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CARAVAN (Pers. *kār(a)vān*, Mid. Pers. *kārwān* in Narseh's inscription at Paikuli, connected with OPers. *kāra* "(group of) people, army"), a form of collective transport of men and goods organized to ensure defense against armed attack, sufficient provisions for both travelers and animals, and adherence to predetermined routes and schedules. In the Near East the most common pack animals were camels, but donkeys, mules, horses, and sometimes even oxen were also used; riding animals were also included to provide fresh mounts for the accompanying personnel. In contrast to wagon trains, caravans rarely included vehicles.

The caravan developed in response to two basic conditions. First, there was a high level of demand for trade goods that had to be transported over long distances; caravans might spend weeks and even months en route to multiple destinations. Second, the long stretches of territory through which the roads passed were for the most part very sparsely settled. In order to maintain security against armed robbers, it was customary for some members of the caravan to be furnished with weapons and even given some combat training (Hedin, I, pp. 55, 136; de Blocqueville, pp. 46f.; Thielmann, p. 306; Vámbéry, 1865, pp. 16, 57; Polak, II, p. 66). Adequate provisions and fodder for the animals had to be brought along or purchased at occasional roadside markets and in small towns along the way. Approximately ten to twenty pack animals formed a unit (Hedin, I, p. 193). They were linked to one another under the supervision of a single leader. The entire train was led by a chief (*kārvān-sālār*), who both decided on the route to be followed and undertook the

organization of the caravan (Hedin, I, p. 192; Vámbéry, 1865, pp. 49, 53). Individual travelers paid him a lump sum for each cargo animal; from these funds all the costs of the caravan were to be paid. It was the exclusive duty of the caravan chief to make arrangements for guards (*badraqa*), provisions, lodgings, and so on. In the mountainous regions of western Persia and in the Caspian coastal area it was common to travel in the daytime. In the steppes and desert areas of central Persia and in Central Asia, on the other hand, caravans traveled by night and rested in the daytime. It was also customary to take a day of rest now and then if possible, especially after a particularly exhausting march (Vámbéry, 1867, pp. 126f.; idem, 1865, p. 161 and passim; Polak, II, p. 60).

Caravans always followed previously established routes, the successive stages of which were determined by the location of water, suitable resting places, and settlements. Not everyone was able to recognize the tracks between these fixed points, however, and every caravan therefore required a specialized guide (*rāh-namā, pīš-āhang, dalīl-e rāh*, or *balad*). These routes must have developed gradually from the traditional travel patterns of individual societies and cultural groups. Because they usually skirted the large desert basins (*kavīrs*) or crossed them at only a few points, the structure of caravan traffic has been compared with that of coastal shipping. Desert routes were marked at short distances by poles (*mīl*).

According to historical sources and archeological findings, from late antiquity political authorities most often took responsibility for establishing and maintaining caravan routes, keeping the wells and springs in functioning order, establishing resting places at distances of a day's journey, managing shelters, building and providing manpower for fortified military posts along the way, constructing bridges and dikes to hold back seasonal floods (Kleiss, 1982), and taking measures to secure passage through steep mountain country. In ideal circumstances travelers would find a caravansary at each resting place along the route. After paying an entrance fee they could obtain provisions for themselves and their animals, sleeping quarters, and stables, all under the protection of watchmen (Thielmann, pp. 302, 305; Polak, II, p. 57). In addition, it was usually possible to have small repairs made and even to find medical treatment. The authorities' interest in protecting and encouraging caravan traffic was generally stimulated by the prospect of collecting road tolls (*rāh-dārī*) and taxes (*bāj*) in the form of customs duties, especially where the roads passed through towns. The security of the roads was the

responsibility of an official called *ḥāmī ṭarīq* under the ʿAbbasids (see, e.g., Ebn al-Aṯīr, IX, p. 193).

The locations of caravan halts (*manzels*) were determined by the presence of supplies of drinking water. As soon as the wells or springs were destroyed or exhausted, however, new locations had to be sought. For example, at the beginning of the 11th/17th century construction of the ʿAyn-e Rašīdī caravansary at the southern end of the Sang-farš south of Garmsār had to be halted because the spring associated with it was already very salty. It was abandoned and the ʿAbbāsī (or ʿAbbāsābād) caravansary built a few kilometers away, near potable water; it is still in use as a military post (Kleiss, 1980).

Trade caravans constituted the largest component of the caravan traffic, but in Persia there were other types as well. The most important were the pilgrim caravans. Shiʿite pilgrims traveled especially to the holy cities of Mašhad and Qom. In the Safavid period Persians frequently visited Ardabīl, where the shrine of Shaikh Ṣafī-al-Dīn, the eponymous ancestor of the Safavid order of dervishes and the Safavid dynasty itself, was located (Olearius, p. 466). Important pilgrim caravans also crossed the borders into the Ottoman empire to visit the holy Shiʿite mausolea (*ʿatabāt*) at Najaf and Karbalāʾ in Iraq.

