Encyclopædia Iranica

Article by **Alireza Shapur Shahbazi, Clifford Edmund Bosworth**

Published: December 15, 1990
Last Updated: June 16, 2017

CAPITAL CITIES

CAPITAL CITIES

i. In Pre-Islamic Times

Iranians most probably first coalesced into an organized community in the Jaxartes and Oxus basins (see most recently Francfort, pp. 165ff.) and gradually migrated westward, eventually reaching as far west as Babylonia on the Mesopotamian plain (Pahl. (A)sōristān, q.v.). This region was to become their cultural and political center, *Del-eĒrānšahr* “the heart of Iran” (Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 21). From there military operations, both defensive and aggressive, against western powers were conducted from 539 b.c. to a.d. 651. This westward movement of Iranian peoples is traceable in their choice of capital cities, from Balḵ to Ctesiphon. These centers played important diplomatic and administrative roles in Iranian history, closely linked to the fortunes of the ruling families.

One category of capital was the provincial city in which the founder of a dynasty had his beginnings, for example, Pasargadae (the first Achaemenid city), Nisa (the first Parthian capital), and Staxr (the home city of the Sasanians). It served as “home base,” a symbolic center of dynastic ceremonial.

Another category consisted of administrative centers, where government archives and treasure were located, as well as law courts and other organs of government. These categories were, of course, not mutually exclusive.

Pre-Achaemenid period. Balḵ (Gk. Bactra; cf. OPers. Bāxtriš, Av. Bāxδī, Bactria), according to Iranian legend the capital of the Kayanids (Christensen, p. 118), may have been the earliest center of "Iranian governmental structure" (Barthold, p. 6). This conclusion accords remarkably well with the fact that the Achaemenids, who customarily retained the capital cities of the empires they conquered (see below), made Balḵ the royal seat of eastern Iran (Shahbazi, 1972, p. 612); Artaxerxes II is said to have built a temple to Anāhitā there (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 217). Balḵ remained a political capital in the Hellenistic period (Tarn, pp. 114-15), and in the Sasanian period it enjoyed great prestige as the "holy land" of the Mazdeans (Barthold, p. 6; Lukonin, p. 698). Long after the Arab conquest Balḵ continued to hold a position of honor in Persian literature (e.g., *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, VI, pp. 66ff.), and local tradition identified a sepulcher (*sar-e tall*) in the main square as that of Kay Goštāsp (Balḵī, p. 17, cf. p. 26).

The Medes shifted the political center to Hamadān (OPers. Hagmatāna, Gk. Ekbatana or Agmatana) at the foot of Mount Alvand (for Hamadān, see Schmidt, I, pp. 20-21, 36ff.). According to Herodotus (1.98-99), the city was built in the 7th century b.c. by Deioces (cf. Book of Judith 1:2-4, where the Median king is called Arphaxad). It equaled Athens in size and was said to have had seven walls, one within the other and each of a different color, a tradition similar to those associated with the palace of Kay Kāvūs on the Alborz (Christensen, pp. 72, 80-81) and the seven palaces of Bahrām V Gōr (cf. Neẓāmī, *Haft peykar*; cf. Herzfeld, 1935, pp. 21-22). Ecbatana became the summer residence of the Achaemenid kings, with a magnificent palace (Polybius, 10.27); a royal archive (Ezra 6:1-3; cf. 1:7-11); a treasury, which was later plundered by Alexander (Schmidt, I, p. 156); and a temple of Anāhitā, which was ransacked by Antiochus III (q.v.; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 219). The Arsacids also used Hamadān as a summer residence (Athenaeus, 12.513-14.), but the Sasanians are not known to have done so. In local tradition a huge lion carved in stone (probably in the early Hellenistic period) was identified as the guardian figure of the city; although the lion was damaged in a.d. 319/911, when the army of Mardāvīj, founder of the Ziyarid dynasty of Gorgān and Ṭabarestān, stormed Hamadān (Masʿūdī, *Morūj* IX, p. 21; cf. Nadjmabadi and Gropp), it still survives as a revered monument (Luschey).

Achaemenid period. From about the end of the 7th to the middle of the 6th century b.c. the Achaemenids were local rulers of Anshan in Dašt-a Bayżā (see bayzÎʷā) and other parts of Fārs. Cyrus the Great founded the city of Pasargadae in the region, and his tomb there became a sort of dynastic shrine. Pasargadae remained the coronation city under his successors, and a sanctuary dedicated to a "warlike goddess" (usually identified as Anāhitā) is said to have existed there (see, most recently, Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 201). The tomb remained sacred in the Islamic period, when it was attributed to the mother of Solomon (Gūr-e mādar-e Solaymān; Ebn al-Balḵī, p. 155; Kleiss). Under the Salghurid atabegs (543-668/1147-1270) it was embellished with a number of Arabic inscriptions, a mosque, and a *madrasa* (Sāmī, 1956, p. 956; Melikian-Chirvani).

