



# IRANIAN IDENTITY IV. 19TH-20TH CENTURIES

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## IRANIAN IDENTITY

### iv. IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Iran entered the age of nation-building and nationalism of the 19th century with the legacy of a longstanding historical awareness and cultural consciousness of its identity. The new Western ideas (which had been spread in the West since the late 18th century) received a new impetus with adaptations and reconstructions of a pre-existing concept of Iranian identity that had evolved over many centuries (see i, ii, and iii, above). Comparative historians of nationalism acknowledge that Iran was among the few nations that experienced the era of nationalism with a deep historical root and experience of recurrent construction of its own pre-modern identity (see, e.g., Seton-Watson, 1977, pp. 243-48, 251-55; Hobsbawm, 1990, pp. 69, 137; Smith, 2004, pp. 218-19, 229, 130, 186). The modern ideas of nation, nationalism, and national identity—as a set of sentiments about the nation and the modern nation-state, conveying the ideals of the autonomy, unity, and prosperity of the nation—came to reinforce the rich historical repertoire of Iranian identity. These new ideas also brought about a transformation of people's identity from subjects (*ra'āyā*) to citizens (with a recently coined term, *šahrvandān*). Furthermore, with such changes in political consciousness and identity, the sense of patriotism became separated from religious feelings, and loyalty to



the nation became a new political value.

When the Iranian pre-modern society encountered the modern age of nationalism, it sought to create a new Iranian national identity on the basis of its own pre-existing ethnic and territorial ties, historical memories, and commemorations of historical events. In this new encounter with the outside world, the enlightened members of Persian literati—whose predecessors had helped create and transmit the idea of Iranian identity since the late Sasanid era—came to form a nucleus of intellectuals (*rowšanfekrān*, i.e., the creators and reproducers of modern cultural ideas) with an expanding audience of intelligentsia (the educated people who are the consumers of those ideas). The new literati promoted the modern conceptions of nationalism and Iranian national identity based on the rich, centuries-old Persian cultural heritage (see iii, above; and [IRAN iii. TRADITIONAL HISTORY](#)). A telling example of Persian pre-existing historical memories that helped the construction of modern ideas of nation and nationalism was the frequent printing of an influential book on the history of ancient Kings of Persia (Faḏl-Allāh Ḥosayni Qazvini, *Tāriḵ al-moʿjam fi ātār-e moluk-e ʿAjam*). Written in the 14th century with some 50 surviving manuscripts, this book was printed seven times between 1831 and 1891 in Tabriz, Tehran, and Isfahan and three in the early 20th century (see Story, I/1, 1970, pp. 243-44; Monzawi, VI, pp. 4386-89; and Mošār, I, cols. 3046-47). It was one of the most frequently reprinted works among a small number of popular reprinted titles in this period. Although the wide circulation of the book was due to its use as a textbook of the difficult Persian epistolary style, its use by a large group of students helped disseminate the information on the roots of Iranian “ethno-national” identity.

The new ideas of nation and nationalism in this period were reconstructed and disseminated mainly by those members of literati who had political, commercial, and cultural contacts with the West. Appearing sporadically in the 19th century, the ideas of popular, liberal nationalism flourished in the course of the 1905-11 Constitutional Revolution (q.v.), and later they were transformed into a state-sponsored form of ethno-nationalism during the Pahlavi period (1925-78). This particular mode of Iranian nationalism and its related conception of Iranian identity was, however, later challenged by the popular nationalist movement that began in the mid-20th century. After a brief survey of the emerging national vocabulary in Persian literature, this entry will examine the above three phases in the development of Iranian identity in the 19th and 20th centuries.



