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CLASS SYSTEM IV. CLASSES IN MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC PERSIA

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iv. Classes In Medieval Islamic Persia

Little evidence survives to show how a new social order replaced the old Sasanian class system during the early Islamic era. A new social stratification and conception of inequality seems to have gradually emerged under the influence of: (1) Islamic ideals of equality and merit; (2) pre-Islamic Persian and Arabian ideals and practices of social inequality; and above all (3) rivalries among social groups over wealth, prestige, and power. Furthermore, Greek philosophical theories of hierarchy and inequality influenced Muslim ideas about social stratification. In this article the theories and Structure of inequality of Persian society in the medieval Islamic period will be treated.

Theories of inequality in medieval Islamic Persia

There were two opposing attitudes toward inequality in Islam: egalitarian and meritocratic views favoring an open stratification system and nonegalitarian views of hierarchy as natural in bout society and the universe.

Egalitarian and meritocratic ideas in Islam

The egalitarian and meritocratic ideal in Islam was an open society in which any memberof the Muslim community (omma)—regardless of social status at birth (*važīʿ wa šarīf*; base and noble), race (black and white), ethnicity (Arab and non-Arab [*ʿajam*]), or inherited wealth (*faqīr wa ḡānī*; poor and rich)—could, owing to his personal qualities or merit (*esteḥqāq*), rise to the highest social status: virtue and piety, wisdom and knowledge, or acquired wealth and political office. Such views are to be found in several Koranic verses and in traditions of the Prophet and early Muslims, notably ʿOmar and ʿAlī. Qurʾān 49:13, "O mankind, we have created you from male and female, and set you up as peoples (*šoʿūb*) and tribes (*qabāʾel*) so you may recognize one another; the noblest (*akram*) among you with God is the most pious (*atqā*) of you," was often invoked by underprivileged ethnic groups and social strata, including Kharijites, early militant Shiʿites (*ḡolāt*), and the Šoʿūbīs of Persian nobility. Other such verses were 49:10, "Believers merely form a brotherhood," and 30:22, "Among His signs [is] . . . the diversity in your tongues and colors . . . ." A number of egalitarian traditions attributed to the Prophet forbade boasting about ancestry: "There are no genealogies in Islam," "the sole title to nobility in Islam is piety and fear of God" (Ebn Ḥanbal, I, p. 301; II, p. 366; III, pp. 456, 460; IV, p. 134; Ṭūsī, 1339 Š./1960, pp. 83-96, 176-87, 303-305). Egalitarian views and practices were also attributed to ʿOmar (*Aḡānī* XIV, p. 4; Ebn Ṭeqṭaqā, 1860, pp. 33, 89; 1947, pp. 25, 70). ʿAlī, among others, defined nobility as resulting from knowledge and piety, not lineage and wealth: "Nobility (*šaraf*) is derived only from knowledge (*ʿelm*) and culture (*adab*), not from inherited merit (*ḥasab*) and lineage (*nasab*)"; and "a man's value consists in what he knows" (Rašīd-al-Dīn Waṭwāṭ, pp. 68-69, 122, 188-89; Wāʿeẓ-e Kāšefī, 1344, p. 186). Abu'l-Fażl Bayhaqī (d. 470/1077) thought that mere noble birth was not "worth a penny" (pp. 524-26). Saʿdī (d. 695/1295; p. 155), who believed in the role of both nature and nurture in the making of human character, tells of stupid sons of viziers who became beggars and gifted sons of peasants who came to court and became viziers. Ḥāfeẓ (d. 792/1389; p. 321) said, "Demanding the royal crown, you should demonstrate your innate noble substance (*gowhar-e ḏātī*), even though you may be from the stock of Jamšīd and Farīdūn." Moḥammad b. Qāżī Malaṭīyawī (7th/13th century; pp. 73, 269-72) advised the prince to overlook noble birth (*šaraf-e obowwa*) in selecting officials. Knowledge was often viewed as superior to wealth, as well (Ormavī, pp. 13-23; Ṭūsī, 1339 Š./1960, pp. 54-64; Qūnavī, pp. 130-38; Rosenthal, pp. 322-33; Muhammad Ali, pp. 31-39).

It was philosophers and social thinkers like ʿĀmerī (d. 381/992), Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048), Ebn Fātek (5th/11th century) and, above all, the eminent sociologist and philosopher of history, Ebn Ḵaldūn (d. 809/1406), who attempted to explain the nature and causes of social differentiation. ʿĀmerī, presenting his meritocratic theory of social differentiation in Islamic society (1387/1967, pp. 159-60, 174-76), blamed the biohereditary notion of the nobility of the Sasanian kings and Zoroastrian teachings for the rigid division between the noble and the base in Sasanian society, a division that blocked upward mobility for many free people with good qualities. Bīrūnī saw coercion and the use of physical force by the rulers and the dominant classes as the main cause of the Indo-Persian caste system: He considered the rigid caste boundaries and strict barriers to social mobility in pre-Islamic Persia and India unnecessary and improper (pp. 75-79). Abu'l-Wafā Mobaššer Ebn Fātek (pp. 150-51), in a discussion of Plato's social thought, anticipated the elitist ideas of Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923; I, chaps. 12-13) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941; pp. 430-64) and advocated the "circulation of elites" as a means of strengthening political leadership and society in general.

Ebn Ḵaldūn, anticipating the external-conflict theories of modern social thought, influenced the ideas of such political sociologists as Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838-1909), who devoted a chapter of his 1899 work to him (Barnes and Baker, II, p. 267), and Franz Oppenheimer (1864-1943; pp. 8-31). Ebn Ḵaldūn traced the origins of the division of society into sovereign and subject classes to the formation of the state by the subjugation of one social group with a weak *ʿaṣabīya* (esprit de corps) by another group with a strong *ʿaṣabīya* (I, pp. 278-301, 313-17). Also anticipating Karl Marx's (1818-83) theory of "surplus value" (I, pp. 177-78, 508-18), Ebn Ḵaldūn argued that, once established, the sovereign class requires compulsory acquiescence of the subject class to its economic needs in terms of extraction of surplus value of their labor; The acquired capital, profits, and gains, "in their entirety or for the most part, are values realized from human labour" (II, p. 314). Economic power is a function of political domination: "A person of rank receives much (free) labor which makes him rich in a very short time" (II, p. 327). Furthermore, the ruling class superimposes its customs and ways of life upon the masses. Ebn Ḵaldūn rejected the idea that noble birth justifies inequality: "Man is the child of customs, not the child of his ancestors." Nobility and prestige are an "accident that affects human beings" (II, p. 318).

