Published: December 15, 2007
Last Updated: January 31, 2017

ISFAHAN XV. EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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(1) Education

Foreign schools. The presence of European educators in Isfahan dates as far back as the reign of Shah Abbas I, when the Carmelites (q.v.) were permitted to open a school for the education of the children of foreign residents in the city (Pietro Della Valle [q.v.] apud Falsafi, III, pp. 68-72). Not until the mid-19th century, however, did Christian missionaries resume their activities in the city. The schools opened in Isfahan by the French Catholics and British Anglicans were often in stiff competition with each other.

French schools. Educational activities by the French began in Qajar Persia through the efforts of a devout Roman Catholic layman, Eugène Boré (1809-78). He successfully established a school in Tabriz in 1839, in competition with the

American Protestant missionaries who had already established themselves in northwestern Persia. Having obtained permission to open schools in Persia on the strength of an edict issued in April 1840 by Moḥammad Shah Qajar, Boré opened a school in Isfahan in the same year. To compete with the American missionaries in attracting native students, Boré excluded religious instruction in his school; the four-year curriculum consisted of French, Persian, arithmetic, geography, and philosophy. Of the total of 31 students enrolled in the Isfahan school, five were Muslims and the rest Armenians. Notwithstanding the good reputation Boré had gained and his insistence on a secular curriculum, he encountered severe opposition from the Armenian Church as well as from the ulema, and he was eventually forced to close the school and leave the town. Nevertheless Boré persuaded the French Lazarist Catholics to come to Isfahan (*Yadgār* 3/6-7, 1947, pp. 60-66 Ringer, pp. 113-21; Nāṭeq, pp. 160-63; Hāj Sayyāh, p. 60; CHRISTIANITY viii. CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN PERSIA).

The Lazarists established themselves in Isfahan in the early 1860s. With the support of the prince-governor Masʿud Mirzā Ẓell-al-Solṭān, they founded in 1875 schools for both boys and girls and an infirmary (Nāṭeq, pp. 182, 191-92). These appear to be the predecessors of the boys school L'Etoile du Matin (Setāra-ye ṣobḥ; opened in 1910 by Father Dimuth) and the girls school Rudāba (from 1904), both closing down completely shortly after the start of World War I (Qafāri, p. 155; apud Qāsemi, pp. 533-34). These schools were reopened later, offering a curriculum in both French and Persian. L'Etoile du Matin was an elementary boarding school for boys with about 100 students, and Rudāba was a twelve-grade school for girls, appended by a unisex kindergarten (ʿĀbedi, p. 224; FRANCE xv. FRENCH SCHOOLS IN PERSIA). They failed to survive the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Aside from the Lazarists' activities, a Francophone Jewish School was founded in Isfahan by Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1901. The number of male students, initially 220, grew to 400 in three years, and during the same period 270 girls were studying in a separate school (FRANCE xv. FRENCH SCHOOLS IN PERSIA). The curriculum for boys included Hebrew, religion, French language and literature, history, physical and natural sciences, mathematics, and Persian, while for girls the emphasis was placed on learning about personal hygiene and home making skills. The Alliance encountered opposition from the local rabbis whose role in education had been undermined by the modern schools. To keep a balance, the teaching of religion was entrusted to rabbis

(Ringer, pp. 135, 36). Later on, schools run by the ORT and Otser ha-Torah were opened. In 1961, 150 pupils attended Jewish high schools and 897 attended elementary school; other Jewish children attended non-Jewish schools, while there were about 50 Jews at the University of Isfahan (“Isfahan,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* IX, Jerusalem, 1971, pp. 78-79; ʿĀbedi, p. 220).

British schools. The Church Missionary Society of London (CMS), the most active of all British Anglican missionaries across the Middle East, administered the most successful foreign schools during its presence of more than a century in Isfahan. Competing with their French Catholic and Armenian Orthodox counterparts, the British Anglicans became a close ally of the American Protestant missionaries. An agreement between the CMS and the American Presbyterian mission in 1895 divided the Persian territory into southern and northern halves, preserved for the British and American missionary activities, respectively. Isfahan, though in the center, fell under the influence of the British (Wright, pp. 118-19; Borumand, 2002, pp. 143-45; White, 1996).

