

The Zands in Iran

A Documentary in Print Form

A historical example of what Iran would be,
and its relations with the West and others,
when its native beliefs and values find
expression in government.

Based on reports from British and American
ambassadors, scholars and specialists on Iran
under the Zands.

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Based on prior work

A documentary arranged in print form in which diplomats, scholars, historians and other specialists, mostly lifetime scholars of Iranian history and culture, speak on the legacy of the Zand family in Iran and its continuance to the present day.

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“There are more stories told of Karim Khan’s kindness, simplicity, generosity, and sense of justice than about any other Iranian monarch. As the archetype of the good king with a genuine concern for his people and who thus gained their respect and love, he ranks with Anushirvan the Just^a, Sultan Sanjar^b, and Shah ‘Abbas^c. Where these and other rulers surpass him in military glory and international prestige, the Vakil [Advocate of the People]^d quietly retains even today an unparalleled place in his countrymen’s affection as a good man who became and remained a good monarch.” ¹

- John R. Perry
Cambridge History of Iran
1991

^b Sultan Sanjar : Ruled 1118-1153 AD

^c Shah 'Abbas : Ruled 1587-1629 AD

^d Chosen title of Karim Khan Zand, founder of Zand dynasty; he Ruled 1750-1779.



Karim Khan Zand

Sovereign of Iran 1750-79

Portrait reproduced by Sir John Malcolm, British Ambassador to Iran, in his *History of Persia*, Volume II, First Edition, 1815



LUTF ALI KHAN.

(From a picture in the Palace at Shiraz.)

(Taken from Sir Harford Jones Brydges' *Mission to Persia*.)

Lotf Aly Khan Zand

Sovereign of Iran 1789-95

Portrait reproduced by Sir Harford Jones Brydges, Envoy
Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from His Britannic
Majesty to the Court of Tehran, in the account of his Embassy
1833

"Malcolm wrote of Karim Khan that 'the Persians to this day [1815] venerate his name'. Persians to-day [1976] may hold Karim Khan in even greater esteem than in Malcolm's time but their knowledge of the particular traits of character of Karim Khan is correspondingly less."²

- Parviz Rajaby, Iranian sociologist and historian. Author, "Karim Khan Zand and His Age", 1976

Introduction : Monarchic Rule with Democratic Values

The institutions, mechanisms and societal tradition of democracy as known in the West have not developed in Iran. But certain Iranian governments that have enjoyed popularity may be representative of what a democracy would be. The Zands (ca. 1750-95 AD) were one such government in modern history. They embodied the beliefs, values and culture of the Iranian people, and enacted it in government. Thus their rule in many respects represents what Iran would be under a democracy. Upon rise to power, they chose to have the title *Advocate of the People*, rather than *Shah*. In practice due to historical traditions and expectations of the population the Zands were invested with and exercised sovereignty in the land and were seen as kings. But under their rule the institutions of government, such as the military and the treasury, came closest to resemble what they would be under a democracy with checks and balances.

Twice in the twentieth century (1953 and 1911) Iran's democratic government was overthrown by outside powers. In the West and other parts of the world democratic institutions have been in existence and have undergone a course of evolution over the centuries leading to their present state of maturity. As political observers and most of the general public would be aware, Iran has not had a continuous democracy. Due to the absence of such precedence, rarely have effective secular political institutions spontaneously formed as they might in the West.

The present regime came to power in opposition not only to the previous dynasty, but to the institution of monarchy itself. It set about effacing the names, institutions, monuments and legacy of previous dynasties. But they

made an exception regarding the Zands. In part this was out of a genuine desire to uphold their legacy, and in part because they were unable to do away with that legacy among the people. It was akin to proposition that was made following the Islamic revolution: In order for the Islam of the clergy to take root, the clergy sought to change the language of the country to Arabic. As observed Clements R. Markham, British historian, of Karim Khan Zand over a hundred years ago, "The memory of this great and good man is still revered by the Persians and his name is immortalized in the splendid bazaar and other buildings of Shiraz."³ And this still remains true today.

The legacy of the Zands today is based on the deeds of two of their ruling members, as noted above by Naficy, by whom the nation remembers them: Mohammed Karim Khan Zand the founder ('Karim Khan' for short), and Lotf Aly Khan Zand the last ruling prince. Others who ruled briefly in the interval, such as Mohammed Sadegh Khan, brother of Karim Khan and grandfather of Lotf Aly Khan, are less known or remembered.

Saeed Naficy, dean of historians in Iran, and sociologist of the post-Islamic era, in his introduction to the *The History of Zandieh*, 1938, writes of the history of the post-Islamic era of Iranian governments:

"Among the dynasties that have ruled Iran there have been none like the Zands who possessed chivalry, virtue, justice, ethics, kindness and were fond of their country, resentful of invaders and those appeasing them. Karim Khan Zand is one of the most beloved men of history and, besides kingship, he would be fit to serve as a model of ethics for mankind. His immediate successors, even if taken to drinking and pleasure-seeking such as Abolfath Khan, did not oppress of the people of Iran, destroy their livelihood or settlements. Loft Aly Khan is one of the dearest and most beloved martyrs of Iranian history, and even now, when one considers his life and times, the great hardships he endured, his astonishing courage, his magnanimity, both that which is evident and that which goes unseen, one is filled with sorrow and is compelled to mourn his fate in company with others."⁴

Origin of the Name Zand

After founding a dynasty, Iranian family names acquire the suffix "ieh", or "ian". Thus the Zands became known as Zandieh, but this was later often abridged to Zand for the sake of brevity. Except for the tribes, Iranians had patronymics and honorifics to indicate last name until the early 1920s. At that time by decree of the King they chose last names, to use instead of patronymics and honorifics. Many, in particular in Shiraz, the capital of the Zands, Kerman and Bam, site of Lotf Aly Khan's last stand, chose the last name Zand for themselves out of the reverence they still hold the Zand dynasty in. Lineal descendants of the Zands, however, are from the Zand clan, situated in southwestern Iran between the Lurs and the Kurds. In recent generations they moved to the principal city there, Kermanshah.

