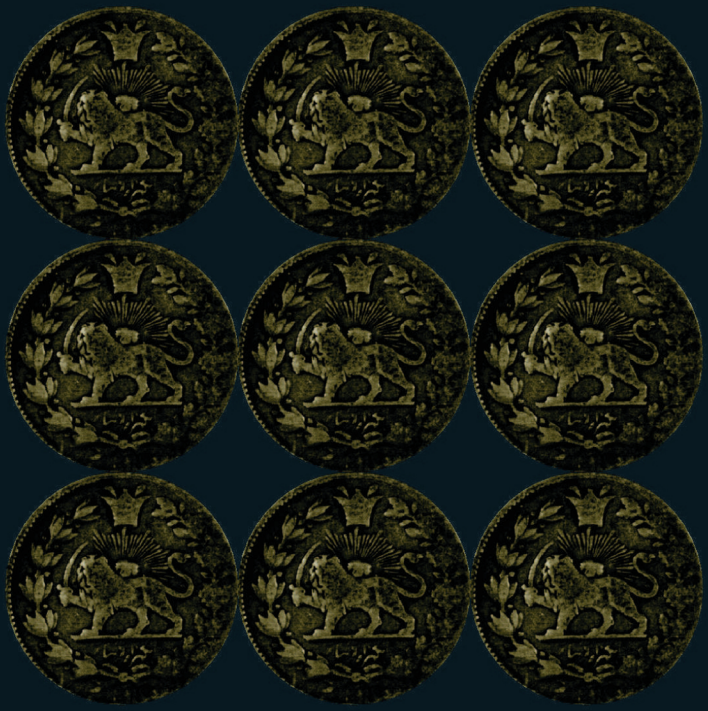

For God, Mammon, and Country

A Nineteenth Century Persian Merchant Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al Zarb

(1834–1898)

Shireen Mahdavi

Praise for *For God, Mammon, and Country*

Shireen Mahdavi has written a fascinating book, based on original archives, about the most important Iranian merchant of the late nineteenth century, Amin al-Zarb. She effectively recounts both his rags-to riches life and his role in the changing economy and politics of late Qajar Iran.

Nikki Keddie

University of California, Los Angeles

The importance of the role of the merchant in the Iranian constitutional revolution of 1906 has been frequently remarked but the merchants themselves have been little studied. Now at last we can welcome a scholarly biography of the leading merchant, Amin al-Zarb.

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Emeritus Professor of the Modern History of Western Asia, University of London

Shireen Mahdavi investigates the economic, financial, commercial and industrial activities of Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb, perhaps the greatest Persian entrepreneur of his time. Dr. Mahdavi's book fills in a major lacuna in late nineteenth century Persian history.

Michel Mazzaoui

Professor of Persian History, University of Utah

For God, Mammon, and Country

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A Nineteenth-Century Persian Merchant, Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb (1834–1898)

Shireen Mahdavi

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
New York London

First published 1999 by Westview Press

Published 2018 by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 13: 978-0-8133-3875-0 (pbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-8133-3642-8 (hbk)

In memory of my son Reza Ali
and for my daughters Dorna and Nayer Lagha Khazeni

I cry day and night in this Paris which is not a place for sadness [but pleasure] and instead of tears blood pours out of my eyes. . . . I observe the conditions of this country and review those of Iran and become demented.

—Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb, from Paris, July 1887

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A Note on Transliteration and Translation

The transliteration system used in this study is that of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* without diacritical marks and with a few modifications. For instance, the name "Hasan," by personal preference, appears as "Hassan."

The letter 'ayn has been represented by the sign ' and the letter hamza by the sign '. The Persian silent *h* is transliterated as *a*, as in "*nama.*"

When dual dates are given, the first figure refers to the Islamic (A.H.) and the second to the Christian calendar (A.D.). The Islamic months have been transliterated according to their Persian pronunciation.

Certain Arabic words such as "*hadith,*" "*fatwa,*" and other similar ones that are in general usage have been represented in their Arabic form. In certain cases, words in general English usage, such as "bazaar," "caravanserai," and "asafetida," have been represented by the American English spelling. Place-name spellings (Qum, Azarbayjan, and so on) conform to the transliteration system I have used here. Consistency in these circumstances is difficult to maintain and anomalies are bound to appear. It is inevitable that any transliteration system will be found unsatisfactory by some readers. It is hoped, however, that any possible inconsistency will not be found to be distracting.

