ones.

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[55] *EJ,* 8:1444.

With Arab supremacy over Iran, the Zoroastrian religion collapsed. Those who had the means fled to other countries, especially India. But most of the country, including the farmers, laborers, and merchants, had no choice but to convert to Islam. The new Muslim Iranians harbored ill-will toward the Arabs, especially their leader, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab. They gravitated toward the Shi'i sect, especially after the death of Imam Husayn at Karbala. There is no doubt that several prominent Jews were forced to convert to Islam. History mentions Jews such as 'Abdallah ibn Saba, who was among the new converts to Islam and played a prominent role in the establishment and growth of the Shi'i sect in the 7th century.[56] It is also written that Imam Husayn married the other daughter of Yazdegird III. If this is true, then there was a close relation by marriage between him and Bustanai, the Jewish exilarch. On this basis, Jewish Iranians considered the Shi'is more worthy than the Sunnis.

The Arab invasion of Iran, like all other phenomena, had both positive and negative aspects. Iran emerged from its frozen rigidity and produced great scientific and literary talents. This held true for the Jews of Iran, too. The great centers of learning in Babylon—which had been closed and whose faculties had been scattered during the last years of the Sasanian dynasty—found new life with the advent of Islam. Under Arab rule the academies of Sura and Pumbedita began anew. From this time forward, the directors of the academies were called *geonim* (גאונים). The golden age of the *geonim* coincided with the rule of the Arab caliphs from the middle of the 7th through the middle of the 11th centuries. Many of the students educated at these two great cultural centers joined the ranks of the foremost Jewish scholars. With the caliphate's borders secured and Arab influence growing, the bond between the Jewish academies of Babylon and the outlying Jewish communities gradually became stronger. In a letter of Sherira Gaon, it is recorded that when 'Ali ibn Abi Talib in 658 C.E. conquered the city of Peroz Shapur, the director of

[56] *EJ*, 2:53.

the academy at Sura, R. Isaac (630–660 C.E.) came forward to greet him accompanied by 70,000 people, and that 'Ali accepted him as spiritual leader of the Jewish community.[57]

At the same time, the position of *resh galuta,* or exilarch, was also preserved. Bustanai lived a king's life as the Jews' representative to the caliph. He collected the taxes imposed upon the Jews, rode in the caliph's chariot on special occasions, and was respected by statesmen. He participated in the legislative assembly along with the *geonim* and seven prominent scholars. This 10-man council was a sort of mini-senate which reviewed the resolutions of the 70-man and 30-man sanhedrins. The position of exilarch became hereditary among Bustanai's descendants. After his death, a dispute arose between the sons of his Babylonian wife and the sons of his Iranian wife, who had converted to Judaism. Finally, based on a determination by the *hakhamim* of the academies, it was decided that succession should pass to the sons of the Iranian wife. The exilarch had to be chosen by the *geonim,* and after his selection, elaborate ceremonies were held which included attending synagogue, where shouts of "Long live the *resh galuta!*" were voiced. The presence of the exilarch himself at the Grand Synagogue with the *geonim* of the academies of Sura and Pumbedita at his right and left sides was cause for uncommon fervor. The decisions of the Jewish legislative assemblies of the time were proclaimed and enforced among Jews as far afield as Yemen, Khorasan, and India. The tax on kosher meats (which was until recent years still in force in Iran) became official in those times. The exilarch was empowered to impose punishment and banishment. Transgressors were usually bastinadoed.[58] As the conquests of the Islamic caliphs spread from India to Spain, the powers of the exilarch of the Iranian Jewish community grew in equal measure. Even the Jews of Judea accepted the authority of the exilarch at Babylon,

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[57]*EJ,* 8:1444.

[58]Before the constitutionalist movement in Iran, Mulla Ibrahim Agha Baba, the last exilarch of the Jewish community in Iran, had these rights.

which was part of the former Iran. In Europe, which was entering the Dark Ages, anti-Semitism was growing daily stronger. The priests cruelly tortured Jews to death. The Jews who had been expelled from Spain made contact with the Arabs, who were conquering northern Africa in the late 7th century C.E. By joining forces with the army of Tariq, they were able to participate in the Muslim conquest of Spain in 712. It was for this reason that Jewish soldiers assumed important offices in the municipal administration. With the Islamic conquest of Spain, the most glorious days of the Jews in that country also began.

After the rule of the Rightly-Guided caliphs, the Omayyids—who had killed the Imam of the Shi'is and were not descended from the Messenger—assumed control of the Islamic world. During this period the Jews of Iran faced many ups and downs. Their sociopolitical standing in Islamic Iran was completely dependent upon the caliph who ruled the Islamic Empire. During the reigns of tolerant caliphs, the Jews enjoyed freedom in their socioeconomic activities. But during the reigns of fanatic caliphs, not only the Jews, but also other non-Muslims—especially the Zoroastrians—faced persecution. The Christians, who tormented the Jews in Europe, were their equals in Iran. There is insufficient data available concerning Omayyid treatment of the Jews from 662 to 753 C.E. What *is* available are pronouncements concerning non-Muslims in general. During this period, the Jews suffered heavy losses as a result of bloody political conflicts, mostly in Iraq. Mukhtar rebelled in Iraq and put to death those responsible for the killing of Imam Husayn. The Omayyid caliph 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwan sent an army under the command of Qassab ibn Ziyad to Iraq to suppress Mukhtar's rebellion, but Qassab, too, was killed, and the rebellion continued.

During the reign of the 8th Omayyid caliph, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, also known as 'Umar II (717–720 C.E.), the regulations imposed on the *dhimmis* by the second Omayyid caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, became much harsher and more restrictive. Jews and

other non-Muslims were suddenly cast into a black hole of torture and persecution. Under the new rules, the right of the leaders of the minority religious communities to collect their taxes was revoked. Friendship with *dhimmi*s was considered a mortal sin. 'Umar II was a fanatic sectarian. He ordered the governor of Khorasan to ban the erection of new synagogues and churches and to require that the Jews and Christians wear distinctive caps and garments to distinguish them from Muslims. They were not to be allowed the use of saddles when on horseback, and it was forbidden for them to have Muslim servants. These restrictions, which illustrate the oppression of the "protected peoples," made the annual poll tax on non-Muslims seem a trivial encumbrance. These strictures later spread throughout all provinces of Iran and the Islamic Empire. The primary objective of this policy was to protect Islam from the old religions and to separate non-Muslim members of society from followers of the ruler's religion. Some particulars of "'Umar's laws" resemble the anti-Semitic laws enacted by the Byzantine Empire.

The *shurut* laws were not always the same. Their strength or weakness, as mentioned previously, depended upon the caliph or sultan of the day. Some caliphs and sultans from the time of 'Umar II to the middle of the 14th century imposed new laws and restrictions, and these were vigorously enforced. Others showed forbearance and looked on the *shurut* laws with a blind eye. Various texts of these laws have survived, from the writings of Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i, founder of the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, to the writings of Ibn Khaldun. The following stipulations summarize them all.

The *dhimmi*s (Jews and Christians):

1. May not build new synagogues or churches.
2. Must show respect to Muslims and stand in their presence.
3. Must provide shelter to Muslim travelers for a period of three days.
4. May not interfere with anyone who wishes to convert to Islam.

5. May not dress or arrange their hair in a manner similar to the Muslims. Jews must wear yellow clothing and a special cap. The shoes worn by Jews must not be of the same color as those worn by the Muslims.
6. They may not choose Muslim names for themselves and their children.
7. Upon entering the public bath, the men must have a special emblem around their necks so that they may be distinguished from the Muslims. Non-Muslim women do not have the right to use the Muslim women's public baths.
8. They do not have the right to bear arms.
9. They do not have the right to hire Muslims.
10. They may not read the Quran.
11. They may not ride horses or mules, and when riding donkeys may not place saddles on their backs.
12. They may not live in houses which are higher than those of Muslims.
13. They may not bury their dead in cemeteries that are higher than Muslim cemeteries.
14. They may not hold public office.
15. When heirs of the deceased cannot establish their claim of inheritance according to Islamic law, the inheritance will become the property of the Islamic government.

When the level of intolerance increased, the exilarch took responsibility for enforcing some of these *shurut,* including the wear of distinctive clothing and headgear. The penalty for failure to comply with these laws was death. During some periods, the state did not strictly enforce these laws, and the Jews might, for example, have built a synagogue. But later, during the reign of an intolerant caliph who insisted upon strict enforcement of these laws, that synagogue would be razed.[59]

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[59] *EJ,* 12:1378.

Abu 'Isa al-Isfahani and Yudghan Hamadani

Iran witnessed the greatest number of Jewish religious movements during the Abbasid caliphate. Whatever reasons there may have been for these changes, the surrounding environment must have been one of them. After the bifurcation of Islam into Sunni and Shi'i denominations, many other branches and offshoots developed, most of which resulted from the ideas of Iranian or Islamic thinkers such as Shafi'i, Hanafi, and others. The existence of these numerous branches inspired Iranian Jews to bring new ideas and new leaders to Judaism.

The first of these was Abu 'Isa Isaac ben Jacob al-Isfahani, the founder of the first Jewish sect after the destruction of the Second Temple. The Arab historian Shahrestani held that Abu 'Isa was a contemporary of the last Omayyid caliph, Marwan ibn Muhammad (744–750 C.E.). During this period, that is, the middle of the 8th century, Islamic sects sprang up rapidly throughout Iran. Abu 'Isa claimed to be the messiah, and sought to bring about a revolution in the Judaism of the *rabbanim.* Abu 'Isa's political ideas put him at odds with the Islamic authorities.

Some Iranian Jews supported Abu 'Isa, and he was able to start a revolt against the Muslims. After several years, however, Abu 'Isa's revolt came to an end when the Muslims defeated his military forces near the city of Rayy, south of Tehran. Abu 'Isa himself was killed in this clash. His followers, not believing that he had died, claimed that he had withdrawn to a cave and gone into occultation. According to another story, he gathered his followers in one place and drew a circle in the dirt around them with a stick to protect them from the enemy. Only Abu 'Isa remained outside the circle so that he might single-handedly deliver a mortal blow to the Muslims and then approach the sons of Moses to deliver his message.

Adherents of the sect founded by Abu 'Isa became known as "'Isunians" or "Isfahanians." Members of the sect survived up to the time of Jacob al-Qirqisani, who found a number of them living in Damascus in the first half of the 10th century.[60]

Before beginning his religious movement, Abu 'Isa was not a religious leader; rather, he was an illiterate tailor who lived in Isfahan. His followers believed that it was by prophetic revelation that, despite his illiteracy, he was able to compose several prayer books. Abu 'Isa said that before the advent of the messiah five prophets would come, including Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. He enjoined his followers to pray seven times daily. He forbade animal sacrifice, the eating of meat and the drinking of wine, and prohibited divorce.[61] He gave his followers military training, and by the year 749 C.E. his armed disciples numbered 10,000. Abu 'Isa's politico-religious uprising coincided with the revolt of the great Iranian general Abu Muslim of Khorasan, who played a key role in the overthrow of the Omayyids and the rise to power of the Abbasids. Those who believed in Abu 'Isa awaited the return of their messiah for several centuries.

Abu 'Isa's movement lived on in the middle of the 8th century through his student and disciple, Yudghan Hamadani (Yudghan of Hamadan). Like his teacher, Yudghan, or Yehuda, claimed to be a prophet, and the Yudghanis believed him to be the messiah.

> The Karaite historian Jacob al-Kirkisani writes in his Book of Gardens and Parks (938) that the Yudghanites "prohibit meat and intoxicating drinks, observe many prayers and fasts, and assert that the Sabbath and holidays are at present no longer obligatory." (*EJ*, 16:868)

The lack of obligation concerning observance of the Sabbath and religious holidays because of the destruction of the Second Temple and the ongoing mourning over its loss is attributed to the Shi'i

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[60] *EJ*, 2:183–4.

[61] *EJ*, 11:1419.

Muslim mentality in Iran. In the middle of the 10th century, a small group of Yudghanis lived in Isfahan.

Yehuda Yudghan of Hamadan was influenced by the Islamic Mu'tazalite sect, whose adherents believed that the attribution of traits to God entails the necessity that the Creator have a material essence, which conflicts with the principle of the unity of God. They considered their beliefs to be based on logic and reason. Yudghan also opposed the idea of God having any shape or form. He believed that the fate of Man was neither predetermined nor foreordained by God. In other words, he maintained that Man has free will and that divine justice will grant every good and evil deed its just reward. Yudghan's followers believed that their leader was immortal and would return after his death. Yudghan sought to promote asceticism amongst the Jews. His thinking was more incisive than that of Abu 'Isa, and he used Halakah to offer more serious opposition.

Another Jew who followed Abu 'Isa was Mushka of Qom. Borrowing from Islam, he called his followers to a "holy war" and sought to spread the message of Judaism by the sword. Originally from Hamadan, he went to Qom with his followers and there began a religious uprising, but he and eleven of his disciples were arrested and put to death.

Another Jewish scholar who worked with Yudghan, Judah ha-Parsi, expressed some ideas about the formulation of the Jewish calendar, but little is known of him and his work.

Toward the end of the Omayyid period, a Jewish resident of Syria by the name of Serene, who thought that Jews were being treated more harshly than other religious minorities and that the *shurut* of 'Umar were enforced more strictly against them, claimed to be the instrument of their redemption. He claimed that by freeing Judea he would put an end to Omayyid rule in the region and gained great influence among the Jews who had migrated from the Hejaz to Judea. Believing that observance of Talmudic law prevented Jews from associating with others, he resolved to refute the Talmud. It is

likely that Serene's revolt was connected with the revolts of Islamic sects against the Omayyids.

Among the Omayyid caliphs—notorious amongst the Shi'is for their coldheartedness and oppressiveness—a caliph would occasionally appear who looked kindly upon the Jews. One of these was Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik, the 10th Omayyid caliph, who granted permission for the reconstruction of ruined synagogues and—within limits—gave the Jews more freedom to choose their own occupations.[62] It was during this caliph's reign that the Arabs attacked the south of France, but they were not victorious.

Finally, the Omayyid caliphate began to decline, and it was the turn of the Abbasids, who, with Iranian support, came to power in the middle of the 8th century C.E. The Abbasid period coincides with the anti-Talmudic movement of a group of Iranian Jews. At first, the Jewish religious leaders did not respond to the movement, which had its origins either in Isfahan or Syria. They did not believe that these new ideas would threaten Talmudic beliefs. But the anti-Talmudic movement grew owing to the factious Islamic environment and the contumacy of Jewish leaders.

The Worldwide Karaite Movement

During these days, the *karaim* (קָרַיִם), or Karaites, sprung up in Babylon and reached maturity in Nehavand. The sect was founded by Anan ben David, whose thinking was influenced by Abu 'Isa. The movement was so momentous that Westerners compare it to the Protestant movement in Christianity, although its success was never as great. For a time, the followers of Anan were called Ananites or *ananim.* Anan led the tumultuous movement, which from the outset had an anti-Talmudic character, from 754 to 775 C.E.

When the exilarch Solomon, the grandson of Bustanai, died in 761 C.E., the second Abbasid caliph, Abu Ja'far Mansur, had just come to power. Solomon had no son to succeed him, so succession

[62]Zaydan, p. 145.

passed to his nephew, Anan ben David. But because Anan disagreed with many Talmudic strictures, the directors of the academies at Sura and Pumbedita opposed his selection and appointed his brother, Hanina, as exilarch. Efforts by Anan's supporters to gain the backing of the caliph Mansur failed. On the contrary, through the clout of the religious leaders, Anan was imprisoned and his life put in jeopardy. He was freed through the intercession of a Muslim who argued before the caliph that Anan had been targeted by Jewish leaders because he belonged to a different sect.

For centuries, no divisions had arisen amongst the Jews, and religious life had been peaceful. Previous attacks against the Jewish religion by the popes and Christian priests had sought to shake the foundations of Judaism, but the reaction to these attacks had been increased attention to the enforcement of religious law, and the Talmud was the product of that increased interest. Abu 'Isa Isfahani and his followers' earlier attacks against the Talmud were not taken seriously because they got nowhere with their fantastic claims. But the anti-Talmudic movement of Anan ben David, himself an eminent religious leader, could not be dismissed. Anan wanted to limit the religion to the enforcement of Biblical law. He accused the Talmudists of weakening the Torah and Judaism by introducing new laws. Anan encouraged his supporters to read the Bible. He was opposed to any commentaries and placed personal understanding of Biblical law above the commentaries of the *rabbanim.* Anan's movement diminished the authority of the *geonim,* the leaders of the Hebrew academies, who ranked among the great Jewish religious leaders of the day.

Anan ben David was a well-educated rabbi from a well-to-do family. His followers were few at first. Although it was one of his followers, Benjamin Nahawendi, who gave his ideas form and created the new sect known as the "Karaites," Anan is considered the father of the anti-Talmudic movement. In reality, he rebelled against the rabbis and their pervasive influence on Judaism. His ordinances were recorded in Aramaic and collected in a book known as the

Sefer ha-mitzvot. Anan rejected the validity of the Talmud and considered the Torah to be the only legitimate source of divine law. However, his writings indicate that he endeavored to make religious law conform with the exigencies of his time.

Anan was influenced by the ritual mourning popular amongst the Muslims. He rejected the principles of joy and pleasure which were important to rabbinic teachings and banned observance of the Sabbath and joyous Jewish holidays. He said that as long as the Jewish people remained in exile and the Holy Temple in ruins, the Jews must also be in mourning. Anan established a seventy-day fast which extended from the 13th of Nisan to the 23rd of Sivan. This fast, like the Ramadan fast of the Muslims, was observed only during the hours of daylight. He forbade the practice of medicine, holding that it went against the healing powers of God. He believed that others' interpretations of the Torah were unacceptable and that each person should accept and implement that which he himself understood and inferred from the divine book. Among his sayings was, "Search diligently in the Scripture, and rely not on my opinion."[63]

After Anan, Benjamin ben Moses Nahawendi, an Iranian scholar, strengthened the foundations of the Karaite sect. The term "Karaite" is derived from his use of the terms *Ba'alai ha Mikra* (בַּעֲל חַמקְרא) [People of the Torah] or *Benei Mikra* (Sons of the Torah) to describe the followers of the new sect. This anti-Talmudic and anti-Rabbinic movement spread like wildfire from Isfahan, Hamadan, Nehavand, and Qom to Basrah, Baghdad, Damascus, Jerusalem, Ashdod, Cairo, Turkey, and Russia. Although the fire has finally died down, to this day its flames still flicker here and there.

Benjamin Nahawendi rejected the notions that God had directly created the world or inspired the prophets. He maintained that because God was pure spirit, He could not have any sort of connection with material things, nor could He have created the material world or have descended to the limited confines of Mount Sinai to make

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[63] *EJ*, 2:921.

His voice heard to His servant. Nahawendi believed that God created the spiritual world and the angels, that the material world had been created by one of these angels, and that God had thus indirectly created the material world. Nahawendi apparently agreed with some Talmudic commands but was opposed to blind obedience to religious leaders. He said that each person must be free to conduct his own religious investigation and insisted that mistaken understanding of the religion was not to be reckoned a sin, but he believed that a free religious interpretation should be based on solid principles.

Benjamin Nahawendi was the most prominent Karaite of the 9th century C.E. and led the movement from 830 to 860. He himself was an erudite rabbi who possessed unrivaled knowledge of the Torah, serving as a judge for many years. Nahawendi's *Sefer dinim* (Book of Precepts) contains the laws, both civil and criminal, to which followers of the Karaite sect adhered. Nahawendi also wrote treatises on the writings of the prophets which earned the respect of all Jewish scholars, even those who disagreed with his beliefs.[64] He did not agree with Anan ben David on all matters. Benjamin rejected Anan's belief that each person must come to a personal understanding of the Torah after study and exploration. He believed that such individualism led to religious anarchy. For this reason, he laid down certain principles and called those who followed these principles "Karaites." Another difference between him and Anan was that Benjamin was irreconcilably opposed to the rabbis. Benjamin can be considered a thoughtful and revolutionary philosopher within the sect which he founded. The Arabs called the Karaites *Ashab Anan wa Binyamin* (followers of Anan and Benjamin).[65]

The Karaites may have accepted the call for a "return to the Torah" within their hearts, but in practice they were confronted with the problem of implementing laws without the slightest interpretation or modification to adapt them to contemporary social and economic

[64] *EJ*, 12:771.

[65] *EJ*, 10:767.

life—a difficult task which could not be compatible with the essence of Judaism. Nonetheless, this great religious movement did not suddenly give up.

The third leader of the Karaites—also a Jewish-Iranian religious leader—was Daniel ben Moses al-Qumisi. He was born in the town of Damghan and led the "Mourners of Zion" or *Avelei Zion.* He was the first of the Iranian Karaites to take the group's message to Jerusalem, where he spent the rest of his days. Daniel attributed the long duration of the exile to the deleterious influence of the rabbis.[66]

The Baghdadi scholar and traveler Jacob al-Qirqisani was the greatest proselytizer of the sect among the Jews of the Islamic world. He spread the sect's philosophy among Jewish communities throughout the Islamic countries.

In these times, a mystical sect known as Cabala, which had appeared at the time of Jesus, propounded new ideas and increased religious discord amongst the Jews. The book *Raza rabba* (The Great Secret), produced by Cabalists during this period, was roundly condemned as a work of sorcery and witchcraft.[67] The Cabalists claimed that they could fix their gaze upon God's palace and perform miracles by reciting mystical names and incantations while fasting. They fashioned talismans upon which were written mysterious symbols and the names of God and the angels. The Cabalists of that time believed that any devout person could perform miracles, provided he was indoctrinated into the secrets of Cabala. Cabalistic beliefs became so widespread among the people that when, during the reign of the caliph Ma'mun in 814 C.E., they had to choose between Mar Aaron Ben Samuel, a first-rate Jewish scholar, and an aged Cabalist named Joseph Baraba, who claimed to be in contact with the prophet Elijah, they chose the latter.

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[66] *EJ,* 5:1292.

[67] *EJ,* 10:509.

The turbulence in religious thinking led to many serious disputes among the Jewish communities of Iran. In the year 825 C.E., a dispute arose between David ben Judah and the renowned Karaite, Daniel, over the exilarchy. The caliph was called upon to resolve the dispute, and finally David ben Judah was chosen as exilarch, which position he held until the end of the caliph Mu'tasim's reign in 840 C.E.

During this period, a man by the name of Abu Amram, known as the "Iranian Moses," appeared in the Iranian town of Safran and later took up residence in Tiflis. He was a Karaite and rejected the corporeal resurrection of the dead. His sect was named after him.

Religious innovation among Iranian Jews during the Abbasid period, which was the direct result of sectarianism among Iranian Muslims, reached the point where, in the second half of the 9th century C.E., Hiwi al-Balkhi of the city of Balkh in Khorasan composed a treatise enumerating 200 criticisms of the Bible. During that time, Balkh was the center of a variety of religious beliefs. Apart from Muslims, followers of other faiths, such as Nestorians, Christians, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians, all expressed new religious ideas. Both Karaites and the rabbis (*rabbanim*) were influential in the city. Balkh was at the same time home to the greatest Islamic scholars. Al-Balkhi, himself a free thinker, followed neither the rabbis nor the Karaites but proposed his own radical ideas. As a result, he was condemned by both groups.

Hiwi al-Balkhi's critical work no longer survives. His teachings and beliefs are known from Saadiah Gaon's refutations of his 200 criticisms and from the writings of other authors. These writings themselves bespeak the importance and influence of this Jewish thinker in his own times. During the communist revolution in Russia, al-Balkhi's ideas were employed in anti-religious propaganda.

Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism

The greatest event of the Abbasid period was the conversion in the middle of the 8th century C.E. of the king of the Khazars and his

courtiers to the Jewish faith and the subsequent conversion of others in the region. The Khazars were a courageous tent-dwelling people who lived in the mountainous region between the Volga River and the Caspian Sea. During the Sasanian period, they, along with the Huns, attacked Iran several times. The Khazars, who called their king the *khaqan,* were of the same race as the Turks. By virtue of their conquering spirit, they reached the shores of the Black Sea toward the end of the 7th century C.E. They held the city of Kiev and became a major power neighboring Iranian Khwarazm.

The first Arab campaign against that country ended in a Khazar victory. According to Arab historians such as Ibn Rustah, Istakhri, and Ibn Hawfal, it was after this victory that the king of the Khazars converted to Judaism. After him, other high ranking Khazars and eventually the common people of the region converted to Judaism. The renowned Spanish poet and philosopher Judah Ha-Levi, in his *Sefer ha-Kazari,* reckons this religious conversion to have taken place around the middle of the 8th century, that is, around the time of the Abbasid rise to power. Historical sources indicate that the Khazars successfully defended against the Arabs for many decades.

According to Ibn Fadlan, the land of the Khazars, Khazaria, was considered by its neighbors to be the "cradle of the Jews," but in fact, the newly-Jewish people of that region had no contact with outside Jewish organizations. The Karaite sect had more influence on them than did the rabbis. It must be noted that the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism—in which force of arms and intrigue played no part—was neither complete nor firm. It was not taken seriously by the Jews themselves, and for this reason, the whole religious structure disintegrated after three centuries. In the late 10th century, Khazaria was ravaged first by the Russians and then the Mongols. The Khazars joined their coreligionists of the diaspora, but most of them abandoned their faith. From the very beginning, the Jewish leaders of Iran and the exilarch were unenthusiastic about the Khazars' religious conversion. They probably found that the

conversion was not in accordance with their beliefs and therefore refused to accept its validity.

Among the most important historical documents concerning the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism is the Hebrew correspondence of Hisdai ibn Shaprut, a prominent Jew in Islamic Spain, with Joseph, the *khaqan* of the Khazars. In his letters, some of which are still extant, Hisdai asks the king of Khazaria, "Does there really exist in the world a Jewish kingdom? How did Jews come to be in Khazaria? How did they accept Judaism? Where is the capital of Khazaria? To what tribes do the Khazars belong? Does the king of Khazaria know of the end of the world? Is war cause for failing to observe the sanctity of the Sabbath?"

In his reply to Hisdai, Joseph gives a short account of how the Khazars converted to Judaism: "Bulan, the *khaqan* of the Khazars, had a dream in which he had converted to Judaism. Later, in a raid on Ardabil in Iran, he captured a house of worship which was fashioned after the Tabernacle of Moses in the Sinai Desert. Bulan was attracted by its holiness, especially that of the menorah and the Holy Scriptures. At Bulan's behest, a debate was held there between representatives of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. After the debate, the *khaqan* of the Khazars converted to the Jewish faith."

After converting to Judaism, Bulan drove the idol worshippers, sorcerers, and fortune-tellers from his kingdom. His courtiers and statesmen also converted to Judaism. But it was Obadiah, another king of the Khazars and Bulan's grandson, who made Judaism universal. During his reign, synagogues and schools were built, and the Khazars were introduced to the Torah, the Talmud, and the rabbinic prayers. The *khaqan* Joseph, in his replies to Hisdai's inquiries, writes that he himself was Obadiah's grandson and then makes reference to his capital at Atil. He closes by extending Hisdai an invitation to visit his country.

Benjamin of Tudela, the 12th century Jewish traveler, mentions that he met Jewish Khazars in the cities of Constantinople and

Alexandria. Some had emigrated to Hungary, while a number remained in the Ukraine, especially at Kiev. The Turkish-speaking Karaite Jews who later settled in Crimea, Poland, and other parts of Eastern Europe were descended from the Khazars.[68]

Bulan, the king of Khazaria, converted to Judaism under the influence of Iranian Jews. Khazaria, the land of the Khazars, of which present-day Khiva forms a part, was under Iranian rule during the Achaemenid period. When Xerxes was fighting Greece, Khazars formed part of the Iranian army, but they later created an independent country which lasted for centuries, until the Mongol invasion. Parts of present-day Uzbekistan and Turkestan once comprised Khazaria. The Russian historian Tolstov believes that the Jewish religious leader Isaac Sangari was present at Bulan's formal conversion to Judaism. Ibn al-Athir writes that the Khazars asked Khwarazmia for assistance against the Russians. Al-Maqdisi wrote that the Abbasid caliph Ma'mun marched against them from Gorgan and that successive Russian and Arab attacks finally defeated Khazaria, forcing the Khazars to disperse.[69]

During the reign of Obadiah, the influence on Khazaria of Jews and Jewish religious leaders from Baghdad, Khwarazm, and Khorasan to Greece grew stronger. Followers of the rabbis also became numerous in the land. Because Khwarazm and Khorasan bordered on Khazaria, the Jews of Iran had more influence on them than did Jews from other places. The Jews of Khorasan had long been the foremost commercial travelers of their day and knew the most about religious matters. They traveled to other places to collect contributions for the academies at Sura and Pumbedita. They had contact with the Khazars, too, and were influential in modifying their religious teachings.

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[68] *EJ*, 10:944–53.

[69] Ben Zvi, pp. 243–53.

The Key Role of Jews in the Advancement of the Sciences in Islamic Iran

In the second half of the 8th century C.E., during the reign of the fourth Abbasid caliph, Musa Hadi, which coincided with the reign of Charlemagne, the situation of Jews was improving in Europe. Charlemagne hired some Jewish scholars from Iran—the cradle of Jewish scholarship—to instruct the Jews in his country and also to assist in administrative and political affairs. He used the Jews to promote commerce within his empire and employed them for embassies to the Arab caliphs. In 797 C.E., Charlemagne commissioned the illustrious Isaac as an ambassador to the Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid. Isaac accomplished his mission and returned to the emperor bearing many gifts. Through his Jewish ambassador, Charlemagne was able to secure from the court of Harun al-Rashid the right of Christian pilgrims to visit Bethlehem.

During the reigns of the first four Abbasid caliphs from 753 to 791 C.E., the Jews of Iran and the other possessions of the caliphate lived in peace. They set about their business, and from northern Kurdistan and Damavand to Nishapur, earned a living in agriculture and the raising of livestock. These caliphs paid no heed to 'Umar's pronouncement concerning the Jews and relied heavily upon Jews in some areas.

> When the Caliph Mansur wanted to receive a pledge of loyalty from his son, Mahdi, he consulted his Jewish physician, Furat ben Shehata regarding it. Furat freely expressed his views to Mansur. (Zaydan, 3:247)

During the Abbasid period, as in the past, treatment of religious minorities was inconsistent. One caliph would grant them freedom in their internal religious affairs, and another caliph would severely limit their freedom. The city of Baghdad, near Ctesiphon, was designated as the Abbasid capital during the reign of the caliph al-Mansur (754–775 C.E.). It attracted many Jews. Great Jewish mathematicians and astronomers such as Masha'allah ben Athan attained the highest

levels of academia in that city. Basrah, where the Shatt al-Arab and the Persian Gulf meet, also attracted a large Jewish community during the time of the caliphs. A tributary of the Euphrates was even called the "River of the Jews." It was in the city of Basrah that the first skilled Jewish translators translated Greek works to Arabic, laying the foundations for the advancement of the Islamic sciences. In addition to scientists and literati, Basrah was also home to Jewish religious scholars. The Jews of the city were in touch with the academy at Sura, in support of which they were obliged to pay 300 dinars per annum. When the academy was permanently closed in the tenth century, the director took up residence in Basrah.[70]

During the caliphate of al-Mansur, several sharp conflicts arose between the *geonim* and the exilarch, and even amongst the *geonim* themselves. As in the past, this situation further weakened their positions, and the conflicts grew more intense during the reigns of succeeding caliphs. The backbone of Jewish social structure in Iran and Iraq was the exilarch, whose appointment was confirmed by the caliph. He was responsible for the collection of the annual poll tax from male Jews and the immediate payment of those taxes to the caliph's officials. The Jewish communities of Iran helped the academies at Sura and Pumbedita by sending financial contributions. Documentary evidence mentions annual support from Nehavand, Fars, Khorasan, Isfahan, and other parts of Iran. These documents also mention the refusal of some Iranian Jews to pay annual support to the academies in Iraq (formerly Babylon), adding that after the dispatching of representatives and the intervention of Islamic authorities, they were forced to pay their share.

A chronicler of the Abbasid period, Nathan ben Isaac ha-Kohen, speaks of a conflict between the director of the academy at Pumbedita, Kohen Zedek ben Joseph, and Ukba, the leader of the Jews of Fars province, concerning the Jews of Khorasan.[71] As a result of the dispute

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[70] *EJ*, 4:311.

[71] *EJ*, 13:310.

over Khorasan, which was a source of revenue, Ukba was finally exiled to Kermanshah on the caliph's orders. In Iran, great homage was paid to this religious leader. The leader of the synagogue at Kermanshah opened the Torah before him, and the congregation sang in his honor. Ukba recited a sermon in the synagogue, and the people celebrated his arrival for seven days.[72]

The religious authorities of the two Talmudic schools in Iraq exercised influence over the Jewish communities of Iran through their control of education and the appointment of judges *(dayyanim)* and religious leaders (*rabbanim*). Benjamin of Tudela mentions the selection by the *geonim* of the grand rabbi of Isfahan, Sar Shalom, and the spiritual leader of the Jews of Samarqand, Obadiah ha-Nasi. The Jewish leaders in Iraq made concerted endeavors to strengthen the foundations of Jewish education in Iran. Through their efforts, yeshivas were established at Hamadan and Isfahan, both of which became centers of Jewish culture. The directors of the two academies dispatched eminent instructors to Hamadan and Isfahan to teach the people and to answer their religious questions. During this time, a student of divinity known as David of Hamadan arrived at Baghdad with a letter of introduction from the director of the yeshiva at Hamadan. It is noteworthy that a portion of the correspondence between Hamadan and Baghdad was written in Persian.[73]

Harun al-Rashid (786–809 C.E.) and his son, Ma'mun (813–833 C.E.), who were religious zealots, added new anti-Jewish and anti-Christian laws to the existing ones and strictly enforced them. According to Harun al-Rashid's treasurer, Abu Yusuf, the Jews and Christians belonged to three financial groups, and each had to pay a back-breaking poll tax. If a Jew whose taxes were in arrears died, his family was not allowed to bury his body until the taxes were paid. Life was made very difficult by compulsory loans, grants and other unpaid services required of the Jews. The payment of taxes

[72] *EJ*, 6:1029.

[73] *EJ*, 13:310.

on the one hand and the degradation of the taxpayers on the other hand was excruciating. Jews were driven from agriculture by heavy taxes totaling one fourth of the harvest. Unable to bear this level of taxation, Jewish farmers left the land and were forced to abandon agriculture and animal husbandry, the occupations of their fathers. As they entered other professions, some became wealthy despite the impediments imposed by the ruling government.

Harun al-Rashid, who had a magnificent court at Baghdad and was without doubt the greatest and most powerful of the Abbasid caliphs, heavily persecuted the Jews, and to the extent that he could, lowered their station in society. He raised their taxes and increased discrimination against them, dictating the clothing they were allowed to wear and the professions they were allowed to practice within the Islamic realm. The author of *Tarikh-e 'Arab va Islam* (History of the Arabs and Islam) writes:

> Among the moral shortcomings of [Harun al-] Rashid was his intense suspicion and fury which sometimes so transformed him that he no longer resembled his normal self. He was despotic and exercised absolute rule. (p. 256).

It was he who eliminated the Iranian Barmakite clan, which had exercised the right to teach and serve the Abbasid dynasty.

Harun's reign was a time of misery for the Jews of Iran, who were compelled to wear yellow patches. Nevertheless, the Jews made important advances in the sciences during his reign and made considerable contributions within the organization which the caliph al-Mansur had established to translate the scientific works of all nations into Arabic. Harun al-Rashid died in the year 809 C.E. at the age of 43 in Samarqand, where he had gone to suppress a rebellion, and was buried in a garden in Khorasan.

After Harun, the caliphate passed to his son, 'Abdallah Ma'mun (813–832 C.E.), whose mother was Iranian. A dispute arose between Ma'mun, who lived with his mother in Khorasan, and his brother Amin, who lived in Baghdad. Their dispute ended in warfare, and

Amin was finally defeated and killed by soldiers from Khorasan. Ma'mun wanted to move the Abbasid capital to Khorasan rather than return to Baghdad, but because of disturbances in Kufa and the Hejaz, he appointed Imam Reza, head of the house of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and imam of the Shi'is, to take his place in Khorasan while he returned to Baghdad to quell the disturbances.

In these times, the rift between the Rabbanites and Karaites, which had always weakened the Jews, surfaced once more in a new form. When the two parties brought their complaint to Ma'mun, he recognized the Karaite leader as the *nasi* of the Jewish community and withdrew the privileges of the chief rabbi. The leaders of the Karaite community, known as *nesi'im,* were the successors of Anan ben David. In 825 C.E., Ma'mun issued a decree granting any two Jews, Christians, or Zoroastrians the right to establish an organization and to choose their own leader. The grounds for the issuance of this decree is believed to be the very same dispute between the two Jewish leaders over the exilarchy.

During these years, both the Jews of Iran and the Jews of the Holy Land were faced with enormous difficulties. As always when war broke out amongst the Islamic states, they were subjected to countless persecutions. Although Ma'mun was an enlightened caliph, influenced by his advisors, he followed the same path as his father and oppressed the Jews to the greatest extent possible.

The scholarly centers of the world in those days were Baghdad in Asia, Qayrawan in Africa, and notably, Marv and Balkh in old Khorasan. A Jewish mathematician who knew both Arabic and Hindi presented an Indian mathematician to the caliph. Together they translated a book which included the four primary arithmetic operations from Hindi to Arabic. Another Jew from Mazandaran, known as Sahl ibn Rabban, translated Ptolemy's *Almageste* on astronomy from Greek into Arabic. Sahl ibn Rabban was a renowned astronomer and mathematician. His son, 'Ali ibn Sahl ibn Rabban al-Tabari, was a skilled physician who wrote works on medicine. Because of internal disturbances, he went to the city of Rayy, near Tehran,

where he taught Zechariah Razi. Because of his profound knowledge, he found his way into the courts of governors. He first served as secretary to Mazyar ibn Qarin, the governor of Tabaristan. After a short time, he became one of the most distinguished courtiers of the caliphs al-Mu'tasim and al-Mutawakkil at Baghdad and converted to Islam. Among his medical works is *Firdaws al-hakim* (Paradise of the Wise), an abridged work in seven parts which familiarized the Arabic-speaking reader with Indian medicine.[74] That the son of Sahl ibn Rabban was the teacher of Zechariah Razi is supported by Islamic historians. 'Abdallah Razi writes:

> 'Ali ibn Sahl Rabban is the son of a Jew of Tabaristan. He was the physician of al-Mu'tasim and al-Mutawakkil, and al-Mu'tasim forced him to abandon his father's religion and become a Muslim. Muhammad Zechariah Razi learned medicine from him, but the student's fame and learning exceeded that of his teacher. Among his works is the book *Hifz al-sahhah* [Preservation of Health]. (Razi, p. 259)

The status of Jews worsened during the reign of the bigoted caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–861 C.E.). In accordance with a decree he issued in 850 C.E., prosperous Jews were required to wear a yellow cone-shaped cap, and Jewish servants and beggars were required to wear a yellow patch on their chests and backs. Four years later, Jewish women were required to wear little bells on their feet. Every so often, this caliph issued a new decree concerning Jewish ghettos, taxes, and daily affairs.

Al-Mutawakkil—whose loathing of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his family was such that he ordered the demolition of the shrine of Imam Husayn and even the plowing over of the land on which it had stood—undoubtedly bore unlimited hostility for terrestrial enemies, especially the Jews. He even decreed that Jews must paint a portrait of Satan on their door frames.[75] After two years as caliph,

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[74] *EJ*, 2:632.

[75] Sykes, 2:14.

al-Mutawakkil converted synagogues and churches to mosques. Among his edicts was an order requiring that Jews pay ten percent of the value of each commercial transaction to the caliph. He rescinded the powers and privileges of the exilarch and withdrew official recognition of that office.

From this time forward, most scholarly Jewish writings were composed in Arabic. Jews of the Arab countries, as well as Iranian Jews, contributed great scholars to the world, among whom was Isaac bin Sulayman Isra'ili, who was born in 845 C.E. An Egyptian physician, philosopher, and linguist, he served the Fatimid caliphs. He wrote eight volumes on medicine which were translated into various languages.

Despite all the restrictions, oppressive decrees, and narrow-minded degradations, many Jews adapted themselves to the social values of the times and attained high stations. They became physicians and researchers. They played an important role in economic life, and because of the dearth of literate people they even attained high government office. That the regulations governing Jewish attire were occasionally reinstated is itself testimony to the fact that they were not uniformly enforced throughout the entire period.

A perusal of scattered Arabic and Hebrew sources on the period of the Islamic caliphate shows that Jews earned their livelihoods in a wide variety of trades and professions such as weaving, dye casting, goldsmithing, pharmacy, shopkeeping, and trading in spices and antiques. When the Abbasids made their capital at Baghdad in 762 C.E., the economic stratification of Iranian-Babylonian Jewry was completely transformed. With the spread of urbanization in the Islamic East and the progress of international trade, the well-to-do class of Jewish merchants also became more concentrated in key Iranian cities such as Ahvaz, Shiraz, Rayy, and Ardabil.

From the 10th century onward, because of the growth of commerce, Jewish merchants became more involved in banking and finance and gradually specialized in that profession. Progress was so great that they even provided financial services to the caliphs and viziers.

Jewish court bankers made financial transactions, managed deposits, transferred funds from one place to another with promissory notes or letters of credit, made large loans to the caliphs, viziers, court, and army, and provided other banking and credit services. But they did not always live in complete comfort and freedom. Their assets were sometimes seized and they were put to death.

During the first six centuries of the Islamic caliphate in Iran, the Jewish diaspora unpredictably expanded eastward. According to Islamic historians and geographers and Jewish religious sources—and also based on the accounts provided by contemporary travelers in their itineraries—there were Jews living in virtually every Iranian city. Jews travelled from Nishapur, Balkh, Ghazna, Kabul, Sistan, Marv, Samarqand, and Bokhara as far afield as the vast land of China.

PART SIX

Tahirids, Saffarids, Samanids, Daylamites, and Ghaznavids (847–1038 C.E.)

Chapter Eleven
Iran, Battlefield of Nationalists

The absolute supremacy of the Arabs over Iran lasted for nearly two centuries. After the death of Harun al-Rashid, the foundations of Abbasid power were shaken, and the splendor of the Abbasid caliphs came to an end. At that time, a conflict over succession to the caliphate arose between the Iranian-born Ma'mun, who lived in Khorasan, and his brother Amin, who lived in Baghdad. Khorasani warriors, who under Abu Muslim had played a crucial role in the overthrow of the Omayyids and the installation of the Abbasids, once again took to the field. Tahir ibn Husayn rushed to the aid of Ma'mun and his army in Baghdad. Amin was removed from the political stage and eliminated.

The Abbasid caliphate continued, but uprisings began in Iran which, though mostly of an independence- and freedom-seeking nature, were not far from being sectarian. At this juncture, the flames of war between the Shi'is and the Sunnis were fanned. Sunni rebels still bore allegiance to the caliph: although they sought autonomy, their goal was not independence from Baghdad. In contrast, the Shi'i rebels sought both autonomy *and* independence. Although the Iranians had converted to Islam, they did not want to be dominated by foreigners. It may be said that to some extent, the movements of the time sought the separation of religion and state. An important characteristic of the period, which lasted until 1038 (the dawn of Seljuq rule), was political disunity in Iran. One part of Iran was ruled by the caliphs of Baghdad, another part by independence-seekers, and yet a third part by other Iranian patriots. It is remarkable that the quest for independence led to the disintegration of national unity. Another aspect of these movements—a geographic one—was that they arose primarily from Khorasan, Sistan, and beyond the Elborz Mountains—areas which had remained relatively untouched by Arab depredations. The main locus of these rebellions was Khorasan.

The Arabs, who with the help of Islam had made their way to Iran, considered themselves lords and masters of the Iranians and did not refrain from oppressing them. Not only religious minorities, but also Iranians who had converted to Islam were oppressed and forced to pay additional taxes. The ubiquitous Arab governors exploited farmers and plundered the fruits of their labors, ruining Iran's agricultural economy. Sometimes farmers and merchants fled to other provinces to escape the tyranny of their Arab overlords, and those provinces later became hotbeds of Iranian rebellion. Iran had to and did rise up against the foreigners in a number of places under various leaders.

The Tahirids ruled in the province of Khorasan for half a century, from 827 to 879 C.E. After the capture of Baghdad by Ma'mun and Tahir ibn Husayn, Ma'mun appointed Tahir governor of Khorasan in gratitude for his assistance. For a time, the Tahirids owed allegiance to the caliphs of Baghdad, but they later raised the flag of autonomy. Their center of power was Marv. Because the head of the Tahirid dynasty was appointed by the Abbasid caliph, most historians do not consider their government a "national" one.

The reign of the Saffarids, who were Shi'is, lasted from 868 to 1014. The founder of the Saffarid dynasty—considered the first pure Iranian dynasty since the advent of Islam—was Ya'qub ibn Layth Saffar [the Coppersmith] Sistani. His rebellion differed greatly from that of Tahir. Although Tahir was Iranian, he was the caliph's appointee, and as soon as he spoke of autonomy, the caliph removed him from power. But Ya'qub rose from among the people, and his rebellion was national in character.

Ya'qub's birthplace, Sistan, had fallen to the Arabs during the time of 'Uthman. Before Ya'qub, Sistan had been defeated each time it had attempted to free itself of foreign rule. Ya'qub the Coppersmith built up a force of frustrated Iranians and Kharijites who had sought refuge in Sistan and started an independence movement which was ultimately victorious. He first marched on Sind and Afghanistan and called the idol-worshippers to Islam. He seized

much booty from the Buddhists. He then seized Khorasan, Kerman, Gorgan, Tabaristan, Fars, and Khuzestan. In 886 C.E., after eighteen years of struggle for Iranian independence, he was ready to attack Baghdad when he suddenly died. After Ya'qub's death, his brother, 'Amr ibn Layth, succeeded him.

The Samanids ruled from 900 to 1010. This dynasty had no beloved hero as its founder. The Samanids lived in a village near Samarqand called Saman. The local emir was called "Saman Khoda," or "chief of the village of Saman." They were originally Zoroastrians, but later converted to Islam. Because of the reliability of the people of Saman, the Abbasid caliph had appointed some of them as governors of the border areas of Balkh, Samarqand, Herat, Bokhara, and Khojand, which had become important in international trade. He later bestowed other government offices upon them. They shared a portion of the commercial taxes they collected with Baghdad and thus built for themselves a secure foundation. The Samanids were able to convert some Turks to Islam. The progenitor of the dynasty was Isma'il Samani, the governor of Bokhara, who took control of Khorasan and gradually added other provinces to his realm.

> Although Isma'il [Samani] was free of corruption, devout, and showed unusual respect for religious scholars, because of his religious zeal he was in fact merely the loyal obedient servant of the Abbasid caliphs. For this reason, he and his successors never displayed the Iranian national sentiments and desire for independence of the Saffarids and Daylamites. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 224)

During the reign of the Samanids, the Persian language experienced a rebirth, though it continued to be written in the Arabic alphabet. Poets such as Rudaki and Shahid Balkhi laid the foundations of Persian prose and poetry during this period. The Samanids, who from their capital governed a large portion of Iran for over a century, were Sunnis.

The government of the Daylamites lasted from 937 to 1068. Arab incursions in Daylam, which comprised portions of present-day Gilan and Mazandaran, came later than in other areas. The Elborz

Mountains formed an impenetrable barrier which made it difficult for the Arabs to enter northern Iran. Indeed, the people of Daylam long remained safe from incursions by Damascus and Baghdad. When Islam did penetrate the area, power was in the hands of Shi'i leaders, and thus Daylam did not come under Sunni rule. The revolt of the people of Daylam was carried out by two factions: one under the Ziyar dynasty and the other under the Buyeh dynasty. Both groups were fearless warriors.

Mardavij ibn Ziyar left the Alids of Tabaristan in 937 C.E. and joined forces with the emir Nasr Samani in Khorasan, with whose help he took control of Gorgan and Tabaristan. Mardavij and three sons of Bu Vahid—known as Buyeh the Fisherman—'Ali, Hasan, and Ahmad, were in short order able to raise the flag of independence over a large portion of Iranian territory. Qabus Voshmgir (978–1012), the most renowned of the Ziyarids, authored the *Qabusnameh,* a classic sociopolitical work. The renowned scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni lived during his time. After the death of Mardavij, 'Ali ibn Buyeh governed Isfahan and Fars, his brother Hasan ruled Rayy and Hamadan, and the third brother, Ahmad, ruled Kerman and Khuzestan. Of all the rebels of these two centuries, the house of Buyeh was the most ambitious. They not only dominated all of Iran, they also took Baghdad, which no longer possessed its former power, and made the caliph their puppet. In effect, the caliph came under the protection of the Buyeh dynasty. The caliph granted Ahmad the title of "Mu'izz al-Dawlah" (Glorifier of the State), 'Ali the title of "'Imad al-Dawlah" (Pillar of the State) and Hasan the title of "Rukn al-Dawlah" (Foundation of the State). These titles bespeak the great influence of the Daylamites on the Islamic state.

Beginning in 962 C.E., Mu'izz al-Dawlah was the first person to observe special mourning rites on the 10th of the month of Muharram in memory of the martyrs of Karbala. 'Azud al-Dawlah (Strength of the Religion) the Daylamite, the son of Rukn al-Dawlah, ruled the vast kingdom—which not only included a large portion of Iran but also Iraq—after the death of his father and two uncles. 'Azud al-

Dawlah was one of the great political leaders of Iran. He beautified the tomb of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib at Najaf. He built schools, libraries, and hospitals. He wrote poetry and was a patron of the arts. The Daylamites, who ruled most of Iran for 131 years, were fanatic Shi'is.

The Ghaznavids governed Iran from 972 to 1203. They were at first Samanid governors of Turkish extraction who turned their small armed units into a formidable military force and delivered a setback to the Samanids. They originated in Ghaznin, or Ghazan (presently known as Ghazna) in Afghanistan, gained strength in Khorasan, and in 992 C.E. occupied Bokhara. The Ghaznavids were new to Islam. Their most prominent member was Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (998–1030). In 1029, he took Rayy, which had been controlled by the Daylamites, but advanced no further. In 1010, Mahmud received the title 'Ayn al-Dawlah (Eye of the State) from the caliph and was appointed governor of Khorasan in place of the Samanids. He conducted several campaigns against India, took much booty, and converted some people to Islam. The conquest of Sumnat and the destruction of its idol temple is one of his famous victories. There were hundreds of poets in his court, the greatest of whom was Iran's epic poet, Firdowsi. After the Seljuq campaign against Iran brought an end to Daylamite rule, the center of power in Khorasan was not spared. In 1038, with the attack of the Seljuq Tughril, that which the Iranoligist Vladimir Minorsky called "the Iranian intermezzo"[76] drew to a close.

[76] *EB*, 21:892.

Chapter Twelve
Silence in the Storm of Rebellion

History is silent on the fate of the Jews during the nearly two centuries that Iran (especially the northeast portion of the country) was caught up in a storm of independence-seeking rebellions. It is unclear whether documentary evidence concerning them has vanished, or if it was never written in the first place. Nonetheless, there are incontrovertible historical facts from which inferences concerning the status of Jews in Iran can be drawn.

One of these historical facts is that the center of the Iranian rebellions was Khorasan, whose borders were broader then than they are today and in which a large Jewish population lived—Jews who remained true to their religion and who had long provided financial support for the religious centers in Babylon.

The second fact is that behind the scenes in these freedom-seeking movements—some of which, like the Saffarids, Samanids, and Daylamites, had a distinct national character and drew warmth from the fire of Iranian patriotism—there were also strong sectarian overtones. In other words, the war was not only against foreigners: it was also a Shi'i-Sunni war. This religious dimension subsumed the national dimension in some instances, such as the rise to power of the Ghaznavids.

Another important fact is that although the link between Babylon (the worldwide nerve center of Jewish society) and Ctesiphon had been severed, Jewish Iranians were still in contact with Babylon. Because all of the former greater Iran (of which Babylon had been a province) was administered by the caliphs, the Jews of the region maintained solidarity with Babylon, and that Jewish center's stature in the leadership of Iranian Jewry was by no means diminished. In other words, despite what had happened to Babylon, the national schools, and the post of the exilarch who had resided there, the place retained its direct influence on Jewish-Iranian society. It is on

the basis of these facts that we can endeavor to lift the veil of obscurity which shrouds the Jews of the period.

Jewish history on the international level provides testimony to the fact that whenever war has broken out between two nations or between two peoples—be the struggle political or religious—Jews caught in the middle have been the victims of atrocities. It is doubtful that the period presently under consideration constitutes an exception to this trend. In times when every so often some Iranian faction was rebelling under the banner of some valiant leader and going to war against the enemy, and in times when at each turn blood was being spilled in uprisings, it is only natural that the lives and property of Jews could not remain secure. Undoubtedly, the militant Iranians needed money and resources to expand their power. The Jews, as "People of the Book," were legally required to pay the *jizya* poll tax to the state and were also forced to give to the armed militants. Apart from that, Jews who had amassed fortunes in Khorasan—the center of domestic commerce and crossroads of trade between East and West—had no respite from violations against their property rights. Whenever rebellion spread, more Jews from other parts of Iran were subjected to extortion and plundering. The institution of the poll tax underwent a transformation during this period. Up to the time of the national rebellions, Jews had paid taxes in return for "protection" and the right to life. They were now forced to pay greater sums in order to be exempted from service in the Islamic army. Those who did not comply lost both their property and their lives.

As the rebels could make no progress empty-handed and the expenses of the soldiers were immense, they were zealous in amassing wealth. Jurji Zaydan writes:

> When the Iranians set their minds on independence, they amassed greater wealth. For example, after the death of Ya'qub Layth Saffar there was 50 million dirhams and 4 million dinars in the treasury. (Zaydan, 5:146)

The Jews living simply and perhaps in poverty in Kurdistan, Damavand, Fars, Hamadan, and other parts of Iran lived in relatively greater comfort both because they were out of range of the militants' arrows and had amassed no fortunes to relinquish. Because the Jews were heavily burdened by 'Umar's *shurut* and hoped that the coming to power of the Shi'is would mean the end of those inhumane regulations, they publicly and privately supported the struggle of the Shi'is against the Sunnis, although it was taking place under the guise of national uprising. But not only did the Shi'i victory fail to bring peace and tranquility to this religious minority, it sometimes worsened their plight. For example, the Iranian Buyid dynasty, which captured Baghdad in 945 C.E. and dominated the country for a century, knew nothing of religious tolerance.

The Shi'i Buyid dynasty was so zealous that they made life unbearable not only for the religious minorities, but also for Sunni Muslims, and fanned the flames of hatred between Shi'is and Sunnis. It was during the reign of these Shi'i potentates that the privileges and powers of the exilarch were revoked and the Jews forced to pay the *jizya* poll tax directly to Muslim officials, who exerted extreme coercion upon them.[77] The conflict between the two Muslim factions—the Shi'is and the Sunnis—under the banner of freedom and independence brought about an anti-Semitic rivalry between the two. It reached the point where even Firdowsi, the Sunni poet and author of the Iranian national epic, subjected the Jews to the scourge of derision and disrespect.

It bears repeating that neither the situation in Iran nor in the Islamic Empire remained static throughout this period. Treatment of Jews and their prominence in the arts and sciences was not consistent. Just as intense factionalism in Islam led to the creation of new extremist Jewish sects, in the same manner, during this scientific and literary renaissance of the Islamic world, when first-rate poets, scientists, and scholars were born in Iran, and especially during the

[77] *EJ*, 8:1446.

Samanid and Ghaznavid periods, the Jews of the Islamic Empire were also able to establish themselves in the fields of science, literature, and philosophy.

It must not be forgotten that during these years—while Europe was going through those dark times of ignorance known as the Middle Ages and the last light of science and wisdom faded from the continent and the all-powerful Church deemed any scientific inquiry a satanic act—the Islamic world, including the Jews living in the Islamic countries, was achieving spectacular advances in science, philosophy, medicine, mathematics and astronomy, making lasting contributions to the world. The Jews, who centuries before the advent of Islam had established two highly respected academies at Babylon, promoted education more than ever. During the Islamic period, eminent scholars arose within the Jewish community in the caliphs' realm, two of whom we will discuss: Saadiah in Babylon and Hisdai in Islamic Spain.

Transfer of the Center of Judaism from Babylon to Spain

Saadiah ben Joseph (882–942 C.E.) was the greatest scholar and Jewish leader during the period of the *geonim.* He was born in Egypt, and according to Mas'udi (890–947 C.E.), learned Arabic in the Holy Land and became acquainted with Greek philosophy. He mastered the Torah in his youth, and, as he had a magic way with words, gained a following. In 921 C.E., he wrote a refutation of Karaism, and from 922 until the end of his days he resided in Babylon, becoming director of the academy at Sura. After achieving great successes in the administration of that academy, he had a disagreement with the exilarch. His works in Hebrew and Arabic are among the most authoritative Jewish histories. Saadiah, though not considered the architect of the rabbinic texts, was certainly among their originators. He was the first person in the Jewish world to comprehend the concept of "book" in its true, modern sense and to write "books." His works on Jewish religious law, covering topics ranging from

commercial transactions to inheritance, are well-organized and meticulously written. He first introduced each topic. He then explained the details, and then embarked upon a precise analysis backed by Talmudic proofs. He is the first Jew to write significant books on the Jewish religion and legal code in Arabic. In his *Six Hundred and Thirteen Commandments,* this Jewish philosopher lucidly presents the fundamental religious precepts of the Jewish faith.

Saadiah also laid the foundations of Jewish philosophy. He wrote works on knowledge, creation, the nature of God, and the nature of Man. He was a master of the Hebrew language and wrote three volumes on its grammar and literature. He translated the Torah into Arabic and wrote a commentary on it. In the tractate *Beliefs and Opinions,* he refutes Hiwi al-Balkhi's criticisms of the Bible. Because the Jewish prayers were widely scattered in those times, he collected them all, from the beginning to the end of the year, in his Arabic *Kitab jami' al-salawat wa al-tasabih* (Book of Prayers). This book became widespread in the Arabic-speaking countries, but was gradually forgotten until a century ago, when its Hebrew translation was published under the title *Siddur Rav Saadiah Gaon.* Saadiah was unrivaled in his advancement of Jewish studies and authorship of Jewish texts until the advent of Maimonides.

> Maimonides disagreed with his philosophical views in many fundamental points, but states "were it not for Saadiah the Torah would have well-nigh disappeared from the midst of Israel" (*Iggeret Teiman*). (EJ, 14:554)

Saadiah was the last Jewish scholar of the East, and Hisdai was the first Jewish scholar of the West.

Hisdai ibn Shaprut (915–970 C.E.), who was previously mentioned in the context of the Khazars' conversion to Judaism (p. 182), lived in Spain. Hisdai was the first prominent Jew to attain high office in Islamic Spain. He first taught medicine and later became court physician to the caliph 'Abd al-Rahman III (912-961 C.E.) in Spain. He conducted medical research and translated works related to that

discipline from Greek to Arabic. Such was the caliph's esteem for and confidence in Hisdai that he appointed him customs inspector, one of the most important state offices of the day. Some time thereafter, he appointed Hisdai as his minister of commerce. Hisdai's influence in the Spanish government grew to the point that he was chosen to act as an intermediary between Islamic Spain and Christian Rome. He brought Roman statesmen to Spain, where a treaty of peace and friendship was concluded between the two countries. The state appointed Hisdai leader of the Jewish community in Spain. He succeeded in elevating the status of Jews in the country to the point that they eventually no longer needed Babylon and its rapidly declining religious centers.

> The news of a Jewish community in the land of the Chazars, which he received from ambassadors from Khorasan, was very welcome to him, especially when he learnt that a Jewish king was on the throne there... He rejoiced when the news was confirmed by the Byzantine ambassadors, who gave him the additional information that the reigning king of the Chazars was called Joseph, and that they were a powerful and warlike nation. (Graetz, 3:220)

It is from that point that Hisdai's correspondence with Joseph began. A papyrus fragment of one of his Hebrew epistles concerning Khazaria is one of the most important historical documents on that country during this period.

During this heated time of rebellion, the status of the Khazar Jews also changed. In 913 C.E., the Russians attacked Iran by way of Khazaria, raiding Daylam, Gilan, Tabaristan, and Azerbaijan. The caliph commissioned Ibn Abi al-Thaj to repulse the Russians, and he defeated them. The aggressors retreated by way of Badkubeh.

> Masudi writes of "many Jews who came to the king of the Khazars from the towns of the Muslims." (*EJ*,:16:40)

It is probable that most of these Jews were from Khorasan and were seeking refuge in a safer place. The Jews of Balkh, Bokhara, and Samarqand who sought refuge in Khazaria became the neighbors of

other Jews who had sought refuge in Uzbekistan during the reign of King Peroz (458–475 C.E.). The main commercial artery between the Islamic world and Atil, the Khazar capital, passed through Uzbekistan, and it also drew Jews to Khazaria. Based on the writings of Mas'udi, the travel of Jews to Khazaria and their mingling with the Khazars may be considered a historical event of this period of Iranian Jewish history. Meanwhile, Khazar Jews migrated to northern Iran to escape domestic unrest.

The settling of Khazar Jews in the northern provinces of Iran made contact possible with the Jews of Isfahan—whose numbers at that time were estimated by Nasir Khusrow at fifteen thousand—and other Iranian cities with Jewish communities. A number of Khazars took up residence among the Jews of Isfahan. In any event, in 965 C.E., a Russian prince named Sviatislav went to war against the Khazars, took the cities of Kiev and Samandar, and captured the Khazar capital, Atil. The Khazars were put to flight and set out from Crimea in various directions, seeking refuge and linking up with other Jews of the diaspora. The contemporary Iranian scholar, Kohan Sedegh, writes in his memoirs:

> A man named Abraham ben Simi was dispatched by the king of the Khazars to Isfahan to purchase a Torah, because in those days, Iran was the center of Torah-copying, but they would not sell one to him. This information is from the writings of the Karaites which were found in a synagogue in Daghestan.

Regarding Babylon and its ties with Iranian Jews during this period, we may mention the illustriousness of that province owing to the presence of Saadiah and its permanent fall as a religious center that resulted from clashes among the leaders and the transfer of the focal point of Judaism from that province to Spain. In 917 C.E., after the exilarchy had remained vacant for more than a year at the behest of the director of the academy at Pumbedita, it was bestowed by popular demand upon David ben Zakkai, the brother-in-law of R. Ukba. The director of the Pumbedita academy did not officially

recognize David's position, and a violent dispute raged for five years between David in his capacity as exilarch (*resh galuta*) and Kohen Zedek as director of the Pumbedita academy (*rosh yeshiva*).

The well-to-do who had influence in the courts of the governors and caliphs were staunch opponents of the exilarch and wanted to see the position abolished. With the help of his supporters, David ben Zakkai was able to amass considerable financial support from Iranian Jews and shore up his position. During those days, the academy at Sura was declining, and the only rival facing the director of the Pumbedita academy was the exilarch. David ben Zakkai, in order to save the old yeshiva at Sura, departed from tradition and declared that directorship of the academy need not be hereditary. In 928 C.E., he appointed the scholar Saadiah ben Joseph—the son of a simple Egyptian laborer who later became one of the greatest sources of Jewish pride—as director of the academy at Sura. With the help of donations he collected, Saadiah set about reinvigorating the academy. By that time, Saadiah's writings against the Karaites and Hiwi al-Balkhi had demonstrated his courage and deep understanding of the Torah to the *rabbanim* and *hakhamim*.

Through his vision and steadfastness, Saadiah reinvigorated the declining academy at Sura. He brought the instructors back and increased the number of students. He dispatched emissaries to Iran, Spain, Egypt, and Baghdad to gather donations, and in short order made Sura the equal of Pumbedita. Amazingly, it was not long before a new dispute arose—between David ben Zakkai and Saadiah ben Joseph. A variety of theories have been proposed regarding the origin of the dispute, one of which holds that it was over inheritance law. Certainly one factor was that each sought a higher position in the Jewish leadership and to be the last word in answering the religious inquiries which flowed into Babylon from all directions. Whatever the origins of the dispute, its consequences were grave. The powerful continued to oppose David ben Zakkai. The disputes split Jewish society. Some supported the one whilst others backed

the other. Finally, the wealthy succeeded in having David ben Zakkai removed from the exilarchy and installed his brother, Joshia Hasan, as exilarch. The disputes became exacerbated. Finally, the caliph was called upon to arbitrate. In 932 C.E., the caliph al-Kabir unseated Saadiah as director of the academy at Sura and placed him under house arrest. He exiled Joshia Hasan to Khorasan and returned the exilarchy to David ben Zakkai. David's return as exilarch prevented the upper class from exploiting the exilarchy to further their personal interests.[78]

Saadiah wrote, "The Jews of Khorasan no longer follow the religious leaders of Babylon." There is no doubt that the reason the Jews of Khorasan decided not to follow them was the banishment of David ben Zakkai's brother, Joshia Hasan, to that region, their acute awareness of the weakness of the Babylonian Jewish leaders, and the specter of deep divisions in the religious centers of that province.

According to a legend which must be considered part of Jewish folk literature (and for the truth of which historians have no documentation) when, after several centuries of educational and religious activity, the academy of Sura began to deteriorate, especially from a fiscal standpoint, four Babylonian religious leaders set out on a voyage to gather donations, but were captured at sea near Italy. One of the four, Moses ben Hanokh, was a native of Iran and had a beautiful wife. So as not to be touched by the brigands, Moses' wife cast herself into the sea and drowned. But all four of the clerics were sold into slavery. Each was taken to a different city, and, after a time, each founded a yeshiva in that city. The Iranian Moses ben Hanokh was taken to Cordoba, Spain, and there established a celebrated yeshiva. This popular tale, known in Jewish folklore as the "Story of the Four Captives," indicates that in the minds of the Jewish populace, the growth of the Jewish centers of Spain was rooted in the focal point of Judaism, Babylon. Such a belief, though based on legend, seems sound. The yeshivas founded by the

[78] *EJ*, 5:1358;14:543.

four rabbinic scholars are incontrovertible realities of Jewish history. Moses ben Hanokh established a yeshiva in Spain which in short order became the equal of the educational institutions of Babylon. Hisdai ibn Shaprut, who endeavored to keep the Jews of Spain independent of the Babylonian Jews, strongly supported him and his undertakings.[79]

The status of the two Jewish figures, Saadiah and Hisdai, in the Islamic world of which Iran was a part, bespeaks the imbalance between the status of Jews in the East and West. Saadiah and Babylon were declining; Hisdai and Spain were ascending. This same imbalance was manifested in Iran, albeit in a different form. The successive movements and contemporaneous national governments, as well as the influence of the Islamic caliphate on Iran, created a multifaceted situation. Although the Abbasid caliphs who ruled from Baghdad no longer exercised their former influence, especially after the advent of the Daylamites, they nonetheless remained in power. During the short reign of the caliph al-Muhtadi, which lasted from 867 to 868 C.E. and coincided with the uprising of Ya'qub ibn Layth Saffar, the status of Jews began to improve. During this period, thanks to the support of the vizier, 'Ubaydallah ibn Sulayman, several Jews were appointed to state office.

The Karaite sect, whose foundations had been laid in Iran, grew during these times. Their supporters and missionaries spread their doctrine and took their struggle against the Rabbanites and supporters of the Talmud to the cities of Mesopotamia, the Promised Land, Syria, Egypt, and Crimea. They gained great influence in some cities. One advocate of this religious sect who attained special prominence was Eldad Dani. He claimed to be of the Tribe of Dan and to have travelled in Africa and Spain. He claimed to have in his possession commandments in Hebrew dating from the time of Moses, according to which the Talmud was invalid and the Karaites were correct.

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[79] *EJ*, 12:417.

During these same years, a new Islamic sect, the Isma'ilis, was founded. The adherents of this sect were Shi'is belonging to the family of 'Ali who considered Isma'il, the brother of Imam Musa Kazim, to be the seventh imam rather than Musa. They had an attachment to the number seven and believed in only seven imams. This sect, to which Hasan bin Sabah later adhered, gained many followers. It became very powerful, and Isma'ili states were established in Iran, Tunis, Egypt, Syria, and Arabia. The method employed by Hasan bin Sabah, leader of the Isma'ilis in Iran, to spread his precepts and beliefs, was to assassinate political, religious, and military figures and create terror among the masses. The Isma'ili Assassins killed anyone they believed to be against them.

Among the people with whom the Isma'ilis did not have good relations were the Jews, whom they persecuted everywhere and whose lives and property they endangered. Although the Jews of Iran were numerous, they faced a bleak future because of Isma'ili propaganda against them. While the Jews of Spain were entering a period of security and freedom, Iranian Jews found themselves in a quandary because of the new Isma'ili ascendancy. Matters were out of the hands of the caliphs resident at Baghdad. Chaos and disorder reigned in parts of Iran, including some Jewish-inhabited cities. Christian Europe was also going through dark times. Only Islamic Spain took the place of Babylon.

The tolerance of the Omayyid caliphs of Spain, who still reigned in that country, transformed the land into a cradle of asylum for Jews. Many Jews who were persecuted both in the East and in the West sought refuge there. It is not without cause that some Spanish cities of the period were considered "Jewish" cities. This notwithstanding, the Jews did not live in comfort throughout the entire Islamic period in Spain. They were on several occasions the targets of persecutions and massacres. Their yeshivas and synagogues were closed. They were prevented from conducting religious ceremonies, and when they were coerced into changing their religion, they attacked the northern, Christian-inhabited portion of Spain. In Europe

on the one hand, and in Asia on the other, events were transpiring which would have a profound impact on the lives of Jews from the Ural Mountains, Turkestan, India, Iran, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Syria to the nations of Europe.

Throughout the period of uprisings and civil war, Iranian Jews did not stop contributing to society, despite all difficulties. Jewish bankers continued their activities in the courts of the Daylamites and Ghaznavids, and they were very influential in the financial affairs of nations. During the reign of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi (997–1030), Isaac Yahudi of Ghaznin served in the sultan's court and was entrusted with the administration of the lead mines of Khorasan.[80]

During this period, the most important—apart from what befell the Jews, the conditions they faced, the advances they made, and the hard times they put behind them—event was the end of Sura and Pumbedita and the abolition of the office of the exilarch in Babylon, who was the supreme religious authority for Iranian Jews. After David ben Zakkai's brother was exiled to Khorasan and the Jews of that territory became aware of the confusion which reigned in Babylon, news from the great religious center was very disheartening.

The conflicts, which some time earlier had erupted between the directors of the academies and the exilarch and created a rift in the community, reached their climax and accelerated the disintegration of that center, for which there were also external causes. The power and prestige of Baghdad—which attracted wealthy and prominent Jews—had an effect on the decline of the religious centers of Babylon and brought the period of the *geonim* closer to its end. Even a great man such as Sherira ben Hanina (906–1006), who in 968 C.E. was appointed director of the Pumbedita academy, could do nothing. Sherira was said to be descended from David, and generation after generation of his family had been leaders of Jewish society. At the time he became director of the Pumbedita academy, both that insti-

[80] *EJ*, 13:310.

tution and the Sura academy were facing difficult days. During his lifetime, Sherira's fame and scholarly eminence saved the great school from oblivion, and students once again came from near and far. At the same time, Sura—which after Saadiah had once again fallen upon hard times—was desperately struggling to survive. Through Sherira's efforts, the Talmud once again became a reliable source for resolving religious questions. Religious inquiries poured in from other cities and other lands, and the replies, based upon rabbinic teachings, helped to stem the relentless Karaite flood. Sherira himself was very active in responding to religious inquiries. In response to a question he was asked in 987 regarding the composition of the Mishna and the Talmud, he wrote a book which has become an important source on the history of the Jewish faith. Approximately half of the written responses of the directors of the academies to religious inquiries were written by him and his son and successor, Hai. These written replies were compiled and in later centuries became an important reference source for Jews throughout the world. Most of the replies in this compilation concern Talmudic laws and regulations. Two years before his death, Sherira appointed his son, Hai, director of the academy at Pumbedita. Sherira died at the age of one hundred.[81]

Ultimately, the blows dealt by the social environment upon these two great Jewish academies—which had governed Jewish life in Iran for several centuries—had their effect. Clashes between the leaders of Jewish society compounded the problem, and combined, these factors pulled the rug out from under these two great cultural foundations. Sura forever closed its doors in 1034 and Pumbedita in 1038. The closure of the Pumbedita academy was accompanied by another blow—the arrest of Hezekiah, the grandson of the former exilarch David ben Zakkai, who was to have assumed the position of exilarch. Hezekiah was arrested and imprisoned on the orders of the caliph's vizier, Jalal 'Abdallah. His sons fled to Spain, and the

[81] *EJ*, 14:1381.

family became well-known under the name of Ibn Dawud. In 1040, while the Ghaznavids governed Iran, Hezekiah was executed in Babylon on the caliph's orders.

Thus Babylon—a province which before Islam had been in every way part of Iran and which after Islam remained part of Iran culturally and socially—gave up its role as the center of Judaism, and the banner of Jewish stewardship was raised in the province of Andalus in Spain.

PART SEVEN

SELJUQS, MONGOLS, AND TIMURIDS (1038–1502 C.E.)

Chapter Thirteen
Iran, Abattoir of Monotheists

Iran, still smarting from the painful wounds inflicted by the swords of the Arabs who descended from the west, was trying once and for all to shake off the domination of the caliphs of Baghdad and secure its political independence, when new, relentlessly crippling attacks came from the east and north. The Daylamites—pure-blooded Iranians and devout Shi'is—had succeeded in this endeavor, but the Sunnis suddenly entered the field with the backing of the caliphs of Baghdad and pushed the Daylamites aside. It was now the turn of the Seljuqs—or Ghuzz Turks—to rule Iran. Tughril I took Nishapur in 1038 and declared himself king. A short time later he prevailed over Gorgan, Tabaristan, and Khwarazm, and it was not long before the Seljuqs' realm spanned from Turkestan to the Mediterranean Sea. The issue of religion and the caliph's support for the Seljuqs played a very important role in this huge victory. Ghazzali, a political theoretician of the Seljuq period, believed that the success of the enfeebled caliph depended upon a powerful dynasty with the support of which he could save the Islamic world, which was confronted with the daily expansion of Christianity in Europe. The Seljuqs were fervent Sunnis and strongly supported the caliphs of Baghdad. The extent of this people's fanaticism and their treatment of non-Sunni peoples was such that from the very outset of their reign, a number of Shi'i clerics from Khorasan sought refuge in Mecca.

In 1055, the Seljuq Tughril Beg entered Baghdad. In gratitude for his services, the caliph placed upon his head a precious double-crown symbolizing the East and the West and declared him "King of the East and West." According to the treaty concluded between the caliph al-Qasim (1037–1075) and the new king of Iran, the Seljuqs were entrusted not only with the task of protecting Sunnism, but also propagating it and promoting Islamic orthodoxy to the greatest extent possible. This dynasty was not Iranian, but they made their

capital in Iran, and it was from that territory that they governed the other nations under their rule. Tughril Beg died in the year 1063.

From the very beginnings of the Seljuq dynasty, Iranian statesmen found their way into the governmental apparatus, one of the greatest of whom was known as Nizam al-Mulk. King Alp Arslan appointed him vizier, which post he held for fifty-five years. He is the author of the *Siyasatnameh* (Book of Politics). In 1092, this politically adroit vizier was assassinated by Isma'ili guerillas near Nehavand. Alp Arslan went to war with Byzantium, and in 1071, with his victory over that nation, he opened the gates of Asia Minor to the Seljuq tribes. He established a strong power base there which some time later gave rise to the Ottoman Empire. The world-renowned poet 'Umar Khayyam lived during these times. In this same period, the Seljuq commander Atsiz of Khwarazm captured Jerusalem. The last of the Seljuq kings was Sultan Sanjar, who before becoming king had governed Khorasan.

In 1153, the aged Sanjar was arrested, and he spent the rest of his days in prison. After Sanjar, the cities of Khorasan fell to the princes of Khwarazm, who were also of Turkish origin. Iran was once again politically divided. The preservation of the vast empire created by the Seljuqs required a powerful military force. As the Seljuq dynasty grew weak and order declined, each prince in every province of the empire laid claim to the title of king. From among all these rebellions, the Khwarazmids, who were related to the Seljuqs and fought them head-to-head, emerged strongest. The military commander Atsiz assembled an invincible military force in northern Iran and founded the Khwarazmshahid dynasty, which lasted until 1223. In other parts of Iran, with the enfeeblement of the Seljuqs, the "Atabegs"—actually experienced advisors who had guided young Seljuq princes in affairs of state—each raised their guidons and took to the field as sole contenders for power. The Atabeg Eldeguz dynasty was established in Azerbaijan and the Salghur dynasty in Fars. Each of these dynasties established an independent government. The government of the Azerbaijani Atabegs lasted into the first half of the 13th century and

that of the Atabegs of Fars into the second half of that century. The Khwarazmshahids were able to expand their dominion, but they were finally defeated by the Mongols.

> When the Mongols began their campaign against Iran, Abu Bakr bin Sa'd bin Zangi submitted, and [with the payment of a heavy ransom] by his son, Sa'd bin Abu Bakr, to Hulagu Khan, the land of Fars was spared despoliation and massacre. (Razi, p. 210).

The Atabegs of Fars were patrons of poetry and literature. Sa'di of Shiraz (d. 1292) lived during the time of Abu Bakr bin Sa'd bin Zangi (1231–1260) and dedicated his *Bustan* to him.

Genghis Khan's invasion of Iran is one of the most painful chapters in the country's history. The Mongol Temuchin, upon becoming chief of his tribe at the age of thirty, assumed the name "Genghis." The mighty leader of the great Mongol nation conquered Beijing and occupied China in 1215. He sent a commercial and political delegation of over 100 persons to Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khwarazmshah, but before they reached his court they were massacred and their property looted. Genghis Khan dispatched others to Iran to investigate and demand an apology, but they, too, were murdered. The Khan of the Mongols burned with rage and unleashed the vast Mongol hordes upon Iran. Besides revenge, Genghis Khan undoubtedly also had economic motives for attacking Iran. The religious exigencies of Iran rendered the lightning-fast advance of the bloodthirsty Mongols all the easier. The caliph at Baghdad was Muhammad Khwarazmshah's adversary, and because of his simplistic support of Sunnism, the caliph refused to come to his defense. Moreover, the various Islamic sects were constantly feuding. Even among Sunnis, the factions could not suppress their mutual antipathy. During the Mongol attack, the Hanafis supported them to defeat the Shafi'is. Once the Mongols had succeeded in this endeavor, they turned against the Hanafis. By exploiting religious animosities, the Mongols succeeded in eliminating both factions.

The Isma'ilis had for years turned people's sweet dreams to nightmares, paving the way for the invaders to extirpate the sect. Genghis Khan's onslaught, accompanied by wanton destruction and massacre, lasted a full seven years, from 1220 to 1227. He first took Bokhara, Samarqand, Khojand, Herat, Tus, and Nishapur. In Bokhara he put all the men to death and took the women and children captive. In Samarqand he put three thousand artisans and professionals to work serving him and his entourage and executed the rest. In Gurganj, the capital of Khwarazm, he kept several thousand artisans as slaves and marched the rest out to the wilderness and executed them. He unleashed a bloodbath in Balkh by dividing the people into groups of one hundred and assigning each to an executioner. The Mongols disemboweled and beheaded people. They also drove the people of Marv out of the city. Every three hundred persons were handed over to an executioner, and young and old were put to death. The Mongols mercilessly slaughtered the inhabitants of and looted each city they captured. They continued their attacks upon Quchan, Tabaristan, Rayy, Qom, Qazvin, Khorramabad, Nehavand, Zanjan, Maragheh, Khoy, and Salmas. In each place they committed cold-blooded massacres. They set fire to mosques and libraries. They ransacked buildings, plundering the wealth of the Iranians. Sometimes they even showed no mercy to animals. Many cities were turned into vultures' nests. In every city the Mongols occupied in both East and West, they sowed the seeds of terror and reaped a harvest of death. Genghis died in 1227, and anarchy and disorder reigned in Iran for several decades. The Mongol functionaries sought out other adventures and cruelties. During this period, Sufism—a sort of Islamic mysticism—gained widespread popularity as a cure for the social ills and a salve for the painful wounds resulting from this national tragedy.

The second Mongol attack, led by Genghis Khan's grandson, Hulagu Khan, took place in 1256. Hulagu completely destroyed the Isma'ili stronghold known as the Fortress of Death and in 1258 seized Baghdad. He seized al-Mu'tasim, the last Abbasid caliph,

and sentenced him to be kicked to death. Eastern Iran came under the rule of "infidels." Hulagu himself was a Buddhist. He made Iran his seat of government and founded the Ilkhanid dynasty there. The blows suffered by Iran during the first years of the second Mongol attack were devastatingly painful. Here, too, it is difficult to attribute all troubles to the renewed Mongol attack. Internal contradictions, the weakness of the national government, the ineptness of the political leadership, religious confrontations, and national disunity all contributed to the suffering. The Ilkhanids made their capital at Tabriz in the province of Azerbaijan. The renewal of national forces was rendered difficult by social turmoil and the lack of a unified legal code. The caliph—the manifestation of Islamic law—had been eliminated, and there was no source for Islamic legislation. Hulagu Khan made the code of Genghis Khan the legal foundation of the Ilkhanid state, and the kings who succeeded him and converted to Islam either added Islamic laws to it or replaced it entirely with Islamic law. It was a long time before the Iranians were able to regain their strength and play a role in the administration of the country. Continual ruinous revolts made it impossible for Iranians to rise up and stand in unison. Even after the Mongol victory, the religious factions did not desist from their squabbling. The taxes imposed on peasants by Islamic law and the code of Genghis Khan disrupted agriculture just as they had during the period of Arab domination, and peasants were exploited by landlords. In addition to these economic pressures, the backs of the Iranian people were further bent by increasing social and political pressures. Arghun Khan—who was enthroned in 1284 and ruled for seven years—executed the scholar Khwajeh Shams al-Din Muhammad Jovayni, who was from a pure-blooded Iranian family, at the instigation of his enemies.

The Ilkhanid Mahmud Ghazan (1295–1304) abandoned the Buddhist faith. He converted to Islam in Tabriz on Nowruz[82] of the first

[82]TN: Nowruz (literally, "new day"), the first day of the month of Far-

year of his reign. He issued a decree calling upon the Mongols to convert and declared Islam the official religion of the Ilkhanid state. From that point forward everything changed, and the flames of religious prejudice burned hot. During these times, a Jewish-born scholar was appointed vizier. Taxation was put in order. Manufacturing was promoted, unused lands were cultivated, and the military and administrative classes emerged. Incentives were established for domestic and foreign trade. Buildings were erected, irrigation canals were dug, and medicinal plants and fruits were exported. Observatories were built, and in short order, the damage done in decades past was repaired. An attempt was even made to reconcile the differences between Shi'is and Sunnis. The downfall of the caliphs of Baghdad unloosed the shackles of the Iranian Shi'is. The end of the Ilkhanids was similar to that of the Seljuqs. "By killing their sagacious Iranian viziers, who had ably administered the country, the Ilkhanids brought about their own decline."[83] Once again, every prince in every locality declared himself ruler. The Jalayirids, Chopanids, Muzaffarids, and Sarbedars all set up governments. In 1393, Tamerlane swept them all aside.

Tamerlane, who considered himself to be descended from the house of Genghis Khan, attacked Iran in 1380. Several years later, he defeated the Jalayirids and seized their capital, Baghdad. He then took Asia Minor and Syria. He died in 1405 while on a campaign against China. Tamerlane's sieges of Sabzevar, Isfahan, Borujerd, Khorramabad, and other Iranian cities were accompanied by merciless bloodshed. Tamerlane, himself Muslim, did not refrain from killing other Muslims. In Sabzevar "he piled up two thousand live prisoners and bound them together with mud and brick to form a tower."[84] In Borujerd, many prisoners were cast into deep chasms

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vardin, is the first day of the Iranian solar calendar. It coincides with the spring equinox. In 1295 C.E., Nowruz fell on Sunday, the 20th of March.

[83]Razi, p. 363.

[84]Razi, p. 365.

upon his orders. In Isfahan, he erected a pyramid of severed heads. In his transgressions he knew no bounds. The people—vulnerable and terrified after the earlier Mongol attacks—seldom resisted.

After Tamerlane's death, his empire was divided among his sons. Tamerlane's eldest son, Shahrokh (1405–1447), took control of Iran, and from his beautiful capital city of Herat struggled to unite all of the provinces of Iran. Shahrokh was a God-fearing king and a lover of the arts. He was bent on atoning for his father's destruction. Herat became a center of poetry, literature, and the arts. During the reign of Shahrokh Shah, Sunnism once again grew in strength and built up a force against which the Shi'i Safavids would later rise. Despite Shahrokh's efforts, Iran was not united, and after him, the Turcomans set up separate governments in northern and eastern Iran. The Kara Koyunlu, or Black Sheep dynasty, who were enemies of the Timurids, gained power in Azerbaijan. The Ak Koyunlu, or White Sheep dynasty, raised their flag over Diyarbekir. In 1501, Isma'il Safavi put an end to Turcoman rule.

Although the several centuries of the Seljuqs, Mongols, and Timurids were full of black and bitter events, they nonetheless saw the continuation of the scientific and literary movement which had begun in Iran after the advent of Islam. Science, poetry, literature, philosophy, astronomy, history, and geography reached such levels that the period is considered one of the finest in Iranian history. Anvari, Nizami, Khaqani, Mowlavi, Sa'di, Shabestari, Amir Khosrow Dehlavi, Khayyam, Hamdallah Mustawfi, and Nasir al-Din Tusi are among the great names that flourished in these times, and each is a source of Iranian national pride. The scholars, mystics, sages, historians, writers, and poets left a legacy of enduring masterpieces. Chinese and Mongol art influenced Iranian art, especially painting. Brocade and silk-weaving, new designs in carpet and rug-weaving, calligraphy, new architectural styles (especially for the reconstruction of ruined buildings), and other arts of the times became widely popular. Scholarly, literary, and artistic works were perfected in a now peaceful Iran.

Chapter Fourteen
New Ups and Downs

The period from the rise of the Seljuq Tughril in Iran in 1038 to the advent of Isma'il Safavi in 1501 was full of ups and downs for the Iranian nation, and, of course, for the Jewish minority. On the one hand, there were sudden attacks, mass executions, and devastating despoliation; on the other hand, there were flourishing cities, new construction, renovation, and the establishment of law and order. Most importantly, the student of history is presented with the continuity of the scientific and literary renaissance in Iran. In other words, the events of these times did not move forward uniformly—there were many twists and turns. Such a situation at first seems astonishing, but indeed, there would be cause for astonishment were it otherwise, for the period under consideration spans more than four and a half centuries. This same phenomenon, that is, the waxing and waning of social movements, can be observed among Jews during this period. There are times of killing, looting, captivity, and flight from one land to another; there are times of religious freedom, equality with the majority, attainment of high political, administrative, and scholarly office; there are other times of persecution, restrictions, threats, oppression, denigration, downfall, and disintegration.

During the period of the Seljuq Turks (1038–1157), whose empire spanned from the borders of China to the shores of the Mediterranean, the freedom of Iranian Jews was limited. Seljuq rule over Iran had a strong religious character. They were Sunnis, and maintained cordial relations with the caliph at Baghdad. They established Sunnism in Iran, where, prior to their rise to power, the Shi'is had had the upper hand for nearly two centuries. Inevitably, serious conflict arose between Sunnis and Shi'is, leading to the persecution of religious minorities. The Seljuqs implemented a new system of land ownership which became the model for Eastern feudalism. They leased arable lands to wealthy Muslims, and the Jews were

inescapably excluded from either owning land or engaging in agriculture.

The Seljuq's Sunni fervor was such that they sometimes forced Shi'is to convert to Sunnism. Whenever their warriors captured a Christian territory, they massacred the priests and burned the churches. The Jews of Iran saw a revival of the *shurut* of 'Umar. Their denigration and persecution by Sunni extremists was officially sanctioned. The Seljuqs had not yet subjugated all of Iran when they proclaimed seemingly new edicts concerning the Jews and Christians. During this period, religious tolerance came to an end in Iran. Islamic historians make reference to the enforcement of 'Umar's restrictions on non-Muslims. Jews did not dare show themselves in the streets without a yellow patch. In 1026, wine taverns—a source of income for Christians and Jews—were closed. This action was repeated two centuries later. In the words of Hafez:

> *They shut the doors of the tavern—God be not pleased*
> *For they shall open the doors of the house of falsehood and hypocrisy*[85]

In 1085, they decided to fully enforce all the strictures of 'Umar's *shurut,* including the prohibition against Jews and Christians praying aloud or having homes higher than those of Muslims. In 1091, the caliph of Baghdad, who had religious authority over Iran, decreed that Jewish women, in addition to the colored patches, must wear shoes of a different color on each foot; one was usually black and the other red. Islamic historians, in making reference to these circumstances, acknowledge that members of the religious minority converted to Islam to escape denigration and persecution. Nonetheless, by 1105 these laws were less rigidly enforced, and 'Umar's *shurut* were set aside, to be trotted out again another day.[86]

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[85]TN: Persian:
در میخانه ببستند خدایا مپسند که درِ خانه‌ی تزویر و ریا بگشایند

[86]*EJ,* 14:1136.