Sir John Malcolm, British Ambassador to Iran, author of *History of Persia* in two volumes, 1815, writes on the "Reign of Kerreem Khan, Zend": "He was chief of a small tribe, who, though described as a branch of that of the Lac, claimed a high rank among the native Persians."⁵ Malcolm, and before him Brydges, had learned Persian in India and been availed of Persian manuscripts which they used in composing their history. Referring to his sources, Malcolm gives the etymology of the name of the Zands:

"Some authors assert, that this tribe received the name of Zend from being charged by Zoroaster with the care of the *Zend-a-vesta*, or scripture of that prophet."⁶

In the 1920's Reza Shah decreed that all people choose family names in Iran. Until that time, except for the tribes who used clan names, people went by patronymics and honorifics. On Reza Shah's decree, many around the country and in particular Shiraz the capital of the Zands and Kerman and Bam, site of last stand of Lotf Aly Khan Zand, chose the name Zand as their surname.

How a Government Comes into Being in Iran

To govern Iran, a person must possess the aura or quality of leadership, *khvarenah*, Divine Grace of Kings, which is believed to derive ultimately from the higher being. The duty of such a leader is not so much to speak the words of God as a prophet, but to enact the will of God on Earth to bring about social justice, and to be insensitive to and largely independent of his personal interests, worldly whims and desires. This has been the principle of government, or even leadership on smaller scales, throughout history among the Iranians and is rooted in Zoroastrianism.

The invading tribes following orthodox forms of Islam as opposed to Shiism, whether Arabian, Mongol or Tartar who forcibly occupied the throne of Iran over the centuries largely lacked that quality, of *khvarenah*. They sought the power, wealth and such possibilities under tyrannical rule, but initially had no notion of responsibilities of kingship. One or two generations later, some of their descendants understood to one degree or another, the above principle, and tried to follow that rule.

Pio Filippini Ronconi, of the Oriental Institute, University of Naples, 1978, describes the *khvarenah* or Divine Grace, in Iranian government and culture, and how after the conversion of Iran to Islam it continued:

"As for the king, the actual presence of the *khvarenah* depended on his loyalty to the Essential Rule^e (*arta, asha*), and was therefore

^e The 'Essential Rule', *arta, asha*, in the holy books of pre-Islamic Iran, the Avesta, one of the main doctrines of Zoroastrianism, defined in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, and compared to Old and New Testaments:

granted in accordance with his personal worth. It was a gift that not only the king, but actually every man received from the Creator . . .

In man this khvarenah is susceptible of developing itself (for instance in the case of the common man who becomes a king), for it is continuously nourished by wisdom, energy and virtues. Its presence within man actually depends on his spiritual awareness, that is, the extent to which he is conscious of his own original 'I-ness' . . .

Originally, 'king' meant a man capable of realising, in full awareness, his own destiny by developing his inborn khvarenah . . . Thus the theory of the sacral kingship in ancient Iran appears to convey a meaning far beyond a class ideology; indeed, it points to an eschatological ideal regarding the mystical liberation of humankind as such. The Iranian people, through the tormented vicissitudes of their history, even after major changes in religion, have never lost sight of this ideal, sometimes personified as a worthy monarch or as a righteous dynasty".⁷

Richard N. Frye, Harvard University:

"In my opinion, the persistence of motifs about the founder of a dynasty in Iran can be attributed to several factors. First, the resilience of the Persians under pressure of foreign rule and mass invasion has been demonstrated time and again throughout history. Second, the tenacity of the Persians in maintaining old traditions is a feature of their history . . . Third, Iran is one of the few countries at present which has an epic tradition . . .

Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics : "In the *Avesta*, whether as an abstract or as a personified name, *Asha* is almost exclusively conceived in the moral sense, as 'righteousness,' 'holiness,' the 'justice' of both the OT and the NT . . .

The moral interest corresponds with the practical and political character of the Persians themselves; but the Zarathustrian ethic has its real foundation in the religious system of the *Avesta* . . .

It is the sacred duty of man, and constitutes his moral uprightness, to uphold the forces of good; and so we see purity, holiness, righteousness, appearing as identical conceptions, and all included under the one word *Asha*. This *Asha* is the fundamental idea of the Zarathustrian religion . . . The final aim of religion, the regeneration of the world, corresponds with this idea of righteousness".

- The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, James Hastings, editor, NY, 1961, Volume 9, under the entry "Philosophy", page 866b, and Volume 5, under the entry "Ethics and Morality", pages 513a-513b.

Finally, the figure and office of the Shahanshah throughout the history of Iran have provided a rallying point for those seeking to preserve a unity and a continuity of Iranian culture and nationhood. The King of kings is a concept peculiar to Iran. Throughout history, others who have assumed this title were copying Iran. The 'mystique' of the Shahanshah then is a potent force, as difficult to analyze as any dream of humanity, for the yardsticks of logic and sensory 'truths' cannot give us the whole story about such intangibles".⁸

Iran Under Zand Government

Under the Zands Iran experienced a return of government to one that, like its pre-Islamic governments, was based on and derived from its native values and culture. People knew that government was there to serve them. The Zands were the only dynasty of Iranian origin and culture to have ruled the country in many centuries. Since the forcible conversion of Iran to Islam the Iranian tribes and much of rural Iran in the villages have led a life largely of their own and apart from what went on in the cities, seats of government and points of concentration of wealth and power. After Islam, the cities for much of the time have been under the sway of Islamic caliphs and then Mongol and Tartar invaders, as they are today under the sway of their successors the Islamic regime.

