A tour of Iran

August 27 to September 9, 2012

David Pierce

Last edited, February 2, 2016

Mathematics Department
Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University
Istanbul
dpierce@msgsu.edu.tr
http://mat.msgsu.edu.tr/~dpierce/

David Austin Pierce
Matematik Bölümü
Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi
Bomonti, Şişli, İstanbul, 34380
dpierce@msgsu.edu.tr
http://mat.msgsu.edu.tr/~dpierce/

Preface

The present document is an account of a visit to Iran in the late summer of 2012. The account makes excursions into some relevant history and linguistics. Writing the account is my way of enjoying the trip after it is over. So is *reading* the account: I do this occasionally.

When I read, I may make corrections and other changes. The document is likely to be fairly stable from now on (September, 2015), unless perhaps I should be moved to add more footnotes like the one on page 63.

Bracketed numerals refer to the bibliography at the end. A source not included in that bibliography is *Wikipedia* (`wikipedia.org`).

Readers are likely to be familiar with me. If not, be it known that I am an American, an academic mathematician by profession, but also an alumnus of St John's College, in Annapolis, Maryland, and Santa Fe, New Mexico; and here I refer the interested reader to my article [25] on the College. I entered St John's as an alumnus of St Albans School in Washington, DC. I lived in Ankara, Turkey, working at Middle East Technical University, from 2000 till 2011; then I moved with my spouse to Istanbul.

Contents

1 To go or not

During my first visit to Turkey in 1998, I used Herodotus as a tour guide. When Ayşe and I travelled to the southwestern coast, we stayed first in the port city of Fethiye, and there I looked up the city's ancient name of Telmessus in my old Penguin edition of Herodotus's *Histories* [10]. Thus I learned that the Telmessians had once been known as interpreters of omens.

More precisely, I was *reminded* of this, since I had already read Herodotus in college. But back then, I had not taken special note of Telmessus. It did not play a big part in the story. It was not on the map of Asia Minor at the back of the book.

Sardis was on the map. This city, inland from Smyrna, was the capital of Lydia. The king, Croesus, fought an inconclusive battle with the King of Persia. In the words of Herodotus, as translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt:

> [Croesus] proposed to wait until winter was over, and attack the Persians [again] in the following spring.
>
> With this purpose in mind, Croesus, as soon as he reached home, sent instructions to his allies to send troops to Sardis after an interval of four months. All the mercenary troops which had been engaged with the Persians and had returned with him, he disbanded and sent home . . . While he was thinking these arrangements over, he was surprised by an unusual occurrence: snakes swarmed into the suburbs of the town, and on their appearance the horses in the meadows stopped grazing and came and ate them. Croesus, quite rightly, took this extraordinary sight as an omen, and at once sent to Telmessus where there were men who interpreted such things. His messenger did in-

> deed learn the significance of the omen from the men of Telmessus, but they never told Croesus what it was—for before their ship made Sardis on the return voyage, Croesus had been taken prisoner. This interpretation was that Croesus must expect the coming of a foreign army, which would subdue the people whose home was in Sardis; for the snakes (so they explained it) sprang from the soil, but the horses were beasts of war and not native to the country. The men of Telmessus who gave this answer had not yet had the news from Sardis, though Croesus was already a prisoner.

Such words illuminated my first visit to Turkey. Now they illuminate a visit to Iran. After fighting with Croesus the first time, the Persian king did *not* go home; he pursued his opponent to Sardis. He took the city, and with it, the king. He intended to burn Croesus at the stake. Then Croesus moaned with regret over not having listened to Solon of Athens, who had told him that a man could not be judged happy until his whole life was over. Tied to the stake, Croesus saw that all of his worldly power and glory counted for nothing in the end. Hearing this wisdom from Croesus, the Persian king spared him.

That Persian king was Cyrus the Great. Ayşe and I have now seen his tomb, at the site called Pasargad, 130 kilometers outside the Iranian city of Shiraz, on the road to Isfahan.

Here then is one reason to visit Iran: History.

Cyrus's tomb is a miniature ziggurat. It is an unadorned stone box atop a stack of six rectangular stone pedestals of decreasing size. In the past, it was surrounded by gardens; today it stands alone. More spectacular than the tomb are the remains of the palatial complex called Persepolis, nearer to Shiraz. Persepolis was erected by Darius, who held power in Persia after Cyrus's son Cambyses, and whose army were defeated by the Greeks at Marathon, as Herodotus recounts.

One ascends to Persepolis on a grand stairway. At the top, one sees an entrance flanked by great bearded centaur-like beasts in the

Assyrian style. There are bas-reliefs of men of many lands, paying tribute to Darius—not abjectly, but proudly, according to our tour guide: Darius was not a conqueror, said our guide, but a uniter. In the Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran, we would see golden bowls and ornaments used at Persepolis by Darius and his successors. Here then is another reason to visit Iran: Artistic beauty.

Our taxi-driver in Tehran did not know of the Reza Abbasi Museum, and he did not know any English. However, he would periodically stop his car, to ask a pedestrian if she could interpret to him the address and map in our guide-book. Of course that pedestrian would try to help. In her book called *A Bike Ride: 12000 Miles Around the World* [21], Anne Mustoe begins one chapter by saying:

> If I had a prize to award to the nicest, kindest people in the world, it would go to the Turks.

But Ms Mustoe had not visited Iran.[1] Ayşe and I had two Turkish companions on our own visit to Iran: they and Ayşe observed that Iranians had retained habits of hospitality that Turks had lost.

When strolling in Turkey, if I hear the word "hello" called out, I usually ignore it now: the speaker probably wants to sell me something. But Turkey has for years promoted tourism as a source of income. The international tourism industry of Iran is small. I learned there that people who address you should not be ignored. They probably just want to shake your hand and say something like, "American people—very good! Iranian people—very good!"

Another reason then to visit Iran is the friendliness of Iranians.

And yet Ms Mustoe may have been well advised not to bicycle across Iran. In Yazd we met a woman from Barcelona travelling alone. She said men passing on motorbikes would circle back to

[1] She does not seem to have considered this possibility for her round-the world trip. From Antakya in Turkey, not having been able to get a visa for *Iraq,* and anyway unnerved by rumors of Saddam Hussein's gassing of Kurds (this was in 1987), she just flew to Karachi.

rub up against her, or would invite her to ride with them, but berate her for refusing.

We did see two women cyclists, soon after our arrival in Tabriz; but like all women in the country, they had to conceal their bodies. Not only their hair must be covered, but also their arms to the wrists, and their legs to the ankles. In Pakistan, Ms Mustoe wore shorts that reached the knees: this would not have done in Iran.

And yet it seems this legally enjoined modesty does not cause Iranian men to keep their hands to themselves. For all I know, it only encourages men to grope. If women will submit to a law that says their hair and skin are not fit to be seen in public, why should women not also submit to the exploring hand of a random man?[2]

Here then is a reason *not* to visit Iran: Women must observe a demeaning dress-code. The code is demeaning to the *men* as well. What kind of man cannot allow his mother, wife, or daughter to dress as she wishes?

The scowling visage of the creator of this situation is seen everywhere in Iran. The late Ayatollah Khomeini is a saint, an *imam,* to his followers. On the other hand, it is not clear that we met any such followers in Iran. Perhaps, in the bazaars, some of the pictures of Khomeini had been hung there out of personal devotion, the way pictures of Atatürk are often hung in Turkey. We did see many mullahs striding through the Isfahan bazaar. But while the people who actually talked to us would often ask, hopefully, what we thought of Iranian people, they never asked, "What do you think of our government?"

Yazd was the most conservative city we visited. A woman elsewhere might just hang a scarf from the bun on the back of her head; but most of the women in Yazd wore a black chador. Yazd

[2] One way that Iran deals with this problem is to segregate mass transit in cities. On local busses, men sit at the front, women at the back. We never used these busses. We did use the Tehran metro, where men are barred from the first and last cars of the trains, though women may (and do) use any car.

was supposedly famous for its sweets, but we could not find a place to sit and eat them: it seemed as if one did not go out in Yazd, except to buy things to take home. We did find a sweetshop, but its products were sold in boxes.

The shop was crowded though, and a group formed around us. A man with good English was pestered by his friend to ask me something, and finally he did:

"Why does your government hate Iranian people?"

On the spot, I could think only to say, "All governments hate all people."

My interrogator was well pleased. He clapped me on the shoulder. *Ergo,* he did not disagree with the proposition that the *Iranian* government hates Iranians.

I did not mean to align myself with the compatriots of mine who habitually denigrate the government. In what I said, hate was not the opposite of love, but its absence. One looks for love from people, not governments. At the shop in Yazd, I meant just to recall a point that I had expected Iranians to understand better than Americans: citizens are not responsible for their governments.

This is sacrilege for an American. According to one of our holy texts [9],

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

It is the *right* of the people to alter or abolish a government; and we believe moreover that it is their *duty* to do so, when that government becomes destructive of various worthy ends. This is a noble belief, when the people in question are one's own people. When they are another people, it is naïve at best to expect outside pressure to inspire the revolutionary fervor of a Thomas Jefferson: a fervor that can actually bring down a regime.

While in Iran, whatever hardships might be due to American sanctions, I relied on people not to blame *me* for them. Neither did I blame Iranians for their dress-code. At least I tried not to.

The dress-code was originally going to keep my wife from travelling to the country. In April of 2012, a fellow called Mohammad invited Ayşe and me to give talks at the 43rd Annual Iranian Mathematics Conference, to be held in Tabriz, August 27–30. In consultation with Ayşe, I decided to accept the invitation, though Ayşe at first declined. Then Mohammad and several of his Iranian colleagues came to Antalya Algebra Days XIV in May.[3] The invitation to Tabriz was repeated, and this time Ayşe accepted.

One of our old colleagues from METU in Ankara was also going to Tabriz. Şafak had been one of Ayşe's teachers. He planned to tour Iran with his wife Soley after the conference. The two of them invited Ayşe and me to join them on their tour, and we accepted this invitation as well.[4] We would visit the cities of Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, and Tehran.

We learned then another reason not to visit Iran, or at least not to visit its cities: the stinking air. Iran has the resource curse. Turkey imports some 90% of its oil; but Turkey is better off than Iran both economically and politically. Turkey is richer and freer than Iran. The people of Iran fill their old cars with cheap petrol, but but much of it is imported, since the country cannot refine enough of its own oil. People drive everywhere: only now are cities building subways. So the air is filled with smoke from cars.

---

[3]In fact the 2012 meeting was not in Antalya, but in Çeşme on the Aegean coast.

[4]*Şafak* means dawn, and *Soley* is the Turkish phonetic spelling of the French *soleil* "sun."

During most of our time in the country, I had a mild sore throat and nasal congestion. These symptoms never developed into a full-blown cold: they may just have been my body's response to the pollution. The symptoms cleared up, once I was back in Istanbul.

But our trip had been amazing, and I cannot help but feel privileged that the Iranian authorities let an American like me visit the country. It transpired in Shiraz that my permission to visit had not been intended so broadly as I had presumed; but we got this sorted out with the police, without having to change our itinerary, as I shall explain.

The Lonely Planet guide to Iran [5] was indispensable for our trip. We used its advice on where to stay and what to see. The few other foreigners that we met in Iran were using Lonely Planet. They had older editions though: the sixth edition, of August, 2012, was too new. Ayşe and I had not found *any* edition in Istanbul bookshops, though we found many other Lonely Planets. We bought a `pdf` file of the latest Iran book from the Lonely Planet website. We printed out the chapters that we wanted, and then I sewed these into booklets with recycled cardboard covers. This was probably more useful than having the complete bound book. However, printed out on office paper, the chapters that we carried were together more bulky then the whole book would have been.[5]

Şafak and Soley had a Turkish guidebook to Iran, but it was not so useful. It suggested some hotels, but did not give their telephone numbers. It also did not point out that, owing to the sanctions, foreign credit cards and ATM cards would not work. We learned this from Lonely Planet.

So Ayşe and I went to Iran carrying hundreds of dollars and euros: many more hundreds than we ended up needing, but we wanted to be sure not to run out. We got more hundreds of dollars

[5]Of the chapters on individual regions of Iran, we carried three, on Tehran and on western and central Iran. We omitted the three chapters on the Persian Gulf coast and on southeastern and northeastern Iran.

in Tabriz when I was reimbursed for my airfare; but we had decided not to count on actually getting this money. In the event, we turned out to have been partially correct in our concern: I was not actually reimbursed for the full fare, since the Iranian authorities thought that fare was too high. They apparently did not accept the argument that this was the fault of their own foreign ministry: my ticket had been bought late and expensively, only because my Iranian visa authorization came late.[6]

The Lonely Planet guidebook is addressed to people from highly "developed" countries, and Turkey is not quite one of these. To somebody used to crossing streets in Ankara or Istanbul, Tehran traffic was not the horror that Lonely Planet made it out to be. A fact not useful to most Lonely Planet readers, but useful to *us,* was that many people in Iran knew some Turkish: either their mother tongue was the related Azerbaijani language, or else they had spent time in Turkey.

Both Turkey and Iran are the remnants of vast neighboring empires, which were sometimes at war with one another, sometimes at peace. The jewelry museum in Tehran, housed in the vaults of the national bank, contained gifts from Ottoman sultans.

When people ask why I like living in Turkey, one reason I give is that it is an origin of my culture. Homer lived here, and Christianity grew up here. But there is no eastern boundary to my culture. I can now say that my culture comes from Iran as well. Herodotus shows this.

---

[6] There was also an objection that my flight back to Turkey was from Tehran and not Tabriz. However, the authorities had paid for Şafak's ticket from the same city. They could do this well in advance, since Turks did not need visas.

2 Tabriz

The four of us arrived in Tabriz, on a Turkish airlines flight from Istanbul, at half past seven in the morning of Monday, August 27. Most women on the airplane covered their hair only after our plane had landed. Mohammad and another conference organizer were at the airport to meet us. But it was not so simple to leave the airport with them.

When I walked up to the passport window, the officer looked at my American document and told me to step aside and wait. He then attended to others in the queue. My three Turkish companions were held until I was dealt with. As I stood waiting, a woman came up to me.

"It's destroyed," she said.

"Excuse me?"

"It's destroyed. I'm sorry, I just want to ask you: Why did you come here?"

"I was invited to a mathematics conference."

"But it's not our country anymore. They have destroyed it."

"I know," I started to say, but then I just asked, "What do you suggest?" I did not get a clear answer, but the woman seemed disappointed in me. She walked off into the Islamic Republic.

I could not follow her until I got fingerprinted: all ten fingers, separately and together, on four sheets of paper, two labelled in English, two in Persian. Stamp-pad ink was used.

The ink did not wash off with soap. I found this out in the wash-room to which I was directed. When a man came out of a toilet stall and waited for the sink to be free, I made room for him, pointing out I would be scrubbing for a while. When he asked where I was from, I said “America—Iran’s greatest friend!” He chuckled.

The officer in charge of the fingerprinting was very apologetic. He addressed his apologies in his own tongue[1] to Mohammad, who then served as interpreter. Because so few Americans arrived at Tabriz airport, cleaner methods of taking fingerprints had not been made available. As it was, the officer offered to treat us all to breakfast. But we just wanted to get to our hotel.

A man named Boris, originally from the Soviet Union, was also bound for the conference; but he was travelling on an American passport, so he was fingerprinted alongside me. He had been to Iran before. He was not surprised by the delay.

I had read that, in 2010, the Iranian theocracy issued a list of acceptable Islamic hairstyles for men. The ponytail was not on the list. Nonetheless, a man in the passport queue ahead of us had worn one, as would a number of men we saw in Iran. Nobody ever bothered me about mine. It did seem to me that Ayşe and Soley got stared at in Isfahan for uncovering their necks in the heat; but we were never accosted by the Morality Police.

In some ways, the conference in Tabriz would resemble a Turkish National Mathematics Symposium, such as the one that Şafak, Ayşe, and I had attended in 2002 in Mersin. At both events, almost any mathematician in the country who wanted to give a talk could do so. According to the Tabriz conference booklet, 975 articles were submitted to the conference, and 591 were accepted, to be delivered as posters or talks. This was at a four-day conference.

In Mersin, the symposium had really been what the Greek origin of the word suggests: a drinking party. There was music and dancing and drinking every night. There were no such activities in Tabriz, at least not that we were invited to. The drinking at least would have been illegal, though it might have happened in secret.

Turkish National Mathematics Symposia do not generally have

[1] I do not recall whether this was Persian or Azerbaijani.

foreign speakers. The meeting in Iran had eight, though one of them, from Sweden, was originally Iranian.

The Turkish Scientific and Technological Research Council did not provide financial support to the Turkish National Mathematics Symposium of 2012. Neither did it support Antalya Algebra Days XIV; this meant that all participants had to pay their own way, including invited speakers from abroad.[2] But my participation in the Tabriz meeting was fully funded by Iran—or *almost* fully, as I said above.

Would the government try to get some propaganda value out of my visit? One day at Tabriz University, a reporter for the Islamic Republic News Agency wanted to interview me. She had to use an interpreter, so perhaps this was not a high-level assignment. There was no microphone that I saw: the reporter took notes with a pen. She wanted to know what I thought of the "level" of the conference. This was like the question I would often get on the street: "What do you think of Iranian people?"

I could not tell the reporter what she wanted to hear. I had so far attended only two talks, besides Ayşe's and my own, and I had not really been able to understand them, since they had turned out to be in Persian.[3]

[2] This is usually the case at Antalya Algebra Days. But speakers do come from abroad anyway: they have their own funding sources, and accommodation at the meeting is cheap, at least by European and American standards.