The pursuit of the CMS in Isfahan began in the Armenian quarter of New Julfa in 1862 through the efforts of Reverend Robert Bruce and his wife. On behalf of CMS, he took over the Armenian George Joseph school in Julfa, which absorbed, a year later, another Armenian school named Batavian. Despite the ongoing dispute between the CMS, the Armenian Church and the ulama, by 1875 the CMS school had 135 students of a variety of backgrounds, including Catholics, Armenians and as many as thirty Muslim boys. The prince-governor Ẓell-al-Solṭān lent the school official protection against possible provocations from the clergy and even ordered some of his courtiers to enroll their sons there. A decade later, the Society’s schools for boys and girls altogether had three hundred students. As the number of the missionaries in Isfahan rose to seventeen by the mid-1890s, more schools were established by the Society in Julfa as well as in Jubāra, the city’s Jewish quarter (Ringer, pp. 126-27; Wright, pp. 118-19; GREAT BRITAIN xv. BRITISH SCHOOLS IN PERSIA).

After a period of inactivity during World War I, the Society resumed its activity in 1920, when Bishop William Jameson Thompson reopened the Stewart Memorial College with 27 students in Isfahan with boarding option for nonresident students. It soon gained a good reputation and the enrollment grew steadily. Its faculty rose to some 30 members, 20 of them British. The staff taught some 150 students using a curriculum based on the British secondary school system. The British Oil Company and British Royal Bank offered scholarships to those students who agreed to join the Oil Company at

the end of the eighth grade. In order to compete with their European counterparts, including the French schools, the college arranged a contract with London University to accept Persian students upon finishing the twelfth grade as MA prospects (Sayfpur, p. 335). The College placed a strong emphasis on physical education, and annual soccer games with the American College of Tehran were held alternately in each town (Sayfpur, p. 332). The CMS also sponsored the Stileman Memorial College for girls in Isfahan; it became Behešt-āyin high school after the nationalization of foreign schools.

Following the governmental decree in 1939 to close foreign schools and to purchase their properties, the Stewart Memorial College was handed over in July 1940 to the government and placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. It eventually became a somewhat mediocre public high school called Adab. The Church Missionary Society itself survived by continuing with its charitable institutions, including a major hospital. Many local and national leaders in various positions were educated in Isfahan College (Sayfpur, pp. 372-77, 589, 622; Thompson, pp. 38-39; Dehqāni-Tafti; cf. Mināsiān; Waterfield, 1973).

Other foreign schools in Isfahan included a finance school (Madrasa-ye māliya) founded in 1912 by the local Belgian finance advisor. It was later renamed Melliya, and eventually Saʿdi public high school (Anṣāri, p. 334; but cf. Sayfpur, pp. 840-41). The joint Perso-German secondary school *Deutsch-Persische Gewerbeschule* (Madrasa-ye ṣanʿati-e Irān o Ālmān) was founded in Isfahan in 1925, offering a combination of science-oriented secondary education, with German as the first foreign language, and technical apprenticeship in several professions. Several years later, the German pastor Ernst J. Christoffel opened a home for the blind in Isfahan. After a period of inactivity during and after World War II, the school resumed its activity in 1955 and eventually joined the Episcopal Church of Persia in 1972 (GERMANY ix. GERMANS IN PERSIA). It was taken over by the Government after the Islamic Revolution.

Educational reforms. Apart from the foreign schools, which involved no more than a tiny fraction of Isfahani children, the educational system of the city remained as a whole under the control of the Shiʿite clergy attached to the traditional curricula. The measures taken during the later Qajar period to introduce modern schools and training facilities, including the establishment of a Ministry of Education in 1910, had little impact on Isfahan. It was not until the rise of Reza Shah that drastic reforms of the educational institutions took

place. In 1921 the High Council of Education was created to carry out the necessary reforms, based mainly on the French system. In the same year the first modern secondary school in Isfahan was founded by the Qajar prince Ṣārem-al-Dawla. Ten students graduated from it in 1925. Among its faculty were such eminent scholars as Jalāl-al-Din Homāʾi and Aḥmad Ārām. Several more high schools appeared in the Reza Shah period, including two for girls. In the 1930s the government integrated and centralized the educational system and established a national, tuition-free modern school system. These reforms were most effective in loosening and gradually removing the clerical grip on the educational system and promoting secularism, but they also ended the hitherto existing diversity provided by foreign and minority schools (see BRITISH SCHOOLS above; cf. Chaqueri, ed., p. 391). By 1937 the number of primary schools in the city of Isfahan had reached 19 for boys and 12 for girls (Imāniya, pp. 202-12; Anṣāri, pp. 331-36). The state also founded, with German assistance, a technical-vocational institute in 1936 (cf. GERMANY ix. GERMANS IN PERSIA), where young artisans were trained in the areas of metalwork, carpentry, and painting, among others. Three years later it was split into two institutes: Industrial (Honarestān-e sÂanʿati) and Fine arts (Honarhā-ye zibā); the latter was aimed at protecting and revitalizing native industries and crafts (ʿĀbedi, pp. 227-30) and achieved some success in its mission over the years.

