



# FRANCE XV. FRENCH SCHOOLS IN PERSIA

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French schools, along with their American, British, German, and Russian counterparts, were the main channels through which modern elementary and secondary education were brought to ethnic minorities and middle class Persians for almost a century extending from the 1830s to 1920s ([Table 1](#)). They had more varied roots than other foreign schools, originating from three distinct sources: Catholic, Jewish, and secular. Catholic schools were established by Lazarist missionaries, Jewish schools by the [Alliance Israélite Universelle](#), and lay schools by Alliance Française. A considerable number of Persian political and cultural elite of the 20th century studied at French schools in Tehran, including St. Louis, Alliance Française, Jeanne d'Arc, Franco-Persane and Razi (usually referred to as Lycée Razi), and Alliance Israélite schools.

### LAZARIST SCHOOLS ([Figure 1](#))

Lazarist missionaries began their educational work in the 1840s in Western Azarbaijan and gradually extended their activities to Tabrīz, Isfahan, and Tehran in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries.



*The beginning.* In 1837 Eugène Boré came to Persia as the representative of the French Académie des Inscriptions, with the support of the French foreign minister, François Guizot. Two years later he founded an elementary school in Tabrīz with fourteen Muslim and Armenian students, the first time pupils of two different religions were brought together in one school in Persia. The aim was to teach modern sciences and French to Persian children (Boré, II, p. 362). In 1840 Boré founded another school in Isfahan with 31 students, five of whom were Muslims (de Bode, I, p. 45).

Before he left the country, Boré persuaded the French Lazarist fathers to send a mission to Persia (Boré, II, p. 362; cf. Curzon, *Persian Question* I, p. 542). The Lazarists and the Daughters of Charity (Filles de la Charité), both orders founded in France by St. Vincent de Paul in the 17th century, arrived in Persia in 1840 and 1856 respectively. The Persian government welcomed the Lazarist mission, as relations with England were strained over the occupation of Herat in 1838 and with Russia over the construction of port facilities at Anzalī (q.v.). The Lazarists also received a friendly reception from the governor of Urmia, Malek-Qāsem Mīrzā, who knew French well and was a member of the Société asiatique in Paris (Dehqān, p. 151). The arrival in 1839 of Félix Édouard Comte de Sercey as French ambassador to the Persian court brought the Lazarists unprecedented advantages. In June he obtained from Moḥammad Shah an order (*farmān*) affirming the principle of freedom of conscience in Persia (de Sercey, pp. 260-61). Thenceforth, Roman Catholics were to enjoy the same rights and privileges as Muslim Persians (Eqbāl, p. 65).

*Lazarist Schools in Urmia.* In 1840, Father Cluzel and Father Darnis founded a boys school in Kōsrowābād, a village near the largely Christian town of Salmās in the Urmia region of western Azarbaijan. The Lazarists at first worked mainly among the Assyrian Christians, but later they expanded their sphere to include the Armenian Catholic community and remained active in the Christian areas of Azarbaijan until 1930s. By the end of Moḥammad Shah's reign in 1848, there were twenty-six schools for boys, with a total of four hundred pupils, and six schools for girls operating in the region (Nāṭeq, pp. 163, 171). In 1863, the Lazarist sisters founded the St. Vincent de Paul schools for girls in Urmia and Salmās; in 1867, the school in Urmia enrolled 150 pupils. Beginning in 1874, after a famine and recurrent pillage of the Urmia region by Kurdish tribes, which led to the closing of most schools, new Lazarist elementary schools were opened in the area with 400 pupils in the city and 731 in the surrounding villages. According to Father Salomon, in 1882 the



Lazarists were operating a total of seventy-four elementary schools and two schools for orphans in the Urmia region (Nāṭeq, pp. 183, 190, 197). In 1894, the Lazarists also founded a school in Sana (Sanandaj) and another one in Naqada with 50 students with the Assyrian Antoine Şāleḥ as principal. In the academic year 1906-7, Urmia had a total of three Lazarist schools, with 16 teachers and 290 students, and in the surrounding villages there were 49 schools with 965 students. In some of these schools Jewish and Muslim children studied alongside Armenian and Assyrian children. The curriculum for Lazarist secondary schools for boys was four years, with courses in ancient and modern Assyrian, Persian, French, arithmetic, geography, church history, philosophy, theology, and hymns. In comparable girls schools Assyrian, Persian, French, knitting, sewing, cotton spinning, soap making, and baking were taught (Ġaffārī, p. 152; Nāṭeq, p. 171).