[3] In the conference handbook, all abstracts were given in English. The abstracts were arranged according to broad subject, as algebra, analysis, and so forth. Beyond this, there was no obvious principle of arrangement. Each abstract was accompanied by date, time, and location of the talk; but this information did not seem to have been used to order the abstracts. There were timetables elsewhere in the booklet, but they were in Persian; so we could not easily identify blocks of talks that we might be interested in. The talks that I attended did have *slides* in English, so I could understand *something.* It is common practice now for a speaker to project slides of text and equations on a screen, then talk about these. Thus a careless speaker can attempt to present too much material. For this and other reasons, I

I could not attend Şafak's talk when it happened, because it was simultaneous with mine, even though we were both billed as plenary speakers. I had thought a plenary talk was a talk that everybody at a conference might attend, because nothing else would be scheduled for that time. I had prepared my talk accordingly. However, my audience were fewer than twenty, and Şafak's were equally few. I do not know about the third "plenary" talk that was simultaneous with ours. But the conference organizers had arranged touristical excursions for conference participants, every day, *while talks were taking place.*

I mentioned these things to the IRNA reporter. But the interview ultimately became a conversation between me and the interpreter, who was just somebody from the university who knew English. In this conversation, I could not stay away from the issue of women's dress.

There were many women students at the conference. A number of them asked to have their pictures taken with me. And they all wore a black uniform that included a kind of cowl. They might as well have been nuns in habits. This got on my nerves. The men students wore no uniform. The only requirement on men in Iran seems to be that they wear long pants. Men can wear tee-shirts, or at least they can get away with it. Women must wear layers, to cover their curves. Throughout our time in the late-summer heat of Iran, I wore a long-sleeve shirt over an undershirt, to be in some sort of solidarity with the sisters, and to see how tolerable it was.[4] The long sleeves *were* tolerable; but most men wore the short sleeves that were forbidden to their mothers, wives,

do not normally like the use of slides; but evidently they can serve as an interpreter of the speaker's language.

[4]Wearing my own headscarf would have drawn too much attention, though I wish Iranian men would cover their own hair, in protest of the restriction on women, if not in revival of the style of headdress that must have been worn in the Prophet's time. Meanwhile, to have more of the experience of a woman in Iran, I suppose I could have worn a scarf around my neck.

and daughters. I had been thinking before: Why did the women not rise up *en masse* and throw off the headscarf? Now I realized that I should be asking also: Why do the *men* not refuse to allow women to be told what to wear?

I wondered this aloud to Ayşe. Obviously there were *men* who thought women needed to be told what to wear; but were there *women* who thought this? Ayşe suggested that I might be surprised at the numbers. I fear she was right.

To my interviewer in Tabriz, or rather to her interpreter, I had to recall some verses of the Quran (24:30–1):

> Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity: this will be most conducive to their purity—[and,] verily, God is aware of all that they do.
>
> And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof; hence, let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms.

This is the translation of Muhammad Asad [4]: the brackets are his, and he suggests in a footnote that what is being enjoined on women is not the use of a head-scarf as such, but the covering of the breasts with whatever is handy. In the Prophet's time, a woman's tunic left her chest bare, but the ends of her headscarf could be drawn forward for modesty. In any case, the Quran assigns to both women *and* men the responsibility "to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity." I did not have these verses memorized, so as to quote them in Tabriz. But I alluded to them, in suggesting that the Quran gave *men* the responsibility of controlling themselves and not raping women. Men could not blame a woman's indecent dress for their lack of self-control.

In my attempt to speak tersely and simply, I was sorry that I had used such a violent word as "rape." I heard the interpreter use something like the Turkish *tecavüz*. This word of Arabic origin apparently has the root meaning of transgression, of going beyond the bounds; and this was the meaning I wanted.

But perhaps I did not want all of my criticisms of the Iranian government to be shared with a reporter from the official news agency. I was planning to spend two weeks in the country. I suggested this to the translator. He seemed to agree that some things were best left unmentioned.

Only one of the logicians at the conference approached me to discuss mathematics.[5] She was an eager student working on a master's thesis. I got her to put some of her work on my USB flash drive: her topic was one that I had already planned on suggesting to a master's student of my own.

We foreign guests were treated like royalty in Tabriz. It was somewhat embarrassing, especially when Ayşe and I thought of how we treated guests at Antalya Algebra Days: we expected them generally to fend for themselves. But at Antalya Algebra Days, all events happen at one hotel, where staff speak English. In Tabriz, our hotel was only for sleeping. Contributed talks took place at the mathematics building at Tabriz University; "plenary" talks were in the chemistry building; meals were in the faculty cafeteria. We had no map in Latin letters of the campus or the city. We were assigned a minibus and driver to take us wherever we needed to go.

We also had a student guide who spoke Turkish. Monireh accompanied us everywhere. I think we could have walked between the hotel and the university campus, although our hosts did not consider this practical. We might have walked to the city center also; but I never managed to locate the university and hotel on the Persian city map.

On Tuesday afternoon, we took our minibus into the city center, with Monireh and another student guide. We visited the bazaar, mainly to change money. We went to the Museum of the Constitional Revolution of 1906–11, but it was closed. Most museums in

[5]Mohammad, an algebraist, found some connection between my work and his. Somebody else who had attended my talk asked me questions.

the country seemed to be closed around noon till four. So we killed time in a working-class teahouse on a side street. Men there sat on benches against the wall. The narrow tables in front of them were like feeding troughs, easily filled by the servers. Some men made room in the corner for our mixed group. We were three men and three women, Monireh in her neat university uniform, Soley and Ayşe in their purple and red headscarves. Şafak had on the white shirt he had worn to his talk. We must have been a sight.

The Constitution Museum had no sign in English. It was in an old house reached through a door in a wall. It consisted mostly of busts and photos of leaders of the Constitutional Revolution. What was this revolution? I went to Iran very ignorant, and I am still quite ignorant. To me, history is best learned after visiting the places where it has happened: but even then, the learning is difficult.

The Constitutional Revolution features in Amin Maalouf's historical novel *Samarkand* [14], originally published in French in 1989. The novel is about Omar Khayyam and the imagined fate, across centuries, of the original manuscript of his *Rubaiyaat.* In pursuit of the manuscript, an American lives through and even participates in the Revolution in Tabriz. He loses the manuscript when he tries to return to the US aboard the *Titanic.*

It seems there *was* a copy of the *Rubaiyaat* on board that ship. This copy had a golden cover, which was studded with the emeralds and rubies that would have made it at home in the jewelry museum in Tehran. However, the notion that this was Khayyam's original manuscript is Maalouf's fantasy. Maalouf does mention a number of historical figures, as when he explains his subject's childlessness:

> Khayyam had made his the maxim of Abu al-Ala, a Syrian poet he venerated: "My suffering is the fault of my progenitor, let no one else's suffering be my fault."

Checking *Wikipedia,* I find that Abul al-Ala al-Ma'arri, 973–1058, was a philosopher and vegan who wrote:

> Do not suppose the statements of the prophets to be true; they are all fabrications. Men lived comfortably till they came and spoiled life. The sacred books are only such a set of idle tales as any age could have and indeed actually did produce.

After the Constitutional Revolution, the Persian parliament hired a foreigner to straighten out the country's finances. The man they chose was an American called Morgan Shuster, who tried to save Iran from the imperial designs of the crowns of Britain and Russia. Maalouf's portrayal of Shuster makes one proud to be an American; but then one recalls that the US and the UK went on to work together, in 1953, to overthrow the Mossadegh government and install the last Shah. Shuster's own book is called *The Strangling of Persia* and is available on the *Internet Archive* (`archive.org`).

When we were in Tabriz, I had read Maalouf's novel once, but I could remember almost nothing of it. During my 2004 reading, I had no image to associate with the locations of Isfahan, or Tehran, or Tabriz; so the events of the novel that happened there did not stick in my mind. On the other hand, when I reread the novel after visiting Iran, I found that the novel took place also in Annapolis. I had not remembered this either, though I had lived in Annapolis for one year of college.

I mentioned not having remembered Telmessus, today's Fethiye, from reading Herodotus in college. Much less did I remember all of the Persian tribes to the east. According to Herodotus, when Cyrus revolted against the Medes, he united the Persian tribes of the Pasargadae, the Maraphii, and the Maspii; also, the royal house of Persia were the Achaemenidae, a clan belonging to the Pasargadae (I.125). Herodotus seems not to mention an actual man called Achaemenes; but on museum labels today, Cyrus and his successors are called Achaemenids.

The Achaemenid empire was conquered by Alexander the Great. Alexander's successors in Persia were the Seleucids, named for

Alexander's general Seleucus. Lying east of Fethiye, the Turkish Mediterranean city of Silifke takes its name from Seleucus.[6] The Seleucids were overcome by the Parthians, whose technique in warfare was apparently to feign retreat on horseback, then twist around and give the "Parthian shot." The Parthians were succeeded by the Sassanids. There are beautiful Sassanian bowls and drinking horns made of silver and gold in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. There are more of these wares in the Azerbaijan Museum in Tabriz (which we would see on Wednesday), as well as in the Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran.

After the Sassanids, Iran had various Muslim rulers. These included the Seljuk Turks, who also took over Anatolia from the Greeks. Later there were the Safavids, a Shiite sect, who are apparently the reason why Iran is Shiite today. The greatest of the Safavids, Shah Abbas, made his capital at Isfahan, creating the architectural beauties that we would see there. A couple of centuries later still, the rulers of Iran were the Qajars, who, according to Lonely Planet, were

> a disaster for Iran, taking just a few years to turn the country into an international laughing stock.

[6] Ayşe and I made a day trip to Silifke after the 2002 Turkish National Mathematics Symposium in Mersin that I mentioned. We were staying in Kızkalesi, "Girl Castle," a beach resort near a castle on an island. American soldiers from the base at İncirlik visited Kızkalesi. There was another castle on the acropolis of Silifke, where we were latched onto by Saatçi İsmail, "Watch-dealer Ismail." We did not accept his offer to take us back to Kızkalesi on his motorcycle. However, we encountered him there anyway. He exulted in drinking beer on the beach: it was cheaper than a restaurant, and more pleasant. Nonetheless, we did see him later, drinking alone in a restaurant. Unfortunately he saw us too, and he tried to induce us to sit with him. We begged off, and the waiter told him to leave us alone. I figure İsmail was interested in Ayşe. I knew little Turkish, and İsmail knew little English; but he could talk to Ayşe, and she was a liberated women, unlike his wife at home.

This would seem to be confirmed by the Qajar propensity for amassing the jewels seen in the jewelry museum in Tehran.

In the Constitutional Revolution, it was a Qajar shah who was forced to introduce a parliament. Turkey went through such a revolution at about the same time. In fact there is a monument to this revolution near our flat in the borough of Şişli in Istanbul; but the monument is not generally open to the public. Two of the instigators of the Armenian Genocide are buried on the monument grounds. When I visited, the caretaker of the monument did let me through the gate, and later she let me in with Ayşe; but when he saw us wandering about inside the fence, a guard from the adjacent justice-ministry building came to investigate, telling us he did not think civilians were allowed in.

The monument in Şişli is called Abide-i Hürriyet, "Monument of Liberty." The hyphenated suffix on the first word is the sign of the construction that Geoffrey Lewis, grammarian of Turkish, calls "Persian izafet" [13, II, 26, p. 48]:

> It was because of the extensive use of this alien grammatical feature, coupled with the borrowing of an immense Arabic and Persian vocabulary, that the literary and administrative language of the Ottoman Empire was largely unintelligible to most of its Turkish subjects. In Persian the qualifier follows the qualified, the opposite of Turkish usage, and the qualified is joined to its qualifier, noun or adjective, by an *i,* as in *koh-i-nur* "mountain of light" and *koh-i-bozorg* "great mountain." This device was used in Ottoman as in Persian, to link Arabic as well as Persian words.

Abide and *hürriyet* are apparently examples of such Arabic words. The modern Turkish name for the monument in Şişli is Hürriyet Anıtı, "Liberty Monument."[7] The Koh-i-nur diamond is called Kuh-e Nur by Lonely Planet, which repeats what is in the guidebook of the jewelry museum in Tehran: Kooh-e-Nur was in the hands of Shah Nadir of Persia until his assassination in 1747; then

[7]The Genocide instigators buried there are Enver and Talât.

the diamond made its way to India, and ultimately to the hands of Queen Victoria.

The Persian word for constitution is apparently *mashrutiyat* in Latin letters; but in place of the letter *a*, the letter *e* could be used. The Turkish word is *meşrutiyet,* though I think this word survives mainly in street-names; the current Turkish word for constitution is the neologism *anayasa,* from *ana* "mother" and *yasa* "law."

As Lewis suggests, knowing Turkish, especially older Turkish, can be a help in understanding Persian. At least it *would* be a help, if one could read the Persian alphabet. Ottoman Turkish was written in this alphabet; but then a Latin alphabet was introduced to the Turkish Republic in 1928, as a key component of Atatürk's Language Revolution. In Tabriz, an Iranian person pointed out to us that, when visiting Istanbul, he can pronounce the various Ottoman inscriptions on old walls, without knowing what they mean; a Turkish person would know what the words meant, if she or he could only read the letters.

Actually this may not be true, given what Geoffrey Lewis says about the unintelligibility of the Ottoman language to most Turkish subjects of the time. The language of Turkey has changed a lot since Ottoman times.

Visiting Iran was like returning to the age of four, when I could see that there were meaningful words written all around me, but I could not yet understand them or even pronounce them. It was a mistake not to learn the Persian alphabet before we went to Iran; but as I said, we could not be sure that we were going to make the trip until a few days before we actually made it.

At least we learned the Persian *numerals,* once we were in Tabriz. We Westerners say that we use Arabic numerals; but it seems we use *western* Arabic numerals. Iran uses variants of the *eastern* Arabic numerals. Some of these are like our western numerals, rotated ninety degrees clockwise; but some are not. The eastern Arabic numeral for five is a circle; the Persian numeral for five is an inverted heart. As provided by the `arabtex` package for TeX, the eastern Arabic numerals 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0, written from right to left, are

٠ ٩ ٨ ٧ ٦ ٥ ٤ ٣ ٢ ١

—the Persian,

۰ ۹ ۸ ۷ ۶ ۵ ۴ ۳ ۲ ۱

Our hotel room in Tabriz had three single beds and two Qurans, and each of the Qurans featured both the original Arabic text and a Persian translation. Arabic and Persian have completely different origins, the one being Semitic and the other Indo-European (while Turkish is Turkic). However, in my ignorance, the only way I could see to distinguish the Arabic and Persian versions of the Quran was that they used slightly different numerals for the verse-numbers.

During a conference talk in Persian, when the speaker wrote something on the blackboard, it struck me: The Persian or Arabic alphabet is made for *writing.* Perhaps even to call it an alphabet is misleading, since each letter comes in four different forms, depending on whether it is initial, medial, or final in a word, or just stands alone.[8] Most of the letters of a word are automatically joined up. In school, we users of a Latin alphabet are taught first to *print.* Only later do we learn to *write,* to use cursive writing; but there are various styles of this, and it is difficult to write both quickly and clearly, since the pen must make so many movements in all directions. At the talk in Tabriz, I got the impression that Persian (and therefore also Arabic) avoided this difficulty: with a simple flowing gesture, a word could be written quickly on the blackboard.[9] Throughout our time in Iran, I would often find myself admiring the calligraphy of the signs we passed.

I was describing Tuesday afternoon in Tabriz city center. After the Constitution Museum, we visited the nearby Masjed-e Jameh.

[8] There does not seem to be a distinction between upper and lower case.

[9] I cannot be sure of this impression unless I actually learn to read Persian or Arabic writing. I did not get to talk about my impression with somebody who knew one of these languages.

The Persian word *masjed* is related to the English "mosque" and the Turkish *mescit.* Here it must be observed that *c* in Turkish is pronounced like *j* in English. The Turkish *mescit* refers to any space reserved for prayer; perhaps a fitting translation in English would be "chapel." The special building called in English a mosque is in Turkish a *cami,* and this word shares its Arabic root with the Turkish *Cuma,* "Friday." (My source here is Sevan Nişanyan's etymological dictionary of Turkish [22].) It would appear that the Persian *Jameh* shares its root as well as its meaning with the Turkish *Cuma.* Thus a *masjed-e jameh* is what a *cami* is in Turkish: a *mescit* or *masjed* where a cleric leads the Friday prayers.

In Turkey, this cleric is called an imam. The imam delivers a Friday sermon, though on a given Friday, the sermon is supposed to be the same throughout Turkey, having been written and distributed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Ankara. The clerics delivering the sermon in Turkey belong to Sunni Islam. In Twelver Shiite Islam, the word "imam" is apparently reserved mainly for one of the Twelve Imams, who successively ruled the faithful after the death of the Prophet. The Twelfth Imam did not die, but went into Occultation; he will appear on earth again one day, accompanied by Jesus of Nazareth. Meanwhile, in Iran, the Ayatollah Khomeini is also called an imam; but the person who serves an ordinary mosque is a mullah.

I personally have not heard of cases where women serve as imams or mullahs. Occasionally, at our neighborhood mosque in Istanbul, it seems to be a woman who is chanting one of the five daily calls to prayer that are delivered by loudspeaker from one or both of the minarets. However, the person doing the chanting is called a *müezzin,* not an imam. According to the *Wikipedia* article called "Women as Imams," there are indeed women who serve as imams; and even in Iran, a woman may lead other *women* in prayer.

The Friday Mosque of Tabriz was mostly bare brick inside; but the bricks formed vaults over a forest of columns. Outside, some boys chatted with me in English. This was the first of many such occurrences. I have forgotten what was said on this particular occasion, except that it was quite friendly. Inside the mosque, a man showed us about proudly. He boasted of the great antiquity of the florally graven *mihrab*—the prayer-niche, showing the direction of Mecca to the south. He explained some prayers. This was all in Turkish. We had removed our shoes when entering the mosque; but a man who was already barefoot padded along with us. I had the impression that he was simple-minded, and that he considered the mosque as his asylum.

We learned that when Shiites prayed, they pressed their foreheads to little clay disks on the carpet before them. The disks might be plain, or decorated with images of Mecca or other holy places. We would see such disks at all of the mosques we visited. A web search now tells me that the prayer disk is called a *turbah,* and its use is optional, though recommended. The root meaning of *turbah* is earth, dirt, soil. The Arabic word appears in Turkish as *türbe,* but this usually refers to a tomb. There is also a Turkish word *turba*: this comes from the French *tourbe,* itself a Germanic word that, in English, appears as "turf." Thus the Arabic *turbah* and the English "turf" have similar meanings. I cannot tell if they have a common origin.