Egalitarian and meritocratic ideas became, during the first centuries of Islam, the ideology of protest movements among underprivileged groups contending for political power, especially the aristocratic Persian Šoʿūbīya, the democratic

Kharijites, and the radical Shiʿite (*ḡolāt*) movements. Later, however, egalitarian ideas lost much of their revolutionary potential and were incorporated gradually into the ethics of the established order, according to which egalitarianism, asceticism, and consideration for the poor were admired at the same time that hierarchy and inequality were endorsed in society.

Proponents of inequality in medieval Islam

Advocates of inequality viewed social differentiation as inevitable or even desirable because they considered it necessary for the survival of society as a whole (functional model), because of the unequal distribution of inherited intelligence (biohereditary perspective), or because of inherited or acquired wealth.

The biohereditary perspective. The most common explanation of social inequality in medieval Islam was that nobility was inherited. In pre-Islamic Persia, members of dominant strata, no matter what social functions they performed, were considered men of rank with noble status; they boasted about the value of their hereditary rank and lineage and were forbidden to associate with commoners (*Nāma-ye Tansar*, pp. 57-59, 64-65, 69-70). Among the Arabs "knowledge of the common descent of certain groups [and] the glory of a tribe," as Ignaz Goldziher noted (I, P. 45), stood "at the center of Arab social consciousness." The term *ḥasab* connoted the accumulation of the famous deeds of one's ancestors, the ancestors themselves, and one's own contributions. These ideas and practices were common during the Islamic era, despite the fact that they contradicted the egalitarian ethos of Islam. Aristotle's theory of the hierarchical order of the universe and social inequality (pp. 9-18, 297-306) supported such ideas of the natural causes of human inequality. Ebn Moqaffaʿ (d. 142/759), who was one of the first translators of Aristotle's works into Arabic, cited the philosopher's advice to Alexander in the introduction to *Nāma-ye Tansar* (tr., p. 27): "[B]e assured that there is no wickedness or calamity, no unrest or plague in the world which corrupts so much as the ascending of the base to the station of the noble" (cf. Ebn Moqaffaʿ, 1331/1913, pp. 120-131; 1339 Š./1960, pp. 501, 504, 523). Meskawayh (d. 421/1030), influenced by Aristotle's ideas, enumerated five main factors that cause differences among people: "natural dispositions; habits; their ranks and their shares of science, knowledge, and understanding; their aspirations; and their desires and concerns" (1966, p. 87; tr. p. 78). Rāḡeb Eṣfahānī (d. 502/1108; pp. 111-20) devoted two chapters to the nature and causes of inequality. He began with a number of Koranic verses and prophetic traditions to demonstrate the utility and necessity of inequality, including two oft-quoted verses: “God is the One Who had raised some of you higher than others in rank” (6:165) and “Watch how We have permitted some of them to get ahead of others” (17:21). Rāḡeb believed as well as in the social utility of inequality and that a man’s place in the social hierarchy was predestined. To support his argument he cited a saying of the Prophet: “Men will not desist to prosper as long as they diverge; if they are equal, they will perish.” He attributed human inequality to seven factors: temperament, character of the parents, sperm and blood, suckling, socialization, influence of significant others, and finally personal effort. Ḡazālī (1387/1967, I, p. 121), who followed Rāḡeb’s ethics, attributed differences of human intellect to natural ability and assiduity.

Most mirrors for princes include advice to rulers to support and maintain the nobility. In the *Naṣīḥat al-molūk*, attributed to Ḡazālī, statements ascribed to Aristotle on the virtues of noble stocks are cited (pp. 127, 231) and it is stated that “five features in man are derived from inheritance: a beautiful face, good character traits, high aspirations, vanity, and baseness” (p. 225). Neẓām-al--Molk (d. 485/1092; pp. 143-44) advised kings to provide allotments for the noble and learned men and warned them of the vices of revolution, because “men of noble birth will be crushed . . . the least of men will be an amir, the basest of persons will become a governor.” The Ziyarid prince Kay Kāvūs b. Eskandar (d. 462/1069), in *Qābūsnāma* (pp. 4-5), advised his son to value his distinctive lineage. *Anīs al-nās*, written by a certain Šojāʿ in 830/1426 (pp. 21-25, 115-16, 230-31), closely followed *Qābūs-nāma* but further advocated the idea of maintaining the boundaries of hierarchical order (honor and nobility) by forbidding the children of tradesmen (*bāzārī*s) to be educated and to learn the skills of the nobility. Ẓahīrī Samarqandī (p. 169) mentioned the Aristotelian idea, which had been attributed to a Sasanian king, that “the degrading of 1,000 men of noble birth is preferred to the elevation of one man of mean origins to higher ranks which would lead toward chaos and disaster.” ʿAwfī (d. 630/1232), in a chapter “On different natural characters of men” (pp. 22-29), presented anecdotes to illustrate how inheritance shapes human character traits.

