



# CENTRAL ASIA VIII. RELATIONS WITH PERSIA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

---

## CENTRAL ASIA

### viii. Relations with Persia in the 19th Century

The question of Central Asia in the 13th/19th century, from the Persian point of view, was a prominent one not only because of Persian territorial claims over Marv, Kīva, Saraḵs, and other peripheral regions, but also because of the threat of the Turkmen frontier tribes of Tekka, Yomūt, and Gūklān to the security of Khorasan, Astarābād, and Māzandarān. The substantial volume of trade between the Persian emporiums, Astarābād and Mašhad, and Central Asian provinces as far east as Chinese Turkestan was another important reason. Persia's reassertion of her territorial rights over Herat, Farāh, and adjacent regions of western Afghanistan in the early part of the century also involved the Turkmen tribes as they often allied themselves with the Afghan warlords against the Persian government. From the middle of the century onwards, Russia's rapid expansion caused much anxiety for the Persian authorities, who saw annexation of Bukhara, Kīva, and later Marv as an ominous prelude to Russia's further advances into the interiors of Khorasan and Māzandarān. The eradication in the 1300s/1880s of the Turkmen resistance by the Russian imperial army, however, was observed by the



Persian government with a cautious relief.

All through the 13th/19th century the sedentary population of towns and villages of Khorasan and Astarābād provinces, as well as the trade frequenting along the Māzandarān-Khorasan route, were seriously threatened by plundering sorties (*čapow*) of the Turkmen tribes of the frontier. Attacking in small bands of horsemen with superior horsemanship and endurance for long rides across the Khivan desert, they could penetrate deep into the interiors of Khorasan with speed and efficiency. Even worse were the massive-scale abductions and enslavement of the Persian villagers, travelers, and townspeople by the Turkmen for sale in the slave markets of Kīva, Bukhara, and other centers of Central Asia or to secure huge ransoms from their relatives. Occasionally these attacks were punished cruelly by military expeditions by the government of Khorasan and Astarābād, but the Persian government was incapable of dealing with the Turkmen problem decisively. It neither possessed the military power to check the swift movements of the Turkmen horses nor found such an undertaking viable. ‘Abbās Mīrzā led an expedition of Sarak̄s and the neighboring country of K̄vārazm in 1247/1832, followed by another expedition by Moḥammad Shah in 1253/1837. According to Mīrzā Abu’l-Qāsem Qā’em-maqām who accompanied ‘Abbās Mīrzā in this expedition more than twelve thousand Persian captives had been taken by Turkmen to Bukhara (*Monša’āt-e Qā’em-maqām*, Tehran, 1337 Š./1958, no. 151 to Mīrzā Šādeq Marvazī).

In 1267/1851 Mīrzā Taqī Khan Amīr-e Kabīr dispatched the chronicler and poet of the Qajar court Reżāqolī Khan Hedāyat to K̄vārazm primarily for intelligence gathering but also to negotiate with the khan of Kīva a peaceful settlement of the Turkmen problem. Hedāyat’s valuable account of this mission provides an important insight into the Persian problems of dealing with the autonomy-seeking powers of the periphery.

The persistence of the Turkmen menace and the failure of the khans of Marv to create a confederacy to resist dual Persian and Russian pressures, among other reasons, led to a new Persian attempt to quell the Turkmen insurgency. This effort came to a disastrous end in 1276/1860 with the ill-fated Marv expedition. The Persian regular troops suffered heavy casualties largely because of poor logistics rather than direct Turkmen attacks. After this the Persian government refrained from large-scale punitive action against the Turkmen, leaving the job of pacifying them to the Russian imperial armies, which by 1298/1881 had conquered the entire Turkmen region. Northern



Persian provinces, however, suffered from Turkmen incursions up to the end of the century.

By the 1290s/late 1870s and early 1300s/1880s Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah realized that the annexation of Central Asia by Russia could not be avoided and used this fact to halt British claims for concessions in the south, as matching ones would then have to be given to the Russians in the north. Russian advances in the territories of Central Asia thus resulted in the loss of peripheral territory, territory that could serve as a buffer for Persia. Instead, Russian advances became a key component in Persia's efforts to maintain a balance between her imperial neighbors.