In the following decades the Isfahan saw the expansion of the educational system as a result of the allocation of human resources to education. The enrollment in all levels grew substantially and women's access to education expanded (Table 1). The percentage of relevant age groups enrolled in primary and secondary schools rose from 12.9 in 1966 to 22.3 in 1986 (*Sāl-nāma*, 1972, pp. 114, 124; 1988, pp. 106-8; *SAOE*, 2002, Table 15.2). The drop in enrollment by the turn of the century is apparently due to the drop in the demography of school-attending age group, a consequence of the deceleration of population growth. The adult-literacy program, introduced first in 1936 (Banani, p. 105), grew slowly until the early 1960s, when the establishment of a literary corps in rural areas proved effective in reducing illiteracy.

Table 2 shows the literacy rates as percentages of the age group 6 and older; it also bears witness to the gradual tapering of the gender gap. Official statistics claim the literacy rate for the age group 6-39 to have approached 98 percent in 2002 (*Gozāreš*, 2002, p. 263).

Higher education. The Junior College of Medicine and Public Health (Āmuzešgāh-e ʿāli-e behdāri) was opened in 1946 (ʿĀbedi, p. 232) and later

expanded its program and was integrated into the University of Isfahan in 1950 as College of Medicine (Dāneškada-ye Pezeški). The University expanded to include schools of pharmacy (1954), literature and the humanities (1958), and sciences (1964). It grew rapidly in the 1970s to a full-grown university with an enrolment of 8,000 in the early 1980s. The university embraces seven faculties with thirty departments as well as an evening school. It is located in a vast campus of 4.5 km2 in Hazārjarib at the foot of the Kuh-e Ṣofa.

The other major institute of higher education in the city is the Āryāmehr University of Technology (now Dānešgāh-e Ṣanʿati-e Eṣfahān), founded in the 1970s on a secluded piedmont west of the town (Amin). Its 3,000 students in the early 1980s grew threefold by the mid-1990s (*Gozāreš*, 1995, p. 86). Moreover, a teacher's college was opened in 1965, followed by several higher vocational schools both by the state (nursing, accounting, horticulture, food hygiene) and by private investors: Madrasa-ye ʿāli-e Kuroš-e kabir (from 1972) with about one thousand students, granting associate degree in accounting, statistics, surveying, etc. (*Iran*, p. 102; Anṣāri, pp. 357-63; *Āmār-nāma*, 1977, pp. 20-21).

The post-revolutionary decades saw a boom in higher education, mostly due to the high rate of unemployment, similar in this respect to other developing nations experiencing population explosion. Branches of the semi-private Islamic Open University (Dānešgāh-e Āzād-e Eslāmi; see EDUCATION xvii) appeared throughout the province, in Nāʾin, Dehāqān (near Šahreżā), Najafābād, Mobāraka, Falāvarjān, Ḵomeynišahr (formerly Sedeh), Ḵᵛorāsgān, and the Majlesi township near Isfahan. In the academic year 2001-02, the total enrollment in the open universities of the province was 60,000, compared with the 67,500 students who enrolled at the higher institutions under the jurisdiction of the ministry of higher education. The respective figures for the next academic year were 66,500 and 72,600, showing an enormous growth, if the data is to be trusted, with females constituting half of the students (*Gozāreš*, 1995, pp. 86-94; *Gozāreš*, 2002, pp. 279-87; Bank Markazi, pp. 150, 157).

(2) Cultural Affairs

Isfahan is distinguished among Persian cities not only for its size, centrality, position in a riverain plain, and numerous historical monuments, but also for the idiosyncratic characteristic of its inhabitant. Their Persian accent is

generally perceived as a provincial accent *par excellence*, and their characteristics: wittiness, thriftiness, and industry, attested also in historical sources (Jamālzāda, 1974; Borjian, 1993), are often cited in popular media and jokes. The objectivity of these stereotypes, however, has been questioned by some authors (e.g., Mir-ʿAlāʾi). Indeed, the findings of a national survey, conducted in provincial capitals of 28 provinces in 2001 (Wezārat-e ershād) shows no meaningful pattern that would distinguish values and orientations attested by Isfahanis from those of the inhabitants of other Persian cities of comparable size and status. The private and public life in Isfahan is portrayed by two famous writers from the region, Moḥammad-ʿAli Jamalzāda (q.v.) in *Sar o tah yak karbās yā Esfahān-nāma*, in a traditional setting, and Hušang Golširi (q.v.) in his last novel *Jenn-nāma*.