It is interesting that despite all the persecutions stemming from religious intolerance which were unleashed against the Jews, the state apparatus could not have been without need of their expertise. The vizier Nizam al-Mulk, while directing in his *Siyasatnameh* that non-Muslims should not be appointed to state office, maintained cordial relations with several Jewish bankers and financiers. Meanwhile, during the same period, wealthy Jews sometimes became the targets of groundless allegations, and their property was confiscated while they themselves were subjected to torture. This period also unleashed a wave of Jewish migration within the Islamic world as Jews seeking to protect their lives and property migrated from city to city, province to province, and kingdom to kingdom. Among the prominent Jews who emigrated from Iran in the 11th century, that is, during the Seljuq period, was a merchant named Banu Sahl al-Tustari, who emigrated to Egypt. He attained high office in the court of the Fatimid caliphs and exercised considerable influence in the Egyptian government.[87]

Benjamin of Tudela on the Jews of Iran

Prior reference has been made to the greatest Jewish-Spanish traveler of the Middle Ages, Benjamin ben Jonah of Tudela. This famous traveler began his journey a short time after the end of the Seljuq state. He came from Tudela, a Jewish town in Spain. His itinerary, the original title of which is *Sefer ha-massa'ot* (ספר המסעות), is among the most esteemed of historical sources and has been translated into several European languages. Most historians consider it reliable. Although non-Jews addressed him as "Rabbi," he held no religious office. He began his journey c. 1159 and returned to Spain in 1172. Benjamin of Tudela travelled to Babylon and Iran. His writings are lucid and animated, and his writing style is influenced by the Bible. He depicts each place he visited and its environs with his characteristic methodicalness. He first mentions the size of the Jewish population,

[87] *EJ*, 13:310.

describes the economic situation, and enumerates the occupations practiced by Jews, from dye casting, weaving, and glass-blowing to money-changing, trading, and peddling. He was particularly interested in Jewish cultural, scholarly, and literary activities and described as many of them as he could for posterity. His visits to synagogues and his zeal in gathering information about the religious beliefs and sects of the Jews—of which there were at least two in his day, the Karaites and the Rabbanites (somewhat akin to the Catholics and Protestants of later centuries in Christianity)—characterize his endeavor to provide a comprehensive view of the status of Jews in those times.[88]

Benjamin of Tudela, who traveled to Iran after the death of Sultan Sanjar, the last of the Seljuq kings, writes:

> To the mountains of KHAZVIN on the river Kizil Ozein, a journey of eight and twenty days. Jews of those parts, who live in Persia at present, report that the cities of Nisapur are inhabited by four tribes of Israel, viz. the tribe of Dan, that of S'bulan and that of Naphthali, being part of the first exiles who were carried into captivity by Shalmanesser king of Ashur as reported in scripture: he banish'd them to Lachlach and Chabor, the mountains of Gozen, the mountains of Media.
>
> The extent of their country is twenty days journey and they possess many towns and cities in the mountains, the river Kizil Ozein makes their boundary on one side, and they are subject to no nation, but are govern'd by their own Prince, who bears the name of Rabbi Joseph Ararkh'la Halevi.
>
> Some of these Jews are excellent scholars, others carry on agriculture and a number of them are engaged in war with the country of Cuth, by way of the desert. They are in alliance with the Caphar Tarac or infidel Turcs, who adore the wind and live in the desert. This is a nation, who eat no bread and drink no wine, but devour the meat raw and quite unprepared; they have no noses, but draw breath through two small holes and eat all sorts of meat, whether from clean or unclean beasts, and they are on very friendly terms with the Jews.

[88] *EJ*, 4:435.

About eighteen years ago, this nation invaded Persia with a numerous host and took the city of Rai, 'which they smote with the edge of the sword' took all the spoil and returned to their deserts. Nothing similar was seen before in the kingdom of Persia; and when the king of that country became acquainted with this occurrence, his wrath was kindled, for, said he: in the time of my predecessors no host like this ever issued from the desert; I will go and will extinguish their name from the earth. He raised the war-cry in the whole empire, collected all his troops and made inquiry whether he could find any guide, that would show him the place, where his ennemies [*sic*] pitched their tents.

A man was met with, who spoke thus to the king: 'I will show thee the place of their retreat for I am one of them' and the king promised to enrich him if he would act thus and show him the way. Upon inquiry how many provisions would be necessary for this long way through the desert, the spy answered: take with you bread and water for fifteen days, as you will find no provisions whatever before you reach their country. This advice being acted up to, they travelled fifteen days in the desert and as they met with nothing that could serve for sustenance, they became extremely short of provisions and men and beasts began to die. The king sent for the spy and thus spoke to him: 'what becomes of thy promise to show us our enemy'? no other reply being made than; 'I have mistaken my way' the head of the spy was cut off by the kings command.

Orders were issued to the host that every one, who had any provisions left, should share them with his companion, but every thing eatable was consumed, even the beasts, and after travelling thirteen additional days in the desert they at last reached the mountains of Khazvin, where the Jews dwell.

They arrived there and encamped in the gardens and orchards and near the springs, which are in the vicinity of the river Kizil Ozein. It being the fruit season, they made free with it and destroyed much, but no living being came forward. On the mountains however, they discover'd cities and many towers and the king commanded two of his servants to go and to inquire the name of the nation which inhabited these mountains and to cross over to them, either in boats or by swimming the river. They at last discover'd a large bridge, fortified by towers and secured by a

locked gate, and on the other side of the bridge a considerable city.

They shouted on their side of the bridge until at last a man come [*sic*] forth, to inquire what they wanted or to whom they belonged. They could not, however, make themselves understood and fetched an interpreter who spoke both languages; the queries being repeated they replied: we are the servants of the king of Persia and have come to inquire, who you are and whose subjects. The answer was: we are Jews, we acknowledge no king or prince of the gentiles, but are subjects of a jewish prince. Upon inquiries after the Ghuzi, the Caphar Tarac or infidel Turks, the Jews made answer: 'verily they are our allies and whoever seeks to harm them, we consider our own enemy.'

The two men returned and reported this to the king of Persia, who became much afraid, and particularly so, when after a lapse of two days the jews sent a herald to offer him battle. The king said: 'I am not come to make war against you, but against the Caphar Tarac or infidel Turks, who are my enemies; and if you attack me, I will certainly take my vengeance and will destroy all the Jews in my own kingdom, for I am well aware of your superiority over me in my present position; but I entreat you to act kindly and not to harrass me, but allow me to fight with the Caphar Tarac my enemy and also to sell me as much provision as I want for the maintenance of my host. The Jews took counsel among themselves and determined to comply with the request of the king of Persia for the sake of his jewish subjects. The king and all his host were consequently admitted into the country of the Jews, and during his stay of fifteen days he was treated with most honorable distinction and respect.

The Jews however meanwhile sent information to their allies, the Caphar Tarac, and made them acquainted with the above-mention'd circumstances; these took possession of all the mountain passes and assembled a considerable host, consisting of all the inhabitants of that desert and when the king of Persia went forth to give them battle, the Caphar Tarac conquer'd, killed and slew so many of the Persians, that the king escaped to his country with only very few followers.

One of the horsemen of the retinue of the king enticed a Jew of that country, of the Name of R. Moshe, to go along with him; he

> carried this man along with him into Persia and there made him a slave. Upon a certain day however, the king was the spectator of sports, carried on for his amusement, and consisting principally of the exercise of handling the bow; among all competitors none excelled this R. Moshe. The king enquired after this man by the help of an interpreter and was told what had happen'd to him and how he had been forcibly carried away from his country by the horseman, upon learning which the king not only immediatly granted him his liberty, but gave him a dress of honor, composed of silk and fine linen, and many other presents. A proposal was also made to R. Moshe, that if he would renounce his religion for that of the Persians he should be treated with the utmost kindness, should gain considerable riches and be made the king's steward, but he refused and said 'I cannot make up my mind to any such step'. The king however placed him in the house of the Rabbi Sar Shalom of the Ispahan congregation who in the course of time became his father-in-law. This very R. Moshe related all these things unto me. (Benjamin of Tudela, pp. 129–36)

The Advent of David Alroy, "the Iranian Messiah," during the Crusades

The growing power of the Seljuq Empire consternated Byzantium, whose capital was at Constantinople. Additionally, the holy city of Jerusalem was in the hands of the Muslims. Small numbers of Christian pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem from Europe, but intolerant Muslims put obstacles in their paths. The Byzantine emperor, hoping also to thwart Seljuq penetration in Asia Minor, reached out to the Pope for help. The highest Christian council, along with the Pope, proclaimed, "Christians of the world! Rise up to save Jerusalem and defeat the Muslims!"

The papal decree of Pope Urban II, summarized above, was proclaimed in 1095. Throughout Europe, a fervor was stirred up which lasted until 1270. No less than eight major conflicts, known as the Crusades, ensued during this period at different times and under different popes. Jerusalem was at times in the hands of the Muslims

and at times in the hands of the Christians. During this 175-year period the flames of war sometimes burned brightly and at other times lay hidden beneath the ashes. The Jews of Europe faced countless massacres and numerous holocausts. Knights, rogues, the illiterate, and the unemployed, along with other lovers of Christ and crucifix-carrying soldiers, joined the Pope's army and unleashed the bloodiest "jihad," or religious war, in the history of mankind.

On 15 July 1099, when Jerusalem first fell to the Christian crusaders, the Muslim and Jewish inhabitants of that city were all massacred. The Crusades were not merely a war between Islam and Christianity, but a war between East and West as well. Every day, its scope became wider and encompassed new countries. Jerusalem passed from hand to hand among the rivals like a precious ball. In 1212, Pope Innocent III issued an edict that children should also enter the field of battle. In 1244, when the Khwarazmshahids were moving westward because of the Mongol invasion, they were able to capture Jerusalem with the help of the Egyptians.[89]

The real victims of these wars, especially as the name "Jerusalem" was involved, were the Jews of Europe. Christian leaders stirred up the masses against the Jews, reviving the old rumor about the circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus. The terrified Jews fled (apart from those living in Islamic Spain) to the East and took up residence in Asia Minor and Russia. In the East it was demanded of the Jews that they convert to Islam, while in the West demands were made that they convert to Christianity, in both cases in exchange for their safety. However, in Europe if such a demand was made it was by good fortune, because usually they simply gathered the Jews in the synagogues and burned them. "The Crusaders...slayed children in their mothers' arms and tossed their body parts in the air."[90] The Muslim kings who fought in the first and third Crusades were Seljuqs, one branch of whom reigned in Syria.

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[89]*EB*, 3:764.

[90]Amir 'Ali, *Tarikh-e 'Arab va Islam*, p. 323.

Because of internal and external insecurities and the massacre of Jews in Iran and Europe—from which there seemed to be no escape—the Jews of Iran believed that the end of the world was at hand, and in those oppressive "last times" they awaited the arrival of the messiah. As had happened dozens of times before in bleak and torturous times, a false messiah suddenly appeared, this time in Azerbaijan, which was then an important Jewish population center. The original name of this "messiah," who created a widespread messianic movement amongst the Jews, was Menahem ibn Solomon. Menahem was from 'Amadiyah, a city near Mosul, but he lived in Azerbaijan. He claimed descent from the ten tribes of Israel whom the Assyrian king Shalmaneser exiled to the land of the Medes and who had retained their Aramaic language. 'Amadiyah was an important Jewish center, and the *rabbanim* of that city had considerable influence in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. The city had several synagogues.

Menahem called himself "David" in order to associate himself with King David and to demonstrate his suitability for kingship to the Jewish people. His family name was al-Duji, which later became al-Ruhi and then al-Ruy. In historical sources he is known as "David Alroy." His movement probably began in 1121 among the Jews who inhabited the highlands of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, but some historians place the beginnings of his movement somewhat later. David Alroy's messianic movement grew out of the first of the Crusades. The dreadful conditions of this time of mass execution of Jews made it easier for the surviving victims to accept the claim that the messiah had appeared. Menahem's father, Solomon, himself claimed to be the prophet Elijah, and the young Menahem, following his father's claim, called himself the messiah. Menahem ibn Solomon, or David Alroy, was tall and handsome. He was an outstanding student at the Baghdad yeshiva and was familiar with Islamic customs and traditions. He excelled in Jewish mysticism. In addition to all this, he was a master of magic and sleight of hand. Father and son proclaimed to Jews of all lands near and far that "the time has come

for the Almighty to gather his people, Israel, and return them to Israel." In preparation for the return, these two called the people to much fasting and prayer. The Iranian government took David's movement seriously and proscribed it. The importance of the Jewish population and the significance of this messianic resurgence is reflected in the Iranian government's harshness of action and the ruling monarch's reaction. The sultan, fearing an insurrection that might actually make David a king and challenge his position, threatened to exterminate all the Jews in all the provinces of Iran if David's movement did not cease.

David Alroy was forced to return to his birthplace of 'Amadiyah. But he did not stop his activities, and he made 'Amadiyah his base of operations. It was not long before he, encouraged by the Yazidi Muslims, set his mind to seizing control of the city. To do this, he exploited his repertoire of magic tricks, which the populace believed to be "miracles." It was rumored in the city that when Menahem was bound in chains by the king of Iran, he miraculously escaped from the king's clutches. David Alroy summoned all the Jews of Iran, especially those who lived in Azerbaijan, to come to 'Amadiyah and see for themselves how he was governing the city. News of his activities and claims reached Baghdad in the form of rumors. Two of his enemies forged an epistle in his name in which he promised the Jews that in the night they would all be transported to Jerusalem on the wings of angels. The mention of Jerusalem, especially during the crisis of the Crusades, was enough to inspire a conspiracy against him. Before he could take another step, he was murdered in his sleep.

Many of his supporters in Azerbaijan believed in him and remained loyal to this "messiah" even after his death. They came to be known as "Menahemites." Benjamin of Tudela places his death around the year 1160, during the reign of the Khwarazmshahids. Benjamin Disraeli's novel, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy,* published in the 1830s, is

based upon this story.[91] Samuel ben Yahya al-Maghribi, author of *Ifham al-Yahud* (Silencing the Jews), who visited Tabriz toward the end of the 12th century, mentions the followers of David Alroy, who were still active in that city.[92] In his travelogue, Benjamin of Tudela describes Menahem ibn Solomon's movement in detail:

> Five days thence to 'AMARIA with five and twenty thousand Jews. This congregation forms part of those, which live in the mountains of Chaphton and which amount to more than one hundred, extending to the frontiers of Media.
>
> These Jews are descendants from those, who were originally led into captivity by the king Shalmanesser, they speak the syriac language and among them are many excellent thalmudic scholars; they are neighbours to those of the city of 'Amaria, which is situated within one days journey of the empire of Persia, the king of which they obey and to whom they pay a tribute. This is collected by a deputy and amounts here as well as in all mahomedan countries to one Amiri of gold—equal to one and one third golden Maravedi—for each male inhabitant of the age of fifteen and upwards.
>
> About fifteen years ago there rose a man of the name of David El Roy of the city of 'Amaria, who had studied under the Prince of the captivity Chisdai and under 'Eli the president of the college of Geon Ja'acob in the city of Bagdad and who became an excellent scholar, being well versed in the mosaic law, in the decisions of the rabbins, and in the thalmud; understanding also the profane sciences, the language and the writings of the Mahomedans and the scriptures of the magicians and enchanters. He made up his mind to rise in rebellion against the king of Persia, to combine the Jews who live in the mountains of Chaphton and with them to engage in war with all gentiles, making the conquest of Jerusalem his final object.
>
> He gave false signs to the Jews by false miracles and assured them: 'the Lord has sent me to conquer Jerushalaim and to deliver you from the yoke of the gentiles;'[93] Some of the Jews did believe

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[91] *EJ*, 2:750.

[92] *EJ*, 15:693.

[93] Undoubtedly, the large number of Jews living in the region, news of

in him and called him 'Messiah.' When the king of Persia became acquainted with these circumstances, he sent and summoned David into his presence. The latter went without fear and when they met he was asked: Art thou the king of the Jews? to which he made answer and said: I am! Upon this the king immediatly commanded, that he should be secured and put into prison in that place, where the captives are kept who are imprisoned for life, situated in the city of Dabaristan, on the banks of the Kizil Ozein, which is a broad river.

After a lapse of three days, when the king sat in council to take the advice of his nobles and officers respecting the Jews, who had rebelled against his authority, David appear'd among them, having liberated himself from prison without the aid of anyone. When the king beheld him he inquired: who has brought thee hither or who has set thee at liberty? to which David made answer: my own wisdom and subtility, for verily I neither fear thee nor all thy servants.' The king immediately commanded that he should be made captive, but his servants answer'd and said: we see him not and are aware of his presence only by hearing the sound of his voice. The king was very much astonished at David's exceeding wisdom, who thus addressed him: I now go my own way! and he went out followed by the king and all his nobles and servants to the banks of the river, where he took his shawl, spread it upon the water and crossed it thereupon. At that moment he became visible and all the servants of the king saw him cross the river on his shawl; he was pursued by them in boats *but without success,* and they all confessed, that no magician upon earth could equal him. He that very day travelled to 'Amaria, a distance of ten days journey by the help of the Shem Hamphorash[94] and related to the

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the Crusades, defeats suffered by both sides, and the horrific massacre of Jews moved him to take this action. Meanwhile, Jewish anxieties in Iran inclined them to believe his words with all their hearts.

[94]TN: Here, Asher provides the following footnote to his English translation: "Shem hamphorash, literally, the explained name, the letters of the word Jehova in their full explanation, a mystery known but to very few, and by which wonders may be executed. The wonders performed by Jesus are ascribed by the Thalmud to his knowledge of this mystery."

astonished Jews all that had happen'd to him.

This King of Persia afterwards sent to the Emir el Mumenin, the Khalif of Baghdad, principal of the Mahomedans, to solicit the influence of the Prince of the captivity and of the presidents of the colleges in order to check the proceedings of David El Roy, and threatening to put to death all Jews who inhabited his empire. (Benjamin of Tudela, pp. 121–125)

Another episode involving the Jews of Iran of that time which Benjamin mentions concerns the shrine of the prophet Daniel. An examination of that episode clearly reveals the way of thinking and religious beliefs of the people of those times. He writes:

...Four miles thence begins KHUZESTAN, 'Elam of scripture, a large province, which however is but partially inhabited, a portion of it lying in ruins. Among the latter are the remains of SHUSHAN the Metropolis and palace of King Achashverosh, which still contains very large and handsome buildings of ancient date. Its seven thousand jewish inhabitants possess fourteen synagogues; in front of one of which is the sepulchre of Daniel who rests in peace. The river Ulai divides the parts of the city which are connected by a bridge; that portion of it, which is inhabited by the Jews, contains the markets, to it all trade is confined and there dwell all the rich; on the other side of the river they are poor, because they are deprived of the abovenamed advantages and have even no gardens nor orchards. These circumstances gave rise to jealousy, which was foster'd by the belief that all honour and riches originated from the possession of the remains of the Prophet Daniel, who rests in peace, and who was buried on their side. A request was made *by the poor* for permission to remove the sepulchre to the other side, but it was rejected; upon which a war arose and was carried on between the two parties for a length of time; this strife lasted until 'their souls become loath' and they came to a mutual agreement, by which it was stipulated that the coffin, which contained Daniel's bones, should be deposited alternately every year on either side. Both parties faithfully adhered to this arrangement, which was however interrupted by the interference of Sanjar Ben Shah, who governs all Persia and holds supreme power over forty five of its kings. This prince is called in arabic: Sultan-al-Fars-al-

> Khabir[95] and his empire extends from the banks of the Shat-el-arab unto the city of Samarkand and the Kizil Ozein, incloses the city of Nishapur, the cities of Media, and the Chaphton mountains and reaches as far as Tibet, in the forests of which country that quadruped is met with, which yields the musk; the extent of his empire is four months and four days journey.
>
> When this great Emperor, Sanjar king of Persia, came to SHUSHAN and saw that the coffin of Daniel was removed from side to side, he crossed the bridge with a very numerous retinue and accompanied by Jews and mahomedans and inquired into the reason of those proceedings. Upon being told what we have related above, he declared that it was derogatory to the honor of Daniel and commanded that the distance between the two banks should be exactly measured, that Daniel's coffin should be deposited in another coffin, made of glass, and that it should be suspended from the very middle of the bridge, fasten'd by chains of iron. A place of public worship was erected on the very spot, open to everyone, who desired to say his prayers, whether he be Jew or Gentile; and the coffin of Daniel is suspended from the bridge unto this very day... (Benjamin of Tudela, pp. 117–120)

The populations of some of the Iranian Jewish communities provided by Benjamin of Tudela in his itinerary are as follows:

Hamadan	30,000	Isfahan	15,000
Shiraz	10,000	'Amadiyah	25,000
Tabaristan	4,000	Susa	7,000
Ghaznin	80,000	Samarqand	50,000
Azerbaijan	100 communities	Rudbar	4 communities

It is difficult to ascertain the accuracy of these numbers, but they nonetheless show the dispersion of the Jews throughout Iran before the Mongol invasion. This great community, which without leader or guide never stopped migrating from place to place in search of security, was guided in its culture and religion by the Jewish religious leaders at Baghdad. The academies of Babylon had fallen from their

[95]TN: Here, Asher provides the following footnote to his English translation: "Supreme commander of Persia."

former splendor and the schools and religious foundations of Baghdad took upon themselves the guidance of the Jews of Iran. Benjamin of Tudela, describing the early Khwarazmid period, writes:

> BAGDAD is inhabited by about [forty] thousand Jews, who enjoy peace, comfort and much honor under the government of the great king. Among them are very wise men and presidents of the colleges, whose occupation is the study of the mosaic law.
>
> The city contains ten colleges...The principal of all [the presidents of the colleges] however, is R. Daniel Ben Chisdai, who bears the titles of: PRINCE OF THE CAPTIVITY and LORD and who possesses a pedigree, which proves his descent from king David. The Jews call him 'Lord, Prince of the captivity' and the mahomedans: 'Saidna Ben Daoud' *noble descendant of David,* and he holds great command over all jewish congregations under the authority of the Emir al Mumenin *(Commander of the faithful)* the Lord of the Mahomedans, who has commanded to respect him, and has confirmed his power by granting him a seal of office. Every one of his subjects, whether he be Jew or Mahomedan or of any other faith, is commanded to rise in the presence of the Prince of the captivity and to salute him respectfully under penalty of one hundred stripes.
>
> Whenever he pays a visit to the king, he is escorted by numerous horsemen, both Jews and gentiles and a crier commands aloud: 'make way before our Lord the son of David as becomes his dignity' in arabic 'A'milu tarik La-Saidna Ben Daud.' Upon these occasions he rides upon a horse and his dress is composed of embroider'd silk; on his head he wears a large turban, cover'd by a white cloth and surmounted by a chain *or diadem.*
>
> The authority of the PRINCE OF THE CAPTIVITY extends over the following countries viz: over Mesopotamia; Persia; Khorassan; S'ba which is Yemen; Diarbekh; all Armenia and the Land of Kota near mount Ararat; over the country of the Alanians, which is shut in by mountains and has no outlet except by the iron gates, which were made by Alexander; over Sikbia and all the provinces of the Turkmans unto the Aspisian mountains; over the country of the Georgians unto the river Oxus, (these are the Girgashim of scripture and believe in christianity) and as far as the frontiers of the provinces and cities of Tibet and India. Per-

> mission is granted by the PRINCE OF CAPTIVITY to all the jewish congregations of these different countries to elect rabbis and ministers, all of whom appear before him in order to receive consecration and the permission to officiate, upon which occasions presents and valuable gifts are offer'd to him even from the remotest countries.
>
> ...Many of the Jews of BAGDAD are good scholars and very rich, the city contains twenty-eight jewish synagogues, situated partly in BAGDAD and partly in al-Khorkh, on the other side of the river Tigris, which runs through and divides the city. The metropolitan synagogue of the PRINCE OF THE CAPTIVITY is ornamented with pillars of richly colour'd marble, plated with gold and silver; on the pillars are inscribed verses of the psalms in letters of gold... (Benjamin of Tudela, pp. 100–105)

Another Jewish traveler, Petahiah ben Joseph ha-Lavan of Regensburg, who travelled to the Orient after Benjamin of Tudela, supports his claims. Petahiah began his journey c. 1175. He passed through Poland, Russia, and Crimea and thence to Mongolia, the land of the Khazars, Armenia, Kurdistan, Babylon, Syria, and the Holy Land. In Jerusalem, the Crusaders had massacred all the Jewish residents after their first conquest. Petahiah found only one Jew in the city, Abraham the Dyer, whose services the Crusaders had required.[96] This traveler states that the Jewish population of all of Iran was 1,200,000. Compared with the number of Jews in Iran in later centuries, this number seems exaggerated, but it is testimony to Iran's large Jewish community in those times. From the advent of Islam on, there was considerable Jewish movement within Iran. They lived in practically every city and province. Precise numbers for the Jewish communities of Iran throughout the course of history are not available, although some Islamic historians and geographers have provided estimates.

> ...The tenth-century Arab geographer, al-Muqaddasi, in comparing the various non-Muslim minorities stated, "in the province of Jibal Jews are more numerous than Christians; in the province

[96] *EJ*, 13:345.

> of Khuzistan Christians are few and Jews not numerous, while in the province of Fars the Zoroastrians are more numerous than the Jews and there are only a few Christians. (*EJ*, 13:312)

In c. 1179, during the reign of the Khwarazmid king Abu Sa'id ibn Dawud, another messianic movement to save the Jews was launched. The great Jewish scholar Maimonides sent someone to Isfahan to investigate. Shortly after the death of Maimonides in 1204, a Jewish-Iranian scholar of Tabriz named al-Tabrizi Farsi wrote a critique and review of his *Dalalat al-ha'irin* (מורה נבוכים) [Guide for the Perplexed]. In this book, which he completed c. 1190, Maimonides expounded upon Jewish doctrine and philosophy. The Jewish physician Samuel ben Yahya al-Maghribi traveled from Baghdad to Azerbaijan in 1174 and took up residence in Maragheh.[97]

The Crusades were at their height at the time of Genghis Khan's invasion of Iran. European ignorance and intolerance and Mongol ruthlessness in Iran combined to gradually kill off the Jews in both East and West. The Christians of Europe thirsted for Jewish and Muslim blood. The Mongols of Iran put Jews, Muslims, and Christians to the sword. Throughout the world, the earth was being irrigated with human blood. The Jews were hapless victims who had neither territorial claims nor pretensions of religious superiority over other peoples and nations. After the grisly massacres of the Mongol invasion, a period of anarchy and confusion ensued. Jewish lives and property were no longer secure, and a new wave of Jewish migration picked up speed within Iran. As a result of the Mongol invasion, Jewish emigration to Uzbekistan increased. Uzbekistan was a sanctuary for persecuted Jews, and they emigrated to that country from the west and south. The great Jewish migrations within Iran, which began at the time of the Mongol invasion, lasted for several generations. But these migrations were not completely suc-

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[97]Fischel. "Azarbaijan in Jewish History," p. 3.

cessful in saving them. A large number of Jews and other Iranians lost their lives in these times, and the Jewish population of Iran rapidly declined.

The Profound Influence of Jewish and Jewish-Born Statesmen on the Iranian State Apparatus

During the Ilkhanid period, when the storms had died down, the Tatar kings set about improving the country. During this period, three successive Jewish or Jewish-born statesmen attained the highest levels of office in the Iranian capital, Tabriz. Although this would at first seem to be good news for the Jews, it also was to entail grave consequences.

During the reign of King Arghun Khan (1284–1291), the Jewish court physician Sa'd al-Dawlah al-Safi ibn Hibbatallah (d. 1291) gained the king's confidence through his wisdom and expertise. Sa'd al-Dawlah, whom Islamic sources refer to as "the Jewish vizier," was from the mountain town of Abhar. His Hebrew name is unknown, though some sources say it is Mordecai. Mordecai of Abhar, or Sa'd al-Dawlah, first went to Mosul and then to Baghdad, where he worked as a physician until 1284. With the knowledge and experience he gained in administrative affairs in Baghdad, he became a renowned figure. In 1288, Arghun summoned him to Tabriz to serve as his court physician. He was fluent in four languages: Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Mongolian, and soon came to Arghun's attention. In 1289, he was appointed vizier of the entire Ilkhanid realm. His mastery of medicine and aptitude as an administrator, which occasioned his rapid rise in the state administration, aroused the jealousy of the other courtiers.

Sa'd al-Dawlah had many enviers and ill-wishers in the Ilkhanid court. Following his appointment as vizier, in keeping with the tradition of the times, he immediately removed his enemies from office and filled important state offices with people on whom he could rely: Mongols, Christians, and especially Jews, most of whom

were his kinsmen. He gave the political administration of Baghdad to one of his brothers, Fakhr al-Dawlah, and made his other brother, Amin al-Dawlah, governor of Mosul, Diyarbekir, and Diyarrabi'. Shams al-Dawlah, the Jewish governor of Fars, was also one of his relatives. Some Arab sources praise him for promoting law and justice in governmental affairs, but the appointment of this able Jew as vizier and especially his conferment of important state offices upon his cronies caused misgivings in the Muslim community. Arghun Khan—who was himself born a Buddhist and had pro-Christian leanings—at first paid this situation no heed. Apart from the Muslims, the Mongols of the royal court were perturbed by the king's unconditional confidence in Sa'd al-Dawlah and his family and nurtured a hatred of him. The foes of this "Jewish vizier" grew daily in number and spread rumors against him. The worst of these rumors was that Sa'd al-Dawlah had urged Arghun Khan to convert the Kaaba to an idol-temple and send his army to seize Jerusalem from the Muslims, who had held it during most of period of the Crusades.

Intrigue was the instrument of Sa'd al-Dawlah's downfall. When Arghun Khan was on his deathbed, afflicted with a grave illness, cliques within the court spread rumors that the vizier-physician had poisoned his benefactor. At a court reception they arrested Sa'd al-Dawlah and his supporters. Some of them were killed on the spot, while the "Jewish vizier" was put to death the following day. According to Ibn Futuhi, after this incident, a campaign was launched against the Jews of Tabriz, Baghdad, and other cities with large Jewish populations. Sa'd al-Dawlah's brothers and kinsmen were tortured to death.[98]

The modern Iranian historian, 'Abbas Iqbal, writes on this subject:

> In gratitude for his services, Arghun appointed [Sa'd al-Dawlah] as his vizier. ...Sa'd al-Dawlah quickly removed Muslim functionaries from office and surrounded himself with Jewish and Christian

[98] *EJ*, 14:618.

> appointees. Only Khorasan and Asia Minor, which were in the hands of Ghazan and Gaykhatu, were spared Jewish domination. The cunning and efficient Sa'd al-Dawlah quickly set the country's financial affairs in order, filled the treasury's coffers, and took control of all matters within his own hands. He everywhere curtailed the powers of Arghun's princes and was all-powerful until the death of Arghun [in 1291]. His despotism reached the point that he obtained from Arghun an edict ordering the army to besiege Mecca and Medina, convert the Kaaba to an idol-temple, and execute the Islamic scholars. However, as he took ill at this same time, he refrained from executing the order out of fear [!], and before long [in 1291] he was killed by Arghun's princes in Azerbaijan. Six days later, Arghun also died. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* pp. 503–4)

'Abdallah Razi, another present-day Iranian historian, writes:

> Sa'd al-Dawlah, who had become one of Arghun's favorites in the capacity of court physician, attracted the king's attention. ...He proved so clever that Arghun entrusted him with the administration of the country's affairs. Sa'd al-Dawlah's eminence and distinction grew daily greater. Although Sa'd al-Dawlah's policies toward Muslims were moderate for a time, as soon as his power became great and he knew that Arghun would take no action without his consent, he appointed Jews to important posts. Sa'd al-Dawlah advised Arghun to wipe out the Islamic faith and raze the hallowed Kaaba [!]. Around the same time, Arghun became ill, and the physicians were unable to cure him. When the Mongol princes saw that Arghun's death was near, out of their loathing for Sa'd al-Dawlah they eliminated him in the cruelest manner and thus rid the world of him. When Arghun learned of this he became deeply pensive, and in the year 1291, he died. (Razi, pp. 322–23)

The intrigue against Sa'd al-Dawlah is clear from the smell of prejudice which emanates from these lines. The claim that he encouraged Arghun to meddle with the holy places of worshippers of God—to set up an idol-temple in one and incite riot in the other and seize it with the help of the Crusaders—while at the same time making

allusion to Sa'd al-Dawlah's sagacity and cleverness—seems a half-baked accusation indeed. Historians unfamiliar with Jewish history have not endeavored to shed light on the obscure particulars of that rumor. How could it be that the Christians of Europe—who delivered the Jews to their deaths one congregation at a time with perfect coldheartedness, who killed all save one of the Jews of Jerusalem—should, after the "defeat of Islam" by Sa'd al-Dawlah and his supporters, extend a tender hand and pat his Jewish head?! If this accusation, which historians have not refrained from repeating, is true, then Sa'd al-Dawlah must be considered an inept, un-Jewish fool, whereas friend and foe alike had no doubts about his expertise, keen perception, and regard for the law. The rumor of Sa'd al-Dawlah's enmity toward Islam is an empty, unfounded, and childish accusation the likes of which have been seen in Jewish history, not only in Iran, but around the world—potent accusations which have cost Jews their lives. Perhaps Arghun himself was inclined to come to the aid of the Christians and help them to capture the Holy Land. It is likely that Sa'd al-Dawlah dissuaded him from this course of action. Sykes writes:

> Arghun during his short reign evinced much favour towards the Christians, and made proposals in 1289, and again two years later, to the powers of Christendom for a joint attack on the Moslems in the Holy Land... (Sykes, 2:108)

The matter of converting the Kaaba to an idol-temple is cut from the same old cloth of anti-Semitic accusations. The Jewish Sa'd al-Dawlah, a monotheist, could never have entertained such a thought, nor could have Arghun, who was inclined toward Christianity and in whose court Christian women were highly influential.

According to Reza Pazuki:

> Sa'd al-Dawlah, a clever and capable man, in the beginning in order to win over the hearts of the people ordered that the princes and governors should settle disputes in accordance with Islamic law, that they should protect the rights of the oppressed and support the downtrodden. After Sa'd al-Dawlah had been vizier

> for two years, the entire kingdom was flourishing and the sum of one thousand gold *tomans* had been amassed in the treasury. ...In the end, absolute power and independence of action dragged him down the path of arrogance and pride. He began to deride the nation of Muhammad and encouraged Arghun to confiscate Muslim property and convert the Kaaba into an idol-temple. Following his advice, the Khan began seizing Muslim property and was contemplating razing the Kaaba when his health declined. He was bedridden for several days and was never again able to destroy anything. (Pazuki, pp. 91–3)

Iqbal writes:

> News of the murder of Sa'd al-Dawlah was met with rejoicing by the Muslims, and the killing of Jews spread. In the cities they took to killing Jews by the cruelest devices and looting their property. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e mofassal-e Iran,* p. 243)

It is clear that during this episode, thousands more Jews renounced their faith and converted to Islam or fled their homes. Graetz writes of the atrocities which befell the Jews after the execution of Sa'd al-Dawlah:

> The Mahometan population also fell upon the Jews in every city of the empire, to wreak their vengeance upon them for the degradation which they had suffered from the Mongols. In Bagdad there were numerous encounters between armed bodies of Mahometans and Jews, and on both sides many were killed and wounded. (Graetz, 3:649–50)

Walter Fischel, whose studies on the Jews of Azerbaijan are valuable sources for the study of Jewish history, mentions the following prominent Jews of Sa'd al-Dawlah's day: Labid bin Abi al-Rabi', the Jewish administrator of Azerbaijan, Muhadhdhib al-Dawlah Abu Mansur, a Jewish physician who governed Tabriz and its environs, and Rashid al-Dawlah, a Jew responsible for food stores. The influence of Jews in the state apparatus during the reign of Arghun Khan must be considered an incontrovertible historical fact.

Although the massacres and persecutions of Jews which followed the death of Arghun and the execution of Sa'd al-Dawlah lasted nearly fifteen years, the disorganization of state affairs, especially in financial matters, necessitated a man with the talents of Sa'd al-Dawlah during the reign of Ghazan Khan, Arghun Khan's successor. This time, fate chose a great man born of Jewish parents who, under the exigencies of the times, had converted to Islam. His name was Rashid al-Din Fazlallah ibn Abi al-Khayr ibn 'Ali al-Hamadani. He was born in Hamadan in 1247 and died in Tabriz in 1318. Rashid al-Din was a physician, historian, and expert statesman who served in the Ilkhanid court as grand vizier from 1298 until his death. His rapid rise in politics derived from his unique scholarly achievements. With his copious Persian-language treatises on medical and scholarly subjects, he made the newly-founded Ilkhanid capital of Soltaniyeh a respected center of learning in the Islamic world. His most important work was *Jami' al-tawarikh* (Universal History), which comprises several volumes and which he completed in 1302. This highly regarded work is the first disciplined study of the history of all nations of the known world. In it, Rashid al-Din devotes a whole chapter to the "History of the House of Israel," which bespeaks the writer's mastery of the Hebrew language and his intimate knowledge of the Torah. It may be reckoned the first history of the Jews in the Persian language.[99] Among Rashid al-Din's other works are *Al-Ihya' wa al-athar* on the various sciences, *Tawhidat* on divinity, *Miftah al-tafasir* on Quranic exegeses, and *Lata'if al-haqa'iq* on Islamic issues.

Ghazan, who himself converted to Islam and endeavored to promote the religion...

> ...appointed as vizier a renowned scholar, skilled and efficient politician, and celebrated historian, Khwajeh Rashid al-Din Fazlallah, who in the rational sciences, philosophy, and medicine was the foremost of his age. (Razi, p. 325).

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[99] *EJ*, 13:1566.

Through the efforts of the Jewish-born Rashid al-Din, wide-ranging judicial, financial, and administrative reforms were implemented throughout the kingdom. The implementation of new laws governing areas such as testimony, statutes of limitations, registration of judgements, and title deeds brought about changes in judicial affairs. The collection of excessive taxes and oppression of subjects were ended. The mails came under central government control, and state post offices were established. New roads were built and the streets made safe. Weights and measures were established, including the Tabrizi *man,* and stone weights bearing the state seal were distributed throughout all the provinces. The Ilkhanids...

> ...the founders of which dynasty, that is, Genghis Khan and Hulagu, took pleasure in bloodshed and homicide and considered havoc prosperity—through the influence of the Iranians and the entrustment of the administration of state affairs to them, returned to civilization. Ghazan Khan made a great name for himself by entrusting matters to Rashid al-Din Fazlallah, and during his reign great reforms were enacted. (Razi, p. 329)

After the new-Muslim Ghazan Khan had called upon all the Mongols to convert to Islam...

> ...he issued an order to his deputies that they destroy the churches, synagogues, and monasteries of the outlying territories. The deputies began destroying churches, Jewish synagogues, and Zoroastrian fire-temples. In Tabriz, they smashed Buddhist idols and piled them up in the streets, converted churches to mosques, and out of intolerance delivered many blows to the non-Muslims. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 507)

After the death of Ghazan Khan, his brother Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh Oljaytu (1304–1316) succeeded to the Ilkhanid throne. During the reign of Muhammad, Rashid al-Din Fazlallah continued as vizier, but his impressive service and innovations earned him many enemies and engendered much rumor-mongering about the Jewish-born vizier. Frustrated, he finally left the service of the court

and went to Tabriz. The king recalled him, sending a message that without his views and expertise, nothing was getting done.

> In reply the master said "The days of my vizierate have lasted longer than those of any other vizier. I have thirteen sons employed in your service. It is better that they serve, while I spend the rest of my days preparing for the next world." (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 534)

But these words proved ineffectual, and he was compelled to resume his duties as vizier. His return struck fear in the hearts of his enemies, and they played the same old tune. When Muhammad Khodabandeh lay ill upon his deathbed, Rashid al-Din's enemies accused him of poisoning the king through one of his sons, who was among the king's cupbearers. "Two princes, who had been paid off by Rashid al-Din's enemies, testified to the truth of this matter."[100] A death warrant was signed for Khwajeh Rashid al-Din, the erudite man who had provided so much service to Iran. In 1316, the executioner killed Rashid al-Din's first-born son—who was the king's cupbearer and not more than sixteen years old—before his father's eyes. They then cut that noble vizier in two, in the seventy-third year of his age, near the city of Tabriz. This ill-omened event took place at the beginning of the reign of the Ilkhanid Abu Sa'id.

Although it seems that Rashid al-Din had converted to Islam in 1277, in condemning him, his enemies cited his Jewish origin in reference to his "conspiracy" against the Muslim sultan. Defending himself before this kangaroo court, he said, "How can it be that I, a simple Jew and son of a druggist of Hamadan, who rose to power in the service of the Ilkhanids, should have committed such an act?" After the executioners had killed both father and son, they cut off Rashid al-Din's head and paraded it about the city under a banner proclaiming, "the head of the infidel Jew." This Jewish-born sage was given no rest even in the grave. In 1407, Miranshah, the son of Tamerlane who became deranged after being thrown from a

[100]Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 534.

horse, commanded that his bones be exhumed from the Rub'-e Rashidi mosque in Tabriz and reinterred in that city's Jewish cemetery.[101] After the execution of Rashid al-Din, the same misfortunes that befell the Jews after the killing of Sa'd al-Dawlah were repeated. Many Jews, including prominent scholars, were coerced into converting to Islam, and many others lost their lives, especially in Azerbaijan.

Rashid al-Din suffered a fate much like that of Amir Kabir. Despite all his reforms and major achievements, he was ensnared by rumormongers and ignominiously condemned to death. His enemies confiscated all of his and his sons' property and plundered the Rub'-e Rashidi district, which he himself had built in Tabriz.

> After the killing of Khwajeh Rashid al-Din, as fate would have it, those who had been party to the intrigue against him one by one met with the same fate. None survived. All were killed at each other's hands or at the hands of Abu Sa'id. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 535)

Once Rashid al-Din's innocence had been established and the curtains of deceit drawn aside, a third vizier was appointed in whose veins flowed Jewish blood. His name was Khwajeh Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad, the son of Khwajeh Rashid al-Din Fazlallah. He was renowned for his wisdom, benevolence, and lofty spirit. It is bewildering that:

> ...opposing princes compelled the Ilkhanid king to kill that enlightened vizier, who after his father was among the greatest patrons of science and literature and one of the great benefactors of his time, and the king had him killed in [1327]. (Iqbal, p. *Tarikh-e Iran,* 543)

For the Jews, the killing of this third vizier was different in that it was not followed by a massacre and looting. The downfall of the Ilkhanid dynasty, like the decline of other dynasties, left a legacy of tumult and domestic chaos. Various groups emerged in different

[101] *EJ,* 13:1566.

parts of the country and set up governments. Among these were the Jalayirids, Chopanids, Muzaffarids, Sarbedars, and the Atabegs, all of whom established feudal systems throughout Iran. This practice continued until the advent of the Timurids.

Shahin, Amina, and Other Prominent Jews in Science, Literature, and Philosophy

The Ilkhanid period was important to Iranian Jews not only in political and social terms, but also in the fields of poetry, literature, and science. During this dynasty's reign, despite all the persecutions suffered by Jews, because the concept of *dhimmis* or "protected peoples" fell by the wayside and the denigrations of the "Contract of 'Umar" were relegated to oblivion, the Jews of Iran embarked on a period of exceptional grandeur.

It was during this period that Shahin, the most illustrious Jewish-Iranian poet, lived. This poet of Shiraz, influenced by classical Persian poetry and inspired by Judaism's days of yore, composed enduring works that for centuries were the companions of the Sabbath and Jewish religious holidays in Iran. He composed poetry in the Persian language, but wrote in the Hebrew script. His greatest work is based on the historical events of the Bible and is entitled *Sefer sharh Shahin al ha-Torah* (Fig. 5). Shahin completed the four volumes of this poetic work—*Musanameh* (Book of Moses), *Ardeshirnameh* (Book of Artaxerxes), *Ezranameh* (Book of Ezra), and *Ketab-e Paydayesh* (Book of Genesis)—in 1359. Shahin, who was both a master of the Persian language and a master poet, by employing the subtleties, constructs, and strictures of Persian poetry, wrought an immortal tribute to the history and religious heroes of the Jews. This oeuvre has been much praised by Persian-speaking Jews throughout the countries of the East, who gave him the sobriquet, "Mowlana Shahin-e Shirazi" (Our Master Shahin of Shiraz). In 1902, a Bokharan Jew published his *Ketab-e Paydayesh* and *Musanameh* under the title *Sefer sharh Shahin al ha-Torah* (Shahin's Exegesis on the Torah)

and in 1910 his *Ardeshirnameh* under the title *Sefer sharh Shahin al-Megillat Ester* (Shahin's Exegesis on the Book of Esther) in Jerusalem.[102]

> ...The first man to write [Judeo-Persian poetry] was the 14th-century poet Mawlana Shahin of Shiraz, who is regarded as the leading Judeo-Persian poet. Shahin was imbued with a profound Jewish consciousness and keenly desired to promote a deeper knowledge of the Jewish past. He devoted himself to writing biblical verse, and his greatest work, *Sefer Sharh al ha-Torah,* is a poetic paraphrase and reinterpretation of the Pentateuch.
>
> Four works of Shahin are extant: the Musa-Nameh ("Moses Book," c. 1327), a commentary on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; Ardashir-Nameh (c. 1332), consisting of the stories of Esther and Mordecai and of Shero and Mahzad, the latter a typical Iranian love story; Ezra-Nameh, dealing mainly with the reign of Cyrus the Great and the building of the Temple of Jerusalem; and a Genesis-Nameh (c. 1358), which includes the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, known to Muslims as Zulaykha. In all his poetic writings, Shahin adopted the typical features of Persian poetry and applied the patterns, forms, technique, meter, and language of Persian classical poetry to the presentation of Israel's religious heroes and the events recorded in the biblical narrative. (*EJ,* 10:434)

There is no doubt that Shahin was the first great Jewish poet of Iran, yet he was not the only Persian-speaking Jewish poet of the Mongol period. There were other Jewish poets, of whom only the names and a few scattered verses remain. The use of the Hebrew script and avoidance of the Arabic alphabet in which the Quran was written is one of the reasons that these poems did not survive. In these times, during which a special "Jewish literary ghetto" came into being, some works by Muslim poets and literati were transcribed in the Hebrew alphabet and gained wide acceptance by the Jewish community. Among these works were Nizami's *Khusrow va Shirin* (Khusrow and Shirin) and *Haft paykar* (Seven Figures), selected

[102] *EJ,* 14:1258.

verses from Jalal al-Din Rumi's *Mathnavi,* selections from Sa'di's *Golestan* (Rose Garden), and Hafez's *Divan* (Collected Works).

In the opening of his book, Mowlana Shahin explains that in his times, other Jewish poets had endeavored to versify the Bible in Persian. He spent thirty years (1329–1359) writing his book, secluding himself beside a spring in Shiraz. He himself says:

In the lunar hegiric year seven hundred sixty
I completed this discourse
One thousand six hundred and seventy
Had passed since the time of Alexander[103]

Apparently, after he completed his versification of the Bible in Persian, there were some people who did not believe he had accomplished this feat. The poet, in order to demonstrate that the verses were his own, after thirty years' labor composed additional verses on the subject and presented them to doubters:

Has Shahin once again, having taken to the field
Seized the ball of Fortune from the polo-stick?
He has taken flight after thirty years
Unfurled his wings like the falcon
He has exhibited his art to the doubters
Opened a gate to Heaven's garden
O God! Once more hast Thou bestowed victory
Thou hast opened the gate of mercy before me
Thou hast made the crescent moon of my fortune full
Thou hast granted me strength in my darkest night
The bride of my glory is a virgin concealed
She is drunken, but with grape juice

In addition to his magnum opus, Shahin composed many other religious verses.

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[103] 1670 is the *shetarot* year. By subtracting 311, we arrive at the year 1359 C.E.

Another poet of this period is Benjamin ben Mishal, better known as Amina. A Persian-speaking Jewish poet of Kashan, Amina completed his book of verse, *Bazharut,* in 1310. At the closing of this book he writes:

Amina, thou hast survived, thou hast reached the end
Let them read, now be glad
Write such a history, lest by the devil's work
Thou become thoughtless and hypocritical. Great tribulation
I give thee in the month of Tammuz, when thou shouldst light this candle
Completion arrived victorious by the grace of the Rejuvenator
From the year of the Creation seventy between it
Apart from the fifth thousand, preserve my account

The Hebrew year 5070 cited corresponds with the year 1310 C.E. and the reign of Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh. The question as to why neither Mowlana Shahin nor Amina—who were contemporaries—mentioned the massacres and persecutions of Arghun's time is a germane one, for which there is no definitive answer. Although Amina was Shahin's senior, he fell short of the latter's poetic genius.

Among the Jewish scholars of the period was Nafis ibn Dawud al-Tabrizi, a master physician who traveled in 1353 from Tabriz to Cairo and there converted to Islam. According to Walter Fischel, from the time of the Seljuqs forward, Azerbaijan was an important center of Karaite Judaism, which was as strong as Rabbinic Judaism. Nafis ibn Dawud had been a Karaite. Another Jewish-Iranian scholar who lived during the 11th century was Sahl ibn Fadl, who was also a Karaite. His Hebrew name is Yashar ben Hesed. Sahl ibn Fadl wrote several books in the Arabic language, some of which are exegeses of the Torah. His philosophical/religious treatise *al-Talwih 'ala al-tawhid wa al-'adl* is a study in Aristotelian metaphysics.

Bar Hebraeus, or Yuhanna Abu al-Faraj (1226–1286), was the son of a Jewish physician and an accomplished, critical writer. He knew Hebrew well and was familiar with the Torah. In addition to religious books and exegeses, he also wrote numerous other works. He trans-

lated Avicenna's *Shifa'* to Syriac. His most important Arabic work is *Mukhtasar tarikh al-duwal* (Abridged History of the Nations), which in addition to history provides details on medicine and mathematics. "Bar Hebraeus converted to Christianity and became a scholarly cleric of that faith. He died in Maragheh."[104]

The conversion of Nafis ibn Dawud to Islam and Bar Hebraeus to Christianity is the best evidence that during the centuries that Iran was governed by the Mongols, Jews became estranged from their ancestral religion, either by force or by proselytization. In a time when prominent figures such as Rashid al-Din changed their religion, it is obvious that there was more pressure and coercion on common Jews to abandon their faith. Apart from massacres, this was the second most important factor hastening the decline in the large Jewish population of Iran.

Jews During the Timurid Period

The Timurid period in Iran also began with the murder and mass killing of Jews by the followers of other religions, including the Muslims. Although Isfahan and its surrounding towns had been spared the ravages of the Mongols, such was not the case with the Timurids. Once more, there was bloodshed, pillaging, and cold-hearted massacre. They unleashed rivers of blood in Qandahar, Nishapur, Kabul, Gurganj, Gilan, and Georgia, and the peoples' property was plundered. Tamerlane built pyramids of severed heads in the cities of Iran. No doubt these heads included those of members of both majority and minority communities, including Jews. Tamerlane's attack on Isfahan inspired a legend among the Jews of that city which has been handed down from generation to generation. This legend, the basis for which must be reckoned to have been a massacre of the city's Jews, goes as follows:

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[104]Razi, p. 238.

On Yom Kippur—the Jewish day of fasting—in the year 1387,[105] Tamerlane passed through the Jewish ghetto on horseback. His passage coincided with the time for prayer, and the congregation had to recite a number of catechisms aloud. At that very moment, Tamerlane was passing by a large synagogue known as that of Harun Velayat.[106] The loud sound of the congregation reciting the communal prayer spooked Tamerlane's horse. The horse reared and fell upon the stone pavement of the alleyway. Tamerlane was thrown from the horse and his leg was made lame. When he learned that it was the Jews who had shouted, he ordered a massacre of them.

Such a popular legend, while historically undocumented, evinces one undeniable truth: the large size of the Jewish population at Isfahan, the combined voices of a number of whom caused that great conqueror to fall from his horse. The mass killing of the Jews of Isfahan turned the former "Judea" into a house of mourning. Ibn Khaldun, the Arab historian and contemporary of Tamerlane, wrote, "His right knee was lame, for as he himself said, it had been struck by an arrow while riding on horseback in his youth."[107] In addition to the Jews of Isfahan, Tamerlane also exterminated the Jews of Astarabad and Sabzevar. The number of Jews who were either killed, fled Iran, or changed their religion during this period can be estimated at 350,000. In 1393, Tamerlane went to Khorramabad and Shushtar and killed the surviving Jews there. He then attacked Shiraz. In Baghdad, which had a large Jewish population, each one of Tamerlane's soldiers presented him a severed head, and with these heads, as was his custom, he erected a pyramid. Tamerlane faced little opposition to his attacks against the cities of Iran. During his times, several clans ruled Iran, and there was no strong government. It was for this reason that his victories came so easily and

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[105]TN: Monday, 1 October 1387 by the Gregorian calendar; 23 September by the Julian.

[106]The mosque of Ali, which it is said was built by Tamerlane, faces the Harun Velayet synagogue.

that there was no force to resist his atrocities. Muslim, Christian, and Jew were equal in the eyes of Genghis Khan, but whereas Tamerlane claimed to be a Muslim, his deeds were colored by religious intolerance. On the one hand, because of the influence of Christians in his court and his correspondence with the kings of Europe—which set the precedent for foreign influence in Iran during the Safavid period—he did not deal harshly with the Christians. On the other hand, because of this very same Western influence, he displayed greater hostility toward the Jews. Hafez of Shiraz died in 1389 as Tamerlane was conquering Iran.

Toward the end of the reign of Tamerlane's son, Shahrokh, Sayyid Muhammad Musha'sha', a Shi'i, claimed to be the *mahdi* (guided one)[108]. He wrote a treatise entitled *The Mahdi* and in 1441 went to Khuzestan from Iraq and began proselytizing the Shi'i faith. Civil disturbances ensued, as a result of which the Jews of Khuzestan either vacated the region entirely or converted to Islam. During the reign of the Musha'sha'ites in Khuzestan—which lasted many long years—Jews were prohibited from living in that province.

Moses ben David, the Bokharan Jewish poet, lived during the time of Shahrokh. He composed beautiful verse in the Persian language that was written in the Hebrew script. During his time, a number of Jews emigrated from Sabzevar to Samarqand.[109] The Timurid attacks on Iran led to the decline of scholarship and literature, the results of which were to become apparent in later times. Moreover, this period marked the beginnings of social injustice toward the Jews of Iran.

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[107]Ibn Khaldun.

[108]TN: in Shi'i Islam, the 12th imam, who is in a state of occultation and will return to usher in the new age.

[109]Neumark, p. 97.

PART EIGHT

THE SAFAVIDS (1502–1722 C.E.)

Chapter Fifteen
Iran, Circus of European Spies

The era of Safavid rule over Iran, which lasted two centuries and two decades, had a beguiling outward appearance, but its inner corruption was extreme. Some historians have been deceived by the charming façade, and in light of the uproar and clamor the Safavids created in forming a religious base in Iran have deemed them heralds of "national unity." The stunningly majestic buildings left behind by the Safavids, the carpet-weaving and other fine arts of the period (which were actually the work of Iranian artists and artisans) are manifestations of this glorious simulacrum. When in 1501 the Safavid Isma'il rose to power in Ardabil, most of Iran was administered along feudal lines by governors of Turkish origin. The absence of a strong central government had led to an unraveling of state affairs. Sunni Islam was the prevailing religion of the Iranians. The caliph of Baghdad, the champion of Sunnism in Iran and a source of inspiration for the Muslims of the East, was rapidly declining. Isma'il took the name "Safavi" from his grandfather, Safi al-Din of Ardabil, a Shafi'i cleric. Along with his soldiers, who wore red headgear and were known as the *qizilbash,* he raised the banner of Shi'ism in rebellion against the caliph's religious authority. After a series of lightning-fast conquests, he occupied Baghdad. The modern historian Nasrallah Falsafi writes:

> If we imagine, as is mistakenly believed, that national sentiment and a yearning to reestablish the former power and greatness of Iran and create a unified state based on Iranian nationalism motivated Shah Isma'il and his supporters, then we are mistaken, having strayed from the path of truth by following the national sentiments and biases of our present time.

In other words, it was the Shi'i faith and not Iranian patriotism and nationalism that brought the Safavids to the fore. Iran was secondary to them. It was the propagation of the Shi'i faith and its acceptance as the official state religion that rallied this faction against the Sunni

rulers. The Safavids did not seek the restoration of national unity, nor was political unity even a concept for them. They sought religious unity as a source of solidarity.

> For Shah Isma'il, who had no misgivings about resorting to bloodshed and massacre in attaining his goals, the promotion of Shi'ism was easily accomplished, and a single political administration was formed in Iran based on a common religion. (Falsafi).

The rise to power of the Safavid dynasty coincided with the advent or fruition of highly important movements in world history, some of which are as follows:

- The religious movements of Martin Luther (1483–1546) in Germany and John Calvin (1509–1564) in France, which resulted in the new Protestant faith.
- The spread of the Inquisition, accompanied by the most brutal tortures directed against opponents of the Catholic faith, especially after the occupation of Spain by the Christians in the 14th century and the killing and expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the country. In 1460, a priest by the name of Alfonso de Spina published a tractate in Spain in which he wrote that the infidel Jews and Muslims must be completely annihilated.[110] The inquisitors tortured and burned alive Muslims and Jews in Spain. In the city of Toledo, one of the great Jewish centers of Spain, they even immolated a third of the Jews who had converted to Christianity.
- The reestablishment of colonialism in world politics and the strengthening of the intelligence services of colonial powers such as England, France, Holland, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, which, with their navies, sought to build power throughout the world and gain for themselves more savory morsels through trickery and deception. Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), the

[110]Graetz, 4:276–77.

great Genovese sailor, was seeking a better route to India when he discovered America.

- The emergence of Ottoman Turkey as a great power in the Islamic world. After extirpating Byzantium by capturing Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453, the Ottoman Empire grew to encompass Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, the Caucasus, Iraq, Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria. It won impressive victories in the Crusades and captured the Holy Land. The Ottoman Turks, who were descended from 'Uthman, the son of the Seljuq Tughril, converted many Christians to Islam. With the decline of the caliphate in Baghdad, the great Ottoman Empire, in which Sunni Islam predominated, became the unrivalled seat of religious authority in the Islamic world. The caliph of Istanbul became successor to the caliph of Baghdad—a caliph who was also a sultan and wielded the sharp, gleaming sword of political power. Jews made desperate by the tortures, persecutions, and massacres of Europe sought asylum in Ottoman Turkey. The number of asylum-seekers increased with advent of the Spanish holocaust. Jews had schools, synagogues, and rabbis in the Ottoman Empire. After the migration of the Jews who had been expelled from Spain to the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Muhammad II said, "Ferdinand [the Spanish king] has impoverished his own country and enriched mine." This quotation became well-known in Jewish history. Among the Jewish emigrants from Spain who went to the Ottoman Empire was Rabbi Joseph Karu (1488–1575), whose renowned book, *Shulhan arukh* (שֻׁלְחָן עָרוּךְ) [Long Journey], was written in that country and to the writing of which he devoted thirty-two years.
- Increasing intensity of religious wars in the East and West which turned the world into a slaughterhouse. In Europe, on the one hand, Catholics and Protestants thirsted for each other's

> blood, and on the other hand, Christians and Muslims were at war. In the Middle East, too, Sunnis and Shi'is competed in fratricide.

Of these events, that which most influenced Safavid Iran was the presence of the powerful Ottoman Empire on its borders. With Isma'il's enthronement and declaration of Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran, relations between Iran and the Ottoman Empire became strained. The Ottoman Sultan Selim (1512–1520), a bloodthirsty man, ordered the massacre of the Shi'is of Asia Minor and spilled the blood of forty thousand innocent Muslims for the sole crime of being Shi'is. Later, in 1516, he attacked Iran and, in an engagement which became known as "the Battle of Chaldiran," defeated the army of Shah Isma'il and vanquished the city of Tabriz. Although the brave men of Tabriz regained the city from the Ottomans, Diyarbekir and part of Kurdistan were lost to Turkey. In this embroilment, Shah Isma'il...

> ...exceeded the bounds of justice and confessional freedom in forcing the Shi'i faith upon the people of Iran, most of whom were still Sunnis. Acting out of religious intolerance, he cruelly killed many innocent [Sunnis]. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 667)

Shah Isma'il governed Iran for nearly a quarter century.

Shah Tahmasp, the son of Isma'il, was enthroned at the age of ten and was king until 1576, a total of forty-two years. The question of "religious unity" became even more deeply rooted during his reign, resulting in the stifling of intellectual activity. During Tahmasp's reign, Bayazid, the son of the Ottoman Sulayman (1520–1566), driven to extremities by his father's tyranny, sought asylum at the Iranian court. The Ottoman sultan requested the return of his son, and after a fragile, temporary peace, Bayazid was returned to the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Sulayman mercilessly put his son to death. It was not long before warfare between Iran and the Ottoman Empire resumed, and the Ottomans made advances in Azerbaijan. During the same period, the Portuguese occupied the islands of Hormoz

and Bahrain in the south, and the Uzbeks attacked Iran from the east.

Europe was alarmed by the rapid expansion of the Ottoman Empire, which rendered an Ottoman conquest of Western Europe not impossible. The colonial powers thought that rather than facing this empire head-on, they could plant a dagger in the Ottomans' back by fanning the flames of Shi'i-Sunni war between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, while they sat back in comfort and continued expanding their colonial base. During the reign of Tahmasp (1524–1576), Anthony Jenkinson, the first English "ambassador," was sent by Queen Elizabeth of England along with a handsome bribe (disguised as a gift) to the Iranian court. It was not long before European spies and agitators disguised as merchants, travelers, painters, artists, ambassadors, princes, advisors, representatives, functionaries, missionaries, and teachers descended upon Iran. This assembly grew out of control during the reign of 'Abbas I (1599–1629), upon whom, in Iqbal's words, "the title 'The Great' was bestowed...by the Europeans."[111]

The Europeans, who sought to incite the king of Iran against the Ottomans and limit the spread of Islamic government in Christian Europe, resorted to political deceit and intrigue. By sending ambassadors and representatives bearing gifts and priceless objects to the court—to a dynasty whose goal was the elimination of the Sunni faith in Iran and whose thinking regarding foreign policy was simplistic—they hatched their destructive plans and easily achieved their ends. In a time when commerce between East and West was growing, Iran, which was considered an important player in the establishment of this relationship, gained great importance in the area of commerce, apart from politics and religion. It became important for the Europeans to have as much influence as possible in Iran, especially to counter an enemy such as the Ottoman state. During the reign of Shah 'Abbas the Great—when the silk trade

[111]Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 686.

was a state monopoly and an important source of revenue—Iran, in accordance with its peace treaty, was obliged to annually send 200 shipments of pure silk to Istanbul. The capital of Iran, which had been transferred from the its precarious position at Tabriz to Qazvin, was again moved, and Isfahan became the center of power. Mosques were erected in that city, and in Mashhad the shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth imam of the Shi'is, was beautified in order to become an alternate pilgrimage site to the shrines of Iraq, which had fallen to the Turks.

When Anthony Sherley and his brother, Robert Sherley, found their way in 1598 to the court of Shah 'Abbas, besides the usual costly gifts, they brought with them a different memento: new weapons which the Shi'is of Iran could deploy against the Sunnis. Their "usual gifts" included six pairs of exquisite emerald earrings, two ruby-like jewels, a golden enameled chalice, a crystal pillbox, and a vase in the shape of a dragon with gold and silver lettering and designs. "By coincidence," there happened to be among the twenty-six men who accompanied the Sherley brothers to the Iranian court experts in the manufacture of artillery and rifles. Thus was the king afforded the opportunity to convert his old *qizilbash* guards into a modern European-style army. It was not long before Iran reentered the war with the Ottomans with new weapons on a wider front. By fanning the flames of war between the Shi'is and Sunnis, the calculating colonialists came close to achieving their goal. The Ottoman government was unable to advance in Europe. The Ottoman sultan, having grown suspicious of everyone and everything, put all the males in his family to death lest any should plot against him.

Dozens of representatives of the colonial states penetrated the cracks of Iranian society to study Iranian mores, beliefs, and customs and sent valuable information obtained about the Iranian government back to their own governments. Some of these foreign representatives were appointed as court advisors and became privy to

state secrets. The travelogues written during this period—from which some short samples will be provided in the next chapter—are testimony to this.

As soon as the Safavids came to power, they bestowed special privileges upon the Shi'i clergy, and by making religious leadership hereditary, they established a religious tyranny. Apart from the senior Shi'i clerics, every Shi'i cleric, mullah, or pseudo-mullah[112] in whichever province, city, or village he lived found he enjoyed unchecked power and began condemning people left and right. The Sunni Muslims were the prime targets of the Shi'i mullahs. It is not surprising that while Sunnis were being persecuted and massacred in the name of Shi'ism, Christians—especially the Armenians—lived in comfort. Shah 'Abbas relocated them from the city of Julfa in Azerbaijan to a "new Julfa" in Isfahan and placed them under his protection. This in itself is testimony to the deep influence of Christian Europe in Shi'i Iran. Had Safavid Iran not only honored the Armenians, but also refrained from torturing and killing the Sunnis and granted freedom to all the other religious minorities, then it would have been a glorious epoch. Beyond the matter of Julfa, the Safavids mostly married Christian women.

With the absolute powers granted to the Shi'i clerics, they found they had the power to meddle in all of the people's affairs, and every day they inaugurated a new bloodbath somewhere in Iran. In short order, it reached the point where the kings themselves did not even have the power to make rulings concerning the treatment of religious minorities. At first, Shah 'Abbas I did not mistreat the Jews:

> During his campaign in Georgia he permitted them to establish a new community at Farahabad ("City of Joy") on the Caspian Sea, in recognition of their military help. The transfer of his capital from Kazvan to Isfahan brought the Jewish community there.

[112]TN: The author employs the term "pseudo-mullah" (Persian ملا نما *molla-nama*) to designate those who professed to be Muslim clerics but who failed to uphold the principles of Islam.

> Abbas I was the first Muslim ruler in Persia to show an interest in the Hebrew Bible. In the latter part of his reign the position of Jews deteriorated, partly due to the instigations of apostates who, with the permission of the shah, enforced discriminatory measures against them. (*EJ*, 2:38)

In practice, the Shi'i clerics were running Iran. Preaching from atop their pulpits, they called on young men to join the fight against their Sunni brethren and urged the army on against the Ottomans.

The interference of colonialists in Iran's political and administrative affairs reached the point where the Portuguese and English navies fought each other for control of the Persian Gulf coastline, ports, and islands. Finally...

> ...ships of the English East India Company in [1626] soundly defeated the Portuguese at Bandar Jask. This event was a major blow to Portugal's naval power in the Gulf. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 683).

It is even more amazing that Shah 'Abbas the Great appointed Robert Sherley as his ambassador to the kings of Europe to form an alliance against the Ottomans. Sherley went to Germany, Italy, Spain, England, and Rome on behalf of Shah 'Abbas and met with the leaders of those countries. Shah 'Abbas was a devout twelver Shi'i. "They say that for two weeks he daily swept the Shah Velayat sanctuary with his own hands."[113] He was a staunch adversary of the Sunnis. This Safavid king put his eldest son, Safi Mirza, to death and blinded two of his other sons.

With the influence gained by the Shi'i clerics in Iran after the death of 'Abbas I, the power and prestige of the Safavid kings declined. During the reign of Shah Safi (1629–1642), the Ottoman Turks attacked and achieved many conquests. Shah Safi was a wine-guzzling hedonist—an incapable yet merciless man. He killed or blinded many statesmen, accountants, princes, and even women in the harem. Shah 'Abbas II (1632–1667), who became king at the age of ten,

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[113]Razi, p. 424.

began drinking in his youth and entrusted the administration of the country to Shaykh 'Ali Khan I'timad al-Dawlah Sadr-e A'zam—an intolerant man. During his reign war broke out between Iran and India.

Shah Sulayman Safavi (1667–1694) was also a heavy drinker and "spent his life in the harem with women and eunuchs."[114] He reigned for twenty eight years. During his reign, the Dutch occupied the island of Qeshm. He committed a thousand sorts of atrocities. Among his common acts were the cutting off of hands, ears, and noses or the gouging out of eyes from their sockets. Chardin writes that he drank all day long. One day he became infuriated with a court harpist whose tunes were not to his liking and ordered that both of the harpist's hands be cut off.

During the reign of king Husayn Safavi (1694–1722), the Afghans attacked Iran. He was a weak and superstitious king. During the Safavid period, the Russians from the north, the Uzbeks and Afghans from the east, the Ottoman Turks from the west, and the European colonizers from the south ate away at Iran like termites. During the reign of king Husayn, schools and wine taverns were closed. Conflict between religious factions increased, and the number of pseudo-mullahs grew.

> The king mostly associated with corrupt clerics, writers of incantations, and women. In times of crisis, he considered spells, incantations, and the like to be the most effective remedies.[115]

Because of its stifling intellectual climate, the Safavid period produced little in the fields of poetry, literature, scholarship, philosophy, and the other sciences. Except for some architects, tile workers, carpet weavers, artisans and craftsmen who worked for the state and mostly lived in the sanctuary of the court at Isfahan—the city of industry and the arts—only a small handful of intellectuals made names for themselves. Perhaps it is for this reason that 'Abdallah Razi, in

[114]Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, p. 699.

[115]Pazuki, pp. 366–77.

naming eight "intellectuals" of the Safavid period, cites a calligrapher, a painter, three musicians, and three story tellers.[116] It is noteworthy that during the last years of the Safavid period, music was totally proscribed in Iran, and musical instruments were considered to be satanic contraptions.

[116]Razi, p. 424.

Chapter Sixteen
The Climax of Anti-Semitism

In the heat of religious war—with Shi'is killing Sunnis within Iran's borders, and Sunnis killing thousands of Shi'is outside Iran's borders—in the hell created by illiterate priests in Europe and unenlightened mullahs in Spain, with the former declaring Jews and Muslims infidels and the latter, Jews and Christians, and both groups thirsting for each others' blood, how could the Jews of Iran live in peace? Iran and the Ottomans were at war. Iran persecuted and killed Sunnis and Jews while protecting Christians, and the Ottomans in turn killed Shi'is and Christians and protected the Jews. The court of the Safavid kings had become a nest for anti-Semitic European agents, and the Ottomans were the object of European loathing for three reasons: first, the Ottoman Empire was Islamic. Second, it knew no bounds in its territorial expansion and had reached the gates of Vienna in Austria. Third, it had granted asylum to Jews fleeing Europe. Anti-Semitic ideas and acts were propagated throughout Iran like an ill-omened plague by dozens of European spies. The germs of this plague multiplied quickly in a ready host. Beginning in this period, Europeans spread baseless, pernicious rumors in Iran, such as the claim that the Jews crucified Jesus, that the Jews killed non-Jewish children, that the Jews hatched dreadful conspiracies, and the like.

Despite the massacres and despoliations of the Mongols and Timurids, the writings of European travelers indicate that there were Jews in virtually every city of Iran and a large Jewish population in the country as a whole. In the past, the Jews had been raided and killed along with the adherents of other faiths. Now, as Jews, they became the direct targets of persecution and were forced to convert to Islam. Because of widespread propaganda by pseudo-mullahs during the Safavid period, the belief that the Jews were "unclean" had created a barrier between them and other Iranians. The Jews, who had lived in this land longer than many other nationalities,

faced the most trying spiritual and corporeal afflictions. Under no previous Iranian dynasty had persecution of the Jews been so intense, widespread, and long-lasting. The free hand given to the pseudo-clerics brought the crushing pressures to their most extreme levels.

European spies bestowed the Inquisition as a legacy upon Iran. Not only did they compel Jews to wear ridiculous caps and garments in public, they also burned Hebrew books to ashes and sanctioned the denigration and degradation of the first followers of a monotheistic religion. Judaism was in danger of being wiped out in Iran. The level of hatred directed against Judaism was much greater than during the time of Haman. While in Haman's time there was an unfulfilled plot against the Jews, in these times they were oppressed, murdered, and despoiled. Jews were subjected to bedlam not in one or two cities, but in every city, and not for one or two days, but every day. Documented sources from the period testify to the bitter events of those times, describing how they forced the Jews to abandon their faith, how they closed down and sometimes razed the synagogues, how they rounded up the newly-converted Muslims to go to the mosque to declare their conversion to Islam in front of their Muslim countrymen, and most importantly, how despite the interference of the Islamic mullahs, Iranian Jews secretly maintained their Judaism and, like the Marranos of Spain, lived a dual religious life, observing different religions in public and in private.

The Safavid government inflicted terrible blows upon and deeply wounded the Jewish community. Apart from the daily persecutions, the link between the Iranian Jewish community and its leadership in Baghdad was severed. In those terrible days, the Jews faced a crisis in leadership. The official representative of the Jews of Iran—the grand rabbi of Isfahan, who was appointed by the exilarch in Baghdad—resigned from his post, and all links between the Jews of Iran and the Jews of other countries were severed. They lost hope of any assistance, not the least of which was the moral support which might have come from the Jewish spiritual leaders at Baghdad. In Iran, too, there was no centralized or decentralized religious leader-

ship. Confusion about religious decisions added to their afflictions, especially at a time when the community was facing so many setbacks. The Jewish community of each vicinity had to make its own religious determinations. It was a blow that cut to the bone.

Isfahan, which still had a sizable number of Jews, was chosen by the government as the representative city of the Jews of Iran because of its status as capital city. The leader of the Jewish community was a *nasi* who was assisted by another rabbi or *dayyan.* The *nasi* was responsible for collecting the *jizya* poll tax and delivering it to local officials. If these taxes were not paid on time, or if the total amount was less than that demanded by the governing council, the *nasi* was removed from office by government agents and usually imprisoned. During the Safavid period, the "Administration for Taxes on Non-Muslims" was an integral part of the Iranian state apparatus situated at Isfahan. One or two Jews were coerced into serving as "intelligence agents" in this administration. In these times, Isfahan had only three synagogues, while Kashan had more than ten. Jewish religious life was dominated by the Rabbanites during this period, though there were more than a few Karaites, especially in Kazerun.

Jewish-Iranian pilgrimage to the tombs of Esther and Mordecai in Hamadan, the shrine of Daniel in Susa, and other shrines, as well as prayer and fasting, grew in popularity in these trying times as the community tried to alleviate its social pains. It was during this period that another holy place gained increased prestige among Iranian Jews: the grave reputed to be that of Sarah bat Asher in the town of Pir Bakran near Isfahan. Nonetheless, as Jews during the Safavid period found that neither pilgrimages nor migration within Iran's borders did anything to diminish their enervating hardships, they began to emigrate in small groups to Afghanistan, Turkestan, Bokhara, India, the Caucasus, Egypt, and other areas. It is interesting that during this period, despite border restrictions, the "Messengers of Zion" were able to travel from the Holy Land to Iran as ordinary

travelers, establish contact with the scattered Jewish communities of Iran, and collect donations for the religious foundations of Jerusalem.

In order to better understand the climate of religious intolerance which grew out of "Safavid Shi'ism," let us examine a short selection from Tavernier's travelog. This traveler (Fig. 6), who visited Iran six times during the Safavid period, writes about the mourning ceremonies of 'Ashura:

> I come now to the Grand Festival of the *Persians*, which is the famous Feast of *Hocen* and *Hussein*.
>
> Eight days before the Festival begins, some of the more zealous sort black all their Bodies and their Faces, and go naked in the Streets with only a covering about their secret parts. They carry two Flints, one in each hand, which they knock one against another, wrything their Bodies, and making a thousand antick Faces; and all the while crying out, *Hussein, Hocen; Hocen, Hussein;* which they act and speak with so much Labour, 'till they foam again at the mouth...
>
> In the year 1667, the third of *July*, I saw the Festival by the favour of the *Nagar*, who appointed me a place just against the *Déla* where the King sate...
>
> About sev'n a Clock in the Morning *Sha-Sephi* the second, who since has chang'd his name to *Sha-Solayman* the second, came and seated himself upon his Throne set up in the mid'st of the *Déla*, all his Nobility standing about him. So soon as he was sate down, the Great *Provost* appear'd at the end of the *Piazza* mounted upon a fair Horse, attended by certain young Lords, who caus'd the People, consisting of the Companies of the two quarters of the City, which are twelve in all, to advance to the places which were design'd them...As he was about his duty, a Horse-man entred the *Piazza*, arm'd with a Bow, a Quiver, and a Scimitar, follow'd by seven Men that carry'd every one a Pike upright in their hands, with every one a Man's Head at the top. Those were the heads of certain *Usbeck-Tartars*, the neighbouring and mortal Enemies of the *Persians*, which those men had cut off from the shoulders of their conquer'd Foes. The King caus'd five *Tomans* a piece to be giv'n to them that carry'd the Heads, and ten *Tomans*

to their Leader...Then the *Provost* caus'd the Companies to advance, every Company having the Thill of a Wagon carry'd before him; being painted with a *Grotesco* of Gold and Silver, and the Bier cover'd with Sattin. When the first Company had order to march, three Horses were led before, richly harness'd; when they were come about a hundred Paces forward into the *Piazza,* in view of the King, they that led the Horses caus'd them to gallop, and then all the Company fell a running and dancing about with the Bier. Besides that, every one flung up his short Cassock, his Girdle, and Bonnet, put their fingers in their mouths, to whistle as loud as they could. While the naked people, with their Flint-stones in their hands, ran knocking their Stones together, crying out, *Hussein Hocen, Hocen Hussein,* 'till they foam at the mouth again not omitting to wryth their Bodies, and to make all the scurvy Faces as before describ'd. The three Companies succeeding one another in the same Formalities, by and by came two Companies more with a little Bier upon their Thills, and in each Bier a little Child lay as if dead. They that accompany'd these two Biers wept and sigh'd most sadly. These two Infants represented the Children of *Hussein,* who when the prophet was slain, were tak'n by *Yerid* [*sic*], *Caliph* of *Bagdat,* and put to death.

Upon this occasion you shall see a great number of Curtisans that come to the Ceremony fall a weeping, who thereby believe their Sins are forgiv'n.

When all the people were come into the *Piazza,* notwithstanding all the care and good order that was tak'n, there were several that went to Sharps, accounting it a great honour to fight smartly in the Kings presence; and farther believing, that if any one be killed upon that occasion, he shall be Sainted; as indeed every one gives something toward his Interrment. The Grand *Provost* seeing the Quarrel grow hot, and fearing more mischief, sent for five Elephants, which ceas'd the Combat, by drawing the Eyes of the Spectators upon them...

Upon one side of the Room where the King stood, a little Scaffold was set up, cover'd with Tap'stry, some five Foot lower than the Kings. In the middle of the Scaffold stood a great Elbow-Chair cover'd with black Velvet, where sate a *Moullah* with six other *Moullah's* round about him. The *Moullah* made a Discourse upon the Death of *Hussein* and *Hocen* of about half an hour long,

> which being ended, the King caus'd a *Calaat* or Habit of Honour to be giv'n him, as also to the others, though not so rich. When they had all put on the Habit, the same *Moullah* return'd to his Chair, and made a Prayer for the health of the King, and the prosperity of his Kingdom.
>
> All these Ceremonies lasted from seven in the Morning 'till Noon, at what time the King retir'd into his *Haram.* As for the People, they carry their Biers up and down the City, and where-ever two Companies meet, whether it be for the upper hand, or to get formost, they presently fall together by the Ears, and knock one another down: For they are not permitted to carry any other Arms than good big Clubs, almost as big as Levers. (Tavernier, 4:7:161–3)

This same traveler also recounts how he was invited to an entertainment hosted by the Safavid king so that they might drink together, listen to enchanting music, and watch beautiful women dance. He reports that during the reception, the king reclined on a bench covered with exquisitely fine carpets.

> About two days after betimes in the Morning I was sent for to the Court in that hast, that I had scarce time to make me ready. When I came to Court, I found the *Nazar,* Father *Raphael,* and two *Hollanders,* upon whom the *Nazar* had began to cast a particular eye of favour all together. After we had stay'd a while, the *Nazar* brought us to the Room where the King was, sitting upon a low Pallet, with two Mattresses cover'd with a rich Carpet. He lean'd his back against a large Cushion four foot long, having before him eight or ten Plates of Fruits and Sweet-meats. Before him also stood two Bottles, with long round necks of Venice Crystal stop'd with Pitch, full of *Schiras* Wine, with a Cup of pure Gold; upon one side a kind of a very small Fat with a handle, within three or four Fingers full of the same Wine, with a Gold Ladle that held a good *Chopine* of *Paris.* The Bottles were for the King's drinking; that in the Fat for those that the King did the Honor to drink with him. After we came in and had made our several obeyances; said the King to Father *Raphael, Raphael, bia, bia,* that is, *come hither, come hither,* who thereupon rising, and falling upon his knees when he came near the King; *Raphael,*

continu'd the King, *if thou wilt drink Wine, stay here, if not, be gone.* The Fryar unaccustom'd to drink Wine, reply'd that since His Majesty did him so great an Honour, he was willing to drink a little. *'Tis very well,* answer'd the King smiling, *go then and take thy seat.* Thereupon the King commanded one of the *Dutch-men* to fill some Wine, which he did, but with a trembling hand Heav'n, knows, as never having been at such a Festival before. And I observ'd that having laid his Hat upon the Carpet, the King commanded him to put it on, it being a very ignominious thing in *Persia* to be bare-headed. Thus the great Ladle went about very smartly, considering it was but early in the Forenoon: But at length the King bethinking himself that the *Franks* were not used to drink without eating, gave such order, that immediately they spread before us a *Sofra* of Cloth of Gold instad of a Table-Cloth...

While we were talking of serious things the Curtisans were bid to retire out of the Hall, which they did, into a Gallery that look'd upon a Garden, where they sate, where immediately a *Sofra* was laid before them cover'd with Fruits and Sweet-meats, and one of their Society continually powr'd out the Wine which they drank round without intermission: One would have thought they should have been fuddl'd; yet when they came in again, no man could perceive they had been drinking. After they had Danc'd a while, they were order'd to retire again, and the King sent for his Musick, which was both Vocal and Instrumental; his Instrumental Musick consisted of a Lute, a Guittar, a Spinet, and two or three Base Flutes. He had also in the Gallery where the Curtisans were, a large Ebony Cabinet eight foot high, adorn'd with several Silver figures, which prov'd to be an Organ that went alone. It was part of the present which the *Muscovite* Ambassadors made the King, which he order'd to be set a going, that we might hear it as we sate. No sooner had the Organ stop'd, but the Curtisans were call'd in again, and the King caus'd the Gold Ladle to go round, commanding that no man should leave a drop. When every man had done, the King was pleas'd to ask me which of the Curtisan's I thought to be handsomest? Thereupon I rose up, and taking a Wax-Candle in my hand, I went and view'd them all. The King laugh'd, and being very glad to see my face among theirs, *Bring hither,* saith he, *her to whom thou hast most a fancy.* In obedience to which, I pick'd out the eldest, as I thought, and led her to his

> Majesty, who caus'd us to sit down by him. Then the King pointing to another, *And why,* saith he, *did you not choose younder Girl, which is younger and handsomer;* commanding them both to kiss me one after another, that I might understand the difference between the Caresses of one and the other. But I reply'd, that were I to choose again, I would make the same choice, believing prudence to accompany age. However I besought his Majesty to consider, that it was not for me to look upon elder or younger, and that though he had giv'n me the liberty to send the elder home to my Lodging, yet it was not in my pow'r to accept of his favour, in regard I had a Wife, to whom I never had been unfaithful...
>
> The next night the King fell a drinking again, and there was in his presence an *Agi* or Pilgrim newly return'd from *Mecca,* and consequently oblig'd never to drink Wine after that. While the *Agi* staid, there was one of the *Persian* Lords got so impertinently fuddl'd, that he twice struck the *Agi's* Turbant from his head, refus'd to drink when the King commanded him, play'd the fool with the Curtisans when they were dancing, and committed so many other acts of folly, that the King, incens'd at such a continuation of Buffonry, in a great fury, *This Rascal,* said he, *has lost all his respect, and thinks he is no more my Slave; drag him out by the feet, and throw him to the Dogs to eat.* Immediately four or five of the King's Officers came and drag'd him out of the Hall by the feet, and every body wonder'd he was not thrown to the Dogs, according to the King's Command; but 'tis thought that some of the King's Woman beg'd for him, so that his punishment was chang'd. (Tavernier 4:17:181–3).

In the words of Hafez:

> *The preachers who display such a mien upon the pulpit*
> *In private behave otherwise*[117]

This is the same king who participated in the 'Ashura ceremonies and made a public showing of his piety. Such deep-seated depravity in the Safavid court—wine, women, eunuchs, and handsome boys

[117]TN: Persian:

واعظان کاین جلوه در محراب و منبر می کنند چون بخلوت می روند آن کار دیگر می کنند

in the case of the king and pretentiousness, mercilessness, and cold-heartedness in the case of his courtiers—made the aggravation of social affliction inevitable. An assortment of inhuman tortures were practiced during these times, the most incredible of which was the hacking to pieces of the condemned's body and the subsequent consumption of those pieces by cannibals.

The two quotations from Tavernier, who was an eyewitness to these events, serve to show that the growth of anti-Semitism during the Safavid period was built upon a foundation of lies, fraud, deceit, pretentiousness, depravity, obstinacy, and mockery of monotheistic religion by those in the government and a cheapening of the worth and status of the individual and humanity. This is the situation which we encounter with all other anti-Semitic incidents throughout the world.

The growth in the number of pseudo-mullahs during the Safavid period, which no obstacle could check, led to the Jews—the vanguards of theology—being declared infidels and created a situation where the annihilation of Judaism for all time became part and parcel of the state's agenda. From the beginning of the reign of Shah Isma'il, when the wars between Iran and the Ottomans intensified and the Europeans played the role of firebrand, persecution of Jews also began in earnest and gradually intensified. Sultan Selim, the Ottoman king, upon learning of "the despatch of Persian envoys to Egypt and Hungary"[118] determined to uproot Shi'ism and the newly founded Iranian state. At the beginning of Shah Isma'il's reign, the Sunni faith predominated in Iran, and in some places, Shi'is were compelled to abide in secret. This religious predominance was so great that the Shi'i religious leaders of Azerbaijan urged the Safavid Isma'il not to take action against the Sunnis. Moreover, the Sunni Ottoman dynasty, which claimed title to the Islamic caliphate, could not countenance Shi'i influence on its borders.

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[118]Sykes, 2:162.

After the establishment of Ottoman power in the Holy Land, the Jewish population of Turkey, which by 1488 had become very small, began to grow. Because of Jewish emigration from Spain, the Jewish population of Istanbul grew to thirty thousand, and many synagogues were erected on Ottoman soil. Ottoman backing of the Jewish people was another reason for Safavid hostility toward the Jews. Because many Jews lived in Azerbaijan at that time, the wars in that province inflicted great losses upon them. At times famine, plague, and drought added to the gravity of the situation.

The religious and political trends of the early Safavid period accelerated during the reigns of later kings. With the arrival of the English ambassador Jenkinson during the reign of Shah Tahmasp, the foundations for European-style inhumane treatment of Jews were laid in Iran. The Italian ambassador openly advised the king, "If Iran does not attack the Ottomans, it will itself fall prey to them." The Ottoman Empire was one of the few places of refuge for European Jews. Because of the propaganda of European spies, some of whom were intolerant priests steeped in the traditions of the Dark Ages, enmity toward the Jews of Iran increased, and as a result, the Jewish populations of cities throughout the country began declining. From surviving gravestones of the period in the Jewish cemetery of the town of Gil'ad, which later became known as Gilyard, it can be determined that there were many Jews living in the town during the reign of Tahmasp. One of these stones, which measures 200×80×30 cm, bears the following inscription: "The young believer Ya'qub ben Shem'un died in the year 1875 Seleucid [*shetarot*]." Subtracting 311 yields the equivalent year of 1564 C.E., which was during the reign of Shah Tahmasp. Landholdings of the Jews of Gil'ad extended thirty kilometers south of the town, from the road to Tehran to Ab Anjirak and Hisar, which are about eighteen kilometers from Damavand. The Jews of Damavand, who are descended from the Jews of Gil'ad, have a legend in their folk literature recounting how one of the kings of ancient Iran had become ill and pressured the Jews of the town, which was governed along tribal lines, to

come up with a cure for his ailment. A woman from the Morovvati tribe said that the king must drink the milk of a black mare that he might be cured. The king did this. He became well, and in gratitude for this service, granted the lands around Gil'ad to the Jews.

This legend, though worthless from a historical viewpoint, like other popular tales incorporates a certain truth: the large size of the town's Jewish population in the past, which more or less continued until Safavid times. In 1580 C.E., Pedro Teixeira reported the Jewish population of Isfahan at between eight and ten thousand families.

The reign of Shah 'Abbas I, whom the Europeans dubbed "the Great" is not without its uncertainties and mysteries. On the one hand, his contemporary historians—either through fear or because they received subsidies—tended to exaggerate, setting the background against which storytellers and fabulists extolled his philanthropy and love of justice. On the other hand, political envoys, merchants, and travelers of his day described the events of the times and the personality of this king. Contemporary pseudo-clerics, seeing their aspirations fulfilled, also related such stories about him that centuries later, the Iranian masses consider Shah 'Abbas a peerless personality, free of all fault or blame. All in all, so much has been written about few kings. Even the written and unwritten words of the Jews about him and his accomplishments are long and detailed. There is no doubt that during this king's reign, the propagation of the Shi'i faith was accomplished, and the Sunnis joined the ranks of the other religious minorities. In this regard, the Shi'i clerics' praise of Shah 'Abbas for this important act is only natural.

In order to make an accurate assessment of this period and the res gestae of Shah 'Abbas the Great, all documents concerning the period must be dispassionately studied so that the truth may be discerned. Nasrallah Falsafi, author of *Zendegani-ye shah 'Abbas-e avval* (Life of Shah 'Abbas I), who drew upon many sources, writes:

> This king...sent ambassadors to the countries of Europe and concluded political and economic treaties with the great kings of that region...European merchants who went to Iran were warmly and

> openly received, and he allowed...them to openly sell various European goods...He was kind toward the Christians and permitted them to build churches in Iran and to freely exercise their religious faith.

Eugène Flandin writes concerning the reign of Shah 'Abbas the Great:

> The first who went to this kingdom and introduced Europe were French missionaries. Following their example, some Portuguese and Italian monks also ventured there. These various missions stayed at Isfahan, governed by the Safavids. At first well-received by Shah 'Abbas, then supported by his successors, they lived there several years, protected and even esteemed. (Flandin, 1:1)

With the attacks of the Uzbeks during this king's reign, the cities of Mashhad, Nishapur, and Sabzevar, which were Jewish-inhabited areas of Khorasan, fell prey to raids, and the Jews suffered the calamities of war along with other Iranians.

Shah 'Abbas delegated domestic policy to Shi'i clerics and foreign policy to "European agents," especially the Sherley brothers. In the opinion of Sir John Malcolm, the entrustment of foreigners with such powers as were given the Sherley brothers was without precedent. In a letter to the kings of Europe, Shah 'Abbas writes:

> "...The entertainment which that principall gentleman [Robert Sherley] hath had with me, is, that daylie, whils't he hath bin in thiese partes, we haue eaten togither of one dysh, and drunke of one cup, like two breethren..." (Sykes, 2:177)

This king's reliance upon Europeans is made patently clear by these words. One of the Sherley brothers' traveling companions writes:

> ...the King [Shah 'Abbas]...called for some wine, and did drink a health unto me, and used these words: "I do esteem more of the sole of a Christian's shoe, than I do of the best Turk in Turkey." (George Manwaring, in *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, E.D. Ross, ed., p. 208)

Among the dozens of European representatives granted access to the Iranian court during this king's reign was the Spanish ambassador del Garcia, an advocate of the Inquisition and a promoter of anti-Semitism in Iran. On the day Shah 'Abbas "went to the residence of the Spanish ambassador and saw that the ambassador's deputies removed their hats as a token of respect, and that the ambassador also wore no hat, he therefore removed his turban."[119] The king had very close relations with this ambassador. The Spanish king's ambassadors were priests and also carried out missions for the Pope. The preaching of these missionaries had a profound effect upon Shah 'Abbas. He strongly believed in fortune-telling, sorcery, and soothsaying.