Functional theories. Functional perspectives in the medieval period originated in Sasanian theory and practice of social stratification, as well as in Plato’s political philosophy. Plato’s ideal state (pp. 111-38) is an organic entity, a rigid aristocracy of power, intellect, and breeding, derived from his conception of the soul and of the whole universe. Thus justice, that is, harmony and coordination of different functions or the maintenance of each class in its proper place, is necessary for the well-being and survival of society. Plato’s functional theory is blended with meritocratic ideas of hierarchy; for him the unity of society and enforcement of social justice must be maintained by “preserving the principle of promotion by merit; there must be no purely hereditary governing class” (p. 111). This theory was introduced into Islamic social thought mainly by Fārābī (d. 339/950; see also Dāvarī, pp. 46, 120-21, 174-76; ʿĀmerī, 1336 Š./1957, p. 209; and Avicenna, II, p. 447). Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), in his influential book of ethics and practical philosophy *Aḵlāq-e nāṣerī* (p. 305), mentioned the functional theory of stratification. For Ṭūsī, society was divided into four classes that should be maintained in their proper place by the ruler: men of the pen, including scholars, jurisprudents (*foqahāʾ*), religious judges (*qożāt*), scribes (*kottāb*), mathematicians, geometricians, astronomers, physicians, and poets; men of the sword; men of affairs, like merchants, craftsmen, artisans, and tax collectors; and farmers. Jalāl-al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502), in *Aḵlāq-e jalālī* (pp. 138-39; tr. pp. 388-90), followed Ṭūsī closely in dividing society into four functional strata and, like him, emphasized that “in order to preserve this political equipoise, there is a correspondence to be maintained between the various classes.” Wāʿeẓ-e Kāšefī (d. 910/1504), a popular preacher and author, in his *Aḵlāq-e moḥsenī* (p. 48), also divided people into four classes and advised the ruler to keep them in their proper places.

The Sasanian quadripartite theory of social stratification was introduced into the Islamic world by historians and authors of mirrors for princes and books of ethics. Ebn Moqaffaʿ (in his introduction to *Nāma-ye Tansar*, pp. 45-49; tr. pp. 26-30) and Jāḥeẓ (1332/1914, pp. 23-26; tr. pp. 32-33) were among the first medieval authors to mention the Sasanian model of stratification. According to Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; I, pp. 179-80), the mythical king Jamšīd established the classes of warriors, men of religious learning, men of the pen, and husbandmen and craftsmen. Following Ṭabarī, Ṯaʿālebī (*Ḡorar*, pp. 11-12), Ferdowsī (d. 416/1025; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Ḵāleqī, I, pp. 42-43), Ebn Balḵī (pp. 30-31), Gardīzī (ed. Ḥabībī, p. 2), and Ebn al-Aṯīr (I, p. 46), among others, referred to the Sasanian quadripartite strata. The influence of both Islamic egalitarian ideas and Plato’s meritocratic functional theory modified the functionalism that emerged in Islamic culture, so that it was only a faint image of the original, pre-Islamic model (for a study of functionalism in Persia, see Marlow, pp. 10-68, 173-232; Mojtabāʾī, passim).

Wealth as a vehicle of social mobility

With the growth of commerce and the rise of a merchant class in the 3rd/9th century (Rodinson, pp. 12-117), wealth emerged as an important criterion of social status and upward mobility, in competition with both noble birth and knowledge. Although the acceptance of Islam resulted in alteration in the contemptuous Zoroastrian attitude toward trade (*Nāma-ye Tansar*, pp. 64-65, tr. pp. 38-39); the Islamic attitude toward accumulation of wealth was ambivalent, leading to the emergence of two different attitudes in the medieval period. In one view, more consistent with the Islamic tradition, trade was a worldly, transient means of living (*maʿāš*), and the accumulation of wealth for its own sake was thus condemned (Ḡazālī, 1387/1967, I, p. 23; III, pp. 250-66, 287-302; idem, 1319 Š./1940, pp. 255-88; see also Rāzī, pp. 286-302; Ṭūsī, 1339 Š./1960, pp. 176-87). Advocates of another view, which was influenced by Greek ideas, “praised wealth for its own sake” (Ritter, pp. 3-4). Thus, in the course of the development of a merchant class in the medieval period, a number of traditions were presented in support of accumulation of wealth. In a handbook of commerce prepared by a merchant, Abu’l-Fażl Demašqī (pp. 26-27, 100), making money was treated as a noble calling. Jāḥeẓ (1389/1969, pp. 53-54) compared the independence and security of the merchant to the precarious life of a courtier. A number of traditions in praise of wealth indicating that wealth was an inherited merit were ascribed to the Prophet (Ebn Ḥanbal, V, p. 10). An ambivalent attitude toward the accumulation of wealth led some compilers of anthologies of verses and traditions to devote one section to the praise of wealth and another to its condemnation (see, e.g., Ebn Qotayba, , pp. 239-45 and 246-49; for references to a variety of views on wealth, see Wensinck, pp. 249-50).

Although it also led to inequality, the recognition of wealth as a factor in social status undermined the biohereditary system and opened the gates of upward mobility to newcomers from below.