As Emineh Pakravan, Iranian historian, writes:

“Karim Khan had not learned the art of being a good sovereign from anywhere, nor seen it in any living role-model. It was, rather, the result of his own august genius. He was the son of the chief of a barely known clan of the Lur tribe, called *Zandieh*.”⁹ . . . “Although his bones may have withered, his lasting legacy to-day is more than mere memory; the Vakil [*Advocate of the People*] continues to live, among his people.”¹⁰

The reforms that the Zands undertook were wide-ranging. They encompassed the realm of government and included the following:

Establishment of the office of *Advocate of the People*, as opposed to Shah

Establishment of order, peace and security in the country
Establishment of Social justice
Clemency for adversaries of the state and pretenders to monarchy
Instituting Religious freedom; protection of minorities
Responsibility in government
The lowest tax rates of any regime in Iran, on individuals and businesses
Re-establishment and promotion of international trade
Fostering foreign relations
Eliminating piracy and terrorism and in the Persian Gulf by Arab tribes
Actively upholding the rights of ethnic and religious minorities
Establishment of education in the country
Revival of the economy, including agriculture, crafts, commerce
Fiscal Responsibility in the state
Establishment of emergency and famine reserves
Patronage of the arts, poetry and cultural activities
Enacted happiness, by decree, as a principle of government

William S. Haas of Columbia University in 1946, sociologist & historian of Iran, trainer of US troops in WWII :

"Immediately after the death of Nader Shah, it was Karim Khan Zand, of the Zand tribe, in the southern province of Fars^f, who was victorious and ruled over Iran from 1750 to 1779. He was one of the most likeable and humane rulers who ever occupied the throne of Iran, and his memory is still cherished in the minds of the Persian people. His reign constituted a real oasis of happiness in a history rich in oppression and tribulation".¹¹

Likewise wrote Clements R. Markham, British historian, of Karim Khan Zand:

" The Wakil chose the city of Shiraz for the seat of his government. Various causes combined to induce him to make this choice, among which were the love its citizens always bore him, its great beauty, its proximity to the powerful tribes in the mountains of Luristan – the chief supporters of Karim's power".¹²

^f Karim Khan Zand, although from Luristan, chose first Shiraz, provincial capital of Fars, and then Tehran, for his capital, due to their being more central.

Karim Khan Zand: *Advocate of the People* And the Origin of the Zands

Nader Shah of Iran, known as the last great conqueror, died in 1747. When after an interregnum of a few years the Zands emerged as victors and rose to power in 1751, they chose not to be called or regarded as kings. Kingship had become equated with tyranny and despotism in that age. They appointed a prince of a former dynasty as a nominal king-figurehead. Themselves they would be called the *Advocates of the People*. In searching for appropriate titles the founder, Karim Khan Zand first picked *Regent*, and after a few variations on this theme settled on *Vakil*. Its meaning in English may be found at the confluence of *Attorney, Representative and Advocate of the People*.

The Zands came from one of the Iranian tribes, the Lak, a branch of the much larger Lur tribe. The Lak were an interface between the Lurs and the Kurds. They were Shiite like the Lurs, but their customs resembled those of the Kurds. Being taller and on average possessing a greater stature, they also physically more resembled the Kurds. Iranian tribes have traditionally been situated in the highlands of southwestern and central Iran. The Zands were Iran's first rulers of Iranian origin in many centuries. As they embodied Iran's values and culture, their government was tantamount to what a democracy would produce. Their experience represents how Iran would be under a government in which its values finally find expression, whether for Iranians themselves or the outside world. Alessandro Bausani historian of Iran, University of Rome, 1962:

"Karim Khan Zand was victorious, and in 1750 he founded the short-lived but beneficent Zand dynasty, which provided a lull in the internecine wars and a period of comparative peace and piety, fondly recalled to this day. The Zands were the first dynasty of Iranian stock to rule after an interval of nearly a thousand years of Turkish rulers. From the very first Karim Khan proclaimed himself regent . . . and never evinced any desire to assume the royal title of shah"¹³

The Zands today are remembered in part because they resemble the pre-Islamic dynasts, for they enacted in government Persian cultural values and religious beliefs. For more than seven centuries, the dynasties of Iran had been of Turkoman origin. Khanak E. Sanaty, Iranian historian of the post-Islamic era, describes:

"Karim Khan-e Zand was the first ruler of true Iranian lineage to rule the entire realm of Iran following the Buyian dynasty⁹. In the years in between the Buyieh and Zandieh dynasties, Iranian monarchs were either Mongol, of Mongolian stock, or Turkish, from Turkish tribes . . . Under Karim Khan, security and freedom reigned in Iran, and the people lived in peace and prosperity . . . With the victory of Agha Mohammad Khan in 1796, the Turkomans once again ascended to the throne in Iran, and donned the crown of this ancient land".¹⁴

Authors may sometimes use the terms *Turkish* and *Turkoman* interchangeably. *Turkoman* is distinct from *Turk* in that generally it refers to Mongols and Tatars, the later Huns. These were the roots of the Qajars (Kajars), who overthrew the Zands. In later generations the Qajars became persianized through multiple marriages to Iranians so that today their differences with the rest of the Iranians are not noticeable. Most Mongol or Tartar people for the first one or two generations of their arrival in Iran had their native culture and followed the orthodox form of Islam, Sunnism, but later became persianized and took up Shiism, so much so that they became ardent patrons of Persian literature and art forms. The term Turkoman does not mean and ought not be used to refer to the Turkish at the present, whether those of Turkey or of Iran. The Turks of Iran are in general Shiites,

have long become integrated into Iranian society so as to be regarded as Iranians and are often largely indistinguishable from the rest of Iranians.

For despots to have ruled Iran it meant to have ruled the cities, seats of government, and points of concentration of wealth. Well over 90% of the population, however, continued to live until the present time in the rural countryside. Included in that are the Iranian tribes, living in mountainous terrain. It is only relatively recently, in the past few decades, that the country has become more urbanized and over 50% of the population has moved to the cities. In a process of give and take the rural population have recently imparted some of their character to the cities while themselves benefit from the advantages of a world more modern than the one which their parents knew.

The observations of American and European historians are echoed by Iranian historians. The descendants of the Zands after the establishment of the Qajar dynasty survived in the protection of the mountains of their homeland in southwestern Iran, Luristan and Kurdistan, those in the cities having been massacred by the Qajars. With the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty (ca. 1921), some of the Zands moved from the mountain villages to cities, such as Kermanshah.

⁹ 1055 AD

Condition of Christians, Jews and Foreign Nationals

In contrast to the present, Iran under the Zands was a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society comprised of Moslem, Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian and other religious communities. This tradition of plurality goes back centuries to pre-Islamic times and to the foundation of the Iranian state, ca. 550 BC under Cyrus the Great. Under the Zands the separation of religion and state was upheld in government. In the administration of law and justice the constituents were not discriminated against or singled out based on their religion, indeed deference was shown the minorities.