We left our two companions of the Friday Mosque of Tabriz in an office, where two more men were hanging out. One of these wore the turban and robes of a mullah. We said our friendly farewells.

According to Lonely Planet, there was an Armenian church called St Mary's at an intersection nearby. The church was said to date from the 12th century and to have been mentioned by Marco Polo. I do not know where these claims come from. The man himself lived 1254–1324, and there are many variants of his text. I have the 19th-century English version by Marsden and Wright,[10] apparently based on the first printed edition by Rambusio in 1559.

[10] This is in the 1996 edition by Könemann of Köln, printed in Hungary [27, pp. 33–4]; it is a physically attractive hardback edition, purchased in Ankara.

There is a chapter on Tabriz, printed as one paragraph:

> *Of the noble city of Tauris, in Irak, and of its commercial and other inhabitants.*
>
> Tauris is a large and very noble city belonging to the province of Irak, which contains many other cities and fortified places, but this is the most eminent and most populous. The inhabitants support themselves principally by commerce and manufactures, which latter consist of various kinds of silk, some of them interwoven with gold, and of high price. It is so advantageously situated for trade, that merchants from India, from Baldach, Mosul, Cremessor, as well as from different parts of Europe, resort thither to purchase and to sell a number of articles. Precious stones and pearls in abundance may be procured at this place. The merchants concerned in foreign commerce acquire considerable wealth, but the inhabitants in general are poor. They consist of a mixture of various nations and sects, Nestorians, Armenians, Jacobites, Georgians, Persians, and the followers of Mahomet, who form the bulk of the population, and are those properly called Taurisians. Each description of people have their peculiar language. The city is surrounded with delightful gardens, producing the finest fruits.

Without having mentioned a particular Armenian church building, Marco Polo now switches to a diatribe against Muslims:

> The Mahometan inhabitants are treacherous and unprincipled. According to their doctrine, whatever is stolen or plundered from others of a different faith, is properly taken, and the theft is no crime; whilst those who suffer death or injury by the hands of Christians, are considered as martyrs. If, therefore, they were not prohibited and restrained by the powers who now govern them, they would commit many outrages. These principles are common to all the Saracens. When they are at the point of death, their priest attends upon them, and asks whether they believe that Mahomet was the true apostle of God. If their answer be that they do believe, their salvation is assured to them; and in

consequence of this facility of absolution, which gives free scope to the perpetration of everything flagitious, they have succeeded in converting to their faith a great proportion of the Tartars, who consider it as relieving them from restraint in the commission of crimes. From Tauris to Persia is twelve days' journey.

It was my understanding that Christian baptism too could absolve the convert of his crimes.

In Tauris or Tabriz, at the appropriate intersection, we could see a small rooftop cross over a wall; but we could not have found a way to St Mary's Church itself without our local guides. After several turns down alleys, we found ourselves at an unsigned solid gate with a buzzer. We buzzed, and the elderly caretaker let us through. There was a lot of space inside for a garden, but this was not taken advantage of, except to grow a few vegetables. A woman eyed us from a porch; perhaps she was the caretaker's wife. The man took down the canvas covers from some French windows and let us into the church itself. The building was not obviously very old; it might have been a nineteenth- or 20th-century construction, still maintained for current use. Unfortunately our camera battery had run out at the gate; inside I snapped a few shots with my cellphone. The caretaker repeated the assertion that Marco Polo had mentioned the church.

While in Tabriz, we did not get to make the journey north to the Church of St Stephanos, 17 km west of Jolfa, on the site where, they say, St Bartholomew founded a church around the year 62. Other conference participants did go there. Perhaps the site is what Marco Polo refers to as "the monastery of Saint Barsamo, in the neighbourhood of Tauris," in the chapter following the one on Tabriz proper. On the other hand, to somebody travelling on foot, Jolfa is not exactly in the neighborhood of Tabriz. Then again, there is some suspicion that Marco Polo himself travelled no further east than Constantinople and some Black Sea ports.

The St Mary's Church that we did see was no more in the "neighborhood" of Tabriz than the Friday Mosque was: these structures were simply *in* Tabriz, and must always have been so.

To finish our sightseeing on Tuesday, we saw the Arg-e Tabriz, an enormous brick wall that had once been part of a mosque, or of the city's fortifications, or both. The structure did appear to have a *mihrab.* We were driven back to the university for dinner.

Meals at the university were a challenge for the vegetarians: Ayşe and me. To somebody with pretensions of being environmentally conscious,[11] the meals were appalling. Each meal produced a mountain of waste. Main courses, at least, were served on ceramic plates. Steel forks and spoons were available. But these utensils were given to us in disposable plastic sleeves. Tables were covered with disposable plastic sheets. Condiments and desserts were served in disposable plastic dishes. Drinking water was poured from disposable plastic bottles into disposable plastic cups.

Two or three kinds of flatbreads were available. Locals would take great stacks of these breads, then eat maybe half of what they had taken. The remainder would be thrown out with all of the plastic. Perhaps, in Iran, the petroleum for making plastic is cheaper than the water for washing dishes. As for all of the food waste, I heard a rumor that it was fed to animals.

In a Turkish restaurant, Ayşe is generally able to get the chef to cook us some vegetables without meat, even if there is no such dish on the menu. In Iran, she was not so persuasive. At a pizza parlor in Shiraz, through a local friend who served as interpreter, she was told that it was impossible to make a pizza without meat. A meatless pie would explode in the oven, they said. In Tabriz, for lunch and dinner, after prodding by Mohammad, the kitchen did serve us plain boiled vegetables like carrots and squash, along with sliced raw tomatoes and peppers. These were presented to us

[11] There is a train from Ankara to Tabriz that we considered taking, instead of the airplane, in part to cut down on the use of jet fuel; but then there was a flare-up of the armed rebellion in the east of Turkey where the railroad passed.

in various decorative ways on a platter; but the vegetables themselves were always the same. We were also given some beans and mushrooms from cans supplied by Mohammad. He went through a lot of trouble for us.

Really, it was not necessary. At lunch and dinner, there was always rice, albeit white rice. Everybody was served a huge mound of plain rice, with a little saffron rice on top. Much of this rice went to waste, along with the bread. There was always a thick soup called *ash,* made with beans and greens (and served in glass bowls). There was salad (served in disposable plastic boxes). There was yogurt (with shallots added, in little foil-topped plastic tubs). At breakfast there was lentil soup.

So we could have just skipped the meat course and been fine, at least for the duration of our stay. On the other hand, if just avoiding meat would have left us with a decent meal, why was meat served at all?

Presumably most patrons of the cafeteria at Tabriz University would refuse pork. Why not go the extra step of refusing all flesh? The aforementioned Abul al-Ala al-Ma'arri did it, though he seems to have rejected religion along with meat. Still, there are a number of websites promoting vegetarianism for Muslims. Even ritual animal sacrifice is not obligatory, on a liberal reading of the Quran. Here again is Muhammad Asad's translation [4, 22:36–7]:

> And as for the sacrifice of cattle, We have ordained it for you as one of the symbols set up by God, in which there is [much] good for you. Hence, extol the name of God over them when they are lined up [for sacrifice]; and after they have fallen lifeless to the ground, eat of their flesh, and feed the poor who is contented with his lot [and does not beg], as well as him who is forced to beg. It is to this end that We have made them subservient to your needs, so that you might have cause to be grateful.
>
> [But bear in mind:] never does their flesh reach God, and neither their blood: it is only your God-consciousness that reaches Him. It is to this end that We have made them subservient to

your needs, so that you might glorify God for all the guidance with which He has graced you.

What Muhammad Asad here calls God-consciousness, Marmaduke Pickthall [24] calls devotion; and Maulawī Sher'Alī [33], righteousness. It is this that God wants, and not the ritually slaughtered animal as such.

More rational than avoiding all animal flesh would be avoiding all animal products; but to live is to compromise. I tried to eat yogurt regularly in Iran, to prevent intestinal problems. In fact I did avoid these problems—problems of one kind, at least. Because the rice and bread that we ate were white and not brown, I had another kind of intestinal problem; but it was not too bad. Perhaps the internal sluggishness that I experienced would have been considered normal by everybody else, just as white rice and white bread were considered normal. Still, I ought to have bought a bag of dried apricots at the Tabriz bazaar; as it was, I did this only in Shiraz.

Meanwhile, on Wednesday morning in Tabriz, we made an excursion to Kandovan, a sort of Iranian Cappadocia. Kandovan is a village in a valley where people are able to dig houses out of the rocky hillside. Many villagers have now turned their cave-houses into cafes or shops for Iranian tourists. Many local herbs are for sale: they must have medicinal properties, but we did not know what they were. I did buy a white lump of some kind of gum. Since it was cheap, I do not think the gum can have been pure gum mastic, which is obtained from such trees as had recently burned in terrible fires on the Greek island of Chios. But my companions thought the gum had the same flavor as mastic.[12]

[12] Chios is called Sakız in Turkish, and *sakız* is also the word for gum. I do not normally chew gum, but it had been recommended for clearing up my ear after a recent infection, and I still seemed to have some fluid in my ear. For all I know, the sore throat and congestion that I mentioned above were symptoms of a lingering infection, not environmental pollution. On

I bought the gum from a line of stalls by the stream at the bottom of the village. Then some of us climbed the hillside again, away from the other tourists. The pathway was littered with loose stones, as well as with the trash of manufactured products. There was the jagged base of a broken bottle, which could have cut through somebody's shoe and foot. As we climbed, a boy ran headlong down past us.

At the top of the inhabited area, a man showed us the cave where his milk kept cool. His donkey was tied up outside.

Back at the university that afternoon, there was a small ceremony, at which the first words were "In the name of God." We foreigners were thanked for participating in the conference, and we were presented with Tabrizi rugs as souvenirs. Ayşe and I let Şafak's polite response speak for us as well. I was not sure I could say something myself without complaining about the treatment of women. There were no women among the officials presiding at the ceremony.[13]

Later on Wednesday afternoon, in Tabriz city center, we visited the Azerbaijan Museum, which housed such antiquities as the Sassanian wares that I mentioned above. In the basement were enormous garish bronze sculptures by a contemporary artist called Asad Hosseini,[14] giving his interpetation of concepts like racism and war.

The so-called Blue Mosque had been built in 1456, but lost its blue tiles and everything else a few centuries later in an earthquake. Apparently what we saw was an ongoing work of reconstruction. This work was adjacent to a public park, where Tabrizis relaxed as the day cooled into evening. Old women in black gathered on one

---

the other hand, as I said, back in Istanbul, the soreness and congestion cleared up, though not the fluid in the ear.

[13] At the closing ceremony of the whole meeting discussed below, the main organizer of the next year's meeting was introduced, and she was a woman.

[14] Lonely Planet gives his name as Asad Hossein, but in *Wikipedia* he is Asad Hosseini; the article on him dates his birth to 1944.

cluster of benches, while old men gathered on another—although amongst these men, a young man and woman were sitting close together, paying attention only to each other.

Somebody told us how to get to the Iron Age Museum, not listed in Lonely Planet. The museum was a structure erected over the graves of a number of bodies, whose now-exposed skeletons lay in fetal position. A young woman guided us along wooden walkways over the graves. She and Ayşe complimented one another on their English. The guide observed that the skeletons faced either east or west. She said the direction was thought to indicate whether the person had died in the morning or the evening.

I don't know that there is any real reason to believe such speculations about ancient customs. We later visited Yazd, the site of a Zoroastrian "fire temple" whose flame still burns. At a shop in town, we picked up a book in English that pointed out how easy it was to misunderstand Zoroastrianism. Writer Farhang Mehr [18] quotes Herodotus:

> Persians never defile a river with the secretions of their bodies, nor even wash their hands in one; nor will they allow others to do so, as they have a great reverence for rivers.

The last clause is said to be a misinterpretation of Zoroastrian practice. If you don't throw shit in a river, this doesn't mean you "revere" the river as such; maybe it just means you don't think it's a good idea to throw shit in a river.[15] If you are buried facing east, why should this mean anything at all?

On Thursday morning, after attending a talk in English and socializing with a number of people, mostly students, we attended the closing ceremony of the conference. We need not have done this, but it was interesting. The ceremony was in an enormous hall, filled with mathematicians—most of whom had not attended the "plenary" talks of Şafak or me. A man stepped up to the

[15] According to Mehr, Zoroastrianism has been called the first environmentalist religion.

podium and began chanting what were perhaps verses from the Quran. Or perhaps it was a hymn to Imam Khomeini, I don't know; but the scowling visage of Himself was on display. All rose for the national anthem, with video accompaniment that included images of Khomeini, missiles of war, and doves of peace. I stood as well, but fidgeted and made noises of exasperation that brought a scold from Ayşe.

Maybe she was right. My thought was this. Khomeini's followers did in fact seize power in Iran, and they may have improved the lives of many people. But I do not respect a theocratic government as such, and in particular I do not respect a government that treats women as the Iranian theocracy does. There are more reasons not to respect this government, such as the fatwa against Salman Rushdie; but their treatment of women is enough. I will be as polite as I can while in Iran. But there exists an historical photo of a crowd in Germany in which everybody is giving the Nazi salute, except for this one guy, who keeps his arms at his sides with a grin. Apparently his name was August Landmesser, and the year was 1936. His example should be followed. At the closing ceremony in Tabriz, there was a camera on a boom mounted on stage. If I am seen in the video, I do not want it to be assumed that I respect the injection of religion and nationalism into a meeting about mathematics—a universal subject if ever there was one. I had already had to give a talk with a photo of Khomeini on the wall behind me.

Many classrooms in Turkey have portraits of Atatürk on their walls; but not at the two universities where *I* have taught.

In the afternoon, we met Monireh's mother and brother at our hotel. The family gave us gifts of sweets and cheeses. We caught a bus to Isfahan. For a while, it had appeared that this trip to Isfahan could not happen at all, at least not for me: Mohammad told us I was not authorized to travel outside Tabriz. Then he made another phone call and said I was free.

3 Busses

Instead of the 17 hours given by Lonely Planet, the trip to Isfahan would take 12 hours: we were assured of this by the Isfahani mathematician who would be travelling with us.[1] Reza bought our tickets for us from a bus company's website. He saved the ticket files on my USB flash drive until he had access to a printer. Another Isfahani mathematician, Majid, actually paid for the tickets with his credit card; he accepted dollars from me to cover our share. A third Isfahani mathematician joined us on the bus. So in all we were seven travelling together, overnight to Isfahan. This meant we occupied about a third of the seats on the bus.

On a standard bus in Turkey, there are forty-odd seats: four across, with two on either side of the aisle. I suppose that is the standard arrangement everywhere. There is not much legroom for a tall person like me, but it is usually adequate. Some Turkish busses, for a premium, have only three seats across: two to starboard (so to speak), but only one to port. However, the pitch of the seats is the same as before. Our bus to Isfahan was a "VIP" bus: three seats across, *and* greater pitch. The seats reclined almost fully and had leg-rests. It was the most comfortable arrangement for a night ride, short of having an actual bed.

Unfortunately three of our seven seats composed the back row of the bus. Ayşe and I and Şafak took these. Reza tried to move us forward, where the swaying of the bus would be less pronounced, and we would be more comfortable. When we demurred, he threat-

[1] The Isfahan section of Lonely Planet gave 17 hours to Tabriz; the Tabriz section gave 1 hour to Isfahan, obviously a misprint.

ened to insist on the host's right to treat his guests as *he* thought best. But he did this with a smile. He could view Iranian hospitality from the outside: he had earned his doctorate in Indiana. Like Ayşe and me, he and his wife did not own a car.

The forward seats of our group on the bus were all single seats on the port side. I told Reza I wanted to be able to sit next to my wife, on the starboard side where we were. He agreed to let us be. During the trip then, we sometimes felt as if swinging about on an amusement-park ride. The bus also seemed to stop a lot, perhaps so that police could stamp a log-book and check for speeding. Nonetheless, the trip to Isfahan did indeed take just twelve hours.

In Turkey, at least in the west of the country where we spend most of our time, the intercity busses are clean, as if brand new. The floors are carpeted. The driver and attendents wear uniforms. The attendents serve tea and snacks periodically. There is a half-hour break every four hours at most, at a facility with clean toilets and many things to eat.

It used to be that the bus driver in Turkey would listen to music, which could be heard over the loudspeakers above every pair of seats. You could turn off your own speaker, but this did not help much. The driver's preference was usually a pop radio station called Süper FM, which I did not particularly care for; but since I otherwise enjoyed the bus journey, the jingle of the station came to have pleasant associations for me. The attendent on the bus might also play a movie, seen on a couple of overhead monitors, and heard through every speaker. It would probably be a Hollywood action movie, dubbed in Turkish; but you did not need to understand the words to follow what was going on. One could hardly help but watch, just as one would involuntarily look at the remains of an accident by the side of the road.

Turkish busses now tend to have a personal video entertainment system for each passenger, as on a trans-Atlantic airplane flight. This is a great improvement, because it means one is not forced to watch or listen to anything. I still wish my fellow passengers would turn off the video if they are not going to watch, particularly at night. But possibly Ayşe and I annoy people who are trying to sleep when we turn on our own overhead reading lights. I try to bring eyeshades, myself, for when I do want to sleep. In any case, the bus in Turkey is taking us to some wonderful destination.

When I was in high school, a particular teacher would meet a few students for philosophical discussions. In one of these discussions, this teacher raised the question: What experience invariably gives you pleasure? I remember only the answer of a classmate: Entering an art museum. I can understand that reply, but now I can suggest another one: Boarding a Turkish intercity bus.

In Iran, I infer the following from our four intercity bus-rides there. The bus may not be carpeted, and the tires may be worn; and this is with the superior bus companies recommended by our Iranian friends. The driver and attendants do not wear uniforms. At the beginning of the trip, the attendants distribute cardboard boxes that are filled with packaged sugary confections; but then they serve no more. There is no tea. You are free to fetch water for yourself from the rear stairway. There is a movie, shown to and heard by everybody; but there is only *one* movie. At night, the reading lamps work only when the bus dome lights are on; and these are not on when the bus is under way.