A glossary of Persian words is provided at the end of the book to facilitate reading, and terms are translated when they first appear in the text. To reduce the confusion of a myriad of personalities, names, and titles, a Who's Who has also been supplied at the end.

Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.

The terms "Iran" and "Persia" have been used interchangeably.

Preface

The seeds for this work were planted in my mind when I read Lucien Febvre's "A Renaissance Merchant."[1] In one essay, he has brought to life the trials and tribulations, the joys and hardships of this unknown man traversing unfamiliar distances, facing numerous dangers on the road, separated for months and sometimes years from his family, trying to make a living. I wished to attempt the same for the life of Amin al-Zarb. I wanted to place him within the social, economic, cultural, and geographical setting of his time in a manner that would bring the period to life for the general reader. The ideal model that I had in mind is the historical writings of Febvre.

I was further reinforced in this resolve by the traditional nature of Persian historiography. There has been an absence of biographies in general, and of biographies of merchants or individuals outside the court and political circles in particular, in historical writings on Iran, either in Persian or Western languages. At the same time, the audience for whom the present historical works on Iran are written is composed of other cognoscenti. In all these works, the life of the individual has been neglected. By contrast, my efforts here are focused on an individual.

This study is a chronological narrative of the life of Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb, the most prominent Iranian merchant of his time. The narrative is interrupted and digresses in some chapters to describe some cultural aspect of life or institutions pertinent to Amin al-Zarb's life at that juncture. I hope that the reader does not find these breaks too disruptive but will see them as a means of conjuring up a lost past and setting Amin al-Zarb in his time and place. To prevent further interruptions in the narrative, the historical background to Amin al-Zarb's life is set out in the Introduction. Also, as far as possible, I have tried to focus on the life and character of Amin al-Zarb rather than on the personalities with whom he came into contact, regardless of the frequency of contact or the importance of these secondary characters in their own right. Finally, this study aspires to be a blend of social history and biography, which although well documented throughout I hope will read like a story.

Acknowledgments

My thanks go first and foremost to my kinsman Asghar Mahdavi, without whose invaluable help this work would not have been possible. All the unpublished materials from the Mahdavi Archives in Tehran were put at my disposal by Dr. Mahdavi. Not only did he provide me with constant information from the family archives, but he took it upon himself at every stage of the work to send me the material relevant to that period.

Next, in all my academic endeavors, in general and in this work in particular, unique gratitude is due to the late Professor Ernest Gellner, who became my friend and mentor from the time I became his student at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His constant encouragement, his meticulous reading of each chapter, and his extremely useful suggestions, all offered in total modesty, were a continual source of inspiration. His untimely death was a great loss to the academic world in general and to his friends and students in particular. I am glad that he lived to see this work to completion.

After the death of Professor Gellner, if it had not been for the invaluable and untiring counsel, help, and guidance of my friend Professor Shaul Bakhash of George Mason University, who became my mentor, this work would not be in print. I can not thank him enough for his help, patience, and kindness.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Michel Mazzaoui of the University of Utah for having been my *ustad-i a'zam* in his love and knowledge of Persian culture, and for his numerous and patient readings of this work and his helpful suggestions.

Special thanks go to Professor Peter Von Sivers of the University of Utah for reading the first rough draft of this study, for his encouragement, and for his many valuable suggestions.

I am grateful to professor John Gurney of Wadham College, Oxford, for his meticulous reading of the text and for having pointed out minutiae of factual errors and transliteration inconsistencies not noticed by others.

I am deeply grateful to Susan and Oktai Parvaz for their help in all graphic aspects of this work, and more.

I must thank Gisela Cavalleri for all photographic works, Latifeh Haqiqi of the University of California at Los Angeles for reviewing and correcting the transliteration, and Francine Mahak for the translation of Italian and Russian texts.

I am specially indebted to my husband, Reza Khazeni, for having provided me with the leisure and the means, over many years, to occupy myself with this venture.

Last but not least, my loving tribute goes to my enlightened father, Ebrahim Mahdavi, for having had a breadth of vision beyond his environment and for having provided me, without gender discrimination, with the educational opportunities that enabled me to undertake this study.