> He believed that sorcery and witchcraft influenced the world. He brought a magician with him from Zanjan to Azerbaijan to use his services in the war against the Turks...Astrologers often predicted the future for the king. (Falsafi, p. 345).

Shah 'Abbas put an end to the prevailing anarchy in Iran. During his reign, burglary and brigandage were greatly diminished and abuses by the commanders of the army came to an end. Manufacturing, agriculture, and commerce flourished, and many caravanserais and coffee-houses were built along roadsides.

Foreign and Domestic Factors in the Flood of Anti-Semitism

Domestic and foreign religious wars on the one hand, and the influence of Europeans who harbored a hatred for the Jews left over from the Middle Ages on the other hand, ensured that the advances of Shah 'Abbas' time were accompanied by a wave of anti-Semitism in Iran, which was soon to reach its peak. The Jews of Iran, facing social decline in these times, had no proper organization or lay leaders and were economically deprived. They were so vulnerable that the slightest push could knock them over. No strong blows

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[119]Falsafi, p. 85.

were delivered against the Jews while Shah 'Abbas remained at Qazvin, because during those years the king was trying to consolidate his power.

With the transfer of the capital from Qazvin to Isfahan, the afflictions of the Jews intensified. Jewish employment was restricted, and poverty and despair became their companions. What added most to their misfortunes and persecutions were the sanctions enumerated in the book *Jami' al-'Abbasi* ('Abbas' Comprehensive Volume), written during this period by Shaykh Baha' al-Din Muhammad 'Amili.[120] Although the writer did not call for different treatment of Jews and Christians, in practice, the restrictions were applied only to Jews. In *Jami' al-'Abbasi,* the blood money for the murder of a Jew is set at a trifling sum, whereas in the book *Ma'alim* (Signs), a source of Islamic law, it is written, "If the killer of a Jew should be an evil man, then that killer who killed the Jew without cause must of a certainty be put to death, and the forfeiture which for the Muslim is 1,000 dirhams for the Jew is 800 dirhams."

The infamous inheritance law governing Jews who converted to Islam—which worsened the lot of a native minority which had lived in Iran centuries before the Mongols, Tatars, and Turks—was enacted during the Safavid period. According to this law, whenever a Jew died who had a close or distant relative who had converted to Islam, the entire estate of the deceased went to that relative. Because of this edict, which remained in force until 1880, Jewish families were easily split apart. Not only did the Jew who had been forced to become a Muslim inherit his people's property after their deaths, but the Jew who had a falling out with his relatives would—genuinely or falsely—convert to Islam to secure for himself their meagre inheritance. Jews unhappy with their relatives converted to Islam in order to seek vengeance or to gain for themselves what little property

[120]Some Islamic scholars believe that these sanctions were written and added to *Jami' al-'Abbasi* by Nizam al-Din, a student of Shaykh Baha', after the death of his instructor.

the poor people of those times had in this world, depriving their relatives of their inheritances. In order to demonstrate that they had indeed become Muslims, they plotted against their former coreligionists. These things were occasionally done by ignorant Jews who were weak in their faith, and they struck a heavy blow to the order of the Jewish community. The inhuman laws and restrictions proclaimed by the mullahs against the Jews during the Safavid period remained in force until the end of the Qajar period and so divided Jewish families that sometimes Jews who had converted to Islam went so far as to kill their brethren.

Because of religious suffering, many Jewish religious leaders' interest in Cabala grew during the reign of Shah 'Abbas the Great. Cabalism was a sort of spiritual salve and became increasingly popular, along with increased hope and anticipation of the coming of the messiah. But anti-Semites spread rumors that the Jews were using the books of Cabala to cast magic spells against the king. On the basis of these false rumors, Shah 'Abbas, who firmly believed in witchcraft, commanded that all the books of Zohar and the other cabalistic books, along with all Hebrew books, be gathered up and destroyed. As a result, books of this sort went underground and became the prized possessions of their owners.

Some of the legends about the justice of Shah 'Abbas and his nocturnal excursions in vagabond's clothes have a Jewish connection. One of them, told by Rabbi Davud Ishaq Yazdi, goes as follows: At the beginning of his reign, Shah 'Abbas had anonymously slipped in among the people of Yazd in the guise of a mendicant. One day, he had a problem with some ruffians. He fled from them and hid in an irrigation ditch. As fate would have it, a Jew passed by. When the king recognized that the man was a Jew, he had confidence in him and asked for his help. The Jewish man rescued the king, who handsomely rewarded him the next day.

This short simple tale tells us several things. One is that at the beginning of his reign, Shah 'Abbas had a favorable attitude toward Jews and trusted them. Second, the image of the reward and enrich-

ment is a sign of Jewish poverty, and third, Yazd and its surroundings were inhabited by Jews. It is on the basis of this third point that the Jews of Yazd say that the residents of the towns of Eshaqabad, Ya'qubabad, and Maryamabad were once all Jewish. These three villages once shared a house of worship known as the Sarsang Synagogue, the ruins of which survived for centuries.

According to Isma'il Morovvati of Damavand, during the early reign of Shah 'Abbas I, a man by the name of Mordecai was the leader of the Jewish community at Gil'ad, near Damavand. A Torah with his name on it survives at Damavand. In his notes, Solayman Kohan Sedegh writes:

> Shah 'Abbas decreed that the Jews must become Muslims or be put to death. A Shi'i religious scholar opposed this idea and said that it was better to engage their adults in a religious discussion. The result was that the Jews were given seventy years after which, if the messiah did not appear and save them, they must then become Muslims or be killed. As the Jews saw this as their best hope, they accepted.

The bitter fruit of this contract can be seen seventy years later, during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II.

Restrictions on Jewish economic activity, religious degradations, forced conversions, and massacres based on the false pretext of the killing of non-Jewish children, all the legacy of the travels of medieval European priests to Iran, as well as raids and despoliation, gave anti-Semitism a new shape in Iran. The domestic pseudo-clerics and crafty foreign advisers were master planners of anti-Semitic acts. The attitude of the Iranian masses toward a minority which now bore the brand, "unclean infidel," on their brows changed completely, and thenceforward, persecution of Jews became common among the illiterate populace. Jews no longer had the right to work in the marketplace next to the adherents of other religions. Most of them became street peddlers. Even the right to purchase fresh fruit was taken away from them.

Seventy years after the agreement made with Shah 'Abbas the Great, news of the advent of the messiah shook the Jewish world. This messiah's name was Shabbetai Zevi (Fig. 7), but other messiahs born out of the oppressive life of Jews in Europe and Asia had appeared before him. One of them, the committed cabalist Solomon Molcho, was called "the messiah" from 1500 to 1532. He was born in Lisbon of Spanish Marrano parents. He completed his higher education at a young age and at the age of twenty-one was appointed to state office. His family name is derived from *melekh,* meaning king. He was a contemporary of David Reuveni, who lived in the Islamic countries and also claimed to be the Savior of the Age. It is likely that the two met.[121]

David Reuveni (d. 1538) fulfilled the Messianic hopes of the weary Jewish people in the first half of the 16th century. The most important source of information about him is his journal, which he kept in Hebrew. He claimed to be the son of Solomon, who ruled the lost tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Mannaseh in the wilderness of Khabur. He maintained that the family name "Reuveni" supported his claim. According to his memoirs, he first lived in the East, where he was taken captive. The Muslims bought him as a slave and brought him to Alexandria. In that city, his coreligionists purchased his freedom. He later founded his movement, and in time gained access to the courts of kings. David Reuveni was fearless and devout. According to his memoirs, he was very troubled by the afflictions suffered by the Jews of his times.[122]

The movements established by these two were taken very seriously, and both garnered many adherents, but it was Shabbetai Zevi who inspired the Jews of Iran and kindled the spark of hope in them. Shabbetai was born in Izmir on the 9th of Ab [Saturday, 1 August], 1626. He used this date of birth to support his claim of being the messiah. His family was descended from Spanish emigrants. His

[121] *EJ,* 12:225.

[122] *EJ,* 14:114.

father traded with Holland and England, and in his childhood he lived in complete financial security. He studied theology and at the age of eighteen became a *hakham.* He mastered the Talmud and then became interested in Cabala and the Zohar, encouraging other youths to study them. Between the years 1642 and 1648, he developed a distinctive spirituality. He became absorbed in thought and fell silent, speaking with no one. In 1648, after a massacre of the Jews, he proclaimed himself the messiah. His commanding voice and handsome visage helped him to quickly gain influence. He traveled to many cities. The shofar was sounded in the synagogues and Shabbetai was proclaimed the messiah. His following continued to grow. In both East and West, the Jewish world was galvanized. The messiah had appeared in the East. The Jews of Europe thanked God with hope and joy.

Tumult ensued amongst the Jews of Iran. The traveler Chardin writes:

> I remember being in Hyrcania [Mazandaran] in the year 1666, at the time when the Jews of Turkey were making such a fuss over the false Messiah, named Sabatai Levi. I recall, as I say, that those of Hyrcania believed like the others that the liberator whom they await in vain had arrived. They abandoned their homes, took to the fields, and covered themselves in ashes and sackcloth, fasted, and prayed for the manifestation of the Messiah. The governor of the province sent word to them, saying "What are you doing, poor people, abandoning your work, rather than considering how you will pay your tribute?" They replied "We will pay tribute no longer, sire, our Liberator has arrived." (Chardin, 6:135)

A miracle had occurred. Seventy years earlier, the Jews of Iran had agreed that if by this time the messiah had not appeared, they would become Muslims. But the messiah had arrived. It is likely that Shabbetai Zevi, who had become widely famed as the messiah, brought tears to the eyes of the tormented Jews of Iran. Shabbetai's movement reached its zenith during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II. Pilgrims arrived daily by ship at Izmir to visit Shabbetai. The religious

Ottoman sultan saw Shabbetai as a rival, however, and ordered his arrest. The "messiah" was arrested. The sultan commanded him to immediately convert to Islam or have his head severed from his body. Shabbetai converted to Islam! He placed a turban upon his head, was dubbed "'Aziz Mehmed Effendi," and entered the service of the Ottoman court in the capacity of *kapuchi basha,* or "guardian of the royal palace."[123]

The hopes of the Jews of Iran, who were prepared for the return to Erez Israel, were immediately dashed. During those times of brutal anti-Semitic persecutions, the Jews had no refuge save hope for the advent of the messiah. It was for this reason that Jewish clerics, through mystical interpretation of the scriptures and Hebrew numerology, believed that the arrival of the Savior was at hand. Nearly two centuries before Shabbetai, it was predicted, based on interpretations of the Book of Daniel, that in the Hebrew year 5263, or 1503 C.E., the messiah would come. Indeed, messiahs did come, one after the other—and sometimes at the same time.

Therefore, it was time for the Jews to honor their agreement. As the messiah had not come to save them and seventy years had passed since their agreement with the Safavid state, they were compelled to convert to Islam. Shah 'Abbas II, who ruled from 1642 to 1667, decreed that all Jews must convert to Islam and that the conversions should begin at Isfahan. Urgent entreaties by the Jews of the capital, based on the argument that Isfahan was the center of Judaism, that the Jews of the city had always paid their taxes throughout the period of Islamic government, had always honored their commitments, and never caused any trouble, failed to sway the sultan. They were forced to publicly profess their new faith and meticulously follow Islamic regulations. They were forced to disavow their former religious faith, allow their daughters to marry Muslims, to register their new, Islamic names, and thenceforward to be called Muslim converts.

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[123] *EJ,* 14:1219.

Though we may attribute offenses against the Jews during the early Safavid period to the provocations of European political and religious emissaries, during the latter Safavid period, persecution of the Jews grew out of the obstinacy of the pseudo-mullahs. We say "pseudo-mullahs" and do not include the few discerning leaders who correctly understood the concept of religion and sought the protection of the followers of all religions, especially the monotheistic religions, and particularly the Jews, who were the first to worship God. The pseudo-mullahs were cut from the same cloth as the hypocritical, outwardly ascetic "preachers" of whom Hafez complained (p. 276). According to Malikzadeh,

> During the Safavid period, the city clerics were always at war with their countrymen, the helpless, and the religious minorities, and at peace with foreign dominators. In their own words, they had not a handsbreadth of leeway. They persecuted Jews and Zoroastrians, showing them Islam's awesome power, but did nothing to resist the Afghan conquest, spending several days studying the positions of the stars...Each of the [pseudo-clerics] had thousands of thugs and commoners of ill repute who attired themselves in religious garb and professed to be students whom they gathered around themselves by paying an allowance of a few *rials* a month, thus increasing their influence. (Malekzadeh, pp. 85, 94)

Climax of Anti-Semitism during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas II

In Chardin's travelogue it is mentioned that French Capuchin missionaries grew more influential during Shah 'Abbas II's reign and that the English gained great influence in the Iranian court. One day the Russian ambassador drank so much with the king of Iran that he vomited. The grand vizier Muhammad Beg—known by the sobriquet "I'timad al-Dawlah"—despised the Jews, and it was during this period that the Persian term *jahud* came to be used pejoratively in reference to the Jews.

The oppressions of Shah 'Abbas II and his vengeful grand vizier caused the Jewish population of Iran to decline precipitously. Ac-

cording to Tavernier, during his time there were 600 Jews in Isfahan and 1,000 in Kashan, while in Qom there were only 10 Jewish families. Most of the Jews who survived the torments and oppressions of the Safavids left Iran for Baghdad, which was under Ottoman rule. Tavernier paints a picture of the Jews of Baghdad after the city's conquest by the Ottomans that vividly depicts the differences between the religious leadership of these two Islamic countries. He writes:

> In the year 1639, after the Grand *Signor* had tak'n *Bagdat,* a *Rafedi* who was a Carrier of Water not only refus'd to give a *Jew* to drink, who disir'd it of him in the Market-place, but abus'd him also in words. Thereupon the *Jew* complain'd to the *Cady,* who immediately sent for him, and caus'd his *Boracho* and his Cup to be brought along with him; when he came before him, he ask'd for his Cup, and gave the *Jew* to drink, and then made the Porter drink also out of the same Cup: After that, he order'd the *Rafedi* to be Bastinado'd, and this Lesson to be taught him while he was chastising, That we are God's Creatures, as well *Mahometans,* as Christians and *Jews.* (Tavernier, 2:7:85)

But the status of Jews in Iran during this period is another story. A Christian religious leader, Père Raphael du Mans, wrote that the king of Iran had decreed that the eyes of every Jew he saw should be gouged out.

The fate of the Jews of Iran, particularly those of Isfahan, during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II is also described by a non-Jewish Iranian historian, Arakel Armani Tabrizi. He writes that one Friday evening in 1658 C.E., Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah ordered that the Jews, being ritually unclean, must depart the city of Isfahan at once and take up residence in a suburb outside the city. The authorities refused to grant the people's pleas for a reprieve at least until the following day. I'timad al-Dawlah refused to modify his decree in any way and promised that any Jew found in the city of Isfahan the next day would be imprisoned and tortured. The Jews of Isfahan—on a Friday night—were driven from their homes. Whosoever put up the slightest resistance was assaulted with spades, daggers, and cleav-

ers. Their wailing and lamenting failed to move the authorities' hearts of stone. Young and old, women and children, healthy and unhealthy were driven homeless from the city in the middle of the night. No one dared admit them into their homes.

I'timad al-Dawlah, having failed in his design to force the Jews to convert to Islam, ordered that the Jewish menfolk be brought shackled before him. He then began preaching to them, advising them and their families to convert to Islam. But the Jewish men resisted. I'timad al-Dawlah threatened them with barbaric tortures. They did not listen. He then ordered that each soldier should be responsible for the torture of two Jews. In one of the suburbs of Isfahan there was a vacant gated fortress. The weather was cold, and they flooded the grounds of the fortress so that they became covered with ice. Then they locked the Jews inside the castle for three days and three nights without food or water. Several died. Muhammad Beg ordered that they be imprisoned within the city. One of them, Obadiah, converted to Islam. I'timad al-Dawlah congratulated him and bestowed his ring upon him. They then brought forth the *hakham* of the Jews and told him that if he did not become a Muslim they would disembowel him, tie his corpse to a camel, parade it about the city, and subject his family to torture. They instantly brought forth a camel and summoned the executioner to disembowel the *hakham.* The *hakham,* fearing for his family's safety, acquiesced. The Jewish men then gradually followed suit. They were told, "Your *hakham* has converted to Islam, now it is your turn to follow him."

They spat upon, cursed, slapped, kicked, and dragged off to prison those who resisted. After several days they brought out the prisoners and repeated the scenario. In this manner they converted 150 Jews to Islam in one month. They continued to use this method to convert the Jews of Isfahan to Islam. A cleric was appointed to instruct them in Islamic law, to ensure that they went to the mosques, and to teach their children using Islamic books. The Jews were ordered to purchase their meat from Islamic butchers. But many of the new Muslims continued to secretly practice their Jewish faith.

They bought meat and brought it home, but they buried it in the ground. They went to the mosques, but in their hearts they recited Hebrew prayers. They were Jews at home, while out of doors they put on a Muslim façade.

After Isfahan, these events were repeated with Jews in other cities. Some Jews fled their towns rather than face mandatory conversion, while others outwitted their oppressors by pretending to be Muslims. The Jews of Kashan, Qom, Tabriz, Ardabil, Qazvin, Lar, Shiraz, and Hamadan suffered this same fate, while the Jews of some other cities, such as Yazd and Kerman, were able to escape compulsory conversion either by paying bribes to the clerics or by fleeing their homes.

The Jews of Farahabad were recalcitrant and claimed that the prince, Mirza Sadiq, had no decree from the king saying that they must change their faith. Mirza Sadiq subjected them to torture. They still would not submit. The Safavid prince then obtained the king's written decree and told the Jews, "This is the king's decree. What say you now? On the king's orders you must accept Islam."

The Jews still bravely resisted, saying, "We will not abandon the faith of our forefathers. Do with us as you please." Mirza Sadiq increased the harshness of his tortures. Upon his orders, the Jews of Farahabad were suspended upside down by their feet and beaten unconscious. They attacked their homes and raped young Jewish boys, women, and girls, and plundered their households. One hundred were arrested, shackled with a long, heavy, iron chain, and brought before the prince daily and tortured. This went on for four months. Finally, the prince grew weary and told the Jews that since they would not abandon their faith, they were each obliged to wear a patch so that every one would know that they were Jewish.[124]

The merciless, oppressive campaign of Shah 'Abbas II and his henchmen to convert the Jews of Iran to Islam was not always successful. In many cases, it ended in defeat, and victories were

[124]Arakel Armani Tabrizi.

sometimes undone by stratagems. By means of a temporary façade, the spiteful enemy was held at bay. This resolve, combined with the intercession of several great, conscientious clerics, led to a reduction in the forced conversion of Jews to Islam even during this king's reign. But when the chief of the armory obtained a proclamation of religious emancipation for the Jews from 'Abbas II, he used it to extort money from the Jews of Kashan and Isfahan. With this proclamation, Jews who felt that the danger had passed returned to Judaism, while those who were surrounded had no choice but to bide their time until a more opportune moment should arrive. But this more opportune moment never materialized, because the mullahs once again came to the fore, resumed their acts of vengeance against the Jews, and—in atonement for their past omissions—redoubled their efforts. Later, as the sun set on the Safavid dynasty, the pseudo-clerics, seeing a power vacuum, rushed in to fill it and acted with greater impunity, preventing the newly-converted Muslims from re-embracing Judaism under any circumstances.

Apart from domestic factors, an important foreign factor which impeded the return of newly converted Muslims to Judaism during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II was Shabbetai Zevi's submission to the Ottoman sultan. Jews who had been forced to convert to Islam were disheartened by this ill-omened event and lost hope in the advent of a messiah to deliver them from their travails. Their farewell to Judaism took place in a gloomy cavern of hopelessness and despair. In his memoirs, Solayman Kohan Sedegh writes that Shabbetai sent an envoy named Rabbi Mattetia to Isfahan, and that those Jews who could fled to the Ottoman Empire during the reign of 'Abbas II. But with the end of the good tidings from the pseudo-messiah, the clock was turned back, and those who had been coerced into becoming Muslims saw no way back. Shabbetai Zevi's submission to the Ottoman sultan took place in 1667—seven years after Shah 'Abbas II's proclamation of Jewish emancipation and one year before his death.

Another reason that the newly-converted Muslims did not return to their Jewish faith was the stubborn contumacy of Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah, who was constantly devising new ways of trying them. As soon as he saw in them the slightest inclination to return to Judaism, he resorted to cruelly torturing and massacring them. Nothing stopped him in this endeavor, not even the king's proclamation. It must not be left unsaid that the enemies of Judaism who governed Iran—to the extent that they could—concealed or watered down the king's proclamation of Jewish emancipation. In any event, the king's proclamation helped only a handful of Jews, and was soon forgotten.

The restrictions on Jews, a favorite topic of the pseudo-mullahs since the beginnings of the Safavid dynasty, were expanded during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II. During this period, Muhammad Taqi Majlisi collected these regulations. The essence of these, excluding those presented in Chapter Ten (p. 170), is as follows:

1. Jews may not have shops in the bazaar.
2. The Jew who becomes a Muslim inherits all of his relatives' property.
3. The oath of a Jew is not admissible in court.
4. Jews must pay a separate poll tax.
5. He who kills a Jew shall go free upon payment of blood money.[125]
6. When it rains, Jews may not take cover in alleyways.
7. Jewish women may not cover their faces in public.[126]
8. The veils worn by Jewish women must be of two colors. (They were not permitted to wear the traditional black veils of the times.)
9. Jewish men may not wear fine clothing; they may only wear blue calico.

[125]The *Bulletin* of the Alliance israélite universelle for 1873, p. 93, reports that during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, this sum was 33 tomans.

[126]This law was a great affront to Jewish women in an extremist society in which women covered their faces.

10. Jews may not wear matching shoes.
11. All Jews must wear a red patch on their garments.
12. No Jew may pass a Muslim in the street.
13. No Jew may raise his voice to a Muslim.
14. A Jewish creditor must collect his debt from a Muslim by politely asking.
15. If a Muslim curses a Jew, the Jew must remain silent and bow his head.
16. The Jew who purchases meat must keep it out of the sight of Muslims.
17. Jews may not build fancy houses.
18. Jews may not paint the rooms of their homes white.
19. The door of a Jew's house must be low and must be a single [not a double] door.
20. Jews may not wear robes, but must carry them beneath their armpits.
21. Jews may not trim their beards with scissors.
22. Jews may not go to summer resorts.
23. If a Jew drinks wine, he must not leave his house; otherwise, he must be immediately killed.
24. Jewish weddings must be held in secret.
25. Jews may not buy fresh fruits.
26. Jews must wear green and red.
27. Jews may not ride white donkeys.
28. When riding donkeys, Jews must keep their feet together.
29. Jews may not walk in the middle of the street. They must walk along the walls.
30. When praying, Jews may not raise their voices or sing.
31. Jewish men may not allow their hair to grow; they must shave their heads.
32. Because Jews are unclean, they must not join Muslim gatherings and touch things.
33. Jews may not enter Muslim shops—especially bakeries—and touch anything.

34. The testimony of a Jew is inadmissible, but a Muslim may testify against two Jews.
35. If a Muslim says that a Jew has blasphemed, that Jew must be put to death or become a Muslim.
36. Jews must live in a certain quarter, and Muslims who live near that quarter may not sell their houses to Jews.
37. Jews must wear ropes around their waists instead of shawls.
38. Jews may not set foot outside their homes after sunset.
39. A Jew riding a donkey may not pass a Muslim on foot.
40. Jews may not wear turbans. Instead, they must wear distinctive caps.
41. Jews must hang a rag over their doors.
42. Jewish shops must be one step lower than Muslim shops.
43. Jews may not open shops on city streets.
44. Jews may not wear long stockings.
45. Jews must bow their heads when addressing Muslims.

These degrading laws reflect the social myopia of the times. Combined with rampant persecutions and tortures aimed at forcing Jews to convert, they unleashed a hidden wave of Jewish emigration to the Ottoman Empire, as well as massacres. This greatly diminished the Jewish population during the Safavid period. In these times, "Jewish emancipation" was nothing more than a hollow phrase. Mistreatment persisted even after the proclamation of Shah 'Abbas II. The anecdote handed down generation to generation by the Jews of Yazd since the reign of Sultan Husayn Shah is indicative of the enduring nature of those persecutions: One Yom Kippur eve during that king's reign, a Jewish cleric by the name of Mullah Ya'qub donned a white garment and proceeded to the synagogue. Several Muslims saw him in that immaculate religious attire and mistook him for a Muslim. They greeted him, but soon realized their mistake. The news reached the governor, who was of a mind to order a massacre of the Jews for failure to observe the restrictions then in force. But the danger passed and the governor ordered that

the Jews must at all times observe the laws governing their dress and wear plain, drab clothes with a colored patch.

So great was the anti-Semitism of Safavid times that it persisted even after that dynasty's end. The erroneous notions received by later generations kept hatreds alive. It is noteworthy that during the Safavid period, the Shi'i government revived and expanded enforcement of the Sunni Contract of 'Umar—which had for a time been forgotten—against the Jews. Many of the anti-Semitic pseudo-clerics and statesmen who later became viziers and advisors to the kings were themselves descended from Mongols and Turks who not long before had not known God and had only recently converted to Islam.

Chardin writes concerning the social status of Jews in Safavid Iran:

> They are everywhere poor and miserable. I have not seen a single family in the kingdom that one could call rich, and which on the contrary did not live in poverty. Some of these Jews are artisans, but the majority live by intrigues, selling second-hand merchandise, by usury, by acting as middlemen, wine-sellers, and as pimps. They are also deeply involved in chemical medicine and magic in various places, and that is how they make most of their money, for their women, slipping into the seraglios, dupe the foolish and simple creatures, who govern by dint of their beauty, into believing that they can predict the future, that they can predict what will happen to them, and that they can concoct potions to make them beloved, to make their rivals detested, to cause them to bear children and to prevent from having them, and for such illusions they make a handsome profit. (Chardin, 6:133)

As the Safavid dynasty declined, there was no change in the status of Jews. Shah Sultan Husayn closed schools, shattered wine jugs, and persecuted Christian, Zoroastrian, and Jew alike. He even brought great pressure to bear on the various Islamic sects. The Shi'i-Sunni conflict escalated and Sufis were forced to abandon their homes. The seed planted during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I and

watered during the time of Shah 'Abbas II now bore fruit. The mullahs continued to torment the Jews and endeavored to convert them to Islam:

> Only the downfall of the Safavid dynasty, through the successful invasion of the Afghans and the subsequent rise of a new tolerant ruler, Nadir Shah (1734–1747), saved the Jews of Isfahan and the Jews of Persia as a whole from complete annihilation. (Fischel, "Isfahan: The Story of a Jewish Community in Persia," p. 126 [16])

Jewish Poetry, Literature, Scholarship, and Art during the Safavid Period

During these dark days of persecution, which were more than even the most patient and forbearing individuals could stand, the Jews, as is their national character, displayed an interest in science, literature, philosophy, the arts, and education. Throughout all these persecutions, they never forgot that they were people of letters and that their way was the way of reason, of the pen, and of scientific curiosity. Many Jewish scholars and artists of the Safavid period have undoubtedly been forgotten. Those whose names are mentioned here are but a few among many.

When the Ottoman Sultan Sulayman attacked Iran during the reign of Shah Tahmasp, he was accompanied by the Jewish physician R. Moshe Hamun. Upon his return to Istanbul, this physician brought with him from Iran R. Jacob ben Joseph Tavus, who translated the Pentateuch into Judeo-Persian in 1534. This Persian translation was published in 1546, along with the Hebrew and Aramaic texts and the Arabic translation of Saadiah Gaon. This translation was re-published along with Greek and Spanish translations. It is not known whether Tavus completed his translation in Iran, or if he resided in Istanbul (Constantinople) at the time. Tavus' translation was published in the Persian alphabet in 1654.[127]

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[127] *EJ*, 15:836.

'Imrani, a great Jewish poet of the Safavid period, was inspired by the epic style of the *Shahnameh* and versified the history of the Jews from after the time of Moses through the reign of King Solomon. Like all Jewish-Iranian authors and poets of his times, he used the Hebrew script to write Persian. His most important work is his *Fathnameh,* which he composed in 1523. His *Ganjnameh* is a versified discourse on religious topics.[128] 'Imrani versified the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, as well as portions of the Mishna.

It is apparent from 'Imrani's verse that he was under pressure to change his religion. In the introduction to Joshua, addressing God, he writes:

Should I be a few days late in my devotions
Forgive me of Thy grace
The noble find not fault with the blind
Even as kings accept the apologies of dervishes

This accomplished poet, observing his people's sufferings, addressed God thus:

Thou knowest that we have neither Migdash,
Offering, priest, nor Ezra
No sacrifice to present Thee
We present our sins
In this land of Galuth, O God!
We are aggrieved by tyranny and corruption
We are aggrieved in Galuth, a people
Captive, wanting, forlorn, and bewildered

Another Persian-speaking poet who lived in 16th century Iran was Judah Lari, whose *Makhzan al-pand* (Treasure Trove of Exhortations) survives.

Of the renowned Jewish poets who converted to Islam during this period, we must mention Sa'id Sarmad (d. 1661). This poet was

[128] *EJ,* 10:434.

born to a priestly family in Kashan in the early 17th century. Although Sarmad was forced to convert to Islam, he is referred to in Asian and European sources as "Sarmad the Jew" or "the Jewish mystic." Sarmad the Mystic emigrated to India and took up residence in Hyderabad. Later, in 1654, he moved to Delhi, the capital of the Mogul Empire, and lived there as a dervish for the rest of his life, where he was known as "the poor man of the passageways." He became universally popular for his mystic verse. He collaborated with the author of the *Dabistan* in writing a book in Persian on comparative religion. He composed the chapter on Judaism and translated six chapters from the book of Genesis. Considering Sarmad an infidel poet, the Mogul court sentenced him to death. A volume of Sarmad's collected works including over three hundred poems was published in 1897.[129] As Sarmad was led from the court to the execution grounds, so dense was the crowd which gathered that the poet could scarcely be led through. It is said that between the sultan's court and the grounds of the Jami'-e Shah mosque at Jahanabad where he was executed and buried, he composed nearly twenty-four quatrains, among them:

In the slaughterhouse of love, they kill only the virtuous
They kill not the scrawny wicked ones
If thou be a lover true, flee not
For those whom they kill not are but lumps of carrion flesh

Sarmad of Kashan was beheaded in 1660.

Another Jewish poet of the Safavid era, mentioned in *Tazkereh-ye nasrabadi* (Nasrabadi's Memoir), is...

> ...the dervish Joseph of the province of Lar, who was a Jew...It seems that he deviated from the path of Judaism and followed the path of Islam and went to Isfahan to pursue an education. He mastered most of the sciences including philosophy, rhetoric, arithmetic, geomancy, poetry, and riddles, and most of the grandees sought his friendship. (Nasrabadi, pp. 2–4).

[129] *EJ*, 14:882.

From his poetry, it appears that the dervish Joseph finally returned to his Jewish faith.

There were many Judeo-Persian poets and writers during the Safavid period, but because of successive flights from city to city, much of their work has been lost. Nonetheless, many of these works either remain hidden in Jewish-Iranian homes or are kept from public view by their overly-protective owners.[130]

The most renowned poet of the times was Baba'i Lutf of Kashan, a contemporary of Shah 'Abbas II who versified the history of the Jews during the Safavid period up to the end of that king's reign. His life and works as well as those of his grandson, Baba'i Farhad, who versified the history of the Jews from the time of Shah Sultan Husayn and the Afghan conquest up to the beginning of the reign of Nadir Shah, will be addressed in detail in the next chapter.

According to Fischel, an Italian priest by the name of G. Vecchietti (1552–1619) travelled to Iran in 1605 to collect manuscripts of various Persian translations of the Torah which had been made in the cities of Hamadan, Isfahan, Shiraz, Lar, and Yazd. He was commissioned by Shah 'Abbas I to translate the Book of Psalms and the New Testament into Persian. The *rabbanim* of Isfahan assisted him in translating the Psalms. This translation was completed in 1618.

R. Moshe Levi, a great scholar of Kashan, played an important role in the education of the Jews of that city. R. Moshe, who developed a unique calendar, lived during the reigns of Shah Tahmasp and Shah 'Abbas I. He wrote several Hebrew books. He was one of the important Cabalists of his day and was probably in correspondence with R. Joseph, the great champion of Cabala. In 1686, late in the Safavid period, another Jewish scholar of Kashan, Mullah Yehuda, wrote *Hubut yehuda* (חובות יהודה), a treatise on philosophy and divinity.

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[130]The author spent a great deal of time and effort to gain the permission of a Jew of Kashan to copy the books of Baba'i Lutf and Baba'i Farhad which were in his possession.

Apart from poetry, literature, and the sciences, the Jews of Safavid Iran also did Iranian society a tremendous service in helping to preserve the national culture, especially in the field of music, which they secretly safeguarded. The religious extremism of the times reached the point where music was totally outlawed during the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn, being deemed a satanic act. But the Jews of Iran, especially those of Shiraz, kept alive the art of traditional Persian music with instruments such as the *tar,*[131] *kamancheh,*[132] *qanun,*[133] and *ney,*[134] and passed it on from generation to generation.

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[131] TN: a string instrument which is strummed.

[132] TN: a string instrument like a violin.

[133] TN: a kind of harp.

[134] TN: a kind of reed flute.

Chapter Seventeen
The History of Baba'i ibn Lutf

The Jewish poet and chronicler Baba'i ibn Lutf began writing his *Ketab-e Anusi* in 1656 (Fig. 8). This book describes the forced conversion of Jews to Islam during the Safavid period. The *anusim* (אנוסים) were Jews who were forced to convert, but who secretly remained true to their religion. These people, who faced physical, mental, and economic pressures to convert, were not few. Most of the new Muslims secretly performed the rituals of the Jewish faith. Like the Marranos of Spain, these *anusim* led a dual religious life: one public, one private.

Baba'i Lutf's popular book describes this dual life. Although Baba'i's verse is weak from a literary standpoint, the content of his work is of tremendous value. Baba'i wrote in the epic poetic style of the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), though it would be more fitting to call his work the *Mardomnameh* (Book of the People). His *Anusi,* which is one of the most important sources for the history of Iranian Jewry, also mirrors Iranian society during the author's times. The Safavid period was a time of intense ritual mourning, commemoration of the martyrs of Karbala, *ta'ziyah* passion plays, self-flagellation, the wearing of black, weeping, and breast beating.[135] The commemoration of tragedy is deeply-rooted. In Baba'i's book, which speaks of actual events, the same melancholic air is conspicuous.

Baba'i Lutf described the persecutions and massacres suffered by the Jews of Safavid Iran during his lifetime in Persian verse written in the Hebrew alphabet. The book comprises eighty-three chapters. His grandson, Baba'i ibn Farhad, who like his grandfather was a resident of Kashan and had some poetic inspiration—and who also like his grandfather was witness to many atrocities during his lifetime—chronicled the times of the Jews of Iran up to the year 1725.

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[135]TN: in ritual mourning, the chest is pounded.

His writings are another important source on the social life of his coreligionists in this land.

Baba'i Lutf, after praising the Almighty, expounding on the unity of God, and lauding the prophets, continues his history under the heading, "On the Cause of the Afflictions of Fate." He writes that during the reigns of Shah 'Abbas I and 'Abbas II, the Jews, who had lived in Iran for over 24 centuries, were forced to flee their native land to the Ottoman Empire because of the atrocities inflicted upon them.

Some families departed together
In the middle of the night for the kingdom of Caesar[136]
...
Wretched me—fatigued from my labors
I became absorbed in thought
I had been thinking for a time of leaving
And making my home in some corner of Baghdad
But for my heart's love of the people of Kashan
I could not built my nest in another country
Each night I thought in my heart
That on the morrow I would extract myself from this mud
When suddenly my heart replied, "O Friend,
Come, I grant thee the kernel, for this is merely the husk
Come, and commit to verse
The story of these times, that it may be a sign."

The poet listened to his heart's call and wrote of the events of his times in verse. Based upon his book, we make reference here to several of those events under separate headings.

[136]The Ottoman Empire.

The Vengefulness of Mullah Mordecai Lari, Who Became Known as "Abu al-Hasan"

In the city of Lar there was a Jew by the name of Mullah Mordecai who, besides being a slaughterer of animals, was also a meat-seller.[137] The Jewish community of Lar protested this practice,[138] but the Jewish butcher paid no heed, so the people determined to chastise him. On the day before Yom Kippur, Mullah Mordecai slaughtered several sheep and prepared them for sale in his shop, but no one came. The butcher was furious:

He said "I will this day do that which will
Deliver up the Jews like straw before the wind"

The plot which he thus conceived was an ill-omened one. He sought vengeance not only against those of his city, but against all the Jews of Iran. He compelled his wife and children to go before the khan of Lar and avow themselves Muslims. Thenceforward, Mullah Mordecai was known as "Abu al-Hasan Lari." He was more anti-Semitic than any Muslim-born mullah and sought vengeance against the downtrodden Jews of Safavid Iran. Abu al-Hasan went before the Shi'i clerics and obtained a religious edict stipulating that eighteen laws must be enforced against the Jews. Most of these laws had been enacted previously, but one was revised. It required that the Jews wear a cap with eleven tassels, each of a different color, around which they were required to wrap a three *zar'*[139] length of red cloth. Additionally, Jewish women were required to wear so many little bells on the hems of their garments.

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[137]In the Jewish religion, the person who slaughters animals may not also sell meat, so that he will not slaughter sick animals for personal gain.

[138]"The people of Lar are mostly Jewish and are occupied in sericulture and all professions, especially making cummerbunds, which they weave well. It is for this industry that the town is renowned." (Tavernier, Persian translation, p. 989).

[139]TN: the *zar'* is a Persian unit of measurment equivalent to 104 cm.

After obtaining this edict from the "religious scholars" of Lar, he went on to Isfahan, the Safavid capital. At that time, a cleric by the name of Mullah Jalal lived in Isfahan, and he was one of Shah 'Abbas I's favorites. Lari incited this cleric against the Jews, and asked him to set his seal upon the edict of the clerics at Lar. Mullah Jalal did so without hesitation and thus, with official blessing, persecution of Jews was redoubled because of the new-Muslim Abu al-Hasan. Enforcement of the edicts began with the Jewish community in the capital. The Jews of Isfahan, finding themselves confronted with a bizarre new encumbrance, drafted a petition to Shah 'Abbas the Great, and their leaders delivered it to the king. By coincidence, 'Ali Pasha—who had been taken prisoner at Tabriz during the Ottoman attack against Iran—was present. When Shah 'Abbas saw the Jewish leaders, he said mockingly to 'Ali Pasha, "Your people have arrived.[140] Give them some of this wine, too."

After extolling the king's virtues, the representatives of the Jewish community of Isfahan asked him to deliver them from the clutches of a man who had come from Lar and to block enforcement of the ruling forcing them to wear caps and bells and other oppressive statutes. The drunken king laughed heartily and told them that they would have to go before Sadr al-Din, the religious leader of Isfahan. They went to Sadr al-Din and protested that the Messenger of Islam had never enacted such measures against the People of the Book. Sadr al-Din summoned Abu al-Hasan, saw the proclamation regarding the cap of eleven tassels, made some slight modifications to the shape and color of the cap, and told Abu al-Hasan that he could go to all the cities of Iran and ensure that the edict was enforced.

It was over. They were obliged to wear those foolscaps, and all their later efforts to rescind the edict were in vain. Abu al-Hasan had three sons: 'Abd al-Rahim, Shah Muhammad, and Isma'il. He

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[140]By this insult, the king was probably referring to the high regard and esteem in which the Jews of the Ottoman Empire were held.

dispatched all three to carry out this enterprise. Father and sons exacted fines from the Jews and otherwise tormented them. Abu al-Hasan amassed power, and a new "edict-proclaiming mullah" emerged for the Jews from the crowded bazaar of Shi'i mullahs. All sheep had to be slaughtered in his presence, and he collected a fee of ten dinars for each.[141] This regulation ruined the business of the Jewish slaughterers and meat sellers. He also decreed that at every engagement, marriage or circumcision reception, a gift must be presented to him—otherwise the celebration would become an occasion for mourning. This bizarre man soon amassed great wealth and bought a house in Isfahan, where he continued to exact his revenge to the greatest extent possible.

Abu al-Hasan Lari in Kashan

The Jews of Kashan knew that there was no way to resist Abu al-Hasan Lari and that the government strongly supported him. Therefore, they went out to greet him, hoping that by showing respect they might lessen his harshness. But Abu al-Hasan told them that he had the seal of the king's spiritual leader, and that they must wear the ridiculous caps.

All the multitude exclaimed "O Mullah of Lar,
Do us not this injustice and hold us not up to ridicule
Whatsoever thou may'st desire
We shall dutifully provide every morning and evening
Do not tell us these things, for God's sake!
Fear the wrath of the people!"

Abu al-Hasan told them about the bad conduct of the Jews of Lar, saying they had "buried him alive" and completely ruined his life. Since the sin of one Jew caused hardship for all Jews, those who caused him hardship in Lar were responsible for the misfortunes of the other Jews.

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[141]This was a large sum in those days.

The Jews of Kashan tried to soften Abu al-Hasan Lari with largess, but he would not give in. A brave man known as Samuel the Butcher, who was ever present when the Jews of Kashan faced difficulty, rebuked Abu al-Hasan, calling him a "half-witted imbecile." He said, "You will receive your just deserts for what you are doing to the Jews. Even Nebuchadnezzar did not escape this world without punishment."

When Abu al-Hasan heard these insolent words, he jumped like a tiger struck by an arrow:

He retorted "Thou rotten stinking lump of carrion—
What right hast thou to address me thus?
With a dagger will I sever thy head from thy body
O foolhardy man!"

Their confrontation escalated into a fight. Lari wounded Samuel with a knife blow, and Samuel the Butcher struck his rival's mouth so hard as to break his teeth, and he began to bleed from the mouth. An uproar arose from the crowd. The news reached the government, and the combatants were brought before the governor's court. Lari expressed his view, saying, "These people are in rebellion against the king's decree. The Jews of Isfahan wear the distinctive cap, but these ones mock the jurisprudents' edict."

The Jews replied, "O just Ruler! O Exalted One! Grant us a ten-day reprieve that we may look into how to resolve this matter, for Lari exacts exorbitant sums from us—and annually, at that."

Samuel told the governor, "Enforcement of this matter in Isfahan has no bearing on our acceptance of it here in Kashan. Either put us all to death on the spot or free us from the hand of this man."

But the governor said:

"That which the Jews in the capital did
You must likewise do"

The decision was in the governor's hands, and the sheikhs and constables supported him. It was decided that it would be done in

Kashan even as it was done in Isfahan. Wearing the ridiculous cap prevented the Jews from appearing in the streets and marketplaces, because passersby would mock and vex them. The spiteful Abu al-Hasan, in addition to his travel expenses, extorted from the Jews of Kashan twice the sum they had originally offered him and left the city.

Abu al-Hasan's Trip to Shiraz

The new-Muslim Abu al-Hasan also bestowed his ludicrous cap upon the Jews of Shiraz.[142] He summoned the leader of the Jewish community of Fars province, a mild-mannered and God-fearing man named Benjamin, and enumerated the regulations. The governor of Fars, Allahvardi Khan, who knew of Abu al-Hasan's plans to persecute the Jews, tried to make peace between him and the Jews of Fars. But Abu al-Hasan, whose proverbial cannon were loaded and who had the capital's blessings, protested to the governor, asking why he sought to pretermit the directive of the Messenger of Islam. The commander of Fars had no choice but to remain silent.

In a subsequent meeting, Benjamin said to Lari, "You say that this directive is that of the Messenger. If this be so, then show us where the Messenger of Islam gave such a directive, so that we may obey it. Otherwise, be on your way and go."

Abu al-Hasan, who like all other obstinate oppressors was steeped in ignorance, became furious upon hearing Benjamin's words and took to cursing him. He threatened to take him before the king and have him sentenced to death. Benjamin replied:

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[142]Lari must have arrived in Shiraz around the year 1613 C.E. During these days, Allahvardi Khan—one of Shah Abbas I's famous officers and originally an Armenian from Georgia—was governor of the province of Fars. He was a convert to Islam and governed Fars for nineteen years. He died in 1614.

"Thou art the enemy of God and the Messenger
The enemy of God will ne'er prevail"

The matter was again submitted to the khan for arbitration. He addressed Abu al-Hasan, saying:

"Art thou Muslim or Jew? Which art thou?
It would seem thou art an incomplete man!"

Lari replied, "I was a Jew. I became a Muslim. I enforce the king's decree, which bears the seal of the sheikhs and stands as a religious edict. All Jews must wear this distinctive cap. No one has the right to modify this decree."

Allahvardi Khan, who was drinking wine, addressed Benjamin with a drunken laugh, saying, "For my sake, take Lari's cap and put it on."

Abu al-Hasan, who was expecting such a command, came haughtily forward. He removed Benjamin's cap and placed the ridiculous cap on his head. The drunken governor then asked Benjamin to dance before the assembly. Those present laughed, while Benjamin wept in his heart. Suddenly, the governor's demeanor changed. He turned angrily to Lari and said "O little man! Have you no shame? I will not sanction the wear of this absurd cap by the Jews of Fars. If the purpose is to distinguish them, then a cloth patch on the chest will suffice. And I only approve of this that the Muslims of Fars might leave me in peace."

Lari replied, "O Governor, do not resist your benefactor's command. I have enforced this edict in the cities of Yazd, Kashan, Damavand, Bandar, and Lar. It must be done thus here, too."

Upon hearing these words, Allahvardi Khan became enraged and ordered that Abu al-Hasan be physically thrown out. The governor's servants hit Lari so hard that his turban fell from his head, and he was driven away, bitter and frustrated. The Jews of Fars were thus delivered from his clutches. The governor of Fars ordered that the Jews must wear a small patch no larger than a coin on their chests.

This rule remained in force until the reign of Shah 'Abbas II, when life for the Jews suddenly changed dramatically.

The Jews of Farahabad and Abu al-Hasan Lari

The people of Zagham, the capital of Georgia, lived in tranquility. A well-known Jew by the name of Bahran or El'azar (Lalehzar) lived in this city. When Shah 'Abbas went to war against Georgia in 1614, Lalehzar encouraged his coreligionists to support the Iranian king. The Jews of Georgia, terrified by the coarse behavior of the European Christians, looked favorably upon the victory of a Muslim king, and they joined Lalehzar. Two hundred Jews, under cover of night, rode to join Shah 'Abbas' camp. Shah 'Abbas was highly pleased by this show of support and asked Lalehzar to be his advisor and guide. He bestowed a reward upon him and his supporters and said:

"I swear upon the soul of Muhammad
By the hearth of Sheikh Safi, my lord
That I will not torment any of the people of Judah
For all time, not merely today and tomorrow
I will honor you in this world
I will found a city dedicated to your memory
I will save them from the enemy's grasp
You will be my boon companions"[143]

The Jews trusted the king, who said that if any of their property was plundered, he would recompense them from his treasury, and they sang his praises. Shah 'Abbas bestowed upon Lalehzar a horse with a golden saddle, and the young Lalehzar accompanied the king at all times as his advisor. The advance against the Georgian capital proceeded along the route designated by Lalehzar. As the occupation

[143]It is left to the unbiased student of history to determine whether Shah 'Abbas broke his word of his own accord or if the clerics to whom he gave free reign forced him to disregard his oath.

of the city neared, Lalehzar took the opportunity to go into the city and get the Jews out so that they would not fall victim to the bloodshed which was to be unleashed by Shah 'Abbas' army. The Iranian army occupied the Georgian capital in the course of a single morning.

Shah 'Abbas asked Lalehzar to relocate all the Jews of Zagham to Mazandaran. In the area of Mazandaran which Shah 'Abbas set aside for them, they built a town which later came to be known as "Farahabad." Whenever the king went with his harem to Mazandaran he stopped in this town. Lalehzar had two sons, Hanuka and Jacob. The king desired that Hanuka should become a Muslim so that he could make him a khan and governor. One day, when he was drunk with wine...

He addressed Hanuka "O youthful son
Come over to my faith, for the sake of God
I will grant thee a khanate and worldly fortune
I bring thee heaven in the hereafter"

Finally, the king's insistence and pressure from his peers compelled Hanuka to accept Islam, and the king made him governor of the town. Years later, Abu al-Hasan Lari entered Farahabad. He had brought many caps with him which he sought to force the Jews to wear while extorting money from them. He introduced himself to Lalehzar, saying, "Upon the king's orders I have come here to place this new cap upon your head."

When a person has no life left
He will taste of the poison chalice by the cupbearer's hand

Master Lalehzar, aware of the havoc which this spiteful man had wreaked elsewhere, chose the path of cordiality and equanimity and hosted a regal banquet in his honor. He provided music, singers, wine, fish and fowl, sparing no expense.

They drank crimson wine
They became drunk, drinking from royal chalices

They dutifully served that Master
Slave, Indian, Georgian, and Tartar
Once Lari had become intoxicated
He said, "O Master—foremost friend,
I desire the profit of the sea
Please, I am weary of the world"

Lalehzar was delighted by Lari's suggestion about going out to sea. He instructed his servants to bring along some wine, and they went down to the shore. At the beach, they offered Lari more wine. When, in his drunken state, he saw the boats upon the water, he desired to board them. They prepared three boats. They seated Lari in one, Lalehzar in another, and one of Lalehzar's Georgian servants in the third. Once they were far from shore, Lalehzar said to Lari, "I say to you before God, desist from this hideous act, and bring not humiliation upon the Jewish people." Lari replied:

I was a prince in my city
I was respected by the people
They made me a stranger to my religion
They humiliated me a hundred times
I made it a point of honor in this life
To trample upon the Jews

When Master Lalehzar heard this, he spoke to the third man in Georgian, telling him to capsize Lari's boat, and he did so. Lari sank to the bottom of the sea and drowned.

The fish ate him bit by bit
They ate both flesh and bone

The story told by Haji Benyamin Asil Mazandarani (1818–1938)—who lived one hundred twenty years and heard the story of Abu al-Hasan Lari from his grandfather but never read Baba'i's book—supports the account of Baba'i Lutf:

When Abu al-Hasan Lari arrived in Farahabad, he immediately announced that they must buy and wear his caps, otherwise, they must either leave behind their homes and property, be banished, and go off to live in the wilderness, or, if they wanted to remain in the city, they were obliged to embrace Islam. They faced decapitation if they resisted.

Master Lalehzar, who enjoyed the king's favor, asked him for a ten-day reprieve. He then went to Shah 'Abbas and asked for his help. The king said that changing the decree or rescinding the edict of the "twelver Shi'i Islamic scholars" was impossible for him. Lalehzar returned disappointed. The Jews of Mazandaran, who were silk workers, offered Lari large quantities of silk, but he would not accept. A disillusioned Lalehzar told Lari "For what reason do you, whose father was Jewish and who yourself were born a Jew and in whose veins flows Jewish blood, nurture such hatred for the Jews? You have been to all the towns from Lar in the south to Farahabad in the north to vex your former coreligionists. Why do you do this?"

Lari replied "Do you want to know? I have disclosed this secret to no one. But I will tell you, who have shown me such great hospitality. Yes, I was once a follower of Moses, and I held a precious jewel in my hand. This precious jewel was my Judaism. But the other Jews caused me to relinquish this jewel, and now I, too, struggle to cause other Jews to relinquish their jewels by any means possible."

The Jews of Farahabad, a stubborn people from Georgia, were not prepared to submit to Abu al-Hasan Lari. They did not wish to abandon either their homes or their religion. Thus, they prepared for a battle which might have ended in all their deaths. One of Master Lalehzar's sons addressed the Jews "If we are all prepared to die, then why don't we put an end to this miserable Mordecai Lari's life?" Everyone agreed, and they drew up and executed the plan to drown him in the Caspian Sea.

It was not long before this plot became publicly known and the news reached Shah 'Abbas. The king summoned Lalehzar and asked him the truth. Lalehzar told him the truth, and in consideration of his prior service, the king spared his life and those of the other Jews on the condition that they all accept Islam forthwith without any reservations. There was no other alternative. The

Jews of Farahabad became Muslims. But many secretly practiced the religion of their forefathers. Some of them left Farahabad secretly in the night, taking their Torahs with them to Kiyakala.[144]

Shah 'Abbas and the Runaway Gazelle

Another of Baba'i Lutf's stories concerns the king's encounter with an old Jewish man while hunting gazelle. Shah 'Abbas took an active interest in the prosperity of his capital city, Isfahan, and erected magnificent edifices there. People of many nations lived in the city. About the year 1616 C.E., Shah 'Abbas went to his hunting grounds in Lenjan, a Jewish populated area where the shrine of Sara bat Asher is situated. The king spotted a gazelle and pursued it. The gazelle fled and ran into an old building. The king, who in chasing the gazelle had become separated from his companions, entered the building and saw an old man reading a book. The king asked, "Who are you and what is this place?"

The old man replied, "I am a Jew, and this is the shrine of the Jews."

The king asked, "Where is the gazelle?"

The old man answered, "That gazelle is Lady Sara, the granddaughter of Jacob, whose house this is."

The old man, who had not recognized the king, remained seated and paid him no further heed. The king grew angry and asked him, "Do you know who is standing before you and with whom you are speaking?" Upon recognizing the king, the old man immediately sprang to his feet and then prostrated himself before him. That visit to the shrine produced a profound effect upon the king. Upon his return to Isfahan, he summoned the secular and religious leaders of the Jews to be present at his court the next morning. The community leaders, Solomon and Simantub, the spiritual leaders, Nisan and Mordecai, and two Jewish functionaries, Khodadad and Moses, were admitted to the court.

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[144]TN: a site near Isfahan.

When they saw the king, they sprang up
All placed their hands upon their breasts
They praised the king, the ruler of the world
They said "Truth is thy protector
May thou forever reign
May the head of thine enemy be severed by thy sword"

The king addressed them, saying, "I visited your shrine. Repair it, and go there every Monday and pray for me. I command that the cap of Abu al-Hasan Lari shall no longer be worn."

I am finally removing this cap from your head
I will make manifest the religion of Moses

The Jewish representatives were dismissed, and the order rescinding the cap of Abu al-Hasan was proclaimed.

Simantub Follows in Abu al-Hasan's Footsteps

Simantub claimed credit for this success. His behavior toward his coreligionists changed, and he demanded money from them. The people turned against him, and two Jews who were frustrated with him sat in protest at the palace gate. The king's vizier, Mir Muhammad Qasim, became aware of the protestors' complaint. The conflict escalated, and a new "Abu al-Hasan" entered the scene. Simantub sent a petition to the king in which he denounced the Jews as a malicious people caught up in sorcery. He said that they were disobeying him—the leader of the Jewish community—and that by extension they were naturally disobeying the king, too. He claimed that the complaint delivered to Mir Muhammad Qasim was unfounded.

The conflict continued to escalate. Simantub's rivals, each seeking to become leader of the Jewish community, fought among themselves, and the conflict ended in brawling and fisticuffs. There was even a mêlée in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Ultimately, the people agreed to unseat Simantub and to forward a complaint to the king

stating that he had received bribes and had not spent funds received for the upkeep of the cemetery and shrines. They brought Simantub bound before the king. He said, "The slave of the court is not worthy of such accusations. These people were practising witchcraft, and I took their books of sorcery away. Finding themselves powerless, they became bent on my demise.[145] If I was heretofore an infidel, I shall now become a Muslim."

The king cleared him of all accusations, and Simantub and his entire family became Muslims. The king summoned the Jewish elders. Among them, there was a pious man known as Mullah Abba, who was constantly at prayer. Addressing him...

His king said "O Jewish man
Become a Muslim, and be delivered of thy Jewishness"
The mullah replied "O King of the World
Though thou smitest me with thy sword
Yet shall I not repent of my religion
I have no plaint against Moses and Aaron"

The king was enraged and commanded that Mullah Abba be thrown to the man-eating dogs. Being thrown to voracious wolf-like dogs was a popular method of execution during the Safavid period. A dog tore the flesh from Mullah Abba's arm, and the holy man died in a pool of blood.

The king ordered Simantub to travel from city to city and to gather and destroy all the books of witchcraft he found.[146] Simantub traveled to the cities of Qom, Kashan, Yazd, Shiraz, Abarqu, Damavand, Farahabad, Gilan, Qazvin, and Baghdad, collecting and de-

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[145]Given the king's strong belief in witchcraft and magic, it was easy for him to believe such allegations.

[146]The enemies of the Jews alleged that the book of Cabala was a compendium of witchcraft, and that they used it to perform amazing magical acts. The king's order primarily concerned this book.

stroying these books on the king's orders. In all of the cities to which he traveled, he found excuses to extort money from the Jews.

Zechariah, the new leader of the Jewish community who was responsible for collecting taxes for the state, was forced to bear down on the Jewish community. Though he surrendered all his personal property, he was bastinadoed and jailed because the government officials were not satisfied with the total sum he had collected. A Jewish convert to Islam named Haji Reza was also a government official. He raised the annual poll tax on Jews from 40 to 60 *tomans*. Not content with this deed, he was constantly searching for ways to extort money from the Jews. One of the tricks he played on his former coreligionists was this: He approached a Jewish prayer copyist named Aharun and asked him to write a prayer for him. Aharun, not knowing Haji Reza's ulterior motive, wrote a prayer for him and gave him the copy. One day, Haji Reza appeared before the king, who was drinking in the company of Anatolians, Ethiopians, Turks, Tatars, and Europeans. He showed the king the prayer and said, "Your Majesty, how can you sit idly by while the Jews are writing magical incantations against you?"

He showed the king the document. The king was infuriated, and summoned the Jewish elders to explain this witchcraft. At the time, Isfahan had four Jewish mullahs: Mullah Yeshua, Mullah Yehshua, Mullah Shelemu, and Mullah Judah. All four were brought before the king. Trembling, they prostrated themselves before him. The king demanded that they read the incantation and disclose its contents. The mullahs swore that they knew nothing of that folio and that the Jews never practice witchcraft.

The king angrily ordered that all four clerics be put to death. The guards seized them by the collars and dragged them to the public square to be hanged. Haji Reza, who was standing near the gate, said, "There is no need to erect a gallows. Use the trees." They hanged them from the trees and sliced open their abdomens with daggers. Every day, five to ten Jews were arrested and executed in

this same manner. This crime was repeated for six months in the public square of the Safavid capital. Such brutal murder by the king in the heart of Iran so emboldened the governors of the provinces and village mullahs that they each in turn began killing Jews, and in order not to fall behind the pack, they further expanded the scope of their repressive acts.

Intensification of Anti-Semitism during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas II

After the clashes during the reign of Shah 'Abbas the Great, the dimensions of anti-Semitism expanded greatly because of the false messiah Shabbetai Zevi and the end of the 70-year grace period which the Shi'i clerics had given the Iranian Jews. During this period, the ten-year-old Shah 'Abbas II was seated upon the throne, and the country was run by fanatical mullahs and pseudo-mullahs. Baba'i Lutf begins his narrative of this period thus:

During the reign of the second king, calamity
Was renewed for all the Israelites
Throughout the kingdom
From Bokhara to Bandar[147]

The painful and terrifying events that began during the reign of Shah 'Abbas "the Great" and which had had their ups and downs now found renewed intensity. Once again Jews were coerced into changing their religion, and Torah and tefillin were proscribed.

When he became king
He was young, but he had a treasury
Now hear from me the story of that king
Of what he did to the Jews every now and then

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[147]Meaning that the calamity spread from Bokhara to Bandar Abbas, or from the northernmost to the southernmost point in Iran.

In that hour, when they mounted him on horseback
They brought him into his city in a cargo saddle[148]

One day Shah 'Abbas II was riding through the city on horseback accompanied by Davud, the governor of Kashan. Every year, Davud took vast quantities of silk and grapes from the Jews, and his repression of them knew no bounds. The Jews of Kashan were exasperated with him and were awaiting the day when they could petition the king. On that day, they asked Khodadad Eli—one of the prominent Jews of the city—to make the king aware of Davud's persecutions. This audience was never held, but news of the plan to complain to the king reached the governor, and he became an even more hostile enemy of the Jews.

The Loss of the King's Dagger and the Riot Against the Jews

Twelve years passed. During this time the king traveled widely and immersed himself in the pursuit of pleasure. One day, he fell into a drunken sleep in a garden near Isfahan. Shah Tahmasp I had possessed a diamond which he believed brought good luck. In order that he might always have it with him, he had it mounted on a jeweled dagger. Shah 'Abbas II inherited this dagger, and he also strongly believed that the diamond brought good luck. The next day, after the king awoke from his long sleep, he took a stroll in the garden and plucked some flowers. But he neglected to pick up the dagger which he had left at his side as he slept. An hour later, he went hunting with his companions. The gardener found his dagger and hid it under some foliage. By chance, someone espied the gardener as he secreted the dagger. As soon as the gardener had left the area, he came and carried it off. The thief removed the precious stones from their settings and took the plain dagger to the Jewish ghetto. Two unwitting Jews purchased the dagger, not knowing that it belonged to the king and that the seller had stolen it. The dagger

[148]Shah Abbas II began his reign in Kashan.

passed through several hands before it was finally acquired by Shah 'Abbas' officials. They found the two Jews who had purchased the dagger and brought them before the king. The king demanded the return of the dagger's gemstones, especially the auspicious diamond.

That man replied "O my king
God knows that I do not possess this knowledge
I swear by the ground beneath the feet of Shah 'Abbas
That I have seen neither jewel, nor ruby, nor diamond."

They also found the gardener and the original thief, but in the end, all blame was laid upon the two innocent Jewish buyers. In his rage, the king sentenced them to death. One of the viziers said, "Their blood is ill-omened. Oblige them to become Muslims instead."

Another vizier replied, "Shah 'Abbas the First made Muslims of the Jews, but to what avail?"

The anti-Semitic grand vizier, Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah, replied, "Entrust them to me, that I may teach the Jews a lesson."

I will plant the sole of my shoe in their backs
I will make Muslims of them through artifice

Exile of the Jews of Isfahan

The king accepted Muhammad Beg's counsel and handed the two Jews over to him. Muhammad Beg summoned the Jews and told them, "You are a filthy, unclean people, and it is not meet that you should live amongst Muslims. If despite your poverty and privation you do not wish to become Muslims as the king commands, then you must vacate the city this very day."

The Jews sullenly replied, "Our fathers built the city of Isfahan. Its original name was "Dar al-Yahud" [Abode of the Jews]. Indeed, we pay our taxes and pray for the king's well-being. All of the kings have permitted us to live in this city.

Assef[149] *replied "I know them not—*
I will once and for all drive you from Isfahan"

"Either you leave or the military will assist you in leaving." The Jews requested a short respite. Muhammad Beg refused. They asked, "When we depart the city, where then shall we live?" The grand vizier designated a site called Kolah-e Qazi [Judge's Cap], which was situated 10 parasangs [60 km] from Isfahan, and which lacked both water and vegetation.

He said "There will you build a city
You shall name it Mehnatabad"[150]
They all went there together
They saw none but jackals, wolves, and hyenas
All the men and women were filled with fear
With pained hearts they returned

They once again approached Muhammad Beg and informed him that life there was impossible. They asked him to provide a location that at the very least had a water supply. Muhammad Beg told them, "Go then to the Takht-e Fulad cemetery that the dead might not be lonely."

The Jews softened the grand vizier's tone with gifts. "Very well," he said, "Come again tomorrow and I will give you a place next to the Zoroastrian quarter."

But he sent a dispatch to the Zoroastrians, telling them to raise a commotion upon the proclamation of his ruling and to thus block the Jews' entry. They did just that, attacking the Jews and driving them out. Once again the Jews approached Muhammad Beg—that treacherous cutthroat—and requested a place to live. He angrily rebuked them: "Go to hell! You no longer have the right to seek an audience with me."

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[149]TN: Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah, the grand vizier.

[150]TN: Abode of Tribulations.

That day was a Friday. The evening skies were getting dark, and the Sabbath eve was drawing nigh. The Jews sat and wept next to their Torahs, and public heralds marched through the streets:

Suddenly, a cry rose up in the city and in the bazaar
That the Jews were to be raided that evening
All are to be expelled, both male and female
For any who are on the morrow seen shall be beheaded
When the people heard this announcement that evening
All these hapless ones sprang up
They said "Woe be upon us. What shall we do?
If tomorrow comes, we shall lose our heads"

Heartbroken and distraught, the people dispersed. Some of them headed for the shrine of Sara bat Asher, 24 km from Isfahan. The remainder headed off in different directions. No one had any further hope of living. Children, old women, the sick, the pregnant, the hungry, and the indigent all wept bitter tears. They set up tents for the women outside the city and camped for the night. Those who went to the shrine of Sara bat Asher wept and prayed until daybreak. On Saturday, Muhammad Beg sent his guards to find the Jewish leaders and bring them to him. They found several outside the city, bound their hands behind their backs, and brought them to the grand vizier. The names of three of the Jewish leaders were Sa'id, Obadiah, and Samson.

Muhammad Beg—that oppressor of Mongol descent—told them, "All the Jews throughout the country must either become Muslims or leave Iran." The guards returned these three bound as they were to the Jews encamped outside the city. When they heard the inauspicious news, the Jews wept and lamented. The guards killed several of them on the spot, and the people...

When they saw that assembly thus
—Thou wouldst think the day of resurrection were at hand—

They all trembled like the willow
With pallid countenance and all with fearful hearts
...
O God! By virtue of the pure—
By virtue of the sufferings of the afflicted—
Heed our call in this Land of Galuth
For no one remembers these tribulations
In this Land of Galuth, hearts are broken
Heart, soul, and religion are in mourning

The disenchanted, wandering Jews had lost all hope. They heard Death's call. Muhammad Beg once again summoned the elderly leader Sa'id and addressed him, "If the Jews do not leave Iran and fail to become Muslims, they shall be killed en masse."

Sa'id, like many of his coreligionists of that day and age, had no alternative but to convert.

He made his declaration of faith and at once became a Muslim
All the others also converted
At first, the leaders went one by one
They all declared their faith before Assef
Then the people went one by one
All declared their faith for fear of the king

Muhammad Beg, finding himself victorious, bestowed a robe of honor upon each of the new converts. It was decided that each of the male converts should be paid 1½ *tomans*, each child 5 *qerans*, and each poor person 2 *tomans* from the endowment of the Fourteen Immaculates.

For the sake of gold all gave up their religion
In their affliction, they sought out every valley
One, because he had a house
Could not set aside his nest
Another, for the sake of his wife and children
His heart was torn on their account

How could his heart bear for all eternity
That he should leave the city without them

This outrage which took place in Isfahan greatly pleased Muhammad Beg. He told the king, "It is best that this technique also be employed in the outlying areas. That is, let us send the guards to the Jewish-inhabited towns and demand that they either become Muslims or leave the country."[151]

The king agreed. The grand vizier sent emissaries with proclamations to eighteen Iranian towns. Jews throughout Iran fasted, went to synagogue, prayed and lamented, and listened to the sounding of the shofar.

Forced Conversion of the Jews of Kashan and Natanz to Islam

Although the Jews of Kashan had been made aware of the events in Isfahan by travelers and merchants, they did not anticipate such things could happen there. But suddenly news arrived that Sepahsalar, a powerful functionary of Shah 'Abbas II's court, was approaching the city for that very purpose. Natanz had 3,000 Jews, who were affiliated with the Jews of Kashan. The threat applied to both towns: they were obliged either to quit Iran, leaving all their property behind, or to convert to Islam; otherwise, they would be put to death.

An uproar ensued among the Jewish community, each person expressing his opinion. The great calamity drew nearer and nearer. They requested a reprieve from Sepahsalar, but he rejected their request, replying that the king had commanded him:

"Upon arriving in Kashan
Act quickly to make Muslims out of the Jews"

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[151]This is precisely the same methodology employed during the Spanish Inquisition, and it is highly probable that European priests and envoys schooled Iranian statesmen in it.

Hence, I perforce this very moment
Shall make Muslims out of you

Sepahsalar first called upon Mullah El'azar, the religious leader, to accept the Islamic faith. But he replied that he saw no reason to abandon the faith of Moses—who had spoken with God—and to accept a different religion. Upon hearing this, Sepahsalar became enraged:

He said "Slice open his belly!
Let his head be smitten like a polo ball on the field!"

The guards grabbed him, ripped off his clothes, and severely bastinadoed him. Then they asked him again, "Now will you become a Muslim or not?" "No," replied Mullah El'azar.

Sepahsalar ordered the guards to slice his belly open with a sword. Several of El'azar's followers begged him not to be stubborn and to concede. El'azar then conceded and recited the Islamic proclamation of faith. Sepahsalar then compelled El'azar to eat meat and yoghurt together.[152]

Next, the gaunt and stoop-shouldered Mullah Shelemu was forced to become a Muslim. After him, the same fate befell one or two other Jewish leaders, and they were all given meat and yoghurt to eat. Then it was the others' turn. Among them was a man named Mir 'Abdal who said, "Though you cut me to pieces, I will not abandon my faith. I will not repent of my Judaism."

They brought him down like a sheep
They bound his hands and feet together
Menacingly, they put a blade like unto a diamond
To his throat, acting on a whim

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[152]According to Jewish dietary laws, it is forbidden to eat meat and yoghurt together. During the Safavid period, forcing the newly-converted Jews to eat both together was a method of testing the validity of their claim to have accepted the Islamic faith.

But they did not cut his throat. Rather, they repeatedly bastinadoed him. Sepahsalar said, "How can I, who seek to make Muslims out of all the Jews of Kashan, allow one to remain a Jew?"

At sword's point, Mir 'Abdal said, "Is not the king's decree that we should become Muslims or leave the country? I will take my wife and children and proceed to Samarqand."

Sepahsalar replied, "I will not allow you to leave the city."

Finally, one of the nobles interceded and took Mir 'Abdal home in order that he might bring him to convert through gentle persuasion. But this counsel also failed, and Mir 'Abdal was severely bastinadoed and bludgeoned in that house. They wanted to throw him from the roof of the house. The next day, after the intercession of his wife and children and the payment of a handsome bribe to officials, Mir 'Abdal was set free. He was bedridden for three months, and then he set out for Jerusalem. But he was able to go no further than Sanandaj. There he died, pained and weary. With his dying breath he said:

At this moment, I have no fear for my life
For I shall be buried by Hebrew hands

During Sepahsalar's several days in Kashan, the officials rounded up the Jews from their hiding places and brought them before him to be converted.

Persecution of the Jews of Hamadan

Concerning events in Hamadan during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II, Baba'i Lutf says:

Now listen to the story of Hamadan
See how the royal court acted
When they heard the story of Hamadan,
All lost hope of their lives

All the Jews fasted, gave alms, and wept at the shrine of Esther. The khan of Hamadan announced Muhammad Beg's infamous decree to them. They replied, "We will not abandon the religion of Moses, and if you permit us, we will go to Jerusalem."

The khan, who was not expecting such a response, threateningly replied, "You will either become Muslims or I will put all of you to death."

After much debate and in consideration of the experience of other cities, the Jews acceded. Some became Muslims, and each was given one *toman,* while others secretly fled the city and emigrated to Istanbul and Baghdad. The synagogues were closed, and the new converts were forced to go to mosque. The khan of Hamadan went to Isfahan, spoke proudly of his success, and asked for reimbursement of the money he had given the converts. The king sent him to see the grand vizier.

When he heard these words, Assef became irate
He sarcastically spake thus
"If thou be a nobleman, go and take the gold
From each person to whom thou hast given it"

The khan returned to Hamadan and said to the Jewish Muslim converts, "You must give me my money back, because the government is not prepared to reimburse me. They have commanded me to take back not one *toman* but two from each of you."

The Jews replied, "Very well. Since that's the way it's going to be, then we will be permitted to return to the religion of Moses."

The khan replied, "After paying the money, you are free."

The community leaders gathered two *toman*s per head and gave the money to the khan. The synagogues were opened, and all were overjoyed. When this news reached Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah, he wrote, "Why have you permitted the Jews of Hamadan to return to their former faith? Do you seek your own ruin? Kindle a fire and compel the Jews to accept Islam."

This was the khan's reaction:

He said "I will execute a ruse
That will spread my fame for many parasangs
When the king learns of my deed
He will say 'Well done, O mighty khan!'"

He again summoned the Jews and angrily reproached them, saying that he would never put his life and position on the line for their sake. He ordered his servants to detain them. They chained the Jews and cast them in prison. Then, with sticks and cudgels in hand, they went out looking for their wives and children. The Jews had no choice but to declare their readiness to return to the fold of Islam.

The khan said, "Each of you, man or woman, must pay three *tomans* in order for me to accept your conversion; otherwise, I will put you all to death!"

In the end, the Jews paid more money *and* were forced to convert.

Khalil Khan Lor in Khansar and Golpayegan

Khalil Khan Lor, the governor of Khansar, Golpayegan, and Khorramabad, proclaimed the same ill-omened decree to the Jews of that province. Debates like those in the other cities ensued. Finally, Khalil Khan summoned the Jews one Saturday and compelled them to recite the Islamic declaration of faith. But when he wanted to bestow a *toman* and robe of honor upon each of them, the Jews asked that they be given the money the following day, on account of it being Saturday.

"Today is Saturday, O Master!
Do not force this sin upon us"
The khan laughed and said "O ye Jews
Why then are ye becoming Muslims?"

Among the Jews who lived in that province was a man named Abraham, who set out for Isfahan and wrote a petition to the king. In it he wrote, "Are we infidels, that you torment us so? We are bound by the Torah to always pray for the king of the land. Idol-worshippers are free in Iran, yet the followers of Moses are forced to change their religion."

Although this letter exposed Abraham to danger, it pleased the king, and he issued a proclamation emancipating the Jews of Golpayegan, Khansar, and Khorramabad.

Plight of the Jews of Lar and Shiraz

In this terrifying crisis, the Jews of Lar and Shiraz also resorted to weeping, wailing, fasting, almsgiving, going to synagogue, listening to the shofar, and reciting *selihot,* but the ill-omened shadow of "exile, conversion, or death" did not spare them. They received a temporary reprieve during which they camped in tents in the badlands outside the city. The Jews of Lar, Shiraz, and Bandar were thinking of emigrating to Jerusalem. But those who had given the Jews a short reprieve in exchange for bribes incited the king's deputies to raid the tents in the middle of the night and carry off the women and children.

The demonic servants went
At night with blades and daggers
They dragged off all the women by their hair
They kidnapped the children, carrying them off in every direction

Every man who stepped forward to defend his wife and children was disemboweled with a sword or had his brains dashed out with a club. The next day, they brought their grievance before the governor. But the governor ordered that the plaintiffs be bastinadoed so severely that they perished under the blows. Some Jews in this great gathering resorted to suicide. They either cut open their bellies with knives, threw themselves from rooftops, or jumped into deep wells.

What shall I say of the fate of Shiraz?
A hundred books could not hold its story

Several Jewish merchants of Lar who had business with Shah 'Abbas II's mother in Isfahan, upon hearing of the events in Shiraz, addressed a petition to her seeking her intercession. The king's mother promised to help, but at that same time another incident occurred which complicated the situation.

The Advent of Obadiah

Obadiah was a Jew of Isfahan who for a time oversaw his coreligionists' administrative affairs. But he gradually overstepped his bounds. It reached the point that he threw people in jail and served as an informant for the temporal rulers of the day. In reward for his services, he was promoted to the station of court centurion, and with I'timad al-Dawlah's help, he committed many repugnant acts and thwarted Jewish aspirations. The renowned miller Pinhas decided to put an end to Obadiah's misdeeds with the help of his friends. One evening, which happened to fall during the month of Ramadan, Pinhas held a reception in his home with wine and drink and also prevailed upon Obadiah to attend. When all were drunk, Pinhas made a gesture to his friends. They pounced upon Obadiah, killed him, and stuffed his body in a gunnysack. The next day they brought it to the furnace-stoker of the public bath and said, "In this sack is the body of a sheep which turned out to be *haram.* Take this money and burn the sack in the bath furnace."

The furnace-stoker agreed, but upon seeing that the gunnysack was new, he decided to burn only its contents. He opened it and found the body of Obadiah inside. Obadiah had been missing for several days before his body was identified. I'timad al-Dawlah ordered that Pinhas and his associates be detained and brought before him, but he had fled to Baghdad the day after killing Obadiah. The blame was automatically transferred to the rest of the Jewish community. Government officials did not discriminate between guilty

and innocent. Persecution and extortion became rampant. The king was infuriated. He ordained that the entire Jewish community of Iran should be put to death in a single day. The decree was committed to writing, but Shah 'Abbas did not set his seal to it. He decided to wait for his astrologers to presage an auspicious hour for the execution of the decree. By chance, he consulted with Mullah Muhsin Shahriyari, a pure-minded cleric.

"I would slay the Jews outright
I would slay them all posthaste
Grant the permission of my pure religion
To cut off the hand of these Jews!"
...
"What sayest thou of the Law, O Sage?
Shall I slay them, or shall I delay?"
When that scholar heard these words
He was deeply troubled by the tyrant's cruelty
He said by way of reply "O King!
Hear from me the commandments of God!"
...
"Listen to me! Mind thou! Mind thou!
Torment not the ant beneath thy feet!"

Thanks to the counsel of that enlightened cleric, the storm subsided, and the Jews escaped serious danger. This notwithstanding, three individuals named Asher, Isaac, and Mattetia were arrested on charges of murdering Obadiah and dragged to the public square for execution. They were told that the time of their death was nigh, and that they must recite the Islamic declaration of faith. But following Jewish tradition, the condemned men recited the Shema. Their stubborn adherence to their faith in the face of death aroused the ire of the crowd of onlookers. The three were set upon with knives, poignards, and scimitars and dispatched in a gruesome fashion. Despite Mullah Muhsin's admonition and the subsiding of the king's wrath, fanatic Muslims continued to persecute the Jews and

used the pretext of Obadiah's murder to cut off the ears and noses of several Jews who passed through the bazaar.

Continuation of the Story of the Jews of Isfahan

In Isfahan, the commotion engendered by the murder of Obadiah silenced news of the struggle of the Jews of Shiraz and Lar. Then one day Shah 'Abbas II went hunting outside the city, setting forth on the road to Khansar. Some Jews who sought his intercession went after him with great trepidation. Among them were several Jewish women who were supposed to make contact with the king's mother in Isfahan and deliver another petition. The king passed Khansar and arrived at a village inhabited by Armenians. The king, who was pleased with the village, ordered that the menfolk should leave the village and that the womenfolk should remain behind to illuminate the place.

During the night, several Jewish women, one of whom carried the petition, joined the ranks of the Armenian women. The king requested that wine be brought and began conversing with the women. Going from one to another, he noticed the Jewish women and asked what they were doing there.

One of the beauties stood up straight
And said "O King! Thou art like unto Dara!
Take this petition from me, O King!
Come to my aid, for the sake of God

The king received the petition and read it. He replied, "These oppressions are undoubtedly the work of Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah." He promised to help, but the grand vizier became infuriated upon learning of the petition and escalated his oppressions. He summoned the petitioners and castigated them.

He intimidatingly ordered his servants
To bind them with ropes

The men were readied for execution, while the women wept and pleaded. They were told that if they wanted to escape death, they must all recite the declaration of faith and become Muslims. The women consented, whereupon the men were brought back from the gallows. Perforce, they converted to Islam along with the women.

The Jews of Farahabad during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas II

Baba'i Lutf continues the tragic story of the Jews in Safavid times thus:

Thou hast heard the story of Lalehzar
Of that which transpired in the time of Lari[153]
Hear now the story
Of the fate that befell that community

Master Lalehzar and his generation passed away. At the end of his rule, Shah Safi, too, departed this world. After him, his son, Shah 'Abbas, was placed upon the throne. This king became so concerned with the absolute domination of Shi'ism that he neglected his other duties. During his reign, Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah became vizier and undertook to make Muslims of the Iranian Jews by any means necessary. The Jews were subjected to endless persecutions throughout all the cities and towns of Iran, including Farahabad.

The Jews of Farahabad had converted to Islam during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I, but Shah Safi emancipated them, and most of them returned to their ancestral faith. But during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II, state officials arrived in Farahabad and imposed the same terms: either they leave Iran, convert to Islam, or face death.

That town's Assef[154] *said once more*
"All must become Muslims"

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[153]A reference to Abu al-Hasan Lari, the Muslim convert of the time of Shah Abbas I.

[154]TN: here, "governor."

In reply to the town's Assef they said
"Though you cut us into a hundred pieces
We will not abandon the religion of Moses
Kill us, for we consider ourselves as good as dead!"

I'timad al-Dawlah's officials said to them, "We will burn you alive." Then they built a bonfire in the public square and brought the Jews to that spot.[155] Once again, they admonished the Jews to renounce their religion and accept Shi'i Islam; otherwise, they would burn to ashes in the flames.

Once again the people said
"Our hearts have sustained a hundred injuries
This fire is to the downtrodden
As a salve to the wounds of the noble"

Upon encountering such intransigence, the executioners seized several of the Jews and cast them, bound hand and foot, into the fire.

They surrendered their bodies to the flames like salamanders
They were completely charred from head to toe

An uproar ensued. Several Jews were clubbed with heavy maces and had their brains dashed out, while several others had their necks stretched on the gallows. That day's gruesome massacre achieved nothing, and the following day the vizier's officials came up with new degradations in an effort to compel the Jews to convert to Islam. They hung large bells around the Jews' necks. They placed wreaths of fodder, thorns, and filth upon their heads and large iron rings on their fingers. This excruciating harassment caused some to abandon their faith, but others stood firm.

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[155]This is another scene borrowed from the European Inquisition, popularized in Safavid Iran by European, especially Spanish, priests.

Plight of the Jews of Qom

In Qom, too, there was a pseudo-cleric who was a sworn enemy of the Jews. The government entrusted the conversion of the city's Jews to him. He summoned the leaders of the city's Jewish community—Mehdi, Benjamin, Elyahu, and Agha Baba—and ordered them to soak the Torah and Psalms in water.[156] The entire Jewish community was required to convert to Islam and eat meat with yoghurt.

When those poor souls heard these words
Tears fell from their eyes like rain

Under pressure, the Jews agreed to convert to Islam on the condition that they not be required to soak the Torah and Psalms. After a time, the cleric told them, "So long as you possess the Torah, you will not abandon the religion of Moses. You have no choice but to soak your Torahs." Seeing that they remained obstinate, he ordered his servants to gather the Torahs, and in the presence of the Jews-turned-Muslims, he himself soaked them in water.[157]

Continuation of the Story of the Jews of Golpayegan and Khansar

After making reference to the "emancipation" of the Jews of Golpayegan and Khansar, Baba'i Lutf goes on to relate that the governor, Khalil Khan Lor, refrained from tormenting the Jews. Then one day a man from Khansar who possessed an exquisite ruby of great value went to Isfahan to sell it. News of it reached I'timad al-Dawlah,

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[156]In those days, as in earlier centuries, all books in Iran, including religious books, were handwritten; the printing press had not yet been adopted.

[157]This forced conversion is the reason that Tavernier reports the Jewish population of Qom toward the end of the reign of Shah Abbas II as only ten households.

and it was suggested that he purchase it to present to the king as a gift. I'timad al-Dawlah sent someone on a Saturday to purchase the ruby, but the man from Khansar said that he did not conduct business on Saturdays. The next day, after confiscating the ruby, I'timad al-Dawlah, who up to that time had believed that all the Jews of Golpayegan, Khansar, and Khorramabad had become Muslims, sent a harsh letter to Khalil Khan Lor:

O contrary, immoral Khan!
O lying, cursed, wicked one!

"By what right have you allowed the Jews to remain free? Either make Muslims of them all or exile them; otherwise you will have only yourself to blame for the fate which will befall you."

The governor was overtaken with fear. His officials tracked down the Jews with swords drawn. They slashed their garments, and under the bastinado sought to compel them to convert to Islam. The Jews resisted. Khalil Khan Lor—unwilling to risk his head for their sake—exiled them to Sefid Kuh, at a distance of several parasangs from the city. The place lacked water and greenery. Acacia thorns sprang from the ground, and the sun's scorching rays bore down from the sky.

A pack of hyenas ruled by night
Bloodthirsty wolves by day

No one was allowed to bring them food and water, which they remained without for ten days. Finally, they could bear no more. Those half-animated souls who survived agreed to eat meat and yoghurt and recite the Islamic declaration of faith. But they remained true to their faith and did not work on Saturdays. This news reached Khalil Khan. In order to test them, one Saturday he sent two of his officials to them, one of whom was to buy silk and the other soap. The officials went to the caravanserai of the apparently-Muslim Jews and found them reading books. One of the officials asked a silk vendor for yellow silk and was told, "I have only undyed silk;

I'll have it dyed by tomorrow. Come again tomorrow. I will have any color you desire."

The second official went to another Jew and asked for soap. He was told, "Do you not know that the month of Ramadan approaches and that all are concerned with cleanliness and purity? All my soap is already sold out."

The officials returned to the governor and reported that they were unable to purchase anything. They further reported that they saw the Jews eating *gipa.*[158] Upon hearing this, Khalil Khan became enraged and increased his heavy-handedness to the point where no Jew could return to his religion.

Unpleasant Situation of the Jews of Yazd and Kerman

Yazd and Kerman were among those cities whose governors I'timad al-Dawlah had directed to convert the Jews to Islam. They used the regular method: conversion to Islam, exile, or death.

Fasts, bribes, alms, and vows were made. Of these, the bribes—given to the pseudo-mullahs and governors—were most efficacious. Moreover, because the Jews of Yazd were engaged in textile- and silk-weaving and owned many workshops and arbors, expelling them from the city would have resulted in unemployment and economic decline in the Muslim community. Therefore, the orders from the central government were left unenforced.

Shah 'Abbas II's Travels to Kashan and His Love for a Jewish Youth

During the Islamic month of Muharram in the year 1659,[159] the Jews of Kashan who had converted to Islam also wore black. One Sunday, a herald announced in the city that the king had arrived in Fin[160]

[158]A kind of tripe stuffed with rice and herbs.

[159]TN: 8 September–9 October 1659.

[160]TN: A renowned royal garden in Kashan.

and would "grace the city with his royal presence" the following day. The governor commanded that the Jewish converts must be the first in the ranks of those sent to greet the king. The people lined up along the route from the city to Fin. The king was accompanied by a retinue with white horses, golden saddles, and ornate garb, with two decorated elephants trailing behind his coach. Shah 'Abbas' eagle eyes spotted in the crowd the face of a Jewish youth with a mole on his chin. The exceedingly handsome youth stole the heart of the "fanatically religious" king. Immediately upon reaching his residence, he ordered his courtiers to find and bring that youth to him. They brought all of the handsome young boys before the king, and he chose two of them, but the youth who had caught his eye was not found, and he still wanted the one who had stolen his heart.

Among all those houris of Paradise
Two met with his approval
But he still sought that one
Who had disappeared in the crowd

The youth was nowhere to be found, as his family had hidden him. Baba'i Lutf says of the government of Kashan during this period:

In that time when we became anusim[161]
We lost our name and our dignity
There was a vizier in our abode
Who feared not God—a disgraceful man
That commander's name was Shafi'
That cause for shame hailed from Yazd

He persecuted not only the Jews, but also those Jews who had converted to Islam, and was always making trouble for them. He appointed a host of informants against them and made their lives

[161]Jews who were forced to renounce their faith but who secretly believed in Judaism.

miserable. During this period, the killing of Jews was a common occurrence in Kashan. In a single day, 150 Jews were put to death and their property confiscated. In the midst of this imbroglio, the king, the "protector of the masses," continued searching for that Jewish youth. A herald announced in the city that the king was pleased with the youth with the mole on his chin and that he must present himself immediately, or else he would be punished.

The handsome Jewish youth whom the king had observed was named Elisha', but was commonly called Yahya. The attempt to keep Yahya concealed ultimately failed. Those who knew him informed the Beg's court. They found the boy. His mother and father beat their heads and chests and rent their garments, but there was no escape. They took the Jewish boy from his home by force.

They brought that boy before the king
He was beautiful like the Moon in the king's eyes
He said "This is my lost Moon
In what constellation did he dwell?"

Shah 'Abbas commanded that Yahya be bathed in rose water, that his hair be styled, and that he be brought back before him. After several days, the king left Kashan with his beloved.

The Miserable Plight of the Jews of Kashan

Despite the persecutions and killings, the Jews of Kashan struggled to cling to their religion by every means possible, from seeking the intercession of the high and mighty to bestowing gifts of silk carpets and other precious objects. But when the people became aware of the measures taken by the Jews to avoid conversion, they became angry with them.

A God-fearing *mujtahid*[162] of Kashan by the name of Mullah Muhsin Fayz sought to help the Jews. He asked them to give him their

[162]TN: a Shiite jurisprudist competent to render an independant legal opinion.

names, and he would go before the king to ask for their emancipation. He solemnly swore by the name of 'Abbas that he had no ulterior motive. The Jews nervously gave him their names. Mullah Muhsin, whose intentions were pure, said that he would explain to the courtiers that they could not persecute the Jews in the name of religion. The Kashani *mujtahid* was true to his word. He went before the king and tried to convince him that the state must stop persecuting and killing Jews. But the malicious I'timad al-Dawlah intervened and foiled the pure-minded *mujtahid*'s efforts.

The grand vizier's political protégé, Mirza Mas'ud, feared that the level of anti-Semitic persecution might taper off, and his hatred of the Jews grew even more brutal. As fate would have it, the king appointed Mirza Mas'ud to oversee Jewish affairs in Kashan. Following Muhammad Beg's instructions, he pursued a policy of duplicity and intrigue. In Kashan, he told the Jews that those who wished to remain Muslims should don white turbans, while those who wished to return to their former faith should pay the *jizya* poll tax and affix a patch to their garments. The Jews asked him to swear that he was telling the truth, and Mirza Mas'ud pledged that he was indeed telling the truth and that any convert to Islam who wished to return to Judaism was free to do so.

Thereupon, a great many *anusim* joyously headed toward their synagogues. Coincidentally, it was Shabbat Anokhi.[163] The people shed tears of joy, recited from the Torah, made pledges to God, and prayed.

