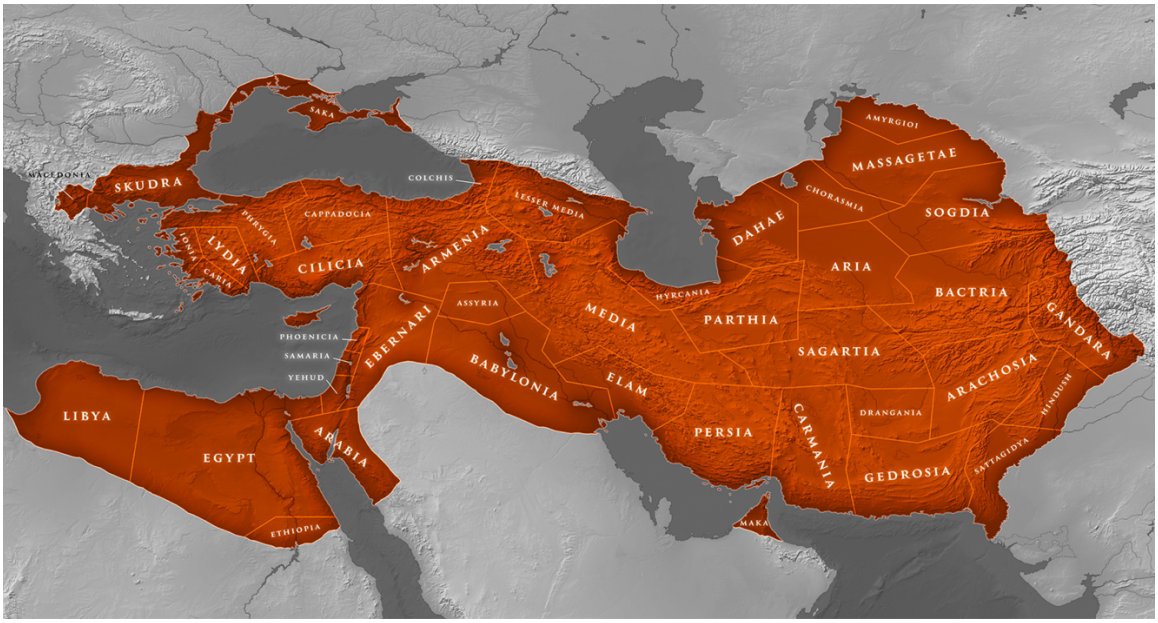

Complete Essay on the Achaemenid Persian Empire in Iran (550-330 BCE)

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In the chronology of ancient empires, Dynastic Egypt was first, and understandably so. It was based on flood-retreat agriculture in the Nile basin. Somewhat surprisingly, Achaemenid Persia was next. The Iranian plateau, though fertile for agriculture, had no large river basins. The Achaemenid leaders instead built their vast empire on sophisticated irrigated agriculture, well-developed transportation networks to stimulate foreign trade, and an astutely-chosen pattern of profitable conquest. The Achaemenid dynasts created a system of indirect government, based on Persian *satraps* (regional governors), that was emulated by successor states for two millennia. This essay begins with an explanation of the rise, rule, and fall of Achaemenid Persia.

Cyrus the Great, the Persian king of Parsa, founded the Achaemenid Persian Empire in 550 BCE. He replaced Astyages, his grandfather, as the ruler of the large Median Empire, merged the two Indo-Aryan states, and conquered Lydia and Babylonia to form the world's largest empire. Cambyses, his son, conquered Egypt. Darius the Great later extended the Achaemenid Empire to

reach from Europe (Macedonia) to India (the Punjab). Both Cyrus and Darius ruled benevolently and practiced religious tolerance. The principal religion in Achaemenid Persia was Zoroastrianism, which stressed personal choices between good and evil gods.