Introduction

This study is an account of the life and times of Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb, the most prominent nineteenth-century Iranian merchant and Iran's first major entrepreneur. His life spanned the reign of three Qajar shahs. He was born in the reign of Muhammad Shah (1834–1848), arrived in Tehran in the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–1896), and reached the zenith of his eminence during the reign of that shah. He died in the reign of Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1896–1906).

The Qajar society into which Amin al-Zarb was born was a pluralistic society composed of different groups with varying social status. It was also a society with a strong kinship system and an extended family system, with kin groups encompassing individuals from different categories, bypassing social status and economic standing. The importance and function of kin groups is well demonstrated by Amin al-Zarb's life. The groups were open and fluid to a certain extent, and both horizontal and vertical movement took place between them. However, there was a certain degree of ascendancy within these groups, and some dominated others. Whether they were hierarchical strata in the Western concept of the word is questionable. [1] There was no aristocracy similar to the European model. In fact, the Islamic laws of inheritance, on the one hand, and arbitrary confiscation of property, on the other, mitigated against the accumulation of wealth in one family and the perpetuation of its accompanying status. As a result, there was greater social mobility both upward and downward.

However, to distinguish the groups it is necessary to discover the different ways in which they operated within the society. It would appear that these groups can be analyzed in terms of their function, status, prestige, lifestyle, and self-image. Central to the concept of social status is a specific style of life. Lifestyle is manifested in such things as clothes, food, occupation, hobbies, and intermarriage. Membership in a status group does not depend upon property, but those both with or without property can belong to the same status group according to the esteem attached by society to their social function. In this type of definition, it is important to take into account the way individuals think of themselves as belonging to a specific group or not. In the final analysis, the group to which individuals assign themselves must have a great bearing on the analysis of any society.

In the first group, the most dominant individual in Qajar society was the shah, and there was a wide gap between him and the second group, that of the princes of

the blood *(shahzadigan).* Not only was the shah all-powerful, but he was unequaled in rank. After the Qajar family, the next powerful group in the society was composed of the great tribal leaders:Afshars, Arabs, Bakhtiaris, Baluch, Kurds, Qashqa'i, Qaraquzlu, and others. They usually were great landowners in their local areas. Their power was based upon the military force that they were able to muster from among their followers, which when necessary was put at the shah's disposal. Thus, their power derived from both land and their military potential. Simultaneously, they were both a threat and a support to the central government.

The classification of the third group is more complex, although frequently they have been classified as landowners. A landowner in Persian is a *malik,* and landowning was frequently secondary to other functions and lifestyles in society and was certainly a status symbol, as result of which diverse groups with no common function or power or lifestyle owned land. The problem is better presented if we consider whether the various groups combined thought of themselves as landowners or as individuals fulfilling a certain function in society with its accompanying status. After all, status is about perceptions of social prestige and power. It is about how people see themselves. The groups in question are the princes, the courtiers, the title holders and high-echelon officeholders such as the *vazirs* (ministers), *farmanfarmas* (governors), and local notables. It is suggested that a prince, a courtier, or a minister would not have first thought of himself as a *malik* but as part of the dominant stratum of society with the accompanying social and political power. If we are forced to combine these various groups, although there was no aristocracy in Persia in the European sense of the word, they would be better defined by the Persian term *a'yan va ashraf* (notables and nobles), which encompasses many dominant groups and distinguishes the elite from the commoner and would serve the purpose better.

The fourth group were the administrators and bureaucrats. [2] In a country where literacy, let alone learning, was rare, the power of this group was based upon the education and training of its members in the traditional branches of learning such as bureaucratic skills, accounting, correspondence, the drawing up of reports, and the like. Since training in these skills was often passed on from father to son or other members of the family or had to be acquired in the service of an important official, it was often hereditary. The most important administrator was the *mustawfi al-mamalik,* or treasurer general, under whose jurisdiction came all central and provincial financial matters.

