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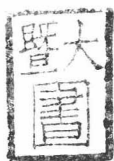
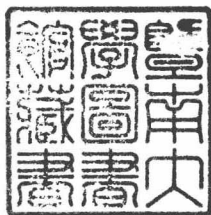
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IRAN

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PAST AND PRESENT

BY DONALD N. WILBER



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PREFACE

THE series of prefaces included in the first, second, and third editions of this work are now replaced by this brief introduction to the fourth edition.

The purpose of the book remains—as stated in the first preface—to furnish definitive information about the past and present of this ancient land, and to present a factual picture of the country as a whole. Every effort has been made to achieve accuracy of facts, and to assemble the most recent background and statistical material. The author has benefited from the helpful suggestions of numerous reviewers to make specific amendments to the text and to round out the coverage of certain subjects.

It is a pleasure to state that this edition represents an extensive reworking of the previous text. The entire section on Modern Iran has been rearranged, fresh material inserted, and most of the section has been rewritten. The material of the closing part, Iran's Future, is entirely new, and there is a new map and new illustrations.

The transliteration of proper names, place names, and descriptive terms from Arabic and Persian—two languages written in the Arabic script—presents problems. There is no single, standardized system for transliteration from Arabic and the exigencies of printing rule out the use of underlines, overlines, macrons, and the other symbols required for scholarly precision. However, the position of the Arabic characters *ayn* and *hamzah* has been indicated by the use of the apostrophe and a serious effort made to achieve internal consistency in transliteration.

December, 1957

D.N.W.

Iran

PAST AND PRESENT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Architecture of Islamic Iran
The Il-Khanid Period

IRAN'S HERITAGE

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I. PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Place Name

IRAN and Persia: the two names have been used to designate the same country, but are not true synonyms. When the Aryan peoples migrated from their original territory south of the Aral Sea to the upland plateau below the Caspian Sea, they called the new region Iran, which means "homeland of the Aryans." The great royal palace site of the Achaemenid dynasty, which originally ruled over the region northeast of the head of the Persian Gulf, was called Parsa, taken into the Greek language in the time of Alexander the Great as Persepolis. The powerful Achaemenid empire was called Iran, but the regional and palace name became transferred to the province within the empire as Pars or Fars, and hence the people of many other lands came to call the country Persia. In Sasanian times the official name of the empire of Iran was Iranshahr. Since 1935 when the Iranian government, for the sake of consistency, requested all foreign countries to use the official name of Iran, the correct designation has gained general usage. On the other hand the language of the country is Persian, *farsi* to the inhabitants, since it is the language of ancient Parsa, and it is written in Arabic characters.

Location

Iran's geographical position has made it the bridge for communication by land between Far Eastern Asia and the lands of the Mediterranean and Europe. Before the dawn of recorded history its mountain caves sheltered the hunters who were among the earliest people of the world to move down into the lower plains and to settle in villages, cultivate crops, and raise domestic animals. It also lay athwart the lines of movement of the early migrant tribes of central Asia, and became settled by many of these groups. Within historic times its rulers expanded their control far to the east and the west of the plateau and established the first great world empire. For

[1]

hundreds of years the main trade routes between the Far East and the West crossed northern Iran, and later on, when sea routes became of equal importance, additional highways led up from ports along the Persian Gulf to the principal commercial centers both within the country and beyond its frontiers.

The vital role of the overland trade routes across Iran was seriously limited by the construction of the Suez Canal, and the decline of her importance as a channel of trade heralded a period of political and military weakness. At the same time her strategic location made her a bone of contention between great powers whose interests were diametrically opposed. Her present frontiers, established during the nineteenth century, were the result of a series of wars in which she was unable to hold her own against more powerful neighbors.

Iran today covers an area of 628,000 square miles, approximately as large as that part of the United States which lies east of the Mississippi River, exclusive of New England—a much smaller area than at any time in her long existence. In general, her previous frontiers were much farther to the east than at present and fairly close to her present western ones, the greater expansion toward the east having been the result both of the less broken topography in that direction and of the strong linguistic and ethnic relations between the people of that area and the Iranians of the plateau. In spite of its present restricted size the country is still known as the Empire of Iran, and its ruler is the *Shahinshah*, or “King of Kings,” a title first used in Iran well over two thousand years ago.

Iran lies between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, and has common frontiers with Iraq, Turkey, Soviet Russia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Along her perimeter dwell peoples of various languages or ethnic stocks whose area of settlement or of tribal movement overlaps the actual boundaries of the country.

Geology and Topography

The geological formations of the country have been fairly well studied, although not in a systematic fashion, by Persian

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

and European specialists in this field, and small scale geological maps of Iran have been published. The more detailed studies of certain areas have been made in connection with the search for oil fields and for important mineral deposits.