A special type of caravan (*naql al-janāʾez*, lit. “transport of corpses”) was organized, especially in the 13th/19th century, to transport the dead to the *ʿatabāt* in Iraq (Ende; Hedin, I, p. 144; Vámbéry, 1867, p. 131). To be buried in the vicinity of the Shiʿite holy cities, where ʿAlī and Ḥosayn are buried, was considered especially blessed. This practice had grown up as a parallel to the centuries-old custom among pious Muslims of seeking burial at Medina, where the tomb of the Prophet himself is located. This custom had persisted until the Wahhābīs seized power in the Ḥejāz in 1219/1804. In Central Asia until the 1340s/1920s Muslims sought to be buried in the cemeteries on the outskirts of Bukhara, where many Sufi shrines are located, the most prominent being that of Bahāʾ-al-Dīn Naqšband (Vámbéry, 1865, p. 159). Often large sums of money were paid for burial plots and caravan transport of the dead, for which special border-crossing regulations had to be adopted. The influence of modern politics and administration and particularly the evolving understanding of hygiene led to the disappearance of this type of caravan at the beginning of the 14th/20th century (Ende; Polak, I, p. 365).

Until the introduction of the Western banking system in Persia in the second half of the 13th/19th century, transfers of funds had to be accomplished by

transporting actual coinage from one place to another. Silver coins were precisely counted into leather sacks and brought to their destinations by extremely well-guarded caravans traveling by prescribed routes. Naturally, this traffic provided a particularly attractive target for armed bandits (Rabino).

Historical development. Beginning in ancient times caravans traveled across the deserts and steppes of North Africa, through the Near East as far as Anatolia, to India, and via the Silk Route across the enormous expanses of Central and Eastern Asia that separate the Persian plateau from China. Continued traffic on the Silk Route depended not only on the efficiency and alertness of Persian political authorities but also on those of Transoxania and the many regional states of Central Asia, including provinces subject to Chinese administration.

Beginning in the 4th/10th century, the effective power of various governments could be gauged by the energy with which they watched over caravan traffic—apparent in the multiplication and extension of roads, the frequency of resting places and the facilities provided, and the maintenance of military security along the way. The Persian caravan system reached a high point in the 5-6th/11-12th centuries under the Great Saljuqs (429-552/1038-1157; Siroux, passim; Le Strange, *Lands*, p. xxi map no. 1). The power of the first rulers of this dynasty extended not only over Persia but also over Iraq, Syria, central and eastern Anatolia, a large part of Transoxania as far as Ḵʷārazm, and much of Afghanistan. The Persian plateau thus functioned as a crossroads in the caravan traffic between the Islamic Near East, Byzantium, and the Caucasus, on one hand, and Central Asia and China, on the other. Until the end of the Mongol period the city of Ray was the most important hub of this traffic (Kleiss, 1984, p. 195). It was linked to Baghdad and Mosul via Sāva, Hamadān, and Kermānšāh (Bāḵtarān). The main route continued east along the base of the Alborz mountains to Nīšāpūr, Marv (Mary), Bukhara, and Samarkand and across Ferghana (Farḡāna) and Xinjiang (Sinkiang) to China. A connecting road led from Nīšāpūr via Ṭūs (later via Mašhad) to Herat and from there farther to the east by either a northern or a southern branch. A road from Ray passed through Isfahan to Yazd, Kermān, and Bam, on one hand, and Shiraz, on the other. To the northwest Ray was linked to Tabrīz, from which a northern connection led via Naḵjavān (Nakhichevan) to Armenia, Georgia, and the Caucasus and a second to Erzurum and Trabzon in Anatolia. Tabrīz was also the starting point for a road via Dīārbakr (Diyarbakr) and Bīra (modern

Birecik) on the Euphrates to Aleppo; this route was to become extremely important in the Safavid period (see below).

As a consequence of the Mongol conquest (ca. 654/1256), Persia became more closely linked with Central Asia and China (Jahn), and the Silk Route continued to flourish through the ensuing Timurid period (771-906/1370-1500). Caravan routes proliferated, and traffic increased. With the collapse of the Timurid empire at the beginning of the 10th/16th century and the fragmentation of political power in Persia, Transoxania, and Central Asia, however, caravan links between Persia and Transoxania were disrupted, to the benefit of contemporary European shipping trade between the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.