The city of Pārsa, also in Fārs, was built by Darius the Great and his two successors (Schmidt, passim) at the foot of Kūh-e Mehr (Arabicized Kūh-e Raḥmat; Shahbazi, 1977, pp. 205-06), beginning about 520 b.c. It became the capital of the Achaemenids, though it was used only seasonally (Athenaeus, 12.513-14). There was a sanctuary of Anāhitā (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 217; cf. p. 226) in the city, as well as a vast archive (see Schmidt, II; Cameron, 1948; Hallock, 1969; Bowman, 1970). Persepolis was generally unknown to the Greeks before Alexander plundered and burned it (Schmidt, passim; Shahbazi, 1976, pp. 66-67). Because of the city's symbolic importance and the fact that its ruins were the best-preserved monuments of ancient Iran, Persepolis continued as a particular object of reverence for centuries. In a.d. 331 the Sasanian prince Šāpūr Sakānšāh, son of Hormazd II, left an inscription there (referring to the complex as Sad-stūn "hundred pillars"; Frye, 1966), and the ruins are mentioned frequently in early Islamic texts (where it is called Taḵt-e Jamšīd "Jamšīd's throne," Čehel Menār "forty minarets," etc.; Shahbazi, 1977, pp. 202-04). From a.d. the early 3rd century, however, Persepolis was eclipsed by the suburb Staxr/Eṣṭaḵr (see below).

As the states of Elam, Media, Lydia, Bactria (Herodotus, 1.153; Francfort, pp. 165ff.), Babylonia, and Egypt were incorporated into the Achaemenid empire, their capitals (Susa, Ecbatana, Sardis, Bactra/Balḵ, Babylon, and Memphis respectively) became centers of Persian administration and the residences of senior Achaemenid princes. Susa and Babylon were the true political and administrative capitals of Persia and the best known before Alexander. According to Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 8.6.22), in winter Cyrus spent seven months in Babylon, the three months of spring at Susa, and the two summer

months in Ecbatana. The practice of shifting residences was in accord with the tribal history of the Persians. Both Susa and Babylon contained extensive archives, treasuries, and palaces (Schmidt, I, pp. 25ff., 156-57; Kuhrt, pp. 116ff.). Alexander intended to adopt Babylon as his own capital (cf. L. Oppenheim, pp. 531-33, 580), but after his death Seleucus I established Seleucia, on the west bank of the Tigris, as the capital (Frye, 1984, pp. 152, 227).

Parthian period. The expansion of the Parthian kingdom is reflected in the sequential establishment of capitals. Nisa (or *Miθrdātkirt, near modern Ashkhabad) was the "home base," where the treasury and archives were kept (Chaumont, 1973, esp. pp. 211-15), but Asaak (near modern Qūčān) was the coronation city: Arsaces was crowned there, and the fire established for his soul was kept burning for centuries (Isidore of Charax, *Mansiones Parthicae*, ed. W. H. Schoff, Philadelphia, 1914, par. 11; cf. Chaumont, 1973, pp. 201-06). Dārā was a stronghold on Mount Apaortenon built by Tiridates I (Debevoise, p. 15; Justin, 41.5.1-4; cf. Chaumont, 1973, pp. 199-201). Hecatompylos (nowadays identified with Šahr-e Qūmeš near Dāmḡān, see Hausmann, esp. pp. 131-33; the Greek name probably represents OIran. *Sata-dwāra "hundred gates," cf. Chaumont, 1973, p. 219) was another capital during the formative period of Parthian rule (Pauly-Wissowa, VII/2, cols. 2790-97; Chaumont, 1973, pp. 217-22; Debevoise, p. 15; Hansman; Hansman and Stronach, 1970a, pp. 36-62; 1970b; 1974). Ray (Gk. Rhagai Arsacia) also served as capital for a brief period (Chaumont, 1973, pp. 204-05; Strabo, 11.13.6; cf. Debevoise, p. 15).

Finally, the Parthians pushed the border of their empire to the Tigris, and built a fortress at Ctesiphon opposite Seleucia; when they captured the latter it was merged with Ctesiphon and made the capital of the Parthian empire (on Seleucia-Ctesiphon see Pliny, *Natural History* 6.26; Tacitus, *Annals* 11.9; Dio Cassius, 40.45; Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.23). South of Seleucia King Vologases (most probably Vologases I; see balāš i) founded a new commercial center known as Vologasias (Valāšāpāt, later Sabāt); it, too, was eventually incorporated into the capital complex (for problems of location, see Frye, 1984, p. 227).