By the 1330s/late 1880s the Russian advances in Central Asia came to a halt, bringing a semblance of normality to the Perso-Turkmen frontier. [Ashkhabad](#) on the Russo-Persian border, the new capital of Turkmenistan, was developed into a Russian showcase of colonial urbanization in Central Asia and attracted a large population of Persians in search of jobs, trade, and relief from religious persecution, and it became a center for the Russian and European trade. With its ethnic and religious diversity (including a Bahai community), for a few decades into the 14th/20th century, Ashkhabad was a successful commercial center in "Transcaspia," comparable to similar Russian colonies in the Caucasus. By the 1310s Š./1930s, however, Stalin's policy of compulsory repatriation forced a large portion of the Persian community back to Persia, and nearly all contacts with Central Asian cities were severed.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Extensive coverage of the Central Asian situation in the 13th/19th century with reference to Persia is to be found in the reports and dispatches of the British legation in Tehran and consular reports from Mašhad and Astarābād (P.R.O. in the F.O. 60 series and some in Confidential Papers F.O. 539; also some in F.O. 65). A specimen of the British reconnaissance reporting appears in A. Amanat, ed., *Cities and Trade. Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran 1847-1866*, London, 1983, pp. 19-74.

Primary sources. European accounts: A. Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, 3 vols.,



London, 1834.

A. Conolly, *Journey to the North of India Overland from England through Russia, Persia and Afghanistan*, London, 1834.

G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, London, 1892, I, pp. 70-113, II, pp. 585-634.

J. B. Fraser, *Narrative of a Journey into Khorasan in the Years 1821 and 1822*, London, 1825, pp. 322-407, 581-623, app. B [58]-[117].

Idem, *A Winter Journey (Tatar) from Constantinople to Tehran*, 2 vols., London, 1838, II, pp. 195-410.

J. P. Farrier, *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkistan, and Baloochistan*, London, 1857, pp. 68-116.

J. McNeill, *Progress and Present Position of Russian in the East*, London, 1836.

N. N. Mouraviev, *Voyage en Turcomanie et a Khiva fait en 1819 et 1820*, Paris, 1823.

E. O'Donovan, *The Merv Oasis. Travels and Adventures East of the Caspian during the Years 1879-80-81*, 2 vols., New York, 1881.

H. C. Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East*, London, 1875, repr. New York, etc., 1970.

P. M. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, London, 1866, 1915, II, pp. 458-71.

A. Vámbéry, *Travels in Central Asia*, New York, 1865, pp. 50-493.

R. G. Watson, *A History of Persia*, London, 1866, pp. 204, 259-70.

J. Wolff, *Travels and Adventures*, London, 1861.

Idem, *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara*, London, 1848.

Primary sources. Persian historical accounts: 'Abd-al-Razzāq Beg Donbolī, *Ma'āter-e solṭānīya*, Tehran, 1241/1825, pp. 92-93, 122-24, 317-19, 338-56, 391-95.

Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E'temād-al Saḷṭana, *Tārīḳ-e montazam-e nāṣerī*, 2nd



ed., ed. M.-E. Reżwānī, 3 vols., Tehran, 1367 Š./1988, III. Reżāqolī Khan Hedāyat, *Rawżat al-şafā-ye nāşerī*, 2nd ed., Qom, 1339 Š./1950, IX and X.

Idem, *Sefārat-nāma-ye K̄vārazm*, tr. with notes C. Schefer, *Relation de l'ambassade au Kharezm (Khiva) de Riza Quli Khan*, 2 vols., Paris, 1876-79.

Moḥammad-Taqī Sepehr, *Nāseḵ al-tawārīḵ (Qājārīya)*, 4 vols., 2nd ed., Tehran, 1344 Š./1965.

Studies: M. L. Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations, 1828-1914*, Gainesville, Fla., 1965.

R. L. Greaves, *Persia and the Defence of India, 1889-1892*, London, 1959, pp. 53-69.

E. Ingram, *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia 1828-1834*, London, 1979, pp. 118-142.

F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia 1864-1914*, New Haven, 1968, pp. 3-99.

H. Nateq, “Abbās Mīrzā wa fath-e Ḳorāsān,” pp. 43-67, and “Abbās Mīrzā wa Torkamānān-e Ḳorāsān,” in *Az mā'st ke bar mā'st*, Tehran, 1344 Š./1965, pp. 43-67, 68-91.

Y. Şahīdī, “Tārīḵča-ye jang-e Marv,” *Barrasīhā-ye tārīḵī* 6/1, 1350 Š./1971, and 6/2, pp. 1-62.