The bus takes a break only at prayer times, which are apparently morning, noon, and evening, not five times a day as in Turkey. Turkish busses do not stop for prayer as such. On our trip from Yazd to Tehran, from nine at night till five the next morning, while there may have been a stop for a change of drivers, or for the police checks that I mentioned, there was no break for the passengers. Neither was there a toilet on the bus. I am not aware that this caused us any problem; but still it does not seem like a good situation.

The prayer stop in Iran will be at a facility with food as well as prayer space. The break will last half an hour, as in Turkey. But in Iran, the facility may be grungy, and the food minimal. Also, you should be able to find your way around a place where all signs are in the Perso-Arabic alphabet. At our evening stop on the road from Tabriz to Isfahan, Ayşe and I followed the couple who had been sitting in front of us and chatting with our companions. The man had a doctorate in statistics from Stanford. At the rest stop, we figured the couple were looking for something to eat. We found ourselves at a room of prayer mats.

In the morning, we did arrive at a wonderful destination.

4 Isfahan

We reached the bus terminal north of Isfahan at half past five on Friday morning. Reza bargained with a taxi driver to take us Turks (or the Turks and me) for seven thousand tomans. That's *seventy* thousand rials, and banknotes are denominated in rials; but apparently Iranians think in tomans, one toman being ten rials. Or perhaps, given what inflation has done, Iranians think in units of a thousand tomans. This is approximately equal to one Turkish lira (which used to be a *million* lira, until the revaluation in 2005; but some Turkish people still say *milyon* for what is now one lira).

In effect then, our taxi driver asked seven lira for a ride into town from the outskirts. That's a lot cheaper than in Turkey; but petrol in Turkey is the most expensive in the world. When we reached Safir Hotel, the driver demanded two more lira. He indicated our many bags. Four people with luggage are indeed a tight fit in a small taxi. But the driver had known the situation when he made the deal with Reza. We gave the driver the seven lira, the seventy thousand rials, ignoring his shouts as we walked into the hotel.

Ayşe had made our hotel reservation with her mobile phone, using the Iranian SIM card that our Tabrizi hosts had provided her with. Lonely Planet had warned us that hotels were scarce in Isfahan, so booking ahead was advisable. Our Isfahani friends told us that our hotel (selected from Lonely Planet) was in a good location. But the person who answered Ayşe's call to the hotel did not speak good English (or any Turkish). Monireh called later, to confirm that we did indeed have a reservation. But would our rooms be available as soon as we arrived at dawn? It seemed unlikely. Reza called from the bus, and indeed our rooms would *not* be ready.

When we arrived with our bags, the man on duty at Safir Hotel spoke neither of our languages. He showed us a closet to leave our bags in. We went out and walked east and north along tree-lined streets to Naqsh-e Jahan, "pattern of the world," the square whose construction began in 1602 under Shah Abbas. They say only Tienanmen Square in Beijing is larger.

The old Turkish word for world is *cihan,* while *nakış* means now embroidery, but formerly also fresco or miniature painting. *Cihan nakşı,* "world miniature," would appear to correspond to the Persian *naqsh-e jahan.* Apparently the Isfahan square of this name used to be called also Shah Square, but this name has been replaced by Imam Square, perhaps in allusion to Khomeini, or in a *damnatio memoriae* of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.[1] We found the square cool in the morning twilight. Pointed, blue-tiled Persian domes peeked over the walls. This was the exotic east. Turkish domes are leaden and hemispherical, inspired perhaps by the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople/Istanbul.

Families were camped out on the grass of Naqsh-e Jahan Square. They were still sleeping, or strolling about, or preparing breakfast. Soley and I wandered with our cameras. The sun rose over the walls of the square.

From the map in Lonely Planet, I found us a better route back to Safir Hotel, along a marble plaza, adorned with sculptures and fountains, serving as a roadway median. By now there was a cheer-

[1] I learned about "damnation of memory" during a bus trip in Turkish Mesopotamia in 2008. After seeing the great statues atop Mount Nemrut, we visited the Severan Bridge over the Cendere Creek. When built during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus, the bridge had two columns at either end, in honor of the Emperor himself, his wife Julia, and their sons Caracalla and Geta. When Severus died, Caracalla would not share power with his brother, but had him killed. He then tried to erase his memory. In particular, the column of Geta on the Severan Bridge was knocked down.

ful English-speaking clerk on duty. We had breakfast, and then the clerk was able to give Şafak and Soley a vacated room: it was not made up yet, but at least it was a place to rest. Ayşe and I went out again.

It may be tedious to read the minute details of our travels. It is somewhat tedious to write them. But they should be remembered. The imperial city of Shah Abbas was astonishingly beautiful. But we could not just pop in. We had to make the arrangements that I have described, or we had to find others who could make them for us. And first we had to *decide* which arrangements we wanted to be made. Should we save time by taking an overnight bus, or would this be a false economy, given that we would be groggy the next day? Şafak's original idea had been to *fly* from Tabriz to Isfahan. Then we learned in Tabriz that there was only one flight a week, on Wednesday. So we had to make other plans. And we were four people. In the event, we got along well.

In a city in Iran, it seems that trees and bushes grow in a ditch between the road and the sidewalk, and the ditch is flooded with water from time to time. Perhaps this arrangement has been in place for centuries. I don't know where the water comes from, or whether the water is in immediate danger of running out. On Friday morning in Isfahan, while Soley and Şafak slept, Ayşe and I further explored Naqsh-e Jahan Square. At a kebab shop where we stopped for a bottle of drinking water, we saw a man wash trays in the nearby irrigation ditch.

Other shops around the square were opening up. Some of these were along an arcade behind the inner walls; some opened directly onto the square. Many shops sold rugs or other handicrafts that tourists might buy. An available artefact that interested me was called in Turkish a *rahle*: a bookrest made of two wooden planks, interlocking to form an X. Since the *rahle* is meant for sitting on the floor with a Quran, the purchase of one could brand me as an Orientalist. However, a *rahle* might just as well hold a dictionary or an art-book. Since we were already carrying gifts from Tabriz, I decided not to load us down with another object. Only a book itself could be an exception to this rule.

One handicraft dealer said he and his father had visited a trade fair in the United States. Owing to the sanctions, the fees for them were high, and they could not afford to go back the next year.

Thinking ahead to lunch, Ayşe and I climbed a flight of stairs, to investigate Naqsh-e Jahan Traditional Banquet Hall. For seating there, the *takht* was used. This word is *taht* in Turkish, where the usual translation is throne. There are some lovely Seljuk examples of this kind of throne in the ethnographic museum in Ankara. I have wondered about having a *taht* made, for use at home, though if a *rahle* would suggest Orientalism, a *taht* would certify it. But a *taht* is just a wooden platform on which a party may sit cross-legged; or they may recline on pillows against the low railings on three sides.

At Naqsh-e Jahan Traditional Banquet Hall, the *takht*s provided a "Qajar-era ambience," as Lonely Planet said; not surprisingly then, the restaurant "caters mainly for tourists (ie the food is overpriced and underwhelming)." We made the place our Plan B.

In the eastern wall of the Naqsh-e Jahan Square, we entered the Lotfollah Mosque, named for Shah Abbas's Lebanese father-in-law. It was just a domed space, with no minaret or courtyard. But the pattern and colors of the inner walls of that space were exquisite. I don't know what else can be said. One could be content to stare at those walls for a long time. Everything was in harmony. The camera battery had died again, so I took some cellphone photos. As we were leaving, the ticket-taker asked if we had seen the peacock. We had not, so he showed us. It was a kind of tail of light emanating from the apex of the dome.

By now our own room at the hotel was ready. Ayşe slept while I made use of the wireless internet connection. I was sleepy too, but I thought it would be better to stay awake till afternoon. For lunch, the four of us found a pizzeria on the main drag, Chahar

Bagh, just west of Safir Hotel. In fact the restaurant served also felafel, which three of us had.

There was a large park north of our hotel, between Chahar Bagh and Naqsh-e Jahan Square. Many families were picnicking on the grass beneath the trees; for Friday is the Sunday of Iran, the second day of the weekend. A couple of old houses in the park were museums; but the nearer one, called Kakh-e Hasht Behesht, was on its afternoon break. Lonely Planet said the summer hours were 9:00–12:30 and 15:00–18:30; but the Persian figures on the paper taped to the gate said 9:00–13:15 and 15:30–19:15.

Instead of waiting till half past three, we walked to Kakh-e Chehel Sotun, the palace of forty columns. In Turkish, *sütun* is column. The Persian *chehel* for forty has some resemblance to the Turkish *çok,* which means many or much, while the Turkish *kırk* "forty" is also used in the sense of many; but according to dictionaries, *çok* is pure Turkish. In any case, under my leadership, we had a lot of trouble finding the 40-column palace. I could not quite match the small Lonely Planet map with what I could see on the ground. Also, passers-by gave us bad directions. By the time we reached the garden of the palace, we were parched.

Since it was the weekly holiday, many shops were closed. We would have to find drinking water on the palace grounds. There was a lot of *water* on the grounds, in the form of a reflecting pool. Indeed, the palace itself had only twenty columns; but if you counted also their reflections in the pool, you got forty.

There were shop stalls beside the pool. A dealer in old prints gave us lemonade. He told us we could purchase his wares by credit card: he would take an imprint of the card number the old-fashioned way, then send the charge slip to his partner in Dubai. We found bottled water at a teahouse elsewhere on the grounds.

The twenty columns of the palace were wooden, supporting a large roof over open space. The columns were tall and thin, like the trunks of the pine trees growing nearby. The harmony of nature and artefact was, again, exquisite. Indoors, the high vaulted ceiling was painted with subtle blues and pinks and oranges and greens that produced an effect of utter contentment and peace. Lower down on the walls were murals depicting scenes of hospitality—but also of battle against the Turks. We were, after all, in an old imperial capital.

My companions had tea at the teahouse, but I did not sit with them, as by now I wanted a nap. First I went to the other mosque at Naqsh-e Jahan Square, on the south side: the Masjed-e Shah or Shah Mosque, now called also the Masjed-e Imam: Royal Mosque seems best in English. Since Friday was the day of prayer, the mosque was supposed to be closed to tourists; but the man who was about to lock the door let me in. When my visit was over, I had to wait for him to come back, to let out some of the faithful who had been inside.

In the Royal Mosque, I began to learn the concept of the liwan. The word is *iwan* in Lonely Planet; in Turkish, it is *eyvan.* A Turkish-English dictionary gives the meaning of *eyvan* as liwan. The word *liwan* is not in the *OED* [19]; but according to *Wikipedia,* it is a loanword from Arabic, the *l* of the Arabic article *al* having been joined to the noun *iwan,* which had been borrowed from Persian.[2] In any case, an *iwan* or liwan is apparently a roofed space, open on one side. Perhaps the vast porch of the Kakh-e Chehel Sotun did not count as a liwan: it was open on *three* sides. But the Royal Mosque had four liwans, opening onto a courtyard from the four cardinal directions. The openings of the liwans were vast arched passageways cut out of large rectangles. Perhaps everybody has seen at least photographs of such things. I remember thinking the photographs looked peculiar: the rectangle

[2]The transfer of the *l* from article to noun seems to have happened in Arabic itself, not just in English. So the situation may not be as with, say, the English *algebra* or *elixir.* In the Arabic sources of these words, the article may have been clearly distinct from the noun, since Turkish borrowed the nouns as *cebir* and *iksir.* In any case, transfer of a letter from article to noun *is* seen in English: "a newt" was originally "an eft."

with the arched opening could be larger or at least wider than the vaulted or domed space behind it. But somehow, at the Royal Mosque, everything seemed right: the arches, their blue colors, the patterns of the blues.

I went back to the hotel for a nap. Meanwhile, my companions tried to see the Royal Mosque themselves; but this time the doorkeeper did not let them in. They saw instead the palace called Kakh-e Ali Qapu on the west side of the Naqsh-e Jahan Square. I would end up not seeing this myself. Outside of it were hanging portraits of the Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei, Iran's successive Supreme Leaders. Some of the furnishings of the Ali Qapu palace had been destroyed in the 1979 revolution that allowed these ayatollahs to come to power. Also the remarkable music room on the top floor was closed.

For dinner we walked south on Chahar Bagh, crossing the dry Zayandeh River on the Si-o-Seh Bridge, a long stone structure used only by pedestrians. Apparently there used to be teahouses on the bridge, but the authorities closed them, because they were places where girls and boys could get to know each other. The authorities did not admit to this though; they said the gas bottles used for boiling water were a safety risk. Many people were strolling on the bridge anyway, or wandering on the dry riverbed, or picnicking on the grass beneath the trees of the park on the southern shore. It was a picture of urban contentment.

Our destination was a restaurant called Khan Gostar, which was said to have a good salad bar. This was in the Armenian quarter, called Jolfa after the town up north that we had not visited from Tabriz. Shah Abbas had brought all of his artisans from Jolfa. The restaurant we sought was not as close to the main road as it seemed to be from the Lonely Planet map; but an elderly local man led us there. He talked about the years he had spent in Istanbul. We walked beside a wall, behind which was the Armenian cathedral; but the door was locked for the night. Across the street from the door was a statue of the Armenian Archbishop Khachatur

Kesaratsi, founder of the first printing house in Iran in the 17th century.

The Khan Gostar restaurant gave us a good meal, if a bit expensive for Iran. The waiter was a loquacious man from India. He warned us that restaurant portions were large, so we should not order too much. He had observed the wasteful tendencies that I had noticed in Tabriz.

After dinner, we stopped in a cafe called Ani, named for the ruined medieval Armenian city in Turkey. The cafe looked like a bar from outside, and I wondered if Christians were allowed to sell alcohol to other Christians. But the containers lined up on the wall did not contain liquor. They were coffee tins of many lands, including Turkey. A man in the cafe called himself Père Noël, which he (correctly) translated into Turkish as Noel Baba. He gave Soley a stuffed animal.

On Saturday, the four of us arranged to meet at the other grand mosque in town, the Masjed-e Jameh: a Friday mosque, such as we had seen in Tabriz. The Friday mosque of Isfahan was northeast of Naqsh-e Jahan Square, and thus on the other side of the square from our hotel. Ayşe and I would get up promptly and walk there, along a route through the bazaar suggested by Lonely Planet. Şafak and Soley would come by taxi.

We did not manage to follow the Lonely Planet route exactly, but we did reach our destination. Meanwhile, in the bazaar, we passed many turbaned, black-mantled mullahs, striding purposefully, on their way to—where? The offices where they got together to think up more restrictions on other people's lives?[3]

We found a *bazari* from whom we could buy a couple of handkerchiefs. They were from Pakistan.

Reza had told us that the Friday Mosque in itself was a museum of art history, having been augmented many times over the cen-

[3]It might be said that the mullahs do not put more restrictions on women's dress than the mullahs put on themselves. But mullahs choose their jobs.

turies. At the entrance were a number of panels of text, explaining the various additions. Unfortunately there was no *book* that we could buy to take home.

Much of the brickwork of the Friday Mosque was bare. The mosque might lack the grandeur of the Royal Mosque, but it seemed to be larger in area and so, in this sense at least, more impressive. It too had four liwans. We started our explorations in the southern liwan, the one with the *mihrab.* An elderly man started telling us about the various features. According to him, a rectangle in the floor indicated the spot where a Zoroastrian temple once stood. Ayşe asked how he knew this. He said he had heard a tour guide say it.

The man offered to show us around the whole mosque. Perhaps he would hope to get paid for this. But he had also said he prayed at the mosque every day. We declined his offer; but I did want to ask him a question. I had seen a number of mosques in Turkey, and now I had seen a few in Iran. In none of the others had I seen an image of any human being. And yet in Isfahan's Friday Mosque, flanking the entrance to the western liwan, there were images of the Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei, looking as if they were painted onto the brick.[4] What did our would-be guide think of this?

He admitted, "It is not good."

At least the images were not placed in the direction of prayer!

One hears that Islam forbids images of people and even animals. For centuries, Iran has not observed such a ban. Persian miniature paintings of humans are famous; we would see some of them in the Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran. Pictures of Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, the First Imam, are probably as popular in Iran as pictures of Jesus in the US. But the people who had

[4] *Wikipedia* has an older photo of the liwan, without the human images. This shows that the images are painted on inserts that fill the gallery openings on either side of the liwan.

actually *built* the beautiful mosques that we saw in Iran—none of them had decorated their mosques with images of themselves or anybody else.

After touring the four liwans, the four travellers walked back through the bazaar to Naqsh-e Jahan Square for lunch. We chose not the Naqsh-e Jahan Traditional Banquet Hall, but the other touristy restaurant. One should remember however that almost all tourists in Iran were Iranian. Bastani Traditional Restaurant had some *takht*s, but they were all occupied, if we had even wanted one; we sat on chairs at a table. We were waited on by a young woman who had little English, but who asked us to write a sentence in English in a little notebook that she kept for this purpose. On the cover was a girl in a white dress, praying; the iconography seemed Christian, though there was no actual cross. Inside the notebook were inscriptions from many countries, praising the beauty of Isfahan and the warmth of the people. I wrote something similar.

On our morning walk to the square, Ayşe and I had seen a group using a stencil to paint some white letters on a red wall. They challenged us to tell them what the Persian letters said. We could not, though the answer might have been obvious: cafe. After lunch then, we returned to this cafe. It was called Zhic, and it did seem to be a chic place. The walls were dark. A couple of men on staff wore their hair long. The lemonade that I ordered came in a slanted glass. But the Turkish coffee that Ayşe ordered did not come for an hour. Ayşe asked if the coffee beans were still being harvested. Perhaps to keep us occupied, the waiter offered us the password to the cafe's wireless internet; but neither Soley nor I could get a mobile device to connect.

By this time, it was certainly late enough in the afternoon to visit Kakh-e Hasht Behesht, the palace that we had not been able to visit the previous day. It turned out to have the same pleasing harmony with the trees outside that we had seen in the Kakh-e Chehel Sotun. It was even more open to the outside, though less colorfully decorated inside.

