



IRAN II. IRANIAN HISTORY (2)

ISLAMIC PERIOD (PAGE 1)

IRAN

ii(2). Iran in the Islamic Period (651-1980s)

This section of Persian history begins with the conquest by Muslim Arabs and the introduction of Islam to Persia, the gradual conversion of the Persians to the faith of the conquerors, and some 200 years of Arab rule of Persian provinces. Then, the rise of local dynasties, namely, the Taherids, the Saffarids, the Samanids, the Ghaznavids, the Ziyarids, and the Buyids, is discussed. Next, the invasion of the Turkish Saljuqs and the powerful state that they formed is taken up, followed by a brief account of the Turkish dynasty of the K̅w̅ārazmšāhs, who faced the Mongol invasion. A discussion of the Mongol invasion and the Il-khanid dynasty and the onslaught of Timur and the rule of his descendents as well as the Turkmen dynasties, chiefly in western Persia, follows. The rise of the Safavids and the significance of their unifying the country under their enforced Shi'ism, with particular attention to the reign of Shah Abbas I, comes next. An account of the Portuguese occupation of the southern shores of Persia and their eventual ousting, the intermezzo of Afghan rule, the rise of Nader Shah, the Zand dynasty, and the Qajarids follows. The Constitutional Movement, the coup of Sayyed Żiā'-al-Din and the formation of the Pahlavi dynasty are treated next. The modernizing efforts of Reza Shah and the secularizing effects of such efforts are next focused upon, followed by



an account of the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, the revolution of 1979, and the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

CONVERSION TO ISLAM

By 651, most of the urban centers in Iranian lands, with the notable exception of the Caspian provinces and Transoxiana, had come under the domination of the Arab armies. Many localities in Persia staged a defense against the invaders, but in the end none was able to repulse the invasion. Even after the Arabs had subdued the country, many cities rose in rebellion, killing the Arab governor or attacking their garrisons, but reinforcements from the caliphs succeeded in putting down all these rebellions and imposing the rule of Islam. The violent subjugation of Bukhara (q.v.) after many uprisings is a case in point. Conversion to Islam (q.v.) was, however, only gradual. In the process, many acts of violence took place, Zoroastrian scriptures were burnt and many mobads executed (for examples, see Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, p. 421; Biruni, *Ātār*, p. 35).

The Qur'ānic injunction on forceful conversion (Q. 9:29) was essentially directed against the pagan Arabs. "The people of the book," i.e., those who were in possession of a holy book, including the Jews, Christians, and Sabeans (apparently the Mandaean [q.v. at *iranica.com*] of southern Iraq and Khuzestan), were designated as falling into a different category (cf. Q. 2:62). They were given the choice of either accepting Islam or paying a poll tax (*jezya*). As a measure dictated by both expediency and the desirability of increasing revenues, the Zoroastrians were also treated as "the people of the book," and this enabled a large number of Persian populations to hold on to their traditional religion. Even as late as the 10th century, some Zoroastrians opted for migration rather than the abandonment of their ancestral religion and found their way to India and settled in Gujarat. They were the forefathers of the present-day Parsis (q.v. at *iranica.com*). Those who remained in the country were treated as inferior citizens. The mounting political and economic pressure, however, caused increased conversion. The assumption of the caliphate by the Abbasids, whose cause many Iranians had embraced against the race-conscious Umayyads, tended to accelerate conversion to Islam. By the 9th century Islam was dominant in Persia. However, in some regions, such as Fārs province, a Sasanian center of the faith, there remained a large number of Zoroastrians (see Moqaddasi, p. 429), so that Abu Eshāq Kāzaruni (q.v.; b. 963), the eponymous founder of the Kāzaruniya order of Sufis, could claim, according to a well-known and extensive hagiographical account of him, to have brought about mass conversions of Zoroastrians in Fārs in the late 10th



century (see Yavari, pp. 242-43).

Many Arabs, who invaded Persia in successive waves, settled in the country permanently, particularly in Khorasan, which served as a station for further invasions into Central Asia; they also settled in some central cities such as Qom. The search for green pastures must have been a motive for such settlements, at least as much as the religious incentive, and, rather than this influx affecting the ethnicity of the local inhabitants, it was the incoming Arab tribes who were gradually absorbed into the local melting pot of different ethnic groups, so that Jahez (Jāhez, ca. 776-869) could say that in Khorasan, after a couple of generations, it was difficult to say who was a Persian and who was an Arab (Jahez, *Manāqeb*, pp. 4-5, 40-41).

The eventual conversion of Iranians to Islam brought profound changes in their life and culture—the deepest cultural transformation that has occurred in the entire history of Iranian peoples, all the more so since Islam as a religion not only is concerned with the spiritual aspects of life, but, like Zoroastrianism, also legislates comprehensively for all spheres of life, including civic, economic, and judicial. Allah was introduced as the sole creator of the world and its absolute sovereign, irrespective of the notions of good and evil and their perennial binary opposition, so prominent in Zoroastrianism and Manicheism. The worship of Aməša Spəntas and Yazatas was abandoned. The four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—lost their sanctity. Burying the dead, instead of exposing them to wild animals and birds of prey, became the norm. The daily worship at fixed hours of the day and the communal prayers on Fridays were prescribed. The belief in Ahriman and a great variety of demons that had to be neutralized or driven out by rituals and mantras was abandoned, although Satan the arch tempter as a counterpart to Ahriman now expressed the idea of an antagonist to the Creator. The rites of passage to adulthood and religious obligations indicated by a special shirt and awoven cord around the waist were given up, as were all the elaborate Zoroastrian prayers and ceremonial rituals around the household hearth and at fire temples. Mosques were built, often on the location of former fire temples. Arabic, as the language of the Qurʾān, the Hadith, and the daily prayers, began to infiltrate the vernacular, and gradually a large number of Arabic words entered the Persian language. However, Arabic did not succeed in replacing Persian in everyday communication, even though it replaced Middle Persian as the language of theology and religious sciences, and of written works generally except poetry.



