



## IRAN IX. RELIGIONS IN IRAN

### (2) ISLAM IN IRAN

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#### **IRAN ix, continued**

##### (2) Islam in Iran

The coming of Islam to the Iranian plateau and the westerly regions of Central Asia wrought a permanent and profound transformation in the religious, cultural, and social life of the Iranian world. Pre-Islamic Iran had been marked by a great profusion of religions, indigenous and imported, and although Zoroastrianism had generally prevailed since Achaemenid times, it lacked doctrinal coherence and a firm textual basis, at least until the Sasanian era. Moreover, it was limited in its social appeal and geographical range and proved vulnerable to the claims of both Christianity and Manicheism. Islam, a quintessentially scriptural religion by virtue of the Qur'an, has contrastingly enjoyed since its inception a remarkable stability in its canonical practices and fundamental tenets, despite the not inconsiderable sectarian differences and conflicts outlined below. The appeal of Islam has in addition been universal, as indeed was first evidenced by the adherence to it of the Persians, and its supremacy in the Iranian world has never been seriously challenged by any other creed. It may in fact be argued that in terms of intimacy and antiquity the Persian relationship with Islam is second only to the nexus of the Arabic-speaking peoples with the faith; the Persians were the second human collectivity to become acquainted with the Qur'anic message, and the tongue



they elaborated bearing its imprint was the first into which the Qur'an was translated. The near-universal acceptance of Islam bestowed on Persian culture a far greater degree of cohesion than had obtained in pre-Islamic times, while at the same time incorporating it into a broad oikumene that embraced much of Asia. Within that community of faith, especially its Turkish and Indian domains, Persians played a consistently prominent role, and their language was second only to Arabic as a vehicle for the cultivation and transmission of Islamic culture. The assertion that "were knowledge to be lodged in the Pleiades, men from among the Persians would reach for it," traditionally counted as a Hadith, might better be interpreted as a hyperbolic acknowledgement of this Persian contribution.

This entry is divided into the following three periods:

(2.1) [The advent of Islam in Iran.](#)

(2.2) [The Mongol and Timurid periods.](#)

(2.3) [Shi'ism in Iran since the Safavids.](#)