



ISFAHAN III. POPULATION (1) THE QAJAR PERIOD

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iii. Population

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Local official information for Isfahan's population was generally inaccessible, with Europeans and Persians alike complaining about the lack of reliable data (Morier, p. 110). Population figures for the Qajar period thus diverge drastically and are largely based on conjecture by European diplomats. Numbers were largely based on auxiliary methods, such as the rough number of houses multiplied by an average number of residents per household, estimates of the city's daily bread consumption, or even the number of slaughtered sheep. Although taxes were based on domestic property, procuring accurate figures remained difficult, even with local knowledge and information (for a discussion of the method of population estimates in the Qajar period see Sa'dvandiān, pp. 158-61).

Moḥammad-Mahdi Arbāb, a native of Isfahan, maintained that, at the time of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah's accession in 1848, there were 200,000 city inhabitants, with that number decreasing to about 80,000 for a period before growing again to nearly 120,000 during the governorship of Z̄ell-al-Solṭān (Moḥammad-Mahdi, pp. 281-82). He evidently relied on European accounts that drew



similar conclusions, with a population much larger at the beginning than towards the end of the century. The figure of 200,000 seems to stem from Thomas Herbert's 1620 account (p. 126). In 1785 Louis Ferrières-Sauveboeuf gave an estimate of 300,000 inhabitants; in 1810 John Malcolm suggested 200,000, a number repeated by most later travelers, who relied (without reference) on his authority. In 1809 James Morier assessed the population at an inflated 400,000, but revised this figure to 60,000 in 1811 (Morier, p. 110). The same year William Ouseley, still relying on Malcolm's and Morier's earlier figures, estimated some 200,000 inhabitants (cited in Curzon, II, p. 43).

A British appraisal of Persia's population, based on 1867-68 state revenue records, estimated Isfahan's inhabitants at only 60,000 (Report on Revenues and Population; Thomson, January-June 1869; FO 248/244). In 1875 Arthur Arnold noted the general estimate to be about 90,000, but deemed realistic only half this figure. In the early 1880s Ernst Höltzer, living in Julfa (q.v., Jolfā), estimated the population at 90,000 ("Beschreibung" Folder 1, p. 9). In 1891 Curzon, using information from the British agents, put the number at around 70-80,000 (Curzon, II, p. 43). In 1911 another British survey reported 80,000 inhabitants, including Julfa and the adjacent villages, with 74,000 Muslims, 4,000 Jews, about 1,500 Armenians, about 35 Zoroastrians, 55 British and British Indian subjects, and 60 Europeans of other nationalities (Isfahan News, no. 43, 28 November 1911; FO 248/1029).

A traditional government census of 1287/1870, taken just before the 1871 famine, probably provides the most reliable figures, which counted 25 urban quarters (*ma-ḥallas*) with 9,176 households (*boyutāt*) and 76,088 inhabitants. The census also included gender and major upper and middle status groups in the city, as shown in [TABLE 1](#).

Population figures for minorities (Jews and Armenians) are similarly vacillating. In 1828 David d'Beth Hillel estimated the number Jewish families at about 300, while in 1868 a British estimate put the figure at 1,500. The 1870 government census included 1,935 Jews (including 1,027 men with 587 adults and 440 boys, and 908 women including 577 adults and 331 girls) living in 180 houses. Various counts through the 1880s stated about 3,000, while in 1907 the Anglicans counted 6,000 souls. Again, later British counts of 1911 gave estimates of 4,000 (Hillel, p. 109; Benjamin, pp. 183-86; Höltzer, "Beschreibung," Folder 1, p. 9; Garland, pp. 14-16; Sanderson to Kennedy; no. 113, 16 September 1889, FO 248/479).



The above census of 1870 put Julfa's mostly Armenian population at 1,517. An 1860 count reckoned 2,586 inhabitants, 1,204 men and 1,382 women in 371 households. European counts in the early 1880s claimed about 2,658, 1,223 men and 1,435 women in 380 houses, which probably also included non-Armenians. A British poll about three decades later mentioned only 1,500 inhabitants, with further Armenian communities in the villages of Čahār Mahāl and Isfahan, counting about 2,100 souls in 390 families (Thomson, Report; 1868; FO 248/244; Ghougassian, p. 160; Der Huhāniān, p. 611).

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