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KERMAN XIV. JEWISH COMMUNITY OF KERMAN CITY

KERMAN

xiv. Jewish Community of Kerman City

References to the Sasanian-period town of Kerman are sparse (see KERMAN ii. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY). But some presence of Jewish and Nestorian Christian communities as an economic force there, as well as at Hormuz (the old port of Kerman province), seems likely, given the eastward range of these minorities. For the medieval period, Jewish inscriptions and literature as far as Afghanistan and Central Asia attest to a wide dispersal of communities (see Paul; Netzer; Lazard, 1968, p. 93, gives a comparative chronology of eastern and western source documents). By the end of the 16th century, during the Safavid period (1501-1722), the growing corpus of European travel literature describes observations of, and interactions with, local Jews. In the region of Kerman, Pedro Teixeira (d. 1641) lived in Hormuz in the 1590s, and he noted in the town “about a hundred and fifty houses of Jews” (Sinclair, tr., p. 168; on Teixeira’s stay, see Garcia, p. 206).

The presence of Jews in the Safavid province of Kerman is also alluded to in the reign of Shah ʿAbbās II (r. 1052-77/1642-66), when a forced conversion of the Jews of the kingdom was attempted (see CONVERSION iv). The events in 1657 at Isfahan are described in detail by the Armenian priest Aṙakʿel of

Tabriz (d. 1670; Bournoutian, tr., pp. 347-61), and his narrative lists Yazd and Kerman among the areas where Jews, instead of dissimulating as Muslims, "did not accept the religion of the Persians, through bribes, flight, or openly rejecting it" (Bournoutian, tr., p. 360; Levi, III, p. 354, tr., p. 291). Not long after, in 1654, Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1605-89) returned to Persia from India, but he made no descriptions of minority communities in Hormuz or Kerman (chap. I.8, pp. 107-9; chap. V.23, pp. 755-62) as he traveled from one city to the other for the purchase of wool. He did note (p. 106) the concentration of Zoroastrians in the province, and journeying along the coast toward Hormuz in 1665, he described the predominantly Jewish population of Lār, who were noted as silk weavers (chap. V.22, p. 749; on the Jews of the Persian Gulf coast, see Fischel, pp. 371 ff.). In the later 17th century, the growing interest of the English and Dutch East India Companies in the fine down wool (see KORK) of Kerman led to establishment of Company residences in the city and the employment of Armenian and Indian traders and translators there; some local Zoroastrians were employed as wool cleaners (Matthee, pp. 353, 365-67), but it is not known if Jews participated in the wool trade in any way.

In the late 18th century, according to the account of the Jewish community of Yazd compiled by Molla Aqābābā Damāvandi a century later (see Yeroushalmi, pp. 189, 193-94), severe drought caused its members to move to Rafsanjān and Sirjān and the villages around Kerman (Levi, III, p. 522, tr., p. 383; Yeroushalmi, p. 200, n. 21). Thus the Jewish Quarter of nineteenth-century Kerman became mainly an offshoot of the community in Yazd (which itself "is said to have travelled east from Baghdád" at some time in its history; Sykes, p. 197). Not surprisingly, Gilbert Lazard (1981, p. 333) judged the Kermani Jewish dialect "almost identical with that of the Jews of Yazd" (see also Gindin, p. 236).

Following the Qajar conquest of the city in 1794 after a lengthy siege, the entire population fell victim to the wrath of Āḡā Moḥammad Khan Qājār, who punished the city for its support of the Zand dynasty (see KERMAN ii, KERMAN ix). Massacring or blinding thousands, he had pyramids of skulls erected, and had women handed over to the soldiers as slaves (Fasāʾi, I, p. 658; Waziri Kermāni, II, pp. 746-48; Sykes, II, p. 288; Levi, III, p. 495; tr., pp. 368-69). The impact on the minority communities is not known. But at his visit in 1810, during the rebuilding of the city, Henry Pottinger (1789-1856) observed that the city population still had not recovered: Zoroastrians were "a small proportion" of a maximum population of 30,000 (the latter respectable

number [cf. the same number reported for 1719 by a buyer for the Dutch: Matthee, p. 375] seemed small to him, perhaps in comparison with the 18th-century heyday of Kerman's international wool trade, on which see Matthee); and "there are neither Armenians, Hindoos, or Jews, resident in the place" (Pottinger, p. 214). He described the reviving local trade and industry, with particular attention to shawl production, but tax revenue was far below the level of the Safavid period (Pottinger, p. 215, n. †).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the populations of the minorities in Kerman may have grown and diminished depending on the state of physical, political, and economic conditions (on which, for an overview, see KERMAN ix, and Gustafson, 2014). The cities of Yazd and Kerman could serve as mutual refuges, as Yazd was for Kermani Zoroastrians, who were punished after the Afghans, whom they had assisted to occupy the city in 1719, subsequently withdrew (Krusinski, I, p. 220, and for the siege in 1722: II, p. 13; Abbott, 1851, p. 149; Matthee, pp. 375-76), and as Kerman was for Yazdi Jews under famine conditions (see above; and again ca. 1872: see below). At mid-century, Keith Abbott, British consul in Tehran, reached the city in December 1849 and noted the improving conditions for life and commerce under the governor, Ṭahmāsp-qoli (Abbott, 1851, pp. 151-52). Although Abbott habitually strove to give precise numbers and he specified 190 Zoroastrian families in the town and environs, he counted no Jews there—finding "hardly a Jew in the place" (Abbott, 1851, p. 149), as though, after Yazd, he was expecting them.

