



DENMARK

DENMARK: relations with Persia.

i. Political, economic, and cultural relations.

ii. Danish-Iranian Society.

i. POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

Danish-Persian relations have been concentrated in three main areas: politics and diplomacy; trade and other economic relations; and Iranian studies in Denmark, including collections of Persian art in Danish museums.

Political and diplomatic relations. In 1937 archeological excavation on a farm in Jutland led to the discovery of two Sasanian coins, one of Pērōz (459-84) and the other of Kōsrow I (531-79), part of a hoard found in a vase. The circumstances in which these coins reached Denmark are not yet certain (see Welin; [COMMERCE iv](#); a fragment found more recently is in the Royal coin and medallion collection; Anne Kromann, personal communication).

In 1687 a ship belonging to the Danish East Asian Company (Det Østasiatisk Kompagni) seized a Bengali ship and brought it into the port of Trankebar, a Danish colony on the southeastern coast of India. The merchandise belonged to Armenians from Jolfā at Isfahan in Persia. The Danes sent the ship with its



cargo to Copenhagen, where four years later a Persian ambassador arrived to negotiate compensation for the merchandise. On 11 December 1691 he presented to King Christian V (1670-99) his credentials and a letter from the Safavid shah Solaymān (1077-1105/1666-94) addressed to a former king, Christian III (1534-59); it included a comprehensive inventory of the disputed merchandise and the names of the Armenian merchants (partially published in Boisen, 1965, p. 66). Although the ambassador returned empty-handed, the exquisitely embroidered envelope in which he had carried his credentials and the letter is kept in the Danish Museum of Decorative Art (von Falsach and Bernsted, p. 39).

From the end of the 19th century the Danish ambassador to St. Petersburg was also accredited to Persia and other countries in the region. There is little evidence of significant diplomatic contact between the two countries, however, until 1312 Š./1933, when the first Danish consulate was established in Tehran (*Udenrigsministriet Kalender*, Copenhagen, 1934), following negotiations between the Danish construction firm Kampsax and the Persian government (see below). It was elevated to an embassy and a Persian embassy was established in Copenhagen after the state visit of Moḥammad-Reżā Shah (1320-57 Š./1941-79) in 1958 (*Corps Diplomatique*, Copenhagen, 1959; *Udenrigsministeriet Kalender*, Copenhagen, 1963). The Danish royal family paid an official visit to Persia in 1341 Š./1962 (Boisen, 1965, pp. 6-9).

Since the Persian revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79 Denmark and Persia have enjoyed generally good relations, though, because of the considerable market for Danish exports in Persia (see below) and consequent fear of economic retaliation, the Danish government has adopted a somewhat cautious position on human rights in Persia. Danish diplomats have usually voted for resolutions condemning violations of human rights, but in the instance of Salman Rushdie the Danish government, despite strong criticism in the national press, has never issued a condemnation of Persia.

The number of Persians living in Denmark probably never exceeded 150 until after the Persian revolution. Beginning in the 1980s thousands of Persians took advantage of a liberal Danish refugee policy to immigrate. In the late 1980s, however, increasing ethnic tensions and a flourishing criminal trade in transporting illegal immigrants led the Danish authorities to adopt greater restrictions on refugees. The Persian community in Denmark numbered 8,800 people in 1993 (*Statistisk Årbog*, Copenhagen, 1993, p. 59), mainly students in universities and other institutions of higher learning but also writers, poets,



film producers, artists, and musicians. According to Danish statistics, Persians constitute the largest single refugee group obtaining higher education in Denmark (unpublished report, University of Copenhagen, 1993). Nevertheless, the difficulty of learning Danish and the high standard of the Danish educational system, as well as “culture shock” because of previous unfamiliarity with Danish culture, have somewhat hampered assimilation. Among Persian organizations and clubs the most active is the Anjoman-e Īrānīān (Persian society), which until December 1992 published the monthly journal *Mohājer* (Immigrant). There is a good collection of Persian books in the “refugees’ library” administered by the Danish Ministry of social affairs, as well as large numbers of Persian books in municipal libraries in the major cities of Denmark.

