



## EPISCOPAL

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**EPISCOPAL(ANGLICAN) CHURCH IN PERSIA (Kelisā-ye osqofī-e Īrān)**, a diocese of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, one of thirty-seven independent churches of the worldwide Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church in Persia was established by British missionaries in the 19th century but was never part of the Church of England and is today predominantly Persian. The Anglican churches of the world, most of whose members are neither native speakers of English nor of Anglo-Saxon origin, regard themselves as being part of “the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” i.e., as part of the original Christian church. This belief is comparable to that held by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Anglican churches are united by an allegiance to beliefs and traditions of church governance and worship derived from those of the Church of England.

In 1025/1616 Shah ‘Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629, q.v.) received the agents of the East India Company (q.v.) in his capital, Isfahan. A year later he issued a *farmān* that, among other things, allowed company personnel free exercise of religion in Persia (Lockhart, p. 393). It can, therefore, be assumed that the first religious services according to the rites of the Church of England in Persia were held for company employees in the 11th/17th century.

It was many years, however, before there was any attempt to spread Christianity in Persia according to the rites of the Church of England. The primary need was for a translation of the Bible into Persian. Portions of the Bible, particularly of the New Testament, had been translated into Persian by different agencies at different stages in Persian history, but not until the young



English clergyman Henry Martyn (1781-1812) translated the entire New Testament so it was accessible to Persian-speaking people throughout the world (see BIBLE vii). Martyn graduated from Cambridge University in 1801 as Senior Wrangler and first Smith's Prizeman. Two years later he was appointed as Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge. Essentially, Martyn was a spiritual man and so he left university life to serve the church. After he was ordained, he went to India to serve as chaplain to the East India Company. He landed in India in 1806. While busy with his priestly duties he learned Urdu, Persian, and Arabic and began to translate the New Testament into those languages. He soon decided to go to Persia with the purpose of revising his translation of the New Testament and Psalms and searching for ancient manuscripts of the Bible. In Jomādā I 1226/June 1811 Martyn reached Shiraz, where he lived for nearly a year, polishing his translation with the aid of a Persian scholar named Mīrzā Sayyed 'Alī Khan Šīrāzī (Waterfield, p. 179). During that time he had many discussions on religion with the mullahs of the town, where his piety, learning, and good nature made a strong impression. In Jomādā I 1227/May 1812 he traveled to Tabrīz and with the help of the British envoy, Sir Gore Ouseley, presented his translation to Fath-'Alī Shah. Leaving Tabrīz, he set out to return to England via Turkey. He died en route on 16 October in Tokat, where he is buried (Padwick, pp. 291-97). The posthumous publication of his letters and journals made him one of the missionary heroes of the Church of England in the 19th century and inspired later missionary work in Persia. His translation of the Bible was first published by the Russian Bible Society in St. Petersburg in 1815; it was later revised by Robert Bruce, the first permanent Anglican missionary in Persia. Bruce's version of the entire Bible was published in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1895. Although there have been several new translation projects, including a further revision by Bruce, the 1895 Bible continues to be the version most widely used.

In the early 19th century the Bavarian Joseph Wolff, a convert from Judaism, emigrated to England and married into the aristocracy. In 1239/1824 and 1245/1830 he traveled to Bukhara via Persia, calling himself "Apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ for Palestine, Persia, Bukhara, and Balkh" and preaching the Gospel to Jews and Armenians. On the first journey he met Prince 'Abbās Mīrzā in Tabrīz and solicited his help for the trip (Hopkins, pp. 97, 151, 161, 166, 169; Wright, pp. 116-17). His son, Henry Drummond Wolff, was the British envoy to Persia from 1887 to 1890.

It was some years later that the Episcopal Church was established in Persia by



missionaries sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS; see christianity viii; CONVERSION IN PERSIA vi). This voluntary society was established by a small group of Evangelical clergymen who met in 1799 and added a new dimension in the Anglican world to the words, “I believe in the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” (S. Neill, *Anglicanism*, London, 1965, p. 323). In 1869 the CMS missionary Robert Bruce arrived in Jolfā, Isfahan, intending to improve his Persian before continuing on to his post in the Punjab. He belonged to the Anglican Church of Ireland, which at that time was strongly influenced by the evangelical revival of 1859. He was soon engrossed in famine relief and educational work, and he was given permission by his committee to stay on the condition that he revise and complete Martyn’s Persian translation of the Bible. His post became an official CMS mission in 1875. It must be emphasized, however, that the missionaries who were sent by the Church Missionary Society and other voluntary societies were not officials of the Church of England, although many of them were ordained. They were individuals sent and sponsored by voluntary societies, which were organized and supported by individual Christians.

Two schools, one for boys and one for girls, and a small hospital were founded by missionaries in Jolfā. Dr. Donald Carr built a large hospital in Isfahan outside Jolfā and in 1904 moved his work to that establishment. The boy’s school in Jolfā was later named Stuart Memorial College and accepted boarding students. This college, under the direction of the Reverend (later Bishop) W. J. Thompson, became one of the best known schools in Persia. The girls’ school, Behešt-ā’in, was directed by Nevarth Aidin. Other institutions were later added to the mission: a school for the blind taken over when its German founder was interned during World War II, book shops, new schools, and hostels. St. Luke’s Church in Isfahan was consecrated in 1327/1909 and is to this day the See of the Bishop in the Diocese of Iran. A large church designed in Persian architectural style was built in Yazd by Reverend Norman Sharp, but it was destroyed by a flood in 1320 Š./1941. Reverend Sharp built a very beautiful church in Shiraz, in Persian architectural style, which was consecrated on 6 Ābān 1317 Š./28 October 1938 and still stands (Waterfield, pp. 159-60, 167, 169).