The following day, a bloody riot erupted in Kashan. Upon the instigation of anti-Semites, some Jews who wore patches on their garments were stabbed and beaten to death. Not one of the killers was arrested. Some Jews were tortured to the point that they became Muslims again. Finally, acting upon Mirza Mas'ud's orders, the mob attacked all the synagogues, demolished them with shovels and pick axes, soaked the holy Torahs in water, and tore them to

[163]The Sabbath on which the unity of God was proclaimed to Moses.

pieces. Baba'i Lutf asks, "Have you read of the historical events surrounding the demolition of Beth ha Migdash in Jerusalem? The destruction of the synagogues that day was similar. The city, which was like a little Jerusalem, became a place of Jewish mourning."

The End of Muhammad Beg's Anti-Semitic Deeds

On this subject, Baba'i Lutf describes Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah's treachery against Shah 'Abbas and his lies and trickery. He relates how this mighty prime minister, who authorized the most terrible persecutions of Iranian Jews, met with an ill-omened fate and, after being removed from office, was exiled to Qom. He cites the year of this tyrant's dismissal as 5420 by the Hebrew calendar, which corresponds to 1659 C.E., precisely the year in which Tavernier reports that he was ousted. Baba'i says:

Come listen, and be still
Take in this sweet story
See how oppressive tyrants
Fall from power in the end
Whosoever does ill in this world
Has as an ill reward in store

The headstrong I'timad al-Dawlah, who for a time possessed horses, mules, and wealth equal to the king's, who entertained dozens of guests at his table and whose turban had twenty folds so that none would doubt his knowledge and piety—a man whose horsemen had golden saddles and who wielded such power that he could put to death whomsoever he wished without the king's knowledge—was ultimately driven from the court like some detestable creature—homeless, with only the clothes on his back. Indeed:

Those poor workers marveled
That his crown and throne were brought low

Muhammad Beg was beaten like a bound dog by the king, his teeth knocked out and his face bloodied. He was enchained and his property confiscated. He was imprisoned and exiled. The story of Haman in Persia was once again repeated. After his fall from grace, the Jews of Kashan breathed freely again, and after paying the poll tax, or *jizya,* they were able to rebuild their ruined synagogues and once more stand in them before the Torah on Shabbat Anokhi.

It was Shabbat Anokhi—Once again
We practiced our faith

In his conclusion to the *Ketab-e anusi,* Baba'i Lutf asks God to grant the Jewish people freedom and expresses his hopes for the construction of the Third Temple. Although this keen-sighted half-poet chronicler speaks of cities such as Isfahan, Shiraz, Lar, Yazd, Kerman, Golpayegan, Khansar, Hamadan, Qom, Kashan, and Farahabad in depicting the status of Jews during the Safavid period and the influence of the European Inquisition in Iran, it seems that he contented himself with mentioning only a few examples to illustrate the depth and breadth of the atrocities. As we know from the brief history of Arakel Armani Tabrizi, the scope of anti-Semitism encompassed all of Iran, even small villages, especially during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II and his stone-hearted grand vizier, Muhammad Beg I'timad al-Dawlah. Arakel himself, in addition to mentioning the cities discussed by Baba'i Lutf, depicts the bitter and terrifying plight of the Jews of Shushtar, Mashhad, Damavand, and Astarabad.

In 1954, the author of this book himself travelled to the villages of Khizan, Parishan, and Bani Isfahan[164] near Isfahan to investigate the plight of Jews during that period. Because the dialect of these three

[164]According to popular Jewish belief, the names of these three villages are derived as follows: the Jews of Khizan woke up early in the morning to pray [TN: "early riser" in Persian is *sahar-khiz*]; the Jews of Parishan embraced scholarship and were *pirushim* (Hebrew for "Pharisees"); and the Jews of Bani Isfahan were descendants of the Children of Israel.

villages is a patois,[165] it can be asserted with some confidence that all three villages were inhabited by Jews during Safavid times. The author himself observed how on Friday evenings the villagers lit oil lamps, as was common in times past, and put them under baskets. Apparently, because the custom of lighting lamps or candles on Friday evenings was—like many other Jewish rituals—prohibited, the Jewish women who converted to Islam in the aforementioned villages hid the lamps under baskets so as not to run afoul of government officials, yet at the same time ensured that they would not be deprived of divine blessings. When asked the reason for placing lamps under baskets on Friday evenings, a villager replied, "It is an act which brings blessings, and has been customary since the time of our forefathers." In Bani Isfahan, the law of abstention from sexual relations during a woman's menstrual period is observed as it is among the Jews, and in addition to the Ramadan fast, they observe a separate day of fasting each year.

Other sources make reference to the terrible persecutions directed against the Jews in the villages of Ordestan, Murcheh, Khort, Abarqu, Julfa, Galanabad, and Ishaqabad, where the *mikveh* bath was situated. In any event, indisputable documentary evidence concerning the status of rural Jews during the Safavid period is not available, and thus far no serious research has been conducted in this area.

Baba'i Farhad, the grandson of Baba'i Lutf who lived during the reigns of the Safavid Shah Sultan Husayn and Nadir Shah, like his grandfather committed the events of his day to writing, but not in as great detail. Regarding a depressing event which occurred during the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn, the king who wore mullah's robes, Baba'i Farhad writes that three Jews—Elihar, Kuchek, and Qalandar—were strumming the *kamancheh* and beating drums in the Mir Daryab Gardens of Kashan, and several people had gathered around listening. Suddenly, a number of religious fanatics came to arrest them. Qalandar fled, but the other two were apprehended.

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[165]An admixture of Hebrew and the local dialect.

They were brought before the local court and sentenced to death. Although they were willing to convert to Islam, the executioners would not be dissuaded. Each was handed over to a group of thugs. They stabbed Elihar and Kuchek so viciously that their bodies were hacked into several pieces. They paraded the pieces of their corpses through the streets and burned them near the Fin gate. This incident once again stirred up the people of Kashan and Isfahan against the Jews. Plunder and bloodshed once more prevailed. Finally, the grand *mujtahid* of Isfahan banned the government from spilling innocent blood and decreed that all the Jews needed only to pay a fine for the "satanic" act of playing music! Government officials went to Kashan to collect fines from the Jews there. By chance, the people were in the synagogues praying. They attacked the synagogues, seized and bound the Jews, and marched them off to the bazaar and the local court. Along the way, passersby taunted them and cast stones at them. They amassed a great pile of wood in front of the court and kindled a bonfire. Then they dragged their religious leader, Mullah Rehamim, toward the fire. They immolated some Jews in the fire, while several others were shackled and cast into prison.

PART NINE

AFSHARIDS AND ZANDS (1722–1794 C.E.)

Chapter Eighteen
The Short-Lived Dynasties

Many histories place the end of the Safavid dynasty at 1736, four years after Shah Tahmasp II, son of Shah Sultan Husayn, was deposed by Nadir Qoli. In this book we will consider the end of the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn in 1722 as the end of the Safavid dynasty, because from that time forward, the country was actually run by the courageous general who later became known as Nadir Shah.

The inner corruption of the Safavid period caused its façade to crumble during the reign of Sultan Husayn, paving the way for the Afghans to enter Iran. The Afghans encamped outside Isfahan, surrounding the capital:

> The imperial palaces and fine estates outside the city fell to the enemy and were converted to caravanserais and stables...A severe famine plagued the city. Not even horse meat or donkey flesh was available. Even the leaves and leather which families had resorted to eating for several days were exhausted. The corpses of the poor souls who died of starvation were a moving sight in the neighborhood streets...The famine worsened with the passing of each day, and the Afghans became increasingly bold...Sultan Husayn [sought a truce] and went out to the enemy camp with several of his princes. He recognized the Afghan Mahmud as his own son, and with his own hands placed the Safavid crown upon his head. The next day, Afghan forces entered the capital. (Razi, pp. 432–3)

Thus the city—which according to Chardin had 160 mosques, 48 religious secondary schools, 1,800 caravanserais, and 273 public baths—fell to the enemy. To begin with, Mahmud treacherously invited all the viziers and nobles of the city of Isfahan to a reception and then put them all to death on the spot. Fifteen days later, he began a massacre of the people of Isfahan. He personally executed all thirty-one of the Safavid princes. Other Iranian cities fell to the Afghans, and after the death of Mahmud, his son Ashraf continued to rule from Isfahan. In the treaty concluded between him and the

Ottomans, the Ottoman Turks "granted" Ashraf the cities of Hamadan, Kermanshah, and Tuserkan!

Iran was thrown into turmoil. On the orders of Peter the Great, the Russian army attacked from the north, making advances in Daghestan, Shirvan, Gilan, Baku, the Caucasus, and Darband. The Ottomans seized Kurdistan, Yerevan, Nakhichevan, Maragheh, Tabriz, Khoy, and Armenia. During those gloomy days, when Tahmasp II laid claim to the throne in Farahabad in Mazandaran, a fearless man arose in Khorasan. Nadir was from the Afshar tribe—Turcomans who migrated to Iran during the Mongol invasion. Nadir's father was a furrier. His mother was taken captive by the Uzbeks and died in captivity. The young Nadir came to the aid of the helpless king of Iran, assembling an army and, after eight years of fighting, driving the Afghans out.

Much has been said about Nadir, good and bad. Not everyone agrees, but all are unanimous on this one point: like Alexander and Napoleon, Nadir was a military genius. In that war, which threatened Iran's very existence, Nadir not only drove the Afghans—who had captured the capital—out of Iran, he also drove the Russians out of northern Iran and advanced against the Ottomans as far as Baghdad. Because the Afghans had retreated to India and were threatening to mount a new campaign, he marched on India, crossed the Indus River, and took Peshawar, Kashmir, the Punjab, and Lahore, bringing back to Iran prizes including the Kuh-e Nur and Darya-ye Nur, the Peacock Throne, and a treasure trove of other precious gemstones. He made the Indus River the border between Iran and India. He quelled the rebellions in the Caucasus and put down insurrectionists within Iran. As was the case with many other great conquerors, with each new victory he became more haughty, coarse, and cruel. The people of southern Iran, fed up with the conduct of Nadir's tyrannical officials and his back-breaking taxes, rebelled under the leadership of Muhammad Baluch.

Fig. 1 Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Second President of the State of Israel and author of ***The Exiled and the Redeemed.***

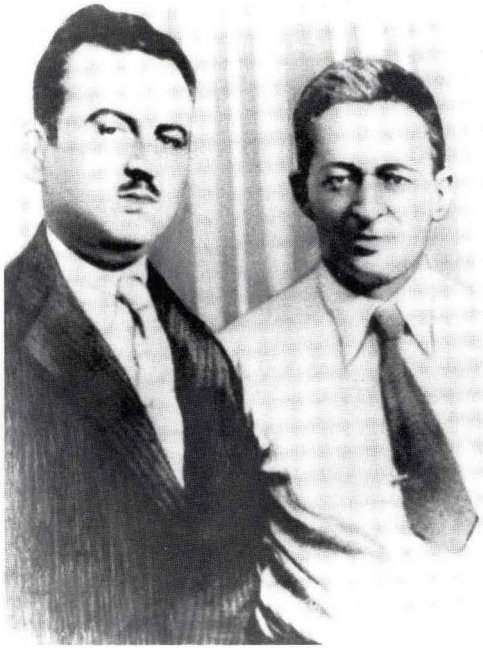


Fig. 2 Itzhak Ben-Zvi (left) and Dr. Habib Levy in 1935.

Fig. 3 The prophet Daniel, a court official of King Darius,in the lion's den. Painting by Rubens, 1618.

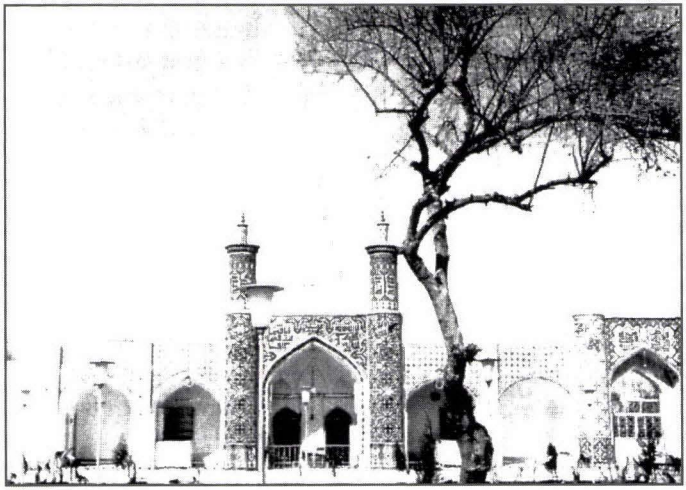


Fig. 4 The tomb of the prophet Daniel in Shush, southern Iran.

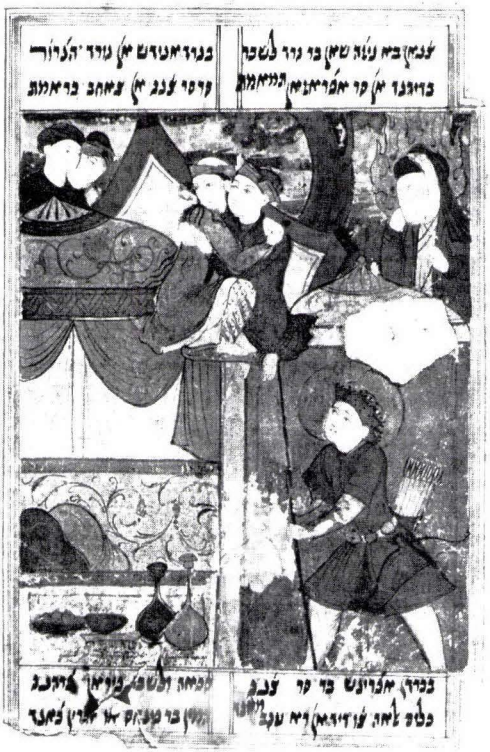
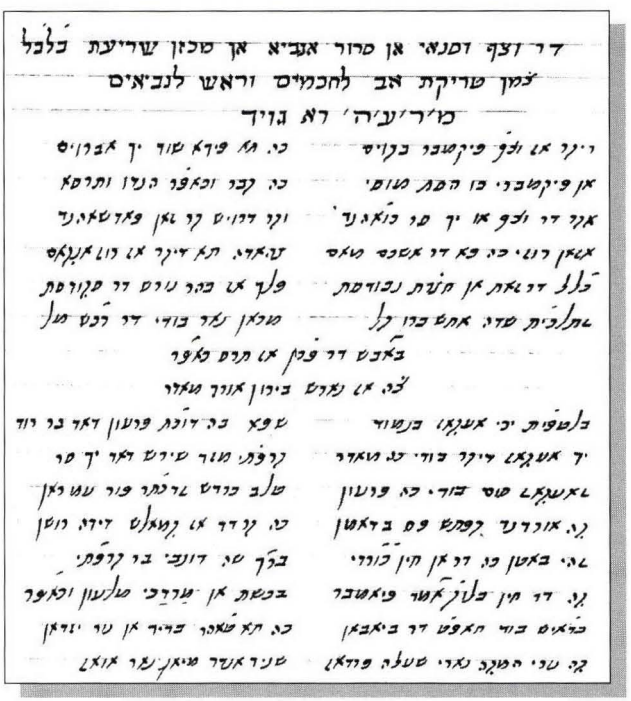


Fig. 5 An illustrated page of *Sefer Sharh-e Shahin al ha-Torah.*

Fig. 6 Jean Baptiste Tavernier, the French merchant who spent many years in Iran during the Safavid era, in Iranian garb.

Fig. 7 Shabbetai Zevi, the false Messiah whose claim brought more problems for the Jews of Iran.



דר וצף וסנאי אן סרור אנביא אן מכזן שריעת בלבל
צמן טריקת אב לחכמים וראש לנביאים
מ׳ר׳ע׳ה׳ רא גויד

ריקר אז וצף פיקמבר בקויס — כה תא פידא שוד יך אברויס
אן פיקמברי כו הסת מוסי — כה קבר וכאפר הנדו ותרסא
אקר דר וצף או יך סר כואהנד — וקר דרויש קר זאן פאדשאהנד
אזאן רוזי כה פא דר אשכם מאס — עהאדה תא דיקר אז רוז אנקאס
כלל דר זאת אן חזרת נבודסת — פלך אז בהר נורש דר סקורסת
זתלכית שדה אחש ברו קל — מכאן נאר בודי דר רכש מל
באבש דר פכן אז תרס כאפר
צה אז נארש בירון אורך מאדר
בלטפית יכי אעקאז בנמוד — שפא בה דוכת פרעון דאד בר רוד
יך אעקאז דיקר בודי כה מאדר — קרפתי מזר שירש דאד יך סר
זאעקאז סוס בודי כה פרעון — שלב כרדש זרכתר פור עמ ראן
קה אורדנד קפתש פס בדאמן — כה קרדד אז קמאלש דידה רושן
זהי באטן כה דר אן חין כורדי — ברך שה דונבי בר קרפתי
קה דר חין בלוק אמר פיאמבר — בכשת אן מרדכי מלעון וכאפר
כראים בוד תאפט דר ביאבאן — כה תא שאהר בדיד אן עד יזדאן
קה עדי המקה נארי שעלה פרדאז — שנד אנדר מיאן נאר אואז

Fig. 8 A page from Baba'i Lutf's *Anusim*.

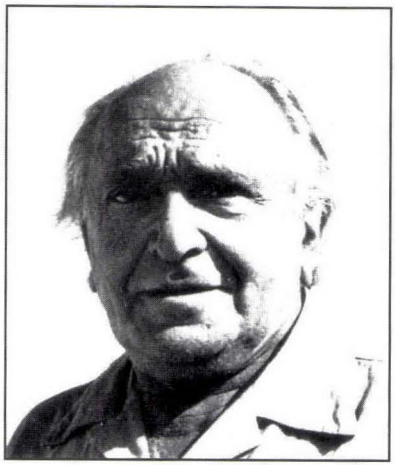


Fig. 9 Yehuda A. Kopeliovitz, leader of third Aliyah, who was active in Iran between the world wars.

Fig. 10 First page of *Radd al-Yahud* (Refutation of Judaism), published against the Jews in the Qajar period.

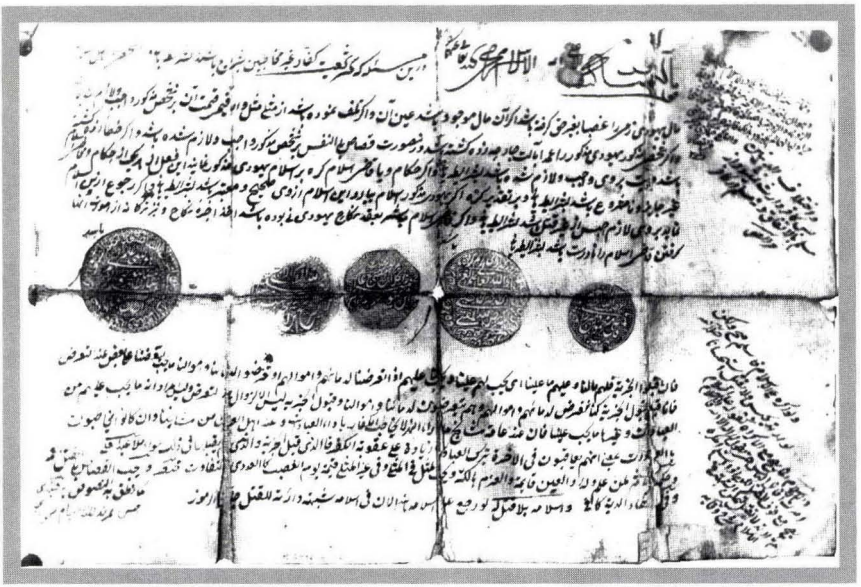


Fig. 11 A decree issued in favor of the Jews by five Iranian clergymen in 1842, but never implemented.

Fig. 12 Mirza-Reza Kermani, the assassin of Nasser al-Din Shah, who tried to prevent his action from being perceived as "Jewish conspiracy."

Fig. 13 Partial family tree of a prominent Tehran family which, as a result of pressures, restrictions, and prevailing conditions, converted to other religions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

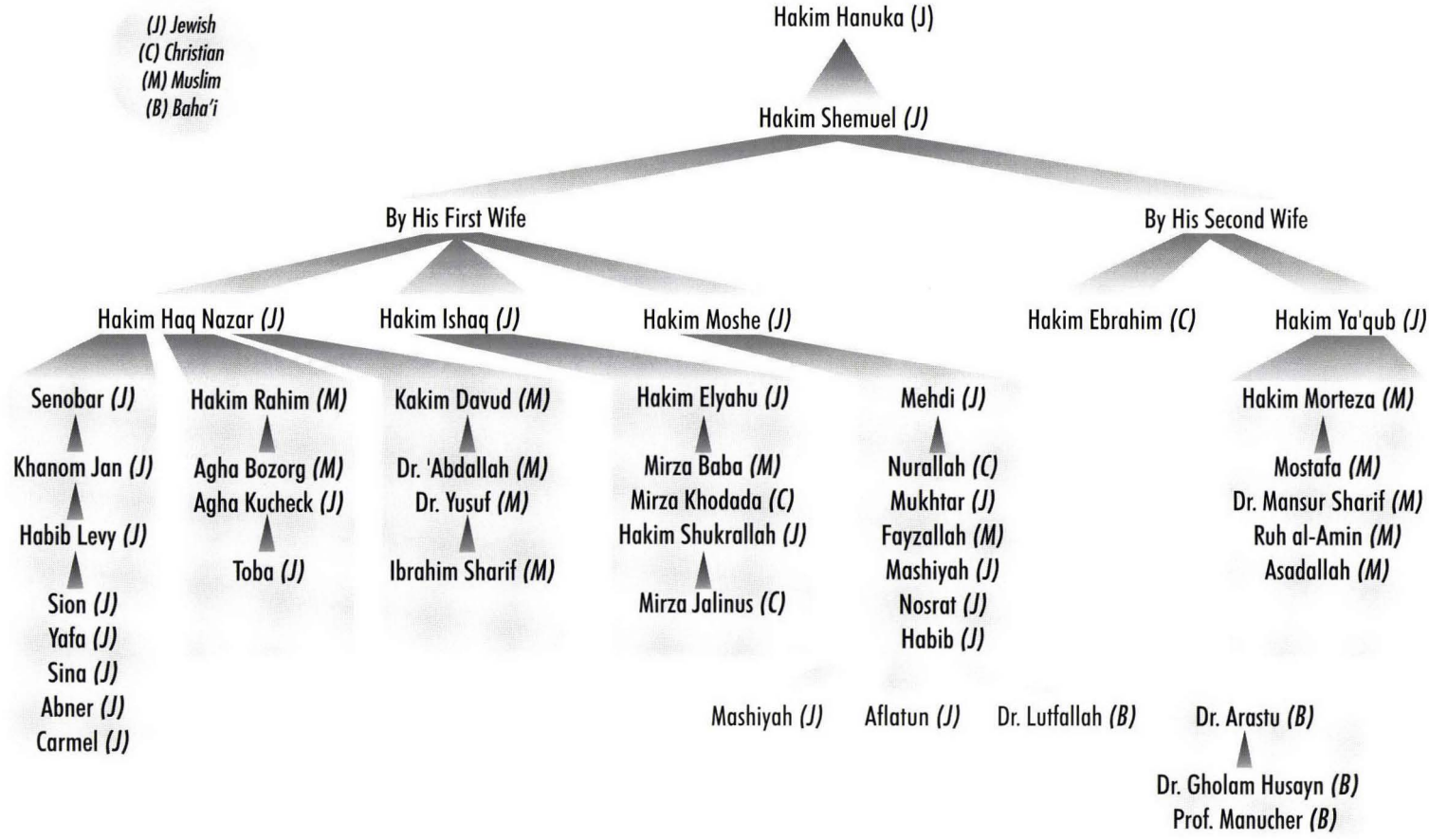


Fig. 14 An entrance to the Tehran ghetto.

Fig. 15 Senobar, a Jewish woman who, after the death of her husband, Ezra Ya'qub, continued his philanthropy.

Fig. 16 A sketch of Jacob Eduard Polak, the Austrian Jewish physician who served at the royal court of Iran during the Qajar dynasty.

Fig. 17 Mr. Joseph Cazès (with white hat), the first principal of the Alliance School in Tehran, in a ghetto synagogue.

Fig. 18 Joseph Cazès (front row, 4th from left) and Nissim Lévy (front row, 5th from left) with Jewish community and religious leaders of Tehran.

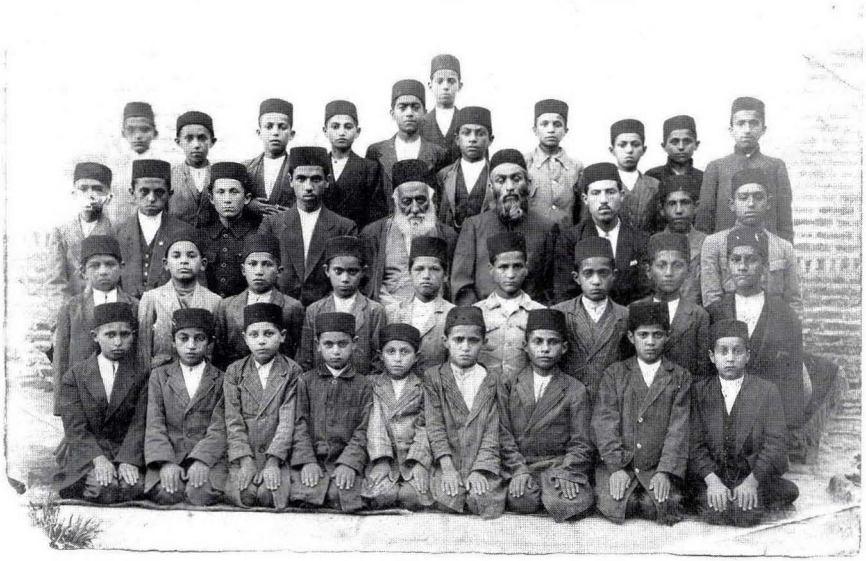


Fig. 19 Students of the Tehran Alliance School with their Hebrew teachers (third row, 5th from left, with white beard: Mullah Ya'qub ben Levi; 6th from left, Haim Mureh).

Fig. 20 Students of the Alliance School in Hamadan.

Fig. 21 'Aziz-Asher, one of the Jews who fought for Iran's freedom in the Constitutionalist revolution.

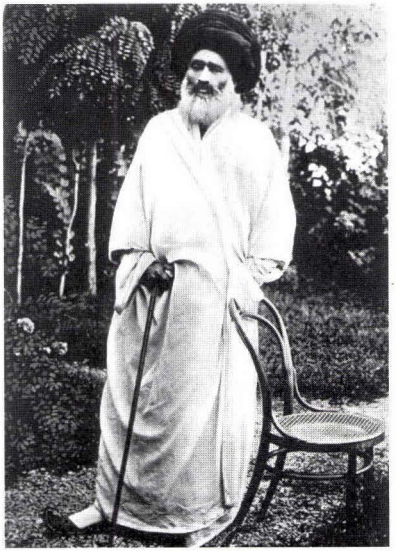


Fig. 22 Sayyid 'Abdollah Behbehani, the prominent Muslim religious leader who represented the Jewish community in the Assembly after the Constitutionalist revolution.

Fig. 23 Habib Levy, the first Jewish officer in the modern Iranian army.

Fig. 24 A ceremony to honor Rabbi Kornfeld, the American ambassador to Iran, who protected the Jews through diplomatic channels.

Fig. 25 A group of Tehran Jews celebrating the proclamation of the national Jewish homeland during the British mandate.

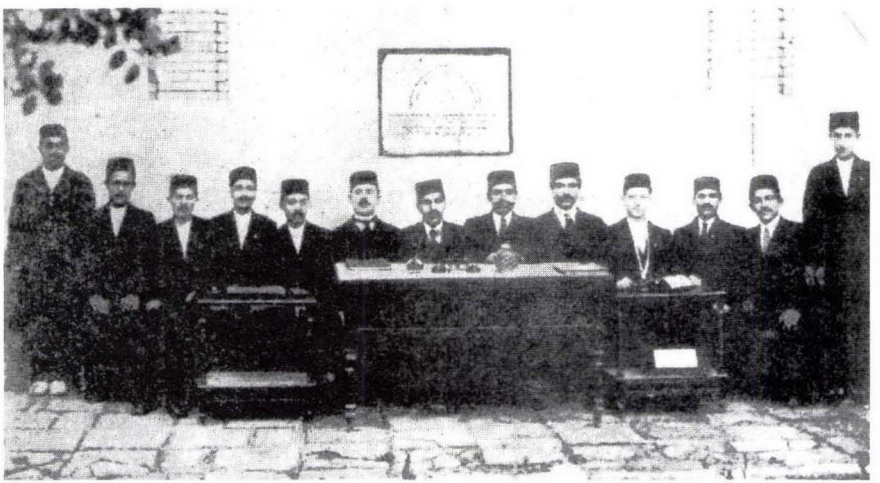


Fig. 26 Board members of the Zionist Association of Iran in 1919.

Fig. 27 Board members of the Zionist Association of Iran in 1920.

Fig. 28 Board members of the Zionist Association of Tehran in 1926.

Fig. 29 Dr. Loghman Nehurai, the Jewish representative to the Assemby during the Pahlavi dynasty.

Fig. 30 The directors of Jewish Association (Hebra Qadishah) in 1908.

Fig. 31 Shemuel Haim, the Jewish Assembly representative who was executed by firing squad.

Fig. 32 Three of the "Children of Tehran," Polish refugees in Iran during World War II.

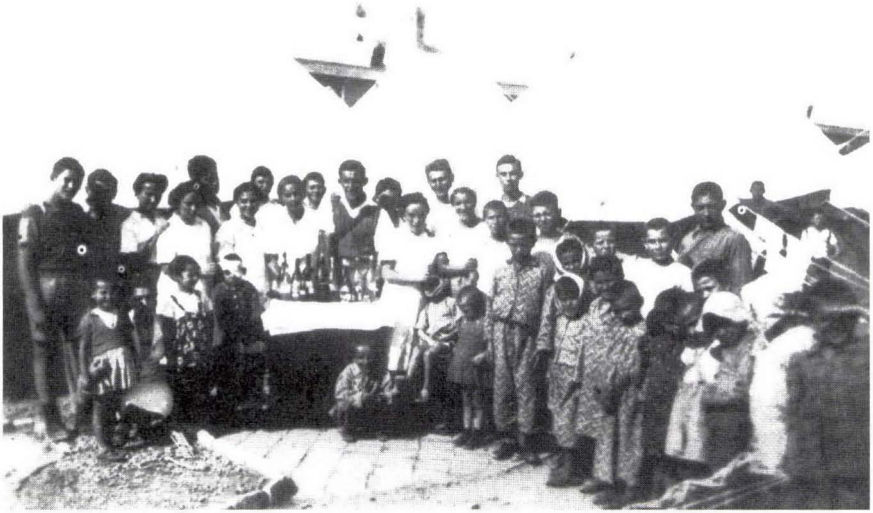


Fig. 33 A group of the "Children of Tehran" in a clinic set up for them in a tent

Fig. 34 The "Children of Tehran" in the land of Israel.

Fig. 35 Dr. Sapir, who treated sick Jews in the Tehran ghetto during World War II and himself fell victim to typhoid.

> Nadir angrily proceeded to Shushtar and unleashed his stalwart soldiers to pillage and rape that city. During this period, they committed atrocities to rival those committed by Genghis' army against the vanquished Muslims. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 720)

Nadir was crowned in 1736. He who had recognized a nursing child, 'Abbas III, as king and himself as his deputy, now summoned the nobles to Dasht-e Moghan and asked them to appoint a new king. They unanimously chose him, who had delivered Iran from the Russians, Ottomans, and Afghans. Nadir accepted the throne on five conditions, one of which was the propagation of Sunni Islam in Iran and the end of Shi'i domination. A Shi'i *mujtahid* who objected to this condition lost his life on the spot.

In his later years, Nadir became self-centered and suspicious of those around him. He killed or blinded many of his associates. He even had his own son, Qoli Mirza, blinded. It is remarkable that despite his victories, Nadir never gained a support base among the populace. This is because he sought to undermine Shi'ism and promote the Sunni sect, and also because he sought to efface the memory of the Safavids, who with their outward splendor had found a place in the hearts of the people. Toward the end of his life, he reached the point that he erected towers with the heads of his foes in his capital at Mashhad and in Kerman. Finally, he fell victim to a conspiracy and was killed by his enemies.

With Nadir's death, his imposing military organization collapsed, and Iran was carved up. Autonomous governments were set up throughout the country—in Georgia, Fars, Khorasan, Azerbaijan, Mazandaran, and other places. One recognized Qandahar as the capital, while another recognized Mashhad. The Qajar clan gradually entered the scene and vied with the Zand clan, one of the clans of Lor. Karim Khan Zand ruled Fars and part of western Iran, while Muhammad Hasan Khan Qajar ruled a territory stretching from Mazandaran to Isfahan. In a clash between these two clans, the Qajar khan suffered a defeat, and in 1750 Karim Khan assumed control of Iran, remaining in power until 1779.

Karim Khan Zand made Shiraz his capital city. He never claimed for himself the title of "king" or "sultan," preferring to be called *vakil al-ru'aya* (deputy of the people), and for this reason he gained great popularity with the masses. The names of buildings he erected in Shiraz, such as Bazar-e Vakil (Vakil Bazaar), reflect this preference. He wanted to be the people's agent, not their king, and was very effective in this regard. He was generous to the people. "He made not only the Muslims, but also the Armenians and all the Christians the beneficiaries of his largess."[166]In his clashes with the Qajars, he succeeded in taking Agha Muhammad Khan hostage.

The influence of European colonialism on Iran became more apparent during the Zand period. The European countries, trying to expand their colonies throughout Asia with the help of their navies, targeted the Persian Gulf. The British, who with their East India Company achieved their political objectives in the name of "maritime trade," gained power in the Persian Gulf. With the help of the Dutch they controlled maritime trade. The French, who at this time were at war with the English, sent several naval vessels to Bandar 'Abbas and fought with their rival on the borders of Iran!

After the death of Karim Khan in 1779, Agha Muhammad Khan escaped from prison and rejoined his clan in northern Iran, where he put together a military force and marched against the Zands. This campaign lasted several years, during which the Zands fought amongst themselves over succession to the throne. Iran was overtaken by chaos while members of this dynasty sat upon the throne. The last of the Zands was Lutf 'Ali Khan Zand in 1794.

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[166]Razi, p. 449.

Chapter Nineteen
Unending Storms

The downfall of the Safavids, who caused the Jews such suffering, might have given them occasion for hope. But such was not the case. The terrible storms which had erupted sometime before and destroyed homes continued unabated. Baba'i Farhad, the grandson of Baba'i Lutf, versified the history of the fourteen years between the siege of Isfahan in 1722 by the Afghan Mahmud and the coronation of Nadir Shah in 1736.

Because of the afflictions of the preceding years and the payment of exorbitant taxes and even more exorbitant bribes, the Jews were especially vulnerable and were living in poverty. The ill-omened policies pursued by the state—which grew from poisonous seeds planted by the Europeans—turned the minds of the populace against the Jewish community. These poisonous seedlings grew more fruitful. The simpleminded illiterate masses of Iran, under the influence of the even more illiterate pseudo-mullahs who did not understand Islam, considered the Jews unclean infidels. They believed that persecuting Jews would open the gates of heaven to the Muslim persecutor. The physically, spiritually, and materially exhausted Jews faced new national and ethnic crises.

Baba'i Farhad writes that the Afghan Mahmud marched on Isfahan from Qandahar. He occupied several cities and besieged Isfahan. A number of Jews from Kashan, Shiraz, and Yazd were also trapped in Isfahan at that time. The Jews faced a terrible crisis. Under conditions of extreme adversity, they rushed to each others' aid and kept their doors open to one other. The young prayed to God for mercy. Pregnant young brides died of starvation during the famine, and there was no one to bury them. When they could, they buried corpses under their houses. The Armenian Minas in Julfa provided great assistance to the Jews. As Sultan Husayn went before Mahmud dressed in black, the Afghans entered the city and killed countless people.

After the Afghan Mahmud assumed the throne, he took other cities and continued his massacres. For him, there was no difference between men, women, and children. He had a deputy by the name of Almas who was involved in everything, and Mahmud's orders were not official without his seal. Upon Mahmud's death, his son Ashraf became king. Ashraf was even more ruthless than his father, and took more Iranian cities. The Mongol period was relived, and Muslims and Jews alike were killed. The Afghan Ashraf hanged hundreds of people a day in the public square of Isfahan. Now it was the Shi'is' turn to be slaughtered. Had Mullah Za'faran, the religious leader, granted his consent, Ashraf would have left no one alive in Isfahan. The mass executions of the Shi'is filled the Jews with dread. Ashraf went from Hamadan to Kashan, Qom, and Semnan. At this point, the Iranian general Nadir met Ashraf on the field of battle.

Baba'i Farhad, writing of the Jews of Kashan, invites the reader to hearken to their story: When the city was surrounded and overtaken by famine, hunger turned many youths with great expectations into skin and bones. They died young. In 1729, Ashraf entered Kashan. Nadir, in pursuit, reached Kashan, and Ashraf fled to Isfahan. In every city he entered, Nadir collected exorbitant taxes. He entered Kashan with 4,000 soldiers. Davud, the Nasi of the Jewish community, went out to greet Nadir along with a group of the Jewish menfolk. But Nadir's underlings stopped them and bade them renounce their religion. Many of them were imprisoned. The soldiers entered Jewish homes and beat and kicked the women and children. They demanded money, food, and fodder. Nadir's officials met with Davud the Nasi. Davud undertook to collect a tribute of several thousand *tomans* from the Jewish community and to deliver the sum to Nadir's army. Everyone grumbled, saying, "how can we come up with the money?" After Nadir's arrival, Ashraf's money had become worthless, so the women collected their cosmetic cases, rings, and bracelets to give to Nadir's men.

That day was a Friday, the 8th of Heshvan.[167] Nadir's underlings attacked Jewish homes, ruining many. Horror-struck men, women, and children wept in terror. Davud the Nasi and the community elders brought the tribute payment, which was a fraction of the sum demanded, to the home of Abu al-Qasim, where Nadir had taken up residence. Davud the Nasi's companions were Khodadad, Mandi Lari, Mordecai, Rabi, Davud Shahriyari, Khwajeh Israel Gorji, Michael Kohan, Mordecai Isfahani, and Benyamin. They recounted their afflictions and said that they had nothing left, but Nadir's men demanded an additional 100 *tomans*. Despite the Jews' remonstrances that they had not a single dinar more, their impassioned pleas had no effect on their cold hearts. Benyamin, yielding under the intense pressure, implored Davud the Nasi, "Let us become Muslims and spare ourselves this hardship."

Then they said, "We are Muslims, and we have provided you all that we possessed."

Nadir replied, "Moses was a great prophet and worked great miracles. May each stick to his own faith. Your conversion to Islam will do you no good. You must pay."

You will not abandon your religion
Though you bring before me all the prophets

Benyamin replied, "I have no money, and perforce not only I, but all the Jews will become Muslims." Nadir was pleased by these words. He congratulated them and bestowed upon them robes of honor. At this point, Baba'i Farhad asks God, "O Providence! Tell us, what shall we do? Are we not Thy servants?"

On Sunday, after Davud the Nasi and Benyamin had made this promise to Nadir, the Nasi summoned the Jews and explained the situation. The people told Davud that it would be best if he went to Nadir's camp and delivered a petition to rescind that promise. A

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[167]TN: In 1729, the 8th of Heshvan fell on Monday, the 31st of October. I cannot explain this discrepancy.

lay leader admonished them not to demand of Davud that he commit suicide in this manner. "If you do not become Muslims, you must pay more money, and since you have no more, your lives are in danger." The people were divided between those who were willing to fulfill the leader's promise and those who were committed to clinging their faith by any means necessary. Someone shouted, "Who would become a Muslim?"

If ye would become Muslims, say so now
Seek ye not trouble for yourselves

Word spread among the assembly that the next day when Nadir came out from his camp he would order that any who refused to become a Muslim would have his belly cut open. The people were overcome with fear, not knowing what to do. They acceded, and bowed their heads in submission. Finally, they brought Mullah Elyahu—who was possessed of a good voice and sang religious hymns with passion—before the people to recite the Islamic declaration of faith. They made Mullah Nathaniel ben Moshe, a pious man, proclaim that he was no longer a Jew. They forced Mullah Rehamim, whose face was radiant like that of a prophet, to accept Islam. When they brought forth Abraham Yazdi to declare his faith in Islam, he declared, "I am not a Kashani[168] that I should become a Muslim along with this company. For God's sake, please put an end to this. What harm has Moses done you that you should treat his followers thus? Did the Messenger of Islam instruct you to force people to become Muslims? If you would force me to become a Muslim, then I would rather quit the country."

Mu'in Beg sprang up and answered Abraham, "It is in your best interest to convert forthwith."

Abraham responded, "God made me a Jew, and a Jew will I remain for the rest of my life."

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[168]TN: The name "Yazdi" signifies that he was from Yazd.

In the end, he refused to become a Muslim. But his obstinacy did not go unpunished. Another man—from Kermanshah—gave all that he possessed but remained a Jew. All the Jewish households of Kashan went into mourning, as though a member of the family had died. The only music to be heard was weeping and lamentation. Everyone murmured against Davud the Nasi and prayed to God for religious emancipation.

Baba'i would return to his religion
He would start anew

Baba'i then describes a petition enumerating grievances which he himself wrote and proffered to several religious and lay leaders. In the petition, he asked the king to grant the Jews permission to return to their ancestral religion and to reopen the thirteen synagogues of Kashan. By coincidence, Davud the Nasi had drafted a similar petition. A group of the newly-converted Muslims gathered to present Nadir with a Torah and deliver the petitions, but some of them said that since they had become Muslims, it would be better if they brought Nadir a Quran instead of a Torah.

These efforts were fruitless. Instead, they appointed Islamic clerics to teach the new Muslim women and children how to pray and fast. They all gathered in one house where the clerics taught them from the Quran and instructed them in Islamic customs. News of Davud the Nasi's submission reached Isfahan, where the Jews reproached him.

At the same time, the contest between the Afghan Ashraf and Nadir continued. Ashraf went to Shiraz. He expropriated the people's money and confiscated the Jews' property, leaving them penniless and empty-handed. In this war-ravaged city, Muslim and Jew suffered the same fate, but in peacetime, the Muslims made life miserable for the Jews. The Jews were like chickens: slaughtered both at funerals and at weddings. When Nadir arrived in Shiraz, the leader of the Jewish community was a priest by the name of Mordecai Qazvini. They seized him and wounded him with a dagger blow. The Jews

went into hiding, but one by one they were found and relieved of their worldly possessions.

Baba'i Farhad then mentions the efforts of the renowned Kashani *mujtahid* Mir Abu al-Qasim on behalf of Jewish religious emancipation. He writes that the Jews went to this spiritual sayyid[169] and asked for his help in returning to their ancestral faith. They tearfully explained that they had always paid the *jizya* poll tax and had done no wrong. Mir Abu al-Qasim told them that he would do his best to help them and would intercede with the king on their behalf. He told them to go and fast and, along with their children, to beseech God's mercy.

Davud the Nasi, shunned by many Jews after his conversion to Islam, also sought the Kashani *mujtahid*'s intercession, saying that he was not personally affected, but that he was acting on behalf of those who were forced to convert to Islam. A group who accompanied Davud told the sayyid, "We converted out of fear, but we find ourselves unable to practice the Islamic faith. We wish to return to the religion of Moses. We implore you to help us reassert our former faith."

Sayyid Abu al-Qasim said that he would approach the government officials the next day and do all that was in his power. Davud the Nasi pressed him to take action on their behalf. Here the poet becomes sentimental about Davud and asks God to forgive his sins because he acted selflessly and struggled to help the new-Muslims to return to the religion of Ben Amram. When the sayyid went to Nadir in Shiraz, Nadir asked after the Jews in Kashan who had converted to Islam. Mir Abu al-Qasim replied that no one can be compelled to abandon his faith by force.

> *It is not by compulsion and force, O Brother!*
> *Why should they adopt the religion of the House of Haydar?*[170]

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[169]A descendant of the prophet Muhammad.

[170]TN: Islam.

"The Jews cannot stop believing. Is it not true that the Messenger, for all his strength, was unable to compel them to accept Islam?"

Nadir replied, "Mir Abu al-Qasim, I put them in your charge."

The sayyid replied "O Champion of Ages!
May thy name endure for all time
For a hundred tomans they became Muslims
For they are in need of every morsel of bread"

Nadir wrote a decree, set his seal to it, and handed it to the sayyid, who returned with it to the city. The people of the city came out to receive him. Upon setting eyes on Davud, the *mujtahid* addressed him thus: "Go, and be at peace, for it is accomplished. The Jews may now open their synagogues. Pay the *jizya,* and be free." Davud was mightily pleased by these tidings.

Another Jewish poet of the times, by the name of Mashiyah Raphael, says of this same event that "Davud the Nasi, the leader of the Jewish community, by his misjudgment brought about his own downfall and brought great suffering upon the Jewish community. We were *anusim,* and were forced to eat non-kosher meat. Abraham ben Isaac Yazdi was in Kashan and struggled night and day for the Jews' emancipation. He went regularly to the religious scholars and government officials in an attempt to win freedom for the Jews. They had sealed the doors of the synagogues, and we assembled in people's homes in groups of ten. Should our prayer assemblies have become publicly known, the consequences would have been ominous. In his endeavors to win the Jews' freedom, Abraham gave large amounts of cash and wine to public officials, and the religious scholars related to the people a tradition of the prophet which holds that Muhammad, out of compassion, brought bread and water to the Jews in the wilderness. Sayyids, sheikhs, and mullahs soon praised the Jews." Abraham approached Mir Abu al-Qasim and:

Began to speak, saying "O Master of Kashan!
Have mercy upon this apprehensive people"

...
Replied that noble old man to Abraham
"By the House of the Messenger I promise
That every act of kindness which is in my power
I shall accomplish, as is meet"

"The proclamation of Jewish emancipation reached Kashan in the month of Sivan.[171] We opened the synagogues and prayed. After Davud the Nasi was forced to convert to Islam, Abraham Yazdi replaced him as leader of the Jewish community. At this juncture, the governor of Kashan was Mirza Shahriyar Nizam. He was unwilling to collect the *jizya* in installments, but demanded a lump sum. For seven years during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II and for seven months during the reign of Nadir, we put on the guise of Muslims. The second time, by paying Nadir's officials the sum of 600 *tomans*, we were able to gain our religious freedom."

Jewish Life in Hamadan

Baba'i Farhad says of the Jewish community at Hamadan during this period: "When dissension had divided society, the Afghan Mahmud advanced on Hamadan. At the same time, the Ottoman emperor sent an army toward Hamadan. The city was besieged. Among the Ottoman soldiers were two Jews named Eliah Israel and Musa Mulla'i. The commander of the army told them that were they to pay him a ransom, he would spare the lives of the Jews of Hamadan. During these times, a charlatan by the name of Mirabul was causing the Jews great aggravation, extorting money from them, and all suffered at his hands. Eliah Israel succeeded in sending a letter to the leader of the Jewish community, Mullah Raphael, in which he informed him of the army commander's proposal. But because of dissension amongst the Jews, nothing came of it. The Ottomans took the city and began plundering and killing. The streets were filled with severed

[171] TN: Sivan 5490 corresponds to 17 May–15 June 1730 C.E.

heads. Among the Jews killed, several were from Kashan: Agha Baba, the son of Yahya, Mattetia, Baba ibn Abraham, Khodadad Rahim, Barukh Nawjavan, Eshaq Mazal, Elisha', Raphael Yadegar, and several others, most of whom were killed at the 'Mullah' and 'Shah' caravanserais. Eliah Musa, Mullah Yushu'a, and Ya'qub Shemuel were killed as they exited the bath. A Jewish youth by the name of El'azar Pur Mullah Safiya surrendered all his possessions in the hope of saving his life, but was nonetheless slain. The Ottoman commander said to Eliah Israel, 'Why did you not give me a few bags of gold to begin with? Now we have both killed the Jews and also plundered their wealth.'"

In his account of the deliverance of Hamadan from foreign forces, Baba'i Lutf tells how the Iranian artillerymen had assembled at a school near the tombs of Esther and Mordecai. As they were preparing to attack the enemy, an explosion suddenly erupted which totally destroyed the school, yet no damage was inflicted upon the Jewish shrine. The government declared that the preservation of the shrine of Esther and Mordecai was by divine intervention, and government officials themselves went to visit the sepulchre.

Baba'i Farhad's book is not as comprehensive as his grandfather's *Ketab-e anusi,* but it similarly has a more or less happy ending. In *Ketab-e anusi,* the "Haman of the Age" reaps his just deserts, and in Baba'i Farhad's book, the enemies of the Jews learn something of the secret of the indestructibility of the Jewish nation and of God's protection of them, and they cease their anti-Semitic acts. With the arrival of Nadir Shah, anti-Semitism was curtailed for a time. One of the wonders of early 18th century Jewish history is the fact that the Ottomans—who granted Jews freedom within their borders—upon defeating the Jewish-populated city of Hamadan, inaugurated a massacre of the Jews. The few names of those killed mentioned by Baba'i Farhad are those of his fellow townsmen who lived in Hamadan at that time. The plunder and massacre of the Jews in the years prior to Nadir's coronation was extensive.

Mullah Agha Baba Damavandi, who in 1924 was about 106 years old, had many memories of his father and grandfather, and his stories appear to be in concord with the historical events of that period. Regarding the days of the Afghans Mahmud and Ashraf, he said: "At the time of the Afghan invasion, the Jews of Gilyard (Gil'ad) lived in a broad and fertile expanse and earned their livelihood through agriculture and pastoralism. Many Jews came to Gilyard from Damghan and Kashan. Few Jews lived in Damavand, and they brought their dead to this town's cemetery. Gilyard had several synagogues. Some of the Jewish inhabitants of this region had sought refuge there during the time of the Mongols and Safavids. As most of the people were Jews, there were no conflicts between Jew and non-Jew. But a plague which spread during the time of the Afghans killed many. When the Afghans attacked Gilyard, the Jews fled the town and sought refuge in the mountains and caves between Mazandaran and Firuz Kuh. Most of those who remained in the towns were killed when the Afghans came. When the enemy had been defeated and the Jews returned to their towns, they found that everything had been destroyed, and they had no choice but to stay at Damavand."

In any event, as far as Jewish history is concerned, the reign of Nadir Shah after the Safavid dynasty can be likened to that of Reza Shah after the Qajars. The storm of anti-Semitism subsided, but the calm was not the result of any pro-Jewish policy. Rather, it was the termination of the pseudo-mullahs' unlimited authority which created that calm. They no longer dared meddle in state affairs. During the reign of Nadir Shah, Rab Hani travelled from Jerusalem to Kashan and began teaching the scriptures. During the Zand dynasty, other rabbis came to the city from Israel. Kashan became a rabbinical center and was once more a "little Jerusalem."[172] Figures such as Mullah Refua Kohan, Shemuel Bernisim, and Elisha' ben Shemuel composed works of poetry and prose which were recited on holidays

[172] *Bulletin* of the Alliance israélite universelle for 1907 (No. 32), p. 66.

for many long years. Kashan gradually became the center of religious education. During the Afsharid and Zand periods, the presence of teachers from Jerusalem on the one hand and the reaction of Jews to past pressures on the other put the Jewish community on a constructive course.

Walter Fischel writes concerning the translation of the Jewish holy scriptures during the reign of Nadir Shah:

> With the Jews of Isfahan is connected Nadir Shah's famous translation project of the year 1740. He ordered the translation into Persian of the four holy books, the Pentateuch, the Psalms, New Testament and Koran, and selected for the realization of this plan also four Jewish scholars from Isfahan, who were entrusted, under the supervision of Nadir Shah's court historian, Mirza Mahdi, with the translation of the Pentateuch and Psalms into the Persian language.
>
> Of these four rabbis of Isfahan, only the name of one has been preserved, namely Baba ibn Nuriel, whose manuscript of the Psalms translation of 1740 "consisting of a completely vocalized transliteration of the Hebrew text into the Persian language, together with an interlinear translation" is still preserved in the British Museum. (Fischel, "Isfahan: The Story of a Jewish Community in Persia," p. 127 [17])

Solayman Kohan Sedegh writes in his memoirs:

> Among Nadir's servants were several Jews, one of whom was named Yusuf. One day, they were reading for Nadir from the Torah at his behest. When Nadir heard the story of the daughters of Zelophehad in the 27th chapter of the Book of Numbers and learned that Moses had brought the daughters' protest regarding their father's inheritance before God, he was moved and determined to take action in support of the followers of Moses, but those around him objected. The Jewish community at Tehran was established in the year 1745, during Nadir's reign.

Nadir's policy toward the Jews before his coronation was a continuation of former Safavid policies, but when he assumed the throne, his restrictions on the mullahs' activities stemmed the tide of anti-

Semitism. At the beginning of his reign, Nadir moved some Jews of Qazvin and Daylaman to Mashhad to help expand the economy of the latter city.

Despite Karim Khan Zand's reputation as a humble man and populist "deputy of the people," the Jews did not live in perfect peace and freedom during his reign. Ephraim Neumark, a representative of the Jewish religious council at Tiberias in Israel who travelled to Iran by way of Damascus and Baghdad in 1883, that is, 104 years after Karim Khan's death, writes:

> During the siege of Basrah by the army of Karim Khan, the king of Iran, when the city was occupied, persecution of the Jews began, and it was feared that there would be a massacre of them. But before long, a miracle came to pass, and the Iranian army left the city, and because of this wonder, the Jews of Basrah wrote a *Megillat paras.*[173] (Neumark, p. 14)

During Karim Khan's reign, cordial relations with Europe continued. The king "granted the Armenians freedom of action and, like Shah 'Abbas, protected them."[174] Overall, owing to the oppressions of Safavid times, Jewish society was weak during the Zand era. R. Haim Yusuf Azulai writes in his *Sham hagu'im* that toward the end of Karim Khan's reign, religious officials who travelled to Iran noted that the Jews of Iran had only the Torah and lacked the other religious books. They shortened their prayers, sufficing with the Shema (שמע ישראל) and Ashrei (אשרי יושבי).

It must not be forgotten that the anti-Semitic fanaticism of the Safavid era had so molded the thinking of the common people against the Jews that the relatively short Afsharid and Zand periods were insufficient to efface this negative perception. Additionally, because the Sunni Nadir stopped the Shi'i mullahs from intervening in policy matters, there was a backlash and show of force from the mullahs at the end of the Afsharid period. The illiterate Iranian

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[173] מגילת פרס.

[174] Dieulafoy, p. 413.

masses innocently believed the dogma that the followers of Moses were "unclean" to be indisputable, and it was easy for the pseudo-mullahs to use this weapon against the Jews whenever it suited their purposes. Even Karim Khan Zand—who rose from among the masses, was a soldier in Nadir's army before assuming the throne, and had travelled to the various cities of Iran—was influenced by this popular belief.

The showdowns between the clerics and the military, which in the last few centuries of Iranian history have been the subject of much debate and research (and which played a key role in both revolutions of the 20th century), began during the Zand period. The mullahs, not wanting another Nadir to emerge and exclude them from political affairs, attempted to consolidate their position. It is clear that many of them sought to revive the policies of Safavid times and employed anti-Semitism as a tool to demonstrate their power. No doubt in these times—when the Jewish community of Iran had already been weakened—many more Jews were either forced to abandon their ancestral religion, killed in massacres, or forced to abandon their native land. A short tale which survives from the days of Karim Khan bespeaks the Jews' fear of the governmental authorities:

> In the days of Karim Khan, in the city of Lar, there was a *hakham* by the name of Johanan Kohan, better known as Zilkha. One day, this aged *hakham*—whose pious visage shone with his pureness of heart—was walking outside his home when he suddenly noticed that the army had entered the city. He began to implore God, and entered a shop seeking protection. As soon as he set foot inside, the doors of the shop closed by themselves, and the *hakham* escaped harm. (From Kohan Sedegh's memoirs)

The missionary Joseph Wolff, who was in Iran from 1825 to 1826, writes that in Shiraz, he was told that during the Zand era they forcibly impressed Jewish women into the royal seraglio. Kohan Sedegh adds, "Lutf 'Ali Khan had five Jewish girls in his harem at Isfahan and eight in that at Shiraz."

Iran was plunged into chaos upon the death of Karim Khan Zand, and the plight of the Jews worsened. Among the statesmen of Lutf 'Ali Khan's time who played an important role in policy making was Haji Ibrahim Khan, whose father was Haji Hashim, or Asher, and whose grandfather was a convert to Islam.

PART TEN

The Qajars: from Muhammad Khan to Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1794–1907 c.e.)

Chapter Twenty
Fall of the Cradle of Freedom

Iran—which in the shining age of Cyrus the Great had promulgated the first proclamation of freedom in the world—after going through a period of ups and downs, reached the point where it had been transformed into a dark cavern of contumacy and selfishness; its pride became its shame. During the Qajar period, human rights in Iran took a precipitous dive. The various forms of torture which were adopted are indicative of the bloodthirstiness of the rulers of the day. Any courageous, dynamic statesman like Qa'im Maqam Farahani or Amir Kabir who sought the prosperity of Iran was sentenced to death. The pseudo-mullahs, with their erroneous interpretations of divine law, considered themselves absolute rulers. In towns and villages, each established his own absolute power base. Apart from the few great, distinguished clerics who put an end to this corrupt system, the country was in the hands of pseudo-mullahs who vied with the Qajars in tyranny, and in order to bring the kings under their sway, they observed no distinction between religion and politics.

During this period, the clerics divided the Muslim population of Iran into two groups: *mujtahid*s and *muqallid*s. A *mujtahid* was a person versed in Shi'i jurisprudence, and a *muqallid* was any person who was not a *mujtahid*. Kings and governors were also classified according to this simple taxonomy: as they were not *mujtahid*s, they had to be *muqallid*s and obey the *fatwa*s (religious edicts) of the *mujtahid*s. This seemingly simple principle held true in affairs of state, and the state was not to take any action without the consent of the religious scholars. In other words, the tyranny of the Qajar period was dual. While the people were under the command of the oppressive Qajar kings, the kings themselves were to obey the clerics. The oppressive governors and the even more oppressive kings dared not contradict the wishes of their domestic overlords.

The dimensions of tyranny expanded in many ways. The Qajar period was a re-enactment of the sectarian Safavid period—minus the captivating façade and grand architecture. The cultural, artistic, literary and architectural achievements of the Qajar period were accomplished by Iranian patriots who escaped the punishment of the Qajars:

> During the Qajar dynasty, unsavory incidents occurred which resulted in the weakening of the country, the loss of some of its territories, the exercise of foreign influence, and the undermining of Iranian independence. (Razi, p. 478)

Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar (1794–1797), the founder of the Qajar dynasty, set the precedent for the spilling of innocent Iranian blood by the kings of this dynasty. While this bloodthirsty man was fighting Lutf 'Ali Khan Zand for the throne, five years had already passed since the great French Revolution of 1789 and the destruction of the bastion of tyranny. Agha Muhammad Khan—who in an earlier conflict had been castrated by 'Adil Shah Afshar and forever deprived of sexual gratification—upon seizing the chalice of power, filled it to the brim with human blood, and like an intoxicating wine, it stupefied him. In his ultimate battle with Lutf 'Ali Khan, the Zand king fled to Kerman. Agha Muhammad Khan marched on Kerman. He was met by soldiers loyal to the house of Zand outside the city gates. It took him four months to capture the city.

> After seizing Kerman, Agha Muhammad Khan ordered the destruction of the city, a massacre, and the chastisement of the populace. He ordered that 20,000 pairs of eyes should be gouged out from amongst the local inhabitants and delivered to him. Such damage was inflicted upon the city by him and his soldiers as cannot be described by words.
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> Agha Muhammad Khan gouged out the eyes of Lutf 'Ali Khan, the young and handsome eldest son of the House of Zand...and ordered that Lutf 'Ali Khan be put to death. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran*, pp. 761–62)

The standard-bearer of the Qajar dynasty granted the women of Kerman to his soldiers and took the children captive. When in 1796 he proclaimed himself king in Tehran, he ordered that the bones of Karim Khan Zand be disinterred and reburied in front of his palace so he could tread upon them daily. Agha Muhammad Khan even showed his brothers no mercy, blinding one and putting the other to death. In the first year of his reign, he marched on Mashhad and took Nadir's grandson, Shahrokh, prisoner. He placed bread dough upon the head of the blind old governor and then poured molten lead on the dough to make him reveal where the Afsharid family jewels were hidden.

This hard-hearted king employed the same murderous methods in his attack on Tiflis. In his bloodletting, he made no distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim. He spared no effort in the looting of the city and the massacre of its inhabitants. He destroyed churches, cast priests bound hand and foot into the water, and took boys and girls captive.[175] The advances made by Karim Khan Zand toward the people's prosperity and the expansion of commerce were undone during the oppressive reign of Agha Muhammad. Colonizers had a free hand in Iran in these days, and in the name of the "expansion of trade," the English made insidious encroachments in the Persian Gulf to secure the sea route for the East India Company. Agha Muhammad—the personification of murder, plunder, and arson, a man not above committing any crime in his struggle for the throne—was killed at the age of 63 by two persons whom he had sentenced to death.

During the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar (1797–1834), the effects of this dynasty's black rule over the nation gradually became apparent. The state's depleted treasury led Iran to become dependent upon foreigners, who looked upon the country with an avaricious eye and vied with one another for direct influence in Iran's foreign and domestic affairs. Napoleon Bonaparte—who came to power

[175]Razi, p. 484.

during this period and was the archrival of an expansionist England—conceived a plan to attack India by way of Iran and to seize that country, which was for practical purposes an English possession. Whereas the Russians, too, had begun encroaching upon Iran by occupying Georgia, the French emperor sent an envoy to the Iranian king with a message stating that were he to ally himself with France and not hinder the passage of a French army through Iran en route to India, then France would reciprocally help to put the Russians in their proper place by organizing a modern army in Iran.

The king agreed, and preliminary measures were taken. French military advisors reorganized the Iranian army and brought new cannon and other weapons to the country. England was agitated by this treaty and appointed Sir John Malcolm—a veteran statesman—to the English embassy in Iran. He offered to contribute £120,000 a year to support the king's campaign against the Russians in return for his refusal to allow the French to attack India from Iranian soil. Iran had plainly become a sphere of influence for the great European powers. Iran accepted the English offer, but England had extended a hand of friendship to Russia in its war with Napoleon and forgot its "aid payment." The Russians attacked Iran. 'Abbas Mirza, the crown prince, was unable to do anything about it, and in the same year in which the Europeans formed an alliance against Napoleon, "the Treaty of Golestan was concluded between Iran and Russia with English backing."[176] England had pinned the naïve Qajars' backs to the ground through trickery and deception. The Russians, exploiting the government's weakness, attacked Iran once more and this time permanently detached another portion of Iranian territory through the Treaty of Turkomanchay.

Under the terms of this truly shameful treaty, Iran ceded Georgia, the Caucasus, Yerevan, Nakhichevan and part of Azerbaijan to Russia. Iran paid Russia 10 million gold *tomans* in war reparations and lost the right to sail on the Caspian Sea. In return, Russia officially

[176]Razi, p. 490.

recognized 'Abbas Mirza as the Iranian crown prince! These treaties made Iran weak and vulnerable in its foreign policy. With the defeat of Napoleon, two great foreign powers—England and Russia—vied for influence in Iran. Russian agents were able to enter Iran without any restrictions. The Russians from the north and the English from the south ate away like termites at the dry-rotted foundations of Iranian freedom and independence. Iran had in effect become a colony, and any talk of its independence is unfounded.

How can one speak of independence when disputes between Iranian and Russian nationals had to be resolved at the Russian consulate? At the same time, the number of wives in Fath 'Ali Shah's seraglio reached 157; he was unsurpassed in his pursuit of merriment and diversion. This number is not exaggerated. The author of *Nasekh al-tavarikh,* which records the history of the Qajar dynasty, lists the names of each of this lecherous king's women.

Muhammad Shah Qajar (1834–1848) was powerless before the clerics. Mirza Abu al-Qasim Qa'im Maqam—a man of letters and a skilled statesman who intended to implement reforms in Iran and made important strides toward the betterment of the country—became the object of the king's scorn through the intrigues of rumormongers and was put to death at his command. In that valley of corruption, whosoever sought to serve Iran lost his life. English intervention in the war over Herat, which took place during the reign of Muhammad Shah, reached the point where they laid claim to Kharg Island and forced Iran to surrender.

> Toward the end of the reign of Muhammad Shah, a Shirazi youth by the name of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad claimed to be the gateway to the Rightful Commander, peace be upon him (that is, the intermediary between the promised Imam and the people), and for this reason came to be known as the Bab.[177] (Razi, p. 517)

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[177]TN: "Bab," an Arabic loan word in the Persian language, means "gate" or "door." The Bab was the founder of the Baha'i faith.

During the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–1896), efforts were made to retake Herat, but in 1857 these abortive efforts came to a halt. During this period, the grand vizier of Iran, Amir Kabir—who is considered a great statesman on a par with Rashid al-Din Fazlallah, the renowned Jewish-born statesman—took an important step toward the betterment of the lives of the people. This exceptional man was the son of Mashhadi Qurban, Mirza Abu al-Qasim Qa'im Maqam's cook. Amir Kabir stood in the way of thieves and brigands. He balanced the country's budget, secured the public safety, spread culture and knowledge, and streamlined the army. He established the Dar al-Fonun academy, and, most importantly, he curtailed the power of the clerics. Yet he was removed from office.

> One of Amir Kabir's goals was to keep the clerics out of state policy and secular affairs. He knew to what extent the meddling of this faction in politics—whether in the days of Shah Sultan Husayn or those of Fath 'Ali Shah—had hurt Iran. Furthermore, their intercession on behalf of everyone and their protection of their own disrupted national affairs and bound the hands of state officials. For this reason, he struggled to lessen their power. (Razi, p. 524)

But Amir Kabir's ambition led his enemies to anticipate his actions and secure a death sentence from Nasir al-Din Shah. They cut his jugular vein in the Fin public bath at Kashan.

During the viziership of Haji Mirza Aghasi Sadr-e A'zam, Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Bab and his followers gained strength. The arrest, imprisonment, and exile of the leader of this movement extended the sphere of the new religion. Clashes broke out between the followers of the Bab and his opponents throughout the cities of Iran. Finally, after a debate between the Bab and Muslim clerics, they sentenced him to death and executed him. After this incident, two of the Bab's brothers claimed to be his successor. One was Mirza Yahya Subh-e Azal and the other was Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, better known as Baha'allah. As a result, the followers of the new religion were divided into two new sects, the Azalis and the Baha'is.

Both brothers went to Ottoman Turkey, but the Ottoman state eventually exiled Subh-e Azal to Cyprus and Baha'allah to Acre. Baha'allah's tomb in Israel is now the greatest Baha'i shrine.

Nasir al-Din Shah, who sold exclusive concessions to foreigners, met with the opposition of the people and enlightened religious scholars. Among these exclusive concessions was that for the cultivation and marketing of tobacco, which planted the seeds of the Constitutionalist Revolution. Apart from that, foreign loans increased the people's anger. Rather than spending the money in the national interest, the king used it to cover the costs of his excursions to Europe. After ruling for forty-nine years, this despotic king was shot to death by Mirza Reza Kermani.

The national protests against the tobacco concession in 1890 were very important for the Iranian people, demonstrating to them that when united, individuals can limit and even eliminate tyranny. The king was forced to revoke the tobacco concession and pay a stiff penalty. Thenceforward, the clerics, with the support of the people, especially the *bazaris*,[178] resisted the headstrong state apparatus. The Iranian government attempted to douse the fire of the mullahs' anger and win their support by persecuting and imprisoning Baha'is.

The Tobacco Revolt finally led to the proclamation of a consultative assembly and constitutionalism without bloodshed during the reign of Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1896–1907). During these years, Iran was plagued by insufferable chaos and turmoil. The country's currency was backed by neither gold nor silver, and coins were struck from copper. A bread shortage added to the misery. A significant and fertile portion of Iranian territory had been ceded to the Russians. European civilization was making rapid progress while Iran was quickly falling behind. The Islamic lands of Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, and Iraq were all under European influence.

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[178] TN: merchants who conduct business in the bazaar, or marketplace.

Such was the corruption of the state apparatus and oppression of the subjects by those who governed them that during the years of famine...

> ...the governor [of Kuchan] took 300 Muslim girls as payment of taxes instead of wheat. He sold each girl to the Turcomans in exchange for twelve maunds of wheat. They say that they took some of the girls from their mothers whilst they slept. (Razi, p. 543).

The Iranian people were cut to the bone. The Qajar king, who was living out the last days of his life, saw no option but to listen to the demands of the people.

In 1906, an ailing Muzaffar al-Din Shah issued the decree establishing constitutionalism, and in October of the same year, the first session of the National Consultative Assembly was convened with trade guild representation. Muzaffar al-Din Shah died in 1907. In the same year, Russia and England concluded a treaty whereby Iran was divided into two spheres of influence. The north belonged to the Russians and the south to the English. By the terms of this treaty, each foreign power undertook not to interfere in the other's sphere of influence.

Muzaffar al-Din Shah's proclamation calling for a constitution and a consultative assembly led nowhere. Before long, the bloody Constitutionalist Revolution had begun, shaking the foundations of the Qajar state. Although we will discuss this dynasty's waning years in another chapter, we must here mention the fact that the entire Qajar period should be considered a period of Iranian decline and decay. The kings and governors were prisoners of their personal desires and followed no political or religious standard. Unlike the Safavid period, when the kings had as their goal the propagation of the Shi'i faith, the Qajars had no strong commitment to either Shi'ism or Sunnism. They left matters in the hands of a group of mullahs who spread superstition and vacuous beliefs. In such an environment—where a person's life had no value and the red-clad

executioners were the busiest servants of the royal court, and even great men such as Qa'im Maqam Farahani and Amir Kabir did not escape their bloody clutches—what could have been the plight of the enervated Jewish minority? The following chapters will answer this question. Against this gloomy background, culture, the arts, and scholarship lacked the requisite strength to flourish. Apart from the works of some poets and authors whose compositions did not measure up to those of past masters, the Qajar period up to the blossoming of the Constitutionalist Revolution neither resulted in prosperity for the cities of Iran nor did it allow Iran any honors in the fields of scholarship and culture.

Chapter Twenty-One
Fears and Hopes

Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar's rise to power and his mad acts struck fear in the hearts of the Jews of the land of Cyrus at a time when the great French Revolution, the proclamation of equal rights for the Jews of that country, and the emancipation of the Jews of Austria had brought the sweet scent of freedom to Iran from afar. The Jews of Iran had thought that their days of affliction had come to an end with Nadir Shah's victory, but seeing the enthronement of a king who had no mercy upon innocent Muslims, they realized the error in their reasoning. Although they were not at first targeted by the kings, once responsibility for administration was handed over to the mullahs, as in Safavid times, they faced the same—and perhaps even worse—restrictions. Upon gaining control of the country, Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar attributed his victory to the clerics. He took back all the property which Nadir Shah had distributed to his soldiers and gave it to the clerics and mullahs. The mullahs, who had bitter memories of Nadir, made a comeback with the beginning of the Qajar dynasty, and with the royal court's support seized control of the kingdom's administration.

Although the Jews were not safe from their antagonists during the period of anarchy and turmoil between the Afsharid and Qajar periods, they did not fear a renewal of Safavid times. On the contrary, they were hopeful that the situation would gradually improve. But the head of the Qajar dynasty dashed their hopes. Before coming to rule over Iran, the Qajar tribe had lived in an area where no Jews lived, and for that reason, anti-Semitic beliefs were less prevalent among them. But once they gained power, they feared for their hold on the throne and looked to the mullahs for support, and there was no level to which they would not stoop. To the greatest extent possible, the Qajars gave the mullahs a free hand in state affairs, which led to the renewal of anti-Semitism. Indeed, for the Qajars, "ruling" meant possessing the throne and a harem. Agha

Muhammad Khan held the lowest pseudo-mullah in the highest esteem, without regard for his character or level of comprehension. Overall, the kings of this dynasty did not interfere in any matter which might in some way be considered religious, even if it had no practical connection with religion. Many of these situations ended in despoliation and bloodshed. Auguste Lacoin de Vilmorin, who traveled to Iran at the beginning of the Qajar period, writes:

> The [government] is obliged to admit the [mullahs] to all its meetings, and the ambition of these people is so great that they continually demand favors destined to render themselves more powerful. Scarcely recognizing the established government, they seek every occasion to augment their authority and to govern the people themselves. (Lacoin de Vilmorin, p. 76)

The Jews, who had fled from city to city to escape persecution during the Mongol, Timurid, and Safavid eras, were by now fewer in number, but distributed throughout Iran and the neighboring lands. Although Turkestan was independent, the Persian language and Iranian culture had taken root there. Jews were relatively concentrated, especially in cities like Samarqand and Bokhara. But during this period, the people of that region, who followed events in Iran, increased the pressure on the Jews such that it was difficult for them to continue practicing their religion.

The Jewish traveler, Neumark, writes:

> The Jews of Bokhara have lived in that city since the 15th century. They went to that city from Iran. The Jews of Bokhara have long been out of contact with the outside world. In the early 17th century, Joseph Maghribi went from Safad to Bokhara and gave the Jews religious instruction. He was from Morocco, and for that reason he was called "Maghribi."[179] But he emigrated to Safad in his youth.

Joseph Wolff writes that Joseph Maghribi taught the Jews of Bokhara, Samarqand, and Tashkent—who had no religious leader—to read

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[179]TN: "Maghribi" is both the Arabic and Persian word for "Moroccan."

the Torah and encouraged them to emigrate to Jerusalem. He remained at Bokhara for the rest of his life, dying at the age of 81. The first people who emigrated to the Holy Land at his behest were a father and son who had studied under him and who went to Jerusalem by way of Baghdad.

The Jewish traveler and scholar R. David d'Beth Hillel (d. 1846), who traveled to Iran during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah and is the second greatest traveler to visit Iran after Benjamin of Tudela, met that father and son in Baghdad in 1826 while on his way to Iran. Hillel, in his critical work *The Travels of Rabbi David d'Beth Hillel: From Jerusalem, through Arabia, Koordistan, Part of Persia and India to Madras,* which was published in 1832, writes, "I was told by them that in Bokhara there are 3,000 families of Israelites..."[180]

Other clerical envoys who journeyed to Bokhara from the Holy Land after Joseph Maghribi include R. Raphael Uhanna Marakashi of Tiberias in 1881, R. Ya'qub Meir—who later became the Sephardic grand rabbi of Jerusalem—in 1882, and R. Benyamin Yuhanan Kohan—himself born in Bokhara—who travelled from Jerusalem in 1892. The emigration of Jews from Bokhara, Samarqand, and surrounding cities to Israel began in the late nineteenth century.

Travel of Jewish Envoys to Iran

During the Qajar period, some religious leaders traveled from Israel to Iran and and brought some light to the Iranian Jews' gloomy hearts. These religious leaders sought to promote Judaism among the Jews of Iran with the holy scriptures they brought and also collected monetary contributions for the religious foundations of the Promised Land. Jewish travelers also ventured to Iran during this period.

Because it is better that the names of all such persons be mentioned in one place, in this discourse we will step outside the bounds of the Qajar period. This list includes only those names identified by

[180]d'Beth Hillel, p. 93.

the author of the present book. Clearly, there were other travelers and religious leaders of whom we are unaware. These Jews include:

1. R. Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish town of Spain, who in 1170 travelled to Iran and whom we have previously (p. 29 ff.) mentioned.
2. R. Pethahiah of Hungary, who visited the vicinity of Kurdistan shortly after Benjamin of Tudela.
3. Judah al-Harizi traveled to Susa in 1230, before the Mongol invasion.
4. R. Moses Alshekh of Safad, Israel, traveled to Iran in 1593, at the beginning of the reign of Shah 'Abbas I. Alshekh's student, Baruch Calimani, in the preface of his book, *The Torah of Moses,* published in Venice in 1600, writes, "Alshekh made an agreement with the Jews of Iran that each man over the age of twenty should pay half a *mithqal* of silver per annum as a *hes sheqel.*"[181] It is likely that the Jews of Iran became familiar with the Sephardic manner of prayer during this time.
5. Pedro Teixeira entered Iran in 1604, during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I. He was one of the Portuguese *anusim,* and it is said that he later returned to his ancestral faith.
6. Baruch Gad traveled to Iran in 1646, during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II. He remarked that he saw some of the people of Bene Moshe.
7. R. Judah ben Amram was sent to Iran in 1712, during the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn, and visited the cities of Hamadan, Sanandaj, Tabriz, Kashan, and Golpayegan.
8. R. Benyamin bar Shalom traveled from Jerusalem to Iran in 1720, toward the end of the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn.
9. R. Mordecai ben Eliezer Sidon and his brother, R. Moshe Sidon, were sent to Iran in 1768, during the reign of Karim Khan Zand. They were robbed by brigands, however, and were forced

[181]This agreement remained in effect until the end of the reign of Ahmad Shah Qajar.

to return to Mosul and set out again for Iran. Once again, they were set upon by highwaymen, but were able to reach Kurdistan.

10. R. Ya'qub bar Yeroham traveled from Jerusalem to Iran in 1775, during the reign of Karim Khan Zand.
11. Joseph Wolff travelled to Iran in 1825, during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah. This Jewish-born convert to Christianity and missionary showed great interest in the plight of Jews.
12. R. David d'Beth Hillel traveled to three eastern countries, including Iran, in search of information on the ten lost tribes in 1827, during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah.
13. Zechariah ben Sa'dia, a Yemeni Jew, visited Tabriz in the 19th century.
14. R. Meir ben Isaiah of Safad traveled to Iran in the first half of the 19th century. Wolff met him in Tehran in 1831.
15. Benjamin II, whose actual name was Israel Joseph Benjamin, traveled to Iran in the middle of the 19th century, during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah.
16. R. Nissim Ohanah visited Iran from Tiberias in 1854.
17. Dr. Jakob Eduard Polak was Nasir al-Din Shah's physician from 1851 to 1855, and had earlier taught at the Nizam academy. This prominent physician used his influence to improve the status of Iranian Jews.
18. Ephraim Neumark traveled to Iran from Tiberias in 1883. The details he provided on the Jewish community of his day are very comprehensive.
19. R. Tvi Hirsch ha Kohen Yerushalimi and R. Hirsch Labin went to Iran from Safad, Israel, in 1877.
20. Abraham Halu'a of Jerusalem was in Iran in 1887.
21. Alhanan Natan Adler, the son of R. Adler, the grand rabbi of London, travelled to Tehran in 1896 to collect old Jewish manuscripts.

22. Yehuda Almog Kopeliovitz (Fig. 9) traveled to Iran in 1928 to establish Jewish emigration organizations. Born in Russia and a resident of Israel, he was instrumental in the founding of the Halutz.
23. Itzhak Ben-Zvi, who became president of Israel after Weizmann, traveled to Iran in 1934 to familiarize himself with ancient Jewish history.

From the Second World War forward, the travels of Jewish researchers to Iran overshadowed the travel of Jewish religious envoys from the Holy Land.

Revival of Anti-Semitism during the Qajar Period

Neumark writes:

> Anti-Semitic activities were renewed at the beginning of the Qajar period, but late in the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah they tapered off.[182] During this king's reign, European Jewish organizations such as the Alliance israélite universelle of Paris and the Anglo-Jewish Association of London made significant gestures to the court on behalf of Iranian Jewry. (Neumark, p. 43)

At the outset of Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar's reign, the many Jews who lived in the vicinity of Kashan were forced to abandon their faith. After this incident, the inhabitants of the villages of Ghamisar, Aran (Harun), Bidgol, Nushabad, Abyaneh, Isar, Barzuk, Beygan, and other villages preserved the distinctive dialect of the Kashani Jews. Mezuzahs were to be found over the doors of the homes of these Jewish "Muslims."

According to Hakham Yedediah Shofet, the contemporary Jewish religious leader, his father went one day to the house of an elderly Muslim man in the village of Aran. The old man said that his forefathers were Jewish and that they had directed that the Holy

[182]This tapering off must be considered only in terms of the level of killing and bloodshed.

Scriptures should continue to hold a place of honor in their homes. These books were kept in a little room upstairs. On the cover of the Torah, the births of family members were recorded, with two names for each person. One was a Hebrew name, and the other Islamic. For example, "Sara" was written next to "Fatimah" and "Shemuel" was followed by "Husayn," etc. This religious leader, who himself is from Kashan, opines that before the Qajar period, the grand Haji Mirza Husayn Naraqi mosque was once a prominent Kashani synagogue, and that it was later modified and re-named.

The story of the Jews' plight during the first years of the Qajar dynasty has not been recorded in the detail that it deserves. Here, we must of a necessity cite some of the accounts related to Mullah Agha Baba Damavandi by his grandfather:

> In the time of Agha Muhammad Khan, anti-Jewish riots broke out. The residents of the Jewish village of Zafreh, on the road between Isfahan and Yazd, were forced to convert to Islam, and their synagogue was converted to a mosque.
>
> After the Safavids, the Jews once again headed for the city of Qom, which was a site of pilgrimage, and a number of Jews lived there at the outset of the Qajar period. One *Tasu'a,*[183] a Jewish child, not understanding the significance of the religious acts of the groups of mourners, laughed in amusement. This laughter incited the groups of mourners to attack the Jewish ghetto, and without giving anyone the option of conversion, they inaugurated a gruesome massacre. During the same period, the inhabitants of a Jewish village between Qazvin and Isfahan were forced to convert to Islam, and their synagogue was converted into a mosque. Although Nadir Shah had moved some of the Jews of Qazvin to Mashhad, the city nonetheless had a Jewish population of several thousand at the beginning of Agha Muhammad's reign, all of whom were either killed or forced to convert.

Other evidence supports Mullah Agha Baba's accounts. In Qazvin, there is a site called "Chahar Payghambar,"[184] which is popularly

[183]TN: The 9th day of the Islamic month of Muharram.

[184]TN: "Four Prophets."

believed by the Jews to be the tomb of four of the prophet Daniel's companions. Jews who reached this city during World War I saw a Torah scroll in the cellar of Chahar Payghambar, and because it was Yom Kippur, they called on their coreligionists to pray there. According to Lord Curzon, who travelled to Iran in the last years of the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, there were no Jews in Qom. The *Bulletin* of the Alliance israélite universelle writes that there is a 500-year-old Torah in Kashan which originally belonged to the Jews of Qom.[185]

Regarding the status of Iranian Jewry in the early years of the reign of Agha Muhammad Khan, we can make reference to all the cities of Iran by relying upon the accounts of the elderly and stories that have been handed down from generation to generation. There is a street in Hamadan whose inhabitants are Muslims, yet it is known as "Jew Street."[186] They say that the Masjid-e Payghambar [Prophet's Mosque] located on this street was a Jewish shrine before the Qajar period, and the common folk believe that the shrine of the prophet Haggai was located there. During this period, the Jews of Damghan fled the town. The Jews of Daylaman and Gilan completely vanished, while a small group remained in Siah Kal. Meanwhile, the Jews of Yazd and Kerman sought refuge in Rafsanjan and Sirjan.

The turbulent times which put an end to the Zand dynasty and brought the Qajars to the fore were so stormy as not to allow the establishment of order, and as a result, the Jews fell victim to countless atrocities during these years. It can be said of a certainty that the afflictions suffered by the Jews during the reign of Agha Muhammad Khan were worse than those of Safavid times and that the number of Jews in Iran declined more precipitously. Many of the Jewish converts to Islam who had been able to return to their ancestral

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[185] *Bulletin* of the Alliance israélite universelle, no. 32 (1907), p. 66.

[186] TN: Persian *kucheh-ye johudha*. The term *johudha* is pejorative and considered highly offensive.

faith during the reign of Nadir were compelled to return to Islam, this time with even greater force. "During the reign of Agha Muhammad, Jews in Isfahan were coerced into converting to Islam."[187] It is noteworthy that with the designation of Tehran as the capital city in 1796—the year of Agha Muhammad's coronation—a number of Jews from Gil'ad, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Kashan emigrated to that city.

After the murder of Agha Muhammad Khan, Jewish disorganization increased in a turbulent environment. At the national level, massacre, oppression, and torture were widespread...

> ...but no persecution equaled that which they suffered under Fath Ali Shah (1798–1834). The Illiats (the Persian nomads) made constant irruptions into the Jewish quarter, violated the women, massacred the men, pillaged the houses, and broke to pieces what they could not carry away. (*JE*, 6:660)

Fath 'Ali Shah, for whom the expansion of his seraglio was a great source of pride, selected attractive Jewish maidens and boys and impressed them into his harem. *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, which lists all of this king's wives and eunuchs one by one, provides the names of the following Jews:

> Ishaq Mirza's mother is of the House of Israel
> The 9th wife, Maryam Khanom,[188] is of the House of Israel...
> The 73rd wife, Hajiyeh Nabat Khanom, is of the House of Israel...
> The 76th wife, Khadijah Khanom, is of the House of Israel...
> The 89th wife, Shirin Khanom, is of the House of Israel...
> The 94th wife, Shahrbanu Khanom, is of the House of Israel...
> The 102nd wife, Ma'sumah Khanom, is of the House of Israel...
> The 126th wife, Kuchek Khanom, is of the House of Israel...
> The 156th wife, Khadijah Khanom, is of the House of Israel
> Musa Khan's mother is of the House of Israel
> (Lisan al-Mulk Sepehr, pp. 281–95)

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[187]Kohan Sedegh.

[188]TN: the honorific title "Khanom" is here similar to the English "Lady," though it is placed after the name rather than before it.

In these times, when the status of women was naught, the "queens," along with the young boys, were gathered in the *khaqan*'s[189] court only to satisfy his lusts. Maryam, the ninth wife of Fath 'Ali Shah, was the most breathtakingly beautiful of all his wives. In the *Tarikh-i 'azudi* it is related that...

> ...Maryam Khanom was of the House of Israel; she had no rival in beauty. Husayn Qoli Khan, the brother of Fath 'Ali Khan, wanted Maryam before she became the king's wife. But his Eminence the *Khaqan* would not allow it and married her himself. The affliction suffered by the late Husayn Qoli Khan during the first month of his brother's reign was on account of his refusal to grant Maryam Khanom to him. This matter gradually worsened, and the late Khan grew blind and passed away.
>
> Shah Beygom Khanom, known by the title "Ziya' al-Sultanah" was born to Maryam Khanom. The late *Khaqan* loved Ziya' al-Saltanah dearly, for she was both an unsurpassed calligrapher and the exemplar of grace and beauty. She penned the late *Khaqan*'s manuscripts. Particularly, all confidential correspondence, to whomever it might be addressed, was drafted by Shah Beygom. Her handwriting was beautiful. All her brothers showed her the utmost respect...During the *Khaqan*'s reign, he would not allow any suitors to marry her. After the *Khaqan*'s passage at the age of 37, in accordance with the wishes of Muhammad Shah, she was married to Mirza Mas'ud Khan, the foreign minister.

The missionary Joseph Wolff, who travelled to Iran during this period, endeavored to depict the plight of the Jews in this land and paints a sad picture. According to Kohan Sedegh, efforts by Protestant Christian missionaries to spread their religion among the Jews of Iran increased during this period. Printed religious books, including the Jewish holy scriptures in the Persian language redacted in the Hebrew script, were distributed among the Jews.

> The Jews of Kashan, weakened by the heavy taxes imposed during Nadir's time and payment of the *jizya* poll tax, were victimized

[189]TN: an honorific title usually associated with the emperors of China. Used here because of the Qajars' Turkic origin.

> by a number of clerics, and especially during the chaos which intervened between the reigns of Nadir and Fath 'Ali Shah, they fell victim to marauders from outlying areas...In Isfahan, too, until the latter portion of that king's reign, raids on the Jewish ghetto by surrounding tribes continued. (Kohan Sedegh)

Mullah Agha Baba or Muhammad Reza, the New-Muslim

As has previously been mentioned, the conversion of Jews to Islam was not always compulsory and collective. The inheritance law was a motivation for some individual Jews—be it to show off their own importance, to exact vengeance, or for material reasons—to recite the Islamic declaration of faith before a Muslim cleric, and, as converts to Islam, to arrogate to themselves the property of both their close and distant deceased relatives. One such person who converted to Islam during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah and kindled the flames of anti-Semitism was Mullah Agha Baba ben Rehamim, or Muhammad Reza, the new-Muslim.

Mullah Agha Baba converted to Islam as a youth in 1822. At that time, the population of the Tehran ghetto was on the rise with the arrival of Jews from Shiraz. The Tehran ghetto had two mullahs who were in competition with one another. One was Mullah Rehamim (d. 1870), who had the greater following, and the other was Mullah Agha Baba. Mullah Rehamim believed that his rival was not properly observing the regulations governing the inspection and slaughter of animals. One Saturday morning, when the congregation was gathered in the synagogue, this matter came to the fore. Complaints were raised concerning Mullah Agha Baba's practices, and animals slaughtered by him were declared unfit.

In those days, people usually cooked their Saturday meals on Friday so that they would not have to handle fire on Saturday. Upon leaving the synagogue they returned to their homes, and at lunch time, picked up the warm pots from their hearths, brought them to the main square in the center of the Jewish ghetto, and dumped the contents into a trash bin by an empty ditch. Upon

seeing this, Mullah Agha Baba considered his religious life over and done with, because he could no longer have any honor in the Jewish community. He likewise lost his livelihood. He didn't think committing suicide appropriate, nor did he even have the courage to do so. The world seemed bleak, and he grasped at his only remaining hope: renouncing Judaism and embracing Islam. Along with his family, he went before the local *mujtahid* and declared his Islamic faith. This occasion is clearly reminiscent of the story of Mullah Mordecai Lari during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I (see p. 304 ff.). The matter of Mullah Agha Baba, who adopted the new name of "Muhammad Reza," led to the writing of a book entitled *Manqul al-Reza ya radd al-Yahud* (Narrative of Reza, or Refutation of the Jews, Fig. 10).

The introduction to the lithographed edition, written in the Persian script, states:

> However, as it was produced in the Hebrew script and the idiom of his people, and the departed's lifetime was inadequate for the translation of that estimable book, for all its virtue and goodness, that worthy book remained little used. Therefore, it was necessary that it should be translated and interpreted, so that its utility might be generalized and that its usefulness might attain its full and utmost extent. Upon the instructions of a group of scholars of the day and at the behest of some of the brethren...[this book] was translated into the Persian tongue by his excellency Akhund Mullah Muhammad Kashani, originally of Kashan and resident at Tehran...and the exalted Agha Muhammad Ja'far, [the author's] nephew. Additionally, citations from earlier works have been cited, where appropriate...each in an appropriate chapter, so that with God's help this book might include all evidences and proofs.