The Achaemenid rulers annually taxed their 30 subject nations to transfer wealth to the center. The main sources of wealth were agriculture, based on *qanat* (underground) irrigation, and foreign trade along the 1700- mile Royal Road that linked Anatolia and the Iranian plateau. The vast empire declined after succession crises eroded central power and encouraged rebellions in the *satraps* (subject regions). Vassal states, including Egypt, then declared independence from Achaemenid rule. Alexander the Great of Macedonia, a genius of military strategy and public administration, conquered Persia between 334 and 323 BCE and ended the Achaemenid dynasty.

What happened in Iran in the Achaemenid aftermath? When Alexander died from fever in 323 BCE, his Hellenistic generals fought over the spoils and divided his conquests into three parts.

Iran, along with much of Anatolia, Syria, and Mesopotamia, became part of the Seleucid Kingdom. But in 238 BCE, a Parthian (Iranian) ruler seceded and formed an independent state in northeastern Iran, based on horse warriors. That small state grew into the Parthian Empire (238 BCE-230 CE), which controlled Iran and Mesopotamia, prospered on Silk Road trade, and fought stand-offs with the expanding Roman Empire. In the 220s CE, that second Iranian empire lost out to a stronger Persian rival, the Sasanian dynasty, from southwestern Iran. The Sasanian Empire (230-651 CE), the third Iranian empire, asserted its hegemony over the Iranian heartland and agriculturally-rich Mesopotamia and took control of the flourishing Silk Road trade.

Between 540 and 629, the Zoroastrian Sasanians and the Orthodox Christian Byzantines (headquartered in Constantinople) fought debilitating wars with each other, vying for control of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and the Levant. Because both powers were severely weakened, the Arab Islamic Jihad overwhelmed

Persia in the 630s and gained control in 651, ending the Sasanian dynasty.

For the next eight and one-half centuries, Iran was ruled largely by foreigners – Arabs, Turks, and Mongols. Most Iranians converted to Islam. Arab Islamic Caliphates were in control for three centuries – the Umayyads ruled from Damascus (651-749) and the Abbasids from Baghdad (749-955). Seljuk Turkish horse-warriors invaded from the northeast and established the Seljuk Turkish Empire (1040-1194). A Mongol-led empire, the Il-Khanate, controlled Iran and Mesopotamia for seven decades (1256- 1335). Temur of Transoxiania (also known as Tamerlane) created a Turco-Mongol empire between 1370 and 1405, and his heirs ruled eastern Iran through the 15th century.

Turkic-speaking Iranians from the northwestern part of the country created the fourth and last Iranian empire, the Safavid Empire (1501-1722). The Safavid dynasty ruled Iran, Mesopotamia, and parts of Afghanistan. Safavid political power was based on Turkmen warriors, Persian bureaucrats, and the

Shi'ite Muslim religion. Safavid wealth depended mainly on the production and export of silk. An Afghan invasion brought down the Safavids and created seven decades of instability in Iran.

During the next two centuries, Iran was ruled by two autocratic local dynasties – the Qajar Dynasty (1796-1926) and the Pahlavi Dynasty (1926-1979). A revolution in 1978-1979 overthrew the last Pahlavi Shah and created the Islamic Republic (1979-present). The second part of this essay looks at the political and economic underpinnings of these wide swings in post-Achaemenid Iranian history. Throughout their turbulent past, the Persian-speaking people have remained justifiably proud of the legacy of Achaemenid Persia. A time line, a bibliography, and a description of sites that I visited in Iran are appended at the end of the essay.

The Achaemenid Persian Empire (550-330 BCE)