*Lazarist schools in Tabrīz.* In 1863 a Lazarist school for boys and a Saint Vincent de Paul school for girls were opened in Tabrīz, followed two years later by another school for girls run by the Daughters of Charity. In 1901, Father Auguste Malaval founded a school in Tabrīz with 65 students, increased to 95 in 1904 (Nāṭeq, pp. 203-4, 215-18; Ġaffārī, p. 154).

*Lazarist Schools in Isfahan.* In 1863, the sisters founded the St. Vincent de Paul school for girls in Jolfā. Supported by Prince Żell-al-Solţān, a Lazarist school for boys, a school for girls, and a medical clinic were also established at Isfahan in 1875 to serve the Armenian community (Nāṭeq, p. 191). The Roman Catholic school for girls at Jolfā was founded in 1904 with 115 students; it was later renamed Rūdāba School. In the same year, a school with an enrollment of 60 boys was founded, expanding to include 120 boys and 130 girls by 1910. Madrasa-ye setāra-ye şobḥ, a coeducational elementary school with five grades and fifty students, was established in 1910 near the Čahārbāġ (q.v.) in Isfahan, with help from local teachers (Ġaffārī, p. 155). During the last decades of their existence (until the revolution of 1979), Rūdāba had twelve grades (supplemented by a coed kindergarten), and Setāra-ye şobḥ operated a standard six-grade elementary school that taught French in the morning and Persian in the afternoon hours to more than one hundred students.

*Lazarist Schools in Tehran.* The Lazarists founded two well known schools in Tehran, St. Louis and Jeanne d'Arc, which enrolled both Christian and Muslim pupils. Compared to their counterparts in Azarbaijan and Isfahan, the Lazarist schools in Tehran were more concerned with educating students in modern sciences and French literature than in religious matters.



*St. Louis School.* Founded in 1862, with the encouragement of the French minister to the Persian court, Joseph-Arthur Comte de Gobineau, St. Louis was the first Catholic Mission school to be established in Tehran. It started with fifteen pupils, several of whom were Muslim. In 1909 the enrollment was 140 pupils, including 90 boarders; in 1910, it was 150, with 50 boarders. In 1909 the school purchased Šojā'-al-Saṭāna's mansion, which had thirteen rooms and adequate space for 350 students. The elementary program was similar to the five-year system of French primary education. The curriculum included French literature, Persian, world history and geography, history and geography of Persia, arithmetic, calligraphy, and painting (Nāṭeq, pp. 179-81; Ġaffārī, pp. 152-54). In 1913 the school opened a two-year high school program which later expanded to four-year. In 1912, the school received one hundred tomans financial aid from the Ministry of Education; this was increased to two hundred tomans in 1921 when the school expanded teaching Persian language courses and accepted up to fifty needy students who were recommended by the ministry. By 1928, there were 170 pupils and 15 teachers at the school. St. Louis was closed in 1941 along with other foreign schools. It soon reopened, but without permission from the ministry. Reportedly, the school experienced internal problems and mismanagement during the 1950s and 1960s (Šayḡ-Rezā'ī, pp. 95-96).