This introduction indicates that the new-Muslim Muhammad Reza was unsuccessful in publishing his book in his lifetime, that after his death, his nephew Agha Muhammad Ja'far—who knew the Hebrew script—succeeded in "translating" or transcribing it to the Persian script, and that religious scholars and clerics also participated in the editing of the book. The goal of *Radd al-Yahud* was to dem-

onstrate the errors of the Jews by citing from the Torah and the books of the prophets of Israel. Although Muhammad Reza's book was not published during the anti-Semitic upheaval of Fath 'Ali Shah's day (had such been the case, a new wave of anti-Semitism would have been unleashed), he disregarded the duty of a mullah or religious leader to protect the faith of his coreligionists, voluntarily and without compulsion abandoned his faith and converted to Islam, and in death incited the people against the Jews. The lamentable episode of Mullah Agha Baba Rehamim during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah was a terrible blow to the body of a harrowed Iranian Jewish community and served to reinforce hatred of Jews.

According to Kohan Sedegh, Mullah Agha Baba was from Shiraz, and of the house of Haji Ibrahim Kalantar Shirazi, the renowned governor, himself a convert to Islam. Though he was more literate than his rival, he was less influential. The day on which the flesh of the animals he slaughtered was declared unfit and dumped in the ditch was the first day of Passover. Mullah Agha Baba Shirazi sat in his home and said nothing. It was the custom of the Jews of Shiraz that on the first day of Passover they went to the home of the city's mullah, and each brought a sour orange to present to him. Mullah Agha Baba waited alone the entire day. That day's pain led him to convert to Islam on the following day. After a time, at the behest of others, he began writing *Radd al-Yahud.* Upon his tombstone in the Islamic cemetery, these lines of verse are inscribed:

From the abode of nonexistence, I came to know existence
I became a leader of the nation of God's interlocutor[190]
In the books of Moses and the commandments of the prophets
I saw Muhammad—I became Muhammad Reza
I left this world in bliss
For I became a scribe in the service of God's religion

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[190]TN: The sobriquet *Kalim-e Khoda* or *Kalim Allah* (God's interlocutor) is a reference to Moses.

The Upright Clerics' Quest for Justice

Mullah Agha Baba Damavandi related that during the time of Fath 'Ali Shah, the people went to their homes in the evening, dined, and went to bed. But the city gates were open to caravans until the first watch of the night, and the Jews were responsible for securing the gate in the darkness of the night. In addition to paying the *jizya* poll tax, they were also required to pay several *mithqal*s of gold to the king each year on the day of the Nowruz[191] festival. Because the Jews of Tehran were impoverished in those days, this tax constituted a heavy burden upon them.

A young Jewish man by the name of Elisha' Shirazi, an itinerant haberdasher by trade, passed by the seraglio of Fath 'Ali Shah. The women bade him enter. As he displayed his wares, he laughed and made mirth with the women. As chance would have it, the king observed this display of merriment from atop his roof. He sent a guard to arrest Elisha' and bring him to him in order to determine if he had any ulterior motive, in which case he would be executed on the spot. But after completing his interrogation, the king had no harsh words for Elisha' and invited him to make a request. Elisha' replied, "The payment of several *mithqal*s of gold each Nowruz is onerous." He asked permission to deliver annually a quantity of silk thread to the royal clothier instead. The king agreed. This rare occurrence occasioned much hope and joy amongst the Jews of Tehran.

Although the reign of Muhammad Shah—unlike that of Fath 'Ali Shah—did not witness mass executions of Jews, neither did it bring them any glad tidings. The Mashhad riot, which will be described elsewhere (see p. 430 ff.), took place during this period. It would take time for the social progress of Europe and the proclamation of equal rights in the West to influence Iran. European ambassadors and foreign travelers spread news of the freedom and equality of

[191]The first day of the Persian solar calendar year, which coincides with the spring equinox.

the West very slowly in Iran. The Jews of Iran had already been debilitated by earlier blows and were in no need of further persecution. From this time forward, anti-Semitism in Iran took on a new form, and the terrifying face of the enemy smiled as Jews became the objects of derision.

During this period, power was in the hands of the fanatic grand vizier, Haji Mirza Aghasi. The king, who was afflicted with gout, had placed the country's affairs in his hands. Eugène Flandin writes:

> He was, otherwise, ignorant of all things foreign to the Quran, a bigot—being a pilgrim having returned from Mecca, as indicated by his surname of Haji—he occupied himself more with his devotions than with affairs. (Flandin, 1:297–8).

At the outset of Muhammad Shah's reign, new disturbances erupted in Isfahan in which 130 Jews were killed and many injured. Among the victims of this disturbance was Mullah Agha Baba, the grand *hakham* of Isfahan.[192] During the reign of Muhammad Shah, the Jews of Tehran were somewhat more secure. The reason for this is believed to be that one of Muhammad Shah's Jewish wives was from Tehran, and she often visited the Jewish quarter of the city. The people slaughtered lambs before her.

A reliable document from this period mentions that despite what happened at Mashhad, some of the grand religious scholars in Tehran issued *fatwa*s protecting the Jews. Among these *fatwa*s is a document signed by several prominent religious leaders. The promulgation of this document in the face of events such as the Mashhad atrocity and the Tabriz riot illustrates the factiousness within the country and the fact that there were insubordinate provinces in Iran. According to this document (Fig. 11):

> Should a Muslim seize the property of a Jew, so long as the property is still intact, he must return it, and should it be damaged, then he must return its equivalent. If a Muslim kills a Jew, then he must pay with his life unless the killing was unintentional or

[192] *JE*, 6:659.

> by accident, in which case he may, under certain conditions, be exonerated. And if a Jew who has converted to Islam should return to his former religion, he must not be killed, but rather shall be imprisoned or shall pay a fine. And Islamic judges must not demand a Jew's estate upon his death.

Such an authoritative document—however much it may be criticized for its conservatism in calling for a fine or imprisonment for returning to Judaism—is important to Jewish-Iranian history with regard to respect for the rights of Jews, especially as it was signed by five *fatwa*-issuing *mujtahid*s. But this unequivocal and momentous document was relegated to history at birth. It was never explained to the masses, nor did it serve to stem the sheikhs' truculence toward the Jews. Although collective massacres, expropriations, and compulsory conversions ceased, infractions against individuals and the forced conversions of individual Jews continued.

Huntsmen of Faith

During the Qajar period, the Jewish community's poverty and lack of freedom provided a suitable environment for the proselytizing efforts of other religions. Apart from the fact that the Muslims coerced some Jews to convert to Islam, European missionaries—whose business it was to draw others to Christianity—found ample opportunity. Moreover, the advent of the new religion led by Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab, daily attracted new adherents from within the community. Proselytization of this new religion in the urban Jewish communities was highly effective, particularly in the cities of Hamadan, Kashan, Arak, and Tehran. Members of the Jewish community abandoned their faith in small groups. Furthermore, the riots which erupted against the followers of 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab, killing a few at a time, fanned the flames of fanaticism for the pseudo-mullahs.

Owing to the kindness of its adherents toward the Jews, the religion of the Bab—an offshoot of Islam—was able to garner a following

among the Jews, who had suffered at Islam's hands. The Babis' greatest gift to the Jewish community was their rejection of the notion that the Jews were unclean. They opened the doors of friendship and humanity to the Jews, permitting them to love others. The spread of the Babi faith gave the Jews of Iran occasion for hope that their suffering at the hands of their Muslim countrymen might come to an end. Indeed, had all the Muslims of Iran converted to Babism, the killing of Jews would have stopped, because Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab, forbade bloodshed.

Like the Jews, the Babis and Baha'is considered themselves persecuted. Moreover, while they had to be very careful in proselytizing among the Muslims, there was no such danger in proselytizing among the Jews, and they were able to spread their religion among them with peace of mind. Baha'i proselytization was most effective among urban Jews, as that population was under greater pressure. In these times, many Jews had lost their religious values because of the disintegration of social organizations, the disappearance of religious schools, and the disempowerment of religious leaders resulting from state-sanctioned persecution. A steady stream of persecutions and massacres did not afford them the opportunity to explore their religious philosophy. For all their love of reading, they were completely unfamiliar with the Talmud. They had forgotten the Hebrew language or retained merely a cursory knowledge of it. Many did not understand the meaning of the prayers which they recited in Hebrew. Discourse on the principles of the Torah was extremely rare. They were familiar with extremist religious ceremonies, yet unacquainted with the fundamental principles of Judaism. Avenues of escape were closed to them one by one. In their struggle with cruel rulers and their even crueler lackeys, they were warriors without arms who suffered continual casualties, and now, too, their weapon of faith had grown dull.

Under such circumstances, when a Jew saw that the very same Muslim who yesterday had deemed him unclean and thirsted for his blood now loved and respected him, he was so taken aback that

he considered him his guide and master. This Muslim-turned-Baha'i invited the Jew into his home, extended a hand of friendship, showed him courtesy, and told him that the leader of the new religion said that all men are equal, that there is no difference between them. All of these things created an attraction toward the new religious movement for the Jews, and sometimes when the head of a household followed this path to its conclusion, the other members of the family followed suit. The Jews' superficial knowledge of their religion—the ill-omened result of past cruelties, especially during the Safavid period—contributed to this. In other words, not only had the Jews been killed off in stages, but their religious consciousness had also been weakened in many instances. This in itself made them ready victims of another kind. The Jews, who at the sword point of tyrants had lost all freedom of education—especially as regards their religion—did not realize that thousands of years earlier, their own prophets had proclaimed the equality of the rights of man and striven toward peace, love, equality, and freedom among men, and that the Jews themselves were the first to worship the one God and to spread monotheism amongst the nations.

During the Qajar period, Judaism for them meant the observation of ceremonies which were sometimes tainted by superstition. Many Jews made a living by fortune telling. They believed that to set foot outside the bounds of some spurious customs—and not the fundamental commandments of the religion—was to abandon their faith. Because the prevailing environment brought this situation about, they lost hope, becoming weak and vulnerable. This group of Jews was ignorant of what was going on in Europe, that there were movements in other lands which considered Jews to be equal to other citizens. The pitiable conditions under which they lived was another factor in their disappointment with and detachment from their ancestral religion.

It is noteworthy that most of those of Jewish ancestry who had been forced to convert to Islam became Baha'is and were among the key proselytizers of the religion. According to Solayman Kohan

Sedegh, the first people in Khorasan who became Babis were some of the new Muslims in Torbat-e Haydariyeh. Some of the Jews who converted to the Baha'i faith told their former coreligionists that Judaism was like a worn out garment which must be set aside. The troubled Jews readily accepted these words, and upon abandoning their religion became hostile toward their former coreligionists. On the national level, the movement of the Bab and Baha'allah not only brought on the persecution of followers of the new religion, but also fanned the flames of anti-Semitism.

During the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, apart from the spread of the Bab's movement, Jews were affected by other events, both great and small. During this period, despite the prevailing despotism, the need for comprehensive reform in government administration and social affairs was accepted, and measures were initiated by leading statesmen. Nonetheless, persecution of Jews persisted, and at times there was talk of the "Jews' patch" and the "Jews' cap." Thus, the old principle, whereby if a single Jew committed a minor offense all Jews were accused of wrongdoing, remained in force. The sworn testimony of a Jew was inadmissible in court, and, as in the past, Jewish converts to Islam inherited the estates of their Jewish relatives.

During this period, the Jewish community of Iran had lost contact with the Jews of other lands. No foreign organizations acted on behalf of this community. The only links to Judaism beyond Iranian borders were established by clerics who sometimes travelled in the capacity of *shelihim* (religious envoys) from Hebron, Tiberias, Safad, and Jerusalem to Iran and Afghanistan seeking financial aid from these far-off communities. In the mid-nineteenth century, four Jewish brothers were the most celebrated and successful physicians in Tehran. One of them, Hakim Haq Nazar,[193] was Muhammad Shah's private physician and later administered to Mahd-e 'Ulya, the mother of Nasir al-Din Shah. But they had absolutely no influence on the

[193]The father of the maternal grandmother of the author of this book.

political and religious affairs of the times that they might intercede with the court and clerics on behalf of their coreligionists.[194]

Hakim Haq Nazar and his brothers were originally from Khansar but resided in Tehran. In those times, one of Nasir al-Din Shah's children died. The king wanted to know who his physician was. The grand vizier, Haj Mirza Agha Nuri, a supporter of the mullahs and an antagonist of the Jews, replied that it was Hakim Haq Nazar. The Jewish physician was arrested and imprisoned. He, who was innocent in this matter, sent a petition to the king's mother. He was released and summoned to Niyavaran Palace to receive a robe of honor. While riding back to Niyavaran on horseback, he encountered the grand vizier Nuri, who was coming from the opposite direction.

Hakim Haq Nazar was a wealthy man. He erected the Hakim Synagogue in his neighborhood and opened a school for the Jews of Tehran, paying all the costs out of pocket. He granted the stipend given him from the royal pantry to the Muslim students at the Marv school.

Meanwhile, the Jews of Damavand sent an undated letter to Mullah Rehamim, the rabbi of Tehran, asking him to intercede on their behalf because the state wardens were demanding a *jizya* poll tax of three *tomans* and six *qerans* per head. Because the people could not pay such sums, they had fled to the mountains.

Among the other events of Nasir al-Din Shah's time is the incident which Menashe Manuchehri Mazandarani related to the author in 1945, when he was more than one hundred years old. According to his account, around the year 1864 in the town of Bar Forush (present-day Babol), a cleric who was also a sayyid stirred up an anti-Jewish riot on the pretext that a Jew had stuck his finger in a grocer's vat of yoghurt, thereby making it unclean. Sixty Jews were killed. Among those killed was a corpulent Jewish man by the name of Danyal Mukhtar, whose corpse they broiled in order that they might use

[194] *EJ*, 13:312.

the fat as an unction. For years, "Oil of Danyal the Jew" was a popular folk remedy in Babol, whose populace was enslaved by ignorance. In this riot, the mob burned both synagogues and Torahs.

The late Rehamim Levy[195] said that about the year 1871, the enemies of the Jews shut off water to the Tehran ghetto. The inhabitants hastily sought a remedy and dug two wells: one at the home of Yusuf Rehamim, the *kadkhoda,*[196] and another at the home of Mullah Abraham Shirazi, the religious leader. In 1875, Mullah Abraham became the spiritual leader of the Iranian Jews, while the *kadkhoda* settled arguments between Jews in the capital and acted as an intermediary between the community and the government. The *kadkhoda* was selected by the Jews themselves, and the government accepted him as their representative. Mullah Abraham—graced with a radiant visage and long white beard—gradually grew in stature. The people brought their disputes before him, and the position of *kadkhoda* eventually fell by the wayside.

Decline of Judaism in a Decadent Society

Two seemingly unimportant details of the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah mentioned by Kohan Sedegh illuminate two interesting incidents. The first detail is that a bribe was paid to politicians and pseudo-mullahs to rescue the Jews, and the second is that the Qajar court, despite its toleration of the physical and spiritual persecution of Jews, nonetheless needed the Jews. The court physicians were either Iranian or European Jews, and the court musicians were Iranian Jews.

The first incident is this: Toward the end of the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, in the vicinity of Khosravi, a member of the Qajar clan was killed, and, as the killers could not be found, it was decreed that those persons imprisoned in Tehran should be put to death! Among those imprisoned were three Jews. The Jews of Tehran im-

[195]Rehamim Khodadad Levy (1853–1945) was the author's father.

[196]The title given by the Jews of Iran to their secular leaders.

mediately brought a precious jewel-encrusted inkwell to Prince Zill al-Sultan and sought his intercession. Believing it inauspicious to spill Jewish blood, he secured the freedom of those three persons, and at dawn the next day, as the prisoners were brought out for execution, the order was delivered to the head executioner, and the three Jews were set free.

The second incident is this: Nasir al-Din Shah hosted an elaborate reception in his court which lasted several days. They brought the Jewish Davud Kuchek—the best *tar* player of his time—to the royal court seven days before Yom Kippur. When the evening before the great fast arrived and he found himself still at the royal court, he fled despite the danger and made his way to the synagogue to observe the religious ceremonies.

There is nothing out of the ordinary in recognizing that while there were pseudo-mullahs who made killing and persecuting Jews a profession, there were also conscientious Muslims who respected the lives and property of Jews. What is extraordinary is that one of these Muslims was Mirza Reza Kermani (Fig. 12), who shot Nasir al-Din Shah to death. During his interrogation he said:

> I previously had a better opportunity to kill the king. I learned that the king was in the habit of taking a stroll in the gardens of one of the nobles.[197] Thus I went to that garden and secreted myself. The king came, and it would have been very easy to kill him, and my escape route was open, but I did not kill him because on that day a number of Jews had come to the gardens for recreation,[198] and if the king were killed and I escaped, the blame would have been laid at the feet of the Jews who were in the park.

As previously mentioned, during the Qajar period—apart from emigration, compulsory conversions, elevated mortality rates owing to

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[197]Probably the gardens of Farmanfarma, because the late Farmanfarma harbored good will toward the Jews and granted them free access to his gardens.

[198]It would seem that it was a Saturday.

drought, famine, plague, and malaria, all of which were factors in the decline of the Jewish population of Iran—another important factor also played a role, namely, voluntary individual conversions to Islam, Bahaism, and Christianity. Conversion to the first religion was primarily motivated by the inheritance law, while conversion to the latter two was the result of proselytization. For this reason, many Jewish families disintegrated, with members going in opposite directions. Material poverty played a role in these conversions to other religions, but the primary reason was spiritual impoverishment and ignorance of Judaism. In other words, while other religions had considerable appeal among poor Jews, wealthy families estranged from the true teachings of Judaism were not safe from this temptation, either. In order to better understand the social and domestic situation of the Jews in these times, we will examine the family tree of a prominent Jewish family of Tehran, some of whose members converted to three other religions (Fig. 13).

We shall consider the family of Hakim Raphael, two of whose sons, Hakim Haq Nazar and Hakim Musa, were the private physicians of Nasir al-Din Shah. The family was originally from Khansar.[199] These two brothers possessed a written family tree which indicated that their forefathers for fourteen generations had been doctors. A member of this family, Hakim Shalom, along with his sister, Sara, was driven by poverty from Khansar to Tehran. Because of the inheritance issue, he converted to Islam and adopted the name Hakim Morteza. Hakim Haq Nazar was a man of faith. On Saturdays he read the Torah and haftorah in the synagogue. His enemies poisoned him in the royal court. Hakim Musa, like his brother, was a faithful Jew and helped the poor, but his children were not interested in the Jewish faith. Hakim Musa's son, Mirza Nurallah, who went

[199]Khansar, Golpayegan, and Hamadan were important centers for the education of physicians, and Jewish Iranian doctors, who were addressed by the honorific title "Hakim," came mostly from these cities up until Qajar times.

to London to learn English, was proselytized, and became a Christian. Upon returning to Iran he became the director of a missionary school. Nurallah's brother, Fayzallah, became a Muslim. Hakim Musa's other children remained within the fold of Judaism, but two of his grandchildren, Dr. Lutfallah and Dr. Aristu, became Baha'is. Thus, while Hakim Raphael's generation remained true to the foundations of the Jewish faith, these foundations so were weakened by spiritual attacks that three generations later, even in a family of doctors with a comfortable standard of living, Judaism was weakened, and Islam, Christianity, and Bahaism all gained footholds.

On the whole, the Jewish community of Iran followed a course of material, spiritual, moral, and religious decline. Because the payment of bribes to the pseudo-mullahs was one means of escaping death and persecution, some resorted to hoarding. Familial affections and friendly sentiments disappeared. Bitter disputes often arose between associates over minor disagreements and led to feuding between families. As work opportunities were limited, the "inheritance law" was the best way to amass wealth. Thus, some converted to Islam to inherit their relatives' property. It was only the presence of the Alliance and the hope for a brighter tomorrow late in the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah that breathed new life into the moribund body of the Iranian Jewish community.

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Among the Jewish poets of Nasir al-Din Shah's time was Mullah Haim El'azar, the author of *Igdal Elohim* (יגדל אלוהים). The religious poems in this book were often recited by Jewish mullahs who read from the scriptures from dawn to dusk in the homes of the deceased on the anniversaries of their deaths.

Among the Jewish musicians of the Constitutionalist era forward was 'Abdallah Khan Asher Ya'qub Yehuda (Khorramiyan), who had a special regard for religious music. He organized a group of

vocalists known as "Kol Na'im" (קול נעים), who performed religious anthems in the Ya'qub Davud Synagogue on Friday evenings and holidays.

The Jews played a crucial role in the preservation of Iranian classical music. In the late Safavid period, during the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn—who exchanged the "Keyan crown" for a "grand turban" and exercised religious extremism—making music was deemed a satanic act by Iranian Muslims, and no one dared perform in public. But the Jews, particularly those at Shiraz, secretly safeguarded the music. From that time through the last years of the Qajar period, while that kind of thinking was prevalent and outside the royal court, instrumentalists were reckoned instruments of Satan, the Jews struggled to preserve Iranian music and gradually returned it to Iranian Muslims. Confino, the director of the Alliance school at Shiraz, writes in his 1903 report that in that year there were 60 female instrumentalists in Shiraz.

Among the accomplished Jewish-Iranian musicians of the Qajar period who helped to preserve Iranian classical music for later generations were:

1. Davud Shirazi
2. Isma'il Khan, the son of Davud Shirazi
3. Musa Khan Kashani
4. Rahim Qanuni Shirazi
5. Yahya Zarrinpanjeh
6. Morteza Ney Davud

Musa Khan Kashani was a master of the *kamancheh* and was chosen to become a courtier of Zill al-Sultan. Later, Jalal al-Dawlah invited him to Yazd. Musa Khan died in 1939 at the age of 83. Morteza Ney Davud was also a renowned master during this period.

Chapter Twenty-Two
Travelers' Viewpoints

As in Safavid times, during the Qajar period foreign travelers visited Iran and wrote travelogues which sometimes vividly illustrate the events of the times. Three of these travelers—d'Beth Hillel, Benjamin II, and Neumark—were Jewish.

> Benjamin II found at Ispahan in 1850 about four hundred Jewish families, three synagogues, and eight rabbis or hakamim. He also made there the acquaintance of the vizier Ishmael, a Jewish convert to Islam, whose Hebrew name was Jekuthiel, and who, a poor workman's son, rose to high rank. (*JE*, 6:660)

Benjamin II writes of the viziership of Isma'il Isfahani during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah:

> About thirty years ago a poor Jewish jeweller, named Aga Babi, lived in Ispahan. He had three sons, of whom one, Jekutiel, distinguished himself as a dancer, and the great people of the city were so delighted with him, that in the dancer they forgot the Jew. At a large fête, which was given in the city in honour of the Shah, Jekutiel was engaged as a dancer, animated by the presence of the ruler to display the most extraordinary powers of his art, the young man had the boldness in one of his daring leaps to kiss the hand of the monarch, who, admiring his talents, kindly excused his temerity, and induced him to follow him to his court, although the father of Jekutiel endeavoured by prayers and remonstrances to keep him back.
>
> The youth grew up under the eyes of his patron the monarch, and proved, by his fidelity and zeal, that he was worthy of the favour which had been shewn him. But even at court, surrounded by flattery and temptation, he never forgot his parentage or his low origin, and long remained faithful to the faith of his fathers. The son of the Shah, his friend and companion, whose amusements he shared, obliged him one day at a feast to partake of forbidden meat: from this time the favorite offered little resistance to the wishes of the prince, and soon afterwards embraced the Islam faith.

In a short time there was an outbreak at Meshed, to subdue which the Shah went in person with his army. In his company was his young friend and servant Jekutiel, who, after going over to Islamism, had taken the name of Ismael. The town of Meshed was besieged, but the rebels defended themselves obstinately, and in a sally put the army of the besiegers to flight. During this general flight the Shah was deserted by his troops, and left alone and without shelter: his faithful Ismael alone remained, and both owed their preservation to the speed of their horses.

When the Shah perceived his faithful servant following him, he called out to him: „Save yourself if you can, and leave me to my fate." — But Ismael answered: „I will not leave you, oh Master; I will save myself with you, or I will perish." — The fugitives gained a wood, in which they wandered about for the space of six days. The Shah thought they would perish of hunger, but Ismael shared with him the remains of some biscuit and water. When this slender store was exhausted, the noble youth mounted his horse and rode away to seek for food. After a long search, he at length fell in with a Persian from whom he obtained some bread, and with that he rode back. But when he arrived at the spot where he had left the Shah, he was no longer there. In despair he prayed to God, and rushed through the wood in all directions calling him by name. At last he found his master, but in a half famished state, and refreshed him with the bread. Finally on the seventh day, the two fugitives were discovered by some horsemen, who had been sent out to the rescue of the Shah.

In consequence of this fidelity and devotion, the Shah, as soon as he had returned to Teheran raised his favorite Ismael to the first minister of his kingdom, and this high post he filled with the greatest zeal up to the death of the Shah. Without becoming proud, he remembered with love those belonging to him, and became an unwearied protector of his former brethren in the faith. When the Shah was near his end, he had his son called to him, and solemnly recommended to him the minister Ismael as his friend, his most faithful servant, and most honest adviser; and he begged the heir of his throne to respect the noble servant as such and allow him to retain his high office. After the death of the Shah, envy and jealousy endeavoured to render the minister an object of suspicion to the young ruler, and to bring him into

disgrace. An especial event, however, kept him in his high position. During the change of succession, the town of Ispahan had revolted, and the young Shah determined to punish it by a demand of 100,000 tumauns. For the exaction of this sum he choose [*sic*] the minister Ismael, and promised that if he fulfilled his duty, he would keep him in his place. In the city an Achund had arranged a new revolt against the emissaries of the Shah; but with a numerous army Ismael chastised the rebels, and carried out succesfully [sic] his difficult commission. But in these events he had to mourn the death of his father and one of his brothers. The instigator of the rebellion escaped punishment by flight.

These events took place towards the end of the year 1850, shortly after the time I had left Ispahan and during the time I was at Teheran.

Ismael still lives at the court of Teheran, but no longer occupies his former high appointment. In the general esteem and respect which are paid him, he finds compensation for his fall, and still endeavours to alleviate the sufferings of his former brethren in the faith to the extent of his power. As already mentioned, I had the honour of becoming personally acquainted with the worthy man, and I owe to his kindness introductions to some influential men at Teheran, particularly to the Mullahs Ababi and Jacob, proprietors of a considerable business in jewelry. (Benjamin II, pp. 192–194)

Another Jewish traveler who visited Iran during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah was Rabbi David d'Beth Hillel. Walter Fischel, the renowned scholar of Jewish-Iranian history and culture, re-published an edited version of his travelogue, which was first published in 1832. After passing through Mosul, Baghdad, Sulaymaniyah, and other towns and villages, d'Beth Hillel entered Iran via Kurdistan. He visited several cities and towns in Iran and continued on to India to write about the status of Jews in these places.

Extract from the Travelogue of Rabbi David d'Beth Hillel

In his travelogue, d'Beth Hillel writes:

> From Sulaimaniya to Bana is three days' journey; the road is over high hills and forests, with good water on it; travelling is dangerous. Bana is a small town built on a little mountain; it is on the confines of the Persian kingdom under the charge of Abbas Mirza...There are about 10 families of poor Israelites using the same manners and language as the Israelites at Bahadina; they have a small synagogue...
>
> From thence I proceeded to Saqqiz, two days' journey on a good road, having many villages and good water...There are about 15 families of Israelites using the same manners and customs as the Israelites at Bahadina. They have a small synagogue. Some of them are rich...
>
> From thence I proceeded to Saugh Bulagh, two days' journey on a straight road having many villages and good water...There are about 25 families of rich Israelites using the same manners and language as those at Bahadina. They have a fine synagogue...
>
> From thence I proceeded to Tasqala, a day's journey on a straight road. *Tasqala* is a fine large tower built of large hewn stones, in the plain which is near the sea of Maragha and Urmiya...In this plain are many villages...In one of the above villages are about 10 families of poor Israelites using the same manners, language, and customs as those at Bahadina...
>
> While I was there, residing in one of the Israelites' houses, one denominated a Mahometan came, and seeing me, enquired who I was. They replied, that I came from Judea; then he began to sing some poetry concerning Moses of which the terminating words were *"Usa* [*sic*] *Rabbin."* I was astonished at this poetry and enquired about the man. They told me that he was one of the caste called Daudiya. I enquired of them what this name meant. They replied, that they believe in King David and Benjamin. He was very glad (as he said to me through an interpreter) that he did not believe in Mahomet but in one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who appeared to Moses in the bush; and on this basis is built this poetry which he sung; I understood nothing about it excepting the terminating words; several of this caste are in these villages...

From thence I proceeded to Urmiya, a day's journey on a straight road...There are about 200 families of Israelites using the same manners and languages as the Israelites at Bahadina. They have three synagogues, and they are generally rich. Their chief is Mulla Raphael. He is an old man, very rich and honorable; I was living in his house.

Two months previous to my arrival there, about six years ago, an extraordinary circumstance occurred there. A Mahometan child being missing, the Persians rose up against the Israelites saying that they had killed him for the sake of having his blood for the Passover, because it was about five months to that feast. They in consequence took all the Israelites to the prison, except Mulla Raphael alone, he being a very old man and much respected by all the Mahometans. His children, however, were taken prisoners. One of the Israelites was cloven in two in the gate of the town, and another was beaten nearly to death. It was a great disaster for the poor Israelites...

...I myself was afraid to go out into the street lest the Persians should say that I came to receive the blood to carry it to another place. One day I was very anxious to go and look over the town and the markets, so I changed my dress that they should not know me as a Jew, and I went out. On returning some of them discovered me and threw stones at me. I ran as fast as possible until I arrived at home...

From thence I proceeded to Salmas, two days' journey, viz., half a day's journey on the banks of the Maragha Sea...

There are about 100 families of Israelites, using the same manners and language as the Israelites at Bahadina. They have a fine synagogue and are very rich people, and considerable merchants. On these also came the distress of the Urmiya Israelites, so that the wicked Mahometans said, "Surely it happened to them on account of the blood of the above child." Some of them fled and some of them were put in prison, but they were not so fortunate as to be put to death, or flogged, but got free by means of money.

I have been told by the Israelites who trade to Georgia, Shirvan, Saki and Daghistan, which means the mountain countries, that there are about 300,000 Israelites speaking their own languages. They are very ignorant of the Hebrew language and customs.

They have not the whole Bible, but only the five books of Moses and some of the prophets...

...I have been told by many that before the Russians conquered the above four provinces, they knew nothing about Jesus or Christianity. Therefore, I conceive that they are some of the lost Ten Tribes. They are very fair; I saw in Constantinople, about seventeen years ago, a mother and a son, who were brought there to be sold as slaves; an Israelite bought them and made them free; indeed, they were very fair and handsome...

From [Salmas] I proceeded to Bashqalah two days' journey over high hills and through many villages of the Amalekites. On arriving by night in one of these villages nobody would receive me into a house for any coming in, because they knew me to be a Jew; and the same night was a very cold one, and abundance of snow had fallen, so that it was impossible to sleep in the street. After many supplications I gave half a rupee to be allowed to sleep in a stable among their cattle.

Bashqalah is a very large town built on the top of a mountain, the whole of which is surrounded with a wall built of large hewn stones; it is a very ancient building, and in the declivity of the mountain is a little town of the same name, having fine houses of hewn stone...There are about 20 families of Israelites using the same manners and languages as the Israelites at Bahadina. They are mostly rich merchants, and have a small synagogue...

From thence I returned to Saugh Bulagh and proceeded to Miyandoab, two days' journey on a straight road...There are about 15 families of Israelites, merchants, using the same manners and language as the Israelites at Bahadina. They have a neat little synagogue...

I was told there by an old Israelite, who is their chief, that about twenty-six years ago [1801?] the Jews were driven out from *Maragha* because some evil Mahometans took a Mahometan child and speared him in his neck, so that the blood ran out, and they said that the Israelites had done this to use the blood for the Passover because it was near the time of that feast. Then they dealt with the Israelites very hardly. The chief of the synagogue and the servant of it died under the stripes inflicted on them; and their houses were spoiled and the other Israelites were taken prisoners and suffered great hardship.

...The old man who related me this history is one of those who were in prison; also he told me that even in Tabriz about thirty-six years ago all the Israelites who were there were killed, being about 50 families on just such a false accusation, and even now no Israelites can appear there, as the following circumstances will prove.

About ten years ago [1817?] there came privately three Persian Israelites, merchants, which when it became known led to a great tumult raised by the Mahometans who said that they came to steal the Mahometans' children in order to take their blood. They were in consequence seized and put in prison, after which they brought false witness against them to prove that they had sent away a child, on which judgment was given that they should be burnt. Even Abbas Mirza could not save them, because he was afraid of a revolution among the people; but he commanded to keep them in prison until the third day, when they should be burnt, and the prison was sealed with his own seal that the peons themselves might not destroy them. The next day the great mullah saw in a dream an old man coming to him, having in his hand a sword, and saying, "If you do not save the Israelites there will come a great plague on the town commencing with yourself and ending with Abbas Mirza; consider then what you will do."

This he saw nearly with his open eyes; then he rose up by night with great fear, and as soon as the day broke he went to Abbas Mirza and related to him this dream. They were both very much afraid; and Abbas Mirza told him not to declare this to anybody till it should be determined what to do in this case. After some hours, he commanded that plenty of wood should be prepared in the middle of the town, saying that on the next day he would burn the Israelites. The whole town was very glad at this, and blessed him saying, "Our king live forever." Then they prepared wood according to his command; the next night he took with him ten soldiers and horses and went to the prison and took out the Israelites. He gave them horses to ride, and the ten soldiers to take care of them on the road, and clad them like Mahometans, and sent them away to Hamadan. After that he sealed the prison door with his own seal, and returned home.

The next morning all the people collected themselves to burn the Israelites. Then Abbas Mirza sent some of his officers to the prison to see if his seal was proper; and they went accordingly and looked over it and found it proper, and brought him word. Then he sent them again to bring the Israelites to be burnt; but on opening the prison they found nobody there. Then they were very much astonished and afraid, and returned to Abbas Mirza saying that there was no one there. Then he became very angry with the people, and said that surely these men were righteous, in that the Lord had done such a great miracle for them, and you are guilty for raising up against them false witness to destroy them, but the God of their father Abraham has saved them; then he fined all the evil reporters and the witnesses. When I arrived at Hamadan I was told by the Israelites the same story which they had heard from the three Israelites themselves.

From Miyandoab I proceeded to *Garus,* five days' journey over very high mountains...There are about 25 families of Israelites using the same manners and language as the Israelites at Bahadina. Some of them are rich merchants, the others are workmen. They have a small synagogue...

From thence I proceeded to *Senna,* two days' journey. The road is mountainous, having many villages and good water on it...On entering the town the usage is to take three *kars* from everyone who is not a Mahometan...

...There are about 300 families of Israelites using the same customs and language as the Israelites at Bahadina. Some of them are rich merchants, and others artificers. They have two small synagogues. The treasurer of the governor is an Israelite, and he is their chief...

From thence I proceeded to Qaslan, two days' journey on a straight road...There are 5 families of Israelites using the same language and manners as those at Bahadina...

From thence I proceeded to *Hamadan,* two days' journey on a straight road, but a little dangerous. It is a very large but not fortified town; very fine houses are in it built of hewn stone and each house had a compound and a stream of water passing through them. It has a very cold climate.

In the middle of the town is a very high tower, a very ancient building and is in the Israelites' charge. I have visited it; there is a

room inside and in it two large boxes of wood, of cunning work, very curious; they are covered with a cloth; the length of each is equal to three English yards, the breadth one and a half, and the height two. In one of these is buried Mordecai, and in the other Queen Esther. The Israelites say that on the top of it is some writing in the Armenian language. They say also that the town is called Hamadan because it is the capital of the cities of Media; and after that it was given by King Ahashverosh as a gift to Haman; therefore he changed its name to Hamadan, which means Haman and Media; and after Haman was killed it was given to Mordecai and Queen Esther, and they built this tower for their burying place. Outside the town are two fine palaces, each enclosed with a low wall for the residency of the governor.

...The governor of it, when I was there, was a son of Abbas Mirza; and he has a Russian captain, with three hundred Russian soldiers, who ran away from their land, and they were sent by his father to teach the other soldiers the art of war. There are about 200 families of Israelites speaking broken Turkish language; most of them are doctors and are much honored by the governor and the nobles. They are very rich, having very fine houses with fine gardens; some of them are merchants, and some goldsmiths. They have two large synagogues. They use the same customs as the Israelites at Bahadina...

From thence I proceeded to Tuiserkan, a few day's journey on a road mountainous and stony till you come near the town. About halfway on the road they are used to take from everyone who is not a Mahometan two rupees...

The coins, weights, measures, and customs are like those of Hamadan; the language is all Persian. There are about 20 families of poor Israelites speaking the language of the town...About half an hour's distance from the town is a little circular tower. The Israelites say that there is buried the prophet Habakkuk. I went to visit it; no sepulchre is there, but a little circular tower, an ancient building. The Israelites told me many stories about it; but I do not find them correct...

From thence I proceeded to Nahavand, two days' journey on a straight road with many villages and good water on it. There are about 20 families of poor native Israelites, using the same manners and customs as those at Bahadina; they speak Persian...

From thence I proceeded to *Kermanshah,* four days' journey, finding many villages and good water on the road. Near the town about half a day's journey to it they are accustomed to take two rupees from everyone who is not a Mahometan.

...There are about 300 families of Israelites using the same manners, customs, and language as those at Bahadina. Most of them are poor, and some are merchants. They have very few Levites among them, and they have three synagogues.

From thence I proceeded to *Zohab,* four days' journey. Halfway on the road are a great many villages of the caste of Daudiya...I stayed with them for a few days to understand their faith and customs. They were very much pleased with me, because I told them that I was an Israelite from Judea. They believe in one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had appeared to Moses in the bush; they believe in Moses as a true prophet, and call him Musa Rabbin, which means "Moses our teacher"; also they believe in Benjamin the son of Jacob and in King David as true prophets. They say that there is not more than the skin of an onion between their faith and that of the Israelites, because they are circumcised and believe in one God, and in the Old Testament; but they eat pork and other creatures which are not allowed in the Old Testament, and drink wine.

...In public they call themselves Mahometans, but they marry only with their own castes. They speak Kurdish.

Bushire is a small town on the coast of the Persian Gulf; it is a miserable place with narrow streets and markets, but there are good houses for travellers and keeping of merchants' goods called *caravanserai,* and a very good house where the governor resides. From April to September it is very hot, and the water is not quite good...

There are 200 poor families of Persian Israelites, having three synagogues; most of them are goldsmiths; they are very badly treated by the common Mahometans. There are about 500 families of Amalekites or Armenians, having their churches; some of them are very rich merchants, the other artificers; they are ill treated as are the Jews...The governor of it, when I was there was Sheikh Abd Ar-Rasul, under the orders of the Shahzadeh of Shiraz, who is a son of Fath Ali Shah, the King of Persia; this Sheikh Abd ar-Rasul is a good and kind man.

From Bushire to *Shiraz* is seven days' journey. There are about 700 families of Israelites. Some years ago a number of Israelites turned Mahometans owing to great oppression from the Mahometans. They are not, however, connected with them in marriage, but with their own people; and it is the same in many parts of Persia, where Israelites have become Mahometans by reason of great oppression. From Shiraz to *Isfahan* is twelve days' journey, and there are also 300 families of Israelites. From Isfahan to *Kashan* is eight days' journey. There are about 100 families of Israelites. From Kashan to *Teheran* is four days' journey. This is the residence of the King of Persia. There are about 100 families of Israelites. From Tehran to *Mazandaran* is seven days' journey. There are about 60 families of Israelites...

There are many other places in Persia where Israelites reside. I have not been myself in these above-mentioned places; but I have been told that there are very few Levites among the Israelites; and also that the latter in general are very ignorant in the Hebrew language and customs. I conceive, therefore, that they must be some of those who did not return with the captivity at the building of the Second Temple. I have been told also that great numbers of Israelites were proselytized to Mahometanism by force in some of the last centuries. (d'Beth Hillel, pp. 94–107)

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R. David d'Beth Hillel's figures for the Jewish populations of the towns he visited are more precise than those from other sources. Although these figures do not account for all of Iran, if we take them as a representative sample and extrapolate to encompass the whole of the country, the Jewish population of Iran at the time of his visit can be estimated at a mere 25,000. This in itself is testimony to the fact that massacres, conversions, and emigration reduced the Jewish population with increasing rapidity. Sir John Malcolm, who puts the population of Iran at the beginning of the 19th century at six million, writes:

The Jews in Persia, who are not numerous, cannot appear in public, much less perform their religious ceremonies, without

> being treated with scorn and contempt by the Mahomedans. (Malcolm, 2:301).

The plight of Jews during this period can be summarized with a single sentence from Lutf 'Ali Beg Azar: "They say that should a Jew remain in Abarqu longer than forty days, he shall not survive."

M.L. Dubeux, who traveled to Iran during the Qajar period, writes, "Hamadan, the ancient Ecbatana, in 1818 had about nine thousand houses and forty to fifty thousand inhabitants..."[200] Another source supports this assertion: "In spite of these persecutions there was still a considerable number of Jewish families at Hamadan at the beginning of the nineteenth century."[201] But this "considerable number" declined precipitously over the course of twenty years. Flandin, who was in Hamadan from 1839 to 1840, puts the number of Jewish households at 200. R. David d'Beth Hillel also puts the number of Jewish households at 200. This remarkable decline from 600 households in 1818 to 200 households in 1839 is testimony to the bitter events of the intervening 21 years such as the calamitous Tabriz incident, the advent of Mullah Agha Baba Shirazi in Tehran, and the Mashhad riot. The Jewish population declined more than ever, and the cycle of exile, forced conversion, and massacre continued.

L. Langlès, in his note on the state of affairs in then (1811) present-day Iran, estimates the Jewish population of the country at between 30,000 and 35,000.[202] The discrepancy between this figure of 35,000 and the above-mentioned estimate of 25,000 lies in the fact that the former figure is provided for the middle of Fath 'Ali Shah's reign, while the latter is for the end of that monarch's rule.

> In 1850 Benjamin II. found at Shiraz 500 Jews and nine synagogues, the chief rabbi being Mulley Israel. Twenty years previously (1830), according to the same author, there had been in Shiraz 3,000

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[200]Dubeux, p. 26.

[201]*JE*, 6:188.

[202]Chardin. *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin en Perse.* L. Langlès, ed., 10:242.

> Jews, but on account of terrible persecutions, 2,500 of them embraced Islam. (*JE*, 11:297)

Overall, the Jewish population of Iran declined by 145,000 during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah: 100,000 through the ceding of Georgia and the Caucasus and 45,000 through massacre and emigration.

Selections from the Travelogue of Benjamin II

Benjamin II sought from 1848 to 1851 to follow the trail of the ten lost tribes in the East. He spent several days in Kermanshah, Hamadan, Yazd, Kashan, Isfahan, Bushehr, and several other Iranian towns. His travelogue provides details about the Jews of Iran during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah. Although the Jews of Iran had sunk to the level of abject poverty, they were still committed to morality, learning, and knowledge. This Jewish cleric, whose original name was Israel Joseph, writes:

> A circumstance occurred which led to my being summoned before the council of the Shah, in order to give my opinion on a rather difficult case; — it was as follows: In Shiraz lived two brothers, both Rabbis, Mullah Ababi and Mullah Isaac, of whom the former for some cause became an apostate. He was considered one of the most learned Rabbis in Persia, and obtained access to the court of the Shah, where he used every means and artifice to establish himself in the favour of the monarch. By application of passages in the Bible, the principle of which did not accord with the notions of the government, he oppressed his former fellow-believers, and then again offered them his services in order to extort money from them. Thus he drew their attention to a passage in Deuteronomy, where it is thus written: „Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury. Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury, but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury."[203]

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[203]Deuteronomy 23:20–21. (Benjamin II's original citation is Deuteronomy 23:19–20).

In consequence of this, the Mullahs of Teheran, Mullah Rachmim, the Nassi Aga Ababi, and the first Jews of the town, were summoned before the highest authorities of the kingdom, and desired to explain this passage. They, however, said that they were not learned enough to be able to expound the text, adding, that in all Persia there was no Mullah who could answer this question; there was, however, a Chacham from Beth-el-Mikdass in Teheran, who would be able to explain it. By this, they meant me; and I, as well as several other Jews, received shortly after a message from the authorities, inviting me to appear before them. I immediately obeyed the summons, presenting on my entrance a certificate from the Russian Ambassador, with whom I had deposited my passport, and whose influence was very great, remarking that as an European, I could not subject myself to any foreign power without the consent of my Ambassador, but that I was ready to obey the order and considered it an honour to appear before that high assembly. When the passage alluded to was placed before me, and my interpretation of it desired, I declared openly that the exposition of the Mullah Ababi was false, adding, that in Europe, the youngest scholars, who were at all conversant with the Bible would understand how to give a better explanation of the text. My interpretation of the passage was as follows: „Thou shalt take no usury from thy brother whoever he may be!" for the Bible says: „Take thou no usury of him or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee,"[204] and further it says: „Unto a stranger thou mayest give interest, but thou shalt not lend upon usury." — The assembly received this exposition with satisfaction. I then remarked that in Europe it was the custom to draw up a protocol in writing respecting such discussions; to which they replied that the whole affair was not worth the trouble. The whole discussion, which lasted about half an hour, was interpreted by the dragoman Mullah Jacob. When the meeting was dissolved, I was asked if I knew the Baron von Rothschild; they had heard that there was a family in Europe of that name which were very rich and much esteemed by all European monarchs. If this family were really so powerful, why did they not come to the relief of their fellow-believers? — I answered that I only knew

[204] Leviticus 25:36.

personally the Baron von Rothschild, who, in the year 1845, lived in Vienna. Besides, in Europe it was not known in what a wretched condition our brethren lived here: for there their lot was a much better one. — With this, the meeting broke up.[205]

After a three months' stay in the chief town Teheran, where I had several unpleasant affairs with the above-mentioned apostate, — which, however, were not attended with any bad results for me, — I began my journey to Hamadan...

By the advice of the Russian consul, I assumed the Russian national costume; for Russia exercises in this country an almost magical power...[206]

Elsewhere in his travelogue, Benjamin II writes:

Ispahan is the greatest city in the kingdom of Persia. The perfectly beautiful situation, the rich and luxuriant vegetation, the abundance and beauty of which pen scarcely can describe, offer food enough for reflection and admiration to the traveller, and awakened in me the remembrance of the magnificent regions of the East. — About 400 Jewish families live in the city, they possess 3 synagogues and 8 Mullahs (Chacham)...[207]

...The Jewish community in Kashan numbers 180 families, who live in a state of dreadful oppression...[208]

...A Jewish community of 150 families dwell [in Yazd], and they too languish under the yoke of the most ignominious oppression...[209]

In the capital of Persia [Tehran] live about 500 Jewish families; they possess eight synagogues and have several Mullahs. Their social condition is also considerably better than those of the Jews in the provinces...[210]

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[205]pp. 199–200.

[206]p. 202.

[207]p. 191. Here, in a footnote Benjamin II adds, "Benjamin of Tudela p. 82 speaks of 15,000 Jews."

[208]p. 196.

[209]p. 198.

[210]p. 198.

Hamadan, the former summer-residence of the Persian Shah, is a town of great importance to the kingdom on account of its trade. The Jewish community, which consists of about 500 families, have three synagogues and three Mullahs. The Nassi of the community is Mullah Eliahu.[211]

...Four days' journey from Hamadan lies Karmanshah, where reside about 40 Jewish families.[212]

Regarding Shiraz, Benjamin II writes:

Only about twenty years since, nearly 3000 Jews[213] lived in this once magnificent and flourishing city. By persecutions, oppressions, and odium of all kinds more than 2500 of them were compelled to go over to the Mussulman sect of Ali. Although outwardly apostate, a great number of these families still preserve in their hearts the faith of their fathers, and even find means of having their children circumcised in secret. Nine synagogues in the town testify the former greatness of the Jewish community; now unfortunately, they are almost all laid waste. The Jews of Shiraz speak the Hebrew language, almost like the Askenasim (german [*sic*] Jews).

On my arrival I found the town in a state of ferment and revolt in consequence of a change of government in Teheran. Fierce combats took place in the streets, and it was not until the evening that the tumult was calmed. The vice-consul received me into his house, and gave me a safe escort to the Nassi, Mullah Israel. This Nassi, a venerable old man, received me with the greatest kindness, and according to Eastern custom, gave me an hospitable shelter, and I lodged with his son Isaac.

My presence had quickly become known among the brethren of the faith, and I was soon visited by the leading members. From morning until night I was in request, my advice and help asked in many matters, and my opinions regarded as oracles. One day my room became gradually filled with women all wearing white veils, who, one after another, introduced themselves to me. As

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[211]p. 204.

[212]p. 205.

[213]Here, Benjamin II in a footnote adds, "Benjamin of Tudela p. 82 speaks of 10,000 Jews."

the Jewish women are allowed only to wear black veils, in order to distinguish them from others, this visit disquieted me, for I was imagined the house might be attacked by insurgents. I was, however, pacified when they told me that all these women belonged to the families who had been compelled to embrace the faith of Islam, but who in secret adhered to the faith of their fathers. My visitors lifted their veils, and kissed my forehead and hand. I addressed some words to them on their apostacy [*sic*], whereupon the women wept bitterly. One of the men present came forward and said: „Our brethren know under what fearful circumstances we were compelled to apostatise: we did it to save ourselves from tyranny and death. We acknowledge, however, that, notwithstanding our apparent apostacy [*sic*], we still cling with all our hearts to the faith of our fathers, and this we testify by our presence here this day; for if it were known, we should certainly all be lost!" — These words much affected me; I tried to console them and said: „Have patience, my brethren; and continue to put your confidence in God. Perhaps the monarchs of Europe, under whose protection your brethren live happily, may be able to alleviate your misfortunes, and may place noble rulers on the throne of Persia, who will loosen your bonds, and allow you freely and openly to avow your belief."

Another day the leader of the rebels came to the Nassi, in order to force on him a new tax. When he perceived me there, he asked who I was, to which the Nassi replied: „He is a Chacham from Beth-el-Mikdass." Hardly had the Persian heard this, when he addressed me in the following words: „I have been told that the Chachamim of that town are very learned, and understand in particular the art of making amulets; make one for me to protect me in war." — At first I wished to disclaim this honour, but my scruples vanished at the sight of his blood-stained yatagan (xymetar), and I promised to satisfy his wish on the following day. I set to work, but as I would not profane our sacred customs by this superstition, I turned over irresolutely the leaves of my Bible, and at length came upon the history of Esther. I took the names of the ten sons of Haman, by means of letters joined them into sentences, and in the form of cabalistic amulets wrote them on a square piece of parchment. This I gave to the Persian, — who expressed great joy on receiving it, — and I told him at the

same time that the amulet would only be of use to him as long as he was courageous and brave. Two days later this Persian took part in a combat of the insurgents against the troops, in which the latter were worsted: he now believed firmly in the power of my amulet, brought me presents, and proclaimed that I was a man of God, because my amulet had been so effective. This little affair obtained for me no little consideration.[214]

Concerning his journey to Shiraz, Benjamin II writes:

During the journey I also was often exposed to personal danger, in which I owed my preservation to the Caravan-Baschi [caravan leader], who had pledged himself for my safety. — Every morning at daybreak I retired before the caravan proceeded on its way, in order to pray. This was remarked, and one day, when I was on the point of putting on my Tephilim (phylacteries) in preparation for prayer, I heard with terror the words: „A Jew is among us!" — I turned round; a Persian pointed his gun at me and fired, but the bullet whistled by me. The Caravan-Baschi, who with many others had run to the spot, wrested the weapon from the hands of the perpetrator, who cried out in a rage: „A Jew is daring to contaminate our company!" — „How do you know he is a Jew?" asked the Baschi. „Because I have seen him pray and put on his sandals!" The Baschi turned pale, but immediately answered: „Perhaps you are mistaken; but be it as it may, Jew or Mussulman, I answer for his safety with my head, and must deliver him up unharmed at the house of the vice-consul of Shiraz." — Nobody ventured to dispute the authority of the commander, for they were all too much accustomed to obey. This quieted the disturbance, and the affair was soon forgotten...[215]

Throughout Persia the Jews are obliged to live in a part of the town separated from the other inhabitants; for they are considered as unclean creatures, who bring contamination with their intercourse and presence... If a Jew is recognized in the streets, he is subjected to the greatest insults. The passers-by spit in his face, and sometimes beat him so unmercifully, that he falls to the ground, and is obliged to be carried home... Sometimes the Per-

[214]pp. 184–86.

[215]pp. 182–83.

sians intrude into the dwellings of the Jews and take possession of whatever pleases them. Should the owner make the least opposition in defence of his property, he incurs the danger of atoning for it with his life... If...a Jew shows himself in the street during the three days of the Katel feast (feast of mourning for the death of the Persian founder of the religion of Ali) he is sure to be murdered...[216]

The Jewish doctors are likewise much sought after, and exercise great influence over the first people of the kingdom, which they nobly turn to the advantage of their oppressed brethren. Thus are fulfilled the sublime words of the scriptures when it is written: „And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their ennemies [*sic*], I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my convenant [*sic*] with them: for I am the Lord their God."[217]

Gobineau, the French ambassador to the Iranian court, wrote of that period:

The Jews do not merit so much disdain. The majority, in truth, occupy themselves solely with material concerns and appear to let themselves go outwardly. This dilapidated appearance and clothing has gained them no sympathy or esteem anywhere. But one finds in them in Asia as elsewhere this moral strength, this religious pride, which elevates them and lets them survive so many catastrophes, and that is combined with a lively preoccupation, amongst some of them, with their dogmas, their books, and their sciences...The Jews have doctors some of whom are very learned in the Talmud and philosophy. I was truly astonished the day one of these erudite men spoke with me admiringly of Spinoza and asked me for clarifications on Kant's doctrine. These names, these ideas, and rays of other ideas which one would expect to be unknown reach them in books which they import especially from Germany via Baghdad. (Gobineau, *Les Religions et les philosophies,* pp. 64–5)

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[216]pp. 211–13.

[217]Leviticus 26:44.

Although the religious ceremonies of the Jews do not include days of ritual mourning and only one day of the year—that which marks the loss of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem—is dedicated to sorrow, on account of both the many afflictions they suffered and a national environment which nurtured lamentation, they embraced ritual mourning. Gobineau writes concerning this:

> ...I must add that this passion for drama is not restricted to Muslims: it has also affected the Jews. Actually, they dare not perform their productions; they fear that they will be accused of parodying the *ta'ziyehs* [passion plays] of the Imams, but they write them. They write them in verse, as do the Persian poets; they write them in the language of the Gemara, read them with passion, and add to them daily, incessantly writing on new subjects. Thus it is that they especially love to hear, at this time, a poet reading at one of their assemblies, whether it be from *The Ruin of Jerusalem, The Burning of the Pentateuch* by the emperor Aposthoumos (Posthumus), *The Massacre of 80,000 Youths by the Christians,* or *The Death of Zecharia,* the subjects are very numerous. I have not seen any of these plays, thus I am unable to comment on their merit. I only make reference to their existence to demonstrate how strong and contagious is the Persian passion for drama, as it is communicated from them to the Jews who live in their territory. It must be added, moreover, to preclude any error, that these Jews are almost all the descendants of proselytes, and that there are extremely few families in Iran who are actually descended from the Hebrews. (Gobineau, *Les Religions et les philosophies,* p. 456)

Henry A. Stern, who visited Shiraz in 1849, writes that during his visit many of the silk merchants in the bazaar were agents for people who had apostatized from Judaism.

> Stern describes the condition of the Shiraz Jews as miserable in the extreme. He says, with a touch of partiality particular to missionaries: "Their domestic life differs little from that of their neighbors. Early marriages are the chief source of their miserable condition. Their occupations are generally mean and sordid, such as

> hawking, telling fortunes, writing fictitious amulets, and keeping secret taverns, the latter bring their main support." (*JE*, 11:297)

Dr. Jakob Eduard Polak, who served as Nasir al-Din Shah's physician for six years beginning in 1855, not only looked into the status of the Jews of Hamadan, which was the king's summer residence, but also researched Jewish life. This exceptional man, who played a key role in changing social conditions for Iranian Jews and will be further discussed in the chapter on the Alliance israélite universelle (p. 451), wrote of the Jews at Hamadan:

> The Jews earn their living by all kinds of gold- and silver-work, in which they are as clever as the Caucasians; by glass-cutting, silk-weaving, dealing in old clothes and in skins. Many of them are masons, blacksmiths, tailors, and shoemakers; some practise medicine, which they study according to the works of Avicenna, who is buried at Hamadan. They live under great difficulties, because they are considered as outcasts; they are constantly exposed to the caprices of the governor, who uses every pretext to plunder them....Should a Jew appear in the street dressed decently, or on horseback, the spectators are indignant at him for daring to appear like a true believer. Should he, on the contrary, be dressed miserably, he is followed by a crowd of young rascals, who throw mud and stones at him. (Polak, *Archives israélites*, 1865, p. 440 ff., quoted in *JE*, 6:188)

Note on the Travelogue of Ephraim Neumark

Neumark's travelogue quotes Dr. Polak as having said:

> Near Hamadan, I met two travelers who had come from Jerusalem and were on their way to India to collect donations. One was from Hungary and the other was born in Greece, but both resided in Jerusalem. The Greek in addition to his mother tongue also spoke fluent Italian, Arabic, Turkish, and Hebrew. They were going to visit the cities of Samarqand, Bokhara, Qandahar, Herat, and Balkh. Their route was dangerous.

Polak states:

> In 1854, a Jew from Jerusalem came to Tehran to collect financial donations. In answer to my question regarding his further travel plans, he replied that he was going to Turkistan and Afghanistan. When I warned him of the dangers which face European travelers there and of the murder of Stoddart and Conelly [*sic*], he continued "My travel is difficult only in Persia, where I must pay a toll to pass each city; as soon as I have passed the borders, I find a Jew of one tribe or another who guides me perfectly safely to the next place. I speak from experience, as I have made the same trip once before." When I saw him two years later, it was with little money, though safely returned to Tehran. (Polak, 1:24)

Ephraim Neumark (b. 1860) moved to the Holy Land as a child with his parents. But at the age of 23, he traveled from Tiberias through Syria, Kurdistan, Iraq, and Iran to Afghanistan. After his three-year voyage, he wrote his travelogue, *Masa be-erets ha-kedem* (מסע בארץ הקדם), which has been used by many leading researchers of Jewish society.[218] The following is an extract from his account of the Jews of Iran:

> The mass emigration of Iranian Jews to Jerusalem began two years before the Bilu[219] emigrations. The Jews of Shiraz in particular were eager to emigrate. Two-thirds of the émigrés were Shirazis. The wave of emigration which had been set in motion did not subside. In 1891, the Persian-speaking poet Mullah Haim El'azar set out with a group for Jerusalem by way of Mazandaran and Russia.

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[218] *EJ*, 12:1015.

[219] Bilu (בילו) is an acronym derived from the initial four letters of the Hebrew "Bayt Yaqub Lekho Vanelkha" (בית יעקב לכו ונלכא), meaning "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk..." (Isaiah 2:5). The Bilu movement was founded by young Russian Jews in 1881, in the aftermath of the bloody Russian pogroms, to promote emigration to Eretz Israel. It unleashed a wave of emigration by Russian and Eastern European Jews to the land of their forefathers.

After the Shirazis, the Tehranis were the second most important group who headed for Jerusalem at the behest of religious officials. Some also went to Jerusalem from Kashan, Isfahan, and Hamadan.

In Iran, they do not purchase bread or other foodstuffs from Jews, and should a Jew wish to purchase from a Muslim, he must point to the product he wishes to purchase from a distance. The Jew who becomes a Muslim may—backed by the testimony of several illiterate persons—claim that any deceased Jew is his relative and in this manner take possession of all his property. The local governors treat the Jews as a master treats a slave, and perhaps it is for this reason that they call him the "Lord of the Jews." The *jizya* tax which the Jews must pay the king's representative are collected from within the community, and the burden is divided according to the individual members' ability to pay. If the "Lord of the Jews" is not satisfied with the collected sum, he expropriates Jewish property. The Jews' only hope is their doctors, who are known by the title *hakim.* These doctors are the only ones who are allowed to ride on horseback and are permitted to visit the nobles' sick. Jews who know something of the Hebrew language and Syriac script are called Mullahs and wear a white kerchief on their heads.

Christian missionaries established a school at Hamadan [1883?]. They teach Jewish children free of charge and gradually draw them to their religion. Of 800 Jewish families, 150 became Baha'is. They have three synagogues. Among their leaders are Haji Meir El'azar and Hakim Abraham Shofet.

Tehran has a thousand Jewish families and eleven synagogues. Unlike Hamadan, the new religion has not created a great division amongst them. In the capital, seven Jewish leaders run the community's affairs. In 1873, when the king returned from his travels to Europe, he set aside a portion of the Tehran bazaar (Sara-ye Amir), for the Jews to conduct business. But to this day only two Jews have gone there. In 1879, the Americans opened a missionary school for Jews under the direction of Dr. Thaddeus. In order to attract them, they offered free treatment for the ill. Ten years later, a missionary school was established to proselytize the Jews of Isfahan.

The language of the Jews differs from city to city. In Mashhad, the Jewish converts to Islam marry amongst themselves. The Jews

of Yazd bake bread in their homes, but the Jews of other towns buy from bakeries. The living conditions of Iranian Jews are even worse than in Arabia. They cover their floors with old rugs and straw mats. Only a few have new carpets. In Hamadan merchants and physicians wear fur caps.

With the exception of Mashhad,[220] Jews are not allowed to enter the baths in the cities of Iran. They are obliged to use separate baths. Generally the Jews of Iran are not craftsmen. They do not know cobbling and tailoring. Children are very poorly educated. Schooling, should there be any, is limited to the reading of the weekly parashah by the local mullah. Only in Yazd do children so much as learn from the Talmud. In 1833, toward the end of the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah, Mulla Ya'qub Yazdi succeeded in teaching several students to read the Torah in Hamadan.

Three hundred Jewish families live in Herat, most of whom fled from Mashhad. Kerman has a few Jews. Six families who emigrated from Qazvin reside in Kabul. The Jews of Bokhara are from Balkh and Sabzevar.

Neumark documents the size of the Jewish population as follows:

Kermanshah		250
Kankavar		15
Nehavand		30
Tuserkan		15
Borujerd		80
Hamadan	(800 families)	5,000
Tehran	(1,000 families)	6,000
Kerman		30
Mashhad	(400 families)	2,400

Without indicating the size of the populations, he also mentions the following cities and towns with Jewish populations: Damavand, Bar Forush (Babol), Kashan, Isfahan, Golpayegan, Khansar, Yazd, Bushehr, Sanandaj, Bijar, Savoj Bolagh, Orumiyeh, Makhes, Beshqelan, and Salmas.

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[220]Here, he is referring to the Jews of Mashhad who converted to Islam.

Neumark also mentions cities which had had Jewish populations several decades earlier but where no Jews remained: Shushtar, Qazvin, Tabriz, Rasht, and Sabzevar. Anti-Semitic massacres and persecutions were so great in those towns that no Jews survived.

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Lord Curzon writes of the conditions facing the Jews of Iran toward the end of the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah:

> ...[The population of Yazd includes] a variety of elements, there being a Jewish population now calculated at 2,000 (they are distinguished by being obliged to wear a patch in front of their coats)...the [Zoroastrians'] numbers have been variously reported as from 3,500 to 7,000 at different periods in the century...[221]
>
> ...In 1878 a careful census was made by the then governor [of Kerman], which showed...85 Jews...[222]
>
> The capital [Tehran] is said to contain about 4,000 Jews, possessing ten synagogues and several schools, and engaged for the most part in trade, as dealers, vintners, and physicians. Here, as elsewhere in Persia, the Jews are obliged to walk circumspectly; but they are not subject to the outbreaks of religious fanaticism which sometimes occur farther south, in the more bigoted atmosphere of Isfahan and Shiraz.[223]
>
> ...There has for long been a considerable number of Jews resident in Barfurush, where they are engaged in retail trade. A furious outbreak against them took place in 1866 and is recorded by Mounsey. It was suppressed by the vigorous action of the Shah; but public opinion prevented him from inflicting condign punishment upon the authors.[224]

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[221] 2:240–41.

[222] 2:244 footnote.

[223] 1:333.

[224] 1:380.

Chapter Twenty-Three
Tabriz, Mashhad, and Tehran

During the Qajar period, Jews throughout Iran were plagued by the demon of anti-Semitic persecutions and massacres. But the persecutions were particularly harsh in three cities: Tabriz, Mashhad, and Tehran. In Tabriz, mass executions turned the soil red; in Mashhad, after a terrible riot, the Jews apostatized and sat in mourning, and in Tehran terrifying scenes steadily made life bitter for the Jews.

The Bloody Tabriz Incident

Travelers who visited Tabriz before the Qajar period mentioned the Jews of Tabriz and observed that some were scholars. Eugène Flandin, who visited Tabriz in 1840, writes:

> The population of Tabriz is no longer five hundred thousand souls, as it was at the time that Chardin visited it two hundred years ago; it has been reduced to at most one hundred fifty thousand, and is comprised of Muslims and Armenians. (Flandin, 1:179)

The Jews of this city had decreased in number after the time of Ghazan Khan and Muhammad Khodabandeh and virtually disappeared during Safavid times. But they were once again drawn to the city because of its centrality to commerce, and by the beginning of the Qajar period, approximately 7,000 Jews lived in Tabriz.

As the kingdom declined under Qajar rule, a great calamity befell the Jews of Tabriz. Mullah Agha Baba Damavandi, who might be considered an ambulatory history book, placed the timing of this inauspicious event at one year before the great plague which broke out during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah. As this plague occurred in 1831, consequently the massacre of Jews at Tabriz must have taken place in 1830. But this date cannot be accepted as definitive. The massacre of the Jews of Tabriz very likely occurred early in the

reign of Agha Muhammad Khan. R. David d'Beth Hillel refers to a massacre of the Jews of Tabriz prior to this date: "When David d'Beth Hillel visited Persia in 1828, the Jewish community in Tabriz had already ceased to exist."[225] The *Bulletin* of the Alliance israélite universelle, no. 27 (1902) supports the gist of Mullah Agha Baba's story. Based upon the former written history and the latter oral history, the Tabriz incident can be summarized as follows:

In the initial years of the Qajar dynasty, many Jewish and Christian merchants lived in Tabriz. A Jewish merchant who was more successful than others in his business and who had therefore amassed a greater fortune than others, came to be admired and respected among the Muslims. This merchant—who had twelve clerks and workers in his employ—on account of the admiration and respect he had gained in the Muslim community of Tabriz, aroused the jealousy of his Christian counterparts, and they sought to eliminate him as a competitor. One of his clerks was a Christian named Richard. Several men who were enemies of the Jews manipulated Richard. They killed a child (whom they may also have raped), and in the middle of the night, with Richard's help, hid the innocent child's corpse in the Jewish merchant's warehouse.

The next day, heralds cried out through the city and a search for the child was begun. Richard remained silent for three days. On the fourth day, prodded by the Jewish merchant's competitors, he went before the governor and falsely alleged that the Jewish merchant had killed the child and had asked him to remain silent. The governor believed him, and set out for the place where the child's body was hidden. The child was from a prominent family, and according to Mullah Agha Baba, his father was a Muslim religious scholar. There was no trial and no conviction. The accusation was accepted without question, and precipitated a hellish outcome.[226]

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[225] *EJ*, 15:694.

[226] The accusation of having killed a non-Jewish child was one of the most effective tactics employed against the Jews during the European

The bigoted populace saw red. They immediately set upon the Jewish ghetto and began killing innocent Jews who were unaware of the ill-omened rumor spreading through the city. The killing continued unabated. Cleavers, daggers, poniards, and broadswords circled in the air and were planted in the bodies of Jewish men and women, young and old. The bloodthirsty murderers planted poniards in the ground and threw young Jewish children into the air in such a manner that they fell upon and were impaled by the sharp blades. Some in the mob wanted to spare the life of a handsome seventeen-year-old named Yahya. They told him to convert to Islam. When he refused, they cut him to pieces. They butchered the Jews and piled up their corpses. Those who managed to hide either fled the city shortly thereafter or perished in the plague which beset Tabriz. For many years, no Jews lived in Tabriz.

Based on the accounts handed down to him, Mullah Agha Baba said that after Tabriz, the assault against the Jews spread to other cities of Azerbaijan. The Jews of Ardabil and Zanjan were also massacred, and no Jews remained in those cities. The old cemetery at Ardabil provides testimony that many Jews once lived in the city. The storm did not easily subside, and for several years the Jews of Azerbaijan were accused of infanticide. Those who survived mostly made their way to the Caucasus, while a few went to Tehran. They went to the Caucasus because they spoke Turkish and did not know Persian. Moreover, the Caucasus, which had been ceded to Russia during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah, was viewed as a sanctuary by Jews seeking to escape their crude Azerbaijani persecutors. This plight brings to mind the saying, "In hell, there are snakes such as will drive a man to seek refuge with vipers."[227] Indeed, before the October Revolution of 1917, the Russian government was one of the primary instigators of anti-Semitic atrocities. The *Bulletin* of the

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Dark Ages, and it was bestowed as a legacy upon the Iranians in Safavid times. Simple and illiterate Iranians were duped by it.

[227]TN: Persian: در جهنم مارهائی هست که آدمی از دست آنها به افعی پناه می برد.

Alliance israélite universelle and Mullah Agha Baba both state that afterwards, the people of Tabriz repented of their deed and considered the deadly plague which spread throughout the city as divine punishment for the killing of innocent Jews.

The plague of 1831, which began in Azerbaijan, spread throughout all Iran. Lord Curzon writes of Shushtar during these times:

> ...Depopulated, and all but destroyed by a severe plague in 1831–2, which carried off nearly 20,000 souls, and attacked by the cholera afterwards, it was superceded as the provincial capital by Dizful, and has never rallied since.
>
> ...Among all writers there has been an absolute consensus of opinion that this fall of a once famous and inherently wealthy place has been due far less to visitations of nature than to the shameful iniquity and oppressions of the Persian Governors who have successively been deputed to this remote province, and have combined the rapacity of a Verres with the cruelty of an Alva. (Curzon, 2:365–6)

In Khuzestan the plague "...killed a great many Arabs and Persians there, and many settlements became uninhabited and fell into ruins."[228] It can be concluded that during this period no Jews survived in Khuzestan, as they were wiped out by contagion on the one hand and persecutions on the other.

In any event, from the time of the massacre of the Jews of Azerbaijan early in the Qajar period forward, no Jews chose to live in Tabriz, Ardabil, or any other towns of the region. Itzhak Ben-Zvi believes that the baiting and massacre of the Jews of Salmas also occurred during these times.[229] Solayman Kohan Sedegh writes:

> They say that when Muhammad Shah died and Nasir al-Din Shah came from Tabriz to Tehran, the Jews of Tehran went out to greet him. At that time, Mullah Rehamim was the religious leader.[230] He and Yusuf Kadkhoda led the community, and in

[228]Kasravi, p. 120.

[229]Ben-Zvi, pp. 117–19.

[230]Mullah Rehamim was the spiritual leader of the Jewish community

order to show respect to the king, they brought a great Torah with them. When the king learned that the Jews had also come out, he was surprised because throughout the entire period of his residence at Tabriz, upon entering many cities such as Zanjan, when people had come out to greet him he had not heard the name of a single Jew.

The Mashhad Riot

Mashhad was not spared the wave of destruction which effaced the Jewish communities of Tabriz, Reza'iyeh, Orumiyeh, and other cities of Azerbaijan during the Qajar period. On a Muslim religious holiday in March 1839, a group of fanatics, incited by a spurious accusation, attacked the Jewish ghetto, set fire to the synagogues and burned the Torahs. Had not Islamic religious leaders intervened and promised the rioters that all of the Jews of Mashhad would convert to Islam, not a single Jew would have survived. With this compulsory conversion, the Jewish community of Mashhad officially ceased to exist, and the former Jews became known in Persian as *jadid al-islam* (new to Islam), or *jadidis* for short. However, as soon as the flames of upheaval had subsided, some Mashhadi Jews secretly observed their religious laws and ceremonies. Behind the mourning of the Jews of Mashhad lay hidden a steadfast faith which kept the Judaism of many alive. They were only Muslims outwardly. Although some of their leaders at the behest of Islamic religious leaders made the pilgrimage to Mecca to prove their newfound faith, they did not forget their former faith. Compulsory conversion compelled the Jewish "new-Muslims" of Mashhad to migrate to other cities.

A wave of emigration toward the east and west began. The *jadidis* fled to Herat and other cities of Afghanistan, to Turkestan, Samarqand, and Bokhara. They established new neighborhoods or ex-

in Tehran from the beginning of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign until 1860. When the original text of the present book was being written, the synagogue of Mullah Rehamim still stood in the Jewish quarter of Tehran, next to the former house of Ezra Ya'qub Kohan.

panded existing Jewish ghettos. Some migrated as far as Bombay, London, Jerusalem, and other far-off cities. Jerusalem proved the best and most receptive home for the *jadidi*s of Mashhad, and they built two of their own synagogues there. The attraction to Jerusalem was unstoppable. *Jadidi* immigration to the Holy City continued under the British mandate and reached its peak with the establishment of the state of Israel.

It is not clear precisely how many of the new-Muslims of Mashhad remained in the city. What is clear is that up until the time that the descendants of the *jadidi*s emigrated to Israel, like other *anusim* in Jewish history, they secretly prayed and observed Jewish religious ceremonies while outwardly observing Islamic traditions. Some descendants of the Mashhad *jadidi*s went to Tehran, where they established their own synagogue. The unity, fraternity, and solidarity of the Jews of Mashhad, who spent years in spiritual captivity, seems incredible. They maintained their faith for three to four generations, that is, more than 130 years, and one of the former *jadidi*s of Mashhad, Mordekhai Zar (b. 1914), who like his mother and father lived a dual religious life in his youth, was elected as a Labour Party member of the Knesset in 1961.[231]

Nineteenth-century travelers such as Wolff, Vámbéry, and Neumark maintain that most of the Jews of Afghanistan were descended from Jews who had fled from Mashhad. These Jews acknowledge that their forefathers lived in Mashhad, but that as a result of persecutions and massacres they were forced to flee to Afghanistan. The Afghan Jews do not speak Pashto, but rather their language is influenced by the Persian dialect of the Jews of Mashhad. It is in this same Persian dialect that talented Jewish Afghan poets have written. The Jewish Afghans' attachment to the Persian language and literature became clear when they came to Israel and published books in their language.[232]

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[231] *EJ*, 11:1399.

[232] *EJ*, 2:327.

The Mashhad riot took place during the reign of Muhammad Shah Qajar. The spark which kindled the conflagration is described by Neumark. Before recounting the story of this event, it must be stipulated that it is not be construed as the primary cause of the Mashhad riot. The contaminated social environment of Mashhad was a ready host for the microbes of a deadly social illness. The incident which reportedly precipitated the riot and about which there is little room for doubt was merely a pretext for the acts of malicious hooligans. On the 13th day of the month of Nisan, 5599,[233] a Jewish woman who had a sore hand consulted an illiterate "physician" who advised her to kill a dog and daub its blood on her hand. The woman's husband lured a stray dog into their house, but he did not have the heart to kill it. He sought help, and invited a Muslim passerby into his house, where he killed the dog. They argued about the fee which he should be paid for killing the dog. As fate would have it, that day happened to coincide with an Islamic holiday. The Muslim, realizing that he was not going to receive the sum that he desired, left the house and proclaimed, "Come ye Muslims! For the Jews are sacrificing dogs![234]"

The "Muslims" set upon the Jewish ghetto, and all hell broke loose. They killed fifty Jews, vandalized the synagogues, and burned the Torahs. The killing, plunder, and destruction continued until evening. Then, through the intervention of several Islamic religious leaders, the rioters agreed to stop the killing on the condition that all of the Jews should become Muslims. The following day, the ceremonies by which the Jews of Mashhad formally converted to Islam began. Neumark writes that apart from a group which fled to Herat and Tehran, a number also remained in the city and gradually lost their Jewish identity.

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[233]TN: Thursday, 28 March 1839.

[234]Dogs are considered unclean in the Islamic religion.

Lord Curzon, quoting Wolff, describes the incident thus:

> The occasion was as follows: A poor woman had a sore hand. A Mussulman physician advised her to kill a dog and put her hand in the blood of it. She did so; when suddenly the whole population rose and said that they had done it in derision of their prophet. Thirty-five Jews were killed in a few minutes; the rest, struck with terror, became Mohammedans. They are now more zealous Jews in secret than ever, but call themselves *Anusim,* the Compelled Ones. (Curzon, 1:166)

A Jew by the name of Mattetia Gorji, whose father witnessed the events at Mashhad and fled to Herat, wrote in an attachment to the book *Oneg leshabat* (ענג לשבת):

> Our ancestors first lived in Meshhed under Persian rule, but for their sins, the non-Jews spread lies against Israel. Those of them who were staunch in their faith in God left their native city. My own parents were among them. They moved to Herat, under Afghan rule, where I was born in the year 605,[235] seven years after the destruction of the community of Meshhed.
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> In the year 616,[236] a Persian army besieged Herat, occupying it one year later. The occupation authorities expelled the Jews and carried them as prisoners to the city of Meshhed. Many of them died of cold on the way. Outside the city there was an enclosure known as Baba-Kordad where all the deportees were concentrated and guarded by two sentries for two years. During that long period many suffered from want and disease, but ultimately the Almighty was merciful, and the authorities released the internees and permitted them to go wheresoever they wished. They returned to Herat in the month of Tebet 5619.[237] (Quoted by Ben-Zvi, p. 310)

In 1850, during the viziership of Mirza Taqi Khan (Amir Kabir), another untoward incident befell the remaining *jadidis* of Mashhad, and ended in murder and plunder. It was precipitated by the fact

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[235]TN: c. 1845 C.E.

[236]TN: c. 1856 C.E.

[237]TN: 8 December 1858–5 January 1859.

that a *jadidi* slaughtered a chicken according to Jewish law, and did not completely cut the head from its body.

Atrocities in Tehran

Qajar Tehran, the center of Iran, was also the center of atrocities. The city did not merely suffer one or two incidents: each day gave rise to a new one. Tehran merits special attention for two reasons: firstly, it was the capital city, giving rise to its own particular misfortunes, and secondly, there is more data available on its Jewish ghetto (Fig. 14), which should be considered representative of other Jewish ghettos.

Rehamim Misha'ili, an elderly man, told the author the following story in 1948:

> Seventy years ago [1878?], Tehran had 3,000 Jews. They mostly worked as itinerant street vendors, peddlers, distillers, musicians, and jewelers. In those days, Ezra Ya'qub Kohan was the most prominent merchant and after him came Davud and Asher Mordecai Kashani, who were important in the bazaar. There was no school. Mullah El'azar Melamed taught in the Moshe Yusuf Synagogue, and Mullah Mordecai taught in the Mullah Rehamim Synagogue, which is also known as the Grand Synagogue. Mullah El'azar Shofet also taught in the Agha Yusuf Synagogue. Most of the men knew Hebrew, and the people would generally not marry their daughters to young men who were not literate. Religious officials who came from Jerusalem with certificates from the grand *hakham* of Bayt ha-Mikdash were highly regarded. One of these representatives was Hakham Pinhas, who came to Iran in 1888. He had a dispute with a Muslim sayyid and was compelled to convert to Islam to save his life, but he died four years later.
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> Around the year 1883, several Jewish itinerant street vendors began dealing in fabrics. The Muslim fabric merchants complained to 'Izzat al-Dawlah, the sister of Nasir al-Din Shah and wife of Amir Kabir, to whom belonged the taxes collected in the fabric market. 'Izzat al-Dawlah decreed that any fabric that should be found in Jewish hands was to be burned. One day at Sarchashmeh they seized my velvet and taffeta and burned it. Several of us

Jewish fabric merchants got together and wrote a petition and sent it along with 200 *tomans* to the minister of war, and he helped us. The Muslim fabric sellers complained once again and this time delivered their complaint to Haji Mirza Hasan Ashtiyani, who had issued the proclamation banning tobacco. Haji Mirza Hasan wrote to the minister of war "O ye liability to the religion and the resurrection! Why are you putting the bread of the Muslims in the lap of infidels?" And once again they prevented us from doing business. We had no choice but to appeal to the minister of war. He replied that he was unable to help. We had no recourse but to appeal to the king, and these encumbrances continued for years.

In those days, there was a regulation in effect that should a Jewish woman convert to Islam, she could take a Muslim husband without being granted a divorce by her Jewish husband. In 1892, Zulaykha, the wife of Zaghi, after a quarrel with her husband, went before the *mujtahid* Sayyid 'Ali Akbar Abshahi and converted to Islam. Sayyid 'Ali Akbar made her his *sigheh*[238] and proclaimed that all of Zulaykha's property belonged to him. The unfortunate Zaghi, fearing Sayyid Ali Akbar's deputies, hid himself in the house of his brother, Bashir. Zulaykha gave him away and came after him with several *akhunds* to arrest him. Zaghi climbed to the rooftop, and as Zulaykha and her companions gave chase, he threw himself from the roof and died. It was summer, and I (Rehamim Misha'ili) was dining on the roof of my house. I ran outside and grabbed Zulaykha in the street. The Muslim clerics and fifty or sixty other Muslim men attacked me. They beat me with murder aforethought and ransacked my house. In her old age, Zulaykha returned to Judaism, and after her death, her son recited the *mishmara,* or Jewish prayer for the dead.

The Benevolent Ezra Ya'qub, Victim of a Reactionary Mullah

Sa'id Nafisi writes of the mullahs of Tehran during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah:

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[238]TN: a "temporary wife." In a *sigheh* marriage, a contract is prepared specifying the duration of the relationship.

> ...In this midst there were also several influential mullahs in Tehran who were ambivalent and who made it their profession to at times support one faction and at times the other. The most renowned of these were Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi Nuri, Sayyid Rayhanallah Musavi, and Sayyid Mahdi Afjeh'i. (*Khandaniha*, no. 170, 9 Aban 1334 S.H. [1 Nov. 1955], p. 160)

Sayyid Rayhanallah Musavi had a house near the Marvi mosque, not far from the Jewish ghetto. He thought that the way to reach his goal of achieving fame was to persecute the Jews. This anti-Semitic sayyid incited Muslims against the Jews in the latter years of the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah and committed acts of inhumanity, some of which will be presented here.

Ezra Ya'qub,[239] who was the greatest merchant of the day and had established commercial ties between Tehran and Manchester, was a charitable and benevolent man. He provided financial aid to young boys and girls and gave generously to the needy. One cold winter's day as he passed through the Alley of the Hajis on his way to the bazaar, he passed Sayyid Rayhanallah standing near the Marvi school and waiting for a snow-shoveller to arrive. The moment the sayyid saw Ezra, he pounced on him like a wolf lying in wait, handed him a snow shovel, and demanded that he clear his roof and the grounds in front of his house. The snow was deep, and Ezra Ya'qub, who had a respiratory ailment, was not feeling well. However much he asked to be excused, the ill-natured sayyid would not consent. Ezra Ya'qub offered to hire some people to do the job and to pay them several times the normal wage so that they would do a better job. The malevolent sayyid would not agree. Ezra Ya'qub shovelled snow until the first watch of the afternoon, and upon returning home fell sick and died in 1895 at the age of forty.

While Ezra Ya'qub lay sick in bed, the water problem in the Jewish ghetto became more serious. Two wells which had been dug in the quarter proved inadequate for the residents, and the neighborhood's

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[239]The maternal grandfather of the author of this book.

population was increasing. The governors of Tehran had decided that water should be delivered to the Jewish ghetto once every six months. Indeed, shallow Muslims were playing the same game with the Jews that Shimr played with the descendants of the Messenger at Karbala. In his will, Ezra Ya'qub directed that the greater portion of his estate be used to address the social concerns of the Jewish community of Tehran. He specifically directed that:

1. A cistern should be built capable of holding a six-month water supply for the Jewish community.
2. A school for the education of children should be erected.
3. A financial contribution should be made toward the construction of a synagogue at the hospital at Jerusalem.

After his death, his instructions concerning the Tehran ghetto were fulfilled.

In 1895, Ezra Ya'qub's wife, Senobar (Fig. 15), the daughter of Hakim Haq Nazar, along with her father-in-law, Rehamim Khodadad Levy, and several other Jews, travelled to Jerusalem via Mazandaran, the Caspian Sea, Baku, and Istanbul, and fulfilled that portion of Ezra's will which concerned Jerusalem. After erecting a synagogue next to the Misgab Ledakh (Refuge of the Needy) hospital in Jerusalem, they returned to Tehran.

Hajiyeh[240] Senobar, having lost her husband in her youth on account of the malevolence and ill-naturedness of Sayyid Rayhanallah, devoted herself to charity and helped not only her coreligionists in Iran, but also sent an annual contribution to the Misgab Ledakh Synagogue. At her burial, in accordance with her wishes, soil from the Mount of Olives and a burial cloth from Jerusalem were used, and her body was interred at Gil'ad of Damavand.

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[240] TN: A title given to a Jewish woman who has made the pilgrimage to the site of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The same title is given to a Muslim woman who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Tehran Ghetto

The Jews of Tehran, like Jews in other cities, lived in their own neighborhood. They had no choice, because they were not allowed to associate with others. They faced severe restrictions. They were not safe outside their ghetto, and were not permitted to open shops in the bazaar or elsewhere. They were not allowed to open baths, butcheries, or synagogues outside the Jewish ghetto. Although their concentration in a single neighborhood was primarily the result of external pressure and secondarily of group solidarity, this collective life-style helped to preserve the national and religious underpinnings of the Jewish community.

The Tehran ghetto was situated in the 'Udlajan district, in the center of Old Tehran, facing Muslim neighborhoods in all directions. Its unpaved alleyways were narrow and crooked. Jews with financial means had the more expensive homes at the ends of alleyways. On the Islamic days of ritual mourning in the months of Muharram and Safar, when mourners paraded through the streets, anxiety in the Jewish ghetto grew tenfold; the houses at the ends of the alleyways were the safest places to be during these dreadful days.

In the summer, the streets of the Jewish ghetto were full of filth, and in winter they were muddy. Houses were made of unbaked brick, and their façades were made of mud and thatch plastered over a lattice of wooden beams and straw. Courtyards were concave so that rainfall would collect in a cistern in the center of the yard. Entrance to the courtyard was gained from the alleyway via a low gate. The size of the yard depended upon the financial status of the home owner.

The smallest courtyards measured 2×3 meters and the largest were 10×12 meters. Rooms opened onto all four sides of the courtyard, and the cistern which guaranteed a supply of potable water was situated beneath one of these rooms. Some houses had no cistern, and the residents were compelled to obtain the water they needed from their neighbors or from the large cistern of the Ezra

Ya'qub Synagogue. Generally, several families lived in a single house. The owner would let out or mortgage (*mishkanta*) one or two rooms. These houses cost between 300 and 2,000 *toman*s in the late Qajar period.

With the passage of time, the mud brick walls of the houses either cracked or became dotted with holes created by mice, snakes, and scorpions. Touching a wall in the darkness of a summer night sometimes brought the pain of a scorpion sting. Winter snow and rain turned houses into hell holes.

In the middle of the Jewish ghetto there was a concave plaza in which household trash was dumped. It was known in Persian as "Sarechal." Sometimes there was so much trash that a hillock formed. Were it not for farmers from Dulab who every so often used the refuse for fertilizer, it is unclear where it might have ended. Sheep were slaughtered daily in the same place, and in the heat of the sun, a fetid stench filled the air, accompanied by the buzzing of flies and wasps. The carcasses of dead cats and dogs—numerous in those days—were also tossed onto the trash pile at Sarechal. Around this very same plaza were vendors who sold tripe, *halim* (a porridge made of wheat and meat), lentil stew, and whey stew, which were the common foods eaten by the poor people of those times. Next to them were also humble greengrocers' and druggists' shops.

Rooms were not furnished with tables and chairs. The poor sat and slept on straw mats, the middle class on rugs, and those who were considered rich on carpets. The poor, who were the majority of the inhabitants of the Jewish ghetto, used tattered old canvas quilts handed down from their forefathers for bedclothes. In the winter they slept under a large quilt spread over a central hearth. The doors had cracks, and cold air penetrated the rooms. The windowpanes were broken and the holes patched with rags. Each house had only one lavatory, which was situated in a corner of the courtyard.

This unsanitary environment increased the Grim Reaper's human harvest. Not a day passed that wailing was not to be heard from the house of a neighbor over the untimely demise of a coreligionist.

Sometimes, when an itinerant vendor set foot outside the Jewish ghetto with his ten or twenty *tomans* to go shopping, he returned bloodied and with broken bones. The cries of his frightened and hungry wife and children would rise up, and their neighbors would reassure them, asking them to give thanks to God that the wounded man had survived.

When they placed a deceased person in a coffin in preparation for burial four kilometers outside the city, they had no option but to pass by either the Pamenar or Sarchashmeh bazaar. When passing through these neighborhoods, ruffians hurled the worst kind of abuse upon the deceased, and some even started fights. The Jews of Tehran, probably on account of their many lamentations and supplications over the centuries, had developed their own distinctive accent. They stretched out words and sentences, and these people mocked them on account of it.

A mind-boggling question is this: "On the basis of what hope did these deprived masses endure despite their horrendous living conditions in cramped and unsanitary quarters?" There is no doubt but that their hope sprang from their religious faith.

They considered their sad living conditions as divine punishment for their sins and the sins of their forefathers and looked hopefully to an unseen tomorrow. Had they also been deprived of the strength of faith, they never would have been able to survive under these conditions.

For all the daily miseries, both material and moral, the Jews—who struggled in that gloomy warren to be literate, to read, and to know the promise of the prophets of Israel for their emancipation—endured. In this regard, it is fitting that we should consider the word "Jew" to be synonymous with "forbearance." They knew that...

> ...the Lord will judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants; when He seeth that their stay is gone, and there is none remaining, shut up or left at large. (Deuteronomy 32:36)

The eternal words of the Torah and the amazing chapters of the books of the prophets of Israel were the constant companions of the scattered and unfortunate Jews and gave them the strength to withstand adversity.

Next to the Tehran ghetto was the charcoal vendors' caravanserai, run by a burly man by the name of Sayyid Davud Zoghali. Sometimes, he would amuse himself by tormenting others. He would stand outside the Jewish ghetto and scream and shout as if ruffians were out to beat and rob the Jews. His screams and shouts terrified hundreds of Jews and sent them scurrying home to hide.