The fifth important group consisted of the *'ulama,* ranging from the great *mujtahids* to itinerant *mullas*. The source of their power was quite different from the other groups in that it was based upon religious learning and spiritual attainment rather than on secular power and material possessions. Some members of the *'ulama*, such as the *shaykh al-islam,* the *imam jum'a* of the major cities, the *khatib,* and the *pishnamaz* received regular salaries from the government and in that sense could be regarded as members of the bureaucracy. The eminent members of the *'ulama*, however, were not only held in special esteem but considered themselves the "representatives" of the Hidden Imam on earth. They themselves held a dichotomous attitude toward the government, on the

one hand maintaining that all rulers in the absence of the Imam were usurpers, and on the other hand believing that any government was better than anarchy. Members of the *'ulama* fulfilled important civil functions such as holding the *shar'i* courts, performing marriages and death ceremonies, and acting as "notary publics." Religious office frequently ran in families as it did in the case of the bureaucrats.

The sixth prominent group in society was occupied by the merchant classes, which comprised the big merchants *(tujjar),* who traded extensively internally as well as in import-export externally, the bazaar merchants, and the shopkeepers. This was the group to which Amin al-Zarb belonged, starting as a small bazaar merchant and eventually becoming the most prominent big merchant. As there were no banks, some members of this group played an important role in providing and transmitting funds both to individuals and to the government. In the big cities, the shah appointed a *malik al-tujjar* who was head of the merchant community, native or foreign, and was empowered to settle disputes, investigate claims, and give certificates of solvency. The office was voluntary in that it did not come with a salary but rather was considered an honor and tended to be hereditary. As Amin al-Zarb and his brothers achieved commercial importance, one of his younger brothers, Haj Abu al-Qasim, was appointed *malik al-tujjar* of Mashhad.

Aside from the above groups, which composed a small percentage of the population, there was also a small middle group of artisans and craftsmen, but the vast majority consisted of urban wage earners and the peasant and tribal rural population, whose primary function was to pay taxes to either the government or the local landlord, or both.

Each group fulfilled a specific function and was accompanied by specific norms of behavior, ranging from clothes to social etiquette. James Morier writes:

> A description of etiquette in Persia would be of endless and trifling minutiae. They are such, however, and so easily observed by everyone from their youth and indeed so strongly marked the gradation of rank, that no person even of the meanest condition, is ignorant of his proper situation and of the several etiquette attached to it. [3]

Not only did etiquette distinguish the different groups, but clothes and lifestyles were also an important differentiating factor among them. The most important item of clothing in distinguishing not only groups but inhabitants of different areas and tribes was headgear, or *kulah*. Both the type of headgear and the manner in which it was worn were different for different groups. The *kulah* was made of sheepskin, the quality of the skin varying according to class. The *kulah*s of the rich upper classes were made of the finest Bukhara lambskin, costing five or six times more than those worn by ordinary people. [4] Edward Waring, who visited Shiraz at the beginning of the nineteenth century, says: "It is the custom for the military men to press their caps down on one side; the Mirza or civil officers to twist a shawl about them; and the artificers, tradesmen, etc. wear their cap upright." He also reports a specific clothes prohibition concerning merchants, in that they were not allowed to wear either scarlet or crimson robes or use silver and gold buttons on them. [5]

Different social groups lived in different types of houses. Justin Perkins describes three different houses: "The houses in Persia are of three general orders, corresponding in appearance and expense to the higher, middle and lower classes of people. The two former are built of sun-dried brick. Palaces of princes and rich nobles are sometimes built of burnt brick and lime like the arched *caravanserais.* " Aside from the material used for construction, there was a difference in the interior design and the facade of the houses of the various groups. The windows were designed and constructed in polygonal spaces ranging from one to three inches in diameter. The difference in social groups was demonstrated in the way these spaces were filled. In the houses of the dominant groups, the spaces were filled with small diamond-shaped pieces of glass of various bright colors, giving the appearance of mosaic. These windows were extremely costly. The groups in the middle covered their sashes with oiled paper. The interior of the houses also differed:That of the dominant groups was plastered with white gypsum and covered with the richest carpets, whereas that of the middle groups was plastered with a mixture of straw and mud and the carpets were of an inferior quality. The houses of the lower groups were built of mud and were one story high, as opposed to the others, which were half and half, were not plastered, and had no windows except a hole in the roof. [6]There were other distinguishing marks such as the gateway or entrance to the house, but the ones described above were the more defining; in some instances, the outside of the houses was not necessarily descriptive of the inside, as in the case of rich merchants who tried to hide their wealth rather than display it.