Sasanian period. Early in a.d. the 3rd century Ardašēr I (q.v.) marched from Dārābgerd, captured the Parthian provincial capital of Staxr, and in 227 took Ctesiphon. Staxr was maintained by his successors as the symbolic home of the Sasanian dynasty (224-651), the ceremonial capital (Schwartz, *Iran* I, pp. 13ff.; Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, pp. 91ff.; Herzfeld, 1910, pp. 98-99). At least some of the Sasanian kings were crowned there, in the temple of the fire of

Anāhitā/Anāhīd (Ādur-Anāhīd; Chaumont, 1958, pp. 154ff.; cf. idem, 1964, pp. 59-75), and it was there that the body of the last Sasanian king was sent from Marv. Because of its significance to the Sasanian royal house Staxr was a prized Arab conquest; it was heavily damaged and depopulated when its inhabitants revolted against the conquerors six years later, in 29/649. Shiraz became the new provincial capital of Fārs (Streck and Miles, pp. 219ff.). The administrative and political center of the Sasanian empire remained at Ctesiphon, which was also the metropolitan see of the Persian Christians (Macomber) and the seat of the chief rabbi of Iran. It had become a conglomeration of several towns, and the whole complex was called *Šahristānān, a name rendered in Syriac as Māḥōzē or Mᵉḏīnāṯā and in Arabic as al-Madāʾen, all literally “cities” (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 383-94; Streck and Morony). Of the component towns three were on the east bank of the Tigris: Ctesiphon (“old city,” Ar. *al-madīna al-ʿatīqa*), Aspānvar (Shaki, pp. 94-95; where the royal palace, Ayvān-e Ḵesrā, was located), and Weh-Andiyōg-Xusraw or Rūmagān “Roman city” (Ar. al-Rūmīya). On the west bank there were Seleucia, partially rebuilt by Ardašēr and called Weh-Ardašēr (Ar. Bahrasīr) opposite Ctesiphon; Darzanīḏān, 3 miles north of Weh-Ardašēr, and Walāšābād 3 miles south. With the fall of the Sasanian empire, al-Madāʾen lost its central position; after the ʿAbbasids seized power a little over a century later (132/749) they established their permanent capital farther up the Tigris at Baghdad (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 383ff.; Streck and Morony; El-ʿAlī).

Ḵosrow II Parvēz (591-628) established his permanent residence at Dastgerd (Ar. Daskara), originally a caravan post on the Dīāla river about 64 miles east of the eventual site of Baghdad, and built there a large palace surrounded by a high wall (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 295 n. 1; Sarre and Herzfeld, 1920, pp. 761f., 89ff.). It remained a capital for only a short time; Heraclius sacked it in 628 (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 454ff.), and the Arabs captured it only a few years later.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ʿAbd-Allāh Balḵī, *Fażāʾel-e Balḵ*, tr. Moḥammad b. Ḥosaynī, Tehran, 1350

Š./1971.

W. Barthold, *An Historical Geography of Iran*, tr. S. Soucek, ed. C. E. Bosworth, Princeton, N. J., 1984.

R. A. Bowman, *Aramaic Ritual Texts from Persepolis*, Chicago, 1970.

G. G. Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets*, Chicago, 1948.

M. L. Chaumont, "Le culte d'Anāhita à Stakhr," in *RHR*, 1958, pp. 154-75.

Idem, "Où les rois sassanides étaient-ils couronnés?" *JA*, 1964, pp. 59-75.

Idem, "Etudes d'histoire parthe. II. Capitales et résidences des premiers Arsacides (III^{e}-I^{er} s. av. J.-C.)," *Syria* 50, 1973, pp. 197-222.

A. Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, Copenhagen, 1931.

N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia*, Chicago, 1938.

S. A. El-ʿAlī, "Al-Madā'in and Its Surrounding in Arabic Literature," *Mesopotamia* 3-4, 1968-69, pp. 417-39.

H. P. Francfort, "Central Asia and Eastern Iran," in *CAH*^{2} IV, 1985, pp. 165-93.

R. N. Frye, "The Persepolis Middle Persian Inscriptions from the Time of Shapur II," in J. P. Asmussen and J. Læssøe, eds., *Iranian Studies Presented to Kaj Barṛ . . .*, Acta Orientalia, Copenhagen, 1966.

Idem, *The History of Ancient Iran*, Munich, 1984.

R. T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, Chicago, 1969.

J. Hansman, "The Problems of Qūmis," *JRAS*, 1968, p.110-39.

Idem and D. Stronach, "Excavations at Shahr-i Qūmis, 1967," *JRAS*, 1970a, pp. 29-62.

Idem, "A Sasanian Repository at Shahr-ī Qūmis," *JRAS*, 1970b, pp. 142-55.

Idem, "Excavations at Shahr-ī Qūmis, 1971," *JRAS*, 1974, pp. 8-22.