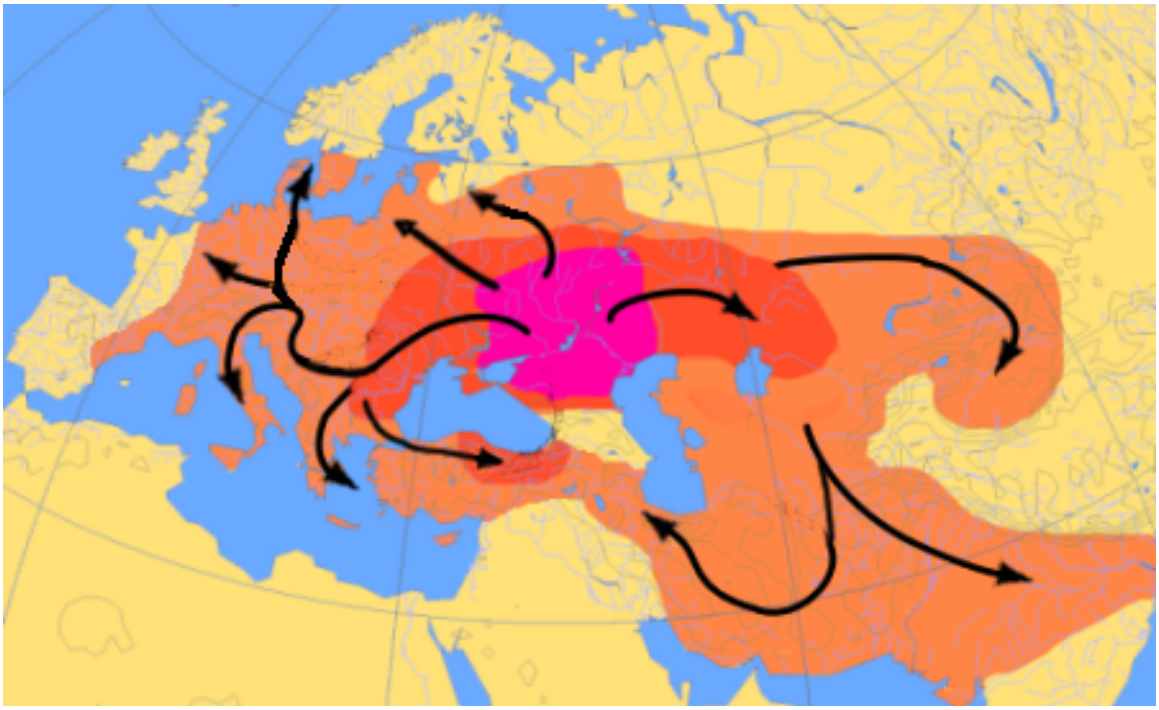
Predecessors of the Achaemenids. The strongest state in ancient Iran was the Elamite Kingdom (*c.* 2700-646 BCE), composed of farmers and herders. The language of the indigenous

Elam people was related to the Dravidian languages of southern India, and they wrote with a modified Sumerian cuneiform script. The Elam warrior-kings ruled southwest Iran from twin capitals at Susa and Anshan. They were defeated by their arch-enemies, the Assyrians, in 646.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elam_Map-en.svg>

Elam and Other Pre-Achaemenid Kingdoms, c. 700 BCE

The migrations of Indo-Aryan peoples (*c.* 4000-1000 BCE) brought new settlers into Iran ("the land of the Aryans"). Those Indo-European-speaking peoples moved first from Ukraine and southern Russia to Central Asia and Central Europe.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IE_expansion.png>

Indo-Aryan Migrations, c. 4000-1000 BCE –
4000-2500 BCE (Red Areas), 2500-1000 BCE (Orange Areas)

Starting about 1500, some Aryans migrated to northern India (and their descendants became Hindi and Urdu speakers).

Later (*c.* 1000-800 BCE), other Aryans, speaking the Avesta language, migrated from Central Asia to northeastern Iran. Those Aryans gradually spread from northeast to southwest and settled the Iranian plateau, absorbing indigenous inhabitants. The principal Aryan ethnic groups were the Medes (northwest), the Persians (southwest), and the Parthians (northeast). Aryan expansion was based on agricultural wealth (from underground irrigation channels, *qanats*) and military strength (horse archers).