Trade and other economic relations. Danish-Persian economic relations essentially began with the construction of the Trans-Persian Railway by the Danish firm Kampsax. After the failure of an American firm to complete the railroad over a number of years the Persian government signed a contract with Kampsax in 1312 Š./1933 for the construction of more than 1,000 kilometers of track between [Bandar-e Šāhpūr](#) in the south and [Bandar-e Šāh](#) on the Caspian coast. The projected cost was about 600 million tomans (\$100 million), and the railroad was to be completed in six years. Because of the difficult mountainous terrain to be crossed the work crew of 55,000 men also had to construct 250 tunnels and 550 bridges. Despite limited available resources, this project was completed in five and a half years, one of the most successful ever carried out in Persia (Boisen, 1946; idem, 1965, pp. 93-105; Maḥbūbī, *Mo’assasāt* II, pp. 351-52).

As an oil-exporting country, Persia maintained a favorable balance of trade with Denmark for many years. From the early 1960s Danish exports to Persia also increased, as Persian oil revenues permitted significant increases in imports from Western countries. The discovery of oil and gas in the North Sea in the mid-1970s permitted Denmark to attain self-sufficiency, and oil imports have dropped to a very low level. [Table 24](#) shows the volume of trade between the two countries in 1977 and 1978 and in 1990 and 1991.

Danish exports to Persia consist primarily of agricultural products, cheese, butter, grains, cooking oil, powdered milk, and the like. Feta cheese, deliberately developed to resemble the Persian goat cheese, is particularly important. In recent years industrial goods, including cold-storage units, slaughterhouses, agricultural machinery, and the like have accounted for a



substantial share of exports. According to trade statistics for 1990, Danish agricultural exports amounted to 446 million kroner, industrial exports to 419 million, and other commodities to 17 million. Persian exports to Denmark include mainly [carpets](#), dried fruits, and raw and semiprocessed materials.

Iranian Studies. The first chair in Iranian philology was established at the University of Copenhagen in 1919, but Danish interest in Iranian studies in Denmark began in the 17th century, when Frederik III, duke of Gottorp, sent a delegation to Persia; the secretary was the German Adam Olearius (1603-71), who left a valuable description of the journey. Olearius arrived in Isfahan in August 1637; while there he learned Persian. When he returned, in April 1639, he was accompanied by a Persian named Ḥaqverdī, who remained with him in Schleswig until his death. It was with Ḥaqverdī's assistance that Olearius was able to publish, in 1654, an edition with a free German translation of part of Sa'dī's *Golestān*. The Persian type fonts were made in Holland, and Olearius himself undertook the setting of the Persian text. This work and a subsequent Danish translation by N. L. N. Boisen (1803-75), *Fra det Persiske* (1853), were used as texts at the University of Copenhagen.

Almost a century after Olearius' expedition the Danish king Frederik V (1746-66), encouraged by J. D. Michaelis of Göttingen, sent another expedition to the east to collect materials about the the Old Testament and the Orient that produced it. This ill-fated expedition departed in 1761; the only member to survive fatal illness on the long and dangerous journey was Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815), who managed to visit Persepolis, where he copied the Achaemenid inscriptions for the first time. His description of the journey, together with a map and drawings, was published in Copenhagen and Hamburg in several volumes: *Beschreibung von Arabien* (Copenhagen, 1772) and *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern* (I-II, Copenhagen, 1774-78; III, Hamburg, 1837). Thanks to Niebuhr's work the study of the cuneiform inscriptions at Persepolis was placed on a scientific basis. Although the German G. F. Grotefend is generally acknowledged to have deciphered the Old Persian inscriptions at Persepolis, it was the Danish cleric F. C. C. H. Münter (1761-1830) who, in his *Undersøgelse om de Persepolitianske Inscriptioner* (1800), identified the vertical wedge and correctly argued that it was used to separate words. He also recognized the repeated word groups that constitute the title "king of kings."