*Jeanne d'Arc School.* Jeanne d'Arc, the well-known school for girls to which many of the members of the upper classes sent their daughters, was in operation until the 1979 revolution. In the early 1960s, it had about a thousand pupils in the secondary school and about fifty in its junior school. However, instruction at its secondary school terminated at the tenth grade (Komīsīūn-e mellī-e Yūnesko, II, p. 1211). Many of the more affluent pupils were then sent abroad or continued their studies for the school-leaving certificate at Lycée Razi which offered mixed classes for boys and girls up to the twelfth grade. According to Anīsa Šayḡ-Rezā'ī (pp. 97-98,) the origins of the Jeanne d'Arc school can be traced to two Lazarist schools. The first school was the St. Vincent de Paul school for orphaned girls founded in 1865 by the Daughters of Charity and later renamed Jeanne d'Arc. In the 1920s, the school offered both primary and secondary education at separate classes for Muslim and Armenian students. The Ministry of Education granted the school one hundred tomans per month to support teaching of Persian and financial aid for needy students. The curriculum of the school at the elementary level included arithmetic, dictation, sewing, history and geography, a study of *Farā'ed al-adab*, and acquaintance with elementary sciences (*'elm al-ašyā'*). At the



secondary level the curriculum included algebra, geometry, natural sciences, Persian (grammar and reading the text of *Kalīla o Demna*), hygiene, sewing, and home economy. In 1931 Sister Pauline was the principal of both Jeanne d'Arc and St. Joseph schools indicating the close links between the two institutions.

The second school was St. Joseph, a four-year elementary school for girls founded in 1880 by the sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul in the Armenian neighborhood of the Qazvīn Gate quarter (Maḥalla-ye darvāza-ye Qazvīn) with more than two hundred students. Later, the school admitted boys in separate classes. The school enrolled ninety-nine girls and thirty-three boys in 1929. The curriculum included arithmetic, history and geography, sciences, Persian, and French (Nāṭeq, pp. 194, 201, 203). A government grant was given to the school to support teaching of Persian and the admission of fifteen non-paying pupils. Later, in the mid-1930s, this school was renamed Manūčehrī Elementary and High School. In the late 1930s it had an enrollment of about one hundred students and about ten teachers. In 1941, the school closed its Persian program, but its French program continued for foreign pupils. In 1953, its Persian program was revived under the name of Jeanne d'Arc (Dabīrestān-e Žāndārk) with Badr-al-Molūk Pāzārgādī as its principal (Šayḡ-Rezā'ī, p. 97; Wezārat-e farhang, pp. 32-33).

#### ALLIANCE ISRAÉLITE SCHOOLS

In a meeting on 12 July 1873 in Paris between Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah and Adolph Cremieux and other members of the central committee of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (q.v.) the shah agreed to the opening of Alliance schools in Persia (see *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, first semester, 1873). But it was twenty-five years later, in 1898, that the Alliance finally succeeded in opening its first school for boys in Tehran. Joseph Cazès was appointed as the head teacher of its 350 pupils. Cazès also opened a school for girls with 150 pupils. The Alliance was warmly received by Persian authorities: Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah donated two hundred tomans to the school and Mīrzā Moḥsen Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla, the foreign minister, gave an audience to a hundred of the school's pupils and donated five hundred tomans to the school. In 1905-6, the enrollment of the Tehran school rose to 750 boys and 400 girls. In 1927, the school had a total of 545 students and 18 teachers. In the same year total enrollment at the school for girls was 390, with 11 teachers (Nāṭeq, pp. 130-34; Ġaffārī, pp. 175-76; Šayḡ-Rezā'ī, pp. 97-98).



The Alliance also opened five schools in provincial towns in the early 1900s: in Hamadān (1900) with 350 boys and 250 girls, increased in 1905 to 600 and 300 pupils respectively; in Isfahan (1901) with 220 boys and 75 girls increased to 400 boys and 270 girls three years later; in Shiraz (1903) with 600 pupils, including 150 Jewish and non-Jewish girls, in Sanandaj (1903); and in Kermānšāh (1904) with about 250 boys and about 150 girls. The Alliance also helped other Jewish communities to establish schools: Tūyserkān and Nehāvand in 1906, Kāšān in 1911, and Golpāyagān in 1914. In 1905-6, the Alliance schools had an enrollment of 2,875 boys and 1275 girls (Nāṭeq, pp. 134-50; Ġaffārī, p. 176).