The theodicies of inequality

Conceptions of equality and inequality are based ultimately on ideas about the world as a whole. In pre-Islamic Persia the dualistic conception of the world along with the idea of the tripartite functional hierarchy of the universe influenced the establishment of distinct fire temples and angels for three social classes, each of which was assigned a specific function to perform (see, e.g., *Kār-nāma-ye Ardašīr-e Bābakān*, pp. 7-9; Moʿīn, pp. 308-48; see also i, ii, iii, above). The pre-Islamic Arab bedouins' polytheism, based on a pantheon of tribal idols, shaped their ideas of tribal and clan hierarchy and of tribal aristocracy (Goldziher, I, pp. 11-97). In contrast, the notion of a single almighty God in Islam was conducive to the idea that all men were equally His creatures but also evoked the question how such a God could have created an imperfect world of hierarchy and inequality. Thus Islamic teachers in the medieval period and after had to work out theodicies, ways of vindicating God's justice in spite of the evils of inequality and suffering in this world. A solution that particularly appealed to Persians was provided by the promises of justice and equality in messianic eschatologies—a future revolution of the Mahdī and the redemption of the masses in this world (see, e.g., Madelung, 1985, pp. 1230-38). This mode of theodicy expressed both the material and nonmaterial interests of the masses and became the driving force in radical (*ḡolāt*) Shiʿite groups in numerous rebellions during the medieval period. In contrast, the Sunni and conservative Shiʿite establishments usually attempted to rationalize inequality. One way was to justify inequality in accordance with the original Islamic monotheism, that is, in terms of God's will and the predestination of man. For example, Wāʿeẓ-e Kāšefī in his interpretation of the Koranic verse 75:4, said "We are capable of creating all fingertips equal, but We do not; We create one fingertip long, another medium-sized, another short, one small, another strong, and still another weak." For Wāʿeẓ-e Kāšefī, in this verse God is pointing to "the unequal creation of social classes; one is created to be king, the other to be marshal, one affluent, the other poor" (1344 Š./1965, p. 343). Ḡazālī believed that God wills poverty, misery, and suffering for some people, just as He wills wealth, happiness, and prosperity for others. God relegates a person to a base occupation such as tanning because of its utility for the relative perfection of the world. Thus people should have "gratitude toward God" for creating social differentiation and inequality. They should respect the dignity conferred upon each rank by God (*ḥormat-e daraja*; 1387/1967, I, p. 76; II, pp. 77-82, 107-8; IV, p. 111; 1319 Š./1340, p. 328). Another way of justifying inequality was to put forth the idea that equality can exist only in the next world or that it existed only in the remote golden age of Islam under the Prophet and ʿAlī. Wāʿeẓ-e Kāšefī, for example, declared that "the grave is a bizarre abode in which pauper and king, general and captive look alike" (1344 Š./1965, p. 343). "Once the trumpet (of resurrection) is blown, no ties of genealogy (*ansāb*) will exist between them (the noble and the base) on that day, nor may they question one another (about their ranks and status)" (Qurʾān 23:101, 23:103). Still another mode of theodicy was to condemn both rank and wealth (*jāh wa māl*), holding instead that this world is merely a means to an other-worldly end, *donyā mazraʿa-ye āḵerat ast* (Ḡazālī, 1387/1967, I, p. 23). Thus poverty is superior to wealth in this world; the poor and the weak will be redeemed and the prosperous and powerful damned in the next world (Ḡazālī, 1387/1967, I, p. 81; III, pp. 250-66, 287-302; idem, 1319 Š./1940, pp. 255-58, 539-66; Ṭūsī, 1339 Š./1960, pp. 143-75, 176-87, 200-10; Rāzī, pp. 286--302; Wāʿeẓ-e Kāšefī, 1344 Š./1965, p. 344).

A mixed image of hierarchy

As in other civilizations, equality in Islam very seldom meant treating everyone alike. An order of inequality based on birth was replaced or blended with another based on capacity. Thus there emerged in medieval Islam hierarchical theories of man and society in which the remnants of pre-Islamic conceptions of cosmic hierarchy and social inequality were blended with Plato’s conception of the functional hierarchy of the universe and Aristotle’s conception of a qualitatively differentiated universe of earth and heavens. The result was a mixed emphasis on honor, capacity, and function, along with generally ambivalent attitudes toward social hierarchy. Fażl Barmakī set the following criteria for promotion to high positions: merit (*esteḥqāq*) for rulers, wisdom and astuteness for viziers, riches for wealthy merchants, and education for the people of middle status (Ebn Faqīh, V, p. 1). Abū Jaʿfar Moḥammad Ṭūsī (d. 459/1067), in his interpretation of Qurʾān 49:13, “the best of you in the sight of God is the most pious,” quoted with approval a scholar who had said: “[I]f two men should be equal in religiosity and one of them has ties of kinship with the Messenger of God . . . it would be necessary to give precedence to the one related to the Messenger of God . . . . Similarly, if one of two people has ancestors known for virtue, good character, noble deeds, dignity, bravery, cultivation (*adab*), and learning (*ʿelm*), it would be according to man’s nature to give him precedence over the other. If it is said: It is according to human nature to give precedence to men of wealth, in which case wealth and riches would have to be considered nobility (*šaraf*), we would answer: Just so; we do not deny or reject this . . . though the poorer man who spends his money appropriately is better than the man who does not spend his money . . . . Similarly, a pious man in whom those characteristics [of piety] are evident, would be better than a man who has *ḥasab* and nobility through his ancestors, yet is himself immoral, foolish, and vulgar” (cited in Mottahedeh, 1980, pp. 155-56).

Social stratification in medieval Persia

Social historians have portrayed the medieval Persian social order in different ways. For some observers it consisted, like the Sasanian quadripartite order, of men of the sword, pen, religion, and affairs (Lambton, 1980, chap. VII; idem, 1988, pp. 221-346; Marlow, pp. 10-68, 195-232). Others have seen a binary division between "feudal lords," including tribal and local warriors, bureaucrats, and the religious caste, on one hand and those they exploited, the masses of peasants, herdsmen, and urban workers, on the other (Petrushevski, 1968, p. 514). Another approach (Mottahedeh, 1980, pp. 154-55) is focused on "fine divisions" within the fabric of medieval Persian society, which was conceived in terms of multifarious human relations within numerous groups: the primordial family and racial groups, urban neighborhoods, rural and tribal communities, fraternal associations (e.g., Sufi brotherhoods, chivalric youth groups, and gangs of bandits), *bāzār* guilds, and religious and sectarian groups (Lapidus, pp. 49-60). Both approaches can contribute to understanding the modes of distribution of resources within the social hierarchy as a whole.

Social divisions following the Arab conquest

In the early period of Arab domination, Persian society was arranged along four lines of division: Arab and Persian (*ʿajam*), Muslim and non-Muslim, emerging nobility and commoners, and free men and slaves. The new aristocracy consisted of the descendants of the Prophet (*ašrāf*), of his fellow emigrants (*mohājerūn*) from Mecca, and of his helpers (*anṣār*) in Medina, as well as of other governing notables (Balāḏorī, *Ansāb*, passim; van Arendonk, pp. 324-29). The relations among these groups were regulated by a combination of religious ideas, ethnic and tribal ties, and legal status (Zaydan, pp. 28-56; Levy, pp. 53-90; Beg, p. 1098). Ironically, the caliph ʿOmar (13-23/634-44), a leading advocate of egalitarianism in Islam, endorsed these divisions by insisting that the caliph be selected from among the clan of Qorayš, by granting a greater share of the booty and stipends (*ʿaṭāyā*) to the new aristocracy according to their ranks, and by insisting on the distinction between Arab and *ʿajam*. ʿOmar's idea of the new society was an Islamic state with a ruling class of Arab warriors and a subject population of native on Arabs and non-Muslims (on the hierarchical distribution of *ʿaṭāyā*, see, e.g., Abū Yūsof, p. 24; Ebn Ṭeqṭaqā, tr., pp.80-81; Naḵjavānī, 1344 Š./1965, p. 31; Zaydan, pp. 28-36; Modarressi Tabataba'i, pp. 122-36, 209-13). The new social boundaries and the destruction of the institutions of pre-Islamic Persia transformed the class structure of Persian society. Under these circumstances Persians of all ranks, even if they became Muslims, were reduced to second-class citizens. Members of the dominant classes