Beginning in the early 10th/16th century caravan traffic became increasingly regionalized, each great empire maintaining a separate caravan network. In Persia the roads, caravansaries, and other related structures were of considerable higher quality than in earlier periods, especially after the capital was moved to Isfahan in 1005/1596-97. Even though the hub of the Persian caravan trade had shifted to the south, from Ray to Isfahan, only a few entirely new routes had to be constructed. One example is the segment of the Kāšān-Garmsār-Fīrūzkūh road that crossed the Mašīla (Daryāča-ye Namak), a salt marsh that dried up entirely in summer, and the adjacent foothills of the Sīāhkūh range through a permanent salt marsh approximately 30 km wide to the vicinity of Garmsār. Many bridges were constructed to carry the road, and a pavement approximately 7 m wide was laid. It was from this pavement that the road took its name: Sang-farš. From the beginning of the 11th/17th century almost all the caravans between Isfahan and the north and northeast traveled over the Sang-farš; only the destruction of the bridges in the 13th/19th century made its continued use impossible (Gabriel, 1952, pp. 71, 188, 197, 302-04; Kleiss, 1980, pl. 40). More often, however, already existing secondary roads were improved and extended. In the 11th/17th century the Safavid caravan system was linked with that of the Ottoman empire at only three main points: Trabzon, Mosul (and thence to Aleppo, the most important center for Persian trade with the Mediterranean), and Baghdad. The India of the Great Mughals was connected to the Safavid caravan network almost exclusively via Qandahar and a little farther south via the Bam-Zāhedān-Quetta road.

From Persia most caravans on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*) traveled via the Iraqi *ʿatabāt* or the route that passed through Aleppo and continued on to Damascus and the Ḥejāz. Toward the end of the 13th/19th century a variant

route became popular, though following it was more expensive. Following the modern highway constructed by the Russian government, pilgrims traveled from Tabrīz via Yerevan (Īravān) and Tbilisi to the Black Sea coast in large-wheeled horse-drawn carriages known as *tarantas* (Pers. *tārāntās*) or even in coaches of the European type. They continued by ship to Constantinople, where they attached themselves to pilgrim trains and eventually reached Aleppo or Damascus, rejoining their countrymen who had traveled in the customary way (Amīn-al-Dawla, p. 464, s.v. Teflīs; Fragner, p. 21).

Into the second half of the 13th/19th century pilgrim caravans to Mašhad, either from Isfahan and Kāšān via Garmsār and Tehran or from Astarābād (now Gorgān), were especially frequent, though they had to be guarded from raids by Turkman tribes seeking captives for the slave markets of Khiva (Ḵīva) and Bukhara. The fact that in Sunnite Central Asia Shiʿites were considered "unbelievers" was cited as justification for enslaving them (Polak, II, pp. 67-68).

Toward the end of the century the domestic caravan trade of Persia became progressively more isolated from that of neighboring states as the government began to develop a modern transportation system, bypassing to a great extent the ancient caravan routes. The first step was to establish highways of the European kind, mostly surfaced with macadam with paved sections here and there and designed to carry heavy transport vehicles, especially the Russian *tarantas*. During this first phase of modernization traditional caravan transport actually benefited from such innovations as surfaced roads, greater density of hostels and provision stations, post stations for the change of horses for military and civil purposes (*čāpār-ḵāna*; see čapār), and improved bridge construction. In the course of the 14th/20th century, however, military requirements in particular led to the introduction of heavy trailer trucks, light vans, land vehicles similar to jeeps, and eventually buses. Railroads, on the other hand, lagged behind automotive transportation in Persia. At first animal transport continued alongside more modern forms, but eventually caravans gave way entirely to bus companies for transport of people and to national and international shipping firms for transport of cargo (Ehlers, 1980b, pp. 249ff). At the same time the caravansaries were replaced by rest stops with fast food, large garages and repair shops, and warehouses on the outskirts of cities. Here camel and mule trains can still be found carrying less perishable agricultural commodities (hay, straw, grain) over short distances, but they resemble caravans only superficially. In fact the caravan no longer exists.

Transoxania. Samarkand was the center of the caravan traffic of Transoxania and Bactria, as well as parts of Khorasan, always seconded by nearby Bukhara, until the Russian conquest in the second half of the 13th/19th century. It was linked in the south with Marv, Herat, and Balḵ. A road led to the west via Ḵᵛārazm (Khiva) to Gorgān (Astarābād), on one hand, and to the mouth of the Volga on the Caspian Sea, on the other. Kashghar could be reached via Astrakhan (Ḥājī-Tarḵān), Ferghana, and Turfan, bypassing Tienshan on the north. While the Persian caravan network was being transformed, step by step, into a modern system of highways, the Transoxanian network was effectively eliminated under Russian colonial administration, when the Trans-Caspian and Turkestan-Siberian (Turksib) railways were built, in 1883-88 and 1930 respectively. With the development of Tashkent at the turn of the 14th/20th century, the importance of Samarkand and Bukhara had already become marginal, and, owing to political changes in this century, all connections between the Persian plateau and Central Asia along the old Silk Route were finally severed.

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