During the 1871-72 famine, Kerman Jews, perhaps still very few in number, received some new migrants from Yazd but did not receive any attention from the European Jewish relief effort (Yeroushalmi, p. 200, n. 21). By 1875, as reported by the Anglo-Jewish Association, the Jewish population of Kerman consisted of about 20 families or 120 individuals (Yeroushalmi, p. 75). Lazard's informant who stated in the 1960s that Jews had been in Kerman for one hundred years (Lazard, 1981, pp. 342-43) could be alluding to the 1870s famine migrants or, in a vague way, to the later and much larger 'second influx' (see below).

In 1878, the governor of Kerman took a census (Curzon, II, p. 244, n. 2), and in 1879, when Albert Houtum-Schindler (1881, pp. 327-28) visited the city, he recorded the results: 39,718 Muslims, 1,341 Zoroastrians (updated in 1879: 1,377 in 317 houses), 26 Indians (who lived in a caravansary), and 85 Jews (in 16 houses, in 1879). In 1884-85, Ephraim Neumark, who had visited various cities in Iran, including Kerman, reported only 30 Jews (Neumark, p. 86; Levi,

III, p. 663; tr., p. 424). For the 1890s, Percy Sykes (p. 195) averaged several estimates (of unknown source and age) and listed 70 Jews and 1,700 Zoroastrians (out of a total population of 49,120).

However, in 1903-4, the *Bulletin Annuel* of the Alliance Israélite Universelle reported that Kerman had a Jewish community of 2,000 (Tsadik, p. 9); if accurate, this count clearly represents the "second influx" (English, p. 43) of Jews in the 1890s-1900s, drawn by the town's industrial growth (see KERMAN xv. CARPET INDUSTRY). Still, Alliance Israélite did not set up any schools there, and little information concerning the community was reported by travelers who went to other Jewish communities in Iran (Landshut, p. 63).

Paul W. English (1966, p. 42), from his extensive research in Kerman province, describes the nineteenth-century Jewish quarter of Kerman city:

> The lanes of the Jewish quarter were extremely narrow, rarely more than five feet wide. The compound walls . . . were ten to twelve feet high, with jagged glass and stone set in the top to discourage entry. The entrances to the houses were guarded by massive oaken doors strengthened by metal studs. One had to stoop to enter the low portals. These details of the structure . . . were designed to prevent mounted horsemen from effectively attacking its residents. All facilities, necessary to Jewish social and religious life, were inside the quarter: baths and schools, a butcher shop, and two synagogues located at the heart of the quarter. The synagogues bore no external symbols.

In the years 1918-25, following the inception of the Zionist Organization in Iran, the Jewish community of Kerman was able to communicate its poor financial condition and legal issues to the Jewish leadership in Tehran (Minutes of the Zionist Organization: September-December 1919). The establishment of the Kerman Zionist chapter was announced in Tehran on 15 July 1920. Later records reflect internal conflicts, and an objection to the payment of membership shekels resulted in the chapter being inactivated (Minutes of the Zionist Organization, 5 June 1922). Nevertheless, there was a celebration in Kerman after the League of Nations' 24 July 1922 approval of the draft Mandate of Palestine (text in Hurewitz, II, pp. 305-9) to be exercised by Great Britain (Minutes of the Zionist Organization, 29 August 1922). The

terms of the mandate, like the provisional four-power San Remo Resolution of April 1920, affirmed the British Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917 regarding the future of Palestine. The records also report a farewell letter written to reform Rabbi Joseph Kornfeld (1876-1944), the American ambassador to Iran, upon his departure (Minutes of the Zionist Organization, 4 November 1922). For 1942, Ḥabib Levi lists the population of Kerman as 60 families, 470 individuals, who were mostly cloth merchants or haberdashers (Levi, III, p. 1025: source not stated).

By the mid-20th century, the segregation of minorities, including the Jews and Zoroastrians, began to decrease as the atmosphere of religious tolerance increased. Paul W. English (pp. 46, 49) noted that “Muslims are no longer opposed to living next to Zoroastrians or Jews, and the limitations imposed upon them have been lifted” (see also Yarshater, p. 438). In spite of this amelioration, Tehran has exerted even in distant Kerman a powerful draw on minorities, as well as on Muslims, with its opportunities for economic and social advancement. (Its power of attraction for Zoroastrians was already noticed in the nineteenth century: see Houtum-Schindler, cited in ii, above.) In addition, since 1948 Jews have had the option of emigration to Israel, as an alternative to migration to the capital city or as a further step after it.

Countrywide, the number of Jews fell from 67,800 in the 1966 census (Mauroy, p. 165) to 8,756 reported in the 2011 census (Markaz-e Āmār-e Irān, p. 19, Table 3). For Kerman province, the 1966 Jewish population is given as 496 (Mauroy, p. 400), a figure which helps chart a straight-line decline from the number 550, told in 1963 to Lazard (1981, p. 333) by his Kermani informants, to 450, told in 1968 to Ehsan Yarshater (p. 457). Since the Revolution of 1979, some of a younger generation of Jews have moved to Kerman from Isfahan and other cities in the province, but at the time of the 2006 national census, the count of Jews residing in the province was given as 75 individuals (Princeton University).

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