



AFYŪN

AFYŪN, opium, its production and commerce in Iran. The word *afyūn* is derived from the Greek *opion* and Latin *opium* (concerning this term and other words used in Persian for opium, see Dehḵodā, *afyūn*, *taryāq*, *taryāq-e akbar*, *taryāq-e fārūq*, *taryāk*, *kaškāš*, *kūknār*). The Persian name most in use today, *taryāk*, is also derived from the Greek (*thēriaké*, antidote against a poisonous bite). The opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) grew in western Asia in ancient times, and Asia Minor remained one of the chief producing regions. It was introduced to Iran from one of the countries to its west before the Christian era. As early as the 4th/10th century it was being used for non-medical purposes (A. R. Neligan, *The Opium Question, with Special Reference to Persia*, London, 1927, pp. 7-8). The exact date of its first cultivation in Iran is difficult to ascertain, but it can not have been later than the time of Abū ‘Alī Sīnā (Avicenna, 4th/10th century; Petrushevsky believes it began from the end of the 5th/11th or 6th/12th centuries, *Camb. Hist. Iran V*, p. 502). From the 5th/11th century it is frequently mentioned in Persian literature.

When in 1030/1621 ‘Abbās I tried to enforce the prohibition of wine drinking, opium consumption grew to such an extent that he had to curb that too (P. della Valle, cited in *EI*² I, p. 243; see also *Farhang-e fārsī*, s.v. *kūknār*). By the end of the 11th/17th century, opium cultivation was well established, but both Kämpfer (*Amoenitates Exotica*, 1712; cf. Neligan, 9-10) and Tavernier refer to opium eating, not smoking, in Iran. The latter habit, which became widespread in the second half of the last century, reached Iran from the east possibly through Muslim pilgrims to the shrine of Imam Reżā; it may also have



arrived via India with Nāder's soldiers (Ḥ. 'A. Ādaraḳš, *Āfat-e zendegī*, Tehran, 1334 Š./1955, pp. 365-67). A small quantity of opium was exported from Būšeḥr in the late 12th/18th century (J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, London, 1968, p. 44), and in 1824 a Persian merchant sent about twenty chests to China (Stannus to Willock, 3 June 1824, FO 60/24). But cultivation and export remained small until the 1850s, when the technique of large scale production for export came from India to Isfahan (Moḥammad Maḥdī Arbāb Ešfahānī, *Nesf-e jahān fī ta'rīf al-Ešfahān*, ed. M. Sotūda, Tehran, 1340 Š./1961, pp. 124-25; Mīrzā 'Abd-al-Ġaffār Naǰm-al-molk, *Safar-nāma-ye Kūzestān*, ed. M. Dabīrsīāqī, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, p. 177). Opium production expanded rapidly (by about fifty times between 1859 and 1926-27) and became the principle exchange earner in Iran's foreign trade.

Cultivation and preparation. In the nineteenth century the chief opium producing regions were Yazd, Isfahan, Khorasan, Kermān, Kāšān and Tehran (R. Thomson, "Memorandum on Opium Trade of Persia," Tehran, 6 March 1869, FO 60/321), and by the 1920s it was grown in eighteen out of twenty-six provinces (D. W. MacCormack and S. M. 'Āmerī, *Memorandum on Persian Opium*, Tehran, 13 October 1924, p. 37), with Isfahan, Fārs, and Khorasan being the main centers (*Observations of the Persian Government on the Report by the Commission of Enquiry*, League of Nations, Geneva, 28 March 1927, p. 10). The reasons for this expansion were that cultivation of the poppy was more profitable than that of cereals, it was easily turned into "ready cash immediately" (W. Baring, "Supplementary Remarks on Opium Trade," 28 September 1881, FO 60/440, 60/449), and it was not especially taxed (R. Thomson to Granville, Tehran, 3 October 1881, FO 60/440). The seed was usually sown in the autumn and the plants were thinned in the spring. With the exception of a few regions like Lorestān where the cultivation was by dry farming (*deymī*; M. 'A. Jamālzāda, *Ganǰ-e Šāygān*, Berlin, 1335/1916-17, p. 31; Graham, "Ispahan," 1912-13, AP [Accounts and Papers, British Parliamentary Publications] 1914, XCIII), in the rest of Iran the crop required irrigation during a period in which water is both plentiful and cheap. This was a point of crucial importance for its expansion (MacCormack and 'Āmerī, *Memorandum*, p. 37; [Report of the] *Commission of Enquiry into the Production of Opium in Persia*, League of Nations, Geneva, December, 1926, p. 39; Ādaraḳš, *Āfat-e zendegī*, pp. 389-91). The sap-collection took place, according to the region, between May and August. The time chosen was after the petals had fallen, while the capsules were still unripe but nearing maturity (Neligan, *Opium*, p. 14). The harvest, or scarification of the capsules, attracted large numbers of