*The emerging national vocabulary of Iran.* The term “nation,” in its modern usage—which is derived from Latin *natio* (a group related by birth or place of origin)—emerged in various European languages predominantly in the 18th and 19th centuries. In Persian, the term *mellat* found currency as the equivalent of the term “nation” in the 19th century. The term *mellat* was, until then, used to denote any religious community, and more specifically, followers of a faith in possession of a holy book (a scripture; *ahl-e ketāb*: Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians). The modern concept of “nation” originated from the concept of religious community (*mellat*) in two phases: first was constructed the notion of “Iranian Muslim nation” by addition of “Iran” to the traditional notion of Muslim religious community (*mellat-e Mosalmān*) to signify the Iranian component of the religious community (*mellat-e Mosalmān-e Irān*). Soon thereafter, by the dropping of the religious designation, the concept became simply the “Iranian nation” (*mellat-e Irān*). This conceptual metamorphosis of the term led to the new reading of *mellat* in the modern sense of the term, conveying the meaning of the “nation” (see below). Yet the term continued to be used with two different connotations: one, the traditional reading with a religious connotation, and the other, the modern reading with a purely national connotation. This may be seen in the reaction of Faḥr-‘Alī Āḳundzāda to the name and logo of *Ruz-nāma-ye mellat-e saniya-ye Irān*, published from 1866-70. The logo of the newspaper shows the picture of the Shah Mosque of Tehran (Masjed-e Šāh) as the symbol conveying the meaning of “the Iranian Muslim nation.” In his satirical criticism of the logo, Āḳundzāda argues that, if the name of the paper refers to the nation of Iran, the chosen symbol of the mosque is not exclusively Iranian but belongs to all Muslim peoples. The symbol of Iranian people during the pre-Islamic era, he argues, was the monuments of Persian kings, such as Persepolis and Estāḳr, and in the Islamic period the monuments of the Safavids, who unified Iran with Shi‘sm as its state religion (cited in Āryanpur I, pp. 239-40). A number of other terms related to the concepts of *mellat* also entered the contemporary political lexicon in the same period, e.g., *melliyat* (nationality), *waḥdat-e melli* (national unity or integrity), *melli* (national, and nationalist, pl. *melliyun*), *melli-gerā‘i* (nationalism), *howiyat-e melli* (national identity). Yet, it should be noted that the antecedents of the new term *mellat-e Irān* were not only its pre-modern religious connotation, but also a longstanding terminology referring to the Iranian people, including *Irāni* (plur. *irāniān*), *Pārsi* (plur. *Pārsiān*), *ahāli-e Irān* (Ar. *ahl al-fors*; meaning inhabitants of Persia; see iii, above).

The old terms *waṭan* (Ar.) or *mihan* (Pers.), which have found currency in



modern times to mean “national homeland” (motherland or fatherland), were used in classical Persian literature to refer predominantly to a person’s place of birth and habitation. One’s place of birth and residence was the object of one’s love, admiration, and devotion. Persians have often referred to the dictum, attributed to the Prophet, that “love of homeland is an article of faith” (*ḥobb al-waṭan men al-imān*). The terms *waṭan* and *mihan* have also found currency in modern times to convey the meaning of “patriotism” (Ar. *ḥobb al-waṭan*, Pers. *mihan-parasti* or Pers.-Ar. *waṭan-parasti*) or love and loyalty to the homeland and the nation-state. Understandably, the tradition of *ḥobb al-waṭan mena’l-imān* has often been taken, retrospectively, to imply love for the “national homeland” of the Iranian people in classical Persian literature. Even the mystical, pantheistic notion of the dictum, meaning love for the “heavenly kingdom,” has been interpreted as love for the “national homeland” (see, e.g., *Ḳubru-ye Pāk*, p. 17). It is interesting to note that, on a few occasions in the late Safavid period (probably for the first time), the Hadith of *ḥobb al-waṭan* was extended beyond its local implication (place of birth or residence) to the whole country of Iran (see iii, above). An attempt to transform the usage of *waṭan* from birthplace to the national homeland was made in 1876, when a bilingual newspaper *Waṭan* began publication in Persian and French on 5 February. Explaining the title of the newspaper, the main article stated: “We have chosen *waṭan (patrie)* for the title of the paper because patriotism (*waṭan-parasti*) is the highest virtue, but in Iran it means primarily love of birthplace, whereas in its comprehensive usage it conveys the meaning of affection for the king, respect of laws and institutions of the nation, and obedience to the government rules” (cited in *Yādgār*, 1/7, 1945, pp. 16-17; for an account of the beginning of the usage of fatherland and motherland leading to “patriotic” and “matriotic” nationalisms, see Najmābādi, 2004, pp. 97-130; and Tavakoli-Targhi, 2001, pp. 113-34).

The territorial conception of Iran as a kingdom with a succession of dynasties has existed since the beginnings of Iranian traditional history including *irānšahr* and *irānzamin*, or *al-Fors* (Fārs), Ar. form of *Pārs* (Persia). The Persian term *kešvar*, which has entered the political lexicon of modern Iran as the equivalent of “country” (e.g., *kešvar-e Irān*), had been used to denote the dynastic realm or kingdom in pre-Islamic traditional history. The first usage of the term to denote a contemporary Iranian kingdom appears to have occurred in the Il-khanid era. It was used very rarely in medieval historiography (see iii, above; for a detailed account of the territorial origin of Iranian identity in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Kashani-Sabet).



## NATIONAL IDENTITY IN REFORM MOVEMENTS AND REVOLUTION

*National identity and reform movements.* Persia's reform movement, which was primarily a response of the reforming Persian literati to the challenges of Western powers, was instrumental in promoting new ideas of nation and national homeland. They were aspiring to modernize the archaic government offices and adopt modern technology and political structure in order to develop Persia's capability to resist Western encroachment. Initiated by the Crown Prince 'Abbās Mirzā (q.v.) with his reforming vizier, Mirzā Abu'l-Qāsem Qā'em-maqām, during the early decades of the 19th century, the reform movement was substantively promoted under Amir Kabir (q.v.) in the period 1848-52. Amir Kabir, who had traveled to Russia and the Ottoman empire, became acquainted with modern institutions and used the new terms of "the zeal of nation and homeland," and "patriotism" (*ḡayrat-e mellat o kāk o waṭanparasti*). He was primarily concerned with infrastructural development of the government to safeguard Persia's integrity and self-determination; "we find him as the representative of Iranian nationalism against European political and economic colonial penetration" (see Ādamiyat, 1977, p. 215; idem, 1969, pp. 159, 464).