The Dane Rasmus Rask (1787-1832) first recognized the genitive plural form in Old Persian *n(a)* and *m(a)* and published other linguistic discoveries in his



valuable short publication *Om Zendsprogets og Zendavestas Ælde og Ægthed*, written in 1821 and published in Copenhagen in 1826. Rask had begun to study Icelandic while still at school, and his quest for the origins of this ancient Scandinavian language led him across Finland and Russia to Persia and India. While in Persia in 1819-20 he learned Persian, and in Bombay he learned Avestan and Pahlavi (Middle Persian); with some difficulty he collected old manuscripts in these two languages, which are now in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. Some of the Avestan manuscripts that Rask collected are believed to be the oldest in existence, dating from about 1324. Rask returned to Denmark in 1823 and worked on linguistic papers until his death in 1832, but he never produced a major work on his eastern discoveries. It was N. L. Westergaard (1815-78), the first professor of Indo-Asiatic philology at the University of Copenhagen, who continued Rask's work of collecting manuscripts. On a journey to Persia and India in 1841-44 he was able to buy and copy some old Zoroastrian manuscripts and learned much about this religion. His irritation with the refusal of the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kermān to sell him their manuscripts is clear from his diary (Royal Library, Copenhagen, Ny Kgl. Samling ms. no. 1320). Nevertheless, he brought some interesting examples back to Denmark, including a copy of *Mēnog ī xrad* (K 23). One of his greatest achievements was publication of the collection of texts in the Avestan language, *Zandavesta or the Religious Books of the Zoroastrians* I. *The Zend Texts* (Copenhagen, 1854). All the Avestan type fonts were made in Copenhagen under his supervision. Westergaard was also the first European to publish a Pahlavi text, the *Bundahišn* (1851), based on a manuscript collected by Rask. Westergaard included in this work two Middle Persian texts from the Sasanian inscription of Ḥājīābād of the time of Šāpūr I (241-72). Between 1931 and 1944 Arthur Christensen and Kaj Barr published the entire collection of manuscripts assembled by Rask and Westergaard in twelve volumes (see [CODICES HAFNIENSES](#)).

The printed lecture lists of the University of Copenhagen reveal that classical Persian literature, for example, Sa'dī's *Golestān* (see above), was taught at intervals by A. M. F. van Mehren from 1875 to 1895, sometimes as part of "Arabic and Persian for beginners." Van Mehren also included Ḥāfez (in 1872, 1878, 1882, and 1883) and Wā'eẓ Kāšefī's *Anwār-e sohaylī* (1883) in the curriculum. Jens Lassen Rasmussen, who had studied Persian in Paris with Silvestre de Sacy, published an article about the odes of Ḥāfez in 1816 ("Nogle Oder af Hafiz," *Theologisk Bibliothek* 9, 1916, pp. 37-70), and in 1892 Harald Rasmussen (1853-1904) received a university prize for his dissertation *Studier*



over *Hafiz med Sideblik til andre persiske Lyrikere*. After van Mehren's retirement in 1898 his pupil Edvard Lehmann (1862-1930), lecturer in the history of religion, taught Persian, introducing Ferdowsī's *Šāh-nāma*; he also taught Avestan and Middle Persian, as well as the history of the Zoroastrian religion.

The first professor of Iranian studies at the University of Copenhagen was Christensen (1875-1945), who was appointed in 1919. His unique range included Sasanian history, Iranian languages and dialects, Persian language and literature, and Iranian religions, ancient and modern. He wrote more than 300 books and articles on such subjects. He visited Persia on three occasions. In 1961 the Institute of Iranian Philology was established at the university, with Christensen's library as a nucleus. Christensen was succeeded by his student and later collaborator Kaj Barr (1896-1970), who taught until 1966; although widely acknowledged as one of the best scholars in the field, he published relatively little. In 1966 Jes P. Asmussen succeeded Barr; he has published a variety of books and articles on Iranian subjects, especially Manicheism and Persian Jewish dialects. In 1968 Fereydun Vahman became lecturer in Iranian philology; he has published works on Pahlavi and Western Iranian dialects, as well as a two-volume Danish-Persian and Persian-Danish dictionary. In recent years the curriculum of the Institute has been expanded with the introduction of subjects related to modern Persian cultural history.