became subservient to the conquerors and were subject to taxes, just as commoners were. Those who did not accept the new religion became subject to both land taxes and poll taxes (*jezya*). The Persian royal household and many of the old aristocratic families declined and lost most of their privileges in the new society. Men of religious teaming, who had served as ideological guardians of the class boundaries, were discredited and lost their status (Zarrinkub, *Camb. Hist. Iran*, pp. 29-33; idem, 1336 Š./1957, pp. 76-83, 89-90; Zaydan, pp. 161-63; Spuler, 1960, I, pp. 20-29; Levy, pp. 58-60; Moroney, pp. 300-05).

The lower nobility of *dehqān*s and *dabīr*s fared better because they and the Arab conquerors shared mutual interests: The Arabs needed their skills and knowledge while they needed the patronage of their Arab masters to retain their dominance in their local communities. To safeguard their social and economic positions, this portion of the Persian nobility converted to Islam, and its members placed themselves as clients (*mawālī*) under the patronage of either a group or a leading personage of the victorious Arab tribes (Jahšīārī, pp. 16-17; Ebn al-Aṯīr, IV, p. 116, Balāḏorī, *Ansāb*, IV B, pp. 11, 15-16, 21, 109, 123; Ebn Ṭeqṭaqā, tr., pp. 80-81; Goldziher, I, pp. 98-136; Cahen, 1975, pp. 305-28; Moroney, pp. 199-211). The dominant class in Persian society during the first two centuries of Islam thus consisted of the Arab nobility at the top and the Persian nobility just below, divided as if into two castes. It took more than two centuries for the Persian nobles to liberate themselves from the burden of second-class citizenship; a series of protest movements known as Šoʿūbīya eventually elevated them to a level equal to their Arab counterparts (Goldziher, I, pp. 137-98; Gibbs, pp. 62-73; Mottahedeh, 1976, pp. 161-82). As the Arab and Persian aristocracies gradually became one, a Persianized Islamic geographical notion emerged: The lands of Persia and Arabia were selected by God as the center of the seven regions (kešvars) of the earth and were inhabited by the noblest people. Thus genealogies of both Persian and Arab nobility were honored in the newly defined territory (Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 255; ʿĀmerī, 1387/1967, pp. 171-72; *Nozhat al-qolūb*, pp. 18-20).

Formation of the new social hierarchy

The founding of the ʿAbbasid empire by an army from Khorasan under Abū Moslem in 132/750 eventually led to replacement of the old Arab clans with a new, mixed aristocracy of Persians and Arabs and also, in the latter half of the

2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries, to the mass conversion of the Persian gentry to Islam and its integration into the new society (Frye, 1947, p. 31; Bulliet, 1979, chap, 5). This process continued as Persian noblemen like the Barmakids reached high bureaucratic ranks, including the post of vizier. Eventually such local Persian dynasties such as the Taherids, Saffarids, and Samanids were founded, a sign of the revival of the power of the old Persian aristocracy in the 3rd/9th century. Furthermore, the formation of an Islamic empire with great economic resources led to the growth of trade and industry, the expansion of regional and international markets, and the flowering of urban centers (Spuler, 1960, I, pp. 50-55; Ashtor, pp. 71-114). These economic changes greatly influenced the fabric of society: "[t]he Arab warrior caste was deposed and replaced by a ruling class of landowners and bureaucrats, professional soldiers and literati, merchants and men of learning" (Lewis, 1960, I, pp. 19-20).

The new Islamic society in Persia was characterized by a binary division between the dominant classes (*ḵāṣṣa*, pl. *ḵawāṣṣ*) at the top and the masses of commoners (*ʿāmma*, pl. *ʿawāmm*) at the bottom of the social pyramid. There was also an intermediary class of notables (*aʿyān*) of local communities that served as a link between the two main classes. Ebn Ṭeqṭaqā (tr., p. 37) advised rulers to handle each class appropriately: "The upper classes are administered by nobility of character and gently guiding aright.*** The middle classes are administered by a combination of interest and fear, while the common people are administered by fear and by being constrained to the straight path and forced to the obviously right." This distinction between upper and lower classes somewhat resembled the caste-like class structure of Sasanian Persia, where theorists sought "a visible and general distinction between men of noble birth and common people with regard to horses and clothes, houses and gardens, women and servants" (*Nāma-ye Tansar*, 1968, p. 44). Although in both instances the division was combined with a functional division of estates (warriors, priests, clerks, men of affairs), each with internal hierarchies, neither the binary division nor the quadripartite functional differentiation was reflected in Muslim law, whereas in pre-Islamic Persia they had rested on Mazdean law. Furthermore, acceptance of personal qualifications as criteria of notability in Islamic society expanded tire structure of opportunities for social mobility (see Ašraf, 1360 Š./1981, pp. 69-86; ʿĀmerī, 1387/1967, pp. 159-61, 165, 174-76; Bīrūnī, pp. 75-79). In the course of these transitions this "binary-functional" arrangement of society became more complex, owing to further differentiation between men of the sword and the rest of the population, Turk or Mongol and Tajik (Persian), nomadic tribes and the settled population, and free men and slaves.

The dominant strata

The renewed dominance of the Persian aristocracy was brought to an end with the rise to power of the Turkic slave soldiers and, subsequently, the Turkmens and Mongols in the 4th-7th/10th-13th centuries. As a result, the military, administrative, and landowning classes of the previous period were gradually replaced by a new Turkic military aristocracy, with Persians serving as bureaucrats (*vizier*s, *dabīr*s, and *mostawfī*s) and as the religious elite (*ʿolamāʾ*; for a description of various ranks and forms of address and titles of the dominant classes, see Naḵjavānī, 1964-76, passim; Qalqašandī, V-VI, passim; *Taḏkerat al-molūk*, pp. 1-84; see also ALQĀB WA ʿANĀWĪN).