The ideas of nationalism, constitutionalism, and progress further elaborated by such Western-educated literati and statesmen as Ḥosayn Khan Sepahsālār (Mošir-al-Dawla; 1828-81), who served as representative of Persia in Bombay, Tbilisi, and Istanbul, and also served as head of certain ministries, as well as in the grand vizierate (1871). Sepahsālār and his close associates, Malkam Khan Nāẓem-al-Dawla (1833-1908), Yusof Khan Mostašār-al-Dawla (d. 1895), and Majd-al-Molk Sinaki (1809-81), among others, advocated the formation of modern political institutions, as well as the new idea of popular nationalism as the prerequisite for progress. Sepahsālār was among the first to use the term *melliyat* to refer to the concept of nationality and nationalism, when he said "the foundation of nationality (*asās-e melliyat*) that was offered by the French Emperor, saying that each nation (*mellat*) should be governed by its own people" (cited in Ādamiyat, 1972, p. 131). His idea was the sovereignty of the nation and the changing of the status of the inhabitants from subjects (*ra'āyā*; the flocks) to citizens.

*Modern schools and the printing press.* The closing decades of the 19th century saw the introduction of modern education and the printing press. It is widely acknowledged that the spread of modern idea of nationalism in the West as well as in Asia and Africa was the byproduct of the development of the



printing press and expansion of modern schools (symbolically called “press nationalism” and “school nationalism”; see, e.g., Anderson, 1991; Hobsbaum, 1983). As a result, thousands of Iranians became aware of modern political ideas and institutions (see EDUCATION). The introduction of Western education in Iran by missionary schools and, more importantly, the foundation of a polytechnic institute (Dār-al-Fonun; q.v.) in 1852 and the Faculty of Political Science (Madrasa-ye ‘olum-e siāsi) in 1899 (offering courses with textbooks on the history of Iran) significantly helped the spread of the new political ideas of nation and nationalism among the emerging intelligentsia. The foundation of printing houses in Tabriz, Tehran, Isfahan, and other major cities led to the publication of a score of books and newspapers. About one-fifth of these books (including reprints) were devoted to pre-Islamic Iran, including some ten reprints of an influential textbook on the history of pre-Islamic Persian kings (Ḥosayni Qazvini, *Tāriḵ al-mo’jam fi ātār-e moluk-e ‘Ajam*), a book on Sasanid history (*Tāriḵ-e Sāsāniān*), a book on the Parthian roots of the Qajars (E’temād-al-Salṭana, 1891-93), the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi, an influential book representing the nationalistic ideas of a Neo-Zoroastrian movement (see *Dabestān al-maḍāheb*), and a book on Persian ethics (*Jāvidān kerad*). Furthermore, the import of Persian books published in India, as well as a number of Persian newspapers published in Calcutta, Istanbul, Cairo, London, and Paris, helped further the dissemination of the critical political ideas as well as a nationalistic ideology among the Persian intelligentsia.

*Romantic nationalism.* Identification with the glorious past through imagined places and golden ages helps people to go beyond the miserable and deplorable present. It was natural then for the early proponents of nationalism in Iran to search for Iran’s national spirit and glory, the primordial soul of an organic entity with its own distinct culture. There developed a belief in the idea that there had been continuity in Iran’s history from the immemorial past to modern times with a romantic view of a pre-Islamic golden age. The intellectual forerunners of romantic nationalism included Mirzā Faḥ-‘Ali Ākundzāda, Jalāl-al-Din Mirzā Qājār, and Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni (qq.v.). They introduced the basic ideals of the autonomy, the unity, and the prosperity of the Iranian nation with patriotic devotion. Their works are devoted to cultivation of the love of national homeland (*ḥobb-e waṭan*) as a spiritual need of the people. The recurrent theme in their works is their distaste for the Arab conquest of Iran and comparison and contrast of the deplorable conditions of the country with its glorious pre-Islamic past, on the



one hand, and with the developed nations of the West, on the other. In search of root causes of the decline of the nation and the means for its resurrection, they blame the absolutism of the corrupt and incompetent members of the ruling classes: the political as well as the clerical elements. As a major requirement for the country's development, they craved for liberation from the alien Islamic past through a purification of the Persian language from Arabic words and the embracing of Western civilization (for a survey of the merging nationalist ideas in the latter half of the 19th century, see Cole, 1996, pp. 35-56).