laborers, peddlers, shopkeepers, village mollas, dervishes, story tellers, beggars, musicians, and owners of performing animals (who might number 3,000 to 5,000 in a single area); all would be rewarded by opium sap. Their accumulations were bought by traveling opium buyers, who also purchased from peasants (A. Millspaugh, *The American Task in Persia*, New York, 1973 [1st ed. 1925], p. 191). In 1881 each *jarīb* (one-third of an acre) was said, probably with exaggeration, to have an average production of 13 lbs of opium (Baring, “Report on Trade and Cultivation of Opium in Persia,” Tehran, 23 September 1881, FO 60/440/, 60/449), while in 1926, when 90,000 acres were under poppy cultivation, a *jarīb*’s production was put roughly at 5 lbs (*Commission of Enquiry*, pp. 38-39).

After the incision of the capsules, the juice was allowed to bleed into brass pans. It was then alternately dried in the sun and kneaded with trowels on wooden boards to remove all excess moisture (the loss of weight in preparation was known as *kayl*). When the juice was reduced to paste, it was divided into cakes of equal size which were allowed to dry in a warm place (Graham, “Ispahan,” 1913-14, AP 1914-16, LXXIV), a process known as *tayārī* (Āḍarākš, *Āfat*, p. 398). Crude opium was called *čūna*, while the prepared type was referred to as *nīm-māl* (Graham, “Ispahan”). In fact *nīm-māl* was the raw opium of commerce, or “the spontaneously coagulated juice . . . which has only been submitted to the necessary manipulation for packing and transport.” The prepared type was “the product of raw opium, obtained by . . . dissolving, boiling, roasting, and fermentation, designed to transfer it into an extract suitable for consumption” (“International Opium Convention, 1912;” for text see MacCormack and ‘Āmerī, *Memorandum*, Appendix I). In the preparation process, occasionally other substances like sugar, flour, starch, and oil (approximately 10 percent of the weight) were added (Thomson, “Memorandum”). This suited the China markets but not those of Europe. Over-adulteration would sometimes discredit the Persian drug (e.g. Najm-al-molk, *Safar-nāma*, p. 177; “Bushire,” 1900, AP 1901, LXXXIV; idem, 1901, AP 1902, CIX).

Around the 1900s, the cost of preparing a chest of opium (approx. 140 lbs) f.o.b. amounted to 630 *qerāns* (Preece, “Ispahan,” AP 1905, XCI). The burnt opium residue, *sūkta*, was treated and smoked as *šīra* (dross). The quality of the Persian opium, estimated on its morphine content, varied from province to province. Its average was variously put at from under 10 percent (*Observations*, p.24) to 12.5 percent (*Commission*, pp. 39-40).



Production and export. The principal market for Persian opium was the Far East and especially China. Initially, the drug was sent, at great cost and risk, through Central Asia (Thomson, “Memorandum”), and some found its way, via Turkey, to Europe (Lucas, “Memorandum on the Cultivation and Exportation of Opium in Persia,” *Persian Gulf*, 25 January 1875, AP 1876, LXXIV). But later, sailing vessels were employed for export through Java, Singapore and subsequently Aden, Suez and Ceylon. The direct route to China was not very popular due to the high freights (Ross, “Bushire,” 1878, AP 1880, LXXIII). Around this time, “nearly every pound of the drug” that went to China was shipped either from Būshehr (two-thirds) or Bandar ‘Abbās (one-third) (Baring, “Report”); Moḥammara and Kermānšāh became important in the present century. A considerable quantity was shipped to England for the first time in 1878 (Ross, “Bushire,” 1878). In 1906, China banned opium production (only to be intensively resumed a decade later) and India arranged to diminish progressively her exports to China (1907) until they stopped altogether in 1913 (Neligan, *Opium*, pp. 46-47); thus Persian exports grew. In the mid-1920s exports to Russia, nominally for Vladivostok but actually for China, increased significantly (MacCormack and ‘Āmerī, *Memorandum*, p. 45); Japan, which produced a considerable amount of morphine, began to take a much larger quantity than formerly (Neligan, *Opium*, pp. 43-44).