By contrast in our day Iran has undergone a large exodus of members of the minorities, not to mention the largest exodus of the majority, Shiite Iranians, to occur in history. Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish Iranians whose roots go back millennia, as well as Bahais, not to mention several million Shiites, have had to leave their homeland.

Under the Zands the various religious and ethnic minorities lived in harmony and prosperity alongside and in association with the majority Islamic population and with each other. The Zands took care to actively protect minorities and foreign nationals. Many families among the minorities, in particular Christians, who had left their homes in Iran for abroad prior to the Zands assumption of power returned. Abbas Parviz, Iranian historian, 1964:

“Karim Khan was conversant with the tenets of various religions and held in honor the followers of all religions. In regard to laws and regulations governing society, he did not discriminate against but treated all equally. Where it happened in that era, that followers of a

non-Islamic minority came under the pressure of the Islamic majority, he would support and protect the minority."¹⁵

Iranian society in several respects resembled pre-Islamic Iran. Emineh Pakravan, Iranian historian, reports, 1951:

"In the age of Karim Khan there was no sign of religious fundamentalism, or mournful and sad faces. His grace extended to everyone, including foreigners and Christians."¹⁶

Reaching across ethnic lines to give people a greater sense of belonging and security was the policy of the Zands. This extended from the political and economic domains to social and family life. Jews were present at the Persian court as in pre-Islamic times, which is recounted in Esther and several other books of the Bible. Some Jews rose to prominent positions, such as Ibrahim, governor of Shiraz, appointed to that post by Lotf Aly Khan Zand's father, Jafar Khan. As with Esther the Jewish queen of ancient Persia, Karim Khan had a Jewish wife. She bore him a son, Ibrahim Khan, in line of succession to sovereignty.

Under conditions of lawlessness, thugs loyal to fundamentalist factions of Islam and their clergy, view minorities and those Moslems who are not strict observants of the religion as easy prey, and set out to commit various crimes against them ranging from theft or confiscation or destruction of property to kidnapping and dishonoring of women and even murder, under the pretense of being warranted to do so by their religion. The thugs often come from fundamentalist factions in Islam. Christians and Jewish minorities in Moslem lands throughout history have been prone to this peril. Knowing such conditions existed, the Zands took special measures to protect the weak, in particular those whom they viewed to be most at risk. Sir John Malcolm, British Ambassador, reports of the interregnum that led to the Zands rise to power, and how minorities fared under Karim Khan Zand, who protected them from "the slightest injury either to their persons or property. His conduct was the more remarkable, as they were almost all Christians".¹⁷ Malcolm describes, further, their condition after the Zands' rise to power:

"The internal commerce of Persia, as well as its agriculture, had greatly revived during the latter years of Kerreem Khan. He gave particular encouragement to all the industrious classes of his subjects, to none more than the Armenians settled in his kingdom. This body of Christians were the first who benefited from his justice, and to the last moment of his life he was anxious for their prosperity."¹⁸

The Zands were more interested in internal development, rather than conquest of other countries or regions which had been historically and typically undertaken by rulers before them and had been viewed as the mark of prowess of a king or dynasty. Through reducing taxes to the lowest they had been, before and after, and a series of measures to strengthen the economy, the Zands brought about conditions conducive to the main sectors of the economy, agriculture, the crafts and trade. They developed and held friendly relations with European and other countries and promoted international commerce. Under the Zands, Iran cultivated close commercial relations with the Dutch and others. Sir Percy Sykes gives a description of the trade with Britain in the section from British Ambassadors.

Abdollah Razee, Iranian historian, ca. 1968, on Karim Khan Zand:

"He sought to fulfill the needs and desires of his constituents. Not only Moslems, but also Armenians and other Christians benefited from his beneficence. Humanity, compassion, magnanimity and fairness were his innate characteristics . . . His goal and desire in government and his ultimate purpose were for all citizens to be happy."¹⁹

When foreign merchants resident in Iran passed away without leaving heirs or a will behind, rather than making left-over property a part of the state, the Zands sent agents to their home country, seeking survivors to avail them of their inheritance.

The degree and the widespread popularity of the Zands in itself is sufficient indication that these sentiments toward minorities and foreign nationals were shared by the Iranian people at large.

William Francklin, who took a "*Residence of eight months at Shirauz, being domesticated with the natives, and living entirely as one in a family*", 1786-87, writes of Karim Khan Zand, 1790:

"If ever a prince deserved the name of Great, Kerim Khan may well lay claim to that title, as his actions prove to this day. . . Kerim Khan gained the throne by conquest, in those troublesome and tumultuous times, and established, during his reign, by natural skill and abilities, an uniform course of justice, moderation, and clemency. The blessings he conferred on his people are still deeply impressed on the minds of many now living. Whatever his religious principles may have been, he was by no means a bigot to them; men of all persuasions lived unmolested under his government . . .

To strangers, and to Europeans in particular, he was remarkably affable, and never suffered any of them to depart without marks of his bounty and generous spirit. He valued money only as far as he could turn it to proper uses. Avarice and covetousness he abhorred".²⁰

The Zands, Islam and the Iranian Tribes

The Zands are a branch of the Lak (or Lac) tribe, a branch of the Lur, which is situated between the Lurs and the Kurds which are two of the great Iranian tribes, each numbering, including their descendants, from several million to twenty million people today. In 1874 Clements Markham estimated the Lak to be about 200,000 families. As notes Iranian historian Habibollah Shamluee, 1969, on Karim Khan Zand:

“Even though he had arisen from among the tribes, in statesmanship and politics he ranked alongside other prominent statesmen of Iran’s past. He never stooped to circumstance, of time or place, but remained true to the end of his life to his tribal character and unsophisticated upbringing.”²¹

Although the majority of the Iranian population, in cities as well as the country, are Shiites, the world in our day has generally come to know of Shiism through the ruling Islamic clergy, rather than the people. There is a difference between Shiism of the people and that of the ruling Islamic clergy. Karim Khan himself, coming from among the people, embodied that difference. Parviz Rajaby, Iranian sociologist and historian of the Zand period in his book in Persian *Karim Khan-e Zand and His Age*, 1976, quoting Sir John, British Ambassador and scholar (1815):

"Karim Khan never tried to bolster his popularity by pretending to be devout, for he was not a hypocrite . . . In studying his life and times, it becomes apparent to us that he did not pay much attention to religious matters . . .