Mirzā Fath-‘Ali Ākūndzāda (1812-78), from Azarbaijan, proudly identified as being of Persian stock (*nežād-e Irāni*), belonging to the nation of Iran (*mellat-e Irān*) and to the Iranian homeland (*waṭan*; cited in Adamiyat, 1970, p. 9). Ākūndzāda influenced Jālāl-al-Din Mirzā through friendship and correspondence as well as Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni (ibid., pp. 108-36). Jalāl al-Dīn Mirza (1826-70), a Qajar prince, initiated the reconstruction of Iranian national history in his *Nāma-ye kosravān* (Book of the Monarchs), the first history textbook for Dār-al-Fonun in simple Persian, purified of Arabic words. His fourfold Persian dynastic history is arranged from the first man to the Qajars. The first part from Mahābādīān to Sasanid, shows the influence of the neo-Zoroastrian mythologized *Dasātir* movement (q.v.; see Amanat, 1997; for the influence of this movement on romantic nationalism of this period, see Tavakoli-Tarqi, 1991, pp. 86-95). Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni (1854-96) followed Jalāl-al-Din Mirzā in producing a national history of Iran, *Ā’ina-ye sekandari*, extending from the mythological past to the Qajar era, to compare and contrast Iran's glorious past with its present plight (see Ādamiyat, 1978, pp. 149-211). Influenced by these ideas, the Persian literati even invented an “Iranian origin” for the last Turkic dynasty of Iran, connecting the Qajars to the Parthian dynasty (see E’temād-al-Salṭana, 1891-93).

Dissemination of the romantic nationalism of these intellectual figures and the nationalistic ideas of the reforming ministers contributed significantly to the intellectual ferment and ideological orientation of the Constitutional Revolution.

*Constitutional Revolution and national identity.* The intellectual ideas of the constitutional movement was primarily oriented toward two fundamental goals: creating a ‘modern nation-state’ in order to develop the resources of the country and protect its autonomy vis-à-vis foreign powers, and forming a nation by transforming the people from “subjects” (*ra‘āyā*) to citizens, with a



greater participation in the political life of the country. Furthermore, this national idea of *mellat-e Irān* encompassed all peoples of Iran regardless of their religious affiliation, ethnic origin, spoken language, or socio-economic status. It was in terms of these principles that the Constitutional Revolution became a patriotic, nationalist movement. Thus from its inception the idea of “national sovereignty of Iranian people” became the slogan of those who advocated constitutionalism, secularism, progress, and equality.

The appearance of scores of newspapers and journals in the course of the revolution helped spread the ideas of nationhood and national sovereignty among the urban population. Derived from the term nation (*mellat*), the concept of national (*melli*) gained increasing popularity. It was used, for example, to refer to the National Consultative Assembly (Majles-e šurā-ye melli), the National Bank (Bānk-e melli), the epithets of national heroes: national commander (*sardār-e melli*) for Sattār Khan, and national leader (*sālār-e melli*) for Bāqer Khan (q.v.)—the commanders of the prolonged armed resistance of the constitutionalist forces in Tabriz (see [CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION i](#)).

In this period a new generation of Persian literati, influenced by the forerunners of nationalism in Iran, appeared on the scene. These included Forṣat Širāzi (q.v.; 1855-1921), the author of *Ātār-e ‘Ajam*, the first Persian work introducing the ancient monuments and archeological sites of Fārs. In his political papers, Forṣat attributes the deplorable conditions of Persia to the ignorance of its people and the tyranny of its rulers, calling for drastic reforms (Forṣat-al-Dawla, 1904). Other influential figures include Malek-al-Motakallemin (1860-1907), who, impressed by the Japanese model of progress, advocated a more rational use of natural resources for industrialization of the country (Malekzāda, 1946, pp. 91-98). Also influential were two Azarbaijani authors, ‘Abd-al-Raḥim Ṭālebof (1835-1910) and Zayn-al-‘Ābedin Marāḡa’i (1839-1910). The former advocated a scientific and political awakening of Persia, while the latter deplored the miserable life of the people and cried for love of the nation and its salvation.

The disillusionment of nationalist supporters of the Constitutional Revolution with the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement (q.v.), which divided Iran into two zones of influence, led to resurgence of the romantic nationalism, anti-imperialism, and ideas of socialism. Thus, for example, the poets of the Constitutional Revolution may be divided into three distinct types: (1) Those who consider the national homeland in its Islamic or even its Shi‘ite form, such