Because of a comity arrangement made in 1895 with the American Presbyterian Mission in the north of the country not to duplicate activities, the Church Missionary Society confined its work to towns in the south (Wright, pp. 118-19). Work started in Yazd with hospitals in 1314/1897. A girls’ school



headed by Miss Nouhi (Armenūhī) Aidin, sister of Nevarth Aidin, served both Muslims and Zoroastrians in Yazd for many years. Also in 1314/1897 work started in Kermān. Dr. George Everard Dodson built a large hospital there in 1321/1903 and served in it until 1316 Š./1937, when he died of typhus. Dr. Carr left Isfahan for Shiraz in 1301 Š./1922, where he built a hospital. A girls' school in Shiraz, Dabīrestān-e mehr-ā'īn, run by Miss Ella Gerard achieved a high reputation (Waterfield, pp. 167, 169; see also EDUCATION xvi).

The only official Church of England visit was the Archbishop of Canterbury's mission to the Assyrian Christians (see ASSYRIANS IN IRAN), which initiated mission work in Urmia in 1303/1886. The purpose of the visit was to help the Ancient Church of the East, i.e., the Nestorian church, in its theological and educational training. The mission ended in 1333/1915, when the remaining missionaries were forced to flee the Turkish invasion (Waterfield, pp. 124-32).

Among other English societies that worked in Persia was the church's Ministry Among the Jews, which started work in 1293/1876 in Tehran and later extended its efforts to Isfahan and Hamadān. Its mainly educational and charitable work was designed to help Jews throughout Persia, many of whom lived in difficult conditions. A small British group, named the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society, started work in Sistān in 1304 Š./1925. Later it operated a hospital in Zāhedān. The mission was closed in 1329 Š./1950 for lack of workers (Waterfield, pp. 175-76).

In 1319 Š./1940 the government nationalized all missionary schools in Persia (Waterfield, p. 143; Dehqani-Tafti, p. 20), although after the war the diocese once again became involved in extensive educational activities. The hospitals were allowed to continue operating until the beginning of the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79.

Until the formation of the independent Diocese of Iran, the Anglican clergy in Persia had been under the titular jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. In 1912 Reverend C. H. Stileman, a missionary of long standing, was appointed as the first Anglican bishop in Persia. With his see at Isfahan, he was consecrated in St. Paul's Cathedral in London on 26 July. However, he was not physically strong and resigned a few years later. The second bishop, J. H. Linton, was consecrated on 18 October 1919, also in St. Paul's Cathedral. On 18 October 1935, Archdeacon W. J. Thompson, until then principal of the Stuart Memorial College, was consecrated as the third bishop in Persia. He served until 1340 Š./1961, when the first Persian Bishop, Hassan Dehqani-Tafti (Ḥasan Dehqānī



Taftī), was consecrated in Jerusalem on 25 April (Dehqani-Tafti, pp. 21-23). After the retirement of Dehqani-Tafti, who was then living in England, the Rev. Īraj Mottaḥeda was consecrated as the new bishop (21 Ḳordād 1365/11 June 1986).

For some time the dioceses in the Middle East were loosely connected in a semi-province under the Anglican archbishop in Jerusalem. A new province or independent church within the Anglican communion called “The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East” was formed in 1976. Its four dioceses are Jerusalem, Egypt, Cyprus and the Persian Gulf (each of which covers a wider area than its name implies), and Persia. The province has a constitution and is governed by a central synod chaired by a president-bishop elected from among the four diocesan bishops for five years, eligible for reelection for a further five years.

Like other Anglican churches, the Episcopal Church of Persia uses the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. Partial translations of the 1662 version were prepared in England or India in 1828, 1830, and 1874. Bruce translated in 1882 the first version prepared in Persia. The Episcopal clergy met in Yazd in 1933 and agreed to prepare a standard version of *The Book of Common Prayer* based on the several versions then in use. This translation was published in several parts in 1935-49 and is still used. With slight modifications for the sake of Persian tastes and sensibilities, a translation of part of the Alternative Service Book of the Church of England was later published. In 1961 a common Persian hymn book with musical notes was adopted by the Episcopal and Evangelical churches (Laster). By 1979 the Episcopal Church of Persia had about 4,000 members, half of whom were expatriates, mainly English Anglicans and American Episcopalians.

In the first few months of the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79 the Diocese of Persia suffered greatly. Its senior Persian priest, the Reverend Parvīz (Arasṭū) Sayyāḥ (Syah) Sīnā, was murdered in his study on 19 February 1979 (Dehqani-Tafti, 1981, pp. 37-38). All of its institutions were taken one by one by force by local people who claimed to be members of the revolutionary committees. Most missionaries left the country, and those who did not were briefly imprisoned. Bishop Dehqani-Tafti protested to the government in Tehran to no avail. An attempt on his and his wife’s lives was unsuccessful, but later his only son, Bahrām, was murdered on 6 May 1980. An attempt was also made on the life of the bishop’s secretary, who was a missionary (Dehqani-Tafti, 1981, pp. 76 ff., 96). When it became clear that the bishop, who had left the country



to chair a conference, would not be able to return, an assistant bishop, the Right Reverend Īraj Mottaḥeda, was appointed to look after the faithful. Reverend Mottaḥeda was consecrated a bishop in Tehran by four bishops from Australia and Pakistan on 21 Kordād 1365 Š./11 June 1986. On the retirement of Bishop Dehqānī Taftī, he was elected Bishop of Persia on 16 May 1990 and installed in the office on 12 October (idem, 1986; *The Flame*, 8 October 1989 and 9 March 1990; *Friends of the Diocese of Iran Newsletter*, September 1990). The small church continues with its life, without its institutions for the time being.

See also [CHRISTIANITY vii](#).

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