In the evening, we tried to find a restaurant that was supposed to have rooftop seating next to the park; but our inability to read signs in Persian letters made this difficult. Somebody was able to point out the stairway leading to the restaurant; but the restaurant was closed. We then tried what was supposed to be Isfahan's best restaurant. Lonely Planet did not say Restaurant Shahrzad *was* the best, only that it had this reputation. There were no vegetables on the menu, but there was an omelette. Soley asked if she could have an omelette with cheese and mushrooms. She was not vegetarian, but was tired of eating kebab all the time. Şafak was feeling the same way. The waiter said omelettes contained eggs only. No variation was possible. We left the restaurant. We resigned ourselves to the Italian restaurant we had seen. It had a salad bar at least.

There is a saying in Turkish:

> *İsteyenin bir yüzü kara, vermeyenin iki yüzü.*
> The one who asks has a black face,
> [but] the one who does not give has two [black] faces.[5]

Our mathematician friends in Tabriz did their best to avoid having two black faces. But some restaurants treated our special requests as if we ourselves were covered in soot.

On Saturday evening, while we were looking for the first restaurant, a young man stopped me, saying he had already met me. I did not clearly remember him; many people had spoken to me. But

[5] Alternatively, perhaps more literally, "The face of the one who asks is black, [but] two faces of the one who does not give [are black]." I translate the explanation from Özdemir's dictionary [23, p. 108]: "One is ashamed to ask something of somebody else. But the real one who should be ashamed is whoever does not give to the asker when asked something himself." Here "real" translates *asıl,* which takes the form *aslı* to mean the reality *of* something. This form *Aslı* is also a given name, and it is my spouse's middle name; as such, it was part of an incident at passport control when we were leaving Tehran for Turkey.

I talked to him some more. When he said how wonderful America was, I pointed out that America had overthrown the Mossadegh government in 1953, when it tried to nationalize Iranian oil.[6] However, the young man did not understand my pronunciation of Mossadegh's name, or he did not know about Mossadegh himself, or he missed my use of the past tense: When I said the US had overthrown the Iranian government, he said,

"I hope so! I pray for this to happen!"

This was on a busy street corner.

What could I say in response? "No you don't"? Khomenei could hardly have seized power, had the Shah not been bad enough to drive the people to overthrow him. And US had supported the Shah. On the other hand, one person in Iran did tell us that she had preferred life under the Shah. But she also liked George Bush: he was a friend of the Iranian people. She was not sure about Barack Obama.

We had tickets for a bus to Shiraz, Sunday at 11:00. There had been no office in town where we could buy these tickets; but our hotel's staff could and did have the tickets delivered. The staff were generally friendly and helpful. One of them was a jolly fellow who said he was getting married soon, and we were invited to the wedding. Ayşe noticed that her headscarf had slipped down, revealing all of her hair. The man covered his eyes in feigned shock.

Before we arranged to buy bus tickets, somebody suggested just hiring a driver. Such a driver happened to be right there in the hotel. Ayşe and I talked to him. I was enthusiastic at first about the idea of hiring him. With our own driver, we could stop when we wanted: for example, at Pasargad, which was actually quite far from Shiraz. With a driver, said Lonely Planet, you could go

[6] However, on the web I find, "'Overthrowing Mossadegh had been like pushing on an already-opened door,' wrote Barry Rubin in *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (p. 89)" [1]. I have enjoyed reading another book by Barry Rubin: *Istanbul Intrigues* [30], about spying in that city during World War Two.

up into the Zagros Mountains, to see some of Iran's remaining nomadic peoples. But this was not realistic in the present driver's small car. The four of us later decided to take the bus.

Before catching this bus on Sunday morning, Ayşe and I walked back down to the Armenian quarter to see the cathedral. We had to wait a little while for opening time. The sanctuary itself was rather small. It had a bulbous pointed Persian dome, just like any mosque. Outside, the church dome was unadorned: it was the color of the clay it was made of. Inside, the walls of the church were illuminated with scenes from Christian mythology. The dominant colors were red and gold. The effect was impressive. Still, the mosques of Naqsh-e Jahan Square may be more beautiful than any church I have seen.

And yet the beauty of those mosques is that of heaven. More precisely, their beauty provides an illusion of heaven. A mosque cannot put you in heaven; at best it can only help you figure out how to get there. But I think this is just what the images in a church are supposed to do.[7]

The walled cathedral compound in Isfahan had a memorial to the Armenian Genocide. The compound also contained a museum, with a display about the Genocide. Other museum displays included decrees from shahs, telling Muslims not to molest Christians. This suggests that the Persian Christians *did* take grief from the Muslims. I do not know how they feel about their situation today.

[7]If the images of ayatollahs in Isfahan's Friday Mosque are intended for a good purpose, why would not images of the Prophet and the Twelve Imams also serve this purpose?

5 Shiraz

Our ride to Shiraz took six hours. We were met at the terminal by Faramarz, who had been a student at METU in Ankara at the same time as Ayşe; he too had had Şafak as a teacher.

Ayşe had reserved rooms for us at a "Top Choice" of Lonely Planet: the Niayesh Boutique Hotel, in the old part of town, with rooms around a courtyard. The streets were narrow there: you had to walk to reach the hotel. On Sunday evening, after we had settled into our rooms, Faramarz took us out to the so-called Quran Gate, on the road that we had just taken into the city. There was a gap in the mountains, fitted out with terraces and artificial waterfalls. Some families were picnicking beside the parking lot; some were picnicking *on* the parking lot. Faramarz could find a slot for his car only between two such families. Some of the people were sleeping, on blankets laid out on the asphalt.

We walked down to where we got a view of Shiraz at night. We climbed some stairs to where Faramarz thought there might be a restaurant. There wasn't. We walked somewhere else. They served no meatless dishes. Finally we went to the pizzeria I mentioned before, where Ayşe was told that a meatless pizza would explode in the oven. Şafak and Soley got meat pizzas; Ayşe and I ate rice, yogurt, and salad. These were brought to us with a disposable plastic tablecloth and a stack of breads, each in its own plastic bag.

On Monday, the four of us from Turkey saw the sights of Shiraz. In the evening, Faramarz took us to dinner at a real restaurant.

Our first destination on Monday morning was the one nearest our hotel: the Aramgah-e Shah-e Cheragh. This can be found in *Wikipedia* under the title Shah Cheragh, which is translated as King of the Light. The site holds the tomb of Ahmad, son of Musa, the Seventh Imam. Another son of Musa, by the same mother, was Reza, the Eighth Imam. Concerning the recovery of Ahmad's tomb, I quote verbatim from a booklet called *Palace of light* [28], available at the site:

> To save the holy body of Hazrat Ahmad ebn-e Moosa after his Martyrdom, it's disappeared from the sight of unbelievers and no one knew the place of his tomb until the time of Azad addole Deilami, the real Muslims saw a brightness over a heap then informed Azad addole that something is shining brightly until morning over that place.

I wonder if the text was translated by computer. Today the tomb of Ahmad is in a large walled complex. There are separate entrances for men and women, and women must don the chador. Lonely Planet says infidels are technically not supposed to enter, though sometimes they may be allowed in. I entered with Şafak. A man stopped me from going further, but this was only because I was carrying a backpack. I think the main concern was cameras: photos were not supposed to be taken. I went back out and checked my bag at a window marked for men. But first I hooked my camera to my belt, along with my cellphone. These were hidden under my shirt. When I went back into the shrine compound, the same man who had sent me out was patting down other men; but he waved me through. I did not take any photographs. I might have been able to get away with it, since there were people talking on cellphones in the compound, even in the shrine itself.

Meanwhile, Soley and Ayşe met us, wrapped in florally printed bedsheets. Immediately we parted again, because Ahmad's shrine itself was segregated by sex. The sarcophagus was in a glass box whose sides were covered by a silvery grid that I think was plated plastic. One side of the box was available for women's veneration;

the other three sides, for men.[1] I saw men caress the grid and kiss it. Şafak observed that one should not turn one's back to the tomb; but then I saw that some men did turn their backs.

There were several rooms on the men's side of the shrine. Many men sat around on the floor, praying or just lounging. One young man asked me, in a friendly way, where I was from, and why I was at the shrine. To the latter question, I said I had come for my education. I guess he did not understand this: he just said his English was not good. A friend of his came up, they started talking, and I slipped away.

The vaulted ceiling of the shrine was tiled with tiny mirrors. I cannot say the effect was particularly appealing. I want to suggest that a reflection is only as good as what is reflected. If you have made an interior space that is pleasing in form, then lining it with mirrors makes as much sense as lining a teacup with fur—which is what Méret Oppenheim did, but she was a Surrealist.

As the tourist's Isfahan had been the creation of Shah Abbas, so Shiraz was the creation of Karim Khan, who made it the capital of Persia in 1750. Apparently this founder of the short-lived Zand dynasty took only the modest title *vakil* or regent; so the next place we visited was called by this name.[2]

We could not *find* the Vakil Mosque so easily. We walked through the bazaar to reach it. We asked people where it was. One of these people latched onto me: he was a bald-pated man with his remaining white fringe tied in a ponytail. He spoke English, but I started getting the sense that he was not all there. Meanwhile my companions found the mosque. I followed them, and the man followed me. I managed to lose him when he started talking to other visitors in the mosque.

This mosque was similar enough in form to the mosques of Is-

[1] Perhaps women had access to one-and-a-half sides.

[2] In Turkish, *vekil* is used for, among other things, members of parliament. The Zands were overthrown by the Qajars in 1794.

fahan, and it was as painstakingly decorated; but somehow the decorations failed to give it the full appeal of the Isfahan mosques. Maybe the Vakil Mosque had too many colors for my taste, or the images of vines and flowers there were too explicit.

The brick fortress called Arg-e Karim Khan was likewise not so impressive. Inside it, I decided that what was to be appreciated about Shiraz was not so much the architecture as the gardens. Behind the walls of the fortress, there was a pool flanked by ranks of orange trees and beds of flowers. There were also Iranian tourists, who wanted to talk to us and have their pictures taken with us. One little girl *seemed* to want to talk to me; but when I squatted down to her level, she could find no words. Either she really knew no English, or was shy. Maybe her parents had told her to talk to me.

We wandered through the exhibits in the rooms of the fortress; we lounged in the garden. Then we were hungry and went out. Şafak and Soley went off to an ice-cream stand they had seen; Ayşe and I bought a bowl of *ash* soup, served from a cauldron opposite the entrance to the fortress.

When our friends came back, we visited the nearby Pars Museum, set in Bagh-e Nazar, Garden of Nazar.[3] The museum was an octagonal pavilion where Karim Khan entertained foreign guests. Exhibits on the walls inside included two works labelled as talismans: sheets on which grids had been drawn, each square of the grid then being filled in with a word or a numeral. The museum was selling a book, in Persian and English [29], which I can now consult: a picture of one of the talismans has the caption,

> A spell written in Abjad (a type of Arabic writing system used for isopsephy)
> Donated by Asadollah Khavari, Qajar Era (1794–1925)

Perhaps "numerology" would have been a better word than "isopse-

[3]In Turkish, *bağ* is vineyard; *nazar* is look or glance, or in a pejorative sense, the evil eye.

phy": the latter word is not in the original *OED,* but its adjective form "isopsephic" is there, with the meaning,

> Of equal numerical value; said of words in which the numerical values of the letters (according to the ancient Greek notation) made up the same amount.

In the Pars Museum, looking at the talismans, I thought of Agnes Martin, the Abstract Expressionist whose works included pencilled grids with a dot of paint in each square.

The most impressive exhibit in the Pars Museum was the *muqarnas* of the domed ceiling itself. This might be described as a regular array of stalactites. I have not been able to understand fully how this regularity is achieved; and I think this is what makes *muqarnas* interesting to me. There had been *muqarnas* in just about every mosque archway we had seen; but *muqarnas* in a whole dome was unusual. Photography was not allowed in the Pars Museum, so I tried to make a sketch of the ceiling; but I was not very successful.

For lunch we went to Sharzeh Traditional Restaurant. It was hard to find, as Lonely Planet said it would be. Somebody showed us the way through a passage in the bazaar, then down a stairway. We sat on a balcony overlooking a lower floor, where a band played to accompany a male vocalist. The house was quite full. There was a salad bar.[4]

After lunch, I suggested we could go to Masjed-e Nasir-al-Molk, though Lonely Planet said it was open only at the whim of the caretakers. Şafak was willing to take a chance. I led the way through the bazaar. First we encountered the Madraseh-ye Khan; it was described in Lonely Planet, but I had not been thinking of it. We saw the *muqarnas* of a large arch over the door. Lonely Planet recommended going to the roof for the view, if somebody

[4]I don't know what the Persian for salad bar is, but the Turkish is *salad bar* or perhaps *saladbar.*

let you in; but nobody answered our knock. We continued to the Nasir-al-Molk Mosque along the main street, but we found the mosque locked up.

My companions agreed to take the back alleys towards our hotel. The bazaar had been north of the main street; now we were south of it. We eventually stumbled on a mosque in ruinous state, though it seemed to be under renovation. We saw a passage from the courtyard into another open space. We tried to go through, but an old man stopped us. The space beyond was the Shah Cheragh complex that we had visited in the morning. We were trying to enter now from the opposite side. The man had already seen me using my camera; he was not going to let me through. For lack of chadors, the women were not going to get through. So we just took a detour through what turned out to be another bazaar.

At breakfast in the hotel courtyard that morning, two young men (from Korea perhaps) had shown us a photo of Cyrus's tomb at Pasargad. They were not sure the long trip out from Shiraz was worth it. But I was sure, for myself at least.

According to Herodotus, Cyrus conquered Lydia after Croesus attacked *him,* as I said. Croesus had been told by the oracle at Delphi that if he sent his army against the Persians, he would destroy a great empire. In the event, he destroyed his own Lydian Empire, which included most of what is now western Turkey. So this territory became Persian, as did territory as far east as the river that Herodotus calls the Araxes, but must have been the Oxus or Jaxartes [11, p. 255].[5] On Croesus's advice, Cyrus crossed this

[5]These rivers are today the Amu Darya and Syr Darya; they would flow into the Aral Sea, if their waters were not diverted for agriculture. The word *darya* appears in Turkish as *derya* "sea." Herodotus refers also to another Araxes, supposedly today's Aras, rising near Erzurum, Turkey, and flowing into the Caspian Sea. By the Genesis account, the river flowing from the Garden of Eden divides into the Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Euphrates. Apparently some scholars identify the first of these with the Araxes, and the second with the Oxus. The name of the third in Greek becomes Tigris,

river to attack the Massagetae, who were ruled by Queen Tomyris. This time it was Tomyris who was victorious, and Cyrus was killed. Somehow, it would seem, his body was brought all the way back to Pasargad for its entombment.

I decided to take the tour of Persepolis and Pasargad that could be arranged on Tuesday by our hotel. Ayşe agreed to go along. This meant Soley and Şafak could go to Persepolis with Faramarz at their own pace, with plenty of space in the car.

Back at the hotel on Monday afternoon, Ayşe and I put down our dollars for the tour. Şafak and Soley wanted to get to Yazd; so on Tuesday afternoon, they would catch a 5:30 bus. The Pasargad tour was scheduled to return at 5:00, but there was no telling how well the schedule would be kept. Ayşe and I figured we should stay a third night in Shiraz.

The Niayesh Hotel was beautiful, and we recommended it to travellers we met in Yazd. It was not in the older editions of Lonely Planet. Ayşe and I had been given a large room with a double bed and two single beds, with windows on three sides. This was in the new wing of the hotel, away from the old courtyard. We turned off the air conditioner, opened the windows, and let the night breezes come in. Unfortunately light also came in, from the lamps illuminating the exterior. There were dark curtains hung over the windows, but the breeze lifted them.

Also, sounds of flowing water came in from the air conditioner, even when it was off. It disturbed my sleep more than the light did. On Monday afternoon, I complained about this to Ali at reception, and he got on the phone. After a while, the sound died out. A woman in the lobby with an Australian accent said she had seen a worker go down to the basement. I figured the problem was solved.

Faramarz came to take us out. First we went to the bus station, to buy Soley's and Şafak's tickets for the next day at 17:30, and

---

or Dicle in Turkish.

Ayşe's and mine for 10:00 the day after that. Then we proceeded to the shrines of Sa'di and Hafez.

Lonely Planet talks about the significance to Iranians of these poets, especially Hafez; but I cannot say I understand what this means. Do people feel a personal connection to these poets, or do they admire them because they have been taught to? These explanations are not necessarily incompatible. In any case, the shrines of the poets were in the midst of gardens, and they did have many visitors.

Signs at the shrines gave the dates of Sa'di as 606–690; of Hafez, 727–792. But these are "A.H.," *Anno Hegirae*: lunar years since the migration of the first Muslims from Mecca to Medina. *Wikipedia* gives the dates as 1184–1283/91 and 1325/6–1389/90, *Anno Domini* or Common Era. These dates agree only approximately with the dates from the sites.

At the Hafez complex, we bought a boxed hardback edition of the poet's works [31]. Each glossy page has an illuminated border and an English translation of what, presumably, is the poem given in Persian below. Each page also has a Western number and a Persian number. But the numbers are not equal: their *sum* is always 521. The pages are numbered in Persian in the normal Persian order, which to us is backwards. Are the poems themselves ordered in any particular way, and if so, for which reader? Here is one of the poems, in the translation of Herman Bicknell, from page 22 by the Western reckoning, 499 by the Persian:

> To lovers since thy beauty cried, to call them to thy presence high,
> Thy lock and mole have jointly sought the spirit and the heart to try.
> That which the souls of lovers feel, when absence renders them forlorn,
> The thirsting ones of Karbilâ no others in the world have borne.
> If, O my soul, thy tyrant Turk loves riot and the goblet's flow,
> Sobriety and ways austere thou must of all things first forgo.
> A happy day, a time of mirth, a season for enjoying wine:
> Five days shall the occasion last: make it a prize, O heart, while

thine!

HÂFIZ, at the auspicious hour,
When thou thy monarch's feet shalt kiss,
Thou shalt attain in both the worlds
The summit of renown and bliss.[6]

Outside the bookshop, a man engaged in the bibliomancy that we had read about: he opened a Hafez collection at random, put his finger on a poem, and told fortunes from that. Perhaps then the order of poems in the book does not matter.

At both the poets' shrines, large photos of Khomeini, Khamenei, and also President Ahmadinejad were on display. These photos may have been aimed at participants of the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, which had been held in Tehran the previous week. Some of those participants were supposedly touring the country now.