as Adib Pišāvari (q.v.; 1844-1930) and Sayyed Ašraf-al-Din Gilāni (1870-1933). (2) Those poets who were influenced by modern, Western conception of homeland such as Abu'l-Qāsem 'Āref (1883-1933) and Mir-zādeh 'Ešqi (q.v.; 1893-1924) and wrote on the themes of patriotism, freedom, and anti-colonialism. Also belonging to this group was Moḥammad-Ebrāhim Farroki Yazdi (1888-1939), who espoused patriotic socialism and called for love, devotion, and sacrifice for Iran and its working peoples. (3) Those who followed a hybrid religio-national response, such as Malek-al-Šo 'arā Bahār (q.v.; 1866-1951), who wrote powerful poems glorifying pre-Islamic Iran while at the same time looking at the Islamic heritage of Iran with respect (see Šafi'i Kadkani, pp. 22-23). In contrast, Aḥmad Kasrawi (1888-1945), a prolific author, published scores of political pamphlets combining nationalistic and anti-religious (including Shi'ism, Sufism, and Bahā'ism) sentiments and advocated a radical approach toward purification of Persian from Arabic words (see Kasrawi, 1978).

The post-Constitutional period saw a nationalist reaction to the country's political decay, which was best manifested in three influential journals during the period of 1916-28: *Kāva*, edited and published in Berlin by Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizādeh (\*q.v.), a leading veteran of the Constitutional Revolution and the leader of Iran's nationalist committee in Berlin (Komita-ye melliyun-e Irān); *Irānšahr*, also published in Berlin by Ḥosayn Kāzemzādeh Irānšahr (q.v.); and *Āyanda* (q.v.), published in Tehran by Maḥmud Afšār (\*q.v.). Kāzemzādeh Irānšahr, an ardent nationalist, set forth his views in a number of essays in his journal (1922-26), and more specifically in his *Tajalliyāt-e ruḥ-e irāni* (The manifestation of Iranian spirit). He had maintained a clear romantic and primordialist notion of the Aryan race and the superior character of the Iranian peoples, which has manifested itself throughout the history of the nation. In various articles in his journal *Āyanda* (1925-27, 1944-45, 1955), Afšār, a political scientist, pioneered a systematic scholarly treatment of various aspects of Iranian national identity, territorial integrity, and national unity. An influential nationalist, he also displayed a strong belief in the nationalist character of Iranian people throughout the country's long history. He was the first to propose the idea of Pan-Iranism to safeguard the unity and territorial integrity of the nation against the onslaught of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Arabism (Afšār, p. 187).

The late Qajar and early Pahlavi period saw the emergence, also, of a number of historical novels and plays, combining the historical facts and fictional



imagination to portray the period's nostalgia for Persia's glorious past; these included Şādeq Hedāyat's (q.v.) *Parvin doktar-e Sāsān* (see [FICTION 2b](#)).

#### THE RISE OF STATE NATIONALISM IN THE PAHLAVI ERA

Similar to the common pattern of the early 20th century, the Pahlavi nation-state was founded on self-glorification. Celebration and commemoration of the collective historical memory through symbols and myths, rituals and ceremonies, museums and archeological sites, Achaemenid architectural design for public edifices, nationalistic music, and a national dress code became its hallmarks. In this period, the emerging nationalist historical writings shifted from the emphasis on the continuity with “the traditional history” to the continuity with “factual history” by emphasizing the Achaemenid period as the political origin of the state (see [HISTORIOGRAPHY viii](#) and [ix](#)). This historical restoration of the Achaemenid era with the help of Western scholars is often misinterpreted by those who, influenced by Eurocentric, modernist orthodoxy, tend to portray the whole of Iran's traditional history as an invention or imagination of “Orientalists” (see Vaziri, 1993; for the neglect of the Median and Achaemenid history, see Yarshater, 1984; for the recurrent updating of Iran's factual history from the Sasanid to the contemporary dynasties, see [iii](#), above).

It was during this early period of the Pahlavi rule that scholarly historical writings began to develop. Ḥosayn Pirniā's pioneering work on the history of ancient Iran (3 vols., Tehran, 1931-33) and 'Abbās Eqbāl-Āštiāni's textbook on history of Iran from the advent of Islam to the fall of the Qajars (Tehran, 1939), and 'Abd-Allāh Rāzi's work on Iran's history from the ancient times to the year 1937 (Tehran, 1938) constituted textbooks of factual history of Iran from ancient to modern times. These texts helped develop a new historical consciousness for the reading public. Meanwhile a number of Iranian scholars began to see a cultural continuity between pre-Islamic and medieval Islamic Iran. In this context, Ebrāhim Pur-Dāwud, the pioneer of Avestan studies in Persia and an ardent advocate of Iranian nationalism, examined the influence of Zoroastrianism and pre-Islamic culture on the emerging Islamic civilization in Iran. He suggested that “our land, our race, and our language have remained the same for several thousand years” (in Mo'in, 1947, pp. 1-4). Moḥammad Moḥammadi Malāyeri (1944, 1975, revised ed., 1995) elaborated on Persian influence in Mesopotamia, the central province of both the Sasanid and the Islamic empires, during the Abbasid caliphate. Moḥammad Mo'in (1947), too, wrote on the influence of Mazdean ideas on recurrent motifs in



classical Persian literature and mysticism. Ḍabiḥ-Allāh Ṣafā in his influential work on the history of epic writing and legendry in Iran (1st ed., 1942; 4th ed., 1984) and in his history of literature in Iran (1953-83), as well as the summary of political, social, and cultural history of Iran from the beginning to the end of the Safavid period (1977), also promoted the new, nationalist view of Iran's history. A new, ultra-nationalist trend in Persian historical writings of this period was initiated by Ḍabiḥ Behruz (q.v) and his disciples (see [HISTORIOGRAPHY ix](#)).