The systematic translation of Persian literary works into Danish began with Christensen. In his *Muhammedanske Digter og Tšnker* (Islamic poets and philosophers; Copenhagen, 1906) he included specimen texts in classical Persian drawn from the works of Ferdowsī, Farīd-al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, and Sa'dī. He also translated parts of Ferdowsī's *Šāh-nāma* into Danish verse (*Firdausis Kongebog*; Copenhagen, 1931) and later the *Robā'īāt* of 'Omar Ḳayyām (Copenhagen, 1943). Christensen also wrote five short stories revealing the influence of the style of the modern Persian writer Moḥammad-'Alī Jamālzāda, which were serialized in Danish newspapers. They were based on his observations in Persia or included motifs from Persian folktales. These and several other stories were published together under the title *Experimentierne på Crackwell Hill og andre Fortøellinger* (Copenhagen, 1938). In the 1980s several Persian literary works were translated into Danish: In 1984 Bent Hunø published an anthology of works by Sa'dī, Ḥāfeẓ, Rūdakī, Ferdowsī, and Ḳayyām; Verner Jul Andersen published a translation of Hedāyat's *Būf-e kūr* in 1989; Sigrid Hansen and Issa Ghaffari published *Forūg*



Farroḳzād's *Tawallod-ī dīgar* in 1990 and translated his *Īmān bī-āvarīm be āḡāz-e faṣl-e sard* in 1992; Søren Theisen and Ġolām-Reżā Ḳvāja'īān translated Šamad Behrangī's *Māhī-e sīāh-e kūčūlū* in the same year. Ḥosayn Šafā and a group of Persian teachers publish a quarterly journal for younger readers, *Javāna*; it has a wide readership in Scandinavia. Manīža Āhanī publishes a biannual literary journal, *Vāža*.

Danish museums contain important collections of Persian art; most notable is the David Samling, which houses rich collections of Sasanian glass and silver, as well as miniatures and other works from the Islamic period (von Falsach). The Danish National Museum, the Ny Glyptotek, and the Rosenborg Palace collection also contain important Persian works.

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(FEREYDUN VAHMAN)

ii. DANISH-IRANIAN SOCIETY

The Danish Iranian Society (Dansk Iransk Selskab, Anjoman-e Īrān o Dānmārk) was founded in Copenhagen on 14 October 1976 to further ties between Denmark and Persia in cultural, social, and economic matters and to further personal contacts between Danes and Persians through meetings, exhibitions, publications, exchange of scholars and artists, and similar activities. The leading figures in launching the society were Mehrangīz Dawlatšāhī, at that time Persian ambassador to Denmark, and Birte Saxild, whose husband, Jørgen, was director of the Kampsax firm, which had built the Trans-Persian Railway (see i, above). A few weeks after its establishment the society already had about 200 members, and the number increased in subsequent years. Birte Saxild served as president until 1984 and was succeeded by Jes P. Asmussen. After the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978 in Persia, however, the membership declined sharply; although in 1994 it seemed to be stable, the possibility that the society will come to an end in the next few years cannot be excluded.

Among the society's most important activities is sponsoring lectures on the culture, defined as broadly as possible, of ancient and modern Persia and on cultural relations between Persia and Denmark, the latter including reports of diplomats since the time of Shah 'Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629), of Danish archeological expeditions to Persia, and of language studies. Danish, Persian, and other foreign lecturers have addressed the society on such topics as "Persian Poetry and Mysticism," "*Šāh-nāma*, the National Epic of the Iranians," "Rūmī and Sufism," "Treasures from Ancient Iran in the National Museum of Denmark" (in connection with an exhibition of the collection), "The Architecture of Isfahan," and "Šādeq Hedāyat and Modern Persian Literature." They have included Annemarie Schimmel, Bozorg Alavī, Arild Hvidtfeldt, Hans Munk Hansen, and Fereydun Vahman.

The society is not sponsored by the Danish government but itself sponsors performances of traditional Persian music and exhibitions of modern Persian art and Persian miniatures, bookbindings, lacquer penboxes, and carpets. Whenever possible these arrangements are made in collaboration with the Danish Royal Library, the David Samling (containing Persian miniatures,



ceramics, and other decorative arts; von Falsach), the Danish National Museum, and the museum of Rosenborg Castle (where a collection of rare Safavid carpets, including the famous “Coronation carpet,” is housed; see [carpets ix](#), Plate CXI; cf. Martin).

K. von Falsach, *Islamisk Kunst*, Copenhagen, 1990.

F. R. Martin, *Die persischen Prachstoffe im Schloss Rosenborg in Kopenhagen*, Stockholm, 1901.

Vedtægter for Dansk Iransk Selskab/Asās-nāma-ye Anjoman-e Īrān o Dānmārk, Copenhagen, n.d.

(JES P. ASMUSSEN)

[Table 24](#). Volume of Trade Between Denmark and Persia (in 1,000 Danish kroner)