For some two centuries Persia was ruled by Arab governors sent either by the caliphs, or later under the Umayyads by their agents in Iraq, with their seats in either Basra or Kufa, two cities in southern Mesopotamia. The Umayyad caliphs (661-750) who succeeded the first four caliphs were essentially Arab nationalists who considered non-Arabs inferior to themselves and, therefore, treated the Persians as second-class citizens, even when they had converted to Islam. There was a custom among the Arab tribes whereby some of the weaker or poorer tribes would attach themselves to stronger or more prosperous ones as clients or *mawālā* (pl. *mawālī*). The Arabs began to also accept the converts to Islam as *mawālī* of Arab tribes, and, as custom required, such *mawālī* adopted the name of the tribe to which they were attached, such as Šaybāni, Qazā'i, Azdi, Ṭā'i, and Tamimi, as a surname, beside an Islamic name that they would choose upon conversion, 'Abd-Allāh being one of the most popular. These *mawālī*, by virtue of both their increasing number as well as their aptitude and competence, grew into a very important element in developing the Islamic civilization, particularly after the Abbasid takeover.

Islam, having arisen in Arabia, was at the outset primarily attuned to the needs and conditions of the people in that land. But when the Arabs conquered other countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Persia, it had to develop in such a way as to respond also to the needs and aspirations of the peoples of these lands. The *mawālī* served as a very significant factor in transforming Islamic culture into an international and cosmopolitan one. In this process, the customs, laws, and traditions of the Sasanians, who had long administrative experience, were in large part adopted in the Islamic East, for instance in such matters as surveying rural lands, the collection of taxes, the minting of coins, the appointment of judges as well as the ceremonials in the courts of the caliphs and their governors, whereas in Syria, the seat of the Umayyads, Byzantine administrative practices were largely followed.

An important fact about Persia in the Islamic period is that, in spite of over 200 years of Arab rule, the change of faith to Islam, and the cultivation of Arabic in all religious matters, Persia did not lose its language, and thereby its separate identity. Nor did it lose it to Turkish invaders who ruled the country, with minor exceptions, for over 800 years from the 11th century to the early 20th (see de Planhol, 1993, p. 480, and Yarshater, 1997 for theories explaining the phenomenon), whereas most other countries conquered by the Arab Muslims, notably Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia, assumed an Arab identity and adopted the Arabic language.



From the Persian point of view, the rule of the Umayyads was oppressive and gave rise to a number of movements and rebellions, mostly of a politico-religious nature, as an expression of Persian unease, antagonism, and opposition. Khorasan proved the most active breeding ground for such movements. When Shi'ism posed as a protest movement against orthodoxy, many Persians flocked to it; and, when its theology developed around the concept of a divinely sanctioned Imamate, they found it congenial to their traditional belief in the divine right of kings through the royal *farr*. When the Shi'ite propaganda in Persia turned into an Abbasid one, led by Abu Moslem (q.v.; d. 755) in Khorasan, many Persians as well as some Arab tribes who had settled in the region welcomed it. The movement grew in strength, and in one of the most dramatic episodes of Islamic history Abu Moslem and his supporters managed to defeat and topple the Umayyad caliphate. The event opened the way for a much greater participation by the Persian mawālī in the first period of the Abbasid caliphate and for a flowering of Persian cultural contributions. The Barmakids (q.v.), who served as powerful viziers under Hārūn-al-Rašid (q.v.; 786-809), and the Sahl brothers, who served his son Ma'mun as counselor and vizier, illustrate the new positions that some of the Persians had risen to. The literary activities of Ebn al-Moqaffa' (q.v.) and the large number of scholars of Persian descent who developed Islamic theology, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and geography, as well as Arabic linguistics, point to the same direction.

When Abu Moslem was murdered by the wily Man-s'Āur, the second Abbasid caliph, the Persian outrage and shattered hopes were expressed in a number of politico-religious movements that often combined some pre-Islamic Mazdakite aspirations with facets of Islamic extremism. The best known are the rise of Moqanna' ("the veiled one," 755-85), during the caliphate of al-Mahdi (775-85) in Khorasan and Transoxiana; the movement of the Kōrramdinis centered in Azarbaijan, Arrān, and western Persia led by Bābak Kōrrami (q.v.), who succeeded a former leader, Jāvdān; and the Carmatians (q.v.), a radical branch of the Bāṭeniya or Ismā'īlis (q.v. at *iranica.com*), active mostly in the Persian Gulf area and Khuzestan. None of these movements, however, succeeded in achieving its goals, and sooner or later the forces of the caliph were successful in crushing them. Their appearance, nonetheless, attested to a vitality that later came to fruition under Persian local dynasties of Persia, for which they prepared the ground.



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