E. Herzfeld, "Pasargadae," *Klio. Beiträge zur alten Geschichte* 8, 1908, pp. 1-68.

Idem, *Archaeological History of Iran*, London, 1935.

W. Kleiss, "Madar-e Suleiman, das Grab des Kyros als islamisches Heiligtum," *AMI* 12, 1979, pp. 281-87.

A. Kuhrt, "Babylonica from Cyrus to Xerxes," in *CAH*^{2} IV, pp. 112-38 V. G. Lukonin, "Political, Social and Administrative Institutions. Taxes and Trade," in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, pp. 681-746.

H. Luschey, "Der Löwe von Ekbatana," *AMI*, N.S. 1, 1968, pp. 115-22.

W. Macomber, "The Authority of the Catholicos Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 181, 1968, pp. 179-200.

A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "Le royaume de Salomon, les inscriptions persanes de sites achéménides," *Le monde iranien et l'Islam* I, 1971, pp. 1-41.

S. Nadjmabadi and G. Gropp, "Mittelalterliche arabische Quellen zum Löwen von Hamadan-Ekbatana," *AMI* N.S. 1, 1968, pp. 123-28.

Neẓāmī, *Haft peykar*, ed. W. Dastgerdī, Tehran, 1314 Š./1935.

L. Oppenheim, in *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, pp. 529-87.

ʿA. Sāmī, *Pasargadae*, tr. R. Sharp, Shiraz, 1956. Idem, *Persepolis*, tr. R. Sharp, 2nd ed., Shiraz, 1955.

F. Sarre and E. Herzfeld, *Iranische Felsreliefs*, Berlin, 1910.

Idem, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigrisgebiet* II, Berlin, 1920.

E. F. Schmidt, *Persepolis*, 2 vols., Chicago, 1953-57.

A. Sh. Shahbazi, "The "One Year" of Darius Reexamined," *BSOAS* 35, 1972, pp. 609-14.

Idem, *Persepolis Illustrated*, Tehran, 1976. Idem, "From Pārsa to Taxt-e Jamšīd," *AMI* 10, 1977, pp. 197-207.

M. Shaki, "Pahlavica", in *A Green Leaf. Papers in Honour of Prof. J. Asmussen*, Acta Iranica 28, 1988, pp. 93-99.

M. Streck and G. Miles, "Iṣṭakhr," in *EI*^{2}.

M. Streck and M. Morony, “al-Madāʾin,” in *EI*^{2}.

D. Stronach, *Pasargadae*, Oxford, 1978.

W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, 2nd rev. ed., Cambridge, 1951.

(A. Shapur Shahbazi)

ii. In Islamic Times

There is no comprehensive work on capital cities in the Islamic period (see, e.g., Aubin, p. 65). There are some general remarks in Roemer (1974, esp. pp. 316-31), and Lockhart (1960) contains sections on many of the cities and towns mentioned in the article. See also *EIr.* on the individual places and dynasties mentioned in the article.

From the Arab conquest to the coming of the Saljuqs. It was not until the advent of the Safavids in the early 10th/16th century that Iran in the strict sense, essentially the lands of the Iranian plateau and the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf shores, became for the first time during the Islamic period a relatively homogeneous political entity and began its transformation into the present modern nation-state of the type familiar in Europe since the 12th/18th century. Previous to this, Iran had either formed part of a wider political grouping—such as the caliphate or the tribal confederations of steppe peoples like the Turkish Saljuqs and the Mongols—or else various provinces of Iran, such as Fārs, Azarbaijan, the Caspian region, or Khorasan, had been ruled by lines of local governors or by military adventurers taking advantage of the decay of larger empires to consolidate their individual authorities, for instance the Taherids, the Saffarids, the Buyids, the Ildegizids, and the post-Mongol Turkman dynasties. In none of these cases were there conditions for the growth of an imperial capital such as those of the Achaemenids and Sasanians, but only of provincial centers of power with authority over limited geographical areas. However, for two reasons in particular these provincial centers of power must be considered as “capital cities”: they normally possessed an administrative complex (*dār al-emāra*) containing the personal residence of the local governor or ruler, usually in a fortified or otherwise defensible building or site, and the *dīvān*s with the organs of administration were located there whenever they did not accompany the holder of power on campaigns or travels. Under the patronage and encouragement of the holders

of power such centers of political and military power often developed their own distinctive cultural life and traditions of literary and artistic endeavor, exemplified especially clearly at Nīšāpūr under the Taherids and their successors in Khorasan, at the Buyid courts of Ray, Isfahan, and Shiraz, and at Herat under the Timurids.