Western scholars of pre-Islamic and medieval Islamic periods also helped the promotion of scholarship on Iran's history. These include important contributions of Ignaz Goldziher, Ernst Herzfeld, Vladimir Minorsky, Bertold Spuler, Samuel Stern; they used the “nationalist scheme” and its related key concepts of “national character” and “national sentiment” to demonstrate the formation of the Iranian nation with a vivid “national identity” during the Achaemenid period (Herzfeld, 1936) and its revival during the 9th-11th centuries and later (see, e.g., Goldziher, 1998-99, 1951; Minorsky, 1932, 1956; Spuler, 1952 and 1955; Stern, 1971). Herzfeld's (q.v.) idea of Achaemenid Iran as a geo-political concept, as “the empire of the Aryans,” as well as his idea that the Iranian “nation” in its combined geographical and political sense emerged during the Achaemenid period, were adopted as the formal ideological framework of the Pahlavi state. These ideas laid the foundation of what Alessandro Bausani (1975, p. 46) calls “Aryan and Neo-Achaemenid nationalism.” They led to four historical innovations: the change, in Western languages, of the country's name from Persia to Iran in 1935, signifying the primordial Aryan origin of the nation; the assumption of the title Āryā-mehr (the Sun of the Aryans) by Moḥammad Reżā Shah in 1965; celebration of the 2,500 years of Persian empire in 1971; and finally, the change of the national calendar from the Islamic Hejri to the invented Šāhanšāhi—the time of the formation of the Persian empire by Cyrus the Great (see Herzfeld, 1935; for a recent support for his idea, see Shahbazi, 2001; for a critical analysis, see Gnoli, 1968, pp. 1-27).

This emphasis on 25 centuries of Persian empire as the main pillar of Iranian identity was drawn from the notion of loyalty to the kingdom of Iran, whose custodian is the king. Accordingly, Iranian identity derived from the king's divinely ordained sovereignty, a glory bestowed upon him as a gift of grace (*farr-e Izadi*; see [FARR](#)), and the love of homeland was seen as the love of the kingdom of Iran. The well-known slogan of “God, Shah, Homeland” (*ḵodā, šāh,*



*mihan*), which was adopted by the Pahlavi dynasty as an expression of the Iranians' loyalty to the shah and his kingdom, did not leave much room for the concept of the "sovereignty of the nation." Such a notion of sovereignty could not be reconciled, furthermore, with the basic principle of the Constitutional Revolution which declared: "Kingship is a gift that with divine will is bestowed upon the person of the king by the nation" (article thirty-five: *Salṭanat wadi'aist ke be muhebat-e elāhi az ṭaraf-e mellat be šakṣ-e pādšāh mofawwāz šodeh*).

The Pahlavi era saw not only the emergence and growth of a nation-state with a clear national policy, but also the rise of a national consciousness that attempted to promote a feeling of belonging to a modern nation with a glorious history spanning more than 25 centuries. This was aided by a vigorous dissemination of the idea of "Iran" as a part of a broad campaign to raise literacy levels, the rapid growth of urbanization and communications, the emergence of a middle class and an educated urban group, and the formation of a national market.

History and language were two important bases for the formation of the new "state nationalism" under the Pahlavis. The historical agenda included an emphasis on the Achaemenid era (as discussed above) and the encouragement of archeological excavations by American and European archeologists. The foundation of an archeological museum in Tehran (*Muza-ye Irān-e bāstān*), construction of public edifices with Achaemenid motifs (see [ARCHITECTURE vi. REZĀ SHAH PERIOD](#)), and the foundation of the National Monuments Council of Iran ([ANJOMAN-E ĀTĀR-E MELLI](#)) were part of these efforts (see Meskoob, 1994).