At the Sa'di shrine, another poster was headed by the logo of the XVI Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement; at the bottom, the Cultural Heritage, Handicraft & Tourism organization [of] Fars Province was named. Blended together across the middle were photographs of: Hafez's tomb; a relief of the Sassanid King Shapur, victorious over the Roman Emperor Valerian; the Arg-e Karim Khan; the Shah Cheragh; Cyrus's tomb at Pasargad; and Sa'di's tomb. We had seen or would see all of these. Above the photographs were some verses from Sa'di (called Saadi Shirazi on the poster):

Human beings are members of a whole,
  In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
  Other member[s] uneasy will remain.[7]

[6] I have supplied the colon in the eighth verse. The Battle of Karbilâ/Karbala was the occasion of the martyrdom of Hussein, the Third Imam.

[7] On the poster, these were printed as two verses, not four.

Unfortunately the verses tell only part of the story. Humans are able to overcome their natural sympathy for one another. They often do overcome it. They overcome their natural sympathy for animals too, in order to eat them.

In Shiraz it was getting dark. Faramarz drove us to a park, but it was closing; visitors were streaming away. We went on to dinner, at Haft Khan, said by Lonely Planet to be “wildly popular with fashionable Shirazis.” There were several floors, with different themes. The floor recommended to us did indeed have vegetarian dishes on the menu, so we filled up well. One of the dishes however was “pesto salad (diet).” The “diet” referred to was evidently the vinegar diet: the salad was quite sour. The dining room had been empty when we arrived, though other groups came later. There were white cloth napkins and wine glasses on the tables, and indeed non-alcoholic wine was available. A pianist played background music, including the most tolerable version of “Hotel California” that I have ever heard. (I hear that song too much in Turkey.)

Back at the hotel, the sound from the air conditioner had returned. Also there was no water from the taps. We complained to the night clerk. He had the water problem taken care of. He said water to the whole hotel had been cut, but now it was back. But he also said that once the water reached the upper floors, the sound from the air conditioner would stop.

It did not stop. For another night, I slept four hours, woke and heard the burbling noise, and could not sleep again for a long time. The sound of a flowing stream would have been fine. Somehow the present noise was different, if only because it sounded like water being wasted.

In the morning, before our tour departed, I told a third clerk that if the sound could not be fixed that night, I wanted another room.

“Oh, you want to stay a third night?”

“Yes.”

“But you only reserved for two nights.”

"We reserved for two *or three* nights," said Ayşe.

There was a brief scare. We could indeed stay for a third night; but we could not change rooms unless we packed our bags before departing for our tour in five minutes. We agreed to keep the old room.

Since our tour guide would speak in English, I thought our fellow tourists would be foreigners. Then it transpired that our guide would speak both English *and* Persian. We went to pick up our tour companions from the Pars International Hotel: they would be two Iranian families from Mashhad in the northeast. Masshad was where the Eighth Imam himself was buried. Concerning the Pars International, Lonely Planet wrote,

> The owners of this four-star business hotel are politically conservative, so don't expect foreign stations on the TV or any relaxation of dress codes.

Ayşe and I had moved to the rearmost bench of the battered green minibus, where there was at least adequate legroom for me. Our guide asked if it would be possible for us to move to the foremost of the three benches, so that one of the families with five members could use the rear. I said it would not be very possible, but the guide did not wait to hear why. The other families just started piling into the van as they could. Ayşe suggested that we might have to sit four across on a bench built for three. I got ready to declare that this was intolerable.

But it did not happen. There was a family of three and a family of five, but one of those five was a little boy who could sit on a parent's lap. His older brother sat next to me. The man in front of us, from the other family, asked Ayşe and me sternly where we were from; then he announced the answer in Persian to the rest of the bus. Our group warmed up to one another as the day went on.

Perhaps it helped that the men of the other families were academics like us (one in geology, one biology). The young man next to me was studying civil engineering at university; his sister was in medical school. At first I had been disappointed that we would not meet more foreigners. But seeing Iranians' reactions to Persepolis was worth the price of admission. Darius was their forefather, and his city of Persepolis was a symbol of the greatness of the Iranian nation.

When buying the book of Hafez at his shrine, we had also bought *The Authoritative Guide to Persepolis* [32]. Our tour guide saw it and said it was the best. But there was too much to read in preparation for the visit.[8] We just followed along with our human guide, whose name was Ariya. He pointed out the connection between his name and the name of the Aryan race.

Our first stop was the site called Naqsh-e Rostam. It was where Darius the Great and his successors were buried in a rock face. Each tomb was graven into the mountainside in the shape of a cross. The horizontal bar was carved to look like a colonnade;

[8] I had bought and read Ryszard Kapuściński's *Travels with Herodotus* [12] not long after it came out in 2007. Rereading the book in 2015, I see that the author describes (in the chapter called "Among dead kings and forgotten gods") a visit to Tehran and Persepolis in 1979. However, as with Maalouf (p. 20), so with Kapuściński: I did not remember what he had had to say about Iran when I visited the country for myself. At least, I do not *now* recall remembering Kapuściński when I was in Iran. Kapuściński describes Alexander's approach to Persepolis at the end of January, 330 B.C.E. He then gives a long unattributed quotation about a band of Greeks whom Alexander meets on the way. They have been captured in war and mutilated. They are missing ears and noses, and sometimes hands or feet—whatever they do not absolutely need to carry on their work. They do not want to return to Greece. I have not been able to find Kapuściński's source. Arrian is supposed to be our best source on Alexander; but Arrian mentions no mutilated Greeks in his brief account of Persepolis [3, III.18]. The Loeb edition of Arrian has an appendix (number X) on Persepolis, describing the accounts of Arrian's predecessors, particularly Diodorus and Quintus Curtius; but there is no mention of the mutilated Greeks. Their story seems not to be in Plutarch's Life of Alexander [26, pp. 801–53]. Kapuściński's quotation does however itself quote Diodorus Siculus (as "Diodor"), and I have located this quotation [7, XVII.69.4, p. 317]. So the ultimate source of the story would seem to be Diodorus.

the burial chamber itself was right in the middle. Below the Achaemenid tombs were Sassanid reliefs, such as the celebration of Shapur's victory over the Romans that had been on the poster at the shrine of Sa'di. Gibbon [8, ch. X, v. I, pp. 282–3] describes this event:

> Elated with this easy conquest [of Armenia], and presuming on the distresses or the degeneracy of the Romans, Sapor obligated the strong garrisons of Carrhæ and Nisibus to surrender, and spread devastation and terror on either side of the Euphrates.
>
> The loss of an important frontier, the ruin of a faithful and natural ally, and the rapid success of Sapor's ambition, affected Rome with a deep sense of the insult as well as of the danger. Valerian flattered himself, that the vigilance of his lieutenants would sufficiently provide for the safety of the Rhine and of the Danube; but he resolved, notwithstanding his advanced age, to march in person to the defence of the Euphrates. During his progress through Asia Minor, the naval enterprises of the Goths were suspended, and the afflicted province enjoyed a transient and fallacious calm. He passed the Euphrates, encountered the Persian monarch near the walls of Edessa, was vanquished, and taken prisoner by Sapor. The particulars of this great event are darkly and imperfectly represented; yet, by the glimmering light which is afforded us, we may discover a long series of imprudence, of error, and of deserved misfortunes on the side of the Roman emperor.

At the cafe by the parking lot, at our guide's recommendation, we tried the strange drink we had seen at a juice bar in town. It consisted of tiny seeds steeped in rosewater. It was supposed to have all kinds of wonderful properties. At any rate, it was tasty.

As we drove over to Persepolis itself, the Achaemenid tombs, which had seemed so large, became little specks at the end of a great mountain.

We alighted from the bus, and we walked along a grand avenue to the elevated platform of rock where Persepolis sat. Through the trees to the right were the poles that had held up the tents where, in 1971, the last Shah had celebrated 2500 years of Persian monarchy.

We ascended the grand stairway. We wandered among the columns that had held up the roofs of Persepolis. Alexander the Great had burned those roofs; but if he had not, the roofs would still have perished over the years, like the canvas of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's tent city. How much else would still have perished? It needs imagination to appreciate Persepolis as it is. Between the legs of the great human-headed, winged bulls at the Gate of All Lands, we saw where 19th-century European visitors had carved their names into the stone, like dogs leaving their mark on fire hydrants.

After being shepherded about Persepolis, we were given lunch at a nearby tourist restaurant. For Ayşe and me, an eggplant dish was cooked, and there was a salad bar. We sat on a *takht.*

Ariya had told us that we were the only ones who had signed up to continue on to Pasargad. He said we would still go there; but it was not clear to us how the others were going to get back from Persepolis to Shiraz. We never found out: they enjoyed Persepolis so much, they decided to see Pasargad as well. But it was a long way to go, and we all fell asleep in the bus.

The grand pathway down to Cyrus's tomb was lined with propaganda. As at the poets' shrines in town, so here were photos of Khomeini, Khamenei, and Ahmadinejad; but now there were additional photos, with obscure captions. A woman stood up to a crouching soldier's rifle, while her children cowered behind her: "Judge yourself" said the caption. Did this mean "Judge for yourself," as if the picture were supposed to speak for *it*self? Or did it mean, Take responsibility for your own crimes, before you meddle in the supposed crimes of others?

Photographs of crying children and heaps of bodies had the legend, "Here Myanmar . . . where are human rights claims?" Near Cyrus's tomb itself, the image of Khamenei was accompanied with words that seemed intended as a boast:

> Islam regards honoured, mental maturity, progress and respect for the women. Islam regards individual identity and personality for the women.

I am not sure what this was supposed to mean; but Khamenei was the Supreme Leader of a country where women were about to be banned from 77 courses at 36 universities.

Standing not far from Khamenei's image, our guide Ariya had words of praise for Cyrus. I do not know what his sources were. By the account of Herodotus, the fight against the Massagetae was hardly admirable. Following Croesus's advice, Cyrus retreated from Massagetae territory, leaving behind his worst soldiers with a feast of meat and wine. A detachment of Massagetae forces attacked and slaughtered these soldiers, then feasted on the meat and wine. Unused to luxury, they fell asleep and were in turn slaughtered or captured by Cyrus. Queen Tomyris's son was among the prisoners. Tomyris invited Cyrus to return her son and depart unpunished. Cyrus declined and was himself killed.

Probably Ariya had read the *Cyropaedia,* that is, the *Education of Cyrus,* which presents its subject as the ideal type of a ruler. Unfortunately I had not read this work of Xenophon myself,[9] except for a passage in a footnote in Marx's *Capital* [15, XIV.5, p. 366]:

> Xenophon says, it is not only an honour to receive food from the table of the King of Persia, but such food is much more tasty than other food. "And there is nothing wonderful in this, for as the other arts are brought to special perfection in the great towns, so the royal food is prepared in a special way. For in the small towns the same man makes bedsteads, doors, ploughs,

[9] A few months later, I did read it. In taking as its hero a man who to the Greeks was a barbarian, the *Cyropedia* can be likened to the *Iliad,* whose noblest figure is Hector. In its implicit considerations of what is the best life, the *Cyropedia* has echoes of the Platonic dialogues.

> and tables; often, too, he builds houses into the bargain, and is quite content if he finds custom sufficient for his sustenance. It is altogether impossible for a man who does so many things to do them all well . . . So it is with the art of cooking." (Xen. Cyrop. I. viii., c. 2.) Xenophon here lays stress exclusively upon the excellence to be attained in use-value, although he well knows that the gradations of the division of labour depend on the extent of the market.

The historical value of Xenophon for the actual life of Cyrus is dubious. In any case, Cyrus was in his tomb at Pasargad before Herodotus and Xenophon were born.

Ariya mentioned also Cyrus's releasing of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity. This is described in the first chapter of the Book of Ezra [6]:

> NOW in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying,
>
> 2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
>
> 3 Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which is in Jerusalem . . .
>
> 7 ¶ Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;
>
> 8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah . . .
>
> 11 All the vessels of gold and of silver *were* five thousand and four hundred. All *these* did Sheshbazzar bring up with *them of* the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

Ariya praised the temperance of Cyrus.[10] But then he made a curious observation.

"Some people drink a little alcohol, and that's fine," he said, indicating, with thumb and forefinger, a small amount in a glass. "But some drink more and more," he continued, widening the gap between finger and thumb. "That's a problem."

I took this as a sign that, despite prohibition, alcohol was commonly consumed in Iran. Moderation would indeed seem to be the wise course; but it is hard to be truly moderate with alcohol if the government tries to ban it completely. Enforced moderation is no virtue.

Some time during the day, Şafak had called Ayşe on Faramarz's mobile to report that their own trip to Persepolis had been postponed by a summons to the police station. Our hotel manager had been ordered to take Soley and Şafak there, where they had to answer a lot of questions, mainly about Ayşe and me. When we ourselves got back to the hotel, the manager was waiting to explain the situation. He was to take us for interrogation at eight the next morning. But probably we should not worry: if the police were going to lock us up, they would have come to fetch us themselves.

Arash took us for tea and a chat in the courtyard. We learned that he had been a vegetarian for a while; but he lived at home at the time, and his mother did not want to cook him special meals, and he himself did not want to live on white rice and yogurt. Arash was one of several Shirazi tour guides listed by name in Lonely Planet: he was called a "young, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and highly organized guide, driver and fixer." We wanted berths on the overnight train from Yazd to Tehran: Arash got on the phone with a friend to arrange this. He told us where to stay in Yazd

[10]By the account of Xenophon, on the subject of temperance, Cyrus tells his troops: "I believe that those who abstain from present pleasures do this not that they may never enjoy themselves, but by this self-restraint they prepare themselves to have many times greater enjoyment in time to come" [35, I.v.9, p. 81].

and what to do in Tehran. We said we had not been able to get into the Nasir-al-Molk Mosque: he said,

"Why don't you try now? I'm sure it will be open."

We did go there, and it was open. It was a smallish mosque, albeit large enough for a long pool in the courtyard. Tiles gave the mosque a pink hue. On the west side was an exhibition space, with photographs and paintings; on the east side, the main prayer space was walled off by colored glass. A young boy with minimal English showed us around, almost by main force. His mother politely tried to keep him from bothering us, but he was no bother. The family were visiting from Tehran. In the exhibition space, the boy showed us the "cow well," a well with an adjacent inclined underground passage, apparently where cows had once been used to pull the ropes that drew water.

We had dinner back at the hotel on a *takht* in the courtyard. I do not remember what we ate, but I remember telling the server that it was the best meal we had had in Iran.

Arash had arranged to meet us at the hotel Wednesday morning, to take us at eight to the police station and then, hopefully, to our ten o'clock bus. We piled into his white SUV with our bags. The entrance to the police station was surrounded by Afghani immigrants trying to get working papers. Arash made a way for us through the crowd. We deposited our cellphones at the front desk, as required, and then we went upstairs, where Arash had to write down our life stories in Persian on some printed forms.

Then we moved to another office, a carpeted office, where one must remove one's shoes before entering. Arash was planning to explain that we had been *invited* to the country, and hospitality dictated that we not be disturbed. So it was dismaying when he was told to wait outside.

We sat in silence as the officer in charge wrote out his own questionnaire for us, in English. We filled this out. We were authorized to visit only Tabriz, he said; so what were we doing in Shiraz?

Our friend in Tabriz made a phone call and got us permission, we said.

The officer was skeptical, though I could not understand what he did not believe. He told us that a university professor had no power to authorize our travel outside of Tabriz. Fine; but could that professor pass along somebody *else's* authorization?

Ayşe offered to call Mohammad to clear things up; but she would have to fetch her cellphone from the entrance. The offer was ignored.

I argued that, as far as I could tell, my visa was a visa for *Iran,* not just a particular part of Iran. I did not get a clear response.

I do not know what the officer's aim was. Ayşe could tell by the softness in his eyes that he did not mean us any harm; but I was not so perceptive. Some time after nine, Ayşe suggested that maybe we were going to miss our bus at ten.

"No" said the officer, "the terminal is nearby."

He added to his questionnaire: "Why did you visit Isfahan and Shiraz without permission?"

I wrote, "I thought we had permission to visit Iran, and in particular those cities."

"What is your intended itinerary after Shiraz?"

"We want to visit Yazd and Tehran. We have tickets to leave Tehran Sunday morning."

And that was it. We were given verbal authorization to do what we wanted to do. We were free to go. Ayşe urged the officer to visit Turkey.

On the way back to his car, I invited Arash to be our guest, next time he was in Istanbul. I gave him our email addresses. He said he might be in Istanbul in a couple of months. He dropped us off at the terminal. We got on our bus. I thought I wouldn't mind a drink. Until then, I had not missed alcohol.

Our bus to Yazd stopped somewhere to pick up a passenger. He was an old man with a green turban, a bristly chin, and missing teeth. He walked right up to me, leaned over, and said what sounded like "When?" He must have meant "Where?" He then asked, "Yazd?" I acknowledged that this was our destination. He seemed pleased. There being no free seat, he sat in the aisle at the front of the bus.

For the fourth time, we travelled the road between Shiraz and Pasargad. We continued. We stopped somewhere in the desert, for prayer and food. Ayşe and I ordered rice and yogurt. The green-turbaned man had rice and meat. He also had some stewed tomatoes on his rice; he offered this to us, saying, "Tomat?" We declined. We had roasted tomatoes with our own rice.

I then had Ayşe take a photo of me and the man. First we had the plate-glass windows of the restaurant behind us, so our faces were black. Also, the man complained with gestures that I appeared too tall. Ayşe took another photo, with the man and me facing the windows; and I squatted slightly for this. The man kissed me on the cheek.

Back on the bus, the man brought us two cans of beer. It was only the non-alcoholic brew that we had first had in Tabriz. It was made with malt and hops—and usually fruit flavoring and sugar. But it could actually be good.

The young woman behind us gave us sunflower and pumpkin seeds. First she offered her bag for us to pick from, and then she poured some seeds in a plastic cup and passed it to us.

We travelled through flats, seemingly barren of all life. Then we climbed into the mountains. It was a spectacular trip. Şafak and Soley had made the trip at night, and even their Iranian fellow passengers had complained about the driving. But our own journey was exceedingly pleasant.