The Arab warriors who overthrew the Sasanians were based on the garrison cities (*amṣār*) of Basra and Kūfa in Iraq, and as they spread across the Iranian plateau they established garrisons, normally in existing urban centers and in many cases adjacent to the frontier war zones. Among these garrisons were those at Ardabīl, Qazvīn, and Ray, which faced the hostile Deylamite and Caspian peoples; at Zarang in Sīstān, which faced the local rulers of southern and eastern Afghanistan; and in Khorasan at Nīšāpūr and, most importantly, Balḵ and Marv, which had been the northeasternmost bastions of the Sasanian empire and served as bases for attacks on the Iranian princes of Ṭoḵārestān, Sogdia, and Ḵᵛārazm (cf. Morony). In fact, during the first two Islamic centuries, Marv may be considered as the capital of the vast and ill-defined province of Khorasan, comprising all the land east of Jebāl and Fārs. It was here that Arab immigrants settled and became assimilated to the indigenous Iranian population of the Marv oasis, producing one of the social elements which seem to have favored the progress of the ʿAbbasid *daʿwa* there (see ʿabbasid caliphate), and it was here that Hārūn al-Rašīd's son al-Maʾmūn established his court while viceroy of the East for his father, governing the whole caliphate from there in the first years of his reign until conditions in Iraq had become quiet enough for him to move to Baghdad in 204/819.

During the 3rd/8th century ʿAbbasid control over Iran relaxed, and the Taherid governors of Khorasan preferred to make their capital at Nīšāpūr rather than in the unhealthy and febrile Marv oasis, located in the Qara Qum desert and open to attacks from the steppes. The Taherids thereby began the process that made Nīšāpūr the literary and artistic capital of Khorasan until it was devastated by the Oghuz and the Mongols in the 6th-7th/12th-13th centuries, even during those intervals when it was not the main seat of administration and political power in the East. The Saffarids of Sīstān, rivals and eventual supplanters of the Taherids in Khorasan, briefly made Zarang the center of a military empire extending from the fringes of Iraq to Kabul, while the Samanids, at first subordinate governors for the Taherids in Transoxania, made the ancient Sogdian city of Bukhara into a capital for the region, alternating in this role at various times (e.g., under the Qarakhanids and

Timurids) with Samarkand. Bukhara was to endure as capital for over a thousand years, until the formal extinction of the khanate of Bukhara by the Bolsheviks after the First World War.

On the eastern fringe of the Iranian world, the Ghaznavids made the hitherto insignificant frontier town of Ḡazna the capital of another military empire in eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and northwestern India for almost two centuries. It was taken over in the mid-6th/12th century as a local capital and springboard for further Muslim conquests in India by a branch of the Ghurid dynasty, whose principal center was at Fīrūzkūh in Gūr, but never succeeded in supplanting or even being added to the three historic capitals of Afghanistan, Kabul, Qandahār, and Herat, and subsequently lapsed into second-rank political significance.

Western and central Iran fell away from caliphal control less than a century after the east. In the early 4th/10th century the Sajid governors of Azarbaijan and Arrān exercised power at various times from Marāḡa, Barḏaʿa, and Ardabīl, but the decisive end to caliphal control over western and central Iran came with the rise of the Deylamites and Kurdish dynasties, who formed what Minorsky called the Deylamite intermezzo in Iranian history (1964, pp. 244-45). At this time, at first under the Kurdicized Arab Rawwadids, Tabrīz began to assume the dominant role as the provincial capital of Azarbaijan, to become in later times the second city of Iran and, for a brief period after World War II, until 21 Āḏar 1325/9 December 1946, the capital of the short--lived, Soviet-backed autonomous Azarbaijan (see Azarbaijan v). In these early centuries there were several minor seats of power in the Alborz mountain chain and the Caspian coastlands beyond it, where the local lords long resisted Arab political and military intrusion, among them Rūdbār in the Šāhrūd basin, seat of the Jastanids; Āmol and Sārī in the Ṭabarestān, in the later 2nd/8th century generally the seats of Arab authority; and Ferrīm or Perrīm in the Alborz, seat of the Bavandid *espahbad*s.

In the middle years of the 4th/10th century the rise of the Deylamite Buyids led to the foundation of something like a family confederation with provincial capitals at Ray, Shiraz, and Baghdad, together with ancillary courts at Isfahan and, in the 5th/11th century under the Buyids' Deylamite vassals the Kakuyids, at Isfahan, Hamadān, and Yazd. All these cities were to play significant roles as local capitals, often of autonomous or semi-independent lines, such as Kermān under a branch of the Saljuqs and Shiraz under the Salghurid *atābak*s in the 6th-7th/12th-13th century, and Yazd under its *atābak*s in the 7th/13th century.

Most of them acquired a cultural as well as an administrative significance through the patronage and encouragement of the local rulers and their officials, and, in the case of the Samanids, the Buyids, the Saffarids, and certain Caspian dynasties, this cultural renaissance clearly aimed at a certain reassertion of Iranian, as opposed to Arab, national and cultural identity.