The fast expansion of Iran’s opium export, from 10,000 lbs (200,000 *qerāns*) in 1869 to 1,600,000 lbs (96,117,000 *qerāns*) in 1926-27 (see [Table 17/1](#), [Table 17/2](#)), was probably the result of the failure of silk production (Jamālzāda, *Ganj*, p. 30) and compensated its loss to the Iranian economy. Production rose from 40,000 lbs (800,000 *qerāns*) in 1859 to 205,000 lbs (4,000,000 *qerāns*) in 1869, and to well over 2,000,000 lbs by 1926-27. Increased local consumption, coupled with intense international pressure, gradually checked its further growth. In the 1900s, as much as two-fifths of the country’s total production was consumed locally (A. H. Schindler, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1911, vol. 21, p. 196; see also MacCormack and ‘Āmerī, *Memorandum*, pp. 39, 43). In the mid-1920s it was estimated that “20, 30 or even 50 percent of the population” (*Commission*, p. 42) consumed opium, while the government put the figure at about 5 to 10 percent (*Observations*, p. 11). In addition to local production, there was always a limited quantity of Afghan, and later Indian, opium re-exported from Iran (e.g., Thomson, “Memorandum”; MacCormack and ‘Āmerī, *Memorandum*, pp. 41-42). Price of Persian opium fluctuated widely, but it generally increased significantly. The price of a pound rose, from 7^v-9 *qerāns* (1859) to 13 (1869) (Thomson, “Memorandum”), 21^v (1881) (Bearing, “Report”),



and 27 *qerāns* (1902; Jamālzādeh, *Ganj*, p. 31). In the mid-1920s it fluctuated between 30 to 80 *qerāns* (*Observations*, pp. 8, 10; MacCormack and ‘Āmerī, *Memorandum*, p. 46). In general, opium prices were determined on the international markets, “mainly by the state of the Indian produce and by the demand in the China markets” (Ross, “Memorandum on the Opium of Persia,” Bushire, 20 August 1879, AP 1880, LXXIII).

Several classes of people were involved in the production and export of opium. Apart from the proprietor, there were three groups, growers, exporters, and middlemen; the role of the last gradually increased (Ḥosayn Khan Taḥwīldār-e Eṣfahānī, *Joḡrāfiā-ye Eṣfahān*, ed. M. Sotūdeh, Tehran, 1342 Š./1963, pp. 115-17). Exporters claimed they made little or no profit, while the growers were able to save every year a “considerable amount of surplus income” (Baring, “Report”). In important opium centers, there were also opium brokers, commission merchants, and merchants who manipulated opium for local consumption. These, with their staffs and carpenters, packers, porters and coppersmiths, partially depended on this trade (MacCormack and ‘Āmerī, *Memorandum*, pp. 38-39). In the 1880s and 1890s, opium brought comparative prosperity to the above classes, especially the cultivators (Ross, “Bushire,” 1878). It also tended to alter the traditional methods of transactions from a long-term credit system (e.g. M. Ḥ. Amīn-al-żarb, “Yādgār-e zendegānī,” ed. Ī. Afšār, *Yaḡmā* 15/5, 1341 Š./1962, pp. 11-12) to a ready-money system (Baring, “Memorandum,” Tehran, 24 January 1882, FO 60/444, FO 60/449). The foreign commerce in opium also lessened the export of specie for the purchase of foreign commodities. Probably because of the adulteration and the risks involved, in the 19th century the opium export trade was “principally in the hands of native merchants” (Baring, “Report”), though some time later European merchants also appeared on the scene (e.g. Branham, “Ispahan,” 1906, AP 1908, CXIV). Great fortunes were gained and lost in this trade. The celebrated Amīn-al-żarb, for example, made a profit of 3,500,000 *qerāns* in the early 1870s (“Yādgār,” pp. 11-12), while a sample copy of an invoice indicates that, some years later, the merchant concerned lost 215 *qerāns* on each chest. The exporter, however, had “little choice in the matter;” the export of opium was “pretty well a matter of necessity,” being his “principle means” wherewith to balance the import trade (Baring, “Report”).