Faced with all these encumbrances in a neighborhood the very sight of which evoked sadness, the Jews had their own social organizations. Every Saturday afternoon, preachers in the synagogues gave the congregations hope for the liberation of mankind and the revival of Israel. Apart from the religious leaders, others who were called the "eyes of the people" ran the abattoirs, baths, cemetery, and schools. Apart from them, there were also selfless individuals in the Jewish community of Tehran who were living endowments to their coreligionists. Among these were Haji Benyamin Asil and Davud Harun.

Haji Benyamin Asil Mazandarani was tall and handsome, with blue eyes and a commanding voice. When the Jews had problems, he contacted the governmental authorities and was usually able to resolve the problem. He worked hard to collect contributions for the relief of poor Jews. Davud Harun was bold and daring, and fable-like stories have been handed down about him. One of these stories relates that when capitulations were in vogue in Iran and disputes between Iranians and foreigners were settled in a special Foreign Ministry tribunal in the presence of the consul of the country concerned, Davud Harun had a dispute with a European. Davud sat for several sessions in this special tribunal, and it became clear to him that although he was in the right, the magistrates were going to decide in favor of the European. The next day, he set aside his

Eastern garb, donned a European coat, collared shirt, and trousers, and proceeded to court with the then customary European cane in hand.

One of the magistrates asked him, "Why are you wearing foreign attire?"

Davud Harun replied, "That you might rule in favor of these clothes!"

Chapter Twenty-Four
Riots of the Spiteful Sole Contenders

The Qajar period was a time of riots incited by spiteful mullahs who had no respect for the authority of the central government and considered themselves the sole contenders for power. Among the anti-Semitic riots of the period, three stand out as deserving of special attention: the riot of Mullah 'Abdallah, that of Sayyid Rayhan-allah, and that of Shaykh Ibrahim. We will provide a short description of these riots here.

The Riot of Mullah 'Abdallah in Hamadan

In 1892, after Haji Mirza Hasan Shirazi proclaimed his *fatwa* proscribing tobacco and the people supported him, every warped-minded individual with a turban on his head and a cloak draped over his shoulders thought that he, too, could be a rabble-rousing leader and incite the people to follow his lead. Mullah 'Abdallah, who had forced a Jewish girl to convert to Islam and married her to a Muslim, upon learning that the Jews had lodged a complaint with the governor, became spiteful and determined to exact vengeance. On the evening before Yom Kippur,[241] while the Jews were gathered in the synagogues, the hullabaloo of an anti-Semitic mob rose up within the city. The congregations hurriedly left the synagogues. Many of them were able to find their way home and secure their doors with wooden planks and stones. Those who were trapped were forced to recite the Islamic declaration of faith and become Muslims the following day in order to save their heads.

The city was taken over by Mullah 'Abdallah, who refused to yield to the state's authority. The central government was forced to send security forces to Hamadan to pacify the city and deliver Mullah 'Abdallah to Tehran. Acting upon the mullah's orders, the people attired themselves in funerary shrouds and took to the streets shout-

[241] TN: Friday, 30 September 1892.

ing, *"Ya 'Ali! Ya 'Ali!"* [O 'Ali! O 'Ali!] and prevented them from taking Mullah 'Abdallah to Tehran. The mob's frenzy continued to grow, and some started ritual mourning processions as is customary on Tasu'a and 'Ashura. They pounded their chests, struck their foreheads with poniards so that blood covered their faces, and prepared to kill or be killed for Islam that they might go to heaven. The government relented and informed the Jews that they were obliged to accept the twenty-two restrictions imposed on them by Mullah 'Abdallah.

The central government had no power against the *akhunds*.[242] The Jews of Hamadan lived under the worst of conditions. Those who could do so secretly fled to Tehran or Baghdad. The followers of Mullah 'Abdallah cried daily that the Jews must be put to death if they did not convert to Islam. Some Jews eventually succumbed to the enervating pressure. Mullah 'Abdallah made it taboo to sell foodstuffs to Jews, but this *fatwa* was rescinded through the intercession of the Ottoman consul.

According to Kohan Sedegh, any Muslim who came to the Jews' defense put his own life in danger. The chief of the Hamadan constabulary did so and was forced to kiss Akhund 'Abdallah's foot and ask his forgiveness. The illiterate, fanatic masses, incited by the mullahs, deemed the Jews infidels. As the *Bulletin* of the Alliance israélite universelle reports:

> In this incident, a number of the Jews of Hamadan went to the telegraph office to ask for stronger support from the government. At the instigation of Mullah 'Abdallah, the Muslims attacked and seized thirty of them. The remainder fled and sought refuge in various places. All of those seized were forcibly converted to Islam. Many of the Jews came under house arrest. Life had become unbearable. Nursing infants died of starvation in their mothers' arms as their mothers' milk had dried up. The Alliance in France became aware of this news and the French and English ambassadors

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[242]TN: the Persian *akhund* is esentially the same as mullah (cleric), but has a pejorative connotation.

> in Tehran took action. The government was forced once again to send more soldiers to Hamadan to put down the disturbance. This time, Mullah 'Abdallah, convinced that the people in the capital would receive him as a holy entity, headed for Tehran, and in his place, another anti-Semite by the name of 'Abd al-Majid took charge of matters. He is one of the worst enemies of the Jews. His followers even attack Jewish rabbis and women. They arrested the city's rabbi, Abraham Ya'qub, and brought him before 'Abd al-Majid.[243] He returned home beaten nearly to death. It is not expected that this sixty-year-old man will survive. The government troops have left the city, and Hamadan is now being run by 'Abd al-Majid. (*Bulletin*, no. 18 [1892], p. 48)[244]

The pressure on the Jews of Hamadan continued for seven years. Among the thirty Jews who were trapped at the telegraph office and forcibly converted to Islam were Mirza Mahdi Lalehzari, Hakim Tahir, Hakim Rehamim, and Mullah Ibrahim, who later became Baha'is, and Badi' al-Hukama' and Haji Solayman, who later became Christians.

The Riot of Sayyid Rayhanallah in Tehran

In the spring of 1897, one year after the assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah, Sayyid Rayhanallah—the same merciless, obstinate wretch who forced Ezra Ya'qub, the benevolent Jewish merchant, to shovel his snow when he was ill and thus caused that noble man's untimely death—stirred up a huge riot in Tehran. Five years after Mullah 'Abdallah's riot, Sayyid Rayhanallah, who like many other mullahs

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[243]According to Kohan Sedegh, they placed a knife to his throat and forced him to agree to ensure that the Jews wore the patch.

[244]TN: The original French text of the *Bulletin* of the Alliance israélite universelle was in most cases not available for review, and with few exceptions, the citations provided in this chapter are translated from Dr. Levy's Persian translation.

For another account of the Hamadan incident, see the 22nd annual *Report* of the Anglo-Jewish Association, pp. 55–63.

aspired to greatness, issued a *fatwa* proclaiming that the Jews must wear a patch on their garments. The *Bulletin* of the Alliance writes:

> In June, 1897, English newspapers reported rioting in Tehran, and in Paris, the Alliance received this letter:
>
> Tehran, 17 May 1897
>
> Details of the terrible situation of our coreligionists in the Iranian capital are coming to light. Sayyid Rayhanallah, exploiting the government's weakness, has incited the people against the Jews and forced them to sew on patches and shave their heads...During the reign of the late [Nasir al-Din] Shah, the situation of Jews in Tehran was good. They were only persecuted in the suburbs, but unfortunately, yesterday, the 16th of May, everything changed. Roughly ten thousand *akhunds* besieged the Jewish ghetto on Sayyid Rayhanallah's orders, and woe was he who was without a patch and shaved head. Such persons were forcibly brought before the sayyid to have their heads shaved and a patch sewn on. This was accompanied by beatings such as would melt a heart of stone. The situation is so bad that several Jews have succumbed to apostasy. A patch on the clothing may not constitute persecution, but the results are sinister. (*Bulletin*, 22:75 [1897])

Joseph Cazès, director of the Alliance school, in a letter to the Alliance's central committee in Paris on the impact of the school's opening, reports:

> ...The Jews of Iran need education, and I congratulate the Alliance, which has taken the lead in this endeavor. [The presence of the Alliance school] keeps the mullahs quiet. Last year, they incited the people of [Tehran] to massacre the Jews. It was so serious that the English ambassador was obliged to send several of the embassy's servants to the ghetto to protect the Jews, and the government also sent soldiers. The Jews did not leave their homes for a week...The Jews know that this year's changes are the result of the measures implemented by the Alliance, and are grateful therefor. The situation of Jews in the provinces has not improved. The Jews of Isfahan have sent me many appeals. (*Bulletin*, 22 [1897])

The *Bulletin* adds to the description of the riot:

> News of Sayyid Rayhanallah's exploits has spread beyond the borders of Iran. He—who was yesterday an unknown *akhund*—like some other of his coreligionists, launched a campaign against the Jews in order to gain celebrity. The Jews petitioned [Muzaffar al-Din] Shah, but this weak monarch is unable to do anything, and has each time replied that this matter is not the concern of state officials but is a religious issue. (*Bulletin*, 22 [1897])

Following this development, the Alliance sent letters to the French foreign ministry and the king of Iran. The Anglo-Jewish Association took action with the British foreign ministry. At the same time, it was reported that Sayyid Rayhanallah had sent his *fatwa* throughout all the suburbs of Tehran. The weakness of the king, who considered the capital's security a religious matter, and the helplessness of his government and officials compelled the Alliance central committee to give more support to its previous decision to establish ties with the Jews of Iran by establishing schools and sending Joseph Cazès to Tehran. To better understand the *akhunds*' show of strength against the central government by stirring up riots, the following letter from the Jews of Isfahan to Joseph Cazès is cited:

[?] August 1898

> ...The *akhunds*, not satisfied with their previous violations against us, have recently issued a *fatwa* imposing the following restrictions:
>
> 1—Muslims must not associate with Jews. In this manner, hundreds of itinerant peddlers have been thrown out of work. Their customers do not pay their previous debts.
>
> 2—Jews may not appear in the bazaar. Any Jew who enters the bazaar for whatsoever reason is beaten.
>
> 3—Muslims may not sell any foodstuffs to Jews. As all purveyors of comestibles are Muslims, this edict places the Jews' lives in danger.
>
> We now fear to leave our homes. When we protest to the governor, he is unable to [put an end to these persecutions]. There are four of these *akhunds*: Agha Najafi, Shaykh Najafi, Sayyid Hasan,

> and Sayyid Fani, who detest us and incite the people against us and do not even care about the government authorities.

The Riot of Shaykh Ibrahim Qazvini in Tehran

On Friday, 18 January 1901, Shaykh Ibrahim, who until that day had been an unknown, spoke of the evils of wine-drinking and the prohibition against alcohol in his sermon at the Masjid-e Shah mosque. He incited the people to destroy all the wine and liquor in the city. He deemed both the Armenians and the Jews blameworthy in this matter, but he aimed the arrow of opprobrium at the Jews. When his sermon was over and the worshippers left the mosque, a riot began, the victims of which were the Jews. With fearsome cries, the mob—comprised mostly of the riffraff of Tehran—followed Shaykh Ibrahim into the Jewish ghetto.

Those who had gone to get rid of alcoholic beverages looted shops in the ghetto and wounded several Jews. This riot went on for three hours before the governor's men arrived, and during this short period the Jewish ghetto was transformed into a battlefield. The rioters cast many goods which they were unable to take with them into the muddy streets.

The new director of the Alliance school in Tehran, Nissim Lévy, writes about this event in his report to the central committee:

> Immediately after this occurrence, I went to the British embassy with two leaders of the Jewish community and made the chargé d'affaires aware of these events. With him, we went to the Foreign Ministry, and he protested this episode. The Foreign Minister promised to arrest and punish those responsible and pay the Jews restitution. The next day I went to the French embassy. The ambassador immediately wrote a letter to the Iranian Foreign Minister and requested that he guarantee the safety of the Jews and their newly-established school. These protests quickly produced results, as the governor of Tehran assigned some Cossacks to guard the school and the ghetto. The government dispatched men to assess the damages. On Saturday, the British consul Graham toured the Jewish ghetto. This sudden attack caused great losses.

Monsieur Lévy, in his report of 24 January of the same year writes:

> ...Up to now, 25 people have been arrested. The person actually responsible is Shaykh Ibrahim, who has yet to be found. Damages have been assessed at 30,000 *tomans*, or £15,000. The intervention of the French and British embassies with the government to end this disturbance was very effective.

The author of the present book was a young child at that time and recalls that the anguished cries of the people filled the air, and that the terrified men in the house barricaded the gates to prevent the attackers from entering. Twenty-five years after this event, when the author was serving in the Iranian army, the paymaster who paid the doctors their salaries at the end of each month was an elderly gentleman by the name of Shams al-Attiba' Felatuni. One day he asked me:

"Do you recall the Shaykh Ibrahim incident?"

"Yes," I replied. "I was a child at the time."

"Do you know the cause?" he asked.

"Not very well," I responded. "I know this much: that they came to break the wine casks, but they broke ribs, hands, feet and heads and looted homes."

He replied, "This is all true, but its cause was something else. Invite me to lunch and I will tell you about it."

"Very well," I answered.

One day I invited him to lunch. On the appointed day, after eating, the aged Shams told me the following story:

> Shaykh Ibrahim and I were close friends. In the evenings, we smoked opium together in the 'Ali Jan gardens. One day during the month of Ramadan, after the hour of fasting had ended, we readied the fire for the opium hookah. I saw that the Shaykh was troubled. I asked him the reason. He replied "Ever since this *akhund* from Khorasan began preaching at the Masjid-e Shah mosque, the people pay no attention to me. My audiences are cold and spiritless." I answered him "The ailment for which there is a cure is no cause for sadness. Beginning tomorrow, when you

> mount the pulpit, start denouncing the Jews. Did you not observe what Sayyid Rayhanallah did?"
>
> Shaykh Ibrahim did not readily agree. I guided him and convinced him to gradually prepare the people. On Wednesday, he loudly proclaimed the prohibition against alcohol in Islam and denounced the Jews, placing the congregation on notice. On Thursday, the crowd gathered around his pulpit had increased twofold. On that day, he preached about the "unclean Jews" and their wine-making and emboldened them. On Friday, which was a day off, as word had spread in the city that there was a militant *akhund* in the mosque who intended to stop the wine-makers, a greater number of people who had nothing to do that day swarmed the mosque. The shaykh, seeing the fervid assembly, vociferously inveighed against the Jews and guided the people to the Jewish ghetto to destroy the casks!

Although Shaykh Ibrahim Qazvini's riot started out well in that it brought him renown, it did not have a good end for him, as the government gradually clamped down on the rebellious mullahs. He remained in hiding for a time and then fled Tehran.

Chapter Twenty-Five
The Alliance: A Star in the Darkness

During the years when the Jews of Iran were declining under the scourge of persecution, Jews in Europe were making remarkable advances after the great French Revolution, the sundering of the chains of tyranny and later, under Napoleon, who ultimately obliged the Pope to crown him Emperor. Great men rose from among them, leaders whose credo was the protection of Jews throughout the world. The outgrowth of the efforts of leading European Jews was the establishment of respected international organizations which provided valuable services to Jews worldwide.

The establishment of the Alliance israélite universelle (Universal Israelite Alliance), formed in Paris in 1860 under the aegis of Adolphe Crémieux, a French member of parliament, is a separate story.

In 1840, a European preacher by the name of Thomas disappeared in Damascus. The enemies of the Jews spread rumors that the Jews had killed him to use his blood in religious ceremonies. The French consul fanned the flames of the fire ignited by this rumor. Seven Jewish leaders were seized and tortured, and several died as a result. The campaign against the Jews of Syria spread. While this was going on, Sir Moses Montefiore of England, along with Adolphe Crémieux, set up a representative council and headed for Egypt to meet the khedive Muhammad 'Ali, of whose realm Syria was a province. They convinced the khedive that such allegations were completely unfounded. As these accusations had also spread to Ottoman Turkey, prominent Jewish representatives headed for Istanbul, and after meeting with Sultan 'Abd al-Majid on 6 November 1840, they obtained from him a proclamation exonerating Jews on Ottoman soil of the accusation of killing non-Jews for their religious ceremonies.

From that date and for two decades forward, the idea of forming an organization for international Jewish solidarity drew strength, and in 1860, with the help of several Jewish journalists, attorneys,

professors, and businessmen, the Alliance israélite universelle was created with the following general goals:

1. To struggle for worldwide Jewish emancipation and the elevation of their intellectual level.
2. To aid those persecuted for being Jewish.
3. To support any kind of publication which furthered this cause.

The Alliance's constitution and proclamation were translated into several languages and sent to many countries. The importance of the Alliance's establishment and the impact of its undertakings on the Jews of the East and Northern Africa cannot be understated. This organization, and, to a lesser extent, the Anglo-Jewish Association (established in London under Montefiore's auspices), provided valuable services to Jews worldwide. Similar foundations were established in Vienna in 1873 and in Berlin in 1901, but none were as pivotal as the Alliance. The Alliance worked to secure relief and freedom for Jews in Serbia and Romania and in 1877 sent three representatives to the Berlin Congress. By the middle of the 20th century, the Alliance had established a total of 64 schools in Morocco, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Syria, and the number of students enrolled at these schools exceeded 20,000.

The first person to inform the leaders of the Alliance in France of the harrowing situation of the Jews in Iran was Dr. Jakob Eduard Polak (1820–1891), a Jewish physician and writer from Bohemia who served as Nasir al-Din Shah's private doctor from 1852 to 1860 (Fig. 16). Polak studied medicine at Prague and Vienna and was invited by the Iranian government to teach anatomy and surgery at the newly-established Iranian military academy in 1851. During these years, he mastered the Persian language, and upon returning to Vienna in 1860, he was appointed as a professor of Persian while continuing his medical practice at the public hospital. Nasir al-Din Shah, who met with Dr. Polak during his 1872 tour of Europe, describes him in his memoirs as "my good old friend." Polak wrote important treatises about anatomy, surgery, ophthalmology, and

military medicine in Persian, some of which were adopted as textbooks. He also compiled a Persian-Arabic-Latin medical dictionary which was published in 1914. Polak, a devout Jew, used his stature and influence in the Iranian court to support the rights of his coreligionists. It was he who brought the deplorable situation of Iranian Jews to the attention of the European Jewish community and suggested that the Alliance send representatives to Iran to establish schools.[245]

Mullah Rabbi Ishaq, the spiritual leader of Tehran, wrote a letter to the Alliance in France in 1865, before the establishment of the Alliance's schools in Iran:

> Let us, they said, present before you our complaints. You will not suffer that your brethren, your flesh, your blood perish in a frightful misery, victims of incessant persecutions. We are scorned by our enemies, who see us without protection, and who may do with us as they please; there is not a day, not an hour, not a moment that passes that does not lead to a new calamity; our life, our fortune, all that we most cherish is subjected to the most abhorrent outrages, worse than slavery...A Muslim who kills an Israelite is not brought to justice, and if the testimony of a Muslim should prove the crime, the most that could happen is that the murderer would be required to pay a fine... (Leven, 1:165)

Narcisse Leven, the Alliance's secretary, informed the central committee of the deplorable circumstances faced by Iranian Jews:

> We have asked several European governments to protect the Iranian Jews...The British government has directed its ambassador in Tehran to protect the Jews. The Iranian ambassador in Paris has also promised to...inform his government of the Alliance's goals and likewise promised to...seek the government's protection of Iranian Jews in accordance with the following:
>
> 1. The establishment of several schools in Iran by the Alliance's central committee.

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[245] *EJ*, 13:708.

2. The promulgation of a decree by which the Alliance schools and their teachers will come under the direct protection of the Iranian government.
3. The establishment of a state agency to administer Jewish affairs in provinces with more than 3,000 Jews.

> We are hopeful that soon our coreligionists in Iran, like the Jews of Morocco, will find relief and be delivered from their present hardships. (*Bulletin*, 25 May 1865, p. 12)

In February of 1866, a telegraph reached the Alliance from Baghdad stating that the leader of the Jewish community in Hamadan had been shackled and sent to Tehran and might be executed. These circumstances were relayed to the French foreign ministry, and the reply came back that French officials were under strict orders to everywhere uphold the interests of civilization.[246] When the horrifying news about the Jews of Hamadan reached London, Sir Moses Montefiore, despite his advanced age and failing health, determined to travel to Iran to ask the king to emancipate the Jews. But the British foreign ministry advised him that such a trip would be highly dangerous for him.[247]

In the Alliance central committee meeting of 26 February 1866, the situation of Iranian Jewry was discussed, and Adolphe Crémieux reported that a scientific delegation to be sent to Iran by the Italian government was prepared to update the Alliance leadership on the status of Jews in Iran. In the meeting of 29 November 1866, Crémieux reported:

> The status of Iranian Jews causes us sadness and consternation. The Jews are beaten. Their property is looted, and there are sporadic savage rapes. Recently, in Barforush, a girl disappeared and a riot was launched against innocent Jews. Eighteen Jews were killed in the city, and two were burned alive...The status of Jews in Turkey, unlike Iran, is satisfactory. (*Bulletin*, 2nd quarter, p. 4)

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[246]Leven, p. 169.

[247]*EJ*, 13:312.

Before opening schools in Iran, the Alliance israélite universelle spread news of the status of Iranian Jewry throughout the world via its *Bulletin.* Incidents in Iran did not escape the attention of the *Bulletin*'s staff. At the same time, with the publication of each misfortune, the European embassies delivered protests to the Iranian government, and each complaint was taken seriously. After the Bar Forush incident and the forced conversion of Jews to Islam, and in the aftermath of the Alliance's undertakings, the Jews were allowed to return to their ancestral religion. The perpetrators were sentenced and the city of Bar Forush paid restitution to the Jews.[248]

All this notwithstanding, the plight of Jews did not improve much. Persecution was combined with chicanery, and in some instances Jewish homes were expropriated by means of forged documents. The Alliance's directors on several occasions protested the deplorable situation to the Iranian government through the Iranian ambassador in Paris, but despite promises of help, the government could do nothing against the bigotry of the illiterate masses.

The Grand Rabbi of Paris, Lazare Isidor, expressed anxiety about the plight of Iranian Jewry at the meeting of the Alliance's central committee on 16 September 1869 in Paris. A severe drought in 1871 added to their hardships and increased mortality. During this period, the Jews of London and Paris collected donations and sent money to Iran. The Alliance's *Bulletin* for the first half of 1873 states:

> In Iran, the worst kinds of religious violations take place. Iran has a bigoted population and a weak government. Despite all the promises made by the Iranian government to rectify the disorder, it appears that social decline in that country is gradually worsening the Jews' situation. As Nasir al-Din Shah is planning to travel to Paris, London, Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Istanbul, it was decided that in each of these cities, a delegation of Jewish representatives should meet with the shah of Iran. We are hopeful that these meetings will produce very good results for our brethren in Iran. The shah's coming to Paris must be received as a miracle.

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[248] *Bulletin,* 1876, p. 25.

The Alliance israélite will tell him "We beseech you to put an end to the persecution of Jews in Iran...In the name of God, the same God who for the past two thousand and several hundred years has protected the Jews of Iran, we implore your majesty to deliver these people, whose ancestors were protected by Cyrus, from their hardships.

In our written account, we will spell out all circumstances of which the shah might be unaware, and we are convinced that God will help us in this enterprise, and that our coreligionists in Iran will write a new megillah about the relief work of the Alliance in the 19th century, the importance of which will be no less than the life and acts of Esther.

Meeting Between Alliance Leaders and the King

Nasir al-Din Shah arrived in Paris. The Alliance *Bulletin,* in the issue for the first half of 1873, p. 176, states:

On Saturday, 12 July 1873, the members of the Alliance central committee gathered at the appointed time for their meeting with the shah of Iran at the French parliament's hotel, which was the Shah's place of residence. The Iranian foreign minister, Mirza Malkum Khan, introduced the delegation from the central committee to the shah in the reception room. Crémieux began his presentation thus: "Your Majesty! The Alliance israélite universelle, whose representatives are present here, are honored by this reception. Your Majesty! Even the most illiterate Jew knows that the history of the Jews is intertwined with the history of other nations. It was the nation of Iran which emancipated the Jews under the protection of Cyrus the Great and returned them to their homeland." (At this point, Malkum Khan translated Crémieux's remarks into Persian for the shah. The Shah nodded with a smile, and Malkum Khan answered "I will precisely translate all that you say for His Majesty. Continue.").

Crémieux continued: "Your Majesty! Everyone knows that in the Book of the Prophets, of all the kings of the world, Cyrus the Great alone is called 'God's anointed' or savior. On the gates of Jerusalem, after the construction of the Second Temple, there was a picture of a city. That city was Susa, the capital of Iran."

(After translating this passage, Malkum Khan said "His Majesty says that he is deeply moved by this historical reminder."). Crémieux continued thus: "Your Majesty! Forty thousand Jews live under your protection. Permit me to inform you that they consider the name of His Majesty Nasir al-Din Shah synonymous with that of Cyrus the Great, and pray for the well-being of their king."

(His Majesty told Malkum Khan that he was grateful for these things and exceptionally moved by these words).

Crémieux resumed his address: "Nonetheless, disturbing news of the persecution of Jews is coming out of Iran. Every day, untoward incidents befall the Jews."

The shah loudly exclaimed "No! No!"

Crémieux replied "Your Majesty! We were fully expecting the people of the world to hear you say that Your Majesty does not believe these things."

The shah was agitated and addressed his minister "These accusations are false. I protect all my subjects. I show religions other than Islam greater esteem. The Jews, as my subjects, are esteemed. Everything they have told you is a lie. I repeat once more, it is a lie."

Crémieux, himself moved, replied "Your Majesty! Your words have penetrated to the depth of my heart. Yes, Your Majesty is the protector of forty thousand Jews and millions of Muslims and followers of other religions. It gives us and the Jews of Iran great pleasure that Your Majesty openly avows your support of the Jewish community of Iran."

At this point, the shah gestured toward his grand vizier, Mirza Husayn Khan Mushir al-Dawlah Sepahsalar and said in French "This grand vizier is so supportive of the Jews that Muslims are suspicious of him." (The grand vizier smiled and bowed).

The shah asked about the number of Jews living in Europe, and Albert Cohen, a member of the central committee, informed him of their numbers. Crémieux asked "Might Your Majesty grant me a request?"

The shah consented and Crémieux said "The Alliance israélite would like your Jewish subjects to be better aware of their responsibilities to their country and to their king. Therefore, it is necessary that they should go to school from childhood and benefit from

science and culture. We propose to open schools in several Iranian cities, as we have done in some Eastern cities, and to pay for their administration at our own expense. Does this proposal meet with royal approval?"

The shah replied in French "Yes. I will support your schools. Monsieur Crémieux, make arrangements with the grand vizier and I will sign."

Upon their departure, the shah addressed in Persian the Alliance central committee and the rabbis who were present, attired in official garb: "I am happy to have met you. You must be reassured regarding the situation of your coreligionists in Iran. Certainly, they themselves will write to you that they no longer have any complaints."

Malkum Khan translated these words, and the shah said to Crémieux in French "Pursue the matter of establishing schools with my grand vizier."

The following day, the minutes of this meeting were redacted and signed by the participants, including the grand vizier, who had received the shah's approval. The printed agreement was distributed to the Alliance's committees worldwide. On the 14th of July, the Alliance presented this letter to Sepahsalar:

4 [*sic*] July 1873

Your Excellency the grand vizier Mirza Husayn Khan Sepahsalar,

The leadership of the Alliance israélite universelle respectfully makes reference to the request submitted today by the central committee.

1. Your excellency will make the royal interest in supporting the establishment of schools known to the Iranian people.
2. The Alliance's first school will be established at Tehran.
3. In order to confirm the Iranian government's support for the establishment of these schools, grounds for the schools and Persian instructors will be put at the disposal of the Alliance.
4. In accordance with His Majesty's decree, four Jewish youths, aged 12 to 15 will be invited to Paris. These individuals will receive instruction necessary for the administration of the Alliance school at Tehran. Their expenses will be paid by the Alliance's central committee. Likewise, the Alliance will pay the entire cost of establishing the school. As new schools are

established in the provinces, the Alliance undertakes to pay all their expenses.

Respectfully,

Adolphe Crémieux
President of the central committee of the
Alliance israélite universelle

The Iranian grand vizier, Mirza Husayn Khan Sepahsalar, in reply to Crémieux's letter, wrote:

Paris. 18 July 1873

M. Adolphe Crémieux
President, Alliance israélite universelle

I wholeheartedly accept your proposal. The imperial government and His Majesty impatiently await the establishment of the organization's schools in Iran, and are convinced that these schools will help the progress of Iranian Jews. An appropriate location for the establishment of the school in Tehran and a Persian teacher, preferably Jewish, will be placed at your disposal.

Mr. President, I hope that, in light of the Iranian government's authorization, that you are convinced of His Majesty's feelings and concern for Iranian Jewry, even as you personally heard from His Majesty...Likewise, in accordance with your request, four Jews suitable to become teachers will soon be sent to Paris, that shining center of civilization.

Mr. President, it is my hope that you will convey the above-mentioned points along with my deep regards to your distinguished colleagues.

Husayn [Khan Sepahsalar]

Jewish committees were formed in each European city that Nasir al-Din Shah visited to seek the improvement of the status and living conditions of Iranian Jews. These committees succeeded in presenting their requests for the protection of the rights of Iranian Jews to the king and his entourage. Even in cities such as Rome, which was

not on the king's itinerary, the Jewish community sent a detailed letter to the king asking that he guarantee the liberty of Iranian Jews and put an end to their persecution.

In London, Nasir al-Din Shah had a private meeting with Sir Moses Montefiore at Buckingham Palace and listened to his request for the amelioration of the plight of his coreligionists in Iran. But the highlight of all these activities was the unforgettable discussion between the king and Crémieux on 12 July 1873. The king, influenced by the solidarity of the European Jews, everywhere promised that he would protect the Iranian Jews, that he and his grand vizier would see to this matter, and most importantly, that he would help the Alliance to set up schools in Iran.[249]

The Anglo-Jewish Association, in order to strengthen the spirits of the afflicted Iranian Jews, decided to publish a book containing all the official correspondence that had been presented to Nasir al-Din Shah by the Jews of Europe, and to distribute it among the Iranian Jewish community. As only a handful of Iranian Jews knew French or English, the book was published in 1874 in Hebrew under the title *Mishloh manut* (מישלוח מנות).

Addressing Iranian Jews, *Mishloh manut* states:

> Brethren, today we bring you glad tidings! In all the countries of the West, the leaders of the Alliance have met with your king, Nasir al-Din Shah, and asked that he and his government grant you protection, and now we present you a translation of all these historic documents.

Then, after mentioning the details of each undertaking and presenting the texts of memoranda and letters exchanged, the following words were added:

> You see that the response to each request is favorable and encouraging. Therefore, may you also be hopeful and courageous... Forget misery, distress, and lamentation... Know that God is your guide, and that the straight and even path will be opened before you...

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[249] *EJ*, 13:313.

> Brethren, it is incumbent upon you that you apply the treasure chest of knowledge that is the Torah and endeavor to reform your community.[250]

In 1874, the French foreign ministry instructed its ambassador in Tehran to give his full support to the Alliance israélite universelle's efforts. But despite all the efforts of European Jews and the promises made by the king and his government, they were unable to eliminate the widespread predations against the Jews because the central government had years earlier abandoned the field to the Muslim "religious scholars."

In 1875, the Muslims of Hamadan rioted against the Jews and dragged a Jew named Yehuda Baba Samah before the *mujtahid* Haji Mirza Hadi, accusing him of heresy. The pious *mujtahid,* rather than quieting the mob, ordered that the man be executed, and incited the people against the city's Jewish population. They knifed Yehuda to death in the *mujtahid*'s presence and dragged his corpse to the Jewish cemetery, where they poured oil on it and burned it. The plunder and massacre of the Jews of Hamadan continued for several days. The moment the Alliance in France became aware of this news, it dispatched a complaint to the Iranian grand vizier, and he sent the following reply by telegraph:

> M. Crémieux. Paris. Justice has been enforced. It was a regrettable and unexpected occurrence. Depend upon my personal attention. Husayn [Khan Sepahsalar]

The vizier then reprimanded Prince 'Azud al-Dawlah, the governor of Hamadan, and asked him to arrest and imprison the guilty parties before the arrival of a special representative from Tehran. The king's representative, Mr. 'Abd al-Rahim, arrived in Hamadan with a written order signed by "Husayn." Section three of this order instructed 'Azud al-Dawlah:

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[250]These words were an attempt to revive the faltering spirit and moral weakness engendered by hardship in the Jewish community of Iran, as a result of which the foundations of faith had been weakened.

> Community leaders will be informed that in the future, should any actions be taken against the Jews at their or the *akhunds'* instigation, they will be severely punished. (Leven, pp. 263–4)

The official and open defense of the rights of Iranian Jews was without precedent in the several foregoing centuries. But the *mujtahids* were too strong to be deterred by orders from the central government, or even by the king's decrees. In Shiraz, a Muslim who murdered a Jewish widow's two children was set free upon payment of a fine of 24 *tomans*. Many Jews from Shiraz, Isfahan, Yazd, Damavand, and Hamadan moved to Tehran. The Iranian royal court, in keeping with its promise, endeavored to protect the Jews from the mullahs. Haji Mirza Hadi, the *mujtahid* who sentenced a Jew to death and immolation, was ordered to pay a fine.[251] Mirza Husayn Khan, who had defended the rights of Jews even before his meeting with the Alliance's officials, worked even harder on their behalf, and whenever the masses rioted against the Jews, he came to their defense.

The Jewish question brought about both overt and covert clashes between the government and the mullahs. For example, in 1876, the government hired several Jews to work at the Rasht mint. But in 1877, on the orders of Sayyid 'Ali Akbar, the Jews of Rasht were forced to wear a particular kind of long cap, and if they wore any other, it would be removed from their heads and ripped up. Mostly on account of this unbalanced state of affairs, but also because of the reluctance of Jewish parents to send their children to Alliance schools, the establishment of the schools was delayed. The first youth who went to France to study was Khodadad, the son of Hakim Elyahu.[252]

On 10 February 1880, Adolphe Crémieux died at the age of 84. Seven years had passed since his historic meeting with Nasir al-Din Shah, and the Alliance school at Tehran had yet to be built. Another

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[251]Leven, p. 264.

[252]Bulletin. 2nd bi-annual issue of 1875, p. 22.

reason for the delay was the deplorable situation of Jews in Romania and Russia, which preoccupied the Alliance and other European Jewish organizations. During this period, complaints filed by Jews with the royal court were adjudicated. Sometimes, the king issued written or verbal orders, but because of the pervasive influence of the clerics, these orders remained unenforced. One of these complaints, which was also pursued by the Anglo-Jewish Association, led to the promulgation of the following decree by the king of Iran:

In the name of His Imperial Majesty

> At His Majesty's command, all present and future judges of the kingdom are informed that a complaint has been filed by a group of Jews concerning converts to Islam who, as relatives, claim sole title to the estates of their deceased kinsmen, as a result of which, Jewish families are systematically harassed.
>
> It is His Imperial Majesty's resolute intention that the various nations under his protection should live in peace. Therefore, when a Jew dies, a convert to Islam does not have the right to oppress the Jews and expropriate their property on the pretext of being the sole heir. It is imperative that you make every effort to prevent designs against the Jewish nation, and to take responsibility for the enforcement of this decree.
>
> Jumada II 1297[253]

This edict is quoted from page 38 of *Activités de l'Alliance israélite universelle en Iran (1880–1890)*[254] by Albert Confino. In 1884, the Jews of Iran, still eagerly awaiting the opening of schools, sent petitions to France. After the British ambassador's actions on behalf of the Anglo-Jewish Association, Zill al-Sultan, the son of Nasir al-Din Shah, issued an order to the governors of the provinces to enforce the equality of Jewish rights.

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[253]TN: 11 May to 8 June 1880.

[254]TN: I was unable to obtain a copy of this report. The title here is translated directly from the Persian to French, and may not be precise.

Fifteen years after the king's trip to Paris, the Alliance's school in Tehran had yet to be built. In 1889, Nasir al-Din Shah again traveled to Europe with Mirza 'Ali Asghar Khan Amin al-Sultan. On 4 July 1889, another delegation of English Jews, led by Albert Sassoon, met with the Iranian king at Buckingham Palace. The members of this delegation included Lord Rothschild, Sir G. Goldsmid, and Sebag Montefiore. In this meeting, the main topic of discussion was the establishment of Jewish schools in Iran.

Upon the king's return to Iran, the matter of establishing the Alliance school was once again pursued, but other developments proved disruptive. On the one hand there was drought and plague, and on the other hand there was the matter of Mullah 'Abdallah in Hamadan, followed by the assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah. After the king of Iran was killed in 1896, the Alliance in France and the Anglo-Jewish Association sent a letter to Muzaffar al-Din Shah expressing their condolences and congratulating him on his coronation. In this letter they also made reference to the late king's promises and asked the new king to help improve the situation of Jews.

On the 10th of November of the same year, the Jews of Sanandaj sent a letter to the Alliance in which they wrote:

> Our city has 400 Jewish families. All are poor, and we do not have the means to open a school. We are held in great scorn. Our situation has worsened after the king's death...We received your address from Eretz Israel. Have mercy upon us, and establish a school here and help us escape our ignorance. We have no hope but you. Our reliance is upon God. It is hoped that you will honor us with a reply.

This letter, which the Alliance in Paris, promising all assistance, did not leave unanswered, is evidence that even before the Alliance school at Tehran was founded, the Alliance was considered the only hope for education in the provinces.

During the reign of Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1896–1907), as a result of the constitutionalist movement and societal changes favoring freedom, religious minorities made significant progress. Iranian Jews

were important participants in this movement. In the first session of parliament, which was convened in 1906, they were thanked for their endeavors on behalf of constitutionalism. To some extent, the constitutionalist movement put an end to the legislative dichotomy between Islamic law and the central government, or the struggle between *fatwa* [religious edict] and *farman* [imperial decree]. Although this peaceful movement soon came to an end with the bloody Constitutionalist Revolution, the year 1898 is considered a turning point by Jews because at that time, after years of struggle, the Alliance school was finally established, and a star began shining in the gloomy sky of Jewish life in Iran.

In April 1898, the Alliance dispatched a skilled representative by the name of Joseph Cazès to Tehran and addressed the following letter to the Iranian ambassador in Paris, Mr. Nazar Agha:

Paris. 18 January 1898

Your Excellency the Ambassador,

We take great pride in announcing the opening of a school for Jewish children in Tehran...His Majesty's equity and justice lend us hope that government officials will provide the requisite assistance in this charitable undertaking. We are confident that by educating the Jews, we are providing a service to Iran...We have chosen to direct the school one of our experienced administrators, M. Joseph Cazès, who is now the director of the Alliance school at Beirut, but who will travel to Iran in April. It is requested that you personally make the necessary arrangements for him with the imperial government.

In July 1898, M. Cazès arrived in Tehran (Fig. 17 & 18). The excitement this generated among Iranian Jews, especially those living in the capital, was unprecedented in Jewish-Iranian history. They considered him a sort of messiah come from a far-off land to rescue them. The elders in Tehran wrote the Alliance in Paris that God had given the Alliance the duty of delivering the Jews of Iran from the maelstrom of misery.

The Jews of Tehran now saw a coreligionist who was well dressed and groomed and whom even passing street performers addressed as *saheb.*[255] After arriving in Tehran, Joseph Cazès contacted Jewish community leaders. The seven-man council of elders was strengthened and grew to thirteen members. A youth organization was formed and was made responsible for sanitation in the ghetto.

M. Cazès's arrival coincided with the uproar over Sayyid Rayhanallah's "Jewish patch." Cazès knew that it would not be easy to get this *fatwa* rescinded, so he went to Sayyid Rayhanallah and asked that instead of wearing a big, ugly patch of red cloth, that the Jews be allowed to wear a metallic insignia on their chests. The sayyid agreed. With the help of Jewish jewelers and metallurgists, he produced a quantity of brass and silver badges bearing the Alliance's emblem of two clasped hands. The emblems, symbolizing worldwide solidarity amongst Jews, were distributed among the Jews of Tehran. Wearing the emblem of the Alliance calmed their hearts. The red cloth patches were gradually forgotten, and a short time later, Sayyid Rayhanallah died.

Opening of the Alliance School at Tehran

The opening of the Alliance school in the heart of the Iranian capital with the help of European brethren, after so much misery and affliction, was one of the most radiant signs of the survival of Judaism in Iranian society. After the establishment of this school, the Alliance opened schools in Hamadan in 1900, in Isfahan in 1901, in Shiraz and Sanandaj in 1903, and in Kermanshah in 1904. Because Iranian Jews were caught between the Christian missionaries and the Baha'is, the establishment of the Alliance schools played an important role in the survival of Judaism in Iran.[256]

The establishment of the Alliance school in Tehran in the midst of the Sayyid Rayhanallah crisis kindled a spark of hope in the

[255] TN: A term of respect, literally, "master."

[256] *EJ*, 13:315.

hearts of Jews and opened the eyes of Iranian Muslims. Things immediately began to change. Joseph Cazès rented a house and founded the Alliance school, serving as director for a short time. Students were admitted free of charge, and some were even served free lunches. Textbooks and supplies were sent from Paris to Tehran. Mullah Ya'qub ben Levi was appointed to teach Hebrew, followed by Hakham Haim Mureh. Persian was taught by several Muslim instructors.

Hakham Haim Mureh (Fig. 19) was born in Tehran in 1872. His father was Haji Mordecai ben Elyahu Shirazi, and his mother was Rahel Yadegar Isfahani. In his youth, this prominent spiritual leader's father went to the Holy Land with his father, Elyahu. The son returned to Iran and the father, Elyahu—the grandfather of Hakham Mureh—died in Aleppo.

Haim Mureh was afflicted with measles when he was two years old and lost sight in both eyes. His father died when he was seven, and his maternal grandfather became his guardian. His mother encouraged him to go to school, but his instructors gave up any hope of being able to educate him. His grandmother, Bibi, took the young Haim to Mullah El'azar and reminded him of her father's role in Mullah El'azar's education. She asked him to spare no effort in instructing the blind child. Under the guidance of Mullah El'azar, Haim Mureh displayed his God-given talents. In short order he memorized the prayers, then the *tehilim,* and then the Torah. He gradually committed other religious books to memory. Hakim Ayyub tested his knowledge of the Torah and Psalms in the presence of Nasir al-Mulk.

Hakham Haim Mureh became a distinguished man of letters as Hebrew instructor at the Alliance school and learned French from M. Cazès. Hakham Mureh's power of memorization was one of the wonders of his day, astounding locals and foreigners alike. He even knew most of the commentaries on the Torah. Over the course of his lifetime, this enlightened scholar published four books, entitled

Derekh haim (The Way of Life), *Gadolat Mordecai* (The Grandeur of Mordecai), *Yaddi Elyahu* (Elijah's Hands), and *Bayanat Mureh* (Speeches by Mureh). Hakham Haim Mureh died in Tehran in 1948.

M. Cazès wrote in a letter to the Alliance central committee in Paris:

[?] November 1898

> On the 30th of October, we celebrated the shah's birthday at the school. Several Muslims took part in the celebration and gave inspirational speeches.
>
> As I had prepared uniforms for the students, the foreign minister asked to see them.[257] [Yesterday] I took several of them to him. Their passage through the streets and alleys caused quite a commotion. The minister congratulated them and told them that if they were successful in their studies, the government would give them jobs in administration. Upon the minister's instructions they were given drinks and awarded a hundred francs each. Last week, the grand vizier summoned me and reaffirmed his support. He said "The Jews are Iranian subjects, and His Majesty observes no difference between his subjects, whatever their religion."

After receiving this report, the Alliance central committee sent a letter of appreciation to the Iranian foreign minister and grand vizier. About the same time, while donations were being collected for the construction of a new Alliance school in Tehran, Muzaffar al-Din Shah wrote in a letter to his foreign minister:

> It is with complete satisfaction that I have learned that, in light of the fact that all schools are closed to the Jews and that several Jews are inclined to teach their poor and orphaned children, that they have decided to collect donations and open a school so that there, in accordance with the Mosaic faith, they may pray for me and my country.
>
> I consider the Jews my loyal subjects. By means of this school, they seek to instruct a number of my subjects, which I consider

[257]At that time, Jewish affairs were handled by the Iranian foreign ministry.

> beneficial for the country. For this reason, I have instructed Nizam al-Saltanah to contribute 200 *tomans* to this foundation.

From the reports which Joseph Cazès filed with the central committee, which were published in the Alliance's *Bulletin,* it can be determined that when it first opened, the Alliance school at Tehran had six teachers of Hebrew and Persian, and the floor space rented by the school was not very large. In the beginning, there were about 300 students, and Hebrew and Torah were taught by rote in several synagogues as well as in the Alliance school. The youth committee organized by M. Cazès encouraged Jews in the ghetto to send their children to school. In the second year, the number of students rose to 421, of whom 304 studied for free while the other 117 paid the school a monthly stipend in accordance with their ability to pay. Because of a shortage of classrooms in the rented building, classes for children aged 6 to 8 were taught in two of the ghetto synagogues. Beginning in November, 1898, sixty poor children were fed lunch every day. Not only were young boys and girls inspired to learn, but adults, too, were invited to study at evening adult literacy classes. One hundred fifty persons registered for the school's first adult session.

In 1898, the Alliance girls' school opened in Tehran, and Madame Abib and her husband were appointed to run it. In its first year, the school had 40 students. A year later, Monsieur and Madame Bassan came from Paris to run the newly-established school in Hamadan. In its first year (1900), the total number of students at the Alliance school in Hamadan was 561, of whom 215 were girls (Fig. 20). The "Jewish patch" worn by the Jews of Hamadan was abolished in that year.

After Joseph Cazès, Nissim Lévy was appointed director of the Alliance school in Tehran. In 1901, M. Bassan traveled to Sanandaj from Hamadan and met with Shaykh Shukrallah—a stubborn enemy of the Jews—to try to curb his persecution of them. In his report to the Alliance central committee dated 19 August 1901 he wrote:

> Although I had not announced my arrival at Sanandaj, the Jews of the city came out to greet me both mounted and on foot. They said that it is impossible that they should allow me to leave before I establish a school for them. The city has three thousand Jews.

In the same year, M. Confino arrived in Isfahan from Paris to open the Alliance school there. The Alliance's *Bulletin*, no. 26 (1901) reports:

> ...When Confino entered Kashan en route to Isfahan, 600 Jews went out to greet him, many of whom wept for joy. They sacrificed lambs in front of him. On the day he arrived at Isfahan, the people received him as some great savior rather than a mere schoolmaster. They said: "Now we can die in peace."

The Alliance school in Shiraz was opened by M. Schouker in 1903.[258]

[258] TN: See pp. 68–80 of the Alliance *Bulletin* for 1904 for an account.

PART ELEVEN

Constitutionalist Revolution and the Pahlavi Dynasty (1907–1979 C.E.)

Chapter Twenty-Six
Iran Between Two Revolutions

Muzaffar al-Din Shah's decree establishing constitutionalism on 15 August 1906 and the convening of the Dar al-Shura [Assembly] was not the end, but rather the beginning of the Constitutionalist Revolution and the Iranian people's struggle for freedom. For a time, things went well and everything seemed calm. Upon the opening of the Assembly, a one-hundred-ten-gun salute was fired at Tupkhaneh [Artillery] Square. The capital was illuminated, and people celebrated throughout Iran. National delegates were appointed based on their social classes or trades. According to the election regulations, Iranian society was divided into six classes:

1. The royal family
2. Religious scholars and students
3. The nobles
4. Merchants
5. Landlords
6. Peasants
7. Artisans

The makeup of the Assembly, which for the first time saw rice-cookers and greengrocers sitting next to artisans and royalty, completely changed the Iranian social structure. According to the law, the religious minorities (with the exception of the Baha'is) each elected a delegate to the Assembly. Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i and Sayyid 'Abdallah Behbehani—two great religious leaders and ardent supporters of constitutionalism—were active in the Assembly. During this period, when most of the representatives were simple, pure-hearted people, important measures were adopted, the most important of which were opposition to the acceptance of new foreign loans, the establishment of a national bank to provide relief from foreign financial restrictions, and the drafting of a constitution.

Around the same time, Czarist Russia was facing internal opposition to tyranny and on Bloody Sunday, 1905, had seen the beginnings of the Bolshevik Revolution. Although it had concluded the ignominious Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 with its rival, Britain, one year after the Iranian monarch's Constitutionalist Proclamation, Russia did not support the Iranian liberal movement. Fearing that the growth of democracy in Iran would cause Russia to lose its sphere of influence in the region and that Russian revolutionaries would be emboldened by events in the neighboring country, Russia nurtured antipathy toward the Iranian liberals. Fortune was on the side of Russia in this matter, and Muhammad 'Ali Mirza Qajar—a duplicitous and mendacious man—acceded to the throne. He swore by the Quran before the representatives of the nation that he would remain faithful to constitutionalism, but he secretly harbored other designs. Muhammad 'Ali Shah was a Russian stooge. His Russian tutor, Shapshal, had instructed him since his youth. The Cossack Brigade, the only organized military unit in Iran, was commanded by a Russian officer, Liakhoff.

Muhammad 'Ali Shah, who reigned from 1907 to 1909, conspired with Iran's enemies from the very outset of his reign. Before long, the Islamic clerics were sharply divided, with some of them opposing constitutionalism (*mashruteh*) and speaking of "[Islamic] legitimacy" (*mashru'eh*). The most prominent of these was Shaykh Fazlallah Nuri. A rift also grew among the people. At the same time, some Qajar governors in the provinces began abusing clerics, fanning the flames of discord.

On 14 June 1908, Muhammad 'Ali Shah, on the pretext of the hot weather, went with great pomp and fanfare to Bagh-e Shah [King's Gardens], outside the western gate of Tehran. A group of ruffians and hooligans began chanting anti-constitutionalist slogans in the city squares, abused the public, and even killed one person in public. Several days later, on 23 June, while the Assembly representatives were in deliberations, the Cossacks under Liakhoff's command bombarded the National Assembly with artillery fire. The Nationalists

resisted for several hours, but the conspirators were ultimately successful. Several Assembly delegates were killed, some were captured, while others fled for their lives. In addition to the delegates, a number of other militant liberals were seized and brought to Bagh-e Shah. The detainees were yoked and chained. Pro-constitutionalist clerics were exiled. Some of those arrested, including Mirza Jahangir Khan Sur Esrafil and Malik al-Mutakallimin, were put to death, while the rest were thrown in jail. Martial law kept the people quiet.

The chapter of the "Constitutionalist Proclamation" was closed and the impassioned book of the "Iranian Constitutionalist Revolution" was opened. The courageous liberal, Sattar Khan, mounted a rebellion in the Amir Khiz district of Tabriz. At first, the government discounted his rebellion, but as time passed, his supporters grew in number, and Baqir Khan joined him. Internal clashes continued for nearly a year until finally, the Armenian Yeprem Khan and Muhammad Vali Khan Sepahdar in Rasht and Sardar As'ad Bakhtiari in Isfahan rose against the tyrannical government in armed rebellion. Tehran was liberated, and Muhammad 'Ali Shah fled to the Russian embassy. Iran's revolution for liberty had ended in victory. On 15 July 1909, the imperious shah was deposed, and his twelve-year-old son, Ahmad, was chosen to succeed him. Since Ahmad was a young child, 'Azud al-Mulk, the aged patriarch of the Qajar clan, was chosen as regent. Ahmad Shah held the throne for the Qajar dynasty for sixteen years, from 1909 to 1925.

The Russian government, which strongly supported the deposed Muhammad 'Ali Shah and was concerned for his safety, obligated Iran to send him into exile in Russia and to pay him a large annual pension. Before the National Consultative Assembly reconvened, Shaykh Fazlallah Nuri, the standard-bearer of the "[Islamic] Legitimacy Revolt," was hanged in Tupkhaneh Square. The execution of a cleric in a land where, a generation earlier all power had been in the hands of the clerics (who had been infiltrated by pseudo-clerics), propelled the revolution to its zenith and introduced the faces of

new leaders to the Iranian people. No doubt not everyone supported this action.

In 1911, the newly convened Assembly appointed a council led by the energetic and serious-minded American, Morgan Shuster, to reform the nation's financial affairs and designated the Swedish Colonel Hjalmarson to reorganize the gendarmerie. The sagacious Shuster, a Jew, did not want to allow even the exiled shah's brother, Shu'a' al-Saltanah, to be exempt from paying taxes. Shuster rendered valuable services to the Iranian nation, but aroused the ire of Iran's age-old enemy, Russia.

During the First World War (1914–1918), while the sapling of liberty had yet to firmly take root on Iranian soil, international chaos shook the foundations of Iran's new nationalist order. This time, dissension arose within the Assembly. One faction supported the Germans, the other the British. Two parties, the radical Democratic Party (*Hezb-e demokrat*) and the middle-of-the-road Moderate Party (*Hezb-e e'tedal*), were formed. The press followed a similar path. Behind these divisions were a dire drought and fiscal bankruptcy brought on mainly by massive loans taken out from Russia and Britain to finance the Qajar kings' trips to Europe. The Russians continued to make trouble. They demanded the ouster of Morgan Shuster, whose reforms were backed by the Nationalists, and forced Iran to re-install the Belgian Naus, who was hand-chosen by the Russians and whose earlier policies had been responsible for nationalist uprisings in Iran. The Assembly did not readily agree. Russia delivered an ultimatum. Iran was brought to its knees and bowed before these demands, but the Russians acted dishonorably. They attacked Azerbaijan, hanged the liberal leadership, and caused wanton destruction in Mashhad.

In 1915, in the midst of the First World War, the Russians, who had advanced as far as Isfahan, and the British, who were operating in the South, replaced the Agreement of 1907 with a new treaty concerning their spheres of influence whereby neutral Iran was divided up between North and South. The Russian Cossacks in the

North and Britain's Persian Rifles in the South considered "independent Iran" their private property. With the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the new Russian government repudiated the treaty of 1915, and Iran came completely under British influence. The Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, signed by the Iranian prime minister, "placed all military, fiscal, and customs-related affairs under the exclusive control of British advisors."[259]

The First World War toppled Ottoman Turkey, the only powerful Islamic country of the times, brought new pressures to bear on other Islamic countries, and strengthened the hands of foreigners who coveted the Middle Eastern countries' natural resources. The Assembly protested against the treaty of 1919 and sought the expulsion of British financial and military advisors.

> Fortunately, the newly-established League of Nations did not officially recognize the treaty, which went against its principles. In Iran, a group of liberals objected to it, and objections were lodged with the British in America and France, as well...This onerous agreement went by the wayside. (Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 864)

During this period, an Iranian officer in the Cossack Brigade by the name of Reza Khan entered the arena of Iranian politics. In 1921, with the help of the sensationalist journalist, Sayyid Ziya' al-Din Tabataba'i, he staged a successful coup and seized command of the Iranian armed forces. His remarkable successes as minister of war and prime minister from 1921 to 1925 gained him the army's loyalty and the people's confidence. In 1925, a constitutional convention deposed Ahmad Shah, the last of the Qajars, and granted the throne to Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Reza Shah, who ruled Iran from 1925 to 1941, for a total of sixteen years (the same length as the reign of Ahmad Shah), was one of the rarities of destiny. This monarch, though he displayed no animosity toward constitutionalism and neither besieged nor dissolved the Assembly, succeeded, with the help of the power base he built up

[259]Iqbal, *Tarikh-e Iran,* p. 864.

around himself, in bringing Iranian politics under his personal control. Even the most erudite and distinguished politicians of the day subordinated themselves to his command. In the ongoing struggle between the military and the clergy—the foundations of which had been laid in Safavid times, with one side or the other at times holding the upper hand—Reza Shah, an efficient military man, succeeded in driving even the most senior clerics from government administration and did not permit them to meddle in state affairs. In practical terms, he separated religion from politics. He carried this separation so far that during his reign, the review by a five-man clerical council of legislation passed by the Assembly, as provided for by the constitution, was disregarded. The removal of the Islamic clergy from politics was very much in the interests of Iran's religious minorities. The atmosphere which Reza Shah brought about—intentionally or unintentionally—led them, along with the rest of the people, to view him as a national savior.

During Reza Shah's reign, after the influence of the clergy had been curbed, new governmental foundations were laid. Wide-ranging reforms were made in the administration of justice and education. Women came out from behind the veil, and revisions benefiting them were made to the divorce law. Flagrantly unscrupulous intervention by foreigners was put to an end. With the renewal of the 1901 concession held by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1933, revisions favoring Iran were made. Granted, this revised concession later highlighted Iran's exploitation by colonial powers with the help of their local stooges. In 1938, the north and south of Iran were connected by rail, which was important for the delivery of military supplies to the Soviet Union during the Second World War. During this period, important changes came about in virtually every aspect of Iran's social, political, economic, and cultural affairs, the importance of which cannot be ignored, despite the criticism of detractors.

Toward the end of his reign, which coincided with the Second World War (1939–1945), Reza Shah was drawn toward Nazi Germany.

Like some other Germanophiles, he was spellbound by Germany's lightning-fast victories. Furthermore, he feared that a Soviet victory would block the export of goods to Europe and bring communism to Iran—a fear which, as history proved, was not unfounded. His infatuation with the Germans grew daily. He invited Hitler's finance minister, Dr. Schacht, to Iran to organize the country's banking and monetary affairs. Iran was invaded by a flood of technicians and advisors from Nazi Germany. Anti-Semitic devices on the ceiling of the Tehran train station are a small, but telling reminder of the undisputable influence of the Germans during the war. German advisors working for Radio Tehran turned the station into a loudspeaker for Nazi propaganda. Reza Shah had no doubt that the Germans would defeat the Soviet Union and therefore sought to establish friendly relations with Nazi Germany.

Given their political histories in Iran and their status as allies against Germany, the Soviet Union and Britain could not long tolerate Iran's unrestrained closeness to and friendship with the Germans. The Allies needed to provide aid to the Soviet army, which was fighting the Nazis, and to get this aid to them, there was no better route than through Iran. Therefore, in 1941 the Soviet Union and Britain warned Reza Shah that he was to rescind the concessions he had granted the Germans and—while maintaining Iranian independence—allow the Allies to use the trans-Iranian railroad and other north-south roads. Reza Shah did not agree. They attacked Iran, and in September 1941 exiled Reza Shah to Johannesburg and accepted his young son, the crown prince Mohammad Reza Shah, as king.

Mohammad Reza Shah was crowned in the midst of a world war and was king of Iran a total of 38 years, from 1941 to 1979. During his reign, Iran went through turbulent times. After the war, Soviet agents had seized Azerbaijan, and there was nothing to stop a new "Treaty of Turkomanchay"[260] from being imposed on Iran. But in

[260] TN: See p. 370.

1946, the communist regime was driven out of Azerbaijan. In 1951, the Assembly ratified a law proposed by Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh nationalizing the oil industry, and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's dealings were put to an end. Iran faced difficult political and financial crises for about two years, and finally, in 1953, after a coup d'état engineered by the Americans, Dr. Mossadegh was driven from office.

In 1961, Mohammad Reza Shah assumed unilateral powers. In May of that year, he dissolved the 20th Assembly and paved the way for the land reform act implemented in 1962. Landholders were required to make their land available to the government for redistribution to peasants. Among these lands were those held by religious endowments. This law laid the foundations of opposition to the king by religious fundamentalists and pitted Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini against Mohammad Reza Shah. The conflict between "cleric" and "soldier" again took shape. Ayatollah Khomeini was arrested and exiled, and all of the reforms of the "Revolution of the King and the People" or "White Revolution" (by which was meant a bloodless revolution) continued. Profit sharing by factory workers was another stage of the revolution. In villages, cooperatives replaced the former great landlords as providers of the means of production. Education was freed from the control of the clergy, and an anti-illiteracy campaign began.

In the referendum of 26 February 1963, the people endorsed the White Revolution. With the completion of the last stages of land reform in 1971, two-and-a-half million families—a total of twelve million rural inhabitants—had benefited, and a new social class of petty landholders was formed. Per capita income rose from U.S. $176 in 1960 to U.S. $2,500 in 1978. Revenue from the sale of oil made possible extraordinary growth in capital investment in economic projects. Iran's net income rose from U.S. $68 million during the first five-year plan (1949–1954) to U.S. $68,000 million (or U.S. $68 billion) during the fifth five-year plan (1973–1978). More clearly stated: a thousand-fold increase in less than thirty years!

From 1961 forward, structural reforms and development projects proceeded on the basis of national independence. The fundamental principles of Iran's foreign policy were support for United Nations resolutions and peaceful coexistence. Iran endeavored to establish mutually beneficial cordial relations with all nations. Against this background, its ties with some nations, including America, were closer. Iran played a key role in the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), an alliance between Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan. Cultural relations with many countries flourished. In 1973, with the end of the 20-year-old consortium accord, the National Iranian Oil Company's relationship with foreign oil companies became that of seller and buyer, and the nationalization of the oil industry became complete. Income from oil and Iran's economic advancement came so rapidly that in some areas it was impossible to maintain an equilibrium.

Instability in world financial markets, an imbalance in the West's oil consumption, and increasing prices on the world commodities market dangerously slowed the Iranian economy, which had been growing rapidly since 1954. The unforeseen costs of construction projects upset the economic equilibrium. Demographic distribution took a new turn with the migration of many from rural to urban areas, especially Tehran and other big cities. Domestically, inflation provided opponents of the government with a new weapon. The arrest of prominent businessmen and the imposition of stiff fines against producers shattered economic confidence.[261]

Against this background, religious sectarians—who since 1961, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, had amassed power by spreading their message from atop the minarets or by distributing underground pamphlets and tape recordings—entered the scene. In 1978, widespread demonstrations against the government began. Many were killed, and in many cities martial law was declared. The religious groups gradually grew stronger and the armed forces grew

[261] *EB*, 21:896–97.

weaker. Solidarity with America and Israel were construed as Iran's greatest sin, and Western influence was viewed as the greatest enemy of Shi'i Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini unified the government's opponents as their mouthpiece. Having been exiled to Iraq in 1964, he travelled to France and in 1978 demanded that the king be deposed.

On 16 January 1979, Mohammad Reza Shah left Iran and shortly thereafter, with the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran, the Islamic Republican Revolution achieved success.

Chapter Twenty-Seven
On Freedom's Threshold

If the Iranian Constitutionalist Revolution bestowed the blessings of political freedom and participation in the legislative process to all the people of Iran—at least on paper and for a limited time—it brought Iranian Jews a more precious gift: it broke the invisible chains which had bound them hand and foot, denying them the right to life. The Jewish individual's right to life—and hence to coexistence with the followers of Iran's official religion—was recognized. It is obvious that this recognition could not come overnight on the national level and that it would take time. But when the Iranian constitution called upon the Jewish community, as one of the "subject nations," to send a representative to the Assembly, this in and of itself was a tremendous revolution within that small community. It is true that only those who followed Twelver Shi'i Islam[262] could find work in the constabulary or in some of the government ministries, but those freedoms that were granted had previously been unimaginable against the background of what had transpired over the past few generations. It goes without saying that this was only the beginning: the minds of hooligans and pseudo-mullahs were not to be changed a bit by the mere jotting down of a law on paper.

No longer could any bully, cutthroat, or delinquent prey upon the weak. No longer did any illiterate mullah have the power to incite a riot to provide for himself and his family. No longer were the rights of the weak—including the Jews—so easily trampled upon in an atmosphere of coercion, extortion, and lawlessness. The revolution had enlightened—albeit incompletely—the Muslim masses, and those who had yesterday been unable to distinguish between authentic religious leaders and pretenders in religious garb now—however slowly and gradually—differentiated between true leaders and false guardians.

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[262] TN: the predominant sect in Iran, which recognizes twelve Imams.

The Jews, like their Muslim compatriots, lived in a world of ignorance and benightedness. With the kindling of the spark of the revolution, they realized that a group of great religious scholars and first rate clerics who studied religious problems supported Jewish rights and were trying to establish constitutionalism to secure freedom for all Iranians. One of these clerics was Sayyid Jamal al-Din Va'iz, the father of the celebrated Iranian author Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali Jamalzadeh. One Saturday, during the days of the revolution, he went to the Hadash Synagogue in Tehran's Jewish ghetto, and in his historic address on constitutionalism, he informed the Jews of the rights they were to gain. This militant cleric was assassinated after the bombardment of the Assembly by Muhammad 'Ali Shah's stooges. Not only the Jewish community, but all the religious minorities of Iran were awaiting the fruits of the Constitutionalist Revolution. This revolution, which ended in Jewish enlightenment, forced the Jews to open their eyes and become aware of what was going on in the outside world.

The Iranian Constitutionalist Revolution liberated the Jews from centuries of imprisonment. A new page had been turned, and the religious minorities of Iran found new life. In the words of Mahdi Malikzadeh, whose father, Malik al-Mutakallimin, became a martyr for the cause of freedom:

> Of course, in countries where there is no freedom or rule of law, the religious minorities are subject to oppression and mistreatment by the public...In Iran, too, the Jews, Armenians, Zoroastrians, and adherents of the new religion [Baha'is] were not immune to abuse from the masses, and the governments of the day countenanced their persecution...Thus it was that minority intellectuals, though lacking power and themselves in need of the protection of others, to the extent that they were able criticized the repressive system and struggled to establish constitutionalism and the rule of law. (Malekzadeh, 1:119)

During the revolution, the freedom fighters formed various organizations, and in Tehran, zealous Jewish youths worked with some of

these. Likewise, supporters of [Islamic] "legitimacy" and the enemies of freedom tried to gain Jewish support for their demonstrations. In this endeavor, as in religious conversions, they resorted to threats and coercion. The day that Muhammad 'Ali Shah went to Bagh-e Shah and hooligans destabilized the city with their rabble-rousing, some of them, along with several pseudo-mullahs, went to the Jewish ghetto and asked of Mullah Abraham Agha Baba, the rabbi of Tehran, that the Jews join their demonstrations and proclaim that they did not want constitutionalism.

Mullah Abraham, knowing that he could not easily refuse the request made by these scoundrels (who had the backing of Muhammad 'Ali Shah), gave a favorable reply, but asked for twenty-four hours to prepare the Jews for the demonstrations. He then secretly sent two Jewish youths to the Assembly to receive instructions from the liberal representatives. Knowing that their refusal would result in an anti-Semitic riot, the Assembly representatives instructed the Jews to do what the "supporters of legitimacy" wanted. The next day, several Jewish elders and men, marching behind Mullah Abraham, joined the roughnecks—who sought to garner the support of all faiths—in the streets. The Jews shouted, "We are the people of Moses! We don't want constitutionalism!" After this scene, a humorous journal published a caricature in which a man with a club was standing over them saying, "Say: 'We don't want constitutionalism! We want bombs and blows to the head! We don't want constitutionalism!'"

The Alliance *Bulletin* writes of these times:

> The present tumult in Iran between the supporters of [Muhammad 'Ali] Shah and the constitutionalists has had an undesirable effect on the status of our coreligionists, and tribal warfare has caused an economic crisis in the country. Radical elements of the two sides have exploited this situation and incited the people against the Jews. (*Bulletin,* no. 33 [1908])

But this same journal writes of the Jews a year later, after the deposition of Muhammad 'Ali Shah and the revival of constitutionalism:

> The Israelites are beginning to regain hope. The revolution seems to be directed foremost against the rule of absolutism, against the fanaticism of preachers, and, consequently, against all their oppressions. And, in effect, the new regime seems bound, should it succeed in taking root in Persia, to be favorable to them. The Bakhtiaris themselves pass for being tolerant, and one of the leaders of the nationalist party, Samsam al-Saltanah, has, at various stages, demonstrated great generosity toward the Israelites. He has, from the beginning, placed them under his protection at Isfahan. Also, the Jews of this city enthusiastically take part in the public ceremonies organized on the occasion of the succession of the new sovereign. The leaders of the nationalist party pay visits to the Israelites, and there is one of them, Agha Nurallah, who condescends, despite his being a preacher, to sit at the table of a Jew. It has been learned, about the same time, that an Israelite has been elected to the municipal council of Isfahan. Samsam al-Saltanah has been named governor of the city. It has become a catchphrase that all confessional differences must disappear...
>
> The Persian Israelites, surprised to see themselves promoted to the status of full citizens overnight, are anxious to fulfil their electoral duties and intend to designate the candidate of their choice. Parliament convenes on the 15th of November. (*Bulletin*, no. 34 [1909], pp. 71–72)

Franco, director of the Alliance school at Kermanshah, also reported during this period that since Nizam al-Saltanah had become governor of the city, the status of Jews had improved and there was no more bloodshed or robbery in the city. But the report from Shiraz of 11 August 1909 paints a different picture. According to this report, this city, as in the past, was plagued by disorder. Hoodlums took advantage of the situation, and their first target was the Jewish ghetto. The attackers broke into homes with pistols and knives demanding money, wine, and liquor. The director of the Alliance school went to Haji 'Ali Agha (the leader of the constitutionalists) and the Friday prayer leader, seeking support. Both of them promised to help, and the Shiraz chief of police sent twenty officers to protect the Jewish ghetto.

All of these short reports, despite their contrasts, are testimony to the fact that the Constitutionalist Revolution brought Jews to the threshold of freedom. No longer did the government and its agents play a direct role in the persecution of Jews, nor did the government indirectly give their enemies the opportunity to act with impunity. Rather, it was the relics of bygone times, for whom the Dark Ages had not yet ended, who persecuted them. Violent attacks which sometimes ended in bloodshed and plunder did not prevent the Jews from joining forces with the liberals. For centuries, Iranian Jews had been counting the days waiting for freedom, and now that freedom was at hand, the Jews could not sit idly by. They were eager to help achieve the victory, despite the innate cautiousness which the vicissitudes of fortune had imbued in them. With this goal in mind, several Jewish youths joined the revolutionaries to fight the enemies of freedom. Here we mention two such youths for whose exploits in the liberation of Tehran we have documentation. These two joined the freedom fighters advancing on the capital from Gilan and Isfahan.

One was Davud Parforush, who made a living as a tailor. Davud, who was an unparalleled orator, quickly became immensely popular with the freedom fighters. It is said that his speeches were so engaging and motivational that audiences became frenzied. For this reason, he gained the admiration of Sepahsalar Tonokaboni. Davud's talks redoubled the courage of the freedom fighters, and for this reason, this Jewish youth's service to the cause of freedom is commendable. Davud Parforush died of tuberculosis at the age of 25.

Another Jewish youth, 'Aziz Asher Rebbi Rehamim, was 17 or 18 years old when—with a rifle strapped to his back and a bandoleer of cartridges around his chest—he took to the trenches of the struggle for freedom (Fig. 21). He was from Tehran and was full of zeal. His lofty nature could not abide the accusations of others that the Jews were cowardly and without honor. He knew that these patches had been affixed by successive anti-Semitic campaigns to the chests of those of his and his forefathers' generations. In his youth, 'Aziz

Asher traveled to Russia, where he met with armed Jews fighting to achieve their aspirations. Upon his return to Iran, he linked up with the revolutionary forces in Rasht. As he was coming from Russia, and the Russian government was the sworn enemy of the Constitutionalist movement, they detained him, suspecting him of being a Russian agent. But when the true situation became clear and the freedom fighters realized that they were dealing with a brave young man eager to fight for the cause of freedom, he was given a weapon and joined the ranks of the revolutionaries. 'Aziz Asher was among those fighters who had the honor of liberating Tehran. After the victory of constitutionalism, he became a photographer in Tehran, and moved to Israel in his old age.

The Constitutionalist Revolution and Jewish Emancipation

The liberation of Tehran and the deposition of Muhammad 'Ali Shah by the freedom fighters caused exhilaration across all classes of society and unleashed a wave of exuberance in Tehran. Various organizations celebrated in front of the Assembly. The Jews of Tehran also participated in this celebration, for which victory arches were erected, and congratulated the leaders of the freedom fighters. The Jews sensed that the moment of their emancipation had arrived. Young Jews, who up to that time had had to fear attacks were they to appear in the street in fine clothing, henceforward had nothing to fear from being well-groomed in public. Sanitation in the Jewish ghetto became a top priority, and the Jewish youth association organized earlier by Joseph Cazès took the initiative in cleaning up Sarechal. The youth association, with the help of the municipality and local street-sweepers, removed the mounds of refuse from Sarechal, swept the alleyways, and put up street lamps at Sarechal and other intersections.

Had mistreatment and suspicion of Jews been entirely eliminated in Iran, one could say that the revolution had miraculously changed the lives of this religious minority. Alas, like a chronic illness, the

old way of thinking about Jews still dominated among many Muslims, especially in the provinces. Despite the persistence of this way of thinking, however, revolutionary strides were made in the status of Iranian Jewry.

One of the most valuable of these strides was the freedom to work. Although the law reserved some government jobs for Shi'is, one can hardly expect that an itinerant Jewish salesman should have suddenly aspired to become a judge or office manager in one of the government ministries. Young men were able to enter new lines of work. Some entered trades such as tailoring and typesetting. Those who knew French became translators and teachers. The presence of Belgian, Swedish, and American advisors in charge of customs, the gendarmerie, and finance attracted many young Jews who knew foreign languages to those government agencies. Jews who up to that time had been traders and peddlers now held positions—however low-ranking—in the state apparatus. In those times of rapid change, becoming a government employee, especially one working with Europeans, was prestigious. Gradually, the mental image of Jews changed, even for the Jews themselves.

Solayman Kohan Sedegh, a prominent servant of the Jewish community during this period, went to work as treasurer of the gendarmerie. The attraction of young Jews to positions in government administration increased their desire for an education. After the Alliance school, the Dar al-Fonun (Polytechnic School) in Tehran, which fulfilled the role of a university in those days, was the second most popular educational institution among Jewish youths.

Iranian Muslims who wanted to learn French hired Jewish boys and girls as home tutors. The presence of a Jew—a person who not long before was considered "unclean"—in a Muslim's home was a tremendous step toward the establishment of civil relations between the Jewish minority and the rest of the Iranian population. Some Jewish youths opened shops on Lalehzar Street, which in those days had a prestige akin to that of Paris' Champs Élysées. Some who had the financial wherewithal even travelled to Europe to establish foreign

trade relations. Youths who wanted to further their educations traveled to France to study subjects such as dentistry after receiving their high school diplomas in Iran. Some young Jews went to work in hospitals, including the American hospital in Tehran, or in pharmacies, to learn the medical and pharmaceutical professions.

It is remarkable that the Jews' relative freedom, rather than creating heightened interest in the study of the religious texts, resulted in lessened religious interest. This notwithstanding, the religious movement was effective in shoring up Judaism, at least as regards the preservation of tradition and the recitation of prayers. The practice of forced conversion of Jews to Islam and proselytization of Jews by the followers of other religions gradually declined.

One perceptible point is that the Jews of Iran, whether they believed in or had misgivings about the effects of the Constitutionalist Revolution, were faced with new social conditions. They were advancing on the road to freedom that they might ultimately achieve true liberty, and this period was not without its particular struggles and hardships.

The election of the first Jewish representative to the first session of the National Consultative Assembly was an exercise which inspired fear and anxiety as well as hope and joy in the hearts of Jewish Iranians. What sort of person could this representative be, who was to be seated next to other representatives of the Iranian nation and demonstrate the ability of Jews and Muslims to coexist in Iran? A Jewish rabbi? A learned Jew? Or a Jewish peddler? How was it to be decided? What meaning did the nomination of a candidate, voting, an electoral commission, vote counting, and the like have for Jews, who had no experience with democracy, or at least had never had the opportunity to learn by observing the election of other Assembly representatives? Of course, they proceeded inexpertly.

'Azizallah Simani was eventually elected as the Jewish delegate to the first session of the Assembly. His election was one of the worst decisions made by the Jewish community during this period of political change, and it laid a weak foundation for the future. While

the Zoroastrian representative, Arbab Jamshid, confidently took his seat in the Assembly, Simani immediately resigned because most of the Assembly representatives looked upon Jews with aversion. The Jewish community then nominated Sayyid 'Abdallah Behbehani, the great Muslim cleric and champion of constitutionalism (Fig. 22), to defend the rights of Jews. Perhaps 'Azizallah Simani foresaw that the Assembly would come under artillery fire even before the end of the first session!

The Constitutionalist movement at last removed the invisible wall between the isolated Jewish community and the Iranian people. Rather than having an exilarch serve as the link between the Jewish minority and the Iranian government, the Jewish representative was permitted to join the other representatives. However infeasible this was during the first session, the structure of the Assembly in later sessions had an undeniable effect on society as a whole. The last exilarch, or *resh galuta,* was Mullah Abraham ben Mullah Agha Baba, who died in the summer of 1910, and whose funeral and burial were conducted with great ceremony. Mullah Abraham was born in Shiraz. He was short, with a handsome face and piercing blue eyes. He was a student of Mullah Bakhaj and Mullah Rabbi Ishaq. His father was financially well off and was one of the philanthropists of his day. Mullah Abraham Agha Baba kept his door open to visiting religious scholars and helped the poor, serving as a community leader for thirty years from 1880 to 1910. After the death of Mullah Bakhaj (1883?), Mullah Abraham officially became both religious leader and exilarch of the Jewish community.

Mullah Abraham completed his religious studies at Baghdad and was one of a handful of religious leaders in Iran who were completely versed in the Talmud. The governor of Tehran, Mukhtar al-Saltanah, and the governmental ministers respected his rulings concerning the Jews. He resolved disputes between Iranian Jews and was in fact the Jewish community's supreme legislator and administrator of justice. Seldom did members of the Jewish community take their disputes before the state rather than to him for arbitration. During

his time, religious laws were observed and the community elders followed his lead. After the death of Mullah Abraham Agha Baba, the position of *resh galuta* ceased to exist in Iran because, with the election of a Jewish representative to the National Consultative Assembly and the reorganization of the Iranian government, it was felt that there was no longer a need for such a position.

The establishment of a new gendarmerie under Swedish supervision greatly enhanced the financial and personal security of Iranian Jews. The gendarmerie stymied those who had made a living by looting and plundering and freed the Jews—long the target of their attacks—from their depredations. In 1914, when Sardar Zafar was governor of Isfahan, two Jews named Yona and Shem'un were killed in Najafabad and their property stolen. In consequence of this, Sardar Zafar ordered that the village should be raided and the killers arrested. A fine of several thousand *tomans* was exacted, and both murderers died after spending several years in prison. Although such "justice" cannot be endorsed (because the innocent inhabitants of the village should not have been held responsible for the crime of the killers), the punishment of those who did not respect the Jews' right to life was good news for the Iranian Jewish community, and freedom's call reached them from afar.

With the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, foreign considerations played a more important role in Iran, and as a result of the poor economic situation, contributions from Iranian Jews to the Alliance decreased. But even in these times of crisis, the Alliance in Paris continued its generous support and kept its schools in Iran open to Jewish children.

It was during this same period that the progressive movement and the pursuit of knowledge by Tehrani Jews saw another great change, opening a new chapter in Jewish-Iranian literary history: the publication of the newspaper *Shalom,* under the management of Mordecai Murad, in 1915. Undoubtedly, the publication of this newspaper several years after the Constitutionalist Revolution paved

the way for future social progress. The title alone, which is a Hebrew word, may considered a turning point in the history of Iranian journalism.

The tearing down of the old wall between Jews and Muslims gradually introduced the Jews to a wider society. Jewish shopkeepers, government employees, university students, and even those who cautiously moved out of the ghetto to other parts of the city all dealt with Muslims. For Iranian Jews, who had lived in complete isolation for centuries, this contact brought about a new world with its own idiosyncrasies. Religion was no longer as powerful as before, especially for the younger generation. The loss of senior clerical figures after the death of Mullah Abraham Agha Baba, the last exilarch, was another blow to the foundations of religion.

Semi-literate mullahs who could read Hebrew became the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community. The Jewish community of Tehran was intoxicated with its relative freedom. Having suffered in the past because of their religious devotion, they were not now concerned about teaching Jewish history and the Hebrew language and literature to their children. This blow to the body of Judaism in Iran was repeated with every good deed done by the new regime. Influence in Muslim Iranian society was the main aspiration of many Jews. They wanted to take advantage of their freedom to escape the material poverty which plagued them and get out of the cesspool of their "ghetto." It was toward this end that they strove. The Jews of Tehran did not need Jewish history and Hebrew to get from Sarechal to the Hasanabad district. They wanted greater financial opportunity. Although many organizations and societies were being formed, none were created to teach the living truths of the religion.

Because of the bad conditions of the past, the Jews failed to elect a diligent and effective representative to the Assembly. In a time when a new despotism had yet to come about and the atmosphere of freedom could be taken advantage of, the individual who went to the Assembly as their representative was a complacent conservative. For this reason, too, no services were rendered that might have

raised the level of religious consciousness among Jewish youths and familiarized them with the Jewish world. This representative, who had gone to the Assembly to secure equal rights and freedom, would not even personally intervene in problems facing his constituents in Tehran, the seat of the National Consultative Assembly, but would refer them to the police or the courts. Take, for example, the complaint of the families of Agha Baba Nuri and Mordecai Isfahani. These two Jewish peddlers, who dealt in second-hand clothing, were invited into a house in Tehran on the pretext of selling some old clothing. Instead, their money was stolen, they were strangled, and their bodies were dumped in a well.

It seems that the achievement of true equal rights and freedom would take longer than anyone imagined, including the Jews. It also seems that apart from the illiterate masses, some of the men in the Assembly were lacking in their comprehension of the meaning of democracy, freedom, and representing the people. When there was talk of constitutionalism—especially in the days when the Constitutionalist Revolution was being fiercely fought out between the constitutionalists and the totalitarians—the light of hope transfixed the gaze of Iranian Jews. They had no doubt that in the constitutionalist era, not only would they, like other Iranians, be accorded freedom and equal rights, but also that there would be a change in their standard of living and that by escaping the clutches of poverty, they would be able to earn a decent living for themselves and for their families.

Chapter Twenty-Eight
Persistence of Anti-Semitism

The liberation movement, for all of its shining successes, did not suddenly erase the toxic impurity of anti-Semitism from the minds of the people; this would have been impossible. The diabolical sheikhs had so poisoned the masses against the Jews in years past that it was impossible that the thoughts of the simpleminded could be cleansed of these impurities in a short period of time. Despite all the anti-Semitic acts committed during this important period of Iranian history—that is, the period between two revolutions—the more the level of anti-Semitism waned, the more productive the Jewish community became and the more assiduous and indefatigable it became in its service to the Iranian nation and people.

From the outset of the revolution, the enemies of constitutionalism portrayed the liberation movement to the masses as a Baha'i and Jewish plot and agitated against it. In 1905, when there were whisperings of the opening of a supreme court and assembly, there were anti-Jewish provocations in Tehran and other cities. In Golpayegan, the matter of the *jadidis*' inheritance claims was revived and a number of Jews were forced to convert. In 1906, the year that the Constitutionalist Proclamation was issued, the French poet and author Pierre Loti (1870–1925), who was in Shiraz at the time, wrote:

> When I return home, passing by the little Jewish marketplace in my neighborhood, all the shops are closed, and the merchants are seated in front of the doors with some Mosaic book in hand: it is the day of the Sabbath; I gave it no more thought. Here, the people of Israel are recognized by an obligatory tonsure, which goes from the back of the neck to the top of the head. (p. 52)
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> The Jewish women, who do not have the right to wear the white veils of the Muslims, but who nonetheless must not show their faces, draw their black veils tighter when I pass by; they will remain complete strangers to me... (p. 57)

The director of the Alliance school writes of events in Shiraz during the same period:

> The situation of Jews in Shiraz is alarming. The *akhunds* object to the Jews' coiffured hair and clean clothes. An *akhund* who met a well-dressed Jewish youth in the street, thinking that he was from a noble family, greeted him. But it later became known that the youth was a simple Jew. They spread a rumor in the city that the Jews tore up the Quran in the Alliance school and stirred up the people on the basis of this pretext. The governor, who has reviewed the school's curriculum himself, knows the falsity of this allegation, and has reported the truth to the people. Nonetheless, the Jews are still persecuted. On the eve of Shabuoth,[263] Mullah Agha Mirza Ibrahim posted a notice on doors stating that instead of a cap, the Jews must wear the red Ottoman fez. On behalf of Mullah Ibrahim, an *akhund* approached me saying that the caps must be replaced. He sought an argument. My composure calmed him, but the matter is not yet over, and the Jews fear to leave the ghetto. On the 16th of November this year [1905], three hundred people attacked the Shiraz ghetto, and the authorities were unable to stop them. Ja'far Qoli Khan, the commander of the Cossacks, swore while holding the Quran that if the attackers failed to disperse he would give the command to open fire. The people failed to disperse. Shots were fired, and three persons were killed and a number wounded, among whom are several Jews. The school was closed for ten days. (*Bulletin*, no. 30 [1905], p. 78)

In 1905, Confino wrote from Isfahan regarding the Jews of Golpayegan:

> Twelve Jews from Golpayegan approached me and informed me that the *akhunds* were persecuting them. They were afraid to bring their complaint against the religious leaders to the governor. They were also afraid to send a telegraph to Tehran. Six months ago, they converted a Jewish woman to Islam, and now they want them to give her uncle's estate to her. (Confino, p. 33)

Confino sent a petition to the foreign minister, Mushir al-Dawlah, reminding him of the king's proclamation on the matter of inheritance.

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[263] TN: If the year referred to here is indeed 1905, then the date in question corresponds to Thursday, 8 June 1905.

At the dawn of liberty, the rights of Iranian Jews were still subject to violation. But these violations—an old and festering wound—did not prevent them from supporting the Constitutionalist movement. Not only did they nurture the hope that the liberals would achieve their goal, but also they themselves, to the extent possible, played a role—however small—in the struggle. When in its first session the Assembly, in order to establish a national bank, asked the nation to participate in the purchase of shares, a number of Jews responded positively to this call despite their lack of financial means.[264]

Léon Loria reported in 1907 that the nation was still in chaos, that Jews lacked adequate protections, that powerful mullahs persecuted them in the name of religion, that they blamed the Jews for things with which they had no connection whatsoever, and that the insecurity of the streets made life dangerous for Jewish peddlers.[265]

Regarding Kashan, the same issue of the *Bulletin* reports that the city had 2,000 Jews. Jewish merchants had the right to open shops in the bazaar but were waiting for increased security. Most worked in sericulture and carpet-weaving. There were also ten tailors, four rabbis, four butchers, three distillers, three cobblers, three masons, one goldsmith, four physicians, three musicians, and one pharmacist. In Kashan, men, women, and children all worked to earn their bread. Three hundred girls were employed as silkworkers. The most skilful of them made 10 *shahis* (¼ franc)[266] a day and saved them for their trousseaus.[267]

In his report on Tehran, Monsieur Loria wrote that the number of students at the Alliance school in Tehran was growing daily. The Protestant missionary school was facing bankruptcy, and nothing stood in the way of its being closed down. Cazès' arrival in 1898 had

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[264]Leven, 1:384.

[265]*Bulletin*, no. 32 [1907], p. 66.

[266]TN: About U.S. $.05.

[267]p. 76–79.

made the Jews in the ghetto aware of the missionaries' true intentions.[268]

The Alliance *Bulletin*'s report on Hamadan dated 13 October 1908 mentions that an *akhund* by the name of Haji Shaykh Baqir[269] issued a *fatwa* that graves in the Jewish cemetery should be exhumed, the bones discarded, and a new building erected on the cemetery grounds. The governor of the city blocked the shaykh's barbarous act. The shaykh, knowing that the Jews had complained to the governor, summoned the leaders of the Jewish community and bastinadoed them. The Jews then sought protection from another *akhund* who was Haji Baqir's rival. The malicious Haji Baqir incited the people against the Jews, and the governor, Muzaffar al-Mulk, yielded to his machinations.

In his report of 3 March 1909, the director of the Alliance school in Shiraz wrote that Shaykh Zakarayya had stirred up a riot in Darab. Acting on orders from the central government, Qavam al-Mulk exiled Shaykh Zakarayya from Darab and hanged two of his followers. But as soon as Qavam al-Mulk left the area, Shaykh Zakarayya returned to Darab and exacted vengeance against the Jews. On his orders, a band of extremists entered the synagogue, tore up the Torah, looted the ghetto, set houses on fire, and forced the homeless people to apostatize. At the time of this attack, many of the Jews of Darab were away from town, and when they learned of it they fled to Jahrom and Nowbavegan.

The Alliance *Bulletin*'s report from Kermanshah dated 31 March 1909 states that a Jewish convert to Islam, or *jadidi,* had employed a Muslim who subsequently died of heart failure. Anti-Semites in the city spread a rumor that the *jadidi* had killed the Muslim to use his blood in the Passover bread. A riot erupted, and the Jewish ghetto was looted and houses destroyed. Twelve hundred Jews were cast

[268] *Bulletin,* no. 32 [1907], p. 82–83.

[269] Haji Shaykh Baqir is the same *akhund* who issued the *fatwa* by which he personally cut off a man's head with a sword.

into the streets, and the property damage reached 500,000 *tomans*. Some Muslims delivered bread to the homeless Jews, and upon learning of the incident, the Alliance immediately sent a contribution of 6,000 francs.

On 21 May 1910, a group of Muslims in Shiraz picked a quarrel with and killed a Jewish schoolteacher by the name of Masha'allah Nisani. The killer was a young *akhund.* Nisani had attempted to stop two Jews from being beaten.[270] The director of the Alliance school in Shiraz, Monsieur Nataf, wrote during this period:

> It seems we are living in the darkest of times. During the 60 days of the months of Muharram and Safar, which is a period of mourning, the peoples' doors are open to the *akhunds*. The situation this year is unusual. Sayyid Muhammad, who is against constitutionalism, whose intrigues caused Siham al-Dawlah to fall from power, and whose departure leaves the city in the hands of the *akhunds*, took advantage of the mourning period to incite the people against constitutionalism.[271] Fifteen days ago, a group of roughnecks came to me and said that because they wanted to put on a big ceremony for the 7th of Safar [18 February 1910], the Jews must provide them with a thousand shawls. They said that if we did not agree to their demands they would pillage and burn the ghetto. My objections were futile. When they left, I informed the Jewish leaders of what had transpired. They all went into mourning. They swore that the entire ghetto could not produce more than a hundred shawls and that a thousand shawls would cost about six thousand *tomans*, which they could by no means pay. When the roughnecks realized that their demands could not be met, they became suspicious of me, thinking that I had thwarted their plan. Then they surrounded the girls' school, saying that since runoff water flowed from the school into the Muslim quarter, the water was unclean, and the school must be moved. They told me "You are not a European; you are a Jew." I assuaged them with promises...Finally, the matter was resolved by giving them

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[270] *Bulletin,* no. 35 [1910], p. 179.