From the Saljuqs to the Safavids. The Saljuq Turks, who overran Iran during some three or four middle decades of the 5th/11th century, retained their steppe nomadic traditions and even after they had left Central Asia behind never developed any strong need for a permanent, fixed capital, which would comprise the sultans' family and personal guard, the court circle, and the divans of the administration. As they advanced westwards across Iran after their capture of Nīšāpūr (431/1040) from the Ghaznavids they successively moved their capital to Ray (434/1042-43), Isfahan (442/1050-51), and Hamadān. In the 6th/12th century the Saljuq sultanate was virtually divided into two parts: the administration of the western half was based in Hamadān or Isfahan and, at times, in Baghdad, nominally shared with the ʿAbbasid caliphs, while that of the eastern half was based in Marv, which under Sultan Sanjar (q.v.) thus enjoyed a temporary recovery of its original primacy in Khorasan (see Lambton, pp. 222-23). There were, furthermore, outlying branches of the Saljuq family in Kermān, Syria, and Anatolia. Such strong tendencies towards decentralization combined with the growth in the 6th/12th century of the *atābak*s (see atābak) in several peripheral parts of Iran, including the Aḥmadīlīs of Marāḡa (see atābakān-e marāḡa), the Ildegizids of Tabrīz (see atābakān-e āḏarbāyjān), and the Salghurids of Shiraz (see atābakān-e fārs), probably favored the growth of a rich cultural life at this time in such cities as Ray, Isfahan, Shiraz, and, especially, the cities of Azarbaijan and Arrān.

This decentralization of power within Iran was not altered by the advent of the Mongols in the 7th/13th century, who were accustomed to extreme mobility and suspected fixed residences, even after their conversion to Islam with its urban bias and outlook. From Saljuq times onwards the availability of lush spring pasture for herds became a prime factor for tribal and nomadic peoples in the choice of favored areas for concentration or of the location of their administrative and cultural centers. This helps to explain the attraction of Azarbaijan and the northern fringes of Khorasan and Gorgān with their favored pasture grounds and valleys with perennial water to dynasties of nomadic origin, from the Mongols to the early Qajars (regarding Azarbaijan cf. Barthold, pp. 218ff.). Thus Solṭānīya, which is situated on an elevated plain

with abundant pasture called by the Mongols Qongqur-Öleng (Qūnqūr-Ūlāng, Brown Meadows), was begun as his capital by the Il-khan Arḡūn (q.v.) and completed by Öljeytü (Oljāytū, q.v.) and adorned with handsome buildings by the khans and such of their ministers as Rašīd-al-Dīn Faẓl-Allāh (q.v.; see Boyle and Petrushevsky, pp. 399-400, 507-08). It was still important under the Jalayerids and Timurids but declined completely once the Safavids established their capital in Isfahan, much further south (see below). After the fall of Baghdad in 656/1258, Hülegü (Holāgū, q.v.) had taken up quarters in Marāḡa, which was also situated in an area of good pasture, and started a building program there. But only with Ḡāzān Khan was a regular capital begun at Tabrīz, the traditional center of Azarbaijan, eventually contributing to the eclipse of Solṭānīya. Tabrīz expanded enormously under Ḡāzān's patronage: Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfī (mid-8th/12th century) affirmed that no city of Iran had so many lofty and imposing buildings as Tabrīz (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, ed. Le Strange, p. 77, tr. p. 80), and the city continued to flourish in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries as the capital of the Turkman dynasties of the Jalayerids, the Qara Qoyunlū, and finally, after 873/1468, under Uzun Ḥasan (q.v.), the Āq Qoyunlū (see Minorsky; Rypka, p. 555; and Pinder-Wilson, p. 758).

Eastern Iran took some time to recover from the destructions of the Mongols. Some historic centers, such as Nīšāpūr and, above all, Herat, gradually revived to varying extents, but Marv, long eclipsed by Nīšāpūr as the natural center for Khorasan except during Sanjar's sultanate (511-52/1118-57), never recovered. In the middle and later decades of the 8th/14th century the small town of Sabzavār to the west of Nīšāpūr achieved momentary fame as the capital of the local Shiʿite dynasty of the Sarbadarids. Tīmūr, even though frequently campaigning, made Samarkand his capital, adjacent to the Central Asian steppes from which he drew much of his fighting manpower, and enriched it with fine buildings, as attested by the Spanish envoy Clavijo (pp. 226-28, 230ff., 275-76, 278-81) among others. Tīmūr's descendants in the 9th/15th century from Šāhroḵ (q.v.) onwards made Herat their capital, which in the 7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries had been the capital of the local Tajik dynasty of the Karts or Korts, and under the last Timurids Herat attained unprecedented importance as a seat of literature, science, and painting. With the unification of Iran under the Safavids, however, Herat, like Nīšāpūr, became a peripheral, provincial city, possession of which was disputed by the Uzbeks of Transoxania. Finally, after the decline of the Safavids Herat passed into the orbit of the Dorrānī Afghan rulers, still retaining its ancient commercial importance and eventually becoming one of the strategic centers of modern