Unlike other kings before him, Karim Khan did not try to win over the public by a display of splendid regalia. Rather, he tried to base his support on having close ties with the people, and care for the underprivileged . . .

Throughout life, he remained grateful to those who at some point in time, in some manner, had been of help to him, and paid respect to those who had previously held positions of seniority in regard to him . . . His social measures were unparalleled in the history of Iran . . . After Karim Khan, historians without exception have extolled the traits of character of this king, the king who held no throne and wore no crown".²²

Among the Iranian tribes religious beliefs and practices in Shiism recedes further still from the religion of the clergy. For example take the case of prayer. After the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran, there was pressure to carry out mass prayers. The relation of each individual to the higher being is an independent one. To-day people are coerced into mass prayer sessions at least once a week. In contrast, as reports one of the Iranian historians of the time, Qazviny (1796) "the Vakil never performed his daily prayers during the whole of his life."²³ ^h This was not special to Karim Khan; it was true in general of the tribes.

Happiness Enacted into Law

As an example of this contrast, while following the Islamic Revolution the security forces have regularly persecuted party goers, the Zands fostered and encouraged such gatherings. They employed social patrols whom they charged with going about the neighborhoods at night time and on the weekends to enquire and report where there were no parties and where the sound of people making merry could not be heard. Emineh Pakravan, Iranian historian, writes of Karim Khan Zand, ca. 1951:

"Until that age, it had been unheard of that a king or regent would turn into an act of government the very enjoyment of life. Karim Khan's wish was to see happy, prosperous people around."²⁴

^h *Vakil* being the term meaning Advocate of the People, the title the Zands chose in lieu of Shah.

Again we see these values inherited from pre-Islamic Iran. Happiness is a unique trait in religions. "Zoroastrianism is a religion which enjoins upon its follower the pleasant duty of being happy," as scholars have observed.²⁵

Justice Douglas (1898-1980) of the US Supreme Court was perhaps the first American in a position of statesmanship to get to know Iran and the Middle East as a self-made scholar and self-made good-will ambassador of the US. He was aware that due to Americans having been busy building their economy at home, unlike colonial powers they had not developed experts on the Middle East and in general on Asia, and took it up on himself to go and meet people in the Middle East, including Iran, to find out their problems. He sought to relieve the U.S. from reliance on colonial powers on foreign policy. He describes the aftermath of Zand rule in Iran. He traveled to Iran several times and lived with the tribes, of whom the Zands are a part, in the late 40s and early 50s. Prior to his visit he had studied the countries of the Middle East and later in several extended trips got to know first-hand the various countries and cultures. He refers to Iran in one of his travelogues called *West of the Indus* as "a country I had visited so often it was a second home to me"²⁶, a point he reiterates elsewhere. As a close friend and confidante of the Kennedys, William Douglas was able to work his knowledge gained first-hand into foreign policy. Using his experience and insights the Kennedys worked out plans to retire the Shah and establish democracy in Iran, ca. 1962. The revolution of 1978-79, prior to being led and taken over by the Islamic clergy due to absence of secular leaders inside Iran, was initially in large measure the people's backlash against the overthrow of Iran's elected government in 1953. The plans of Justice Douglas and the Kennedys did not come to fruition due to the untimely death of JFK but were actively under consideration at the time of his death.

While most other visitors stayed in hotels and saw the tourist route, or met government and business officials in the capital, Justice Douglas explored the countries of the Middle East off the "beaten track". He was thus able to develop his unique knowledge and insights. He summarizes the results of his research of the problems of the Middle East in the last twelve pages of his book, *Strange Lands and Friendly People*. Although most of it consists of how

to deal with communism, much of it holds just as valid today as then such as:

“We will be secure only when the bulk of the world is aligned on the democratic front.”²⁷

Here we quote from Justice Douglas’s readable travelogue “Strange Lands and Friendly People”, 1951, which he wrote as an account of “discovery and adventure south of the Soviet border: Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria. Iraq, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, India”:

“Persia shows the West the true art of hospitality. Persians are spiritually close kin to Americans”, which he reiterates elsewhere: “In great measure Persians and Americans have a close spiritual affinity”²⁸

“Persia needs to be known more intimately by the West. Though far away and remote, it occupies a strategic and important place in world affairs. It possesses about one-fifth of the known oil reserves in the world. Its ports along the Persian Gulf give access to India and Africa. Its northern neighbor is Russia, who either may need oil or may desire to shut off Europe’s supply from the Middle East . . .

The pages which follow attempt to introduce the people of Persia, to describe their problems, and to analyze some of the major stresses and strains within the nation. I use as my main material the four chief tribes of Persia -the Kurds, the Lurs, the Bakhtiaris and the Ghashghais who, I think are a good mirror in which to see the soul and spirit of the nation. These tribes -with whom I have lived intimately-reside in the rough and broken Zagros Mountains that stretch from the Russian and Turkish borders on the North to the Persian Gulf on the south . . . They have a tendency to sparseness. They are a quick-witted, friendly people with a yen for tall tales and dry humor. They know the art of hospitality; they thirst for discourse and argumentation. They love the outdoors -streams and mountains and the hunt. In the social sense they are as democratic as any people I have known. They have a reserve we associate with our New Englanders; but underneath they are close kin to our Westerners.

These characteristics, most conspicuous among the tribes, tend to become diluted and modified in the cities . . .

Though the Lurs today are Shiah Moslems, they have clung fast to some ancient customs dating back to Zoroaster . . . When the lampⁱ is lit at night and brought into the room, all members of the family rise out of respect".²⁹

Clements R. Markham, British historian, 1874, on the Zands :

"During more than twenty years, it was governed by the best and most virtuous sovereign of Persia since its conquest by the Muhammadans . . .

The lofty chain of mountains, extending from Kermanshah to Shiraz, and covering great part of the provinces of Luristan and Khuzistan, is inhabited by numerous and powerful tribes of Persian origin . . .