In 1941, the Alliance operated 15 schools with 6,376 pupils. This increased to 23 schools with 7,500 pupils a decade later. On the eve of the 1979 revolution, the Alliance operated 7 schools in Tehran with 1,800 pupils and 4 schools in Hamadān, Yazd, Kermānšāh, and Borūjerd with 1,286 pupils (Nāṭeq, pp. 134-50; Aubin, p. 307; Ġaffārī, pp. 175-76).

#### NON-RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS OF ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

The Alliance Française (Association nationale pour la propagation de la langue française), was founded in Paris in 1883 to promote French cultural, political, and commercial interests in foreign countries. The Persian committee of the Alliance was formed in 1889-90 with a number of Persian high ranking officials, including Kāmṛān Mīrzā Nāyeb-al-Saltāna, Mīrzā ‘Alī-Aṣḡar Khan Amīn-al-Soltān, the grand vizier, Mīrzā ‘Alī Khan Amīn-al-Dawla, a noted reformist statesman, and Ja‘farqolī Khan Nayyer-al-Molk, the principal of Dār al-fonūn (q.v.). The French ambassador was also a founding member and Dr. Feuvrier (q.v.) was elected as its chairman. However, the actual creation of the Alliance’s schools proved a slow process owing to Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah’s fears and suspicions of Western liberal institutions, as well as British, Russian, and German rivalry and intrigues against French interests in Persia. Furthermore, the school suffered from chronic budgetary shortages and lack of efficient management (Nāṭeq, pp. 83-94).

Only in 1899, when Dr. Jean-Etienne Justin Schneider, private physician to Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah, became chairman of the Alliance Française in Persia and appointed Vizioz, a capable administrator, as the principal, did the Alliance school turn a new leaf and become an active educational institution with eighty-five students. In 1904, when the number of pupils reached 130, the Shah contributed ten thousand tomans to the school, and it moved to a new



spacious building with an annex for the teachers' residence. The school's enrollment increased to 215 pupils in 1910. Almost all of them, with the exception of a few Jewish and Armenian pupils, were Muslims between the ages of eight to thirty-five and even forty. The older students were enrolled in French language courses. The Alliance school offered the six-year French elementary school curriculum. The courses included French, English, mathematics, geography, physics, and chemistry. The school had a small laboratory for physics and chemistry. The Alliance school was still active in the 1920s, with a high school program and about 100-120 students of whom 50 were non-paying pupils. The Ministry of Education provided the school with some financial aid. Alliance Française also established a school in Tabrīz in 1903 with 76 students; it was operating with a budget deficit until the 1910s (Nāṭeq, pp. 94-114; Ġaffārī, pp. 172-74).

*Franco-Persane and Lycée Razi.* The Franco-Persane girls elementary school was founded in 1908 in Tehran by Yūsof Khan Rīšār Mo'addab-al-Molk, teacher of French at Dār al-fonūn. In 1914, 215 students were enrolled in the school. Franco-Persane founded a boys high school and around 1916 it also began to offer, for the first time in Persia, a three-year high school education for girls to train them for teaching at elementary schools. The courses included French, Persian, Arabic, English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, natural sciences, history, and geography. Franco-Persane received financial aid from the Ministry of Education to cover the tuition of non-paying students recommended by the ministry and to pay the salary of teachers of Persian sent from the ministry. The enrollment in 1929 included 150 girls and 103 boys. In the early 1930s, the school was renamed the Mission laïque française lycée Razi and operated until the 1979 revolution (Šayk-Rezā'ī, pp. 96-97; Nāṭeq, pp. 102-3).

*École Supérieure.* In 1911, the idea of establishing a French institution of higher education (*école supérieure*) in Tehran was discussed between French representatives and Persian authorities. Nāṣer-al-Molk, then the regent, donated a site adjacent to the grounds of the Majles in Bahārestān for developing a campus for the college, but the project was aborted because of the First World War (Ġaffārī, pp. 176-77; Nāṭeq, p. 205).



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