6 Yazd

As we approached Yazd, it was not obviously the adobe city it was supposed to be; but we were on the outskirts, where construction materials and techniques would likely be as elsewhere in Iran. When we alighted from our bus, a man offered to give us a ride for five thousand tomans, what we thought of as five lira. Then two other men yelled at him and drove him away: he was not an official taxi driver. The ride in an official yellow taxi still cost 5000 tomans. At least that is what it cost us. We never saw any taximeters.

We were staying at the Orient Hotel. Like the Niayesh Hotel in Shiraz, it was built around a courtyard, in the older part of town. Here was the adobe city we had expected. It was more authentic than Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I had spent three college years. In Santa Fe, as I understood it, buildings had only to be coated with a stucco that *looked* like adobe. In the old quarter of Yazd, on the back streets at least, every surface was plastered with mud and straw.

At the Orient Hotel, we were shown to a narrow room, away from the courtyard, but near the kitchen. The only window was a loophole by the door, fitted with a lattice of blue-glazed brick. The clerk turned on the air conditioner, then wandered off with the remote control: I had to go to the office to retrieve it.

We did not want the air conditioner. The room stayed cool without it. Whether this was because of the clever desert architecture, or because air conditioners were used in adjacent rooms, I do not know. There was an electric swamp-cooler in the courtyard, as there had been in Shiraz: it was a great metal box blowing out air that had been cooled by passing over water. I had never actually seen such devices before, though I had heard the term "swamp cooler." It did not seem like the right term for a device used in dry climates. *Wikipedia* uses the term "evaporative cooler." The device must be periodically recharged with water, though I never saw how this was done.

The woman on the phone at Orient Hotel had told Ayşe there was wireless; but the clerk now said it was not working. He did not act as if this situation was going to change. He was an odd man. From the front, he seemed to have a wig; from the back, one saw that he was dying his remaining hair and combing it forward. His white roots were showing. Like the waiter at the restaurant in Isfahan, he was from India. On Thursday, he grumbled to Ayşe about the laziness of Iranians; then he took a nap on a *takht* in the courtyard. He let us keep our rooms well past checkout time.

When we reached the hotel on Wednesday, I wanted an internet connection, to say that we were fine to the people who had known about our appointment with the police of Shiraz. We went to the nearby Silk Road Hotel, owned by the same firm as the Orient Hotel. Arash in Shiraz had told us that Silk Road used to be better, but now the ranking was reversed. I do not know what he based his ranking on. The wireless internet at Silk Road worked. Also, while the Orient restaurant menu had one vegetarian choice, the Silk Road had several. We ended up taking our meals there. Perhaps others did the same. This may be why, in our room at the Orient, we were not bothered by kitchen noises: nobody at the hotel ordered food.

At Safir Hotel in Isfahan, all of the other guests had seemed to be Iranian, except for an American woman, who was travelling with her Iranian husband's sister. At Niayesh Hotel in Shiraz, there had been both local and foreign guests. I mentioned the one with an Australian accent: she was originally American, but travelling on an Australian passport, and she had visited Iran also in 1974. Back then, the Shah's picture had been everywhere; now it was Khomeini's picture that was everywhere. "We just changed dictators," said an Iranian nearby.

In Yazd, the guests at the Orient and Silk Road hotels seemed all to be foreign. These hotels were also the cheapest of those we used in Iran. A shopkeeper in Yazd asked us about our salaries: he did not understand why academics would be staying in a backpacker hotel. But we were comfortable there.

Yazd holds no grand attractions like the Naqsh-e Jahan Square of Isfahan or the gardens of Shiraz. The very *existence* in Yazd of a Zoroastrian fire temple is fascinating: the flames are said to have been burning since the fifth century. But the flames are now housed in a modest structure that is only a few decades old.[1] I think one goes to Yazd to see a desert city.

One sees *badgir*s in Yazd: vertically slatted boxes on rooftops that catch the wind and direct it into the houses. Underneath the ground are *qanat*s: narrow tunnels, dug by hand, that lead water by gravity from a source to where it is wanted. We would visit a couple of houses with stairways down to their *qanat*s.

Meanwhile, after a Turkish coffee (for Ayşe) and a watermelon juice (for me) at Silk Road, followed by an early dinner, we went out wandering, first to the nearby Friday Mosque, then to Amir Chakhmaq Square. The mosque had the blue tiles that had been so lovely in Isfahan. Near the square, we found the sweetshop that I mentioned in the beginning, where I was asked why my government hated Iranians, and where you could buy sweets only packaged in a box. Ayşe observed of the shop, "This is no Saray Muhallebicisi!" She was referring to an establishment in Istanbul with several floors of seating, where one could consume all kinds of pudding (*muhallebi*), baklava, cake, and ice cream, as well as regular meals. Maybe there was such a place elsewhere in Yazd;

[1] A sign in the temple said the flames had been burning for 700 years when they were moved to Yazd in 1174; and the present structure was completed in 1940.

but we did not see it.

At Amir Chakhmaq Square is what Lonely Planet calls a Hosseinieh: a building where one mourns the killing of Muhammad's grandson and Ali's son, the Third Imam, Hussein. A *Wikipedia* article is illustrated by this structure, which is an array of arched alcoves, like liwans, on three tiers. There are eleven recesses in each of the two lower levels, and three on top. The three alcoves that compose the central column are larger than the others, and flanked by minarets. The *Wikipedia* article—currently a stub, with no sources[2]—is found under the headword "tekyeh." The spelling "takieh" is found in Lonely Planet's glossary. Some tourism posters show the Amir Chakhmaq *tekyeh* at night, with the alcoves alone lit up; but the whole façade was flooded with soft light when we passed by.

In front of the *tekyeh* was a *nakhl*: this is the name given by Lonely Planet to a structure consisting of two parallel wooden lattices in the shape of broad leaves. The whole thing looks like a giant paper-napkin holder: it could be a Claes Oldenberg sculpture.[3] We would see other *nakhl*s in Yazd. From an Iranian friend in Istanbul, I have learned only that *nakhl* resembles the word for palm tree. I have found no relevant *Wikipedia* article. Another web article says what should perhaps not be surprising: the *nakhl* is carried in processions that commemorate Hussein. Likewise, I suppose, Catholics may process with a statue of the Virgin; and Hindus, Ganesh.

Passing through the central ground-level alcove of the *tekyeh,* we

[2]As of February 1, 2016, this is no longer true. Citations have been added. The article is still short enough to be quoted: "**Tekyeh** is a place where Shiite gather for mourning of Muharran [*sic*]. Such places are particularly found in Iran. They are usually traditionally designed with observable elements of Persian architecture. Tehran is said to have had up to 50 tekyehs in the Qajar era."

[3]However, on all of the tables in Iran where we ate, there were not paper napkins as such, but boxes of facial tissues instead.

found shops, including a small tourist bookshop. The man there offered us tea, and we sat for a chat. He was the one who wondered why we were staying in a backpacker hotel. We bought the book on Zoroastrianism by Farhang Mehr that I mentioned earlier.[4]

Back at Orient Hotel, we met Soley and Şafak. They had tried to get us all train tickets for the following night to Tehran, but the train was full; so they got bus tickets. Evidently then, Arash in Shiraz had been unsuccessful in arranging our trip through his friend. Meanwhile, Şafak and Soley had also seen most of the sights of Yazd; they would relax on Thursday.

On that day, Ayşe and I walked first to the Zoroastrian fire temple. In transliterated Persian, it was an *ateshkadeh.* In Turkish, *ateş* is fire; *kadeh,* goblet. At the temple, flames rose from a great urn in a darkened room, seen through a plate of glass. A sign told us that Zoroastrians did not worship fire, but regarded it as a symbol of purity. Woods of different types were added daily to the flames; their ashes were simply discarded when necessary. The temple had a number of visitors, doing what we were: looking at the fire and taking photos. I suppose many of them were Zoroastrians, but I don't know how one would tell. We met a mixed couple, a man and woman, perhaps from Germany, whom we had run into in Shiraz. The man was tall, with a blond ponytail down his back. He pointed out that there was another facility in the garden of the temple, in addition to the temple itself: this was a large room with many writings on the wall, not all of them translated into English. There was a painting of a robed man with a staff, a long beard, and flowing locks: Zoroaster.[5] There were quotations in English from the Avesta.

---

[4]On another visit, we would pick up another book: *The Religion of Zarathushtra* [34], featuring translations of Zoroastrian scripture.

[5]At a conference on Kurt Gödel in Vienna in 2006, I met a Parsi, a Zoroastrian from India, who preferred the name Zarathustra to the Hellenized form Zoroaster. This preference is seen in the books [18, 34] that we picked up.

But I had learned from Mehr's book that many parts of the original Avesta had been lost, and new ones had been added over the years. The religion of Zoroaster had become corrupted, almost from the beginning. The Persian Magi could not stop the religion, so they joined it and changed it. They made it ritualistic. As I gathered from Mehr, understanding Zoroaster's original insight would require philosophical archeology.

Walking back towards the hotel, we saw a sign for an *ab ambar.* The English *Wikipedia* actually has an article by this name: the meaning is water reservoir. In Turkish, *ambar* is granary, but *ab* is no longer used for water. In the direction of the arrow on the sign, we went looking for the reservoir, and eventually we found it: a dome surrounded by *badgir*s. We did not see an obvious way in; at best there was a choice of three doors. A boy, passing with his mother, went and pounded on one of these doors. A man let us in, showed us around, and took our pictures with our camera. He had no English. The reservoir under the dome was dry. As we went to leave, Ayşe offered money, but the man would not take it. Ayşe was fairly insistent; was she not insistent enough? In any case, the man could hardly be expected to derive an income from the few foreign tourists who might stop by.

The man then motioned for us to follow him to another door. Inside, he showed us the stoves and cauldrons used to prepare food during the commemorations of the martyrdom of Hussein. He gave us a cup of rosewater from a great basin, chilled by a block of ice. He took us to a sort of open-air *mescit,* the chapel that we had already seen from outside. Overhead there was a white canvas canopy, on which were pasted some translucent colored images, including angels such as one might see in a Christian church. There were also lions bearing swords, surmounted by suns, as on the flag of Iran before the 1979 Revolution. There was a stylized cypress tree. We went out. The man took a dried apricot from the bag I proffered.

We continued walking the back streets towards the hotel. We discovered that this was the correct way to walk: we saw only the smooth adobe walls on either side of the road. Occasionally other people passed by, on foot or motorbike. There might be a *badgir* above a wall. Some stretches of road had vaulted roofs.

After lunch, we wandered again along these adobe-lined streets. Lonely Planet had a recommended route that would take in some particular sites of interest, but we did not get to all of them.

The so-called Alexander's Prison was now basically a workshop for handicrafts. Beneath the courtyard was the chamber that had given the complex its name; when we went down, the boy tending the cafe there switched his music from Iranian to Western. Back on the ground level, Ayşe spoke with a woman selling ceramics. She had tiles painted with portraits of Iranian poets and writers; Ayşe knew one of them. I took a picture of Ayşe with the woman and her daughter; but I had the feeling the woman wished we would just buy one of her tiles.

On the street nearby, a young man pulled up on a motorbike, went through a door, then came back out. We caught the scent of liquor as we passed.

The coin museum was *not* in Lonely Planet, and its unlabelled displays seemed hardly worth the price of admission (which was 3000 tomans for foreigners: not a lot, but most admission prices in Iran had been a sixth of that.) As Şafak and Soley had told us, the coin museum was in an old house with a *qanat* that you could see. So we saw it; but we had already seen another.

A man in the street had told us we should visit the Kohan Traditional Hotel, for the view from its roof. So we went in, and we climbed the stairs that were pointed out to us by the cheerful woman at the desk. We contemplated a skyline of *badgir*s, with barren flats to the east, and behind them, mountains. We went back down and saw the courtyard of the hotel. Ayşe wished we had been staying there. Another stairway led down to a subterranean room with a pool of water in the floor. The pool could be fed from one tunnel through the wall, and emptied from the tunnel opposite.

But no water was flowing. One might indeed crawl through the tunnels on hands and knees; but just barely.

Not city houses perhaps, but outlying villages might still get their water through such tunnels. Lonely Planet claims

> the highly skilled and well-paid *qanat* builders of Yazd won't be picking up redundancy cheques any time soon.

But Lonely Planet also seems to recommend the Yazd Water Museum. Şafak did not recommend it, so Ayşe and I skipped it.

Something else that we had to skip was a visit to the Zoroastrian towers of silence outside town, where corpses were presumably once left to be eaten by birds.

During our stroll on the back streets, when we paused to admire a particularly large *badgir,* a mixed couple of Iranian tourists told us of a pleasant village out in the desert. The man had to think a bit to remember the name; but his forgetfulness seemed a sham. Maybe I had been overly influenced by a warning in Lonely Planet, about an outfit that enticed backpackers into the desert "with promises of dirt-cheap accommodation, alcohol and even drugs." In any case, we did not get to go out into the desert, except on our initial ride from Shiraz.

What stays pleasantly in mind about Yazd are the adobe walls, like the walls found in Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings of Ranchos Church in Taos, New Mexico. One could spend a day in a Yazd courtyard, sitting by the pool on a *takht* with a good book. We might have been well advised to do this, actually: our experiences in Iran had already filled us up like a heavy meal. And we had one more city to go.

7 Tehran

Our bus to Tehran was called VIP, but it did not have the legroom we expected. It was three seats across: that was all. There was no difference in pitch from a standard bus. We did not get much sleep. But we had to *try* to sleep: the scenery was invisible, the reading lamps did not work, and we wanted to be able to do things the next day. Fortunately, our rooms at Hotel Atlas were ready when we arrived at dawn. This was Friday morning; we had less than 48 hours to see Tehran.

A taxi driver at the bus terminal said the trip to the hotel would be five thousand tomans. At the hotel, he said it was five-*teen* thousand tomans. The matter was discussed with the desk clerk. Ultimately the man was given ten thousand tomans and told to get lost.

The clerk said he was giving us his best rooms, since I was an American; but I do not know if he actually had a choice. In any case, the rooms were good, at least in the sense of being roomy and clean. We reached them by crossing a garden. But this was not in some quaint old house; we were in the big city, and the hotel had a number of storeys. We slept, had a late breakfast, then went out. It was the weekend, so traffic was light, and the air was fairly clean.

Hotel Atlas was on the same street as the old American embassy. We saw the various murals added since 1979 to the walls of the compound: Miss Liberty with a skull-face, and the slogan "Down with USA." I took some photographs. Lonely Planet said the authorities might not like it, but I do not know why that would be.

We took the subway to the Golestan Palace complex, a "monument to the glories and excesses of the Qajar rulers," as Lonely Planet put it. *Gol* appears in Turkish as *gül*: rose. There were four different tickets, for different buildings; but they were only five thousand rials each: five hundred tomans, half a Turkish lira. We bought them all, then walked across a great garden to start our clockwise visit to the edifices of the complex.

Some of these edifices forbade photography, while others did not. Some were closed for renovation, but this did not seem to be a great inhibition to our visit: we still saw how these Qajar rulers thought they needed to live. Every surface was decorated, either with colored tiles—yellow was common—or small mirrors. It was all pleasant enough to see, but not necessarily in the best taste. Nothing else we saw in Iran could match Shah Abbas's Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan.

In one building of the Golestan complex, there were ethnographic displays, including doll-sized figures of women and men from all walks of life. Male or female, *every* figure wore a head covering.

Walking north from the Golestan complex, we passed through a great urban park, with grand promenades along pools with fountains, and alleys shaded by ranks of trees. It was the kind of elegant oasis that, in my experience, Turkish cities lack. Ankara does have a large park, near the old city center. It closed for renovation, and we never bothered to visit it after it reopened: from our experience of the mayor's many projects, we expected this one as well to be in bad taste. The mayor had already allowed a kebab stand to invade the narrow stream-valley park that was closer to our flat. But the Park-e Shahr in Tehran had been designed by people who knew how to live in a city.

Outside the park, we found a restaurant, and Ayşe and Soley went in to investigate. Meanwhile, on the street, a man talked with Şafak and me for a long time. I found myself having to explain our trip to Iran: how we had started out at a mathematics conference in Tabriz, then travelled to Isfahan, and so forth. The man said he was an English teacher; but he had trouble understanding that I actually lived in Turkey. After he had questioned me as much as the police in Shiraz had, he asked, "So on Sunday you are flying back to Washington?"

The restaurant was nearly full; but it was full of the members of an Iranian tour group. Their guide was helping to serve them, and she ended up serving us as well. The chef was too busy to offer vegetarians anything but rice.

The National Museum of Iran was not a Louvre or a Metropolitan Museum of Art. This meant one could see everything in one visit, taking in the sweep of thousands of years of Persian history. From the childhood of civilization, there was an earthenware bowl, its rim painted with human figures. Each figure had its hands on the shoulders of the figure in front of it. There was a circle of fifteen figures in all. Each figure appeared to have an erect penis. The label said, 6th millenium B.C.

From the previous millenium, there were the female figures, with great pendulous breasts and massive thighs, that archeologists tend to label as Venus. Similar Venera, from the 6th millenium, can be seen in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara.[1] Other figures found in that museum have become almost a symbol of Ankara: they are bronze deer with great antlers from the third millenium. The museum in Tehran had similar bronze deer, from two millenia later.

I have an early-childhood memory of what must have been a dream. It could have been inspired by the monumental statuary of Washington. In the dream, a sphinx on the cornice of a building took flight and lit on the ground beside me. In the National Museum of Iran, there was an elegant sphinx in profile, depicted

[1] I take the dates of artefacts in that museum from a 256-page guidebook [20] that is full of glossy color photos, but that has no date, and is attributed only to "members of staff at the museum of Anatolian civilizations as a service to the museum." I must have bought the book before 2005.

in glaze, on a brick from West Azerbaijan, first millenium B.C.E. This winged sphinx was not crouching, but prancing; it had the bearded head of a man.

The museum was a place to contemplate Persepolis, away from the blazing sun. An elaborate capital from Darius's palace complex was topped by back-to-back bulls' heads. Below the heads, the capital seemed to combine the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders of the Greek world: there were floral layers, scroll-like layers, and simple circular layers.