Furthermore, a nationalist current in Persian music was encouraged in this period. The main figures in this movement were 'Ali-Naqi Waziri and Sayyed Jawād Badi'zāda. Waziri composed a number of marches to mobilize the younger generation to serve the nation. His "Toward the Throne" (*Besu-ye tak̄t*) was composed during the coronation of Reza Shah (see *Kāleqi*, II, pp. 103-7, 222-23). Badi'zāda, a popular vocalist and prolific singer and composer, wrote national hymns glorifying Iran's past and present. Recorded in Berlin, these hymns were widely disseminated among the growing middle classes, who had access to "His Master's Voice" gramophones. He was a genuine romantic nationalist with records whose motifs included glorifying the Persian flag, calling Iran the country of Darius (*Irān ey kešvar-e Dāryuš*), praising the unveiling of women, and celebrating the completion of the Iranian trans-



national railway system, and the national anthem (see Badi'zāda, pp. sizdah, 126-27, 154, 221). Later, during the occupation of Iran by allied forces, in the early and mid-1940s, Gol-golāb (q.v.) wrote two national songs, with music composed by Ruḥ-Allāh Kāleqi: “Āḍarābādegān,” during the Azarbaijan secessionist movement of 1945-46 and “Ey Irān” (O Iran); the latter has achieved great popularity among Iranians of different backgrounds and political persuasions.

The state language policy sought to purge Arabic and other “foreign” words from Persian. The idea of purification of Persian from Arabic had been started in the latter half of the 19th century by a small group of romantic nationalist intellectuals (see above). The first systematic attempt to find Persian words for new technical terms, but with no intention for purification of Persian, took place on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution and involved the formation of a forum, “The Academic Assembly” (Majles-e ākādemi), that met on a monthly basis in 1903 (Āryanpur, III, p. 16). Several other short-lived organizations, formed during the period 1924-35, continued the search for Persian words, particularly in new military and technical arenas. This led to many imprecise coinages and to heated arguments for and against the purification movement. These attempts gathered momentum when Reza Shah visited Turkey in 1934, where he learned of Kemal Atatürk’s promotion of a similar project (for a comparison of language reform in Turkey and Iran, see Perry, 1985, pp. 295-311). It was under these circumstances that the Iranian Academy of Language (Farhangestān-e Zabān-e Irān; q.v.), was established in 1935 on the initiative of prime minister M.-‘A. Foruḡi (q.v.); it aimed at replacing Arabic words with carefully chosen Persian equivalents (see Foruḡi, “My Message to the Academy” [*Payām-e man be Farhangestān*]; and Ḥ. Taqizādeh, “The National Literary Movement” [*Nahzat-e melli-e adabi*]). During its six years of activity until 1941, the first Farhangestān adopted over 3,500 words, including place-names (see Bayāt). Following a long dormant phase which began with Reza Shah’s abdication in 1941, the Academy of Languages was reactivated in 1970 with Šādeq Kiā, as its president. A disciple of Dabiḥ-Allāh Behruz, Kiā was an ardent advocate of the purification of Persian words from Arabic. By the 1979 Revolution, the second Farhangestān had collected and approved Persian equivalents for 1,470 technical terms and loanwords from Arabic and European languages (see [FARHANGESTĀN](#)).

*The politics of Iranian identity.* Drawn to different ideological agendas for reconstructing modern Iran, the Persian intelligentsia has been divided among



a number of contesting groups since the middle of the 20th century. The main controversy derived from two fundamental objectives of the Constitutional Revolution: the foundation of a nation-state and the development of a civil society that can transform people from subjects (*ra'āyā*) to citizens with the right to participate in national affairs. The Pahlavi state focused on the former at the expense of the latter. The Pahlavi shahs believed that the country's modernization would pave the way for the creation of a civil society. A large group of intelligentsia, too, came to adopt the idea of 25 centuries of Persian empire as the foundation of Iranian national identity. Two prominent examples in the early period, were members of the Radical Party (Ḥezb-e Rādikāl), which was founded by 'Ali-Akbar Dāvar (q.v.), who was an architect of the formation of the Pahlavi state and modernization of the country, and a group of Western-educated Iranians who formed the Iran Javān Club (q.v.) under the leadership of 'Ali-Akbar Siāsi. A group of Western-educated technocrats who were also dedicated to the cause of the progress and prosperity of Iran became involved in the drive towards rapid economic growth and modernization of the country during the 1960s, with the Plan Organization, Central Bank, and Ministry of Economy as their base of activities (see 'Ālikāni, 2002, pp. 73-74). However, the main organs of propaganda advocating "Achaemenid nationalism," were the state-sponsored political parties, Melliyun, Irān-e Novin, Mardom, and Rastākiz, all formed in the period from mid-1950s to mid-1970s (for the positive nationalism of the shah, see Cottam, pp. 286-311).

A second group of intelligentsia envisioned the development of a civil society as a prerequisite to national formation; they underscored liberal nationalist ideas and as such were identified with popular nationalism. The main proponents of this mode of national identity in the mid-20th century included the National Front (Jebha-ye melli), a loose coalition of various organizations (under the leadership of Mohammad Moṣaddeq) with different persuasions from the right to the left of the political spectrum (see Cottam, pp. 243-85).