The warrior class. The military aristocracy that replaced the Arab soldiers consisted mainly of Turkish slaves and later of Turkman and Mongol tribal soldiers. The latter groups (*omarāʾ*, sg. *amīr*) constituted the military and power base of all Persian dynasties in the post-Saljuq period. Their style of life and behavior showed distinctly nomadic features: horse riding, hunting, fighting, and favoring life in the tribal camps (for an account on the norms of conduct of men of the sword, see Faḵr-e Modabber, passim; Kay Kāvūs, pp. 223-26). The political authority of the Turkish military aristocracy was also based on the legitimation they received first from Sunni theologians and later from the Sufi shaikhs and *ašrāf* (see below).

The bureaucrats. The bureaucrats (*dabīrān*) consisted of viziers at the top of the pyramid, accountants of revenues and expenditures (*mostawfīān*), secretaries, record keepers, and scribes (*monšīān*). They maintained continuity in bureaucratic techniques (e.g., styles of handwriting and composition and knowledge of social ranks and protocol), life style (e.g., manners, appearance, clothing), personnel, and the institution of the *wezārat* (Mottahedeh, 1981, pp. 25-36; Klausner, pp. 37-81; see also works on letter writing, *tarassol*, and collections of letters, *monšaʾāt*; Neẓāmī ʿArūżī, pp. 19-48; see DĪVĀN, DABĪR). Well-known Persian families of viziers in the medieval period included the Barmakids during the early ʿAbbasid caliphate, the Jayhānīs under the Samanids, the ʿAmīdīs under the Buyids, the Neẓāmīs is under the Saljuqs, and the Jovaynīs and Rašīdīs under the Il-Khanids (see, e.g., Jahšīārī, pp. 89-95, 177-261; Naḵjavānī, 1344 Š./1965, p. 13; Klausner, pp. 105-10).

The religious hierarchy. The *ʿolamāʾ* emerged as the religious elite in the 3rd/9th century and rose to prominence as members of the social and political elites in the 5th/11th century. Leading *ʿolamāʾ* and *ašrāf* families belonged to the urban patriciates and maintained close ties with local landowners, merchants, and bureaucrats. They played a mediating role between the *ḵāṣṣa* and *ʿāmma* and a central role in the maintenance of social order and inequality. At the peak of the religious hierarchy were such prominent theologians and jurists as Abū Jaʿfar Moḥammad Ṭūsī (d. 459/1067), Emām-al-Ḥaramayn Jovaynī (d. 478/1085), Abū Ḥamed Ḡazālī (d. 505/1111), and Ebn Jawzī (d. 597/1200) in the medieval period and Nūr-al-Dīn ʿAlī b. ʿAbd-al-ʿAlī Karakī (d. 940/1534), Shaikh Bahāʾ-al-Dīn ʿĀmelī (d. 1030/1621), and Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī (d. 1110/1698) in the Safavid period. Such leading *ʿolamāʾ* families often maintained positions of prominence for many generations. Next came the influential judges (*qāżī*s), reciters of sermons during the Friday prayer (*ḵaṭīb*s), scholars and teachers in seminaries (*modarres*), supervisors and censors of the morals and good conduct of the *bāzārī*s and urban inhabitants (*moḥtaseb*s), popular preachers like Qotb-al-Dīn ʿAbbādī Marvazī (d. 547/1152) and Ḥosayn Wāʿeẓ-e Kāšefī, leaders of prayer in the mosques, and the religious functionaries of the villages, who often worked in the fields (see, e.g., Bulliet, 1972, pp. 20-27; Aubin, 323-32; Lambton, 1988, pp. 309-27; for the "job discription" of members of the religious hierarchy see, e.g., Rūzbehān Eṣfahānī, pp. 57-192).

The *ašrāf* (descendants of the Prophet) and mašā*yeḵ* (saints and leaders of Sufi orders) were two other constituents of the religious classes. The *ašrāf* constituted a corporate nobility and were headed by a *naqīb al-ašrāf* (later *naqīb al-sādāt*), who kept the genealogical records of the *ašrāf* and presided as judge over their special court. They were exempted from taxes and were entitled to a tithe of the net profits of members of the Shiʿite community. They were often among the powerful and wealthy landowners and notables of the cities (Rawżātī, I, pp. 30-65; Najm-al-Dīn al-ʿOmrā, pp. 1-92; Qomī, pp. 191-239; Ḥosaynī Qomī, pp. 84-150). Medieval Persia also witnessed the rise of Sufi orders and their associated saints, whose teachings had an appeal for the Turkman and Mongol tribal aristocracy. By the Mongol period (7th-8th/13th--14th centuries) Sufism, characterized by organized brotherhoods (*ṭarīqa*s), had become the popular religious expression of the urban and rural masses. Thus, for a large segment of the people, Sufi shaikhs replaced the *ʿolamāʾ* as interpreters of Islam, and the shrines of Sufi saints (*qoṭb*s) partially replaced mosques as centers of religious life (see, e.g., Schimmel, 1975; Zarrīnkūb,1970, pp.136-220).

The great merchants. The merchant class developed gradually during the 2nd/8th century, emerged as a recognized social stratum in the 3rd/9th century, and rose to prominence during the 4th/10th century (Spuler, 1970, pp. 11-20; Goitein, p. 218; Lambton, 1980, chap. XII; Rodinson, pp. 12-75). Further development of the merchant class and of trade and industry was, however, thwarted, first, by the rise of a new military aristocracy of slave soldiers in Islamic society and, later, by the process of tribalization in Persia (Ashraf, 1970, pp. 308-32; Issawi, 1970, pp. 245-66).