Afghanistan. Qandahār remained the capital of Afghanistan under the Dorrānīs until Tīmūr Shah b. Aḥmad Shah Dorrānī in 1189/1775 replaced it with Kabul, the ancient capital of the pre-Islamic Kābolšāhs and strategically situated as a base for launching expeditions down to the plains of northern India (see afghanistan x).

From the Safavids to the Qajars. The origin of the Safavids was at Ardabīl in Azarbaijan, the heartland of the Turkmen, and when they achieved power over rival Āq Qoyunlū in northwestern Iran during the opening years of the 10th/16th century, they at first made their base in Tabrīz. Shah Ṭahmāsb (q.v.), however, in 962/1555 moved his capital eastwards to Qazvīn, henceforth called *dār al-salṭana*, both because of the vulnerability of Tabrīz to Ottoman attacks which became obvious after the Čālderān disaster and, possibly, with the intention of moving his capital away from Azarbaijan and nearer to the core of Iran proper (see Roemer, 1974, pp. 313-16; 1986, p. 270). Qazvīn constituted an important stage along the vital road connecting Azarbaijan with Khorasan, and it also occupied a strategic situation along the overland trade route from Anatolia, Russia, and the West into Iran. This commercial role of Qazvīn survived long after Shah ʿAbbās I moved the capital to Isfahan in 1005/1596-97 or 1006/1597-98, apparently desirous of reigning from a more central position within the land of Iran and of taking advantage of the very fertile and well-watered nature of the Isfahan plain. The exact date of this move is not known, as there seems to have been an interval of uncertainty when the court, consonant with the nomadic background of its Turkmen Qïzïlbāš supporters, fluctuated between Qazvīn and Isfahan (see Roemer, 1974, pp. 319-20, who favors a date of spring 1006/1598). Whereas Qazvīn had developed little during its forty years or so as capital, Isfahan was turned into what became for the first time, a genuine metropolis of Iran by the shah, who for his extensive building and irrigation programs began to attract European merchants and foreign artisans, encourage architecture and the visual arts, establish workshops for craft production, and bring in, among others, Armenian and Georgian artisans (cf. Savory, pp. 154-76, who compares the planning and reconstruction of Isfahan by Shah ʿAbbās with that of Baghdad in the 2nd/8th century by the caliph al-Manṣūr). European visitors were more impressed by Isfahan and the splendor of its court life than by any other Middle Eastern city, and Chardin believed that it was as populous as the London of his time, perhaps with 600,000 to 700,000 people (cf. Curzon, II, pp. 21ff.; Lambton, in *EI*^{2}, p. 102a).

Just as the renaissance of Isfahan was bound up with the maturation of Safavid political and military power and the burgeoning of Safavid culture, so was the passing of its glory bound up with the fall of the dynasty after the sacking of the city by the Afghans in 1134/1722. Nāder Shah at first resided at Isfahan, but when he assumed the throne of Iran in 1148/1736 he moved his capital to Mašhad in the far northeast of the country (see below). Isfahan suffered badly in these middle decades of the century from plundering, famine, and other disasters until peace was brought by Karīm Khan Zand in 1172/1758-59, who moved the capital to Shiraz a few years later (1180/1766-77). Shiraz, which flourished as a city of culture and commerce, was thus brought a brief restoration of the glories it had had as the capital of the Salghurids and the Mozaffarids in the 7th-8th/13th-14th centuries, before it had sunk to provincial status under the Safavids.

Under the Qajars and Pahlavis. After the short period of Zand power the capital of Iran left the southern part of the country for ever. Nāder had pointed the way with his move to Mašhad, better placed as a capital for his incessant campaigning into Transoxania, Afghanistan, and northern India and adjacent to his mountain plateau and natural fastness of Kalāt-e Nāderī, and Mašhad remained the capital of the nominally independent but in fact Afghan-controlled Khorasanian principality of Nāder's blind grandson Šāhroḵ b. Reżāqolī until the Qajar occupation in 1211/1796-97 and the definitive Qajar takeover of Mašhad in 1218/1803. Mašhad, whose importance in the history of Iran has been primarily as a religious rather than a political center, gradually rose to prominence after the Mongol destruction of Ṭūs and Nīšāpūr. Under the Safavids, when access to the *ʿatabāt* of Iraq was generally impeded by the hostile Ottomans, its shrine of Imam ʿAlī al-Reżā was especially favored.