The food consumed by the different social groups also varied. Rice constituted the staple diet of the dominant groups but bread that of the lower groups, and again, not the same bread as that consumed by the dominant groups. The lower groups made their bread from barley or millet; that of the others was made from wheat. The type of meat consumed was also linked to social group differences. Mutton, lamb, and chicken were exclusive to the dominant groups and were a sign of social prestige; beef was exclusive to the lower groups and was considered socially highly undesirable. Another distinction existed in the kind of fat used in cooking. The poor used the tails of sheep, and the rich, butter. [7]

Although Qajar society was a society in which certain groups dominated others, it was not a closed society, and the lines of demarcation between the groups were not rigid, thus diminishing class conflict and antagonism. Also, the nature of everyday life in Qajar society was based in the community, be it the urban neighborhood or the rural village, and involved daily social contacts between different groups, which lessened their own perception of class differences. Both upward and downward social mobility took place. Two factors were responsible for this movement. First, the Islamic laws of inheritance divided the estate among the survivors, thus preventing both the concentration of private wealth and the perpetuation of social rank. Second, the arbitrary nature of central governmental power resulted in no man being certain that his fortune was safe from confiscation to be passed on to his descendants. There was also an overlapping of functions from one group to another

that facilitated social mobility. For instance, military leaders were drawn both from landowners and tribal chieftains or a governor of a province would settle permanently in the province in which he had held office and become part of the local *a'yan va ashraf*. Although at the beginning of the nineteenth century the members of the bureaucracy were considered to be in an inferior position to the tribal leaders and landowners, toward the middle of the century this was no longer true. Two factors contributed to this change. First, as the administration became more complex, the status of the higher ranks of bureaucracy rose and many more members were drawn from the tribal and landowning classes. Second, at the same time some members of the bureaucracy became landowners themselves.

Although theoretically the landowning classes held trade in contempt, they would sometimes be found in partnership with merchants, as was the case with Amin al-Dawla, the governor of Isfahan under Fath 'Ali Shah and Amin al-Sultan, prime minister under Nasir al-Din Shah and Muzaffar al-Din Shah, who was in league with Amin al-Zarb. High government office was not limited to the landowning groups and could be the means of acquiring wealth and social position. Examples of this type of mobility are Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, Nasir al-Din Shah's first and greatest prime minister, whose father was a cook in the household of Qa'im Maqam; Amin al-Sultan, whose grandfather was a Georgian slave, a house servant to one of the Qajar princes, and later one of the kitchen staff of Nasir al-Din Shah when he was crown prince; and our subject Amin al-Zarb, who arrived penniless in Tehran and eventually became master of the mint and one of the richest men in Persia.

Aside from high government office, there was another means of social mobility, that of entering into prestigious marriage alliances. Intermarriage was an important factor in social mobility, and marriage alliances were used for political purposes. The daughters of the shah, provincial governors, and *a'yan va ashraf* were given in marriage to those whose support was required, whose daughters in turn would enter the *harems* of those in power. The leading *'ulama* and merchants frequently intermarried, although marriage within their own kin group was preferable, as the marriages of Amin al-Zarb himself and other members of his family demonstrate. [8]Thus, social differences were less fine, as has been stated, and members of the ruling Qajar house could be found in almost all walks of life by the end of the century. [9] Therefore, Qajar society was not rigidly closed; rather, there was an overlapping of functions between the different groups and social mobility both upward and downward took place. [10]

The religion to which Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb adhered was Shi'i Islam, that of the majority of Iranians. [11] It should be stressed that Iranians in general and Amin al-Zarb in particular lived a "Shi'i way of life. " Iranians had been Muslims since the conquest of Iran in the first half of the seventh century by the Arabs, but it was under the Safavids (1501–1725) that Shi'ism was consolidated and declared the official religion of the country. [12]

By the mid-nineteenth century, Shi'ism was the most important ingredient of the social and cultural life of Iran. It determined every aspect of life, ranging from fam-

ily relations to the position of women to ethics and morals; it influenced the arts, in particular architecture, and even provided a national pastime in the form of *rawza-khani*, *sufra*, and *ta'ziya* and a raison d'être for family trips on pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams and their minor descendants *(imamzada).*