Taxation. Up to 1307/1889-90 opium was not especially taxed and landowners paid the regular fixed government tax irrespective of the crop they grew. In this year, new taxes—10 percent in cash in installments—were levied on



opium and other cash crops (A. K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*, Oxford, 1969, pp. 168-70). In the 1920s, opium's cultivation, like that of all other farm products, was subject to the "government's tithe," or 10 percent of the "net share of the proprietor," which was usually one-third of the total. In 1923-24 the opium tax amounted to 3,500,000 *qerāns* (MacCormack and 'Āmerī, *Memorandum*, pp. 48-49). The export duty that Iranian merchants paid in the 19th century varied (between 1 percent and 2 percent of the total value) according to the port from which it was shipped (Baring, "Report"). Foreign merchants were to pay 5 percent ad valorem duty, but were often allowed to compromise for less (Thomson to Granville, 3 October 1881). The new customs tariffs, which in the Persian Gulf came into operation in 1903, set the export duty at 20 percent (Kemball, "Bushire," 1903, AP 1904, C); as a result export temporarily was diminished (e.g., Shakespear, "Bundar Abbas" and "Bushire," 1905, AP 1906, CXXVII; Gabriel, "Bundar Abbas," 1906, AP 1907, XCI). But Indian export restrictions again augmented Persian exports in spite of the increased prices (Rae, "Bundar Abbas," 1908-09, AP 1910, CI). In 1923-24, the total annual tax collected on the internal consumption of opium (102 *qerāns* per lb) was just under 10,000,000 *qerāns*. This represented only one-sixth of the real quantity of the total consumption, the rest being distributed as contraband. Additional duties on opium provided the government with a total of 20,500,000 *qerāns* (9 percent of the country's total revenue) annually (MacCormack and 'Āmerī, *Memorandum*, pp. 48-50).

International conventions. Iran participated in the Shanghai conference (1909), and signed the Hague convention (1912) with a reservation concerning the important Article 3a (chapter I), according to which the contracting powers "shall prevent" the export to "countries which shall have prohibited its entry" (for the text see MacCormack and 'Āmerī, *Memorandum*, pp. 24-34). In September, 1923, Iran declared its willingness to withdraw this reservation as soon as a satisfactory scheme for the substitution of other crops for opium was worked out (*ibid.*, p. 3). It also submitted a detailed study of its case, containing an analysis of the financial and political obstacles to the curbing of poppy culture, to the 1924 and 1925 Geneva opium conferences. Thus, a commission was appointed to study poppy cultivation and its partial replacement by other crops (*Commission*, p. 5). It arrived in Tehran in March, 1926 and, after a stay of ten weeks, made the following recommendations: 1. Persia should allow three years to improve its economic conditions. 2. More efficient controls on the production and distribution of the drug should be implemented. 3. After three years opium production should be reduced by an annual rate of ten



percent (*Commission*, pp. 54-56; *Letter from the Chairman of the Commission*, Geneva, League of Nations, 1 June 1927, pp. 3-4). A part of the cost was to be met by further taxation on opium. While questioning the accuracy of the commission's findings regarding the morphine content of the Persian drug, Iran criticized it for not having related the reduction there to that elsewhere. Iran also declared that "no loan" was required for the program of substitution, but it did ask for "complete liberty of action in fiscal affairs" (*Observations*, pp. 24, 26), which was "the absolutely necessary condition of success" for the scheme's implementation (*ibid.*, p. 2). The government also agreed to submit to the Majlis new legislation in which were included some of the commission's proposals (*ibid.*, p. 3). Before World War II, three more international opium conferences were held in Geneva (1931, 1936) and Bangkok (1931), the first of which was ratified by the Majlis in 1932 (Āḍarākš, p. 492). It also approved the 1953 New York protocol (*Rūz-nāma-ye rasmi* 3730, 9 Āḍar 1336 Š./30 November 1957). In 1972 Iran joined the second New York convention (March, 1961) which annulled and replaced all previous opium conventions (*idem*, 8035, 1 Šahrīvar 1351 Š./23 August 1972).

Laws. Up to the constitutional revolution, the production, sale and export of opium was entirely free of government control; nor had it been banned by religion, though some high ranking 'olamā', such as Šīrāzī, Ešfahānī, Mamaqānī, and Ḳorāsānī, are quoted as having confirmed a ban on its consumption, and the Sufi Ḥājj Mollā 'Alī Gonābādī wrote a book on its prohibition by Islam (*Ḍu'l-faqār*, Tehran, 1318/1900-01; cf. Āḍarākš, *Āfat*, pp. 525-26). It was not, however, until the second session of the Majlis that on 12 Rabī' I 1329/14 March 1911 the "Qānūn-e taḥdīd-e taryāk" ("Law of opium restriction") containing six articles was ratified. It levied a duty of 300 dinars on each miskal of the prepared drug and was designed to restrict its use within seven years to medical requirements (Āḍarākš, *Āfat*, pp. 488-89). The war and events during the post-war period prevented its implementation. Once again, under immense international pressure and the influence of the opium commission, on 26 Tīr 1307 Š./18 July 1928 the Majlis approved the "Qānūn-e enḥešār-e dawlatī-ye taryāk" ("State opium monopoly law") which consisted of sixteen articles. It granted the government a monopoly for the collection, sale, storage, production, transport, and export of the opium sap, cake, and residue (article 1). Opium export became conditional on government license (article 6), and each stick of opium was to carry a banderole, indicating its weight and the amount of duty leviable (2^v *qerāns* per miskal, subsequently lowered to ^v *qerān* in some regions; 14 Ordībehešt 1310 Š./4 May 1931). For the