The average traveler in Iran is made aware of its geological history by the lofty peaks, the ranks of jagged mountains springing abruptly from the fairly level plains, the vivid coloration of many formations, and the spectacular faulting or folding of the rocks. The traveler by air, who usually approaches Iran from the west or southwest, looks down on a series of mountain ranges which resemble the corrugated surface of a washboard. Each successive ridge is tilted from the vertical and higher than the one before until the general level of the high plateau is reached, but even there mountains rise on every side. From sufficient altitude the villages and tilled fields lose all identity, and the entire country seems to be barren and devoid of life.

The Zagros and the Elborz Ranges, which came into being in geological periods from the Paleozoic to the Pliocene, attain altitudes of over 11,000 feet. As mountains go they are rather young, as is shown by their sharp, broken profiles. The general configuration of these ranges and of the Iranian plateau seems to have been the result of prolonged pressure against the area of Iran from a Russian mass on the north and an African mass on the south. The fact that the southward pressure was the stronger is indicated by the steeper slopes of the Elborz as compared to the softer folds of the Zagros Range. The building of the mountain systems was of course complicated by vertical movements and by extensive faulting.

In several regions of the country the prominent cones of formerly active volcanoes are a dominant feature of the landscape. The principal volcanic peaks are Demavand, the highest peak in Iran, which figures in many ancient tales of heroes and demons, rising to 18,600 feet, in the north; Savalan, at 14,000 feet, Sahand at 12,138 feet, and Ararat (lesser Ararat is within Iran, but greater Ararat lies just over the frontier) in the northwest; and Bazman and Chihiltan at 13,262 feet, in the extreme southeast. Two of these cones still show some traces