The position of women within Shi'ism is circumscribed by that of men. The authority and superiority of the male, according to Qur'an IV:34, as interpreted by the Shi'i *'ulama*, determined his position in the household and society. The interpretation of Qur'an XXIV:31 ordained the veiling of and segregation of women, and the interpretations of other *sura*s defined her rights within society. [13] Subsequently, the role of woman is essentially that of housekeeper, bringing up children, and providing the husband with sexual pleasure. Women are seen as emotionally too unstable to be trusted with major decisions and as a sexually disturbing element, if unveiled, to men who are in charge of important affairs. Theoretically, women have well-defined rights in Islamic law such as the right to inherit, to possess property independently of the husband, to choose a husband, and to initiate divorce, but in practice within a male-dominated religion, it is difficult to fulfill these rights.

The position of women and their segregation had a direct effect on domestic architecture, creating separate quarters for men *(biruni)* and women *(andaruni),* surrounded by high walls so that the interior of the houses could not be seen, resulting in narrow streets. Public architecture was also influenced by the religion, as mosques, *madrasa*s, and shrines to minor Imams were constructed to glorify Shi'ism.

Shi'i legends provided pastime and leisure activity for both men and women in the form of recitations *(rawza-khani)* and passion plays *(ta'ziya). Rawza-khani* is a recitation of the sufferings and martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the third Imam. It is held throughout the year but in particular in the month of Muharram, commemorating Husayn's martyrdom. A *rawza-khani* is often held as a result of the fulfillment of a vow. Invitations are sent out and tea and sweetmeats served, although the concept behind it is that of open house and anyone can attend. A *rawza-khan* is also invited, whose abilities are marked according to the amount of weeping and lamentations he can arouse. Men and women sit in separate rooms, although *rawzas* can be held exclusively for men or women. At Amin al-Zarb's house, a *rawza-khani* took place once a week. *Ta'ziya* is a theatrical representation of the tragedy of Karbala, which is enacted in the month of Muharram. Its closest Western equivalent is the Christian passion play. Annually, a *ta'ziya* was held at Amin al-Zarb's house. *Ta'ziya* took place in towns and villages and became of great importance under the Qajars, being a regular feature of court life. On an ordinary level, the whole community participated, both as spectators and as providers of the necessary funds. It was not unusual for a *ta'ziya* to be performed as a result of a fulfilled vow, or the cost might be borne by an endowment.

Another social event for women, which took place as a result of a fulfilled vow, was the *sufra* (literally, tablecloth). The woman who had made the vow would invite her female friends and relatives to a meal, during the course of which a discourse was given by a *mulla*, usually a female, on a religious theme, the vow having been made to a member of the Holy Family, who then became the subject of the sermon. [14]

To go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of 'Ali at Najaf and that of Husayn in Karbala is the dream of every Shi'i. For those who found it difficult to go outside the country, a visit to the shrine of the eighth Imam, Riza, in Mashhad or that of his sister M'asuma in Qum was the next best thing. Aside from these important shrines, every town and village had its own more modest *imamzada* to which they would make vows and go on pilgrimage.

The Iran of Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb was one in which major changes were taking place through the impact of the West. It was the setting for the impact of emerging new ideas and served as the political battleground for great-power rivalry. The primary impact of the West on the world of Islam, including the Ottoman Empire and Iran, came as a result of military defeats. These defeats were the cause of a new attitude on the part of the Muslims toward the West. Previously there had been contact, but it was limited to some adventurous travelers and a few ambassadors whose view of life and ideas had left little impact. [15] The Muslims, living in a state of splendid isolation, kept aloof and hence out of touch with the scientific revolution and the resulting growth of economic and military power. The military defeats made them acknowledge the military superiority of the West and attempt to discover the key to the secret. In looking for military know-how, engaging Western military advisers, and sending students to be educated in the West, they became familiar with the ideas of the French Revolution, which most writers consider to be, in the words of Bernard Lewis, "the first great movement of ideas in Western Christendom that had any great effect on the world of Islam. "[16]

The military defeats that made Iran conscious of the impact of the West were at the hands of the Russians in 1813 and 1828 and the British in 1856, as a result of which Iran lost the Caucasus and Afghanistan, respectively. Although initially the impact was felt as a result of military defeats and technological backwardness, in general it was the ideas and ideologies emanating from the West that finally were the major instruments of change. By mid-nineteenth century, the impact of the West was felt in many walks of life in Persia, ranging from the intellectual, cultural, political, and social to the economic.