[271] And this was four years after the proclamation of constitutionalism!

120 shawls, 70 of which were from the ghetto and 50 of which were borrowed. (Bulletin, 35 [1910]).

Monsieur Nataf also wrote:

> What happened in the Jewish quarter resembles a terrible military battle. In the space of several hours, 6,000 Jews lost their belongings. Twelve persons were killed, and fifteen were injured. The people don't have a single dinar with which to buy a glass of milk. I am so upset that I cannot easily describe these events.
>
> The murderer of the schoolteacher has been in jail for three months. His family paid a hundred *tomans* and expect him to be released...During the feast of Sukkot, several persons accompanied a Muslim merchant to the homes of the Jewish rabbis and said that the merchant's four-year-old daughter was missing, and that the Jews must have kidnapped her for her blood. The rabbis swore that they knew nothing of such a child, and that the story about her being kidnapped by the Jews was completely false. But the ruffians threatened that if the girl was not found by the next day, they would destroy the Jewish quarter along with its inhabitants. The next day, a child's body was found about a kilometer from the city, near the Jewish cemetery, and it was rumored that the Jews had killed her.
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> I immediately dispatched two teachers to meet with Qavam al-Mulk, Mirza Ibrahim, and Nasir al-Dawlah and put an end to these baseless rumors. Nasir al-Dawlah sent 300 soldiers to defend the quarter. It has been ascertained that the body was that of a Jewish girl who had died eight days earlier and that her body had been secretly exhumed at night in order to blame the Jews. They brought the body to the public square. They gathered the Muslims around it and incited them to seek vengeance. Qavam al-Mulk ordered his cavalry to support Nasir al-Dawlah's soldiers, but they themselves were the first group to begin looting [!], and in less than six or seven hours, the representatives of the government along with the people, whose eyes and ears had been sealed by the agitation of an ignorant handful of people, plundered the homes in the Jewish quarter and unleashed a bloody riot. The pen is inadequate to describe those atrocities.
>
> The looters even searched the bottoms of cisterns. Not a single one of the 260 houses in the quarter was spared. Muslim soldiers,

ruffians, sayyids, women, and children looted Jewish property. Qashqa'is who had come to the city to sell their livestock joined the looters and broke anything that was too heavy to carry off. Doors and windows were smashed, and they tore apart walls to see if anything was hidden therein.

They were not content with looting and began beating, maiming, and killing. They tore a woman's ears off to get her earrings. They wounded a woman in the neck with a knife in order to get the silver necklace she was wearing. Several Jews sought refuge in the British consulate, the homes of Muslim acquaintances, and even in mosques. But most are scattered in the streets of the quarter, which has a mournful atmosphere. Men and women, young and old sleep in unpaved streets...European doctors attached to the English telegraph office came to the quarter to dress wounds...A number of honorable Muslims are welcoming their afflicted countrymen. Qavam al-Mulk[272] distributed 2,000 kg of bread, a Muslim 1,400 kg, the *mujtahid* Mirza Ibrahim 400 kg, the Friday prayer leader of Shiraz 400 kg, and Nasir al-Dawlah distributed 1,500 kg of bread. Some conscientious and honorable Muslims personally distributed bread, grapes, and money to the Jews. It is very cold at night. The people are without bedding and heating. A committee has been established to help [these war refugees]. Qavam al-Mulk fears the people, and there is no hope from the central government. (*Bulletin*, 35 [1910])

Were it not for the financial and political support of the Alliance in Paris, the embattled Jews of Shiraz would have been completely wiped out. Monsieur Tarragano, the director of the Alliance school in Sanandaj, wrote in May 1910 that a convert to Islam by the name of Faraj demanded five *qerans* from the 28-year-old Davud Boluri. Davud did not pay, and Faraj started shouting that Davud had a relationship with a Muslim woman. The people gathered around. They dragged Davud to a mosque and demanded that he convert to Islam. Davud agreed, but the mullahs did not accept his conversion to Islam and issued a *fatwa* calling for his death. They dragged

[272]The same governor whose soldiers had shamed him by beginning the looting.

Davud to the public square, killed him, and hacked his lifeless body to pieces. Hundreds of Muslims descended upon the murdered man's house to loot it and abuse his relatives. Before the danger spread to other homes, however, government troops arrived on the scene and restored order. Salar Mukram protected Tarragano's house. A rumor then spread in the city that the Jews had killed an *akhund.* In fear, the director of the school sent his family to the home of the tribunal counsellor.

On 20 May 1910, the director of the Alliance school in Hamadan reported that news of the Sanandaj riot had affected the city of Hamadan, too. The *akhunds* were eager to proclaim a jihad against the Jews and sought a pretext. On Sunday, 8 May, the Jewish Ibrahim Murad, who had gone shopping and was returning home with his hands full, brushed against a Muslim woman in a narrow alleyway. He was accused of doing so deliberately. The "incident" was magnified. An uproar ensued, and the accused's life was placed in jeopardy. The preachers of Hamadan delivered fiery sermons against the Jews from atop their pulpits and once again demanded that the Jews wear patches on their clothing. The bazaars and shops closed down. The people set upon the Jews, stabbing thirty and robbing a hundred. They dragged Ibrahim Murad to the public square to be killed. But Agha Taqi, the chief of police, arrived and rescued him from the clutches of the mob and sent him under guard to Tehran on the pretext that he was being sent there for further interrogation and investigation.

Events of this sort, all of which occurred in Iran in 1910—that is, after the victory of the liberals over Muhammad 'Ali Shah and the reopening of the Assembly, the details of which are reported in the Alliance's *Bulletin*—are indicative of the fact that freedom, law and order, and human rights were not yet truly observed in Iran. It is likely that many of the people, duped by anti-Semitic propaganda, did not realize that the reign of tyranny had been replaced by the reign of law. Indeed, the deeply-rooted patterns of oppression in Iranian society, which extended from the king to the lowliest beggar

and were ingrained in the Iranian consciousness, were not something which could be easily or at once removed.

In this context, it can be said that 1910 did not mark the end of Jewish social suffering. The series of ups and downs seemed never-ending. Nonetheless, on the whole, with the passage of each year, the total number of anti-Semitic incidents on Iranian soil declined. In 1912, Haji Danyal's son was murdered in Tuserkan. In 1913, the financial situation of the Jews of Kermanshah was so bad that the Alliance in France collected donations for them.

The Simitqu episode in Azerbaijan and Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi's riot in Tehran, both of which took place in 1922, bespeak the fact that the people's mentality was still bound by the chains of intolerance and that the minds of the illiterate were still enslaved by the unwise. Unsavory events of this sort undermined optimism about freedom and equal rights and kept alive the memory of the bitter riots before the revolution. Sometimes the road from the revolution to true freedom seemed long.

Simitqu's Revolt in Tabriz and Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi's Riot in Tehran

Sixteen years after the Constitutionalist Proclamation, the shameful episode of Simitqu occurred in Azerbaijan, and the Jews, who had lived in that area for nearly twenty-seven centuries, were completely uprooted. Isma'il Agha Shakkak, popularly known as "Simitqu" or "Simitgu,"[273] launched a rebellion in the aftermath of border clashes between Iran and Turkey. He built up a power base in Azerbaijan and shed the blood of Shi'is, Assyrians, Kurds, Turks, Jews, and Armenians in the region.

[273]Simitqu, who in 1917 raided and plundered the inhabitants of Azerbaijan, revolted again in 1926. In the same year, Sepahbod Amir Ahmadi was ordered by Reza Shah to suppress the rebellion. Simitqu fled to Turkey, but later returned and once again made trouble. In 1928, he was killed in a plot.

In 1922, Simitqu, effectively in control of Azerbaijan, mistreated the Jews. Every day he sent a Jewish merchant a note demanding 500, 200, or 100 gold liras. If the merchant did not or could not come up with such an excessive bribe, Simitqu would kill him the following day and plunder his shop. With such insecurity, Azerbaijan became a terrifying place for Jews. Faced with mass killings and looting, life for the Jewish community was transformed into a dreadful nightmare. The Jews were gradually forced to flee a country to which—as history bears witness—they had immigrated even before the fall of the First Temple. The Jews of every city and village, having recently buried the bloodied corpses of their family members, gathered up their meager belongings and headed elsewhere. Between 1922 and 1923, 500 Jewish families from Reza'iyeh, 200 from Salmas, 60 from Naqdeh, 20 from Oshnoviyeh, 30 from Mahabad, 300 from Sardasht, 40 from Baneh, 30 from Saqez, 40 from Bukan, 40 from Sa'en Qal'eh, 40 from Miyandoab, and 40 from Tikab left for other places. Extended families of not only father, mother, and children, but other relatives as well, sold their household goods for a pittance in order to purchase provisions for the journey. Samovars were offered for sale at thirty *shahi*s apiece, and furniture worth a hundred *toman*s was sold for ten.

The other shameful episode, which came to be known as the "insult to the Agha's burro," happened as follows: On Wednesday, the 4th of September 1922, a riot against the Jews suddenly broke out in Tehran. The cause of this riot clearly demonstrates that the people's level of thinking had not made any appreciable progress, that the mullahs were still themselves manipulated by foreign hands, and that the innocent illiterates were still the puppets of the mullahs. In the afternoon, when Agha Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi's servant was riding the Agha's burro back to the Agha's house, he passed by the Alliance school. At that moment, a column of students was exiting the school door. To prevent a collision between the Agha's burro and the children, the school's custodian stood in front of the burro until the children had passed. The Agha's servant related these details

to his master, and Agha Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi declared a general strike in the city and determined what was to be done with the Jews.

In a period of less than two hours, the city was shut down and the merchants closed their shops. The people gathered in the mosques—especially the mosques surrounding the Jewish ghetto—and decided to attack, kill, and loot. Ruffians and hoodlums attacked Jews they encountered in the streets and alleyways. The Jews of the Tehran ghetto sought refuge in their homes. The riot continued into the following day. On Friday, some groups carrying banners, flags, sticks and clubs like mourners on Tasu'a and 'Ashura descended upon the Jewish quarter.[274] Tens of thousands of armed rioters surrounded the Jewish ghetto in the capital, and a number of hooligans headed for other Jewish-inhabited streets in the city. The danger of bloodshed and looting was imminent. The ominous days of Agha Muhammad and Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar were revisited. The day before, the American embassy's Muslim clerk, being mistaken for a Jew, had been severely beaten in Sarchashmeh. On Friday morning, with the smell of death and blood in the air, the American ambassador, a devout Jew, asked for help from the minister of war, Reza Khan, reminding him of the international consequences of this incident.

The American ambassador, Joseph Saul Kornfeld (1876–1943), was a prominent rabbi and diplomat whose family had immigrated to America from Austria when he was a child (Fig. 24). In 1899, after completing his studies in divinity, he became a rabbi. For years he served as a rabbi in synagogues in Arkansas, Montreal, and Ohio. His interest in politics led him to join the campaign of presidential candidate Warren G. Harding, and in 1921, Harding appointed Kornfeld ambassador to Iran. Kornfeld, who held the position in Tehran

[274]The author, who at the time was the only Jewish military officer in Iran (Fig. 23), while in uniform asked a number of passersby, "What started this?" He was told, "The Jews killed two of the sayyid's children!"

until 1925, rendered the Jews of Iran considerable services, and by consulting with Iranian officials succeeded in nipping several anti-Semitic plots in the bud.[275]

Following Kornfeld's meeting with Reza Khan, the minister of war immediately dispatched the cavalry to the ghetto and other tumultuous districts to restore order, and the flames of upheaval subsided. After the riot's end, Assembly representative Solayman Mirza said in his historic speech at the parliamentary tribunal:

> ...Section Eight of the Iranian Constitution declares that all the people of Iran are equal before the law. According to Section Nine, the lives, property, homes, and dignity of individuals are protected and are inviolable and cannot be abridged except as stipulated by the law of the land...We must prove to the world that the free and constitutional nation of Iran protects all of its people. Our deputies must not be deceived by foreign cabals. The Muslims must maintain their authenticity.

The Prime Minister, Qavam al-Saltanah, gave reassurances that necessary measures had been taken to maintain order, that those responsible for instigating the riot would be punished, and that "gentlemen" could return to their jobs. In his closing remarks to the Assembly, he expressed regret over this incident.

But in the summer of 1922, with the incidents at the Masjid-e Jami' mosque in Tehran and the public water fountain on Agha Shaykh Hadi Street, which led to the killing of the American consul, no doubt remained that diabolical foreign hands were still playing an important role in the affairs of the common people of Iran. This incident, following on the heels of Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi's riot, clearly demonstrated that foreign agents started a riot against the Jews in order to portray Iran to America as an uncivilized and unreliable country, to stop American investment in Iran, to make American oil companies abandon concessions in the north, and to arouse the ire of the American ambassador—who was originally a Jewish rab-

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[275] *EJ*, 10:1208.

bi—and thus indirectly cause him to send negative reports about Iran back to America.

After the fountain incident, the issue of the northern oil concession was abandoned, and in the newspaper *Ha Haim,* Mr. Haim attributed this incident to the British. Before his move to Jerusalem, Solayman Kohan Sedegh held an evening reception at his home honoring Ambassador Kornfeld in appreciation of the American ambassador's prompt and decisive action to save the Jews of Tehran, and especially for his humanitarian services during the riot over Agha Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi's burro. Kornfeld was praised in speeches, and a beautiful memento was presented to him. This precious gift consisted of two silver tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved in letters of gold. The edges of the tablets were decorated with a gold floral design. This gift, the handiwork of Haji Rehamim Khodadad, the author's father, so moved Kornfeld that his eyes brimmed with tears.

Chapter Twenty-Nine
Gravitation toward the Holy Land

A phenomenon of Jewish world history during the second half of the 19th century was the emigration of Persian-speaking Jews from Iran and neighboring countries to Erez Israel. This movement roughly coincided with the Hibat Siyon (חיבת ציון) [Lovers of Zion] movement, which was more religious in nature. It is highly likely that there was no practical connection between these two movements. Jewish emigrants headed toward Jerusalem from Tehran, Shiraz, Hamadan, Yazd, Isfahan, Kashan, Mashhad, Herat, Kabul, Bokhara, and Samarqand.

It appears that the first Persian-speaking Jews to take up residence in Jerusalem after the fall of the Second Temple were a group of Karaites who emigrated to the Holy City in the middle of the 9th century.[276] In 1839, fourteen Iranian Jews lived in the Israeli city of Safad. It has been said that in 1815, the Pharisees of Jerusalem, in order to complete the minyan, invited an Iranian to join them. The first small Iranian synagogue in Jerusalem was established in 1895 in the Shevet Zedek quarter. By 1908, eight other synagogues had been established by Iranians in Jerusalem. In that same year, eighty students were studying in the Talmud-Torah schools of Jerusalem. The most prosperous of the Iranian Jews who emigrated to Israel in the late 19th century were the Mashhad Jews of the *jadidi* generation.

Beginning in the mid-19th century, pilgrimage to Jerusalem also became popular among the Jews. Those who had the financial means went from Mashhad Sar (present-day Babol Sar) to Baku and Istanbul. They made their way to Jerusalem by ship, and upon returning from their pilgrimage they took the title "Haji" in emulation of the Muslims. The patron of the Haji's Synagogue in Tehran brought back a stone from Jerusalem on which the image of a menorah was engraved, and he erected it in his synagogue in 1854 (*anno Hebraico* 5614).

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[276] TN: See reference to David ben Moses al-Qumisi, p. 179.

The emigration movement to Jerusalem began in the late 18th century. In 1895 (A.H. 5656), mass emigration to Jerusalem began. This was the same period in which the movement popularly known as "Bilu" became active. Haim El'azar Rabbi Hanina was the trail-blazer of that group, and after him, other religious leaders led groups of emigrants. All of these emigrations were linked to historical events in Iran. In general, the greater the persecution of Jews, the greater the urge to emigrate to the Holy Land became. When the aged Mullah El'azar Melamed's group set out for Jerusalem, his son, Haji Aharon, carried him on his shoulders.

Jewish-Iranian emigration to the Holy Land took on a different form in the early 20th century. The year 1917 was historic not only for Iranian Jews, but also for Jews throughout the world. Russia's October Revolution of that year overthrew the czarist government and put a permanent end to one of the Jews' greatest enemies—one which had instigated brutal pogroms and led many other nations in anti-Semitism. In 1916, in the middle of the First World War, the Russians occupied nearly the entirety of western Iran as far as Isfahan. The Ottomans, who had been driven out of Hamadan by Russian forces, took up a defensive posture in Kermanshah.

In 1917, the Ottomans quit Iran after being driven from Baghdad by British forces. At the same time, the revolution in Russia reached a critical juncture. In October 1917, the foundations of the czar's legendary power finally gave way, and the Bolsheviks came to power. The new Russian regime, in contrast with the old regime, granted the Jews new national freedoms. Although in the beginning some of the Bolshevik leaders were Jewish, religion had no place in the communist system of government. However, the liberation of the large Jewish community of that vast land from czarist oppression and inequity gave hope to the Jews of neighboring Iran.

Another event of 1917 that gave the Jews occasion to rejoice was the signing of the Balfour Declaration on the 2nd of November (Fig. 25). According to this declaration, which British foreign minister Lord Arthur James Balfour (1848–1930) wrote to Lord Rothschild,

the British government acceded to the Jewish Zionist Federation's request to establish a national homeland for Jews throughout the world in a land that was then called "Palestine" and which had become a British mandate. Balfour also gave assurances that he would do his utmost to achieve this end.

Because of the revolution in Russia, Britain was in need of fresh backing against its rivals in the war and gained the support of Russian and American Jews with this declaration. Although the declaration was not entirely sincere, the agreement of a great power to accede to the age-old aspirations of a scattered people laid the foundation for the establishment of a new country, the spectacular results of which would be seen later. The Balfour Declaration was no mirage, but rather a sweet water spring which quenched the thirst of a people wandering in the arid desert. Jews throughout the world celebrated and rejoiced. On the 5th of November, the Jews of Iran were informed of the Balfour Declaration by a telegram sent by the Zionists at Petrograd. This telegram was passed on to the religious leader of Tehran by 'Azizallah Tizabgar.

The Jewish religious leader of Tehran, Mullah Elyahu, immediately summoned Jewish elders and gave them the news. Afterwards, meetings were held in the Khaleh, Hadash, and Hakim Asher synagogues. The joy and excitement which the Balfour Declaration engendered among the Jews of Tehran and the provinces is indescribable. The young, who were the most enthusiastic, organized an association to promote the Hebrew language. The importance of this declaration was not apparent to all. Nonetheless, afflicted Jews—who, faced with the demon of persecution, had for centuries clung to the hope of returning to Jerusalem—saw yet another door opened before them following on the heels of the Iranian liberal movement.

On the evening that the Jews gathered in the synagogues of the ghetto to hear news of the "freedom" of their ancestral homeland, they decided that "the Association" should be established. The opportunity was not to be lost. Hearts were pounding for Jerusalem. All needed to prepare for an exodus; all needed to learn Hebrew to

live in the Holy Land. The youths chose thirteen persons from among themselves to establish the Association. Those appointed were, in alphabetical order: (1) Abishur (2) Rabbi Nisan Mullah Agha Baba (3) Davud Aharon (4) Nehurai Barukhiyan (5) Shem'un Elyahu (6) Shemuel Elyahu (7) Solayman Haim (8) Agha Jan Kohanim (9) Solayman Kohan Sedegh (10) Benyamin Masachi (11) Morteza Mu'allim (12) Solayman Naghi and (13) Rabbi Meir Mullah Ya'qub.

This group established the first Jewish organization in Tehran with grand ideals and objectives. Solayman Kohan Sedegh was elected president of the Association, and because its primary goal was to spread the Hebrew language and Jewish studies among the community, they first named the association "'Ebriyat Hamziqat Sefet 'Eber," meaning "Association for the Strengthening of the Hebrew Language." The first meeting of this historic association took place on the 9th of Tebet A.H. 5678 (24 December 1917). The association's charter, drafted by Morteza Mu'allim, was ratified. In the meeting held on the eve of Thursday, the 11th of Shebat (24 January 1918), proposed Hebrew classes were approved, and in the meeting on the eve of Sunday, 22 Tebet (6 January 1918), it was agreed that a notice should be distributed in the Jewish community of Tehran urging people to register for evening Hebrew classes. In the fifth meeting, Habiballah Yud'im took the place of Solayman Haim, who had withdrawn, in the thirteen-man Association. Beginning in the winter of 1918, the Association's meetings were held in the home of 'Aziz Haim Ishaq, later known as Haji 'Aziz Elghanian. In the same year, Solayman Kohan Sedegh's book, *Geramer-e 'ebri* (Hebrew Grammar), was published.

In late 1918, in the cold of winter, the Tehran ghetto was faced with inflation, drought, and pestilence. Roughly a thousand Jews perished. During this period, the second Jewish association—Anjoman-e Nikkhah (The Nikkhah Association)—was established by Solayman Nikkhah to provide relief and community service. This association, with the help of the American Jewish Joint Distri-

bution Committee, distributed food and medicine to the poor. Despite the difficulties engendered by the prevailing circumstances, interest in learning Hebrew remained constant. A generous cobbler by the name of Yusuf Ge'ula opened his home to the youth association. The Alliance school also agreed to make Kohan Sedegh's grammar book part of its curriculum. What kept these associations from being more successful, however, was constant turnover in leadership. To resolve this problem, they consulted with Rab Na'im, whose full name was 'Azizallah Yona Damavandi. Thenceforward, the Association sought broader contact with the people. On a Friday evening which coincided with Pesach, they put on a play which attracted an audience of 1,500. At the Association's 25th session, Yona Damavandi was elected secretary of the Association.

During this period, the Iranian government ordained that all persons must have an identification booklet. One of the requirements for obtaining an identification booklet was the selection of a family name. The Jewish Youth Association published notices encouraging Jews to choose Hebrew names.[277] In an effort to expand its activities and recruit new members, the Association printed membership cards and created an official stamp. The speeches and meetings organized by the Sefet 'Eber Association on various subjects resulted in a transformation of the Jewish community. It was not long before a third organization, the Shem Tub Association, was created especially to carry out the religious laws related to the Sabbath.

This period, though it did not mark the end of anti-Semitism, was critical for the Jewish community and could be aptly called the "Age of Jewish Enlightenment" in Iran. It was during this period that solidarity with the ancestral homeland spurred the Jews on to greater activism. The Balfour Declaration introduced Zionism to the people. "Zion" had until then been more a religious than a

[277]Family names such as Barukh, Aharon, Haim, Kohanim, etc., which have been mentioned in this chapter, demonstrate that this recommendation was very effective.

political concept to them. Because of the lack of newspapers, radio, and other mass media, many, even the young, were unaware of what was going on behind the scenes internationally to resurrect the old Jewish state, but understanding the concept of "Zion" was not difficult for any Jew. They did not want to be left out of this worldwide movement. For this reason, the organizers of the Sefet 'Eber Association changed their name to "Anjoman-e Siyonist-e Iran" (Iranian Zionist Association) and broadened their objectives.

The new association succeeded in forging closer ties with the Jewish world, and by establishing solidarity with Jews worldwide whose hearts beat for Eretz Israel, was able to reap the benefits of cultural and religious cooperation. Because the Jewish Assembly representative, Dr. Loghman Nehurai, was busy at his clinic day and night and had no office or staff see to Jewish concerns, the Association undertook to provide for Jewish relief and establish relations with the state authorities. Moreover, it sought to establish a network bringing together Jews in the provinces and to relieve their suffering. This endeavor was unprecedented in Jewish-Iranian history. Up to that time, the Jews of Iran were separated, sometimes living in an isolation like that of the inhabitants of scattered islands, unfamiliar with one another. After repeated contacts with the ministry of the interior and the police administration, the Association succeeded in establishing branches in twenty Jewish-inhabited towns and villages, and sometimes took effective action in defense of Jewish rights.

The establishment of the Zionist Association was a blessing to Jews throughout Iran. Thenceforward, whoever sought relief, especially from the state authorities, turned to this organization. The Zionist Association was so active on behalf of the people that its Zionist goals were frequently called into question. In any event, the Association kindled hope in the despondent hearts of the scattered children of Israel through action, not slogans. Although the Association was primarily concerned with raising the people's standard of living, it did not refrain from establishing foreign ties and propagating Zionism. Ties were established with the Zionist Organization's

Copenhagen office. Its first meeting on the Zionist revival was held at the Hadash Synagogue. The Association's new charter was drafted and ratified, and individuals were urged to join the Association and add their names to those of other members in the registry. The cities and towns in which Zionist Association branches were located were: (1) Hamadan (2) Kermanshah (3) Rasht (4) Orumiyeh (5) Sanandaj (6) Babol (7) Damavand (8) Mashhad (9) Kashan (10) Isfahan (11) Yazd (12) Kerman (13) Bushehr (14) Shiraz (15) Nehavand (16) Tuserkan (17) Malayer (18) Borujerd (19) Golpayegan and (20) Khansar. In its contacts with its counterparts abroad, the Association asked that they send books, newspapers, and magazines for a reading room to be opened in Tehran. Donation boxes were placed in various locations. In addition to volunteers, the Association also gave employment to some persons with low incomes. The Association's national activities caused excitement among the Jews in the provinces, and many people considered it their only refuge.

The Zionist Association put an end to the activities of Christian and Baha'i missionaries, especially in Tehran and Hamadan, whose proselytization had penetrated to the heart of the Jewish community and had daily attracted new converts. The Association's connections with government offices in Tehran began when forces conspired against the Jews in Khomayn, and the Association, with the help of government officials, succeeded in thwarting the plot.

During this period, the persecuted Jews in the provinces had an advocate. Motivated young people in Tehran expeditiously, courageously, and unhesitatingly turned to the central government and promptly pursued complaints so strongly that government officials ordered local governors, usually by telegram, to resolve the problems of the Jewish plaintiffs. The Association took effective measures to save agricultural lands held by Jews in Gil'ad. But its most valuable contribution was the opening of elementary schools in places such as Golpayegan, Yazd, Damavand, and Nehavand, where none had previously existed.

In 1919, the Austrian Zionist Abraham Kohen Harbet[278] delivered a speech in Hebrew about the Zionist movement at the Agha Ezra Ya'qub Synagogue. His words were translated into Persian for the congregation.

Internationally, Zionism was making rapid progress. On the 4th of April 1918, a delegation led by Dr. Chaim Weizmann went to Palestine on a fact-finding visit regarding Jewish emigration to and development of that country. At the time, this sparsely-populated land had become a wasteland because of war, drought, and disease, and the Jews there numbered no more than 55,000. In the 1919 peace treaty, at the request of Zionist representatives, the Jews' historic right to their ancestral homeland was recognized. On the 7th of October of the same year, a Jewish founding council by the name of Asefet Hanibharim (אסיפת הניבחרים) was created.

Before the First World War, eleven Zionist congresses had gathered. In 1920, the Iranian Zionist Association was invited to send a delegate to the 12th congress, which was to be held in Carlsbad in September 1921. Because the Iranian Jews could find no one to represent them in the congress, however, the Zionist Association, with the approval of its branches, decided to ask Dr. Weizmann to represent Iranian Zionists. He turned down this request owing to a lack of time; therefore, the Association appointed David Florentin to represent Iranian Zionists.[279] Because all existing associations in the country were disbanded several years later with the advent of Reza Shah, the Iranian Zionist Association was unable to maintain ties with world Zionist organizations or to send representatives to the annual Zionist congresses.

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[278]TN: This spelling is phonetically derived from the Persian spelling (آبراهام کوهن هربط). I was unable to determine the precise German spelling.

[279]This action is reminiscent of the election of Sayyid 'Abdallah Behbehani to represent the Jews during the first session of the Assembly (p. 491) and is indicative of the dearth of statesmen within the Iranian Jewish community in those times.

Reorganization of the Iranian Zionist Association

In the winter of 1919, the Iranian Zionist Association's activities expanded through the efforts of Solayman Eshaq Hayy, Solayman Rokhsar, Sinor Kohan Shohet, Dr. Habib Levy, Davud Muradi, and Dr. Albu Nehurai. During this period, Monsieur Larédo, the director of the Alliance school, also worked with the Association (Fig. 26–28). In the Association's 63rd meeting, which convened on Tuesday, the 1st of Tebet A.H. 5680 (23 December 1919), on a motion by Dr. Habib Levy, the Association agreed to publish its charter and to send a copy, along with a letter describing the Association's organization, to police headquarters to make the organization official so that members could get evening curfew passes. It was additionally decided that commissions should be established for culture, finance, recreation, theater, religious teaching, and emigration, and that a fixed meeting place should be established for the Association's organizations. On the eve of 20 Tebet A.H. 5680 (the night of 10 January 1920), the movie *Athalia*[280] was screened by the Association for the people.

A new charter was drawn up for the Association whereby representatives of the branches in the provinces held an annual meeting and directly elected the central committee by secret ballot. The Association also gained an inspector general, and 'Azizallah Na'im, who published a Judeo-Persian translation of a brief French history of the Zionist movement, was appointed manager of a newspaper which was to be the organ of the Iranian Zionists. During this same period, Mureh Siyon was hired as a teacher of Hebrew.

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[280]Athalia (עֲתַלְיָה) was queen of Judea from 842–836 B.C.E. During her reign, Baal-worship was common in Jerusalem. She had all rivals for the throne from within her family put to death. But finally, the temple of Baal was destroyed and Athalia, faced with the anger of those who worshipped God, met with an untimely end. The story of her reign is told in Second Kings and Second Chronicles.

On the eve of Sunday, 17 Adar 5680 (the night of Saturday, 6 March 1920), the Jewish community hosted a gala performance of *Astar va Khoshayarsha* (Esther and Ahasuerus), which was erroneously dubbed *Astar va Ardashir* (Esther and Ardashir), in the auditorium of the Grand Hotel in Tehran. On Monday, 17 Nisan 5680 (5 April 1920), in accordance with the new bylaws, the following 25 persons were chosen for the central (Tehran) branch of the Zionist Association:

1. Nehurai Barukhiyan
2. Davud Bakhur
3. 'Aziz Beral
4. Ishaq Brukhim
5. Solayman Bustanai
6. Rahim Torbati
7. Solayman Eshaq Hayy
8. Solayman Haim
9. Yusuf Darvish
10. Shemuel Rokhsar
11. Asher Shalom
12. Shem'un Kasher
13. Sinor Kohan Shohet
14. Solayman Kohan Sedegh
15. Yusuf Ge'ula
16. Dr. Habib Levy
17. Shemuel Meir
18. Davud Mari
19. Mirza Agha Haim Mashiyah
20. Davud Muradi
21. Benyamin Masachi
22. 'Azizallah Na'im
23. Dr. Albu Nehurai
24. Hakham Yud'im
25. Habiballah Yud'im

These persons selected thirteen individuals from among themselves to form the Central Committee. 'Azizallah Na'im was appointed President, Dr. Albu Nehurai Vice-President, Solayman Kohan Sedegh Treasurer, and Dr. Habib Levy Inspector General.

After the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles, Ottoman Turkey, which had been allied with Germany, lost much of the territory which had been under its control, including Palestine. On 25 April 1925, at the San Remo conference in Italy, Palestine, which had previously been under British military occupation, was designated a British mandate in accordance with Article 22 of the covenant of the League of Nations. At the San Remo conference, it was officially

acknowledged that with the support of its allies Italy and France, Britain would implement the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917. The great Jewish scientist, Chaim Weizmann, whose discoveries were of great service to Britain in the World War and whose request for the establishment of a Jewish national homeland had been honored by the victors, was present at the conference. The proceedings of this conference were published in a bulletin, and Jews throughout the world rejoiced and called on those who awaited the independence of the Jewish homeland to celebrate with dancing, festivities, and the exchange of embraces.

The telegraphed announcement from San Remo reached the attention of the Iranian Zionist Association during the session held on the eve of Wednesday, 10 Iyar 5680 (the night of Tuesday, 28 April 1920). The following day, the news spread in Tehran and soon thereafter, throughout other Iranian cities. The Jews of Iran were overjoyed. With the prime minister's consent, the Association held a grand celebration of the worldwide declaration of the establishment of a "Jewish national homeland," attended by national leaders and hundreds of Jews.

After the Balfour Declaration, gravitation toward the Holy Land generally increased among Iranian Jews. In 1919, several families from Hamadan loaded their belongings on pack animals and headed for Jerusalem, and after a time, families from Tehran and Shiraz followed. The San Remo proclamation intensified their desire to emigrate. In early 1921, a national Jewish association by the name of Hebret Israel (חברת ישראל) was created and sought the assistance of the Zionist Association in reaching out to Jews in the provinces. This association was later designated Va'ed Haghhila (ועד הקהילה). In the same year, a Persian translation of Herzl's immortal *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) was published.

In fall 1921, the Iranian Jewish Women's Zionist Association (Anjoman-e Siyonist-e Nesvan-e Yahud-e Iran) was organized under the honorary leadership of Hajiyeh Senobar, the wife of Ezra Ya'qub, and 'Azizallah Na'im was nominated as advisor. The Jews of Iran,

having put a bitter past behind them, were now hearing of freedom in Iran, and news of the freedom of the Promised Land encouraged them. They entertained more seriously the thought of returning to their ancestral homeland and tried to make this dream a reality. In Tehran, more than twenty families packed for the trip to Jerusalem, taking the plunge in making their way to the city which generation after generation had hoped to see. The Zionist Association, which after its reorganization had made emigration to the Jewish national homeland one of its prime objectives, was active in guiding families and arranging for their travel. In its meeting of 25 April 1921, Solayman Kohan Sedegh, one of the most active members of the Association, was designated chairman of the Emigration Affairs Commission.

The granting of a license for the Zionist Association's newspaper was held up by bureaucratic obstruction, especially the objections of the minister of war, Nasir al-Dawlah. Finally, after a shake-up of the cabinet in the winter of 1921, a license for the newspaper *Ha-Ge'ula* (הגאולה) was granted to the Association. 'Azizallah Na'im set out for Europe to represent Iran at the 13th congress of the Zionist Federation, and the Zionist Association voted to make 'Aziz Beral, president of the Va'ed Haghhila association, manager of *Ha-Ge'ula* in his absence. But after the publication of the first issue, Beral stepped aside due to time constraints, and management of the newspaper passed to Solayman Naghi. Thenceforward, the newspaper was published on a regular basis with financial support from Musa Lavi.

Regrettably, because of the closure of the road from Baghdad to Aleppo, 'Azizallah Na'im was unable to continue his trip to Europe to participate in the World Zionist Congress. In 1922, a new charter was drafted in order to unify the branches of the Zionist Association. Nonetheless, disputes, grievances, and resignations among Association organizers became commonplace. In that year, a new leadership council was appointed as follows:

Solayman Kohan Sedegh ..... President
Dr. Habib Levy ..... Vice-President

Musa Salim ..... Inspector General
Mirza Agha Mashiyah ..... Secretary
Yusuf Ben Levy ..... Bookkeeper
Meir Halimi ..... Treasurer
Natanel Levanof..... Supervisor
Habiballah Yud'im ..... Recorder

The Association had an additional twenty-four advisors who sat on the commissions for emigration, culture, publicity, and financial affairs.

At a time when the Jews of Iran should have acted in unison for the sake of their new social status, unforeseeable disputes arose. For example, in 1922, the newly-founded Anjoman-e Mutaraqqi (Progressive Association) objected to the policies of the Zionist Association, and 'Aziz Beral, who had angrily resigned from the Zionist Association, attacked it in an official meeting of Va'ed Haghhila. As it was feared that the provocations would get out of hand, it was decided that as soon as possible, each synagogue in the city would be asked to appoint a representative to a new National Zionist Congress.

The story of the emigration of the Azerbaijani Jewish refugees to the Holy Land in the wake of Simitqu's revolt is one of the blank pages of Jewish-Iranian history. Although it was not promptly documented, it is nonetheless one of the most moving chapters of this history. Most of the refugees fixed their gaze on a single point: Jerusalem! Some went to Russia while others traveled to Baghdad via Hamadan or Sulaymaniyah in order to reach Jerusalem either by sea or by land. Each misfortune which befell the Jews after the Constitutionalist Revolution increased their desire to reach the Promised Land. The incident of the "insult to Agha Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi's burro" and the disturbance at the Agha Shaykh Hadi public fountain, which resulted in the death of the American consul, redoubled Jewish interest in emigrating to the "national Jewish homeland."

In 1923, Solayman Kohan Sedegh accompanied 56 persons to Jerusalem. Later the same year, approximately 1,300 persons left the country and joined their brethren who had fled Iran for the Promised Land during the time of Sayyid Rayhanallah. Some newspapers in the capital, including *Shafaq-e Sorkh* (Red Twilight), wrote harsh articles against Jewish emigration to the land of their forebears and asked that they be stopped. But none of the Jews paid these words any heed. Six months later a large number of Jews from Hamadan and other provinces emigrated to Jerusalem under the supervision of Rabbi Menahem Levy, and it was not long before the Iranian population of the Holy Land exceeded twenty thousand persons.

In 1928, Yehuda Almog Kopeliovitz (1896–1972), a founder of Halutz and leader of the third Aliyah,[281] came to Iran to encourage Jews to emigrate to Eretz Israel. But these were times in which, following the clash between Dr. Loghman and Mr. Haim, the Jewish community was in a state of decline. Although Mr. Haim was in prison, conflicts continued, and Kopeliovitz had no choice but to spend his time trying to mend rifts in the Jewish community.

On the threshold of the Second World War, between the years 1934 and 1938, a number of Jews from Bokhara and Samarqand came to Tehran by way of Afghanistan and Khorasan. Although at that time the Jews lacked well-ordered organizations, they provided considerable support to their homeless coreligionists who lacked any means of support. They put them up in the Ezra Ya'qub Synagogue and other available locations, and, to the extent that they were able, helped them in their gradual emigration to Israeli soil.

Although Iran was not a direct participant in the Second World War, because it was occupied by the Allies, it effectively became a

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[281]The Hebrew word "Aliyah" (עֲלִיָּה) originally meant "ascent," and in the present era, especially after the establishment of the world Zionist movement, it has come to mean "the immigration of Jews to Israel." It is usually used in conjunction with another word, for example, the "Polish Aliyah," the "First Aliyah," or the "Aliyah to Israel."

war-struck nation. When Israel declared its independence, a great many Iranian Jews were living in poverty, and at the national level a shortage of jobs, hunger, and inflation sounded the warning bell for the Jewish community. Jews throughout the provinces flocked to Tehran. Under these sorry conditions, they faced not only the threat of death from hunger, but also the depredations of others. Thousands of Jewish refugees in the capital had no place to sleep, so a place was set up for them in Beheshtiyeh, the grounds of which had been set aside for a Jewish cemetery. The large number of refugees grew, and donations gathered were inadequate for their support. Therefore, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) came to their aid. Jews who had fled to Tehran for fear of their fellow townsmen and a desire to emigrate to Israel needed to reach the land of their forebears by any means necessary. The AJJDC put an aircraft at the disposal of the Jewish Agency (הסכונות היהודית) free of charge so that they could arrange for transportation to Israel. In short order, all of the refugees were on their way to Israel. A number of Iraqi Jews who had been forced to leave Iraq had joined the Jews at Beheshtiyeh. They went to their new homeland along with the Iranian Jews.

In 1950, twelve Jews were killed in an anti-Semitic attack in Kurdistan. The government moved to quell the disturbance, and with the help of government officials, Kurdish Jews came to Tehran and then proceeded on to Israel with the help of the Sukhonot. The farmers who made up part of this group were the last Jews to be employed in agriculture in Iran.

Chapter Thirty
Shemuel Haim and Loghman Nehurai

In September 1909, the ministry of the interior proclaimed in Jewish-populated cities of Iran their right to elect a Jewish representative to the National Consultative Assembly. On 15 November 1909, the legislature's second session opened, and Dr. Loghman was admitted as the representative of Iranian Jews. Only a little more than two-and-a-half months had passed between the announcement of the decision and the opening of the new session of the Assembly. It is not clear how elections were conducted throughout Iran in such a short period of time, and to what extent they were valid. Of course, this question might be asked regarding all representatives at that time.

Dr. Loghman Nehurai (Fig. 29), the eldest son of Hakim Ayyub, was born in Kashan in 1882. He graduated from the Polytechnic School with a degree in medicine in 1907 and opened a clinic in Tehran. In those days, the Jewish community had an association known as "Hebra Qadishah" (חברה קדישא) (Fig. 30). The aged intellectual Yequtil Kashani was president of the association, and Dr. Loghman was vice-president. After the bombardment of the Assembly and the resulting hiatus, Dr. Loghman was elected as the representative of the Jews of Iran. The length of his tenure in the Assembly made up for the several-day term of 'Azizallah Simani, the Jewish representative in the first session. Dr. Loghman served as the Jewish representative from the 2nd session through the 13th with the exception of the 5th, that is, a total of 11 sessions or 22 years, which is longer than many kings have reigned. One of the Jewish community's mistakes was that it gave its representative to the Assembly the presidency of the Jewish Association. This tradition, which undermined many projects, was engineered by Dr. Loghman to circumvent the possibility of his being pressured by the Association at election time.

Dr. Loghman was at all times an independent in the Assembly, yet he maintained cordial relations with other factions, and when necessary, obtained their support. Among Dr. Loghman's most important achievements for the Iranian Jewish community during his long career in the Assembly are the following:

1. During the reign of Ahmad Shah Qajar, when Reza Shah was prime minister, the pseudo-mullahs of Shiraz issued a *fatwa* stating that the Jews of that city must wear the cap designed by Abu al-Hasan Lari, known as the "manifest cap" (*kolah-e jali*). Through the intercession of Dr. Loghman, the government and the president of the Assembly sent a telegram to Shiraz to put an end to the tumult created by the *fatwa*. But the disturbance continued unabated. Later, on behalf of the Assembly, Mr. Shirazi, the representative from Shiraz, who was a religious scholar, went to Shiraz and through his intercession with the instigators succeeded in lifting the encumbrances placed upon the Jews.
2. In Shiraz it was proclaimed that Jews could not own booths in the bazaar or appear on the platforms of their shops,[282] thus making the Muslims lower than themselves! Dr. Loghman brought this matter up with the government, and directed their attention to the article of the constitution which stated, "All Iranian subjects are equal before the law, and no one can be prevented from conducting his legal business or expelled from his place of work except as prescribed by law." The Assembly and the government sent an order to a liberal religious scholar to rescind the *akhunds*' edict. The complaint of the Jews of that city and province was thus resolved.
3. Each year, the Jewish community was required to pay a sum to the government. Although during the constitutionalist peri-

[282]TN: Shops in the bazaar typically had an elevated platform about shoulder height which served as a kind of private office space for the proprietor.

od this sum was collected as a "poll tax," it was, in effect, the same old *jizya* tax of the past. Payment of this tax was not only morally humiliating, it also put impecunious Jews in a predicament. During the reign of Reza Shah and Davar's tenure as minister of justice, which coincided with Dr. Loghman's tenure as representative, major legal changes occurred and encumbrances of this sort were legally ended.

4. The inheritance law, which was much less enforced than before, still caused family disputes and was attributable to the avarice of the mullahs. The *akhunds* rejected Nasir al-Din Shah's decree on this matter, and whenever the close or distant relative of a convert to Islam died, the convert would descend upon the house of the deceased, accompanied by a handful of pseudo-mullahs, to claim the property. In the event that the deceased's survivors protested, they would be beaten up or even bastinadoed. This egregious custom, which was still practiced in the provinces during the constitutionalist period, resulted, as in the past, in rifts within families. Dr. Loghman and the Zoroastrian and Armenian representatives, with the cooperation of the minister of justice, succeeded in passing a law in the Assembly whereby, "Heirs of the deceased shall inherit in accordance with the law of his religion." Although attempts were still made to enforce the old inheritance law governing converts in Golpayegan, Khansar, and other small towns, they were blocked by the law passed by the Assembly.[283]
5. Legislation passed by the Assembly stipulated that all marriages, divorces, and wills must be officially registered at offices to be designated by the ministry of justice. As these offices were

[283] In 1959, during the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah and long after the passage of this law, the chief judge at Kashan issued a ruling granting the estate of two Jewish sisters, Khanom Farshi and Sara 'Arab Shademan, to Khanom Bashi Aminan, the great-grandchild of the deceased's paternal uncle, who was a Muslim.

based on Islamic law, the registration of such actions precluded them from observing Jewish law and presented various difficulties. Dr. Loghman, along with Arbab Kaykhosrow, the Zoroastrian representative, and Mirza Yanes, the Armenian representative, and with the guidance and support of Minister of Justice Davar, took action and finally, in an extraordinary meeting of the National Consultative Assembly, the Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Armenian minorities were exempted from registering the aforementioned transactions with official Islamic offices and were remanded to the legal registries of their own religions.

6. Another of Dr. Loghman's successes during his long tenure in the Assembly was the granting of leave to Jewish soldiers. After passage of the universal conscription act during the 5th session of the Assembly and the conscription of eligible Jews, passes were granted on official national holidays. Dr. Loghman met with officials of the ministry of war to ask that Jewish soldiers be granted leave on important religious holidays. Obtaining no results, he sent a petition to Reza Shah, and after renewed correspondence with the ministry of war and face-to-face meetings, he succeeded in obtaining leave for Jews serving the flag on the following days: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the first two days of Sukkot, and the eight days of Pesach.

Whereas each of these achievements seems important for the Jewish community as a whole, especially in consideration of the many sufferings they had lived through, at the individual level, Jews remained unsatisfied. Each had his own individual problems, most of which resulted from dealings with individual Muslims or government agencies, and sought help in resolving them from his "representative." The weight of such individual problems was so great that it called for special organizations. At that time, it was not customary for individual Jews to consult lawyers to resolve their personal difficulties,

nor was it likely that by doing so they would achieve the desired result.

There were no Jewish lawyers. Thus, everyone pinned their hopes on their Assembly representative. But the representative was unable to resolve their grievances, either because he was a full-time physician and also had duties as president of the National Jewish Association of Tehran (the "Jewish Association"), or because he lacked the ability to attach these problems to other, more comprehensive, legislation. It is remarkable that despite the public's displeasure and aggravation with the fact that their representative was not helping them, they elected him to session after session! This phenomenon was to be observed with many other Assembly representatives of the day, too.

The complaints which daily reached Dr. Loghman from the provinces led nowhere. Dr. Loghman was pure at heart, but his personal traits engendered many of the complaints. He was unwilling to spend less time working in his clinic, which occupied his whole day, in order to work for his constituents. Because he had no choice but to participate in meetings of the Assembly, he unavoidably had less time to address the countless complaints of the community. Most of that time he spent writing letters to the offices of the ministry of the interior, the police, and other state offices. He could not personally be present to help persecuted Jews, hold meetings, and obtain results. Moreover, he was a conservative, and he lacked organizational skills. During the whole of his tenure in the Assembly, he failed to open an office to establish a truly effective bond with the people. The Jews had many difficulties, and everyone expected that their representative would come to their aid. Undoubtedly, many of these expectations were unrealistic and beyond the purview of an Assembly representative's responsibilities, but those who felt the sharp sting of persecution had no one else to whom to turn.

The situation was complicated by this representative's re-election. After the 3rd session, the people were tired of him and openly displayed their dissatisfaction with him. With the likes of Sayyid Kazim 'Attar and Nayib 'Abdallah stirring up problems for the Jews

and anti-Jewish riots in Azerbaijan and Shiraz, complaints about the ineffectiveness of the Assembly representative grew. It was during this period that a Jew by the name of Shemuel Yahazqel Haim, or "Mr. Haim," came to Tehran from Kermanshah.

Mr. Haim (Fig. 31) was a young, determined, daring, and influential man and displayed an interest in the people. He had close ties with several newspapers of the day. Shortly after his arrival in Tehran, he set about making the acquaintance of the leaders and luminaries of the Jewish community and for the first time made contact with an organizer of the Iranian Zionist movement. During this period, the Zionist Association was falling apart. Its active members had either emigrated or were preparing to emigrate. Even those few who were in Tehran came up with various excuses for not participating in the Association. As a result, there was no effective and suitable leader to guide the Jewish community and propel the Zionist movement forward. Thus it seemed that Mr. Haim, with his exceptional qualities, might be the best candidate to lead the Jewish community. With this in mind, he was granted introductions to many influential Jews in Tehran. He was able to quickly gain their backing and lay the groundwork for victory.

Common Jews gradually came to know the name of Mr. Haim and pinned their hopes on a man who was familiar with the country's press and would thus be able to solve the community's problems. Although the members of the Zionist Association had no objections to this courageous young man, the leader of the Va'ed Haghhila association, 'Aziz Beral, gave Mr. Haim the false impression that the Zionist Association was against him.[284] As a result, in the latter half of the month of Shebat A.H. 5682 (February 1922), members of

[284]Division within the Jewish community originated with such rumor-mongering and made Mr. Haim's election, which had been a near certainty, more difficult. Later, in the elections for the 6th session of the Assembly, Mr. Haim was defeated and faced accusations which ultimately cost him his life.

the Zionist Association's public relations commission reported that 'Aziz Beral was about to move against the Zionist Association and that the Progressive Association had been created with this purpose in mind. A rumor spread among the people that Va'ed Haghhila, along with a high council of Jewish leaders, was going to disband the Zionist Association. The Progressive Association published a bulletin openly attacking the Zionist Association, and other organizations such as the Hope Association were established, probably in consultation with Mr. Haim.

In the 18th meeting of the Zionist Association on Friday, 24 Adar 5682 (24 March 1922), a member of the Association who was a supporter of 'Aziz Beral brought a message from Mr. Haim stating that since the Zionists had sullied the reputation of the Jewish community and brought it into disrepute, it would be best if they disbanded all of the Zionist Association's organizations. Following this message, several persons were sent to meet with Mr. Haim in an effort to resolve the matter. But these efforts led nowhere. Everywhere there was talk that Mr. Haim was working for the British. This served to increase his prestige, because in those days, the Iranian people attached great weight to the name of the British.

Finally, on the appointed night, Va'ed Haghhila extended an invitation to community leaders and members of the Zionist Association. The organizer of this historic evening was 'Aziz Beral. A speaker who took the podium expressed his view that the situation was grave, and that anyone who interrupted him was a traitor to the people. Beral and his group gave their support while Kohan Sedegh expressed reservations. The main goal was to disband the Zionist Association.

During this imbroglio, news arrived from World Zionist Federation headquarters that the League of Nations had endorsed the British mandate over Palestine, supporting the creation of the "Jewish national homeland" agreed to in the San Remo conference. It was essential that all Jews should gather in a communal celebration of this news.

During the same period, the rebellion in Azerbaijan took place, a short description of which was provided in the chapter entitled "Persistence of Anti-Semitism" (p. 503 ff.). On the eve of Wednesday, 2 Tammuz 5682 (the night of Tuesday, 27 June 1922), a letter arrived from Tabriz with news that an upstart by the name of Simitqu had massacred and pillaged the Jews of Sa'en Qal'eh in Azerbaijan and that all the Jews of the outlying areas had sought refuge in the neighboring mountains and were without food, clothing, or shelter and in immediate need of relief.

In such a situation, disunity in the Jewish community served no purpose, and the Zionist Association did its utmost to make peace between and unite those who aspired to the leadership of the Jewish community. To this end, the public relations commission extended an invitation to Mr. Haim to work with them. As it became apparent with the beginning of publication of *Ha-Haim* on 17 June 1922 that Mr. Haim intended to become a candidate for the National Consultative Assembly, the Zionist Association assured him that they would in no way try to influence the elections. This neutrality was officially proclaimed in the Zionist Association's newspaper, *Ha-Ge'ula,* in the issue of 20 Adar 5682 (20 March 1922). Moreover, it was suggested that as soon as Mr. Haim should support the Zionist Association, he would be appointed its president. At this point, Kohan Sedegh, who was planning to go to Jerusalem, had become gravely ill, and the survival of the Zionist Association was in danger.

In order to demonstrate to Mr. Haim that it would support him if he wanted to be a serious advocate of the Jewish community, the Zionist Association chose him to be master of ceremonies at its gala soirée in celebration of the official proclamation of a "national Jewish homeland." Dr. Loghman was also invited, as an ordinary guest. This was to be a grand reception of the highest order in celebration of the international endorsement of the San Remo decision.[285] Haim

[285]The celebration of the "national Jewish homeland" was the most important Jewish holiday before Israeli independence. The Jews of Iran

was pleased with these arrangements, and even provided his views on how the celebration should be organized. It seemed that differences had been laid aside and that the Jews were moving forward hand-in-hand toward a common goal. At the same time, an appeal was sent by telegraph to American Jews for aid for refugees from Simitqu's rebellion. In Tehran, too, Haji Benyamin Asil Mazandarani worked night and day collecting donations. It is an ironic twist of fate that just as the national Jewish homeland celebration was getting underway, the tragedy of the Azerbaijani Jews occurred. In order to organize the celebration, a group of a hundred Jewish-Iranian merchants and guild leaders met and decided that the celebration should be held at the Alliance school and that government officials should be invited.

Finally, the 15th of Ab arrived, the evening of which was to mark the beginning of the celebration. Kohan Sedegh was ill and bedridden, and the vice-president of the Zionist Association struggled to make the celebration a success. It had been agreed that Shemuel Haim would arrive three hours before the beginning of the festivities, but he was nowhere to be found, and attempts to reach him by telephone failed. Because a master of ceremonies was an absolute necessity, Dr. Loghman was perforce called on to prepare an opening address a half hour before the commencement of the celebration. Having learned that his rival, Mr. Haim, had originally been chosen for this honor, he agreed reluctantly.

The program ran for two nights. On the first evening, all of the cabinet ministers, Assembly delegates, foreign ambassadors, leading merchants, journalists, and clergymen were sent official invitation cards. All came, including the representative of the prime minister,

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chose to hold the celebration on the 15th of Ab because it coincided with an important religious holiday. The celebration of the national Jewish homeland took place in Kohan Sedegh's home on the 15th of Ab 5681 (19 August 1921), and the celebration of 15 Ab 5682 (9 August 1922), described above, was held at the Alliance school.

General Reza Khan. Several statesmen and Assembly leaders delivered speeches in support of the "national Jewish homeland." On the second evening, entry was free to all Jews. On both evenings, guests were entertained by a military orchestra.

Mr. Haim, who did not attend either of the two evenings, two days later published an article in his newspaper under the title, "To Haim's Friends" in which he wrote, "Some friends have asked the reason for my absence at the independence[286] celebration. The reason is that I abhor British policy, and in consideration of the fact that this celebration was organized by them, I refrained from partaking in such an event."[287] The members of the Zionist Association's central committee held a meeting in the wake of this article, and as it was inferred that Haim was making an accusation of complicity with the British, research was done on *his* personal history and background. Investigation revealed that Shemuel Yahazqel Haim had worked in the customs office for a time. He had also worked for the British for a while, but for certain reasons they dismissed him, whereupon he collaborated with a journalist in the capital in support of the American Sinclair Company's bid for the northern oil concession.

Disunity in the Jewish Community

Thenceforward, the Zionist Association distanced itself from Mr. Haim, who upon the provocation of others had started a quarrel with its leadership, and decided, based on their own observations and age-old tradition, that it was better that the Jewish community not become involved in politics. Certainly, the Iranian constitution did not prevent anyone from participating in politics regardless of his religion, but the climate of the times and the Iranian people's antipathy toward the Jews necessitated the community's non-involvement. But this approach ran counter to Haim's. In the issue

[286]"Independence" was not at issue.

[287]*Ha-Haim.* 23 Ab 1301 S.H. (17 August 1922).

of *Ha-Haim* dated 27 Joza 1301 S.H. (2 June 1922), he made reference to Jewish detachment from the country's political arena and expressed his view that this detachment prevented Jews from serving the Iranian nation.

Haim's interest in politics was new in the Jewish community, which had never abandoned its cautious conservatism. In his edition of 13 Saratan 1301 S.H. (1 July 1922), he attacked the newspaper *Setareh* (Star), which supported the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and the renewal of the British concession and he once again urged that the concession be granted to the Sinclair Company. His attack against the British oil company and support for the American Sinclair Company in other issues of *Ha-Haim* bewildered Jews who were unfamiliar with such matters. Haim went so far in his impetuosity as to vilify others, and in his newspaper he called the leaders of the Zionist Association "thieves and traitors" and labeled the *Ha-Ge'ula* newspaper "the nation's shame." The flames of dissension grew daily hotter, and those who were the subject of Haim's scathing attacks did not see fit to remain silent.

The Zionist Association expelled Mr. Haim, who had originally sought to join the Association as the representative for Kermanshah. Shortly thereafter, a merchant by the name of Rahim Haruniyan was chosen to represent the city of Kermanshah at the National Zionist Congress. At the next session of the Zionist Association, 'Aziz Nehama, a servant of Va'ed Haghhila, entered, gave each of those present an envelope, and quickly departed. The message inside the envelopes was very inflammatory and insulting. After the election of representatives from Tehran and the provinces, it was decided to convene the Congress thirty days after the celebration, on 15 Elul 5682 (8 September 1922). On the appointed day, all were present in business attire. The same day, Mr. Haim appeared with a physician friend of his whom he hoped to get admitted as a member of the Congress. But it did not happen. Haim, after hurling abuse at the

representatives, left the meeting. Thenceforward calumny, rumors, accusations, lies, and provocations spread within the Jewish community.

While the Zionist Association and Congress were beset with strife, the grievous problem of the Jewish refugees from Azerbaijan, who were homeless and without means of securing a livelihood, continued. Some of these refugees made their way to Baghdad via Hamadan and thence by sea to Jerusalem.

On the day of the "insult to Agha Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi's burro" incident in Tehran, when armed gangs set out for the Jewish ghetto, Dr. Loghman's opponents said that he had fled the ghetto and was busy playing backgammon at the home of Ishaq Mordecai Muradoff, a renowned merchant of the day. Meanwhile, Haim was satisfied that the incompetence of the Jewish representative was being made clear to the people. The dispute between Dr. Loghman and Mr. Haim gradually created a rift between Jewish organizations, and the Jewish community also became rapidly divided into two camps. One faction supported Dr. Loghman, the other Mr. Haim.

On 29 October 1922, the Hibat Siyon association published an announcement in *Ha-Haim* declaring its intention to create a new Zionist association. At the bottom of this announcement, or letter, the newspaper editor wrote: "Although in recent developments, the committees were put to the test and left us in utter despair, we have included the above correspondence in the name of freedom of the press. In passing, we are hopeful that Mr. Mirza Loghman is not acting behind the scenes and that this committee will not, like all the others, become a tool for achieving the ends of the 'polycracy.'" Ten months later, the Hibat Siyon committee was formed.

Dr. Loghman's supporters included three groups:

1. Conservative Jews who abhorred extremism. These included the Jews of Yazd, Kerman, and Kashan.

2. Kashani Jews who lived in Tehran. Their support for Dr. Loghman was derived mostly from the fact that they were from the same town.
3. Zionists who not only lacked confidence in Haim, but also feared that he would bring new headaches to the Iranian Jewish community. This group had no option but to back Dr. Loghman.

But Mr. Haim's supporters, with the exception of a handful who joined his faction out of spite or to establish a name for themselves, were generally people who sought the betterment of their community. They felt the nation's pain in their hearts, and were hopeful that after centuries of impoverishment and helplessness, a daring, determined, and benevolent man could reform the disorganized Jewish community. They saw the person they were looking for in Mr. Haim, and no sacrifice was too great in their efforts to make him successful. In provinces where the Jews were intellectually active, such as Hamadan, or brave and daring, such as Isfahan, they supported the intrepid Mr. Haim strictly for nationalistic and religious reasons, without being fully aware of his demeanor.

Divisions in the Jewish community led to name-calling and vilification. This was one of the biggest mistakes that Haim's followers allowed themselves to commit. Haim, too, fanned rather than doused the flames of extremism. In issue no. 19 of *Ha-Haim,* under the title "To the Witless Representative," Haim openly maligned Dr. Loghman. This situation affected the morals of the community's younger generation while denigrating those elders who were serving the community. It is worth noting that most Iranian Jews, especially those active in the Zionist Association, were already discontented with Dr. Loghman without any need for obloquy and character assassination. His being turned out of office was a certainty, but violent protests against him merely lent strength to his supporters. The result of this disunity was that frustrated servants of the nation

withdrew one by one, and organizations which it had been hoped would become strong and disciplined after the National [Zionist] Congress instead broke down.

All of the Zionist Association's efforts to mollify Mr. Haim were in vain. The Association's newspaper, *Ha-Ge'ula,* had explicitly stated that it would not become involved in the Assembly elections, but to no avail. It appeared that Haim wanted to seize control of the Zionist Association, but the Association's organizers could no longer give their blessings to such an extremist. Thus, in order to counter Mr. Haim's attacks, they were finally compelled, for lack of an alternative, to cooperate with Dr. Loghman, for although they did not consider him a helpful factor, neither did they consider him to be one likely to create troubles for the Jewish community, which had spent centuries on end in silence.

Aspersions and recriminations between the two factions escalated, and not a day passed without both sides circulating published statements. This resulted in a regrettable schism within the Jewish community, especially in Tehran. Conflict coursed through the streets and alleys and infected families, leading to fallings-out between family members. Husband quarreled with wife, brother with brother, brother-in-law with brother-in-law, father-in-law with son-in-law, and associate with associate, each with unswerving faith in the correctness of his views. In this struggle, Mr. Haim's hand grew steadily stronger. Apart from his own newspaper, a number of other newspapers in the capital also supported him because of his friendship with other journalists.

Jewish merchants and those who felt that the Jewish community was in danger opposed Mr. Haim's election as representative of the Jewish community. On the other hand, Mr. Haim's supporters were selfless youths with fiery spirits. Haim's opponents, seeing that his victory in the elections was near-at-hand, openly stated in an announcement addressed to the "government and people of Iran" that "government officials are helping Haim, and even though the majority of Iranian Jews do not support him, since it is likely that

he will be elected as the Jewish representative in the National Consultative Assembly, it is here and now clearly stated to the Iranian nation and government that this person is no representative of the Iranian Jewish community, and that any harm that he may cause the country is not the responsibility of Iranian Jews."

These measures did not discourage Mr. Haim's supporters, but rather strengthened their resolve. Some of his supporters had so much faith in him that they swore that he was the promised savior. Such extremism had a bitter and painful end.

Ultimately, the majority of the votes cast in the election for the 5th Assembly session were for Shemuel Haim, and he went on to the Assembly. During his term of office, the then-existing Zionist Association was dissolved, and he personally established a new Zionist organization with the assistance of an organizer from the former Zionist Association, which by itself kept dissension alive among community elders.

During this period, as the end of the Qajar dynasty neared, it was decided that two Jews should participate in the Constituent Assembly which was convened to transfer the throne to General Reza Khan. Mr. Haim and Rabbi Musa Muqtadir, a physician of the old school, represented the Iranian Jewish community in this assembly, which was formed in October 1925. Mr. Haim was also present at Reza Shah's pompous coronation ceremony, which took place in April 1926. Publication of *Ha-Haim* had ceased in December 1925.

Leaders who for the past nine years had worked for the betterment of the Jewish community and were now faced with crumbling organizations once again tried to reorganize with Mr. Haim's blessings. In several meetings, Haim agreed to cooperate, contingent upon the approval of the prominent Jews whom he counted among his supporters. But such approval was not forthcoming.

During his two-and-a-half year tenure in office, apart from a few successful initiatives in government administration which benefited Jews, Mr. Haim failed to accomplish anything of consequence for the Jewish community. This failure is mainly attributable to the

disunity for which he was largely responsible. The dispute remained so heated that in the next election—a strong regime having meanwhile come to power—the tables were turned, and this time, government officials supported Dr. Loghman and his faction. One Saturday, when Mr. Haim was delivering a campaign speech for the 6th Assembly elections in the Ezra Ya'qub Synagogue, he and his supporters were forced to flee as a result of the tumult that erupted. Haim was defeated in the 6th session elections, and Dr. Loghman, who had proven himself to the government, was seated in the first Assembly session of Reza Shah's reign.

These events coincided with the arrest of several disgruntled officers, led by Colonel Mahmud Khan Puladin, on charges of planning a coup against Reza Shah. Mr. Haim was accused of cooperating with those arrested. While the court promptly condemned the principals in the case, the former Jewish representative was incarcerated for several years before ultimately being condemned. Mr. Haim was shot on 15 December 1931.

After Dr. Loghman was elected to the 6th Assembly, it was hoped that he would abandon his old ways and take an active interest in national affairs. In particular, those struggling against hardships expected that he would make amends for the past. But he devoted even less time to Jewish concerns than before and was less cooperative with community leaders. With the advent of the Pahlavi era, the country's domestic policies no longer tolerated organized groups. The Iranian Zionist Association and all other associations which had political or social activities were dissolved.

Around 1929, when news of the opening of the Kurosh School by a private group of directors was announced, Dr. Loghman sought to have it closed. This conservative informed Minister of Culture Rahnama that he bore no responsibility for the Kurosh School. Indeed, Dr. Loghman's statements caused problems for the founders of the school and led the minister of culture to order the school's closure. However, heroic efforts convinced those in high office that there was no motive at play other than education and the

dissemination of culture, and the government permitted the school to reopen. Dr. Loghman Nehurai died on 16 January 1952.

Chapter Thirty-One
Resurgence of the Jewish Community

During the reign of Reza Shah (1925–1941), mostly because the mullahs were completely excluded from politics and the *akhunds* could no longer mount the pulpit and stir up the ignorant masses against minority groups, the status of Jews generally improved, except for sporadic incidents. Before Reza Shah, most of the people in the land, from king to minister to governor to shaykh to mullah and on down to the common man, made a living by preying on each other; the idea of creating jobs was not a concept for those in power. Naturally, in such an environment, the Jews' plight was clear. Reza Shah's reign brought relief and social progress to the Jews, whose plight even the Constitutionalist Revolution had done little to improve.

The history of the Jews of Iran shows that during the reigns of great monarchs like Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes II, and Shapur, when the political and economic situation of the country was on a stable footing, the Jews lived in peace, and whenever Iran faced political and economic crises and its level of culture and refinement declined, the Jews faced persecution and torment. Because of the general progress made in Iran during the reign of Reza Shah, the status of Jews also improved during this period. The reasons for this improvement may be summarized as follows:

1. Unprecedented stability, the likes of which had not been seen in Iran in 13 centuries.
2. The fight against illiteracy and the elevation of the people's level of education and culture, especially the young.
3. Administrative reform in the government.
4. The creation of jobs and the growth of industry and commerce.

Reza Shah had no opinion about the Jews; their prosperity at the beginning of his reign and their disquietude at its end were based on a variety of factors. During his reign, many Jews prospered finan-

cially. Many Jews, both in Tehran and in the provinces, left the ghettos and bought homes in town. Because of the capital's growth, some urban Jews moved to Tehran, especially those from Hamadan and Kashan. Upon the marriage of Crown Prince Mohammad Reza to Fawziyah, the daughter of the king of Egypt, the Jews of Tehran gave the young groom a costly ornament inlaid with jewels and bearing a verse in letters of gold:

So long as our king of kings is ruler of Iran
Youthful fortune is our companion—all is in order

However, even in these peaceful times, the Jews still faced various other forms of persecution, among which was the conspiracy of several persons to confiscate Jewish endowed lands in Gil'ad. Although a court had ruled in favor of the Jews in 1922, the notorious Naqibzadeh, himself an attorney, came up with yet another stratagem by which he seized those lands from their rightful owners and registered them in his own name. The Jews protested this action, and even wrote a petition to the king. It was hoped that the lost lands would be returned to them. Years later, when a new dispute had arisen within the Jewish community between Dr. Loghman and Murad Ariyeh over the Jewish seat in the National Consultative Assembly, rivals hoping to destroy evidence of the Jewish community's title claims secretly removed the headstones from the local cemetery which proved the age-old Jewish claim to those lands. The area of the Gil'ad (or Gilyard) cemetery was 72,000 square meters.

One of the Jews' great accomplishments during Reza Shah's reign was the establishment in Tehran of the Kurosh Elementary School, which later became a high school. Because a number of Jews in the capital lived in the Hasanabad, 'Aziz Khan, and Agha Shaykh Hadi districts, this school was crucial for Jewish children. The school was first proposed by Farajallah Hakim and Dr. Habib Levy, and later Isma'il Hayy, Haji 'Aziz Elghanian, Rabbi Na'im, Nurallah Makabi, Yehuda Haruniyan, Ishaq Brukhim, and a number of other benevolent community members provided great assistance in setting up

and opening the school. At first, space was rented, and numerous budgetary problems ensued, but a plot of land was later purchased for the school. The Kurosh school opened its doors in 1931.

The reforms enacted during Reza Shah's reign, especially the establishment of security and the reining in of anarchists—rebels who claimed to rule parts of the country, highway robbers, or the rabble-rousers who were always stirring up illiterate mobs—combined to create an atmosphere in which the people—to a certain extent under martial law—set about their business. In moving Iran forward, they did not think about bothering the Jews. The people's perception of the community gradually changed.

But Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and Nazi Party and fifth column propaganda in Iran once again turned back the clock for the Jews and rekindled the old beliefs held by simpleminded Iranians. In response to Nazi overtures, Iranians—even those who were educated—armed themselves with the old weapons of accusations and false pretexts against the Jews. It was the same old story: neither the liberal movement nor the uprooting of the clergy by Reza Shah could have broken the chains of hatred and enmity. The moment World War II began, a new wave of anti-Semitism was unleashed in Iran. People in the streets and bazaar laid plans for an attack on the Jews. This came at a time when Reza Shah was extending a hand of friendship to Hitler's agents, having given them free rein in Iran. There was no room for doubt about the reason for this friendship and cooperation. Iran was Aryan, and the Nazis were also of Aryan descent. It was because of these Aryan aspirations that in 1935—that is, when Hitler had come to power—it was announced to the world that the name "Persia" had been changed to "Iran," which better reflected the country's Aryan roots.

As time passed and the Nazis occupied more countries in the war, which began in 1939, the wave of anti-Semitism in Iran became more like a dreadful typhoon. Merchants in the bazaar bought goods from Jews at higher prices but used promissory notes and credit because they were certain that Hitler would reach Iran before their

debts fell due and eliminate the Jews. Journalists who received subsidies from the German embassy wrote anti-Semitic articles. It reached the point where subsidized newspapers even attacked the mannerisms and attire of destitute Jews.

We will make reference to only two of the dozens of writings and speeches against Iranian Jews which appeared during Reza Shah's reign. They are articles which appeared in the 4 and 5 September 1933[288] issues of the newspaper *Kushesh,* published shortly after Hitler's rise to power. In these articles, published under the title, "A Stroll through Tehran," the author showed no restraint in his insults and accusations against the Jews. He blamed the Jews for every instance of arson worldwide. He called them a money-grubbing and selfish people and derided the dark hovels of the Jewish ghetto in Tehran. He belittled the occupations held by Jews. He called the inhabitants of the ghetto the "greatest mortal danger" and attacked Jewish merchants with unfounded accusations.

Publications such as this, combined with rumors and other propaganda, gradually poisoned the minds of Iranians nationwide against the Jews, plunging them into a sea of fear and anxiety. News of the war and the dreadful situation of Jews worldwide added to this fear. With Reza Shah's compulsory abdication and exile, the storm of anti-Semitism in Iran subsided, but as the war dragged on, the fears remained.

The Jewish plight—after a temporary respite during the reign of Reza Shah—once again worsened during the confusion of the Second World War. After the exile of Reza Shah by the Allies and the coronation of the young Mohammad Reza, a new period began which ultimately resulted in a resurgence of the Jewish people in Iran. Jews were so prominent in economics, industry, commerce, higher education, administration, and in the arts and sciences that it was absolutely unbelievable that their roots were in the hellish

[288]Nos. 189 & 190.

ghettos in which their forefathers had taken refuge from persecutions and massacres.

The reign of Mohammad Reza Shah (1941–1979) is of special importance to Iranian Jews, especially as it coincided with the rebirth of an independent Israel, and it is fitting that the history of this period should be written elsewhere. Mohammad Reza Shah struggled to follow in his father's footsteps and—by freeing himself of the mullahs' grasp and westernizing Iran—sought to bring about great social and cultural changes. The power of the mullahs was kept in check for years, but the fire beneath the ashes flared up and carried Iran down a different path. The years of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign may be considered the zenith of Jewish Iranian well-being and prosperity.

The Children of Tehran

In the early years of this tumultuous period, during which the Second World War continued, one of the most amazing chapters of Iranian-Israeli relations unfolded. This story, which has come to be known as that of the "Children of Tehran" in Israeli history, is an important and moving chapter of Jewish-Iranian history (Fig. 32–34). It tells how the Iranian Jews—who during the most trying days of the Qajar dynasty had received a helping hand from the Alliance—extended a helping hand to Jewish children from Poland who had fled from the clutches of the Nazis via the Soviet Union to Iran.

In 1942, when Hitler had advanced to the heart of the Caucasus, a large group of Jewish children and youths who had fled the war's destruction entered Iran with the permission of the Soviet and British governments for eventual resettlement in the Promised Land. The children arrived in Iran in pitiful condition, lacking adequate clothing, and were put up in large tents in the vicinity of Dustan Tappeh, near Tehran. It was not long before Schiffer, the representative of the Jewish Agency, also came to Tehran and with the help of several Iranian Jews, including Haji 'Aziz Elghanian and Dr. Habib Levy,

collected donations and provided food and clothing. Travel to Jerusalem was no easy matter. The state of Israel did not yet exist, and each of the countries of the Middle East was aligned with one side or the other in the war. Obtaining visas and safe passage seemed impossible. Worst of all, financial need compounded these problems. But somehow, passage was planned for the refugees—who were waiting in a large camp—through Pakistan and thence by ship via the Red Sea.

The large camp was crowded with the many young refugees. The Tehrani Jews selflessly took some of them into their homes. Members of the Jewish community did their utmost to help them, and although they knew that the young war refugees might spread the deadly typhoid fever, they did not hesitate to give them their beds while they themselves slept on the floor. Typhoid spread in Tehran and claimed a number of lives. Among those struck down was Dr. Ruhollah Sapir (Fig. 35), a great and benevolent man who played the key role in opening the clinic in the Tehran ghetto, which later came to be known as the Benevolent Society. The size of Dr. Sapir's burial ceremony was unprecedented, and his death left the Jewish community deeply bereaved.

Two other prominent figures from the Jewish Association, Elyahu Duvokin and Mrs. Moshe Sharett,[289] came to Tehran to help the Jewish refugees from Poland. Getting the young refugees to the Holy Land could not be accomplished overnight and took a long time. Following these two figures who worked day and night on behalf of the Polish refugees, Zilberberg came to Tehran, and thenceforward the Jewish Agency, or Sukhonot, established itself in that

[289]Moshe Sharett (Shertok) (1894–1965), the great Israeli politician, was one of the great leaders of the Zionist movement. He was appointed as the first Israeli foreign minister, and became prime minister following David Ben Gurion's resignation in 1954. Sharett was active in the Jewish Agency. In 1942, his wife went to Tehran to facilitate the emigration of the "Children of Tehran."

city. One of its active leaders was Dr. Goldberg, who helped Iranian Jews themselves emigrate to the land of their forebears. Through tireless efforts, the "Children of Tehran" were gradually sent on to Jerusalem.

With the end of the war, educational opportunities for Iranian Jews increased. The ORT, founded by Russian Jews, increased its activities in Iran with help from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The ORT founders believed that if the Jews learned trades, it would help them become independent.

With the help of European and American foundations, Ozar ha-Torah[290] (Persian "Ganj-e Danesh") opened offices in Iran. Its goal was to shore up traditional religious values and to spread the Hebrew language among Jews. Ozar ha-Torah had great influence on the younger generation of Iranian Jews through its opening of new schools, summer camps, seminars for training teachers, and other cultural initiatives. Rabbi Levy of Poland, who lived in Israel, actively administered Ozar ha-Torah's schools in Iran, which at first were called "Berit Torah." The directors of Ozar ha-Torah worked to open schools in cities and towns that had Jewish populations but lacked Alliance schools. The president of Ozar ha-Torah in America, Rabbi Isaac Shalom—one of the three founders of the organization—made a special effort on behalf of the education of Iranian Jews and sent an annual contribution equal to a hundred thousand *tomans* through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to the Tehran schools.

With Iran's cultural development, the number of Jewish university students saw considerable growth. Hundreds of Jewish students went to Europe and America to pursue advanced studies. Jewish girls,

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[290]This non-profit organization was created in 1945 by three religious figures from New York, Jerusalem, and Buenos Aires to provide religious instruction to Jewish children in the Near East and North Africa. It achieved rapid growth through the support of benevolent Jews. In 1970, Ozar ha-Torah had 41 schools and summer camps in Iran.

who until a few generations earlier—before the establishment of the Alliance schools—had received no education at all, were now on an equal footing with the boys and studied at all levels. In 1968, the Iranian Jewish population was more than 70,000, more than half of whom lived in Tehran, Isfahan, and Shiraz.

After the Second World War, Jewish publications in Iran used the Persian alphabet, and community newspapers were published. The weekly newspaper *'Alam-e Yahud* (Jewish World) was published from 1950 to 1959, the newspaper *Israel* was published in 1947, and the illustrated weekly *Sina* ran from 1950 to 1951.

The Iranian Jewish community came to have a number of organizations, the most important of which were in Tehran:

1. The Benevolent Society (Kanun-e Khayrkhah), founded by the late Dr. Sapir.
2. The Jewish Women's Organization (Sazman-e Banuvan-e Yahud). Among this organization's charitable acts was the opening of two nurseries which cared for children whose parents could not afford their upkeep.
3. The Jewish Cultural, Charitable, and Welfare Association (Anjoman-e Farhangi, Khayriyeh, va Behdasht-e Kalimiyan), which was affiliated with the Alliance high school.
4. Ozar ha-Torah.
5. The Jewish Quarter Association (Anjoman-e Ku-ye Kalimiyan) was established for the welfare of the Jewish ghetto, which still had impoverished residents.
6. The Cemetery Administration (Anjoman-e Edareh-ye Omur-e Gurestan).
7. The Kurosh School Association (Anjoman-e Madraseh-ye Kurosh).
8. The Jewish Association (Anjoman-e Kalimiyan), which grew out of the former Va'ed Haghhila association.

Despite the existence of numerous associations, because of their lack of coordination and the absence of a national fund to coordinate

them,[291] at least financially, and also because of the same attributes that wreaked havoc in earlier years, the Jewish community was not as successful in solving its problems as it should have been. One of the worst problems was that the community did not see to the separation of administrative and legislative power: the Jewish representative in the Assembly was also president of the Jewish Association. Though this served the interests of cronies who ultimately found their way to the Assembly, it caused the Jewish community great harm.

After the Second World War, many poor Iranian Jews headed for Israel. The poor who remained saw some improvement in their economic situation. The kinds of work performed by Jews gradually changed, and hundreds of educated Jews found jobs in business, government administration, and banking. Of course, top-level jobs were still reserved for Shi'is under the constitution; otherwise, it is hard to imagine that Jews would have advanced to the highest levels of government service. Whereas by the 1960s, conversion of Jews—both compulsory or through proselytization—had stopped, because of social change, leaving the confines of the ghetto, and interaction with others at various levels, intermarriage with non-Jews became common, especially in Tehran. With economic growth, which gradually extended to many Iranian Jews, fewer considered emigrating to Israel.

History Repeats Itself: Friendship between Iran and Israel

The most important historical event of this period for Iranian Jews—and Jews worldwide—was Israeli independence, which was achieved in the first decade of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign. In April 1947, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was formed. This committee was comprised of eleven members, including the Iranian representative. In its report pub-

[291]A national fund *was* created after the first printing of the original Persian edition of this book.

lished in August 1947, the Special Committee recommended that Palestine be divided into two independent states: one Jewish, the other Arab. This recommendation was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly on 29 November 1947.[292]

On 14 May 1948, David Ben Gurion announced Israeli independence to the world, and Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq immediately declared war on the newly-founded State of Israel. Although Iran was not an Arab country that it should confront Israel, neither could it remain still. An uproar broke out domestically, and the flames of anti-Semitism leapt up once more. The press attacked the "puppet state" and the crisis took on Islamic overtones. According to the enemies of the Jews, Islam was in danger. Newspapers with ties to Arab countries called on Iranian religious leaders to take the lead. One newspaper published an advertisement calling for volunteers for the war in Palestine. On the Shi'i holy day of 'Ashura, which fell on 12 November 1948, the Iranian Jewish community was on the brink of danger. There was little standing in the way of a new riot and massacre, but through the intervention of the Iranian government and authentic clergymen, the uproar died down.

In 1951, during Mosaddegh's term as Prime Minister, when all political parties were given freedom, the National Socialist Party (Sumka), whose young members wore black and shaved their heads in emulation of the Nazis, began spreading anti-Semitic propaganda. But with the political changes which favored the king and put an end to unbridled freedoms, the anti-Semitic propaganda also halted. The Jewish representative to the Assembly after Dr. Loghman, who served through the 13th session, was Murad Ariyeh, who held the position for 14 consecutive years, from 1942 to 1956.

In March 1949, Iran sent a representative to Israel to adjudicate "property claims of Iranian subjects in Palestine" and a year later granted Israel de facto recognition, but would not agree to receive a legation from Israel. In July 1951, Prime Minister Mohammad Mo-

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[292] *EJ*, 15:1688.

saddegh, hoping to gain the support of the Arab countries for the nationalization of the oil industry, recalled the Iranian representative to Israel. In so doing, he also pleased domestic sectarians, who at that time had once again entered the political arena along with the whole spectrum of political standard-bearers. But Iran's failure to gain support from the Arab countries in its struggle with Britain, the Israeli victory in the Sinai in 1956, and most of all Egypt's anti-Iranian activities in the Persian Gulf, forced Iran to review its relations with Israel. Despite all of these factors, and although all power was in the king's hands, Iran avoided establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel for fear of the Arab countries, and in 1958 opened an interests section through the Swiss embassy.

Finally, in 1960, the king recognized Israel, and Egypt immediately severed relations with Iran. The king repeatedly affirmed Israel's right to exist and publicly declared that Iran and Israel should maintain economic ties. With the implementation of various treaties, Israeli organizations engaged in a wide range of activities in Iran. One of the most important of these was the rebuilding of Qazvin, which suffered severe damage in the 1962 earthquake. The Marv Dasht project by Israeli technicians in Shiraz marked the beginning of agricultural changes in Iran. The Israeli national air carrier, El-Al, had regularly scheduled flights to Tehran. Many other Israelis helped to implement various other projects in Iran, and Muslim Iranians also went to Israel to study and to undergo complicated medical procedures. Bilateral trade was effected by air and through the port of Eilat.[293]

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The Jewish resurgence in the last years of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, following the bitter sufferings of centuries past, is one of the wonders of Jewish-Iranian history. Not only Jews, but Muslims, too, were amazed that after all the adversity, killing, and looting

[293] *EJ*, 8:1440–43.

suffered by this community—especially during the Safavid and Qajar dynasties—after all the harrowing events of the Constitutionalist and even the Pahlavi periods—of which the Kurdistan massacre is but a single example—this nation could survive, stand up on its feet, raise its head, gird itself for service to the Iranian nation, produce surgeons, professors, bankers, engineers, nurses, artisans, artists, factory owners, managers, office workers, and technicians, and clasp hands with their fellow countrymen, whose forefathers had committed the most heinous acts against their forebears. How could it be that this Iranian Jew—who should be filled with hate, vindictiveness, enmity, and suspicion—could take the hand of a desperately ill Muslim and bring him to an Israeli hospital to be cured? How could it be that this person, whose grandfather was cut in half during the Qajar dynasty for the crime of playing an instrument in a public park, should struggle so hard to preserve traditional Iranian music, saving it through the likes of Davud Shirazi, Musa Khan Kashani, Rahim Qanuni Shirazi, Yahya Zarrinpanjeh, and Morteza Ney Davud?

This Iranian Jew with his physician's healing hands and musician's magical fingers both cured his countryman's bodily ailments and served as a salve for his soul. What kind of person is he that vindictiveness should find no place in his heart? Is not this follower of Moses an example of sublime humanity? Is not the Iranian Jew a lily growing in the salt marsh of bigotry? Is not the blossoming of this flower in such a salt marsh—the likes of which are to be found in many other parts of the world—a miracle of God? ✡

Glossary

DEFINITIONS of some of the Persian and Hebrew terms used in this book are provided here. —*G.W. Maschke*

akhund (آخوند) A Muslim cleric. In contemporary Persian usage, this word has a pejorative connotation. See p. 444.

dhimmi (ذمّی) A non-Muslim living in an Islamic country, especially in medieval times. See p. 165.

fatwa (فتوی) In Islamic jurisprudence, a formal legal opinion.

geonim (גאונים) pl. Title given to the directors of the Jewish academies in Babylon. See p. 167.

hakham (حاخام) Title given by Iranian Jews to their religious leaders.

haram (حرام) forbidden by religious law.

jadidi (جدیدی) Short for *jadid al-islam* (جدید الاسلام), or "new to Islam." Appelation given to a convert to Islam; used especially in reference to the Jews at Mashhad who were compelled to convert to Islam. See p. 430.

kadkhoda (کدخدا) Title formerly given by Iranian Jews to their secular leaders. In common Persian usage, a village chief.

khaqan (خاقان) Title of the emperor of China, and used by extension to designate the leaders of Turkic peoples. Used in this book in reference to the king of the Khazars (p. 181 ff.) and the Qajar kings (p. 385).

mujtahid (مجتهد) In Shi'i jurisprudence, a jurist deemed competent to independently arrive at a valid legal opinion.

mullah (ملا) A preacher. Though commonly associated with Muslim spiritual leaders, the term is also used by Iranian Jews to designate their preachers. Compare to "pseudo-mullah" (ملانما) used by the author to designate wrongheaded clerics (see footnote on p. 265).

qeran (قران) In Qajar times, a silver coin valued at 1,000 dinars and weighing approximately five grams.

resh galuta (ראש גלותא) Exilarch. Leader of a Jewish community outside of Eretz Israel. See p. 114 ff.

shahi (شاهی) In Qajar times, a coin valued at 50 dinars (one-twentieth of a *qeran*).

shurut (شروط) Literally, "conditions." The *shurut* of 'Umar were restrictions placed on *dhimmi*s. See p. 166.

toman (تومان) In Qajar times, a coin valued at 10,000 dinars; equivalent to 10 *qeran*s.

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Index

THIS KEYWORD INDEX includes most proper names and adjectives appearing in this book. Instances of words appearing in footnotes have not been included.