The Zand tribe is a branch of the numerous Lak tribe, which is subdivided into many clans . . . They date their origin from the time of the Kaianian dynasty^j; and the Zands declare that their ancestors were charged with the care of the Zand Avesta^k, by the great prophet Zoroaster himself."³⁰

During the various invasions of Iran over the centuries, the Iranian tribes have managed, as a group, to maintain their culture and identity. They have inhabited the most inaccessible mountains and were able to have a degree of isolation and maintain their traditions and values. But as a consequence they were away from educational institutions and the progress in science and knowledge, which took place in cities. They received little by way of written education. Due to the strength of the oral tradition over the ages, they retained their own culture and traditions.

The continuity and strength of the Persian oral tradition over the ages is demonstrated by the close correspondence of extant accounts, which

ⁱ Lamp being the symbol of forces of Light and Good versus Darkness in the pre-Islamic religion of Iran, Zoroastrianism

^j During which, based on oral history, arose Prophet Zoroaster.

^k Zand-Avesta: Collection of holy books of Zoroastrianism.

happened to be recorded, widely separated in time and space. As remarks Mary Boyce of the University of London:

“Oral literature is immensely conservative, and one finds individual works existing for centuries, recreated in Parthian^l and Middle Persian^m, from Avestanⁿ originals.”³¹

Polemic of the Islamic Clergy with Karim Khan Zand

Several arguments and polemics are reported by Karim Khan's contemporaneous historians and court chroniclers to have taken place between him and the Islamic clergy and their followers. One of these concerns eschatology, soteriology, and Good and Evil. In the following, it needs to be noted, the Traditions of the Prophet of Islam are used with the Koran to interpret Islamic law, and are analogous to precedence in secular law in the West, except that in the former case religion and law are mixed, in the latter separate.

When asked by followers of the Islamic clergy why he refuted an Islamic Tradition on the End of Days Karim Khan replied : “I have friends among people of various faiths and ethnicities and have had discourse with those who have read books sacred and profane, Traditions, histories, legends and other accounts. They have related the same to me. I am aware of the lot of these and although not educated, I have come to possess a knowledge and understanding regarding these matters above than those who claim to be divines. In any era, until the sovereign possesses such knowledge and wisdom he cannot govern”.³²

Karim Khan continues, mentioning how he came to learn the *Jamasp-Namah*, part of the collection of holy books of Zoroastrianism, which deals with eschatology and soteriology : “I have come to know a Zoroastrian astrologer. He read to me the *Jamasp-Namah* to the end. I recollect it. It

^l Eastern Iran, the Parthian Dynasty having ruled ca. 250 BC - 225 AD.

^m Western Iran, spoken ca. 200 BC - 1000 AD.

ⁿ Language of the Zand-Avesta, or collection of the holy books of Zoroastrianism., placed by modern scholars concurrently with Vedic as around 1800 BC, while the Greeks, including Aristotle, placed it about 6,000 years before their time.

recounts the events of more than five thousand years . . . It is sound and veritable." The Islamic clergy replied, in somewhat of a protest, to Karim Khan : "Do you give credence to what Jamasp the Zoroastrian would say, and refute the account of a saint" ? Karim Khan makes a characteristically Zoroastrian reply: "A saint would never utter such irrational statements" as in the Tradition. He concluded the argument as such : "We have heard tales and absurdities such as these many times. God has availed us of power of intellect and discernment, and it is with that which we have to get to know Him and distinguish between Truth and Lie, between Good and Evil."³³

State Policy Toward the Islamic Clergy Under the Zands

Since the time Islamic clergy came to Iran from Arab countries in the early 1500s, and were established with endowments from the state, they have not worked to earn a living, except during the period of Zand rule. The attitudes and policy of the Zands in this regard, being the temporal representative of the people, is representative of how a preponderance of the Iranian people may view the Islamic clergy in this regard. The founder of the dynasty, Karim Khan Zand, is characterized by historians to have regarded the Islamic clergy as "parasites" on society.

While prior and successive regimes set endowments for the Islamic clergy, the Zands declined to do so. When asked by the clergy and their representatives for a stipend for them, Karim Khan responded by listing what he regarded as the legitimate civil occupational categories in society, their engagements and how he required that people pursue an occupation in these categories :

"those engaged in agriculture, those engaged in trade and commerce, those engaged in the professions, and those engaged in the service sector", four in all, adding: "the order of wisdom mandates that people generally should belong to one or other of these categories" and earn their livelihood, noting that he himself had made a living from being a craftsman, an engineer, of the time. As for those who fall outside these categories Karim Khan remarked : "may their faces not be seen"³⁴ around the court.

He thus discontinued the stipend that had been set up from the public treasury for the Islamic clergy, with the exception of a handful of their

leaders as a token of acknowledgement of their status. Without state funding, the clergy's influence and power was thus greatly diminished, and they were deprived of their militia, to harass and terrorize secular leaders in society, until the Qajars (Kajars), the dynasty succeeding the Zands, restored their privileges.

Many leading members of society over the years have been persecuted or assassinated by the extremists among the Islamic establishment. Among those in recent political history prior to the Islamic regime is Ahmad Kasravy, a nationally known author and scholar, who wrote in bitter opposition to the Islamic clergy. Kasravy's books still remain popular reading stock for much of the educated in Iran. He was called to the supreme court of Iran to defend his position in 1945 and while in court assassinated by Islamic fundamentalists. Perpetrators and criminals behind this act went unpunished, because of the influence of the clergy over the Shah and his own lack of interest to support or do much to benefit popular, secular leaders. The Shah's lack of support for secular leaders led to a vacuum of leadership at the time of the revolution in 1978-79, with the result that the Islamic clergy were the only leaders and had the only organization, which though in appearance religious, was political and thus filled that vacuum. Another example was Prime Minister Razmara who was supported by the U.S. and assassinated in the 1950s by the same elements.