Some intellectuals and members of the elite saw the salvation of the country in the adoption of Western techniques and the application of democratic principles to the theory of government. In striving to acquire Western techniques, the primary means was seen to be education, as there were no modern schools in Persia in the first half of the nineteenth century. Once again, the primary incentive was military considerations. A new army needed a new bureaucracy and officers to run it, and neither of the traditional institutions met Western standards. Therefore, aside from sending students abroad, a new school called Dar al-Funun (The Abode of Sciences) was founded in 1851 by Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, one of the major reformers of this period and Nasir al-Din Shah's prime minister, with the objective of training army officers and civil servants. [17] In fact, few of the students joined the army, but the school made modern education available to some, most of whom joined the bureaucracy.

Among the Qajar shahs, Nasir al-Din Shah was more conscious than his predecessors of the need for reform and made sporadic attempts at bringing about political, social, and economic reforms. During his reign, contact with the West increased, and its impact was felt more deeply through native Iranians, who gained a greater idea of the Western way of life, and also through the shah's own three trips to Europe. [18] The shah realized that to transform Persian society, foreign help was needed, although at the same time he knew that he was unable to prevent foreign intervention. He therefore adopted a policy of encouraging foreign powers to invest in Iran, hoping that their involvement would contribute to the development of the country.

The first major concession came about as a result of British interests in India. After the 1857 Indian Mutiny, the British became acutely conscious of the slowness of their communication with India and the necessity for rapid communications with a country that was at the center of their empire. In the telegraphic system created by the authorities in London and India, the vital overland link was Persia. Therefore, it was not due to any charitable or humanitarian motives that the British became interested in the installation of telegraph lines inside Persia. Lord Curzon puts the matter frankly and aptly by explaining the problem from the British viewpoint:

> It was from no special desire to bring Persia in to telegraphic connection with Europe, nor with any direct intention of conferring upon her the enormous benefits that have resulted from the introduction of that system into the country, that sprang the first proposal for so startling an innovation as a through wire from the western frontier of the Shah's dominions to the Persian Gulf. It was her geographical position that made Persia the fortunate recipient of this not wholly disinterested boon. Had her territories not lain upon the high road between Great Britain and India, she might have waited long for the outside pressure necessary to effect so bewildering a revolution. During the Indian Mutiny the need of direct telegraphic communications with Hindustan was seriously and increasingly felt in England; a period of nearly three months elapsing at that time between the despatch of a message and the receipt of a reply. [19]

The Persians, however, were not particularly interested in this unexpected bonus. Their lack of interest arose from fear, based upon ignorance, of the consequences of rapid communications. They felt that the existing line installed between Tabriz and Tehran in 1858 was sufficient and that British motives were suspect. Eventually, Persian reluctance was overcome, and the first Telegraphic Convention between the two countries was signed in 1863, thus granting the concession to the British. [20]

The telegraph not only brought Iran and the West closer but also accelerated the passage of news and reactions to events occurring in Iran and elsewhere. It permitted more direct communication nationally and internationally and was a particularly effective instrument during the protests against the Tobacco Régie. It was also a valuable source of income for Iran, and it enabled the shah to be in closer contact with different parts of his country.

The primary target of the concession hunters in Persia was the railways. Ironically enough in an age when all the great railways were built, the preponderance of and competition between the concession seekers prevented Persia from having one. Numerous plans for a central railway were drawn up by the Belgians, Austrians, French, British, and Russians, but none of them materialized. Between 1865 and 1871, railway concessions were granted to a French, a German, an Austrian, and a British company, none of which came to anything. Finally, in 1872, the shah granted a comprehensive and disastrous concession to Baron Julius de Reuter, a German by origin and a naturalized British subject. The concession included the right to construct railways and irrigation works, to explore mines, and to set up a state bank. Thus, the shah put almost the entire resources of the country in the hands of an unknown individual without sufficient guarantee and in return for only hypothetical benefits. The shah also gave Reuter a twenty-year monopoly over Persian customs. [21] The Reuter concession went unsupported by the British, the Russians, and popular Persian opinion. The British, on the one hand, did not approve of such a large concession being given to a private individual, and on the other hand, they feared Russian reaction. The Russians were naturally annoyed that they were being excluded from the economic activity of a country in which they had a stake. Thus, this concession was opposed both from abroad and at home, meeting massive opposition internally as a result of which the shah was forced to cancel it.