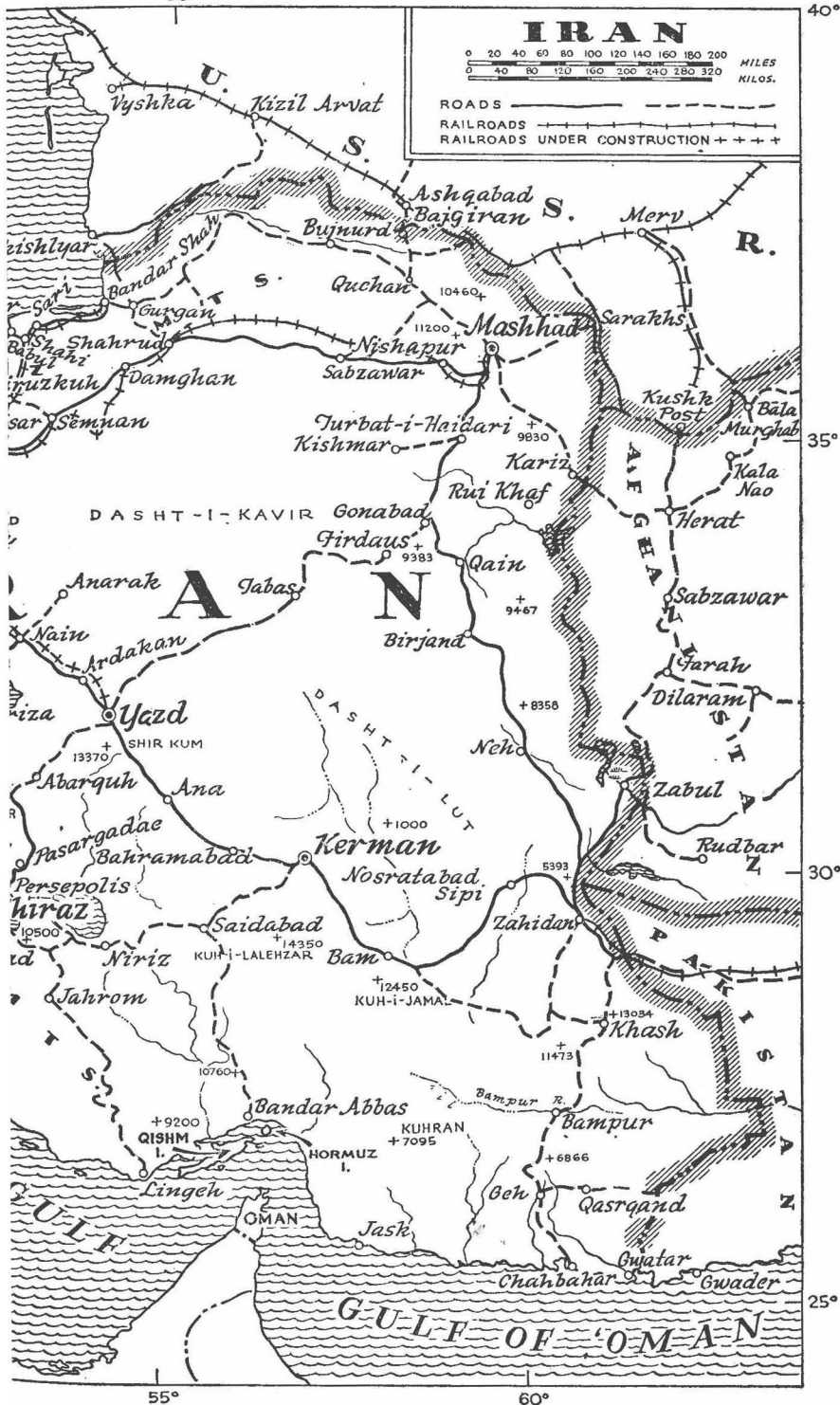
55°

40°

IRAN

0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200
0 40 80 120 160 200 240 280 320
MILES
KILOS.

ROADS ———
RAILROADS ———+———
RAILROADS UNDER CONSTRUCTION + + + +



55°

60°

25°

of activity: all climbers who have made the ascent of Demavand have noted the presence of sulphur gases, and Chihiltan trails a smoky plume of sulphurous gas from its summit.

The oil fields of the south occur in a region of oval limestone domes, while the area south of Tehran is strewn with great salt plugs, a type of formation often associated with oil deposits.

Iran may be described in general terms as a high plateau some 4,000 feet above sea level, strewn with mountains. Specifically, there are four main topographical areas, each distinctive in character and extending beyond the frontiers of Iran:

1. The great Zagros and Elborz Ranges, stamping a huge V upon the surface of the country. The apex of the V forms in northwestern Iran and extends beyond into Turkey and the Russian Caucasus. The southern arm of the letter is represented by the Zagros Range, which runs southeast and roughly parallels the frontier of Iraq and the shore of the Persian Gulf, while the upper arm, the Elborz Range, looms like a great wall across the north of the country, breaking down into other ranges which run on into Afghanistan and Turkestan.

2. The area within the V begins as the high plateau with its own secondary mountain ranges and gradually levels off to become the empty deserts which continue into southern Afghanistan and Pakistan.

3. The region of Khuzistan, below the lower arm of the V, is a continuation of the low-lying plain of Iraq.

4. The Caspian Sea coast above the upper arm of the V is below sea level and forms a separate climatic zone.

The fact that each of these topographical formations extends beyond the frontiers of Iran does not mean that the country is easy of access, for its present boundaries are guarded by formidable natural barriers. The entire western frontier and the country inland from the Persian Gulf is protected by lofty ramparts of rock, where steep passes lead from sea level to a height of over 7,000 feet and down again to the plateau. Equally forbidding passes isolate the Caspian littoral from the rest of Iran, and along the northeastern and eastern frontiers

the approaches are either through hilly country or across vast spaces of empty desert.

Drainage

There are four principal drainage basins, roughly corresponding to the topographical zones: The Caspian, the Lake Rezaieh, the Persian Gulf, and the great desert basins. The Persian Gulf basin is fed by three separate systems: the smaller streams of northwest Iran which eventually find their way into the Tigris River; the Karun and its tributaries, which empty into the head of the Persian Gulf; and the countless streams which indent the thousand-mile-long coast line of the Persian Gulf.

Most of the rivers and streams of Iran flow not into one of the three large bodies of water, but into the vast interior deserts where there are three subordinate drainage areas, separated from one another by lines of hills but having the same effect as that of a single basin. This feature of interior drainage has an important relation to the economic life of Iran.

The great majority of the inhabitants of Iran live along the lines of the V formed by the main mountain ranges. The mountains run in parallel files, enclosing long, narrow valleys walled at each end by mountainous cross barriers. The general pattern of mountains and valleys may be compared to a number of ladders laid down roughly parallel to each other, the uprights representing the lines of the mountains and the rungs the barriers across the ends of each valley. An average valley may be eight miles in width and from 25 to 40 miles long, flat bottomed, with rims rising directly and abruptly into the mountains above. Villages are more closely clustered along the rims than along the center line where may be found one of the highways which even in modern times have penetrated relatively few of the thousands of mountain valleys. Nomads spend the summers in the higher altitudes where the heavy snows and extreme cold of winter would make village life impossible, while farming communities abound in the valleys where the level ground is more suitable for cultivation. For centuries the farmers have led isolated, self-sufficient lives, and the barriers