Relations among the components of the dominant class. The relative importance of the main component groups of the dominant class varied through time. After the consolidation of central authority and the demise of the Arab tribal military aristocracy in the mid-2nd/8th century the bureaucrats rose to prominence under the powerful institution of wezārat in the latter half of the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries (see, e.g., Mez, pp. 89-106; Lambton,1988, pp. 28-68). The same period also saw the rise of a merchant class. In the 3rd/9th century the religious class (*ʿolamāʾ*) emerged, achieving prominence by the 5th/11th century; its members were later joined by a group of powerful Sufi shaikhs and the prominent *ašrāf*. The military stratum lost its supremacy in the 2nd/8th century but regained it in the 4th/10th century through the rise of Turkish slave soldiers and Daylamites. The military retained this supremacy through the ascendancy of the tribal aristocracy of Turkish, Mongol, and Turkman chieftains in the 5th-7th/11th-13 centuries and until the 13th/19th century (see, e.g., Ashtor, pp. 168-248). The dominant classes were not homogeneous, nor did they always cooperate. Soldiers and bureaucrats—“men of the sword” and “men of the pen”—struggled for both resources and relative status. Thus writers, who came mainly from the ranks of the men of the pen, often placed the sword below the pen or considered the two to have equal significance in the state (for arguments favoring one or the other group, see, e.g., Abū Sāʿed Yaʿqūbī, pp. 27-54; see also Māwardī, p. 10, who believed in the superiority of the pen over the sword).

The dominant class controlled the agricultural land on behalf of the state through assignments of land (eqṭāʿ, toyūl) that resembled the medieval European institution of benefice. Both *eqṭāʿ* in the medieval era and *toyūl* in the later period were nonhereditary remuneration for military, administrative, and religious services and were basically assignments of the right to extract taxes from an area (Lambton, 1980, chap. X; Fragner, pp.

499-524; Cahen, 1971, pp. 1088-91). The similar institution of *soyūrḡāl*, granted to the great Mongol and Turkman warriors, more closely resembled the European fief, in that it was hereditary and accompanied by judicial, administrative, and fiscal immunity. In the Safavid era the institution of *eqṭāʿ*, or *toyūl*, once again became an important way of remunerating viziers, bureaucrats, and warriors. It may have represented an attempt by the Safavids to integrate the Turkic warriors into the bureaucratic network of the state, which was predominantly Persian (Fragner, p. 514).

After the Saljuq conquest there was a tendency for men of the sword, the landowning classes, and the custodians of *awqāf* lands to move from their estates to the major cities, in order to retain their connections with the state functionaries and maintain their privileges. One result was that the dominant classes became exposed to the commercial life of the cities and invested a part of their capital in mercantile enterprises (Bertel's, pp. 48-49; Petrushevski, 1968, pp. 509-12).

Local histories show how families of the military aristocracy, landowners, bureaucrats, *ʿolamāʾ*, and great merchants dominated the everyday life of local communities for many generations, how they managed to survive waves of tribal invasion, how they rose to prominence and perished, and how they became interrelated through common interests, joint ventures, and marriage. The local notables of Qazvīn, as presented by Mostawfī (d. 750/1349) in *Tārīḵ-e Gozīda* (pp. 798-814), provide a typical example. Thirty of thirty-three families on this roster had established themselves in Qazvīn before the Mongol invasion,(though eighteen of them perished after a few generations), and three families came to the town under the Il-khanids. Twenty-one families were of Arab origin, ten Persian, and two Mongol. These families were among the prominent *ʿolamāʾ* and judges (fifteen families); governors, city officials, tax collectors, and bureaucrats (sixteen families); and large landowners (two families). Many members of these families were men of great wealth and landed property. In Sabzavār, twenty-four of forty ruling families were of Arab origin, and sixteen were of Persian stock; three families had been pre-Islamic *dehqān*s, nine had been Samanid administrators, and one was a merchant family (Bertel's, p. 48; for other examples, see Bulliet, 1972, pp. 20-27, 61-75; Mottahedeh, 1973, pp. 33-45; Mofīd, passim).

The middle strata. The middle classes comprised a variety of people who enjoyed wealth, esteem, and power as local notables in their own communities. However, they were often looked down upon as prosperous commoners by the upper elements of the *ḵāṣṣa*. Moḥammad Mofīd (p. 471) locates the *ṭabaqa-ye awsāṭ* below the higher classes of amirs, viziers, and *mostawfī*s and the second class of men of religion. They included middle landowners, merchants, and skilled men of arts and crafts (*mohandesān-e honarvar*). They also included the local headmen (*kadḵodā*s, *roʾasāʾ*; *kalāntar*s) and the lower notables who supervised one or more groups of the primary social units (tribal groups, villages, *bāzār* craft guilds, and city wards). Together they constituted the local *aʿyān* and played the dual role of trustees of the communities and representatives of the governing class. In this capacity they served as the link between the central authority and the local groups, thus playing a significant part in societal integration and maintenance of social order.

The commoners (*ʿāmma*)

The people who were referred to by such words as "commoners" (*ʿāmma*, *ʿawāmm al-nās*) and "subjects" (*raʿāyā*) included peasants, herdsmen, and *bāzārī*s (craftsmen, shopkeepers, and their apprentices). *Raʿāyā*, a term that originally referred to those who "tended livestock," was used to describe the subjects of the ruler (often nonmilitary and/or nongovernmental subjects); although it could include wealthy people as well, it generally denoted the masses of the people, especially the peasants vis-až-vis landowners (*arbāb*). The term *ʿāmma* was often used pejoratively, and *ʿawāmm al-nās* were characterized by such terms as *sefla* "rabble," *awbāš* "ruffians," and *ḡawḡā* "the mob" in the literature of the dominant classes. Fażl Barmakī described the commoner as "filthy rubbish, a torrent of scum, mean, contemptible, and doomed to nothing but his food and sleep" (Ebn Faqīh, V, p. 1). Masʿūdī (d. 346/957; III, pp. 43-45) portrayed the *ʿāmma* with many vile traits and attributed to Moḥammad and the ʿAlī sayings to the effect that the *ʿāmma* are the corrupt about whom even God does not care. According to Masʿūdī, there was a consensus that the *ʿāmma* were the source of chaos (*ḡawḡā*). The author of *Tārīḵ-e Sīstān* (pp. 161, 179, 182) also characterized the *ʿāmma* as *ḡawḡā*. Abū Bakr Qūnavī (d. 690/1291) went even farther and characterized the illiterate *ʿāmma* as the "satan of mankind" (p. 134). Ḡazālī placed the *ʿawāmm al-nās* of Turks, Kurds, and Arabs, *ajlāf-e ḵalq*, in the lowest rank, close to the animals (1387/1967, I, pp. 23, 115).