enforcement of this law, a Mo'assesa-ye enḥeṣār-e dawlatī-e taryāk (“State opium monopoly institution”) with a capital of 20,000,000 *qerāns* was established in Tehran with branches in all districts. Beginning from 1308 Š./1929, the internal consumption was to be reduced by 10 percent annually (article 15; act no. 19705, 10 Amordād 1307 Š./1 August 1928, *Maǰalla-ye rasmī*, 1 Kordād-29 Esfand 1307 Š./22 May 1928-20 March 1929; certain parts of this law were subsequently amended; see *Rūz-nāma-ye rasmī* 1083, 2 Amordād 1311 Š./23 July 1932). Further legislation was introduced in 1928 (16 Amordād 1307 Š.) for the punishment of opium and narcotic offenders (amendments in 1934, 1940, 1953, and 1959). A subsequent cabinet decree (15 Mehr 1342 Š./7 October 1963) stipulated heavy sentences including capital punishment for opium smuggling as well as for the production and import of heroin and morphine (*Rūz-nāma* 5443, 29 Mehr 1342 Š./21 October 1963; see also 7856, 27 Dey 1350 Š./17 January 1972; 8654, 31 Šahrivar 1353 Š./22 September 1974; 9069, 28 Bahman 1354 Š./17 February 1976). The state opium monopoly law was designed to control, and gradually suppress, the internal consumption, as well as to enhance the government's revenue from its export. In 1309 Š./1930, the state opium monopoly institution granted a five-year export monopoly to Ḥāǰǰī Amīn Eṣfahānī who, because of the world economic crisis and heavy export duty, had to abandon it. The government failed to find foreign firms willing to accept its conditions: a minimum of 450 tons of annual export and full payment of export duties. In 1312 Š./1933 it established a limited company called Bongāh-e enḥeṣār-e ṣāderāt-e taryāk (“Opium export monopoly corporation”) with an initial capital of twenty million *qerāns* (80 percent supplied by the government, 10 percent by Ḥāǰǰī Amīn and 10 percent by others; Āḍarākš, *Āfat*, pp. 492-93).

In the late 1930s, a cabinet decree (1317 Š./1938) banned poppy cultivation in 35 provinces and districts which, however, did not include the two principal producing provinces, namely Isfahan and Fārs. Another significant move was made in 1325 Š./1946 when the government prohibited the sale, and subsequently the cultivation, of opium throughout Iran (cabinet decree 13138, 27 Tīr 1325 Š./18 July 1946); but shortly afterwards, the succeeding government rendered this prohibition meaningless by declaring that, as before, it was ready to buy the opium sap (cabinet decree 4533, 29 Ordībehešt 1326 Š./19 May 1947; Āḍarākš, *Āfat*, pp. 495, 500-01). Finally, in 1955 a “Qānūn-e maṇ'-e kešt-e kaškāš va este'māl-e taryāk” (“Poppy cultivation and opium use prohibition law”), containing five articles and a note, was enacted; poppy cultivation, production and import of narcotics, consumption in public places



of these drugs, and finally the manufacture and import of equipment related thereto, were all declared prohibited throughout Iran (article 1). Five different ministries became responsible for its implementation and enforcement, and a *Sāzmān-e maṇʿ-ē kešt-e kaškāš va mobāraza bā esteʿmāl va qāčāq-e mawādd-e afyūnī* (“Organization for the prevention of poppy cultivation and the suppression of the consumption and smuggling of narcotic articles”) was established (*Rūz-nāma* 3143, 1 Āḍar 1334 Š./22 November 1955). The prohibition, accompanied by a campaign against the internal consumption of opium, proved to be effective, and exports sharply dropped. Thus, despite subsequent measures to reintroduce its official small-scale cultivation as a cash crop for export (for the enhancement in March 1969 of a law authorizing limited poppy cultivation and opium export, see *Rūz-nāma* 7022, 29 Esfand 1347 Š./20 March 1969), opium lost the important role it had acquired in Iran’s agriculture and trade.

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