Near a Persepolitan stairway and a human-headed capital, Ayşe met two high-school girls. The front edges of their headscarves showed from beneath black chadors. One of the headscarves was blue; the other, purple. The girls made an elegant pair, posing for a photograph on either side of Ayşe; but they did look like festive nuns. They wanted to study mathematics at university.

As Lonely Planet had advertised, the Salt Man was on display: he was a head found preserved in a salt mine. Perhaps his body was stored elsewhere. He had long white hair, a long white beard, and a golden ear-ring. He glared at us from the display case. One might think his features were a sign of somebody who did not work with his hands. But Lonely Planet said he was a salt-miner.

I did not photograph the museum's own label, figuring I could find the information later. Unfortunately the museum shop turned out to have no book about the collection. It had DVDs, along with reproductions of some of the works.[2]

We now continued walking north to our hotel, about two kilometers. Perhaps in every city we had visited, we had seen quotations from the Quran on little metal signs, in Arabic, Persian, and English. On our walk away from the museum, we saw what might be the saddest and even most dangerous of these:[3]

---

[2]Apparently the Salt Man was one of several found on the same site: see the *Wikipedia* article "Saltmen."

[3]I photographed the sign. I later found another photograph of the same sign on a Japanese blog at `hanatomo31.exblog.jp`. Through a friend who can

AND A BELIEVER WHO PUTS HIS TRUST IN ALLAH
HE WILL MAKE HIM FREE FROM THE NEED OF MANKIND

We walked past the national bank, where the jewelry museum was supposed to be; but there was no *sign* mentioning the jewelry museum. The museum was closed on Fridays anyway; we planned to see it on Saturday.

We passed the old British embassy. A sign said Sweden was now handing consular affairs for the UK. We could not see over the wall; but it seems that during the Constitutional Revolution, after the Shah had driven protestors out of a mosque, Britain allowed them to take refuge on the grounds of its embassy.

One of the vegetarian restaurants of Iran was near our hotel. Situated in Artists' Park, it was called something like Vegie Restaurant of Iranian Artists' Forum. The *maître d'hôtel* was a loquacious fellow, from whom we learned, that night and the next, that he was both Iranian and American, having a parent of each nationality; his name was Michael; he was also part-owner of a pizzeria called Da Vinci in Brooklyn; and, with the help of the Turkish ambassador to Tehran, he was planning to open a vegetarian restaurant in Istanbul. The intended location of this last was however a secret. He knew of Govinda's vegetarian restaurant near Taksim Square in Istanbul; in fact he had another vegetarian restaurant of his own in Tehran called Govinda's. The name suggests an association with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness: Govinda is a name for Krishna in the guise of what might be called the Good Cowherd.

What exactly should we do on Saturday? "Set on 104 hectares of spectacular mountainside parkland," wrote Lonely Planet,

---

read the Arabic of the sign, I have learned that the quoted passage is from the 3rd verse of Surah 65, The Divorce. Muhammad Asad's translation is, "for everyone who places his trust in God, He [alone] is enough." The two other translations that I have are similar: none refers to mankind as dispensible.

> the Sa'd Abad Museum Complex was a royal summer home during the Pahlavi period. The site's 18 buildings house museums dedicated to subjects as diverse as the royal dishware, royal automobiles and miniature paintings. To see everything you'll need at least three hours. Having lunch at Darband and then entering from the north entrance makes sense and your thighs will thank you.

This might have been a good plan for Saturday afternoon. Unfortunately we could not do everything. Also north of town was the Niyavaran Palace Museum, "where Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his family spent most of the last 10 years of royal rule." There were also hiking trails to the north. But our energy was fading. The jewelry museum in town would open only in the afternoon, from two till 4:30; and we were determined to see this. Arash in Shiraz had said it was well worth visiting, though he might not have expected to say this of a collection of cut stones.

In the morning, we made the amusing trip to the Reza Abbasi Museum that I mentioned: amusing because our taxi driver had so much trouble figuring out where our destination was. It was to the north, though not so far north as the last Shah's palace. Posted in the museum was a text whose legal force I do not know:

In the name of God

> As long as a tourist is in an Islamic country, the Islamic
> government is responsible to guarantee his safety and comfort.
> If a tourist in an Islamic country loses his properties the
> government should support and provide him with the lost
> property.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him)

The police officer in Shiraz had uttered similar words, as a reason for why he was disturbing us: he was responsible for us.

For lunch, we made our way south on foot, to an Indian restaurant. We ended up on the street of the restaurant, but we didn't know it. A passerby didn't know it either: he told us the street we wanted was a few blocks further down. We walked several blocks before realizing there must be a mistake. Ayşe reminded me of her rule, generally broken by everybody else in our group, including myself: don't ask directions of random people, but ask a shopkeeper who can be expected to know the area.

We were still in northern Tehran, very bourgeois. Lonely Planet wrote well of the Cingari restaurant, saying it would be at home in Sydney or London. (I assume this was intended as praise.) There were Hindu gods and Buddhas in niches in the walls. Such decoration may be standard for Indian restaurants; but if it is appropriate to pair food with religious imagery from its country of origin, why did not the Italian restaurant back in Isfahan have a crucifix and menorah on the wall?

When we sat down at Cingari, we were the only customers. The food was expensive for Iran, as we expected; it was also good, as we had hoped. What *was* it? As usual, I hardly remember. I am like Larry Darrell in Maugham's *Razor's Edge* [16, pp. 30–1], except that I eat greater quantities:

> "Bob Nelson will give you luncheon," she said.
>
> "I have a better plan than that," said Elliott. "Put up a luncheon basket for them and let them lunch on the stoop and after lunch they can talk."
>
> "That would be fun," said Isabel.
>
> "There are few things so pleasant as a picnic lunch eaten in perfect comfort," Elliott added sententiously. "The old Duchess d'Uzès used to tell me that the most recalcitrant male becomes amenable to suggestion in these conditions. What will you give them for luncheon?"
>
> "Stuffed eggs and a chicken sandwich."
>
> "Nonsense. You can't have a picnic without *pâté de foie gras.* You must give them curried shrimps to start with, breast of chicken in aspic, with a heart-of-lettuce salad for which I'll make the dressing myself, and after the *pâté* if you like, as a concession to your American habits, an apple pie."

> "I shall give them stuffed eggs and a chicken sandwich, Elliott," said Mrs. Bradley with decision.
>
> "Well, mark my words, it'll be a failure and you'll have only yourself to blame."
>
> "Larry eats very little, Uncle Elliott," said Isabel, "and I don't believe he notices what he eats."
>
> "I hope you don't think that is to his credit, my poor child," her uncle returned.

Be it to my credit or not, I do remember that the *raita* at Cingari was something special: refreshing, but infused with some of the warmer spices to give it depth.

We took the subway further south for the jewelry museum. On the street where it should be, we had to ask around to find the way in. Security was tight; I think the jewelry museum was the only place in Iran (except the airport next morning) where we had to pass through a metal detector. Light inside was low. When I walked around to the back of a jewel-encrusted throne, a guard told me this was forbidden. Another guard told me not to rest my hand on the brass railing in front of a display case. I was impressed the most by objects like swords and shields, decorated with rubies and emeralds. What impressed me was the pointlessness of the decoration. Pointlessness was the point. The monarch wears jewels, to show off the power of sending armies of miners into the earth, or armies of warriors into the battlefield, for no other purpose than the adornment of the monarch.

Does the jewelry museum inspire longing in its visitors? Do they dream of being a Shah, sporting a diamond-studded aigrette? Just as we are, we can all be as prodigal as a monarch:

> Time, because it is so fleeting, time, because it is beyond recall, is the most precious of human goods and to squander it is the most delicate form of dissipation in which man can indulge. Cleopatra dissolved in wine a priceless pearl, but she gave it to Antony to drink; when you waste the brief golden hours you take the beaker in which the gem is melted and dash its contents to the ground.

That is Maugham again, in the story called "The Bum" [17].[4]

The diamonds in the jewelry museum were pretty for the way they refracted light.

The Glass and Ceramics Museum was nearby, in a fine old house with a grand wooden stairway in its atrium; but the Lonely Planet description was overblown:

> The well-designed museum stands out in a country where detailed explanations are hard to find . . . The galleries walk you chronologically through the ages, with detailed, lucid explanations in English . . .

The museum was a pleasant place, with interesting ways to display its dishes and bottles: in a forest of black columns, each holding a single object in its glass midsection; or in an array of cubbyholes, each again holding one object. But the available texts did not live up to the expectations created by our guidebook.

Maybe I had had enough of Iran for now. We had already seen and experienced so much. I was getting ready to enjoy emotions recollected in tranquillity—the tranquillity of home. But my companions were keen to see the bazaar.

Şafak repeated something I had seen in Lonely Planet: one-third of Iran's "retail and trade sector" was controlled by the *bazari*s of Tehran. An English-speaking taxi-driver took us to their bailiwick. We wandered a while, and we happened upon the shops that sold fake designer labels—the labels themselves, that is, for use by the manufacturers of the fake designs.

We found a juice bar at the edge of the bazaar. There were many options; I myself chose mango. Soley and Şafak still wanted something sweet to *eat.* A young passerby said he could take us to a place where sweets could be had. So we followed him, and we climbed a stairway to what seemed to be a fast-food restaurant;

[4] A web search suggests that, according to Pliny the Elder, it was Cleopatra herself who drank the dissolved pearl.

but there were no sweets on offer. We gave up and headed for the hotel.

By now it was the Saturday evening rush hour. The first day of the working week was over. The subway was jammed. But Ayşe and Soley did not get groped; in fact they were given seats.

We had dinner again at Michael's restaurant, as I indicated. I slept at 21:00, having set my alarm for 1:00. I woke up around 00:45. Our taxi to the airport was coming at 1:30. We had been told the price would be 35 thousand tomans. But in the lobby now, the clerk, the same one who had checked us in Friday morning, who had boasted of giving us his best rooms,—he now said he had got us a better vehicle: a van, not a small car. The price would be 50 thousand tomans. Some of us did not like this. But it was indeed more comfortable to take a van on the long trip to the airport; and we did happen to have enough tomans left.

The road to the airport stank, perhaps from heavy industry; there were few cars on the road in the middle of the night. We passed the illuminated mausoleum of Imam Khomeini. At Imam Khomeini International Airport itself, the knot of people inside considered themselves as a queue. The end of the queue was not apparent. Some people accused us of cutting in line—"Hey, we've been waiting here an hour!" We in turn accused others of cutting. Şafak had a verbal exchange with one women, who ended up saying something like, "When you come to *our* country, you have to obey *our* rules!"

Meanwhile I conversed with her male companion, who was taking in everything placidly. He was Iranian, but living in London. Iran having no working embassy there, he had come home to renew his passport. I answered his question about my own nationality with, "I'm American; sorry about 1953." He just said something like "Oh, right"—not sarcastically, but as if it took a moment to realize what I was talking about.

I was afraid we were not going to be able to leave this crazy country. But we did eventually make our way to the one working

X-ray machine. There was a back-up, because the man operating the machine had stepped aside to remove all of the loose cigarette packs from a woman's luggage. None of us understood why taking cigarettes *out* of the country would be considered an offense. I told the Londoner that I appreciated how *little* people smoked in Iran. He was surprised at this; but he was not living in Turkey, where many people cannot walk down the street without holding a cigarette.

We passed through security, checked our bags, and cleared passport control. Before we could do the last, an officer had to clear up his own confusion about my spouse's full name, Ayşe Aslı Berkman Pierce. Turkey does not seem to hyphenate the last two parts.

"What is *aslı*?" asked the officer.

"It means the core of something, the essence," Ayşe started to explain.

What the officer really needed to know was that Aslı was the core of Ayşe's name: her middle name.

It was amusing to see duty-free shops with no alcohol. We spent some of our last thousands of tomans on candy and on the Persian poetry anthology [2] that we had seen in the bookshop of the Hafez complex. One of the Sa'di poems in the collection is called "Love the Foe":

> When the enemy doth throw
>   His lasso,
> As his whim determines, so
>   We must do.
>
> None has earned, till he has loved,
>   Manly fame,
> E'en as silver pure is proved
>   By the flame.
>
> Never did reformer take
>   Passion's way,
> But that both worlds he must stake

In the play.

To his memory I am so
Wholly turned,
That with self my mind is no
More concerned.

Thanks to love sincere and whole
I confess;
Love, that burned my heart, my soul
Doth caress.

Sa'di! poet sweeter page
Never writ
For a present to an age
Great with wit.

May the sugar tongue remain
Ever blest,
That hath taught the world such pain
And unrest.

It was time for our flight. On the gangway to the airplane, Ayşe removed her headscarf, and she told a couple of hesitent Turkish parents that they should allow their impatient daughter to remove hers. We were greeted by female flight-attendents of Turkish Airlines. They did not wear headscarves. We were back in the civilized world.

Bibliography

[1] Steven Aftergood. *Secrecy & Government Bulletin*, 70, September 1997. Published by the Federation of American Scientists. http://www.fas.org/sgp/bulletin/sec70.html, accessed September 14, 2015.

[2] A. J. Arberry, editor. *Persian Poems: An Anthology of Verse Translations*. Yassavoli, Tehran, 2005.

[3] Arrian. *Anabasis of Alexander Books I–IV*, volume 236 of *Loeb Classical Library*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1976. With an English translation by P. A. Brunt. Reprinted 2004.

[4] Muhammad Asad. *The Message of the Qur'an*. Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, 1993.

[5] Andrew Burke, Virginia Maxwell, and Iain Shearer. *Iran*. Lonely Planet Publications, sixth edition, August 2012.

[6] Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, editors. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford, 2008. First published 1997.

[7] Diodorus Siculus. *The Library of History VIII*. Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1963. Transcribed by Bill Thayer at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/17D*.html, accessed September 15, 2015.

[8] Edward Gibbon. *The History of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Penguin Books, London, 1995. Edited by David Womersly. In three volumes.

[9] Richard D. Heffner. *A Documentary History of the United States*. New American Library, New York, 3rd edition, 1976. Expanded and Revised Bicentennial Edition.

[10] Herodotus. *The Histories.* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England, 1981. First published, 1954; translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt.

[11] Herodotus. *The Persian Wars, Books I–II*, volume 117 of *Loeb Classical Library.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 2004. Translation by A. D. Godley; first published 1920; revised, 1926.

[12] Ryszard Kapuściński. *Travels with Herodotus.* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2007. Translated from the Polish by Klara Glowczewska.

[13] Geoffrey Lewis. *Turkish Grammar.* Oxford University Press, second edition, 2000. First edition 1967.

[14] Amin Maalouf. *Samarkand.* Abacus, London, 1994. First published in Great Britain in 1992 by Quartet Books Limited.

[15] Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy.* International Publishers, New York, 1967.

[16] W. Somerset Maugham. *The Razor's Edge.* The Blakiston Company, Philadelphia, 1944. A novel.

[17] W. Somerset Maugham. *The World Over*, volume II of *The Complete Short Stories of W. Somerset Maugham.* Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York, 1952.

[18] Farhang Mehr. *The Zoroastrian Tradition: An Introduction to the Ancient Wisdom of Zarathushtra.* Mazda Publishers, Costa Mesa, California, 2003.

[19] James A. H. Murray et al., editors. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary.* Oxford University Press, 1971. Complete text reproduced micrographically. Two volumes. Original publication, 1884–1928.

[20] *The Museum of Anatolian Civilizations.* Dönmez Offset, Ankara, no date. 'This guidebook has been prepared by members of staff at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations as a service to the Museum'.

[21] Anne Mustoe. *A Bike Ride: 12000 Miles Around the World.* Virgin Books, London, 2002.

[22] Sevan Nişanyan. *Sözlerin Soyağacı: Çağdaş Türkçenin Etimolojik Sözlüğü.* Adam Yayınları, İstanbul, 3rd edition, 2007. "The Family Tree of Words: An Etymological Dictionary of Contemporary Turkish." Genişletilmiş gözden geçirilmiş ("expanded and revised").

[23] Emin Özdemir. *Açıklamalı Atasözleri Sözlüğü*. Remzi, İstanbul, 1981. Annotated dictionary of [Turkish] sayings.

[24] Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, editor. *The meaning of the Glorious Qur'ân*. Çağrı Yayınları, Istanbul, 1998. An explanatory Translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall.

[25] David Pierce. St John's College. *The De Morgan Journal*, 2(2):62–72, 2012. Available from `http://education.lms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/st-johns-college.pdf`, accessed October 1, 2014.

[26] Plutarch. *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. Modern Library, New York, no date. Translated by John Dryden and others, 1683–6, and revised by Arthur Hugh Clough, 1864.

[27] Marco Polo. *The Travels (Description of the World)*. Könemann, Köln, 1996. The translation of William Marsden (1818) in the revised version of Thomas Wright (1854).

[28] Mohammad Hossein Rastegar. *Palace of Light: The Biographies and Personalities of Amir Ahmad ebn-e Moosa and Mohammad ebn-e Moosa*. Asar Mandegar Publication, Shiraz, Iran, 2011.

[29] M. Rostami. *Pars Museum: Kolah Farangi Mansion*. In Persian and English; publication details in Persian.

[30] Barry Rubin. *Istanbul Intrigues*. Boğaziçi University Press, Istanbul, 2002.

[31] Ismail Salam, editor. *The Divan of Hafez*. Arena of Persian Art & Thought, Tehran, 2011.

[32] A. Shapur Shahbazi. *The Authoritative Guide to Persepolis*. Safiran Publishing Company, Tehran, 2011.

[33] Maulawī Sher'Alī, editor. *The Holy Qur'ān*. The Oriental and Religious Publishing Corporation, Rabwah, Pakistan, 1979. Arabic text and English translation by the late Maulawī Sher'Alī.

[34] Irach Jehangir Sorabji Taraporewala. *The religion of Zarathushtra*. Faravahar Publications, Tehran, 1980. Originally published 1926 in India.

[35] Xenophon. *Cyropaedia*, volume 51–52 of *Loeb Classical Library*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1914. With an English translation by Walter Miller.