The main subgroups of *ʿawāmm al-nās* were rural, tribal, and urban people, who lived and worked in four primary communities: tribal camps, villages, vaulted *bāzār*s, and urban wards, each under a headman. These groups were the basic units for the extraction of rents, taxes, and forced labor. They were treated as collective units by the rulers, governors, tribal leaders, and landlords. Social relations within these groups were based on intimate personal ties. Physical proximity, mutual interest, and collective dealings with the governing notables shaped their identity and loyalty to the group, but there was no similar loyalty to other craftsmen or to peasantry or tribal communities in other locations or at the national level. Peasants were divided into a number of strata, including petty landowners who also worked in the fields, peasant proprietors, sharecroppers, laborers, and slave workers. Peasants were primarily free men-Islamic law never included the social category of serfs-but they were subject to the excesses of tax collectors and possessors of *eqṭāʿ* (Neẓām-al-Molk, pp. 33, 132). Later, however, the decline of rural areas and the exodus of peasants from the land as a result of the excesses of the Mongol tribal leaders led the state to impose certain constraints upon the movement of peasants (for an account of serfdom in the Mongol era, see Petrushevski, 1345 Š./1966, II, pp. 154-90, and, for numerous obligations of peasants, pp. 245-305; idem, 1968, pp. 522-29; Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, pp. 10-128).

The *bāzār* was led by the large merchants (*tojjār*) and the headmen (*kadḵodā*s), who were often elderly leaders (*rīš-safīd*s) of the more than 100 categories of crafts and trades. Master artisans, skilled craftsmen, and shopkeepers occupied the middle level, and the masses of apprentices and servants were at the bottom, along with some marginal elements like poor peddlers, dervishes, and beggars (see BĀZĀR, iii. POLITICAL ROLE OF THE BĀZĀR). Craftsmen and shopkeepers were divided into numerous trades, which were arranged hierarchically, each with a specific place in the order of occupational prestige (see, e.g., Ḡazālī, 1387/1967, II, pp. 106-08). The *bāzārī* craftsmen and shopkeepers formed a network of face-to-face relations that could be exploited by external forces, for example, by secret religious societies (see, e.g., Massignon, 1934, pp. 436-37; idem, 1968, pp. 214-16; Lewis, 1937, pp. 20-37). The *ʿāmma* in urban centers were also organized in a number of other groups, like *ʿayyārān*, *aḥdāṯ*, and *fotowwa* groups, primarily associations of athletic youths with chivalric ideals, and the later *ḥaydarī* and *neʿmatī* factions (see, e.g., *Tārīḵ-e Sīstān*, pp. 192-99, 301-11, 349-51, 362-64; Wāʿeẓ-e Kāšefī, 1350 Š./1971, passim; Mirjafari and Perry, pp. 135-62). The masses of *ʿāmma* also included the so-called “déclassé people,” consisting of poor dervishes, beggars, and gangs of bandits (see, e.g., ʿAwfī, pp. 102-60; Ṣafī, pp. 359-80). Another important category of *ʿāmma* in medieval Persia was slaves, used in agricultural fields, domestic services, and at times manufacturing (see

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The commoners and rebellious movements. While the Persian nobility of the early Islamic era expressed its yearning for equality with its Arab counterpart in the Šoʿūbīya movements, the *ʿāmma* of peasants and urban poor often supported democratic Kharijite, radical Shiʿite, and neo-Mazdkite movements (see, e.g., Sadighi, 1938, passim; Yarshater, pp. 1001-24; *Tārīḵ-e Sīstān*, pp. 27, 110-12, 118, 156-203, 212; Neẓām-al-Molk, pp. 193-245). Rebellious movements among the masses gathered momentum once again in the 7th/13th century, culminating in the Sarbedārān revolts of the 8th/14th century (Petrushevski, 1345 Š./1966, II, pp. 306-431).

The continuation of the medieval synthesis

The new conception of man’s worth and status (*qadr wa qīmat*) in medieval Persian society involved a combination of honor (*ḥasab wa nasab*), capacity (merit, piety, knowledge, wealth, office, etc.), and social function in the larger context of a loose binary division between base and noble (*ważīʿ* and *šarīf*), commoner and elite (*ʿāmma* and *ḵāṣṣa*), powerless and mighty (*żaʿīf* and *qawī*), poor and affluent (*faqīr* and *ḡanī*). These images are indicative of a new eclectic notion that signifies an important change in class arrangements in medieval Persian society, compared to both the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, and a widening of the paths of upward mobility. By the 4th/10th century personal merit and achievement in terms of wealth, political office, and knowledge had been added to hereditary privilege as possible bases for joining the ranks of the aristocracy. In the aftermath of the Saljuq conquest hereditary distinctions once again became predominant. Yet the lack of a coherent conception of the social hierarchy led to the blurring of the functions of the various strata within the dominant class as, for example, in the frequent engagement of military aristocrats, landlords, bureaucrats, and *ʿolamāʾ* in mercantile activities and tax farming or the involvement of large merchants in landownership, tax farming, and the bureaucracy. Ann Lambton, for example, has noted that “Under the later Saljuqs there are cases of men from outside the bureaucracy rising to the office of vizier,” and that “there was a good deal of social mobility between men of affairs and men of the pen” (1988, pp. 47, 328-46). Horizontal mobility, that is, movement across the different strata of the dominant class was relatively limited. For example, although leading members of the *ʿolamāʾ* came from the families of local notables, entry into higher echelons of the *ʿolamāʾ* from the upper ranks of the army or the central bureaucracy was relatively rare. Nor was it common for men of the pen and the *ʿolamāʾ* to move into the ranks of the military aristocracy. However, a limited degree of upward mobility from the lower classes to the lower ranks of the military was fairly frequent (Lambton, 1988, pp. 223-24, 328-29; Mottahedeh, 1980, pp. 125-37). Both the mixed conception of man’s worth in society and the actual arrangements of social classes and status groups that developed in medieval Persia continued, with some modifications, through the Safavid and Qajar periods (see v, below).

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