The first periodical in Isfahan was the official newspaper *Farhang* (q.v.; 1879-90), founded on orders from the Qajar prince-governor Ẓell-al-Solṭān. It was followed by about 39 serial titles initiated during the Qajar period; 27 more during the Reza Shah's reign; and 87 more from 1941-53, of which some 80 percent belonged to the four concluding years alone. No new newspaper was initiated in the ensuing decades. In spite of the impressive quantity, the majority of these newspapers exhibited a lack of professional skills and were a one-man enterprise, which goes some way to explain their short span of publication, their irregular daily appearance, and their inability to maintain even a weekly run. In the mid-1970s there were only four newspapers: *Rāh-e nejāt*, *Mojāhed*, *Eṣfahān*, and *Awliāʾ*, the most enduring and consistent of which were *Eṣfahān*, published from 1942-77 by the noted journalist and scholar Amirqoli Amini, and *Awliāʾ*, run by the Awliāʾ family since 1950. None of these papers, however, could compete with those from the capital, save for their local official advertisements and public statements. Professional journalism never took roots in Isfahan (ʿĀbedi, pp. 234-38; Amini; Anṣāri, pp. 338-47; cf. Moḥammadi, 2003).

More notable were perhaps the literary reviews that have flourished in Isfahan sporadically since the Constitutional Revolution. In the active period of 1933-35 the second series of *Dāneškada-ye Eṣfahān* (q.v.) was published by the poet and calligrapher Mirzā ʿAbbās Khan Dehkordi Šeydā, and the magazine *Bāḵtar* (q.v.) published by the influential Sayfpur Fāṭemi family; the editorship of the latter was entrusted to Amirqoli Amini, who then owned the newspaper *Aḵgar*. These periodicals enjoyed the literary and scholarly advice of Moḥammad-Taqi Bahār (q.v.), who was then living in internal exile in

Isfahan (Sayfpur, pp. 771-74). Moḥammad Ṣadr-Hāšemi, an eminent local educator and historian, published *Čehelsotun* in the early 1950s. Notwithstanding these figures, for most of the 20th century Isfahan suffered a brain drain in favor of the capital city of Tehran, yet remained a hub of traditional Persian literature centered around the literary societies such as Ḥaqāyeq, Adib-e Farahmand, Šeydā, Kamāl Esmāʿil, Ṣāʾeb, Saʿdi, Sarā-ye soḵanvarān (sponsoring the literary review *Nāma-ye soḵanvarān-e Sepāhān*), and many less-recognized circles that often met in the residences of their founders and sponsors. Linked with these circles were scores of poets of various genres, predominantly traditional and, more exclusively, satirists and humorists (cf. Anṣāri, pp. 368-86), with the poet Mokrem as a famous figure.

A modernist circle was formed in the 1960s and published *Jong-e Eṣfahān*, eleven issues of which appeared from 1965-81 (Ḥoquqi, p. 439). Among the members of the circle were such prominent writers, poets, and translators as Hušang Golširi Moḥammad Ḥoquqi, Abu'l-Ḥasan Najafi, Żiāʾ Mowaḥḥed, Aḥmad Mirʿalāʾi, Moḥammad Kalbāsi, Aḥmad Golširi, Moḥammad-Reżā Qānunparvar, Jalil Dustḵᵛāh, Moḥammad-Raḥim Oḵowwat, and Majid Naficy. The circle re-emerged in the late 1980s with the quarterly *Zendarud*.

On the religious side there were Hājia Ḵānom Noṣrat-Bēgom Amin, a leading female *mojtahed* who wrote a fifteen-volume study of the Qurʾān, and equally prolific Sayyed Moṣleḥ-al-Din Mahdawi with mastery in the genre of necrology (*taḏkerat al-qobur* "account of the graveyards").

Isfahan is also known as a center of traditional artists. It has its own school of Persian classical music and its contemporary figures have been the vocalists Ḥosayn Ṭāherzāda and Jalāl Tāj and instrumentalists ʿAli-Akbar Šeydā, Jalil Šahnāz and Ḥasan Kasāʾi. Of many painters of the town, Maḥmud Farščiān has gained international recognition owing to his distinguished style. A whole new generation of miniaturists, calligraphers, tile makers, and other visual artists emerged during the restoration of historical monuments and, as the city grew into a center of tourist attraction, handicrafts flourished. Worth mentioning is also the performing arts, most notably the theatrical comic group led by and named after Arḥām-e Ṣadr (Kušān et al., passim).

The Armenian cultural contribution to the city has been demographically disproportional to this small community of a few thousand. The Vank museum and research library were the only ones of their kind in Isfahan until recent past. Several Armenian residents of the town have gained prominence in

painting, music, and cinema. The department of Armenian language and literature at the University of Isfahan, founded by the Gulbenkian Foundation in 1974, is the only center of Armenian studies in the country (Mināsiān, pp. 23-28; Lāzāriān, passim; see JULFA).

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