The real successor to Isfahan as the metropolis of Iran proved to be Tehran, in the north of the country, near its medieval predecessor, Ray. Despite Tehran's strategic situation on the highway to Khorasan, however, there was an element of the fortuitous in its rise to fame and fortune. A provincial town under the Safavids, although occasionally a residence of the later shahs, it was adopted by the founder of the Qajar dynasty Āḡā Moḥammad Khan as his capital in 1200/1786 in the course of his attempts to subdue rival powers in the south and east of Iran from his northern base and to unify the country under his tribe and family. The location of Tehran was not particularly well-favored by nature, and a critical factor in its choice as a capital was its being within easy reach of the Qajar Turkmen's tribal pastures in the Astarābād-Gorgān

area (cf. Planhol, pp. 445ff.). In its external appearance and the absence of most of the amenities normally associated with capital cities, it remained essentially a provincial town until the rebuilding and expansionary measures of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (q.v.), which were in part inspired by what he had observed during his European journeys from 1284/1867 onwards. Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah could therefore in good conscience claim, in Curzon's words (I, p. 305), "to have made his city a capital in something more than the name." The adoption of Tehran as capital naturally meant a clear displacement of the center of importance in Iran from south to north, a process which did not take place without engendering some tensions, witness the unrest in Fārs during Moḥammad Shah's reign in the 1830s and 1840s directed at unpopular Turkish northerners and possibly the resentment by the south at its lost status and the neglect of its commercial interests as a factor in the genesis and early development of Babism (see Davies, pp. 173ff.; Avery, pp. 52-53; but cf. Momen, p. 179). Tehran nevertheless grew inexorably, probably trebling its population in the century or so between 1222/1807 and 1328/1910 (cf. Ettehadieh, pp. 199ff.), and has in the present century so far overtaken in population growth and urban sprawl the other cities of Iran as to enjoy what would appear to be an unassailable position as the country's capital for the foreseeable future.

For eleven months in 1324-25 Š./1946, Mahābād, the older Sāvojbolāq in western Azarbaijan served as the capital of the short-lived Soviet-backed autonomous Kurdish Republic of Qāżī Moḥammad.

J. Aubin, "Elements pour l'étude des agglomérations urbaines dans l'Iran medieval," in A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern, eds., *The Islamic City. A Colloquium*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 65-75.

P. Avery, *Modern Iran*, London, 1965.

W. Barthold, *An Historical Geography of Iran*, tr. S. Soucek, Princeton, 1984.

J. A. Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Īl-khāns," in *Camb. Hist. Iran* V, 1968, pp. 303-421.

Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane 1403-1406*, tr. G. Le Strange, London, 1928. Curzon, *Persian Question* II, pp. 21ff.

C. E. Davies, "Qajar Rule in Fars Prior to 1849," *Iran* 25, 1987, pp. 125-53.

M. Ettehadieh, “Patterns in Urban Development. The Growth of Tehran (1852-1903),” in E. Bosworth and C. Hillenbrand, eds., *Qajar Iran. Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925. Studies Presented to Professor L. P. Elwell-Sutton*, Edinburgh, 1983, pp. 199-212.

A. K. S. Lambton, “The Internal Structure of the Saljuq Empire,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* V, 1968, pp. 203-282.

Idem, “Iṣfahān. 1. History,” in *EI*[2] IV, 1978, pp. 97-105.

L. Lockhart, *Persian Cities*, London, 1960 (earlier version, *Famous Cities of Iran*, London, 1939). V. Minorsky, “Tabrīz,” in *EI*[1] IV, 1934, pp. 583-93.

Idem, “Persia. Religion and History,” in *Iranica. Twenty Articles*, Tehran, 1964.

M. Momen, “The Social Basis of the Bābī Upheavals in Iran (1848-53).

A Preliminary Analysis,” *IJMES* 15, 1983, pp. 157-83.

M. G. Morony, “Conquerors and Conquered Iran,” in G. H. A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies in the First Century of Islamic Society*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill., 1982, pp. 77-80.

I. P. Petrushevsky, “The Socio-Economic Condition of Iran under the Īl-khāns,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* V, 1968, pp. 483-537.

R. Pinder-Wilson, “Timurid Architecture,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* VI, 1986, pp. 728-58.

X. de Planhol, “Geography of Settlement,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* I, 1968, pp. 409-67.

H. R. Roemer, “Das frühsafawidische Isfahan als historische Forschungsaufgabe,” *ZDMG* 124, 1974, pp. 316-31.

Idem, “The Safavid Period,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* VI, 1986, pp. 189-350.

J. Rypka, “Poets and Prose Writers of the Late Saljuq and Mongol Periods,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* V, 1968, pp. 550-625.

R. M. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, Cambridge, 1980.