Ab Anjirak 278
Abarqu 316, 343
Abba 131
Abba Arikha 133, 135
'Abbas I 263, 266, 279, 283, 296, 300, 303, 305, 310, 313–14, 318, 320, 333, 379, 387
'Abbas II 266, 284, 286, 289, 291, 293, 295, 297, 300, 303, 310, 318–19, 324, 326, 330, 332–33, 337, 342, 358, 379
'Abbas III 349
'Abbas Mirza 370–71, 404, 407, 409
Abbasid 164, 172, 175, 180–81, 183, 185, 187–88, 195, 197, 209, 220
Abbasids 165, 173, 175, 190, 195
Abbaye 135
'Abd al-Majid, Sultan 451
'Abd al-Malik bin Marwan 169
'Abd al-Mutallib, 'Abdallah ibn 159
'Abd al-Rahman III 204
'Abd al-Rahman, Emir 33
'Abdallah ibn Saba 167
Abel-beth-maacah 25
Abhar 241
Abishur 511
Abraham 5, 13, 22, 74, 157, 404, 408, 410
Abraham ben Simi 206
Abraham the Dyer 239
Absalom 16
Abu al-Qasim 353
Abu al-Talib 159
Abu Amram 180
Abu Bakr 159, 162–63
Abu Bakr bin Sa'd bin Zangi 219
Abu Muslim 164, 195
Abu Sa'id 248–49
Abu Sa'id ibn Dawud 240
Abu Yusuf 186
Abyaneh 381
Achaemen 43
Achaemenid 10, 22–23, 33, 39, 43, 47, 49, 52, 55, 63–64, 70, 72, 74–75, 79, 81, 85–86, 88, 93, 112, 121, 132, 144–45, 183
Achaemenids 43, 48, 50, 63, 71, 99, 120, 132, 144
Acre 373
Acropolis 48
Adam 152
Adiabene 104–5, 108, 111, 115, 141
Adler, Alhanan Natan 380
Adriatic Sea 50
Afghan 32, 34, 37, 300, 347, 351–52, 355, 358, 360, 431
Afghanistan xv, 32, 34, 37, 59, 127, 148, 196, 199, 271, 394, 422, 430–31, 521
Afghans 33–34, 267, 297, 347, 349, 351, 360, 431
Afjeh'i, Sayyid Mahdi 436
Africa 19, 24, 39, 108, 163, 169, 188, 209, 452
Afridi 37
Afshar 348
Afshar, 'Adil Shah 368
Afsharid 361–62, 369
Agha Baba 335, 359
Agha Baba, Mullah Abraham 485, 491, 493
Agha Muhammad Ja'far 387
Agha Muhammad Khan 350
Agha Shaykh Hadi 541
Agha Shaykh Hadi Fountain 520
Agha Shaykh Hadi Street 506
Agha Taqi 502
Agha Yusuf Synagogue 434
Aghasi, Haji Mirza 390

Ahab ben Omri 17
Aharon, Davud 511
Ahashverosh 409
Ahasuerus 64–65, 67, 70
Ahava River 77
Ahmad ibn Buyeh 198
Ahmad Shah 475, 477, 524
Ahmetha 61
Ahriman 10, 120
Ahura Mazda 10, 47, 92, 120, 139
Ahvaz 190
Ak Koyunlu 223
Akkadians 5
al-Kabir, 'Abbasid caliph 208
'Ala' al-Din Khwarazmshah 219
'Alam-e Yahud 547
Alani 109, 238
Albania 261
Aleppo 28, 467, 519
Alexander 49, 52, 63, 81, 85–86, 91, 93–94, 238, 252, 348
Alexandria 94, 99, 103, 107, 110, 146, 183, 285
Algeria 261, 373
'Ali ibn Abi Talib 159, 162, 164, 167–68, 188–89, 199, 210
'Ali ibn Buyeh 198
'Ali Muhammad 391–92
'Ali Pasha 305
Alids of Tabaristan 198
Allahvardi Khan 308–9
Alliance israélite universelle 106, 381, 383, 399–400, 421, 427, 429, 444, 446, 448, 451, 470, 485–86, 489, 492, 495, 499, 501, 504, 512, 516, 531, 544, 546–47
Almageste 188
Almas 352
Alp Arslan 218
Alps 19
Alroy, David 230, 232, 236
Alshekh, R. Moses 379
'Amadiyah 232–33, 237
Amalekites 9, 406, 410
Amanallah, Shah 33
'Amaria 234–35
America 24, 261, 477, 481–82, 505, 507, 546
American 30, 489–90, 505, 507, 510, 520, 531, 533
American Board of Foreign Missions 30
American Indians 39
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 511–12, 522, 546
Americans 480
'Amili, Shaykh Baha' al-Din Muhammad 282
Amin 187–88, 195
Amin al-Dawlah 242
Amin al-Sultan, Mirza 'Ali Asghar Khan 464
Amina 250, 253
Amir Kabir 249, 367, 372, 375, 433–34
Amir Khiz 475
Amiri 234
Ammon 10
Ammonites 9, 58, 78
Amnon 16
amoraim 132–33, 136–37
Amorites 78
Amram, son of Kohath 7
Amsterdam 455
Anahita 38, 59, 87, 92
Anan ben David 175, 178, 188
Anania 104
ananim 175
Ananites 175
Anatolians 317
And 34
Andalus 213
Anglo-Jewish Association 381, 447, 452, 460, 463–64
Anglo-Persian Agreement 477

Anglo-Persian Oil Company 478, 480, 533
Anglo-Russian Agreement 474
Anjoman-e Edareh-ye Omur-e Gurestan 547
Anjoman-e Farhangi, Khayriyeh, va Behdasht-e Kalimiyan 547
Anjoman-e Kalimiyan 547
Anjoman-e Ku-ye Kalimiyan 547
Anjoman-e Madraseh-ye Kurosh 547
Anjoman-e Mutaraqqi 520
Anjoman-e Nikkhah 511
Anjoman-e Siyonist-e Iran 513
Anjoman-e Siyonist-e Nesvan-e Yahud-e Iran 518
anti-Rabbinic 177
anti-Semitic 6, 32, 64, 103, 166, 170, 202, 244, 269, 277, 284, 287, 296, 304, 320, 340, 359, 362, 376, 388, 426, 428, 436, 443, 485, 487, 495, 502–3, 506, 522, 543, 549
anti-Semitism 107, 112, 169, 277, 281, 284, 296, 318, 342, 359, 363, 376, 386, 388, 390, 394, 495, 509, 512, 542–43, 549
anti-Talmudic 175, 177
Antigonus 101–2
Antioch 94, 126, 150
Antiochus 86, 88, 98
Antiochus III 87
Antiochus IV Epiphanes 96
Antiochus Sides 98
Antiochus VII 88, 98
Anushirwan the Just 125–26, 150, 152, 159
anusim 33, 302, 431, 433
Anvari 223
Apharesachites 60–61
Apis 9
Appeles 96
Appolonius 96
Arab 31, 59, 126, 160–61, 165, 167, 172, 181, 183–84, 190, 195, 197, 221, 239, 242, 255, 549–50
Arabia 19, 109, 148, 154, 157, 159, 210, 261, 378, 424
Arabian 157–58, 165
Arabic xvi, xviii, 31, 165, 185, 187–88, 190, 197, 203, 205, 241, 251, 253–54, 297, 421
Arabs 127, 150, 154, 157–58, 160, 163, 165, 167, 169, 175, 178, 181, 187, 195–96, 198, 217, 429
Arak 391
Aramaic 30–31, 49, 58, 73, 92, 123, 135, 176, 232, 297
Aramea 10
Aran 381
Ararat, Mount 238
Ardabil 182, 190, 259, 291, 428–29
Ardeshir I 91, 112, 119, 121, 139, 141, 148
Ardeshir III 38
Ardeshir Papakan 119
Ardeshirnameh 250–51
Arghun 221, 241, 246, 253
Dr. Aristu 399
Ariyeh, Murad 541, 549
Arkansas 505
Armani Tabrizi, Arakel 289, 342
Armenia xv, 30, 44, 49, 89, 91, 109, 123–24, 141, 143, 146, 148, 238–39, 348
Armenian 143, 351, 409, 475, 525–26
Armenians 265, 332, 350, 362, 410, 412, 426, 448, 484, 503
Arsaces 87
Arsaces VI 87
Arsaces IX 88
Arsaces XI 89
Arsaces XIII 89, 100
Arsaces XIV 102
Arsaces XVIII 90, 103
Arsaces XXII 90, 105
Arsaces XXVI 110
Arsaces XXVII 111
Arsaces XXIX 87, 111

Arsacid 87, 89, 91–92, 95, 97–98, 101, 109, 112, 115, 135
Arsacids 87, 90, 120, 129
Artabanus 48, 87, 104–5
Artabanus III 90, 103
Artabanus V 91, 111, 135
Artaxerxes I 49, 72–73
Artaxerxes II 49, 74, 80, 540
Artaxerxes III 49
Aryan 43, 113, 542
Aryans 43, 71, 127
Arzhang 122
Asefet Hanibharim 515
Ashab Anan wa Binyamin 178
Ashdod 177
Ashdodians 58
Asher 23, 331, 364
Asher, 'Aziz 487–88
Ashi 133, 136–37, 145
Ashk 87
Ashraf 347–48, 352, 355, 360
Ashrei 362
Ashtiyani, Haji Mirza Hasan 435
Ashur 3, 9–10, 227
'Ashura 272, 276, 444, 505, 549
Ashurbanipal 11
Asia 188, 211
Asia Minor 44, 89, 108–9, 128, 142, 144, 146, 150, 153, 211, 218, 222, 230–31, 243, 262
Asian 299
Asil Mazandarani, Haji Benyamin 312, 441, 531
Assassins 210
Assyria 9, 11–12, 18, 22, 25, 31, 35, 37–38, 43, 56–57, 59
Assyrian xv, 11, 18, 24, 30, 33, 35, 37, 39, 232
Assyrians 3, 10, 12, 18, 23, 28, 31, 35, 37, 39, 43, 48, 58, 71, 113, 503
Astarabad 255, 342
Astarte 3
Astyages 43–44
Atabeg 218
Atabegs 218–19, 250
Athalia 516
Athens 48–49, 151
Atil 182, 206
Atossa 47–48
Atsiz 218
'Attar, Sayyid Kazim 527
Augustus Caesar 90, 103
Australia 24, 39
Austria 269, 376, 505
Austrian 515
Avelei Zion 179
Avesta 10, 91–92, 119
Avicenna 254, 421
Avlet 134
Avva 26
Aws 159, 161
'Ayn al-Dawlah 199
Ayyub, Hakim 467, 523
Azalis 372
Azerbaijan 28–29, 36, 43, 87, 109, 114–15, 128, 130, 205, 218, 221, 223, 232–33, 237, 240, 243, 245, 249, 253, 262, 265, 277–78, 281, 349, 370, 428, 430, 476, 479–80, 503–4, 528, 530, 534
Azerbaijani 428, 520, 531
'Aziz Khan 541
'Aziz Mehmed Effendi 287
'Azud al-Dawlah 198–99, 461
'Azud al-Mulk 475
Azulai, R. Haim Yusuf 362
Ba'alai ha Mikra 177
Baal 10
Bab 391–92, 394
Bab, Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad 372
Baba ibn Abraham 359

Baba ibn Nuriel 361
Baba Samah, Yehuda 461
Baba'i Farhad 300, 302, 343, 351, 353, 358–59
Baba'i Lutf 300, 302–3, 314, 318, 326, 335, 338, 341, 343, 351
Baba-Kordad 433
Babis 392
Babism 392
Babol 395–96, 424, 514
Babol Sar 508
Babylon xv, 3, 9–10, 12, 19, 23, 26, 28, 38, 43, 46, 51, 56, 58, 61, 63, 66, 71, 75, 77, 85, 87, 91, 98, 100–101, 105, 110, 114, 122–23, 129, 133, 135, 137, 141, 143, 146, 148, 150, 158, 165, 168, 175, 185, 200, 203, 205, 211, 213, 226, 237, 239
Babylonian 19–20, 23, 25, 28, 33, 45, 57, 81, 132–33, 136, 138, 168, 208–9
Babylonians 10–11, 20, 28, 43, 45, 71
Bactria 46, 87, 98, 114
Badi' al-Hukama' 445
Badkubeh 205
Bagh-e Shah 474–75, 485
Baghdad 29, 164–65, 177, 183–84, 186, 190, 195, 198, 202, 207, 209, 211, 217, 219–20, 222, 224–25, 232, 234, 236, 242, 245, 255, 259, 261, 270, 289, 303, 316, 327, 330, 348, 362, 378, 403, 419, 444, 454, 491, 509, 519–20, 534
Baguas 77
Baha'allah 372–73, 394
Baha'i 373, 392, 394, 495, 514
Baha'is 372–73, 392–93, 399, 423, 445, 466, 473, 484
Bahadina 404, 406, 408, 410
Bahaism 398–99
Bahrain 263
Bahram Chubin 153
Bahram Gur 124–25, 136, 145–46
Bahran 310
Bakhtiari, Sardar As'ad 475
Bakhtiaris 486
Bakhur, Davud 517
Baku 348, 437, 508
Balfour Declaration 509–10, 512, 518
Balfour, Lord Arthur James 509–10
Balkh 32, 85, 180, 188, 191, 197, 205, 220, 421, 424
Balkhi, Hiwi al- 180, 204, 207
Baluch, Muhammad 348
Baluchi 128
Baluchistan 85
Bandar 329
Bandar 'Abbas 350
Baneh 504
Bani Isfahan 342–43
Banu Nadhir 161
Banu Qaynuqa 160–61
Banu Qurayza 161
Baqir Khan 475
Bar Forush 395, 424–25, 454–55
Bar Hannan 136
Bar Hebraeus 253–54
Baraba, Joseph 179
Bardiya 46–47
Barmakite 187
Barmakites 164
Barukhiyan, Nehurai 511, 517
Barzuk 381
Bashqalah 406
Basrah 5, 177, 185, 362
Bayanat Mureh 468
Bayazid 262
Bazharut 253
Beersheba 8, 157
Behbehani, Sayyid 'Abdallah 473, 491
Beheshtiyeh 522
Beijing 219

Beirut 465
Belgian 489
Beliefs and Opinions 204
Ben Gurion, David 549
Ben-Zvi, Itzhak xvii, 33–34, 145, 381, 429
Benei Mikra 177
Benevolent Society 547
Benjamin 15, 17, 23, 28, 57, 308, 335, 404
Benjamin ben Mishal 253
Benjamin II 31, 380, 401, 403, 412–13, 415–16, 418
Benjamin of Tudela 29–30, 32, 182, 186, 226–27, 230, 233–34, 236, 239, 378–79
Benjamin, Israel Joseph 380, *See also* Benjamin II
Benyamin 353
Benyamin bar Shalom 379
Beral, 'Aziz 517, 519–20, 528–29
Berit Torah 546
Berlin 452, 455
Berlin Congress 452
Bernisim, Shemuel 360
Beshqelan 424
Bethlehem 184
Beygan 381
Bible xv, 17, 21, 24, 26, 38, 47, 53, 63, 70–71, 75–76, 152, 157, 176, 180, 204, 226, 252, 414, 417
Bidgol 381
Bigthana 66, 68
Bijar 424
Bilu 422, 509
Biruni, Abu Rayhan 122, 198
Bistun 47–48, 50
Black Sea 181
Black Sheep 223
Bohemia 452
Bokhara 28–29, 33–34, 36, 148, 191, 197, 199, 205, 220, 271, 318, 377–78, 421, 424, 430, 508, 521
Bokharan 256
Bolshevik 509
Bolshevik Revolution 474, 477
Bolsheviks 509
Boluri, Davud 501–2
Bombay 431
Bonaparte, Napoleon 348, 369–70, 451
Borujerd 222, 424, 514
Brahmins 121
Britain 474, 476, 479, 510, 518, 550
British 350, 361, 431, 447, 449, 453–54, 463, 476–77, 501, 507, 509–10, 517, 529, 532–33, 544
Brukhim, Ishaq 517, 541
Brussels 455
Bu Vahid 198
Buckingham Palace 460, 464
Buddha 129
Buddhism 127, 138
Buddhist 221, 242, 247
Buddhists 121, 180, 197
Bukan 504
Bulan 182
Bulgaria 261
Bushehr 410, 413, 424, 514
Bustan 219
Bustanai ben Haninai 166, 168, 175
Bustanai, Solayman 517
Buyeh 198
Buyid 202
Byzantine 146, 153–54, 160, 205, 230
Byzantine Empire 170
Byzantines 126, 154, 160
Byzantium 124, 126, 146–47, 151, 153–54, 160, 218, 230, 261
Cabala 179, 283, 286, 300
Cabalism 283
Cabalist 179

Cabalistic 179
Cabalists 179, 300
Caesar 89–90, 101, 106
Cairo 177, 253
Calah 27, 35
Calimani, Baruch 379
Calvin, John 260
Cambyses 33, 46, 56, 59
Canaan 5, 7, 9, 13, 71
Canaanites 78
Caphar Tarac 227, 229
Cappadocia 121
Carlsbad 515
Carrhae 89, 101, 121
Carthage 46, 95
Caspian Sea 92, 125, 181, 265, 313, 370, 437
Catholic 260
Catholics 227, 261
Caucasians 421
Caucasus 24, 28, 34, 92, 109, 148, 261, 271, 348, 370, 413, 428, 544
Cazès, Joseph 446–47, 465, 469, 488, 497
Cemetery Administration 547
CENTO 481
Central Asia 128
Chahar Payghambar 382–83
Chaldea 9–10, 158
Chaldean 19, 45, 52, 71
Chaldeans 11, 18, 38, 412
Chaldiran, Battle of 262
Chaphton 234, 237
Chardin, John 267, 286, 288, 296, 347, 426
Charlemagne 184
Children of Tehran 544, 546
China xv, 88, 91, 128, 140, 148, 191, 219, 222, 224
Chinese 223
Chisdai 234
Chopanids 222, 250
Christ 231
Christensen, Arthur 129, 133
Christian 113, 122, 125, 146, 150, 152, 154, 158, 160, 225, 230–31, 242, 256, 466
Christianity 123–24, 127, 129, 138, 140, 142, 150, 160, 175, 182, 217, 227, 231, 244, 254, 260, 380, 391, 398–99, 406
Christians 21, 31, 121, 123, 125, 128–29, 131, 137, 139, 142, 144, 148, 151, 154, 160, 164, 166, 169–70, 180, 186, 188, 225, 230–31, 239, 241, 244, 256, 260, 262, 265, 269, 280, 282, 289, 310, 350, 420, 445
Cilicia 121
Cleopatra 102
Cohen, Albert 457
Columbus, Christopher 260
Confino, Albert 400, 463, 470, 496
Constantine 123
Constantinople 144, 182, 230, 297, 406
Constitutionalist Proclamation 474
Constitutionalist Revolution 373, 375, 473, 483–84, 487–88, 490, 492, 494, 540
Copenhagen 514
Cordoba 208
Cossack Brigade 474, 477
Cossacks 448, 474, 476, 496
Crassus 89, 101
Crémieux, Adolphe 451, 454, 456, 462
Crete 145
Crimea 183, 206, 209, 239
Crusaders 231, 239, 243
Crusades 21, 230, 233, 240, 242, 261
Ctesiphon 90–91, 103, 110, 128, 133, 140, 143, 184, 200
Curzon, George Nathaniel 383, 425, 429, 433
Cuth 227
Cuthah 26
Cyaxares 11–12
Cyprus 373

Cyrus xv, 21, 23, 27, 36, 43, 47, 49, 51, 57, 61, 63, 70–71, 114, 153, 251, 367, 376, 456–57, 540
Cyrus cylinder 45
d'Beth Hillel, R. David 378, 380, 401, 403–4, 411–12, 427
Dabaristan 235
Dabistan 299
Daghestan 206, 348, 405
Daghestanis 34
Dalalat al-ha'irin 240
Damascus 126, 164–65, 173, 177, 198, 362, 451
Damavand 19, 27, 35–36, 38–39, 94, 115, 130, 184, 202, 278, 284, 309, 316, 342, 360, 395, 424, 437, 462, 514
Damavandi, Mullah Agha Baba 360, 382, 389, 426, 429
Damghan 179, 360, 383
Dan 23, 31, 209, 227
Dani, Eldad 209
Daniel xv, 71–72, 236–37, 271, 287
Daniel Ben Chisdai 238
Danube River 47, 114
Dar al-Fonun 372, 489
Dar al-Shura 473
Dar al-Yahud 320
Darab 498
Darband 348
daric 48
Darius 38, 46, 50, 55, 57–58, 60, 64, 70, 72, 85, 94, 540
Darius II 49, 73
Darius III 49, 81
Dark Ages 169, 278
Darvish, Yusuf 517
Darya-ye Nur 348
Dasht-e Moghan 349
Daudiya 410
David 16, 33, 55–56, 63, 99, 211, 238, 404, 410
David ben Judah 180
David ben Zakkai 206, 208, 211–12
David of Hamadan 186
Davud 352–53, 355–56, 358
Davud Parforush, 487
Daylam 197–98, 205
Daylaman 362, 383
Daylamite 198–99
Daylamites 197, 200, 209, 211, 217
dayyan 271
dayyanim 186
Dead Sea 9
Deborah 14
Dehlavi, Amir Khosrow 223
Delhi 299
Demetrius 88
Democratic Party 476
Denmark 24
Derekh haim 468
Deuteronomy 8, 12–13, 19, 251, 413, 440
Dezful 429
dhimmis 165, 169–70, 250
Dhu Nuwas 158
Disraeli, Benjamin 233
Diyarbekir 223, 238, 242, 262
Diyarrabi' 242
du Mans, Père Raphael 289
Dubeux, M.L. 412
Dubnow, Simon xvi, 37, 59, 81
Dulab 439
Durrani 32
Dustan Tappeh 544
Dutch 267, 350
Duvokin, Elyahu 545
East India Company 266, 350
Eastern Europe 183
Ebrami, Hooshang xv-xvi
'Ebriyat Hamziqat Sefet 'Eber 511
Ecbatana 43, 46, 87, 114, 412

Edessa 121
Edom 10
Edomite 101
Edomites 9, 58
Egypt 3, 6–7, 9, 12, 16, 18, 45–46, 49, 54, 58–59, 73, 75, 93, 96, 99, 102–3, 108, 126, 128, 154, 163, 203, 207, 209–10, 226, 261, 271, 277, 373, 451, 541, 549–50
Egyptian 18, 58, 190, 207, 226
Egyptians 9, 11, 71, 73–74, 78, 231
Eilat 550
El'azar 310
El'azar, Haji Meir 423
El'azar, Mullah Haim 399, 422
Elam 9, 11, 28, 87, 236
Elamite 22, 49
Elamites 5
Elborz Mountains 195, 197–98
Eldeguz 218
Elephantine 58–59, 73–74
Elghanian, Haji 'Aziz 511, 541, 544
Eli 14–15, 234
Elihar 343–44
Elijah 179, 232
Elisha' 339, 359
Elisha' ben Shemuel 360
Elizabeth, Queen 263
Elyahu 335
Elyahu, Shem'un 511
Elyahu, Shemuel 511
Encyclopedia Judaica xvii
England 260, 263, 266, 286, 370–71, 374, 451
English xv-xvi, 33, 114, 263, 266, 278, 288, 350, 369, 371, 374, 399, 409, 444, 446, 460, 464, 501
Ephraim 13
Esarhaddon 57
Eshaqabad 284
Ester xv
Esther xv, 64, 71, 251, 271, 327, 359, 409, 417, 456
Ethiopia xv, 17, 46–47, 50, 64, 69, 158
Ethiopians 317
Euphrates River 16, 27, 30, 47, 89, 92, 105, 110–11, 114, 123, 141, 185
Euripides 89
Europe 37, 108, 123, 169, 184, 203, 210–11, 217, 230, 232, 240, 244, 256, 261, 263, 266, 269, 279–80, 285–86, 362, 373, 389, 393, 414–15, 417, 423, 451–52, 457, 460, 464, 476, 479, 489, 519, 546
European xvi, 226, 240, 259, 263, 267, 269–70, 278, 281, 284, 288, 299, 310, 342, 350, 370, 373, 381, 389, 391, 396, 414, 422, 441–42, 451, 453, 455, 459, 461, 463, 466, 499, 501, 546
Europeans 263, 269, 277, 279, 281, 317, 351, 370, 489
Exodus 6–7, 251
Ezekiel 24, 38, 73
Ezra xv, 24, 36, 52–53, 55, 58, 60, 63, 71, 73, 80, 137
Ezra Ya'qub Synagogue 438–39, 515, 521, 538
Ezranameh 250
Fakhr al-Dawlah 242
Farahabad 265, 291, 310–11, 313–14, 316, 333, 342, 348
Farahani, Qa'im Maqam 367, 375
Fars 43, 63, 101, 115, 119, 121, 185, 197, 202, 218–19, 240, 242, 308–9, 349
Fatimid 190, 226
Fawziyah 541
Felatuni, Shams al-Attiba' 449
Ferdinand 261
Feridun 152
Fin 337–38, 344, 372
Firdaws al-hakim 189
Firdowsi 199, 202

Firuz 163
Firuz Kuh 32, 360
Fischel, Walter 245, 253, 297, 300, 361, 403
Flandin, Eugène 280, 390, 412, 426
Flavius Vespasian 107–8
Florentin, David 515
Fortress of Death 220
Four Captives 208
France 114, 175, 260, 370, 444, 452–53, 461, 464, 477, 482, 490, 503, 518
Franks 140
French xviii, 280, 288, 350, 368, 370, 376, 419, 444, 447, 449, 451, 454, 456, 458, 461, 467, 489, 495, 516
French Revolution 451
Frye, Richard Nelson 43
Furat ben Shehata 184
Gabri 128
Gabriel 81
Gad 23, 35, 285
Gad, Baruch 30, 379
Gadolat Mordecai 468
Galanabad 343
Galilee 25–26, 107, 154
Gamaliel 146
Gamiel 111
Ganj-e Danesh 546
Garus 408
Gaul 114
Gaumatha 46–47
Gaykhatu 243
gazit 127–28
Ge'ula, Yusuf 512, 517
Gemara 132, 136–37
Genesis 6, 158
Genghis Khan 219, 222, 240, 247, 256
geonim 167–68, 176, 185–86, 211
Georgia 28, 143, 148, 254, 265, 310, 313, 349, 370, 405, 413
Georgia 310
Georgian 143, 310, 312
Georgians 238
German 543
Germania 121
Germans 476, 479
Germany 260, 266, 419, 478–79, 517
Ghamisar 381
Ghazan 199, 243, 246–47
Ghazan Khan 426
Ghazan, Mahmud 221
Ghazna 29, 191, 199
Ghaznavid 203
Ghaznavids 199–200, 213
Ghazni 32
Ghaznin 30, 199, 211, 237
Ghazzali 217
Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad 249
Ghur 32
Ghurids 32
Ghuristan 32
Ghuzz 229
Ghuzz Turks 217
Gil'ad 35, 39, 94, 114, 130, 278–79, 284, 360, 384, 437, 514, 541
Gilaki 128
Gilan 28, 36, 197, 205, 254, 316, 348, 383, 487
Gilead 25, 35
Gilyard 94, 278, 360, 541
Girgashim 238
Giza 150
Gobineau, Arthur Comte de 419–20
God 3, 10, 13, 15, 20, 22, 52–53, 57–58, 60, 62, 72, 75, 77, 79, 139, 144, 157, 159, 161–62, 174, 177, 179, 204, 225, 243, 252, 286, 288, 296, 298, 303, 309, 311–12, 320, 323, 325, 331–32, 338, 340, 342, 351, 353, 356, 361, 363, 393, 402, 404, 408, 410, 414, 417, 419, 433, 440, 456, 460, 464–65, 551

Goldsmid, Sir G. 464
Golestan 252
Golestan, Treaty of 370
Goliath 16
Golpayegan 328–29, 335–36, 342, 379, 424, 495–96, 514, 525
Gorgan 28–29, 38, 85, 87, 115, 130, 183, 197–98, 217
Gorji, Khwajeh Israel 353
Gorji, Mattetia 433
Goths 140, 144
Gozan River 27, 29–30, 32
Graetz, Heinrich xvi, 37, 94, 101, 112, 130, 139, 151, 205, 245
Grand Synagogue 434
Grant, Asahel 30
Great Britain 21
Greece xv, 48–49, 72, 85, 95, 98, 107, 128, 183, 421
Greek xvi, 20, 46, 48–49, 64, 81, 85–86, 88–89, 92–93, 95, 98, 103, 105, 108, 112, 124, 128, 151, 185, 188, 203, 205, 297, 421
Greeks 21, 48, 64, 87–88, 92, 98, 103–4, 112, 114, 147
Gregorian xviii
Gundishapur 121
Gurganj 220, 254
Ha-Ge'ula 519, 533, 536
Ha-Haim 530, 533, 535, 537
Habakkuk 409
Habib Levy Cultural Foundation xiii, xvii
Habor 27
Hadash Synagogue 484, 510, 514
Hadassah 66
Hafez 225, 252, 256, 276, 288
Haft paykar 251
Hagar 157–58
Haggadah 137
Haggai 60, 71, 383
Hai ben Sherira 212
Haim, Shemuel 521, 523, 528, 538
Haim, Solayman 511, 517
Haj Mirza Agha Nuri 395
Haji 'Ali Agha 486
Haji Aharon 509
Haji Danyal 503
Haji Hashim 364
Haji Ibrahim Khan 364
Haji Mirza Hadi 461–62
Haji Mirza Husayn Naraqi mosque 382
Haji Reza 317
Haji Shaykh Baqir 498
Haji Solayman 445
Hajiyeh Nabat Khanom 384
Hajiyeh Senobar 437, 518
hakhamim 168, 207
Hakim Asher Synagogue 510
Hakim Synagogue 395
Hakim, Farajallah 541
Halah 27, 35
Halakah 137, 174
Halevi, Rabbi Joseph Ararkh'la 227
Halimi, Meir 520
Halu'a, Abraham 380
Halutz 381
Hamadan 28, 43–44, 50, 63, 70, 78, 115, 145, 173–74, 177, 186, 198, 202, 237, 246, 248, 271, 291, 300, 326–27, 342, 348, 352, 358–59, 379, 383, 391, 407, 409, 412–13, 415–16, 421, 423–24, 443, 445, 454, 461–62, 464, 466, 469, 498, 502, 508–9, 514, 518, 520–21, 534–35, 541
Hamadani, Yudghan 172, 174
Haman 64, 66, 71, 270, 342, 359, 409, 417
Hamath 26
Hamun, R. Moshe 297
Hanafis 219
Hanani 79

Hanilai 105
Hanina 176
Hanukkah 98
Haq Nazar, Hakim 394–95, 398, 437
Haran 5
Harding, Warren G. 505
Harizi, Judah al- 379
Harmon, Mount 8
Harun 381
Harun al-Rashid 164, 184, 186–87, 195
Harun Velayat 255
Harun, Davud 441–42
Haruniyan, Rahim 533
Haruniyan, Yehuda 541
Hasan 163
Hasan bin Sabah 210
Hasan ibn Buyeh 198
Hasanabad 493, 541
Hasidim 95
Hasinai 105
Hasmonai 96
Hasmonean 100, 102
Hasmoneans 112
Hayy, Isma'il 541
Hayy, Solayman Eshaq 516–17
Hazor 25
Hebra Qadishah 523
Hebrew xviii, 27, 31–32, 78, 81, 92, 146, 151–52, 176, 182, 190, 203, 205, 209, 241, 246, 250–51, 253, 256, 266, 270, 283, 285, 287, 291, 297–98, 300, 302, 326, 341, 361, 382, 385, 387, 392, 401, 405, 411, 416, 421, 423, 434, 460, 467, 469, 493, 510, 512, 515–16, 546
Hebron 394
Hegai 65–66
Hejaz 158, 165–66, 174, 188
Hell 120
Hellenism 86, 95
Hephthalites 125–26, 148, 150
Heraclius 154
Herat 32–33, 36, 197, 220, 223, 371–72, 421, 424, 430, 432–33, 508
Herod 101, 103, 143
Herodotus 43, 46, 64
Herzl, Theodore 518
Hezb-e demokrat 476
Hezb-e e'tedal 476
Hezekiah 101, 212–13
Hibat Siyon 508, 534
Hifz al-sahhah 189
Hillel 102, 146
Himalayas 19, 92
Hindi 188
Hindu Kush 19
Hisar 278
Hisdai 205
Hisdai ibn Shaprut 182, 203, 205, 209
Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik 175
Hitler, Adolph 542, 544
Hittite 10
Hittites 10, 78
Hjalmarson, Colonel 476
Holland 260, 286
Holy Land xv
Hope Association 529
Hormoz 112, 262
Hormozd I 138
Hormozd IV 152–53
Hoshea 18, 26–27
Hubut yehuda 300
Hulagu 219, 221, 247
Huna 135, 144
Huna ben Nathan 136
Huna II 131
Huna III 131
Huna IV 131
Huna V 131
Huna VI 131, 149

Huna Mar I 131
Hungary 183, 261, 277, 421
Huns 126, 136, 144, 181
Husayn 164–65, 167, 169, 189
Husayn Qoli Khan 385
Husayn Safavi 267
Hyderabad 299
Hyrcania 86, 286
Hyrcanus 98–99
I'timad al-Dawlah 267, 288, 290, 293, 320, 327, 330, 332, 337, 340, 342
Ibn Abi al-Thaj 205
Ibn al-Athir 183
Ibn Dawud 213
Ibn Fadlan 181
Ibn Futuhi 242
Ibn Hawfal 181
Ibn Khaldun 170
Ibn Rustah 181
Ifham al-Yahud 234
Ifra-Hormoz 143
Al-Ihya' wa al-athar 246
Ijon 25
Iliffe, J.H. 138
Ilkhanid 221–22, 241, 246, 249
Ilkhanids 221–22, 247
Ilyas 37
'Imad al-Dawlah 198
Immortal Guards 48
India xv, 17, 24, 33, 39, 47, 64, 69, 85, 88, 91, 110, 128, 140, 148, 167–68, 199, 211, 238, 261, 267, 271, 299, 348, 369–70, 378, 403, 421
Indian 188
Indian Ocean 50, 92
Indians 48
Indians, American 24
Indus River 44, 92, 348
Innocent III, Pope 231
Inquisition 260, 270
Iqbal, 'Abbas 160, 162, 197, 242–43, 245, 247, 249, 262, 266, 349, 368, 477
Iran xiii-xv, 3, 11, 23, 26, 30, 33, 39, 43, 46, 55, 57, 59–60, 62, 64, 66–67, 69, 71, 73, 75, 78, 81, 85, 102, 104, 107, 109, 115, 119, 121, 128, 130, 148, 150, 154, 157, 163, 170, 172, 174, 180, 188, 191, 195, 202, 205, 213, 217, 227, 232–33, 236, 241, 244, 248, 250–51, 254, 256, 259–60, 262, 272, 277, 282, 284, 289, 291, 293, 296, 298, 300, 305, 318, 322, 324, 329, 331, 333, 376, 342, 347, 351, 362, 364, 367, 369, 381, 383, 385, 389–90, 392, 394, 398–99, 401, 403, 411, 413, 420, 422, 426, 429, 434, 437, 441, 446–47, 451, 460, 463, 467, 473, 485, 488, 490, 493, 502–3, 505, 510, 512–13, 518, 523, 536, 540, 544, 546, 550
Iranian xiii-xvi, 3, 5, 24, 27, 29, 34–35, 39, 44–45, 47, 49–50, 52, 55, 57, 59, 63–64, 71, 73–74, 76, 78, 80–81, 85, 87, 89–90, 93, 95–96, 98, 100–101, 104–5, 107, 109, 111, 113, 115, 123, 125, 127, 131, 133, 135, 137, 140, 142, 144, 148, 151, 154, 163, 165, 168, 172–73, 175, 177, 179, 181, 183, 185, 187, 190–91, 195, 202, 206, 208, 210–11, 217–18, 221, 224, 230, 233, 237, 241, 243, 250–51, 259, 262, 264, 270–71, 277, 279, 281, 284, 288–89, 301–2, 310–11, 318, 324, 333, 341, 347, 352, 359, 362–63, 368, 370–71, 373–74, 377–78, 380–81, 383, 388, 394, 396, 399–400, 413, 419, 421–22, 424, 446, 448–49, 452, 456, 458, 462, 464, 468, 473, 479, 481, 483–84, 487, 489, 495, 497, 502–3, 506, 508, 510, 512, 515–16, 518, 521, 524, 528–29, 532–33, 535, 537, 543–44, 546, 551
Iranian Jewish Women's Zionist Association 518
Iranian Zionist Association 513, 515–16, 518, 538
Iranians 10, 49–50, 54, 58, 62–63, 70, 73, 81,

86–87, 98, 111, 114, 154, 164, 167, 195–96, 200–201, 217, 220–21, 241, 247, 259, 269, 280, 441, 484, 490, 494, 508, 542–43, 550
Irano-Greek wars 48
Iraq 5, 30, 166, 169, 185–86, 198, 256, 261, 264, 373, 422, 482, 522, 549
Ireland 24
Isaac 5, 157, 331, 404, 410
Isaac, ambassador of Charlemagne to Harun al-Rashid 184
Isaiah 13, 24, 38, 53–54, 71, 73
Isar 381
Isfahan 28, 63, 143, 145, 147, 173, 175, 177, 185–86, 198, 206, 222–23, 230, 237, 240, 254–55, 264–65, 267, 270–71, 279–80, 282, 287, 292, 297, 299–300, 305, 308, 314, 317, 319, 322, 324, 327, 329–30, 332, 335, 342, 344, 347, 349, 351–52, 355, 361, 363, 382, 384, 386, 390, 401, 411, 413, 415, 423, 425, 446–47, 462, 466, 470, 475–76, 486–87, 492, 496, 508–9, 514, 535, 547
Isfahani, Abu 'Isa Isaac ben Jacob al- 172, 176
Isfahani, Isma'il 401
Isfahani, Mordecai 353, 494
Isfahanians 173
Ishaq Mirza 384
Ishaq, 'Aziz Haim 511
Ishaqabad 343
Ishmael 157
Isidor, Lazare 455
Islam 33–34, 59, 153, 157, 162, 165, 167, 170, 172, 174, 182, 187, 189, 195, 199, 202–3, 213, 221, 223, 225, 231, 239, 244, 249, 253–54, 256, 259, 261, 269–70, 282–83, 287, 290, 292, 296, 299, 302, 305, 308, 311, 313, 317, 324, 327–28, 333, 338, 340, 343–44, 349, 351, 353–54, 356, 358, 364, 382, 384, 386, 388, 391, 393–94, 398–99, 401, 413, 417, 423, 428, 430, 432, 434–35, 443, 445, 450, 455, 457, 463, 482–83, 490, 496, 498, 501, 525, 549
Islamic xvi, xviii, 166
Islamic Empire 165, 169, 202–3
Islamic law 171, 221
Isma'il 210, 259, 262
Isma'il I 259, 262, 277
Isma'il Khan 400
Isma'ili 210, 218, 220
Isma'ilis 210, 220
Isra'ili, Isaac bin Sulayman 190
Israel xiii-xv, 4, 6, 12–13, 15, 19, 22, 29, 32, 39, 52–53, 56, 59, 72, 75, 78, 133, 138, 154, 204, 227, 232–33, 246, 251, 287, 360, 362, 373, 378, 381, 384–85, 388, 412, 431, 433, 440–41, 452, 464, 482, 488, 495, 508, 513, 518, 521–22, 544, 546, 548, 550
Israel (newspaper) 547
Israel, Eliah 358–59
Israeli 26–27, 29, 35, 73, 508, 521, 544, 548, 551
Israelis 550
Israelite 33, 39, 406, 408, 410, 451, 453, 486
Israelites xv, 4, 6, 14, 24, 28, 30, 34, 36, 38, 58, 62, 127, 154, 318, 378, 404, 411, 486
Issachar 23
Istakhr 119
Istakhri 181
Istanbul 261, 264, 278, 297, 327, 437, 451, 455, 508
Isunians 173
Italian 278, 280, 300, 421, 454
Italy 208, 260, 266, 517–18
Izates 104
Izdundad 166
Izmir 285–86
'Izzat al-Dawlah 434
Ja'acob, Geon 234
Ja'far ibn Abi Talib 160

Ja'far Qoli Khan 496
Jacob 4, 7, 404, 410
jadidi 431, 434, 498, 508
jadidis 430–31, 433
Jahanabad 299
Jahrom 498
Jalal 'Abdallah 212
Jalal al-Dawlah 400
Jalayirids 222, 250
Jamalzadeh, Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali 484
Jami' al-tawarikh 246
Jami'-e Shah mosque 299
Jamshid, Arbab 491
Janoah 25
Japan 24
Jask 266
Jaxartes River 44, 50, 85, 92
Jebusites 78
Jekutiel 401–2
Jenkinson, Anthony 263
Jeremiah 24
Jericho 38, 102
Jerusalem 13, 16–17, 20–21, 23, 26, 28, 30, 52, 55, 57–58, 60, 62, 65, 73, 76, 80, 93, 96, 98, 101, 103, 105, 108, 110, 114, 126, 132–33, 135, 138, 140, 145, 150, 153–54, 160, 166, 177, 179, 218, 230–31, 233–34, 239, 242, 244, 251, 272, 326–27, 329, 341, 360–61, 378, 380, 394, 420, 423, 431, 434, 437, 456, 507, 510, 516, 518, 521, 530, 534, 545–46
Jerusalem Mishna 134
Jeshua ben Jozadak 55, 57, 60, 63
Jesus 103, 122–23, 129, 160, 173, 179, 231, 269, 406
Jew 7, 23, 32, 56, 65, 67, 69–70, 72, 144–45, 153, 165, 174, 182, 186, 188–89, 204, 229, 237, 239, 242, 245, 248, 250, 256, 282–83, 289, 293, 296, 299, 304, 306, 309–10, 313–14, 326, 330, 337, 354–55, 360, 380, 383, 390, 396, 398, 401, 405–6, 412, 418–19, 421, 423, 430, 433, 440, 447, 453, 456, 461, 463, 476, 486, 489–90, 496, 499, 505, 513, 528, 551
Jewish xiii-xiv, 3, 5, 10, 13, 24, 26, 35, 37–38, 44–45, 52–53, 56, 58, 60, 62–63, 66–67, 70, 75, 78, 80–81, 93, 97, 103, 105, 110, 112, 115, 129, 139, 141, 153, 157–58, 160, 162, 165, 167, 169, 172, 174, 186, 188, 191, 200, 213, 224, 227, 231, 233, 237, 239, 256, 260–61, 265, 269, 272, 278–79, 282, 295, 297, 300, 302, 304, 306, 308, 312, 317, 319–20, 322, 324–25, 327, 330, 332, 335, 337, 343, 351, 353, 355, 363, 375, 377, 395, 397, 399, 401, 403, 411, 413, 415, 417, 419, 421, 425, 427–28, 430, 432, 434, 441, 443, 445–46, 448, 450, 455, 457, 466, 469, 483, 506, 508, 515, 518, 524, 526, 538, 540–41, 543, 550
Jewish Association 547–48
Jewish Cultural, Charitable, and Welfare Association 547
Jewish Publication Society of America xviii
Jewish Quarter Association 547
Jewish Women's Organization 547
Jewish World *('Alam-e Yahud)* 547
Jewish Youth Association 512
Jews xiii-xiv, 3–4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 15–16, 18, 24, 28, 39, 52, 55, 57, 59, 61, 64, 67, 76, 78, 81, 88, 90, 93, 106, 108, 115, 121, 124, 126, 128, 154, 158, 162, 164, 172, 174, 177, 179, 191, 200, 203, 205, 212, 224, 229, 231, 246, 249–50, 254, 256, 260–61, 265–66, 269, 271, 277, 298, 300, 315, 317, 324, 326, 329, 331, 344, 351, 353, 355, 364, 376, 398, 400, 403, 406, 410, 416, 418, 434, 436, 438, 440–41, 443, 448, 450, 457, 459, 470, 483, 515, 518, 520, 537, 540, 546, 548, 550
Jezebel 17
jihad 231
jizya 128, 164–65, 201–2, 271, 525

Joel 23
Johannesburg 479
Jonathan 16
Jordan River 99
Joseph 23, 251
Joseph ben Hiyya 135
Joseph, *khaqan* of the Khazars 182
Josephus 28, 30
Joshia Hasan 208
Joshua 13, 15
Jovayni, Khwajeh Shams al-Din Muhammad 221
Jozadak 55
Judah 17, 23, 28, 38, 52–53, 57, 60, 63, 76, 79, 310
Judah ben Ezekiel 135
Judah Ha-Levi 181
Judah ha-Nasi 134, 136
Judah ha-Parsi 174
Judah Maccabee 97
Judaism xiii-xiv, 9, 19, 22, 34, 63–64, 70, 75, 97, 103, 105, 108, 112, 114, 138, 141–42, 154, 158, 168, 172, 174, 176, 179, 183, 203–4, 206, 208, 213, 253, 270, 277, 287, 292–93, 299, 313, 325, 340, 378, 387, 391, 394, 396, 398–99, 420, 430, 435, 466, 490, 493
Judas "the Galilean" 103
Judea 12–13, 17, 19, 21, 26, 28, 36, 38, 45, 47, 52, 56, 58–59, 62–63, 73, 75, 78, 80–81, 89, 93, 115, 133, 135, 139, 142, 144, 146, 150, 153–54, 165–66, 168, 174, 255, 404, 410, 516
Judean 26, 28, 95, 97, 102, 107–8, 111, 114–15, 142
Judeans 38, 59, 94–95, 98, 100, 102, 106, 108, 142
Judeo-Persian 33, 251, 297, 300, 516
Judges 14
Julfa 265, 343, 351
Jupiter 96, 103
Justinian 150–51
Juzjani 32
Ka'beh-ye Zartosht 121
Kaaba 158, 162, 242, 245
Kabul 28, 32–33, 36, 191, 254, 424, 508
Kadkhoda, Yusuf 429
Kahana I 131
Kahana II 131
Kai Feng Fu 148
Kalantar Shirazi, Haji Ibrahim 388
Kankavar 424
Kanun-e Khayrkhah 547
Kara Koyunlu 223
karaim 175
Karaism 203
Karaite xvi, 32, 173, 175, 177–78, 180–81, 183, 188, 209, 212, 253
Karaites 175–76, 178, 180, 188, 206–7, 209, 227, 271, 508
Karbala 165, 167, 198, 437
Kartir 121
Karu, Rabbi Joseph 261
Kashan 28, 253, 271, 289, 291–92, 299–300, 302–3, 306, 309, 316, 319, 324, 326, 337, 340, 342, 344, 351–52, 355, 361, 372, 379, 381, 385, 387, 391, 411, 413, 415, 423–24, 470, 497, 508, 514, 523, 525, 534, 541
Kashani, Akhund Mullah Muhammad 387
Kashani, Asher Mordecai 434
Kashani, Musa Khan 400, 551
Kashani, Yequtil 523
Kasher, Shem'un 517
Kashmir 348
Kavad 150
Kavad I 125, 131, 133, 137, 149, 151
Kaykhosrow, Arbab 526
Kazerun 271
Kedesh 25
Kerman 28, 46, 197–98, 291, 337, 342, 349,

368–69, 383, 424–25, 514, 534
Kermani, Mirza Reza 373, 397
Kermanshah 186, 348, 355, 410, 413, 416, 424, 466, 486, 498, 503, 509, 514, 528, 533
Ketab-e Anusi 302
Ketab-e Paydayesh 250
Kevir-e Lut 27
Khabur 27, 285
Khabur River 38, 110
Khadijah 159
Khadijah Khanom 384
Khaleh Synagogue 510
Khalid bin Walid 163
Khalil Khan Lor 328, 335, 337
Khansar 328–29, 332, 335–36, 342, 395, 398, 424, 514, 525
khaqan 182
Khaqani 223
Kharg Island 371
Kharijites 196
Khaybar 161–62
Khayyam, 'Umar 218, 223
Khazar 181, 205–6
Khazaria 181, 183, 205–6
Khazars 125–26, 180, 183, 204, 206, 239
Khazraj 159–60
Khiat 145
Khiva 183
Khizan 342
Khodabandeh, Muhammad 426
Khodadad 353
Khodadad ben Elyahu 462
Khodadad Eli 319
Khodadad, Haji Rehamim 507
Khojand 85, 197, 220
Khomayn 514
Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah 480, 482
Khorasan 28, 32–33, 36, 39, 55, 85, 87, 115, 121, 130, 164, 168, 170, 173, 180, 183, 185, 188, 195, 201, 205, 208, 211, 217–18, 238, 243, 280, 348–49, 394, 449, 521
Khorramabad 220, 222, 255, 328–29, 336
Khorramiyan 399
Khort 343
Khosravi 396
Khoy 220, 348
Khusrow I 131, 150
Khusrow Parviz 126, 153–54, 159
Khusrow va Shirin 251
Khuzestan 5, 60, 110, 112, 115, 121, 197–98, 236, 240, 256, 429
Khwarazm 28, 39, 46, 145, 181, 183, 217–18, 220
Khwarazmia 183
Khwarazmid 238, 240
Khwarazmids 218
Khwarazmshahid 218
Khwarazmshahids 219, 231, 233
Kiev 183, 206
Kisra 150
Kitab jami' al-salawat wa al-tasabih 204
Kiyakala 314
Kizil Ozein 227–28, 235, 237
Knesset 431
Kohan Sedegh, Solayman 140, 146, 154, 206, 284, 292, 361, 363, 385–86, 388, 393–94, 396, 429, 444, 489, 507, 511–12, 517, 519, 521, 529, 531
Kohan Shohet, Sinor 516–17
Kohan, Ezra Ya'qub 434
Kohan, Johanan 363
Kohan, Michael 353
Kohan, Mullah Refua 360
Kohan, R. Benyamin Yuhanan 378
Kohanim, Agha Jan 511
Kohath, son of Levi 7
Kohen Harbet, Abraham 515
Kohen Zedek ben Joseph 185, 207

Kol Na'im 400
Kolah-e Qazi 321
Kopeliovitz, Yehuda Almog 381, 521
Kornfeld, Joseph Saul 505, 507
Kuchan 374
Kuchek 343–44
Kuchek Khanom 384
Kuchek, Davud 397
Kufa 163, 165, 188
Kuh-e Nur 348
Kurdish 27, 128, 410, 522
Kurdistan 27, 32, 36, 43, 55, 111, 114–15, 130, 141, 184, 202, 232, 239, 262, 348, 378, 380, 403, 422, 522, 551
Kurds 108, 503
Kurosh School 538, 541–42
Kurosh School Association 547
Kushesh 543
Labid bin Abi al-Rabi' 245
Labin, R. Hirsch 380
Lacoin de Vilmorin, Auguste 377
Lahore 348
Lalehzar 310, 313, 333
Lalehzar Street 489
Lalehzari, Mirza Mahdi 445
Langlès, L. 412
Lar 93, 291, 299–300, 304, 306, 329–30, 342
Lari, Abu al-Hasan 304, 313, 315, 524
Lari, Judah 298
Lari, Mandi 353
Lari, Mullah Mordecai 387
Lata'if al-haqa'iq 246
Lavan, Petahiah ben Joseph ha- 239
Lavi, Musa 519
Lazar, S. Menahem 34
League of Nations 477, 517, 529
Lebanon 56, 153, 452, 549
Lenjan 314
Levanof, Natanel 520
Leven, Narcisse 453
Levi 7, 23, 30
Levi, R. Moshe 300
Levites 56, 76, 78, 410
Leviticus 251
Levy, Habib xiii, xiv-xvi, 516–17, 519, 541, 544
Lévy, Nissim 448–49, 469
Levy, Rabbi Menahem 521
Levy, Rehamim Khodadad 396, 437
Libya 46
Lidians 48
Lisbon 285
London 380–81, 399, 431, 452, 454–55, 460
Lor 349
Lori 128
Loria, Léon 497
Los Angeles xvii
Loti, Pierre 495
Luristan 5, 63
Lutf 'Ali Khan 363–64, 368
Dr. Lutfallah 399
Luther, Martin 260
Lydia 44
Lysias 97
Ma'mun 179, 186, 188, 195–96
Ma'sumah Khanom 384
Maccabean 97, 99
Maccabee 97, 107
Maccabee, Jonathan 98
Maccabee, Judah 97–98
Maccabees 95, 97, 99, 113
Macedon 49
Macedonia 261
Macedonian 85
Macedonians 88
Madras 378
Maghribi, Joseph 377–78
Maghribi, Samuel ben Yahya al- 234, 240
magi 92, 119, 122, 124, 126, 128–29, 139, 146,

150, 152, 154
magus 119, 121
Mahabad 504
Mahd-e 'Ulya 394
Mahdi 184
mahdi 256
Mahmud 347, 351–52, 358, 360
Mahmud of Ghazna 199, 211
Mahmud, Sultan 32
Mahoza 133, 135–36, 143, 150
Mahzad 251
Maimana 33
Maimonides 204, 240
Majlisi, Muhammad Taqi 293
Makabi, Nurallah 541
Makhes 424
Malayer 514
Malcolm, Sir John 33, 280, 370, 411
Malik al-Mutakallimin 475, 484
Malikzadeh, Mahdi 149, 484
Malkum Khan 456, 458
Manchester 436
Mani 122, 125, 127, 129
Manichaeism 122, 138
Manichean 122
Manicheans 125, 138
Mannaseh 285
Mansur 175–76, 184–85, 187
Manwaring, George 280
Mar Aaron Ben Samuel 179
Mar Kahana 144
Mar Samuel 133, 135
Mar Ukba I 131
Mar Ukba II 131
Mar Zutra 149
Mar Zutra I 131
Mar Zutra II 131, 149
Maragheh 220, 240, 254, 348, 404, 406
Maragheh Sea 405
Marakashi, R. Raphael Uhanna 378
Maravedi 234
Marco Polo 29
Mardavij ibn Ziyar 198
Marduk 3, 9
Marhab of Khaybar 162
Mari, Davud 517
Mariamne 102
Mark Antony 90
Marranos 270, 302
Marv 188, 191, 196, 220
Marv Dasht 63, 550
Marwan ibn Muhammad 172
Mary 153
Maryam Khanom 384–85
Maryamabad 284
Mas'udi 203, 206
Masachi, Benyamin 511, 517
Masada 102
Maschke, George W. xiii, xix
Masha'allah ben Athan 184
Mashhad 33, 264, 280, 342, 349, 362, 369, 382, 389–90, 402, 412, 423–24, 426, 430, 433, 476, 508, 514
Mashhad Sar 508
Mashhad-e Morghab 44
Mashhadi 430
Mashhadi Qurban 372
Mashiyah, Mirza Agha Haim 517
Masjid-e Jami' 506
Masjid-e Payghambar 383
Mata Mehasya 133, 136
Mathnavi 252
Mattathias ben Johanan 96–97
Mattetia 331, 359
Maurice 153
Mazal, Eshaq 359
Mazandaran 28, 36, 115, 130, 188, 197, 286, 311, 313, 348–49, 360, 411, 422, 437

Mazandarani 128
Mazandarani, Menashe Manuchehri 395
Mazdaeism 138
Mazdak 125, 127, 129, 149–50
Mazdakism 138, 150
Mazdakite 126, 149–50
Mazdakites 125–26, 149
Mazdean 121
Mazyar ibn Qarin 189
Mecca 159, 162, 217, 243, 276, 390, 430
Meccans 161
Mede 72
Medes 10, 12, 27, 35–36, 38–39, 43–44, 48, 232
Media 9, 12, 22, 27, 29, 35, 39, 43–44, 47, 61, 64, 87, 100–101, 105, 110, 227, 234, 237, 409
Median 11–12, 27, 43–44
Medina 109, 158, 162, 165, 243
Mediterranean coast 95, 99
Mediterranean Sea 47, 217, 224
Mehdi 335
Mehdi-tash 37
Meir ben Isaiah 380
Meir, R. Ya'qub 378
Meir, Shemuel 517
Melamed, Mullah El'azar 434, 509
Menahem ibn Solomon 232, 234, *See also* Alroy, David
Menahemites 233
Mesopotamia 30, 39, 85, 109, 114–15, 123, 128, 133, 139, 141, 143, 148–49, 154, 166, 209, 211, 238
messiah 173
Michael 81
Michal 16
Middle Ages xvi, 160, 203, 226, 281
Middle East 262, 545
Miftah al-tafasir 246
Milan 123
Minas 351
Minorsky, Vladimir 199
Mir 'Abdal 325–26
Mir Abu al-Qasim 356–57
Mir Daryab Gardens 343
Mirabul 358
Miranshah 248
Mirza Agha Mashiyah 520
Mirza Ibrahim 500–501
Mirza Mahdi 361
Mirza Malkum Khan 456
Mirza Mas'ud 340
Mirza Mas'ud Khan 385
Mirza Nurallah 398
Mirza Sadiq 291
Mirza Shahriyar Nizam 358
Mirza Taqi Khan 433
Mirza Yanes 526
Misgab Ledakh Synagogue 437
Misha'ili, Rehamim 434–35
Mishna 132, 136–37, 212
Mithra 91–92, 120
Mithradates 48, 87
Mithradates I 87–88, 95, 98, 113
Mithradates II 88, 98–99, 113
Mithraism 127
Mithredath 53
Miyandoab 406, 408, 504
Moab 10
Moabites 9, 71, 78
mobadan mobad 119, 122, 145
Modarres, Andrea xiii
Moderate Party 476
Moghestan 92, 104
Mogul Empire 299
Mohammad Reza Shah 479–80, 482, 541, 543–44, 548, 550
Molcho, Solomon 285
Mongol 32, 114, 183, 219, 221, 223, 231, 237,

240, 243, 251, 322, 348, 352, 377, 379
Mongolia 239
Mongolian 241
Mongols 11, 181, 219–20, 222–23, 240, 242, 245, 247, 254, 269, 282, 296, 360
Montefiore, Sebag 464
Montefiore, Sir Moses 451–52, 454, 460
Montreal 505
Moore, George 34
Mordecai 64, 70, 251, 271, 353, 359, 409
Morocco 452, 454
Morovvati, Isma'il 284
Morteza, Hakim 398
Mosaddegh, Mohammad 480, 549–50
Moses 6, 8, 13, 15, 18, 21, 30, 43–44, 52, 57, 75, 103, 111, 130, 145, 172–73, 182, 209, 313, 325, 327, 335, 353–54, 356, 404, 406, 410, 551
Moses ben David 256
Moses ben Hanokh 208–9
Moses ibn Ezra 32
Moshe Yusuf Synagogue 434
Moshe, R. 229–30
Mossadegh, Dr. Mohammad 480
Mosul 232, 241–42, 380, 403
Mourners of Zion 179
Mowlavi 223
Mu'allim, Morteza 511
Mu'awiyah 164
Mu'in Beg 354
Mu'izz al-Dawlah 198
Mu'tasim 180, 189, 220
Mu'tazalite 174
Muhadhdhib al-Dawlah Abu Mansur 245
Muhammad 159–60, 162–63, 165, 173, 245
Muhammad 'Ali 451
Muhammad 'Ali Shah 474–75, 484–85, 488, 502
Muhammad Beg 288, 290, 293, 320, 324, 327, 332–33, 340, 342
Muhammad II 261
Muhammad Khodabandeh Oljaytu 247–48, 253
Muhammad Khwarazmshah 219
Muhammad Shah 371, 389–90, 394, 429, 432
Muhtadi 209
Mukhtar 169
Mukhtar al-Saltanah 491
Mukhtar, Danyal 395
Mukhtasar tarikh al-duwal 254
Mulla Raphael 405
Mulla'i, Musa 358
Mullah 'Abdallah 443, 445, 464
Mullah Ababi 403, 413–14
Mullah Abba 316
Mullah Agha Baba 386, 388, 390
Mullah Agha Baba, Rabbi Nisan 511
Mullah Agha Mirza Ibrahim 496
Mullah Bakhaj 491
Mullah El'azar 325, 467
Mullah Elyahu 354, 416, 510
Mullah Ibrahim 445
Mullah Isaac 413
Mullah Israel 416
Mullah Jacob 403, 414
Mullah Jalal 305
Mullah Judah 317
Mullah Mordecai 304, 434
Mullah Muhsin Fayz 339–40
Mullah Muhsin Shahriyari 331
Mullah Nathaniel ben Moshe 354
Mullah Rabbi Ishaq 453, 491
Mullah Raphael 358
Mullah Rehamim 344, 354, 386, 395, 429
Mullah Rehamim Synagogue 434
Mullah Shelemu 317, 325
Mullah Ya'qub 295
Mullah Ya'qub, Rabbi Meir 511
Mullah Yehshua 317

Mullah Yehuda 300
Mullah Yeshua 317
Mullah Yushu'a 359
Mullah Za'faran 352
Muqtadir, Rabbi Musa 537
Murad, Ibrahim 502
Murad, Mordecai 492
Muradi, Davud 516–17
Muradoff, Ishaq Mordecai 534
Murcheh 343
Mureh, Haim 467–68
Musa Hadi 184
Musa Kazim, Imam 210
Musa Khan 384
Musa, Eliah 359
Musa, Hakim 398–99
Musa-zay 34
Musanameh 250
Musavi, Sayyid Rayhanallah 436–37, 443, 445, 447, 450, 466, 521
Musha'sha', Muhammad 256
Musha'sha'ites 256
Mushir al-Dawlah 496
Mushka of Qom 174
Muslim 32–33, 37, 122, 159, 163, 167, 169, 171, 173–74, 176, 189, 202, 222, 231, 240, 242, 245, 248, 251, 256, 266, 270, 282, 287, 290–91, 293, 295, 308, 311, 316, 323, 325, 327, 337, 351, 354–55, 367, 369, 372, 374, 381, 386–87, 390, 392–93, 395, 399, 423, 427, 430, 432, 434–35, 438, 443–44, 453, 462, 467, 483, 491, 493, 498, 502, 505, 550–51
Muslims 21, 34, 36–37, 159, 166, 170, 172, 177, 180, 202, 205, 222, 224–25, 230, 233, 240, 242–43, 245, 251, 254, 259–60, 262, 265, 269–70, 283, 287, 290, 295, 302, 304, 309, 314, 316, 320, 322, 328, 331, 333, 336, 340, 349–50, 352, 358, 376, 381, 383, 391–92, 394, 397, 400, 420, 426–27, 430, 432, 435, 437, 443–44, 447, 457, 461, 467–68, 489–90, 493, 495, 499, 502, 506, 508, 524, 526, 550
Mustawfi, Hamdallah 223
Mutawakkil 189–90
Muzaffar al-Din Shah 373–74, 447, 464, 468, 473
Muzaffar al-Mulk 498
Muzaffarids 222, 250
Na'im, 'Azizallah 516, 519
Na'im, Rabbi 541
Nabatea 46
Nabonidus 44
Nadir Shah 297, 300, 343, 347, 349, 351, 353, 355, 358, 363, 376, 382, 384, 386
Nafisi, Sa'id 435
Naghi, Solayman 511, 519
Nahawendi, Benjamin 176, 178
Nahman ben Jacob 135
Nahmani 135
Najaf 199
Najafabad 492
Nakhichevan 348, 370
Naphtali 23, 25, 31, 35, 227
Naqdeh 504
Naqsh-e Rostam 47, 50
Naraqi, Haji Mirza Husayn (mosque in Kashan) 382
Narseh 123–24, 145–46
Narsi 133, 136
Nasekh al-tavarikh 152, 371, 384
nasi 188, 271
Nasir al-Dawlah 500–501, 519
Nasir al-Din Shah 372–73, 380–81, 383, 394, 399, 413, 421, 425, 429, 434, 436, 445, 452, 455, 457, 459–60, 462, 464, 525
Nasir al-Mulk 467
Nasir Khusrow 206
Nataf, Monsieur 499–500
Natanz 324

Nathan ben Isaac ha-Kohen 185
Nathan I 131
Nathan II 131
National Consultative Assembly 374, 473, 478, 480, 483, 485, 488, 490, 494, 497, 502, 506, 513, 523–24, 526, 530, 537, 541
National Iranian Oil Company 481
National Jewish Association 527
National Socialist Party 549
National Zionist Congress 520, 533
Nawar 34
Nawjavan, Barukh 359
Nayib 'Abdallah 527
Nazar Agha 465
Nazareth 154
Nazi 479, 542
Nazi Party 542
Nazis 479, 542, 549
Nazoreans 121
Nebuchadnezzar 12, 18–19, 23, 52–53, 61, 66, 71, 133, 307
Negev Desert 58–59
Nehama, 'Aziz 533
Nehardea 114, 133, 135, 140, 144
Nehavand 127, 154, 163, 175, 177, 185, 218, 220, 409, 424, 514
Nehemiah xv, 24, 71, 74–75, 78, 80, 93, 131
Nehurai, Albu 516–17
Nehurai, Dr. Loghman 513, 521, 523, 527, 530–31, 534, 536, 538–39, 541, 549
Nero 90–91, 105, 107
nesi'im 188
Nestorian 31
Nestorians 30–31, 180
Nethinim 77
Netrona 142
Netzer, Amnon xiii
Neumark, Ephraim 33, 362, 377, 380–81, 401, 422, 425, 431–32
New Testament 300
New York 45
New-Muslim 386
Ney Davud, Morteza 400, 551
Nicanor 97
Nicanor Day 97
Nikkhah, Solayman 511
Nile River 6, 114
Nimrud 27
Ninevah 22, 27–28
Nisani, Masha'allah 499
Nishapur 30, 33, 114, 121, 125, 184, 191, 217, 220, 227, 237, 254, 280
Nisibis 110–11, 114
Niyavaran Palace 395
Nizam al-Mulk 218, 226
Nizam al-Saltanah 469
Nizami 223, 251
Nowbavegan 498
Nowruz 389
Numbers 251
Nuri, Agha Baba 494
Nuri, Mirza Husayn 'Ali 372
Nuri, Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi 436
Nuri, Shaykh Fazlallah 474–75
Nushabad 381
Obadiah 183, 322, 330, 332
Obadiah ha-Nasi 186
Obadiah, khaqan of the Khazars 182
October Revolution 509
Odenathus 140
Ohanah, R. Nissim 380
Ohio 505
Old Persian 47, 49, 92
Old Testament 410
Olmstead, Albert Ten Eyck 43
Oman 158
Oman, Gulf of 92
Omayyah 164

Omayyid 164, 169, 172, 174–75, 210
Omayyids 164–65, 169, 173, 175, 195
Ordestan 343
Orodes I 89, 100–101
Orodes II 90
ORT 546
Orumiyeh 30, 404–5, 424, 430, 514
Oshnoviyeh 504
Osiris 9
Ottoman 261, 264, 266–67, 277–78, 287, 289, 292, 295, 297, 305, 348, 358–59, 373, 444, 451, 477, 496, 517
Ottoman Empire 218, 261, 263, 303
Ottomans 21, 262, 264, 266, 269, 277–78, 288–89, 348–49, 358–59, 509
Oxus River 238
Ozar ha-Torah 546–47
Pacorus 101, 109
Pahlavi 92, 128, 477, 538, 551
Pakistan 481, 545
Palestine 10, 21, 108, 154, 163, 510, 515, 517, 529, 549
Palmyra 140
Pamenar 440
Papak 91
Paradise 120, 163
Parforush, Davud 487
Paris xvi, 274, 381, 446, 451, 453, 455–56, 458–59, 461, 464–65, 467, 470, 489, 492, 501
Parishan 342
Parni 87
Pars 63
Parthia 46, 87–88, 91, 102, 109
Parthian 86, 92, 95–96, 100–101, 103–4, 106, 108, 110, 115, 128–29, 132, 139–40
Parthians 48, 86, 93, 95, 97–98, 101, 104, 107, 111, 113, 115, 119, 122, 140
Pasargadae 28, 44, 46, 50, 55, 60
Pashto 431
Passover 498
Pazuki, Reza 244–45
pe'ot 37
Peacock Throne 348
Pekah 25
Pentateuch 251, 297
People of the Book 166, 201
Perizzites 78
Peroz 125, 147, 149, 151, 206
Peroz Shapur 143, 167
Persepolis 49–50, 52, 63–64, 93
Persia (*See also* Iran) xv, 9, 12, 29, 43–44, 47, 52, 54, 56, 58, 64, 72–73, 81, 87, 94, 121, 138, 145, 227, 230, 234, 238, 266, 275, 297, 342, 361, 378, 410–11, 413, 415, 417–18, 422, 425, 427, 486, 542
Persian xiv-xvi, 32, 34, 128
Persian Empire xiii-xiv
Persian Gulf 5, 92, 148, 161, 185, 266, 350, 369, 410, 550
Persian Rifles 477
Persians 10, 43, 48–49, 71, 139, 154, 229–30, 272, 405, 418–19, 429
Pesach 526
Peshawar 348
Peter the Great 348
Pethahiah of Hungary 379
Petrograd 510
Pharisees 99, 102, 508
Philip of Macedon 49, 81
Philistine 15–16
Philistines 9
Phoenicia 3, 10, 45
Phoenician 81
Phoenicians 9, 71
Phraates 87
Phraates II 88, 113
Phraates III 89

Phraates IV 90, 102
Pinhas 330
Pinhas, Hakham 434
Pir Bakran 271
Pirnazar, Jaleh xiii
Plutarch 89
Polak, Jakob Eduard 380, 421, 452–53
Poland 183, 239, 544, 546
Polish 545
Pomerleau, Paul xviii
Pompey 89, 111
Pope 230–31
Portugal 260, 266
Portuguese 262, 266, 280, 379
Potiphar 251
Prague 452
Progressive Association 520, 529
Protestant 260
Protestants 227, 261
Proverbs 17
Psalms 300
Ptolemaid 93–94
Ptolemaids 94
Ptolemy 93, 188
Puladin, Colonel Mahmud Khan 538
Pumbedita 133, 135, 137, 144, 150, 152, 167–68, 176, 183, 185, 206–7, 211–12
Punjab 85, 348
Punjab River 92
Pur Mullah Safiya, El'azar 359
Purim 70
Pushtu 33
Qa'im Maqam, Mirza Abu al-Qasim 371–72
Qabusnameh 198
Qajar 283, 349, 367, 369, 371, 374, 378, 381, 383, 391, 393, 396–97, 400–401, 412, 426–27, 429–30, 432, 434, 439, 443, 474, 476, 537, 544, 551
Qajar 349
Qajar, Agha Muhammad Khan 350, 368–69, 376–77, 381, 384, 427, 505
Qajar, Fath 'Ali Shah 369, 371–72, 378, 380, 384, 386, 388–89, 401, 403, 412–13, 424, 426, 428, 505
Qajar, Muhammad Hasan Khan 349
Qajar, Muhammad Shah 371
Qajars 350, 360, 367–68, 370, 374, 376, 383, 477
Qalandar 343
Qandahar 254, 349, 351, 421
Qanuni Shirazi, Rahim 400, 551
Qashqa'is 501
Qasim 217
Qaslan 408
Qassab ibn Ziyad 169
Qavam al-Mulk 498, 500–501
Qavam al-Saltanah 506
Qayrawan 188
Qazvin 220, 227–28, 264–65, 282, 291, 316, 362, 382, 424–25, 550
Qazvini, Mordecai 355
Qazvini, Shaykh Ibrahim 448, 450
Qeshm 267
Qirqisani, Jacob al- 173, 179
qizilbash 259, 264
Qoli Mirza 349
Qom 174, 177, 220, 289, 291, 316, 335, 341–42, 352, 382–83
Quchan 220
Qumisi, Daniel ben Moses al- 179–80
Quran 161–62, 171, 251, 355, 390, 474, 496
Quraysh 159–60
R. Isaac 168
Rab Hani 360
Rab Na'im 512
Rabbah 135
Rabbah bar Hana 135
Rabban, Joseph 148

Rabbana 133
rabbanim 172, 176, 180, 186, 207
Rabbanite 32
Rabbanites 188, 209, 227, 271
Rabbi Akiva 114
Rabbi Hanina, Haim El'azar 509
Rabbina 137
Rabi 353
Rad 10
Radio Tehran 479
Rafsanjan 383
Rahim, Khodadad 359
Ramadan 177, 330, 337, 343, 449
Raphael 81
Raphael, Hakim 399
Raphael, Mashiyah 357
Rashid al-Dawlah 245
Rashid al-Din xv, 246, 249, 254, 372
Rasht 425, 462, 475, 488, 514
Rav 133, 135
Rava bar Joseph bar Hama 136
Rayy 172, 188, 190, 199, 220, 228
Raza rabba 179
Razi, 'Abdallah 189, 243, 267
Razi, Zechariah 189
Red Sea 17, 545
Red Twilight 521
Regensburg 239
Rehamim, Hakim 445
Rehamim, Yusuf 396
Renaissance xvi
resh galuta 114, 129, 131, 141, 166, 168, 207, 491–92
Reuben 23, 35, 285
Reuveni, David 285
Reza Shah 360, 477, 479, 505–6, 515, 524, 526, 532, 537–38, 540, 542–43
Reza'iyeh 430, 504
Reza, Imam 188, 264
Rhaetia 121
Rhagae 87
Rightly-Guided caliphs 162, 166, 169
Rokhsar, Shemuel 517
Rokhsar, Solayman 516
Roman 88, 90, 100, 103, 106, 112, 114, 121, 123–24, 129, 136, 140, 142, 144, 205
Romania 452, 463
Romans 21, 88–89, 91, 93, 95, 100, 102, 105–6, 108, 111, 113, 115, 119, 121, 126, 130, 141, 143, 145
Rome 85–86, 88, 91, 96, 98, 100, 105, 107, 111, 113, 115, 122, 124, 128, 132, 134, 136, 139, 142, 144–45, 147, 152, 205, 266, 459
Rosh Hashanah 526
rosh yeshiva 207
Rothschild, Baron von 414–15
Rothschild, Lord 464
Rowshanak 85
Roxana 46, 85
Rub'-e Rashidi 249
Rudaki 197
Rukn al-Dawlah 198
Rumi, Jalal al-Din 252
Russia xv, 34, 177, 180, 231, 239, 370–71, 374, 381, 415, 422, 428, 463, 474, 476, 488, 509–10, 520
Russian 183, 206, 288, 348, 371, 409, 414–15, 428, 474, 477, 488, 509–10, 546
Russians 181, 183, 205, 267, 348–49, 370–71, 373–74, 406, 476, 509
Sa'd al-Dawlah xv, 241, 246, 249
Sa'd bin Abu Bakr 219
Sa'd bin Muaz 161
Sa'di 219, 223, 252
Sa'en Qal'eh 504, 530
Sa'id 322–23
Saadiah ben Joseph 203–4, 206, 209, 212
Saadiah Gaon 180, 297

Sabzevar 222, 255–56, 280, 424–25
Sacas 88
Sadducees 99, 102
Sadr al-Din 305
Sadr-e A'zam, Haji Mirza Aghasi 372
Safad 377, 379–80, 394, 508
Safavi, Isma'il 223–24
Safavid 256, 259–60, 262, 265, 272, 274, 276, 279, 282–83, 287–88, 291, 293, 295, 302, 304–5, 316, 318, 333, 342–43, 347, 360, 363, 368, 374, 376–77, 383, 393, 400–401, 426, 478, 551
Safavids 223, 259, 265, 280, 289, 349, 351, 360, 382
Saffar, 'Amr ibn Layth 197
Saffar, Ya'qub ibn Layth 196–97, 201, 209
Saffarid 196
Saffarids 196–97, 200
Safi 266, 272, 333
Safi al-Din 259
Safi Mirza 266
Safran 180
Sahl ibn Fadl 253
Sahl ibn Rabban 188–89
Sakas 57
Saki 405
Salar Mukram 502
Salghur 218
Salim, Musa 520
Salmas 220, 405–6, 424, 429, 504
Salome Alexandra 99–100
Saman 197
Samandar 206
Samani, Isma'il 197
Samani, Nasr 198
Samanid 199, 203
Samanids 197, 199–200
Samaria 17, 26, 28
Samarian 59, 78
Samarians 56, 59
Samarqand 28–29, 34, 36, 122, 186–87, 191, 197, 205, 220, 237, 256, 326, 377–78, 421, 430, 508, 521
Samsam al-Saltanah 486
Samson 14–15, 322
Samuel 15
Samuel Amora 134
Samuel, Paula M. xiii
San Remo 517–18, 529–30
Sanandaj 326, 379, 424, 464, 466, 469–70, 501–2, 514
Sangari, Isaac 183
sanhedrins 168
Sanjar 29, 218, 227, 236–37
Sapir, Ruhollah 545, 547
Saqez 404, 504
Sar Shalom, Rabbi 186, 230
Sara bat Asher 314, 322
Sara-ye Amir 423
Sarah 157
Sarbedars 222, 250
Sarchashmeh 434, 440, 505
Sardar Zafar 492
Sardasht 504
Sardinia 103
Sarechal 439, 488, 493
Sarmad, Sa'id 298–99
Sarsang Synagogue 284
Sasan 119
Sasanian 89, 107, 119, 121, 132, 137–38, 143–44, 147, 154, 163, 166, 181
Sasanians 132, 140
Sassoon, Albert 464
Satan 81, 189
Sattar Khan 475
Saul 32
Savoj Bolagh 404, 406, 424
Sayyid Abu al-Qasim 356

Sayyid Muhammad 499
Sazman-e Banuvan-e Yahud 547
Second Kings 18, 25–26, 29
Sefer dinim 178
Sefer ha-Kazari 181
Sefer ha-massa'ot 29, 226
Sefer ha-mitzvot 177
Sefer sharh Shahin al ha-Torah 250
Sefer sharh Shahin al-Megillat Ester 251
Sefet 'Eber Association 512–13
Sefid Kuh 336
Seleucia 86–87, 90, 95, 103–4, 110
Seleucid 86, 94, 98, 112
Seleucids 86, 91, 93, 95
Seleucus 86, 94
Selim 262, 277
Seljuq 195, 199, 217–18, 224, 227, 230, 261
Seljuq Empire 230
Seljuqs 217–18, 222, 225, 231, 253
Semites 43
Semnan 352
Senna 408
Sennacherib 26, 39
Sepahdar, Muhammad Vali Khan 475
Sepahsalar 324, 326
Sepahsalar, Mirza Husayn Khan 457, 459, 461–62
Sepharvaim 26
Sepphoris 142
Serbia 261, 452
Serene 174–75
Setareh 533
Severus 111
Shabbat Anokhi 340, 342
Shabestari 223
Shabuhragan 122
Shafaq-e Sorkh 521
Shafi'i 259
Shafi'i, Muhammad ibn Idris al- 170
Shafi'is 219
Shah Beygom Khanom 385
Shah Sultan Husayn 343, 347, 379, 400
Shah Velayat 266
Shahid Balkhi 197
Shahin 250, 253
Shahnameh 302
Shahrbanu Khanom 384
Shahriyari, Davud 353
Shahriyari, Mullah Muhsin 331
Shahrokh 223, 256, 369
Shakkak, Isma'il Agha 503
Shalmaneser 18, 26, 29, 39, 227, 232
Shalom, Asher 517
Shalom, Hakim 398
Shalom, Rabbi Isaac 546
Sham hagu'im 362
Shams al-Dawlah 242
Shapshal 474
Shapur 121–22, 143, 146, 540
Shapur I 121–22, 130, 133–34, 138, 140–41
Shapur II 123–24, 130, 135–36, 142, 144, 146
Sharett, Mrs. Moshe 545
Shatt al-Arab 185
Shaul 15–16, 33
Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabi 503, 507, 520, 534
Shaykh Zakarayya 498
Shem Hamphorash 235
Shem Tub Association 512
Shema 151, 331, 362
Shemuel, Ya'qub 359
Sherira ben Hanina 211–12
Sherira Gaon 167
Sherley brothers 280
Sherley, Anthony 264, 280
Sherley, Robert 264
Shero 251
Sheshbazzar 53, 55
shetarot 94

Shethar-bozenai 60–61
Shevet Zedek 508
Shi'i 163, 167, 172–73, 195, 198, 202, 217, 223, 256, 259, 262, 265–66, 277, 279–80, 284, 296, 304, 306, 313, 318, 334, 349, 362, 367, 374, 482–83, 549
Shi'is 164, 167, 169, 175, 188, 195–96, 199, 202, 210, 217, 222, 224–25, 262, 264, 269, 277, 352, 489, 503, 548
Shi'ism 259–60, 262, 265, 272, 277, 333, 349, 374
Shifa' 254
shindai 24
Shiraz 63, 93, 133, 190, 219, 237, 250, 252, 255–56, 291, 300–301, 308, 316, 329–30, 332, 342, 350–51, 355–56, 363, 384, 386, 388, 400, 410, 413, 416, 418, 420, 422, 425, 462, 466, 470, 486, 491, 495–96, 498–99, 501, 508, 514, 518, 524, 528, 547, 550
Shirazi, Davud 400, 551
Shirazi, Elisha' 389
Shirazi, Haji Mirza Hasan 443
Shirazi, Mordecai ben Elyahu 467
Shirazi, Mullah Abraham 396
Shirazi, Mullah Agha Baba 412
Shirin Khanom 384
Shirvan 348, 405
Shofet, Hakham Yedediah 381
Shofet, Hakim Abraham 423
Shofet, Mullah El'azar 434
Shu'a' al-Saltanah 476
shurut 166, 170–71, 174, 202, 225
Shush 28
Shushan the castle 65, 79
Shushana 144–45
Shushandokht xv, 145–46
Shushtar 121, 145, 255, 342, 349, 425, 429
Shuster, Morgan 476
Siah Kal 383
Siberia 19
Siddur Rav Saadiah Gaon 204
Sidon 17, 56
Sidon, R. Mordecai ben Eliezer 379
Sidon, R. Moshe 379
Siham al-Dawlah 499
Silk Road 87
Simani, 'Azizallah 490–91, 523
Simantub 315–16
Simeon 23, 28, 150
Simeon ben Shetah 99
Simitqu 503–4, 520, 531
Sina 547
Sinai 135
Sinai Desert 182, 550
Sinai, Mount 7, 177
Sinclair Co. 532–33
Sind 196
Sirjan 383
Sistan 191, 195–96
Sivandi 128
Siyasatnameh 218, 226
Siyon, Mureh 516
Smith, Eli 30
Solomon 16–17, 21, 23, 36, 53, 99, 175, 285
Soltaniyeh 246
Song of Songs 17
Soviet 479, 544
Soviet Union 478–79
Soviet Union 544
Spain 114, 164, 168–69, 182, 203, 210, 212–13, 226, 231, 260–61, 266, 269–70, 278, 302, 379
Spanish 181, 205, 210, 226, 261, 281, 285, 297
Sparta 49
Spenta Armaita 139
Spina, Alfonso de 260
Stakhr 28
Stern, Henry A. 420

Strasburg papyrus 73
Subh-e Azal, Mirza Yahya 372–73
Sudan 46
sufism 220
Sukhonot 522
Sukkot 98, 526
Sulayman 262, 267, 297
Sulayman II 272
Sulaymaniyah 403–4, 520
Sultan Husayn 295, 300–301, 351
Sumerians 5
Sumka 549
Sumnat 199
Sunni 172, 195, 198, 202, 225, 259, 261, 263, 265–66, 277, 296, 349, 362
Sunnis 163–64, 167, 195, 197, 202, 217, 219, 222, 224, 262, 264, 266, 269, 277, 279
Sunnism 217, 223, 225, 259, 374
Sur Esrafil, Mirza Jahangir Khan 475
Sura 133, 137, 144, 147, 150, 152, 167–68, 176, 183, 185, 203, 207–8, 211–12
Susa 55, 60, 63, 67–68, 72, 77, 80, 86–87, 93, 114, 142–43, 236–37, 271, 379, 456
Sviatislav 206
Swedish 489, 492
Swiss 550
Sykes, Percy 244
synagogue 168, 171, 186, 206, 239, 255, 295, 315, 324, 382, 386, 397–98, 404, 406, 408, 431, 437, 498, 508, 520
synagogues 78, 96, 147, 151, 154, 166, 170, 175, 182, 190, 210, 227, 231–32, 236, 239, 247, 261, 270–71, 278, 286, 327, 340, 342, 344, 355, 357–58, 360, 396, 401, 405, 408, 410, 412, 415–16, 423, 425, 430, 432, 438, 441, 443, 469, 505, 508, 510
Syria 77, 86, 89–90, 93–94, 96, 98–99, 109, 111, 128, 160, 163, 174–75, 209, 211, 222, 231, 239, 261, 422, 451–52, 549
Syriac 81, 254, 423
Syrian 31, 111, 151
Syrians 114
ta'ziyah 302
Tabaqat-i nasiri 32
Tabari 161
Tabari, 'Ali ibn Sahl ibn Rabban al- 188–89
Tabaristan 29, 85, 87, 189, 197–98, 205, 217, 220, 237
Tabataba'i, Sayyid Muhammad 473
Tabataba'i, Sayyid Ziya' al-Din 477
Tabriz 221, 234, 240, 242, 245, 249, 253, 262, 264, 291, 305, 348, 379–80, 390, 407, 412, 425, 430, 475, 503, 530
Tabrizi Farsi 240
Tabrizi, Nafis ibn Dawud al- 253–54
Tahir ibn Husayn 195–96
Tahir, Hakim 445
Tahirid 196
Tahirids 196
Tahmasp 262–63, 278, 297, 300, 319
Tahmasp II 347–48
Takht-e Fulad 321
Talmud xv, 132–33, 136, 138, 148, 174, 176–77, 182, 209, 212, 234, 286, 392, 419, 424, 491
Talmud, Babylonian xv, 138
Talmud, Jerusalem 138
Talmud-Torah 508
Talmudic 150–51, 174, 176, 178, 186, 204, 212
Talmudists 176
Talmuds 132, 138
Al-Talwih 'ala al-tawhid wa al-'adl 253
Tamerlane 222–23, 248, 254, 256
Tansar 121
Tansar, Book of 121
Tansar-nameh 121
Taq-e Kisra 128
Targum 31
Tarikh-e 'Arab va Islam 187

Tarikh-e Yahud-e Iran xvi
Tariq 169
Tarragano, Monsieur 501–2
Tashkent 377
Tasqala 404
Tatar 241
Tatars 11, 282, 317
Tattenai 60–61
Tavernier, Jean Baptiste 272, 274, 276–77, 289
Tavus, R. Jacob ben Joseph 297
Tawhidat 246
Tehran 172, 188, 278, 361, 369, 380, 384, 386–87, 389, 391, 394, 396, 398, 402–3, 411–12, 414, 416, 422, 426, 428–29, 431–32, 434, 438, 440–41, 443, 448, 450, 453–54, 458–59, 461–62, 464, 469, 474–75, 479, 481, 484–85, 487, 491, 493, 497, 502, 508, 510–11, 514, 517, 519, 521, 523, 527–28, 531, 533, 536, 541, 543, 548, 550
Teixeira, Pedro 279, 379
Temuchin 219
tennaim 132
Teresh 66, 68
The Hague xix
Theodosius 146
Tiberias 142, 150, 154, 362, 378, 380, 394, 422
Tiberius 103
Tibet 237–38
Tiflis 180
Tiglath-Pileser 25, 39
Tigris River 45, 87, 103, 111, 114, 123, 141, 239
Tikab 504
Timurid 254, 256, 377
Timurids 223, 250, 254, 269
Tiridates 87, 90–91, 106, 109
Titus 107–8
Tizabgar, 'Azizallah 510
Toledo 260
Tonokaboni, Sepahsalar 487
Torah xv, 21, 34, 80–81, 96, 102, 122, 132, 134–35, 137–38, 148, 157, 176, 178, 182, 186, 203–4, 206–7, 246, 250, 253, 284, 300, 318, 329, 335, 340, 342, 355, 361–62, 378–79, 382–83, 388, 392, 398, 424, 430, 441, 461, 467, 469, 498
Torahs 96
Torbat-e Haydariyeh 394
Torbati, Rahim 517
Trajan 109–10
Tsiz 34
Tudela 226
Tughril I 199, 217–18, 224, 261
Tunis 46, 210
Tunisia 261, 452
Tupkhaneh Square 473, 475
Turcoman 223
Turcomans 223, 348, 374
Turkestan 33, 122, 183, 211, 217, 271, 377, 430
Turkey xv, 10, 30, 177, 261–62, 278, 280, 286, 373, 451, 454, 477, 481, 503, 517
Turkish 31, 183, 199, 218, 241, 259, 409, 421, 428
Turkomanchay, Treaty of 370, 479
Turks 144, 181, 197, 224, 227, 229, 261, 264, 266–67, 281–82, 296, 317, 348, 503
Tus 220
Tuserkan 348, 409, 424, 503, 514
Tusi, Nasir al-Din 223
Tustari, Banu Sahl al- 226
Tyre 56
'Ubaydallah ibn Sulayman 209
'Udlajan 438
'uhud 166
Ukba 185–86, 206
Ukraine 183
'Umar 159, 162–63, 225
'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz 169
'Umar ibn al-Khattab 166–67, 169

'Umar II 169–70
'Umar, Mosque of 166
United Nations 45, 481, 549
United Nations Special Committee on Palestine 548–49
Ur 5
Urban II, Pope 230
'Uthman 162–63, 196, 261
Uzbekistan 206, 240
Uzbeks 263, 267, 280, 348
Va'ed Haghhila 518, 520, 528–29, 533, 547
Va'iz, Sayyid Jamal al-Din 484
Valerian 121
Vámbéry, Armin 33, 431
Vandals 140
Vashti 65
Vecchietti, G. 300
Venice 379
Venus 66
Versailles, Treaty of 517
Vespasian 109
Vienna 269, 415, 452
Volga River 181
Vologases I 90, 92, 105, 110, 113, 115, 119, 132
Vologases II 110
Vologases IV 111
Voshmgir, Qabus 198
Weizmann, Chaim 515, 518
White Revolution 480
White Sheep 223
Wolff, Joseph 33, 363, 377, 380, 385, 431, 433
Wondrous Tale of Alroy, The 233
Woods, John xviii
Woodworth, Mark xviii
World War I 383, 477, 492, 509, 515, 517
World War II 478, 521, 542–43, 547–48
World Zionist Congress 519
World Zionist Federation 529
Xenophon 43
Xerxes 48, 60, 63, 70, 72, 183
Xerxes II 49
Ya'qub bar Yeroham 380
Ya'qub ben Levi, Mullah 467
Ya'qub ben Shem'un 278
Ya'qub Davud Synagogue 400
Ya'qub, Abraham 445
Ya'qub, Ezra 435, 437, 445, 518
Ya'qubabad 284
Yaddi Elyahu 468
Yadegar Isfahani, Rahel 467
Yadegar, Raphael 359
Yahudi, Isaac 211
Yahya 339, 359
Yashar ben Hesed 253
Yathrib 109, 158
Yazd 28, 283–84, 291, 295, 300, 309, 316, 337–38, 342, 351, 382–83, 400, 413, 415, 424–25, 462, 508, 514, 534
Yazdegird I 124, 144, 146
Yazdegird II 124, 146–47
Yazdegird III 126, 154, 166–67
Yazdi, Abraham 354, 357–58
Yazdi, Mulla Ya'qub 424
Yazdi, Rabbi Davud Ishaq 283
Yazid 164
Yazidi 233
Yeb 73
Yehuda, 'Abdallah Khan Asher Ya'qub 399
Yellin, Frank xix
Yemen 17, 24, 158, 168, 238
Yemeni 380
Yeprem Khan 475
Yerevan 348, 370
Yerushalimi, R. Tvi Hirsch ha Kohen 380
yeshiva 136, 142, 186, 207, 209, 232
yeshivas 133
Yom Kippur 255, 383, 397, 443, 526
Yona Damavandi, 'Azizallah 512

Yose 137
Yud'im, Habiballah 511, 517, 520
Yud'im, Hakham 517
Yudghanis 173
Yudghanites 173
Yuhanna Abu al-Faraj 253
Yussafzai 32
Yusuf Ben Levy 520
Zafreh 382
Zagham 310–11
Zamzam 157
Zand 349–50, 360, 363, 368, 383
Zand, Karim Khan 349–50, 362, 364, 369, 379–80
Zand, Lutf 'Ali Khan 350, 368
Zands 350
Zanjan 220, 281, 428, 430
Zar, Mordekhai 431
Zarrinpanjeh, Yahya 400, 551
Zaydan, Jurji 201
Zebulun 23, 227
Zechariah 38–39, 60, 71, 317
Zechariah ben Sa'dia 380
Zend 10
Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel 55, 57, 60, 63
Zevi, Shabbetai 285–86, 292, 318
Ziai, Hossein xiii
Zilkha 363
Zill al-Sultan 397, 400, 463
Zion, Mount 16, 56
Zionism 512–13, 515
Zionist 513, 515, 534
Zionist Association 513, 515, 519–20, 528, 530, 532, 537
Zionist Federation 510, 519
Zionist Organization 513
Zionists 510, 515, 529, 535
Ziya' al-Saltanah 385
Ziyar 198
Ziyarids 198
Zoghali, Sayyid Davud 441
Zohab 410
Zohar 283, 286
Zoroaster 10, 50, 91, 105, 119–20, 122–23
Zoroastrian 50, 90, 92, 119, 124, 126, 129, 134, 139, 142–43, 148, 150, 152, 167, 247, 296, 321, 491, 525–26
Zoroastrianism 92, 119–20, 125, 127, 129, 138–39, 145, 158, 165
Zoroastrians 164, 166, 169, 180, 188, 197, 240, 288, 321, 425, 484
Zulaykha 251

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Habib Levy, the great Jewish thinker, scholar and historian was born in the Tehran ghetto in 1896. He began his studies as a youth in Paris. The social movements in Europe had a profound influence on Dr. Levy's religious thinking, and after returning to Iran, he began his research in the field of Jewish-Iranian history.

Writing the history of the Jews of Iran was no small task. At that time, no reference had been published on the subject. He spent more than forty years in this endeavor, traveling to many countries, searching libraries and archives for historical data on the Jews of Iran. He was methodical in his research and did not accept the validity of all accounts. With a critical eye, he sought to establish historical fact without bias.

During World War II, Dr. Levy played a key role in the immigration of the "Children of Tehran," Jewish children from Poland who took refuge in Iran on their way to Israel.

Dr. Habib Levy was an exceptional man of many talents. In 1984, while still actively pursuing his historical research, his life's passion, he passed away in Los Angeles at the age of 88. In accordance with his wishes, he was interred in Israel.

In 1998, the Habib Levy Distinguished Visiting Professorship in Judeo-Persian Studies at UCLA was created in his honor.

"My old friend, Dr. Habib Levy, is a thorough expert in the history of Iranian Jewry of all times. Dr. Habib Levy is the author of the three volume *History of the Jews of Iran*, which was published in the Persian language... Dr. Levy is interested in the publication of this work in the English language for the benefit of Jewish and non-Jewish readers."

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