During the Qajar period, following the Zand dynasty in 1795 and ending in 1921, the power and influence of the Islamic clergy and their organization grew. During the Pahlavi period, which began in 192-25 and ended with the advent of the present, Islamic regime in 1979, initially a political stance was taken against the Islamic clergy, but this was later not followed up by action, and the power and influence of the Islamic clergy again grew. They were paid regularly by the late Shah from state funds in large sums, in what was called their "oil share". With this they financed their organization as a state within a state. The Shah found it easier to appease the Islamic clergy than confront them. At the same time he oppressed and eliminated popular, secular leaders in Iran, for it was easy to do so. The Islamic clergy used state funds to gain power and in the end hijacked the revolution against the Shah from the people, a fact commonly overlooked today. There were more prominent, and moderate, clergy who were household names, in contrast to

the status Ayatollah Khomeini had. The revolution in 1978-79 did not begin as an Islamic movement. The Shah had eliminated potential political rivals, leaving the clergy. The clergy then eliminated what political opposition remained or could emerge.

Although following the Islamic revolution of 1978-79 the regime changed or effaced the names of institutions (such as universities), buildings, roads, monuments etc. having anything to do with prior dynasties, and replaced them with Arabic or Islamic names, they have left intact all that bore the Zand name.

Dissenting Opinions on the Zands

At the end of life, pioneering leaders sometimes are confused whether to expect the heir they name to have the same qualities they have become successful by, or Conquerors seem to. Such was the case with Alexander, and is the case with Mollas.

For the dissenting views in all this please see: John R. Perry, *Karim Khan Zand*, 1979, pages 290-292.

First-Hand Reports of British Diplomats on the Zands

Contemporaneous British diplomats, envoys and visitors who were fluent in Persian and were rather keen observers of Iranian political history here describe their personal experiences in Iran and specifically with the Zand dynasty, and the place it occupies in Iran's culture and national ethos. These diplomats later translated books from Persian into English, and authored obooks of history on Iran, their information being drawn from Persian manuscripts, their experiences and other sources.

Their titles alone are suggestive that on our day, in many respects, we are re-living their times. Sir Harford Jones Brydges was Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from His Brittanic Majesty to the Court of Tehran, having spent thirty years in Iran. He dedicated his book to the King of England, which became posthumously published. Part of the result of his embassy and friendship with Lotf Aly Khan Zand appears to have been that the transfer of some of the crown jewels of Iran to the royal family of Britain. Sir John Malcolm arrived from British India with a retinue of five hundred in Iran.

In reading these contemporaneous accounts, it becomes evident that they write from a slightly different Zeitgeist and milieu, but what they say about the Zands applies to Iran today. Their spellings of names may slightly vary.

As it is often pointed out by historians, Iran has been the only country in the Middle East that did not become a colony of the European powers or a belligerent party in the World Wars. Unlike Japan which limited European visitors to the port of Nagasaki, these visitors were not only allowed free

entry into the country, but were warmly received and given room and board by people along their way. As a result, they got to know the country well. The European powers later came to exercise considerable influence in the internal affairs of Iran.

Sir John Malcolm, British Ambassador to Iran, author of a *History of Persia* in two volumes, 1815, writes on the *Reign of Kerreem Khan, Zend*:

"The happy reign of this excellent prince, as contrasted with those who preceded and followed him, affords to the historian of Persia that kind of mixed pleasure and repose, which a traveller enjoys, on arriving in a beautiful and fertile valley, during an arduous journey over barren and rugged wastes . . .

The inhabitants of the principal cities in the empire showed from the first their partiality to Kerreem, which was grounded on their confidence in his humanity and justice . . .

He had ambition, but free from the turbulence which almost always mixes with it. He preserved an undisturbed temper equally amid scenes of violence and repose, and was through life distinguished by a manly simplicity of mind, which kept him as remote from the pomp and vanities of his high rank, as from that affectation which endeavours to conceal its pride under the garb of humility . . .

Kerreem Khan possessed that noble courage which dares to pardon, and the generous confidence with which he treated those whom he forgave, appears to have almost always attached them to his person. His virtues had nothing of a romantic character; they were, like all his other qualities, plain and intrinsic. He was esteemed pious, and was exact in the performance of his religious duties; but his religion was not austere. His natural disposition indeed was gay and cheerful; and he continued to the last to enjoy the pleasures of is world, anxiously desirous that others should do the same . . .

Possessed of great bodily strength and an active frame, he was an admirable horseman, and expert in all military exercises but though unlearned himself, he valued and encouraged learning in others. His court was the resort of men of liberal knowledge . . .

The mode which Kerreem Khan took to attain and preserve his power was different from that pursued by any former monarch of

Persia. He made no effort to gain strength by the aid of religious or superstitious feelings . . .

There is no part of his character more pleasing and surprising, than being able, amid such scenes as he lived in, to carry out the best affections and feelings of human nature into almost every measure of government; and his success affords a lesson to despotic monarchs. He lived happily; his death was that of a father amid a family whom he had cherished, and by whom he was beloved. The Persians to this day venerate his name, and those who have risen to greatness on the destruction of the dynasty which he founded, do not withhold their tribute of applause to his goodness. Indeed, when meaning to detract from his fame, they often give him the highest possible eulogium. 'Kerreem Khan', they say, 'was not a great king. His court was not splendid; and he made few conquests; but it must be confessed, that he was a wonderful magistrate.'³⁵

Sir Harford Jones Brydges, 'Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from His Britannic Majesty to the Court of Teheran', Translator of a Persian history into English, in *Dynasty of the Kajars*, 1833:

"Those scenes in which we were engaged in early life, and which were agreeable to us at that time, (and mine in Persia, from a variety of circumstances, were peculiarly so to me,) the mind afterwards falls back on, with no common fondness; and at the close of life, few things are more cheering, than to recall to our thoughts the first impressions made on us by what we met with in youth, when visiting distant countries— the acquaintances we made; the friendships we formed there; the kindnesses we received; the mutual efforts made to amuse, to please and inform each other, and the joyous hours spent in the society of amiable and intelligent foreigners; and, in this instance, I may add, in a most luxurious climate, and amidst scenery where brilliancy and picturesque beauty increased the charm of novelty. . .