The third group, challenging the state-sponsored notion of national identity included the supporters of leftist ideologies who championed the cause of Iranian peoples. These groups often tend to shift the question of Iranian collective identity from its 'national' perspective to its component peoples; they speak not of Iranian nation but of Iranian peoples (*kaḷqhā-ye Irān*) who are made up of different nationalities. To them, Iran is a multi-national country where, by definition, the right of ethnic minorities to self-rule should



be recognized. The leftist view was influenced by the establishment of the Union of Soviet Republics and shaped by the collective identities of the peoples of the southern republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia in the period from the early 1920s to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. While the internal policy of the Soviet Union consistently suppressed national sentiments in its socialist republics, its propaganda machine encouraged separatist movements in other countries (see Connor, 1984). A manifestation of this policy in practice was the formation of the republics of Azarbaijan and Kurdistan with the help of Red Army in 1945-46 (see Cottam, pp. 65-74, 118-33; for an analytical survey of various political movements with national aspirations among Kurdish, Ađari, and Baluchi peoples, see Ahmadi, 2000; see further [IRAN v. PEOPLES OF IRAN \(1\); IDENTITY V. IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD](#) in Supplement online forthcoming).

The fourth notion of Iranian national identity is a religious one. Ayatollah Mortazā Moṭahhari, ‘Ali Šari‘ati, and Mehdi Bāzargān were among the main proponents of the Iranian religio-national identity. For Moṭahhari a moderate and peaceful nationalism leading to cooperation and social ties among people is compatible with the Iranian-Islamic national identity (Moṭahhari, pp. 62-67). Šari‘ati defines nation and nationality in relation to culture and, therefore, sees a close relationship between these terms and religion. Following this line, it is maintained that during the last 14 centuries the two histories of Islam and Iran have become so intermingled that it is impossible to search for Iranian identity without Islam or for Islamic identity without a strong Iranian presence within it. In Šari‘ati’s view, these two elements of *Irān-e Eslāmi* constitute Iranian identity. He believes cultural and national alienation can only be overcome by relying on the Iranian nation while supporting its Shi‘ite culture (Šari‘ati, pp. 72-73). Bāzargān, in his talk during the critical transitional moment between the fall of the shah and the rise of the Islamic Republic, notes that “to oppose Islam to Iranian nationalism is tantamount to destroying ourselves. To deny Iranian identity and consider nationalism irreligious is part and parcel of the anti-Iranian movement and is the work of the anti-revolutionaries” (Bāzargān, cited by Maḥmud Afšār, 1959, p. 655; for detail, see Chehabi, 1990).

The findings of a recent cross-cultural survey comparing Iran, Egypt, and Jordan, which was carried out in 2000-01, may be relevant to the question of the relationship between nationality and religiosity. The survey showed a lower level of religiosity among Iranian respondents compared to their



Egyptian and Jordanian counterpoints, but a much higher level of national sentiment. While in Jordan and Egypt only 14 percent and 10 percent of the respondents, respectively, indicated that they are “Jordanian” or “Egyptian” above all,” 34 percent of Iranians identified themselves as “Iranian above all” (see M. Moaddel and T. Azadarmaki, p. 302).

## CONCLUSION

In the Iran of the late 20th century, similar to many other societies, ethno-linguistic affiliations and provincial and tribal ties, often compete with national identity. Yet, in spite of these multiple identities, a deeply rooted cultural awareness and a historical consciousness of continuity in a long and distinctive history of the country have served as a strong cohesive force to help overcome various divisive currents. The findings of a national survey, conducted in provincial capitals of 28 provinces in 2001, shows people’s strong ties to their “Iranian” identity. In answering the question, “to what extent are you proud of being an Iranian?” 68 percent of respondents indicated that they highly value their Iranian identity, including 35 percent who answered “fully” (*kāmelan*) and 33 percent who answered “very high” (*keyli ziād*). Furthermore, 27 percent of respondents valued their Iranian identity moderately to highly, with 19 percent at the higher level (*ziād*), and 8 percent at the medium level (*motewasset*). The lower levels accounted for only 5 percent of respondents. When the sample was divided according to the educational level of respondents, those with lower levels of education showed the higher levels of feeling of national identity: 92 percent of those with no education or with primary education indicated greater feeling of national identity, compared to 86 percent of those with secondary education and 80 percent of those with higher education (Wezārat-e eršād-e Eslāmi, pp. 249-50).

Finally, a conscious belief in “Iran’s cultural distinctiveness” served as the foundation and common denominator of Iranian identity and the binding force among Iranians for centuries, with Persian literature, and more specifically, Persian poetry, as its core element. Furthermore, with a strong tradition of oral literature, particularly poetry, the idea of “Iran” and its elements in Persian cultural heritage have been widely disseminated through *naqqāli* and *Šāh-nāma k̄wāni*, to the masses in urban, rural, and tribal areas. There are many illiterate people who know verses from the *Divāns* of Hafez and Sa’di and the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi by heart and often refer to them in



their daily social discourse.

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