The major Persian promoter of the Reuter concession was Mirza Husayn Khan Mushir al-Dawla, the prime minister. He had been briefly educated in Paris, held diplomatic posts in India and Russia, and was ambassador to the Ottoman Empire at the time of its reforms. He was also the holder of a number of ministerial posts leading to premiership, during which he attempted various economic and military reforms. He was convinced that the solution to Persia's problems lay in reforms along Western lines. Misguidedly, but with good intentions, he saw the Reuter concession as a means for Iran's economic development. His zeal in the promotion of the Reuter concession led to his downfall. [22] He was instrumental in organizing the shah's first European trip in 1873 as a means of further influencing the shah to adopt reforms, and he accompanied the shah on that trip.

By the time the shah returned to Persia, the anti-Mirza Husayn Khan and anti-Reuter popular feeling was so strong that the shah felt compelled to dismiss Mushir al-Dawla and find a way to cancel the Reuter concession, which had been made public in November 1873. [23] Reuter, however, as part of his agreement, continued to hold outstanding claims against the Persian government, which were finally negotiated and settled in 1888. The accord gave Reuter two rights from the first concession: the establishment of a bank (Iran had no banking system) and the exploration and exploitation of all the country's mineral resources (other than gold, silver, and precious stones). After Reuter was granted banking rights, the Russians received a similar right to establish Iran's discount bank. The Imperial Bank of Iran, founded by Reuter, issued banknotes and exercised an enormous influence over the Persian economy.

In 1890, the shah granted another concession to an Englishman, Major Gerard F. Talbot, which gave rise to a popular agitation that became a landmark in the history of Iran's struggle for political reform. This concession gave away control of the country's production, sale, and export of tobacco. Although the other concessions did not noticeably affect the working population, the tobacco monopoly affected large sections of the society, ranging from growers to shopkeepers and local exporters. Protests against the concession began, instigated in part by Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani, who had been on a visit to Iran. As a result of a *fatwa* attributed to Ayatullah Shirazi, but thought by others to have been inspired by Afghani, a national boycott of the sale and use of tobacco took place. Different sections of the population, consisting of the *'ulama*, merchants, the educated classes, the courtiers, ordinary people, and even the shah's wives, united in this protest against the concession. During this period, Amin al-Zarb played a significant role as an intermediary through whom the merchants voiced their protests. Consequently, the shah was forced to cancel the concession, but Iran had to pay £500, 000 sterling in compensation, which constituted the basis of Iran's national debt. Ironically, the electric telegraph line installed by the British for their own convenience played an important role against their interests in keeping geographically distant parts in contact.

The protests against the Reuter concession and the tobacco monopoly, aside from their political significance, point to a rarely mentioned social aspect, the powerful role played by women behind the scenes. Anis al-Dawla, the shah's favorite wife, played an important role in being the nucleus of the protests against the Reuter concession, and it was not until the shah's wives boycotted the use of tobacco that Nasir al-Din Shah realized the strength of national and popular opposition to the tobacco monopoly. [24]

The economic conditions of the country, of which Amin al-Zarb took advantage, were also partly shaped through the impact of the West. This impact had a direct effect on the social and economic life of the country, ranging from the composition of foreign trade to the balance of payments and the pattern of consumption. Simultaneously, the economic problems that Iran faced by the mid-nineteenth century were closely related to the effects of the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe. Thus, the economic situation in the country was one consequence of the position of Persia in an international context.

One of the main features of the economy during this period was population growth. According to Charles Issawi, the population approximately doubled from 5 million to 10 million. [25] Persia was the most populous country in the Middle East. However, in spite of a high birth rate, the growth rate of the population remained low, at 0. 5 percent, as it was accompanied by a high mortality rate. The urban population consisted of 800, 000 people, divided among towns with a population of 10, 000 and over. The nomadic population was approximately 3. 5 million in the mid-nineteenth century. The peasant population in rural areas was 5. 5 million, thus composing 55 to 60 percent of the country's population. [26] However, during the second half of the nineteenth century, a process of urbanization took place that