It seems fair to both parties^o, that I should lay before you some short account of the means I have had of becoming acquainted with Persia and its inhabitants, in order that you may the better appreciate the observations on them which I shall hereafter present to you. As a

stranger and an humble individual, I was long ago admitted in Persia to a considerable degree of intimacy with Princes, Ministers, men of the law, shopkeepers, and agriculturists. I then mixed in society in Persia, at different times, from the Zenith to the Nadir of it. I was present in Shiraz when the abominable treachery of Hajy Ibrahim to his benefactor, and too-confiding master and sovereign, transferred the throne of Persia from Family of Zend to that of Kajar. I waited on the gallant and unfortunate Lutf Aly Khan, in his distress, by the desire of his fallen Minister, Mirza Muhammed Husain, whose guest I was at Shiraz: and the last time I visited Persia, I had the high honour to appear there as the First Minister in modern times, regularly accredited from the Sovereign of this country to the Sovereign of that. The space of time consumed in my acquaintance and intercourse with Persia and Persians was near thirty years; and it is now not far from twenty years since I left that country.

The estimate I have made of the Persian character may be different from that made by others: and I acknowledge, that, in portraying their character, it would be difficult for me to repel—and indeed I should despise myself, if I wished to repel—those feelings which I must ever cherish, for kindness and attention received in sickness, for acts of the most disinterested friendship received in cases of unexpected and most dangerous personal emergency, and for unparalleled proofs of confidence, generosity and attachment received, when beaten to the ground by those who ought to have supported me.³⁶

...

“The reader, I hope, will pardon me, if I treat the reign and misfortunes of the noble Lutf Aly more in detail than usual. I received great kindness and attention from him, when he filled the throne, and under a miserable tent, I had the honour of sitting on the same horse-cloth with him when a fugitive!

His virtues endeared him to his subjects and the bravery, constancy, courage, and ability which he manifested under his misfortunes, are the theme of poems and ballads, which, it is not improbable, will last as long as the Persian language itself. He was

^o i.e., author and reader

manly, amiable, affable in prosperity, and under calamities as great and severe as human-nature can suffer, he was dignified and cool and determined . . .

I will not travel through the account of a series of most heroic and unfortunate attempts made by the king to reestablish his fortunes, but hasten to relieve my mind from the sorrow and regret which, even after this length of time ^p, it feels for the misfortunes of Lutf Aly khan.

. . .

The remaining days of this great prince were few and sad; but Persia, even now, speaks of his heroic actions with pride; and the inhabitants of the southern part of the empire retain an affectionate and respectful regard for his memory and virtues".³⁷

^p Over forty years after the tragedy that befell Lutf Aly Khan

The Ending and Aftermath of Zand Government

In those times it was a routine matter that pretenders to the throne, whether in Iran or in Europe, would be dealt with summarily and likely be put to the sword. It continues to be so in many countries even today. Karim Khan Zand wanted to break with that tradition, establish a humanistic government, usher in an era of open-ness and clemency. He sought to restore the pluralism, and multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic character that Iran has always had since ancient times. Thus he would pardon or honor his enemies or pardon them, including the Qajar tribe, who being descended from the Mongols and Tartars, at that time could not speak Persian. Karim Khan, instead of killing the pretender to the throne, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (a.k.a. Kajar), being the chief the Qajar tribe, treated him for years as a guest at his court. Upon the death of Karim Khan, Agha Mohammad Khan escaped, gathered the Qajar tribal militia, killed his own brothers and relatives who could be rivals to him for the leadership of his tribe, and launched a war against the Zands to gain the throne of Iran. After sixteen years of such warfare, when a young Zand prince, Lotf Aly Khan, was in power, Agha Mohammad Khan got his chance. After a series of battles, through treachery of the Shiraz governor, Lotf Aly Khan Zand was blocked from entering the capital. He became a king without a capital. Later, Agha Mohammad Khan pursued him to Kerman, and personally blinded him, dismembered him, then tortured him to death (1795 AD). Agha Mohammad Khan was himself a eunuch. He had his servants rape the princess, wife of Lotf Aly Khan Zand. He massacred the Zands at court in Shiraz so that there would be no-one of renown among them claiming the throne.

Clements R. Markham, British historian, 1874 :

"The Zand dynasty produced two great and worthy scions . . . The Kajars, raised to power by the hideous atrocities of that monster Agha Mohammad, have supplanted their rivals."³⁸

The Qajars had been exiled for sixty years to the Syrian desert by the Tartar chief Tamerlane on account of their extreme savagery. To-day, however, descendants of the Qajars are integrated into the Iranian population, and after over ten generations of marriage have become culturally as well as in appearance largely indistinguishable from the rest of the population.

Under the Zands the Islamic clergy had little or no role in government, and their influence had been reduced since Karim Khan ceased paying their stipend from the state. They had to be productive and work for a living like the rest of society. The clergy had come into Iran from Arab countries under the Safavid dynasty. The Islamic clergy, in mounting the Islamic revolution of 1979, sought to return to the power and privilege they had under the Qajar (Kajar) dynasty which followed the Zands. From the point of view of the Islamic regime, their present rule is, in large measure, a restoration and continuation of their influence in the Qajar period. During that period they were being patronized by the state.

Justice Douglas of the US Supreme Court, on the Aftermath of the Zand Dynasty:

"In the eighteenth century [ca. 1795] disaster struck Persia, a disaster that has been a crippling force even to this day. At that time an alien Turkish tribe, who could not speak the language, seized control of the country . . . They established the Kajar dynasty, which laid a curse on the land. They ruled and exploited the people; but they did not govern . . . Thus government became a ferocious, devouring force. It lived on the people. It squeezed every copper from them. The feudalism that had been the strength of Persia became the means for bleeding it white . . . Justice was for sale, power was used to exact blackmail. The army and the police were weakened and corrupted. Decay took hold in the moral fiber. The religious ideas that had supplied the generating force behind Persia's great dynasties were discarded.

Not all of the country was despoiled. The Kajar dynasty reached as far into the hinterland as it could, but the fastness of the mountains held treasures it could not reach. These treasures were the main tribes: the Kurds, the Lurs, the Bakhtiaris, and the Ghashghais. They remained independent and largely untouched. Their power in fact grew under the Kajars, for peasants flocked to their dependencies for shelter from the long, oppressive hand of the central government.^{q 39}

^q The Lurs have clans. The Lak tribe (a.k.a. Lac) from whom the Zands come and are a sub-clan, are one of the clans of Lurs.

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