The Medes, featuring highly-skilled horse archers, were the first of the Aryan peoples to create an Iranian empire. From their capital at Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), first established in the 8th century BCE, the Medes subjected the Persian kingdom of Parsa (Persis) in 625.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <>https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Median_Empire-en.svg

The Median Empire (625-550 BCE)

Thereafter, in an alliance with Chaldean-controlled Babylonia, the Medes crushed Assyria and captured its capital, Nineveh, in 612, eliminating what had been the most powerful state in the Near East. Following conquests of Armenia and Afghanistan in 590, the Median Empire (625-550 BCE) stretched from the Black Sea to the Indus Valley.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Neo-Assyrian_map_824-671_BC.png>

Sargonid Assyria (911-612 BCE) – Holy War Ideology Based On Extreme Religious Tenets Led To Destruction At Home

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Destruction_of_the_Elamite_city_of_Hamanu_645-635_BCE.jpg>

Limestone Relief, Nineveh, Assyria, 645-635 BCE – Depicting Assyrian Soldiers Defeating Elam in Hamanu

Cyrus the Great (550-530 BCE). In 559, Cyrus II (ruled 559-530 BCE) became the king of Parsa, a Persian vassal state of Media, which had been founded by Achaemenes in the 7th century. Cyrus (*Kurosh* in modern Persian) was a charismatic leader and a brilliant military tactician. Within a decade, he claimed leadership of the Median Empire by winning the Battle of Pasargadae (550),

marching his army into Ecbatana, and replacing his grandfather, Astyages, the Median king (ruled 584-550 BCE).

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cyrus_stele_in_Pasagardae.jpg>

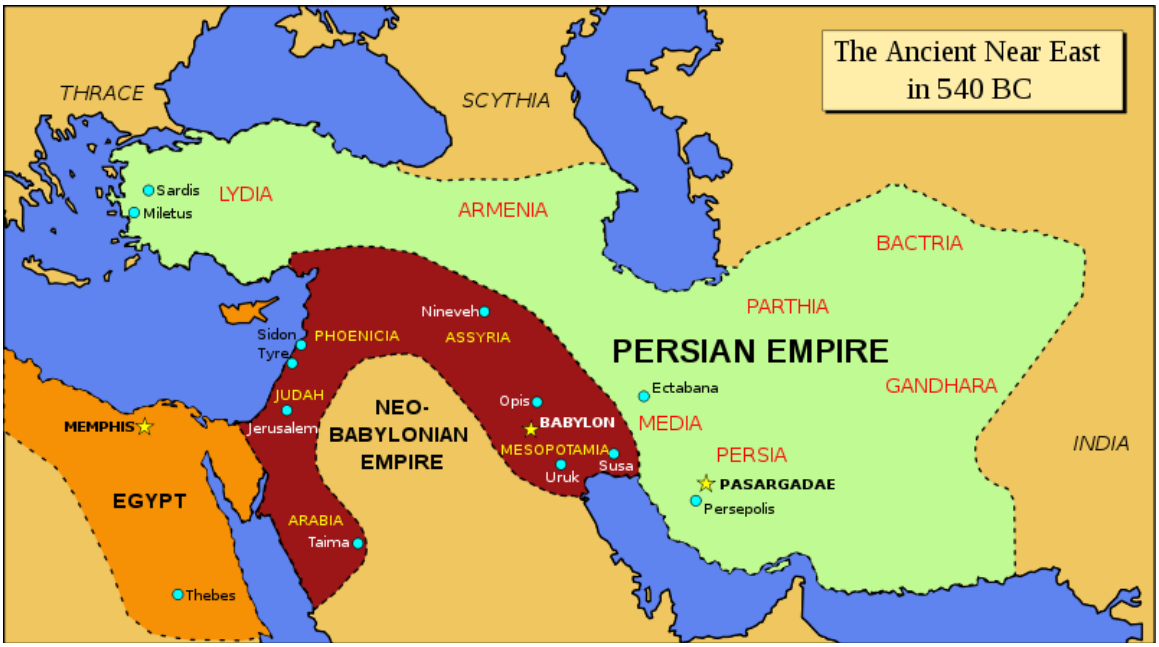
"I Am Cyrus, The Achaemenid" –
Inscription on Bas-relief, Pasargadae

The coup d'état was a management change within an Aryan partnership. Cyrus permitted Median government officials to retain their positions, and Astyages endorsed Cyrus' rule and faced no retribution.

In 546, Cyrus conquered gold-rich Lydia in Anatolia, after its king, Croesus, foolishly attacked the Persians. Croesus, the most powerful Greek king in Anatolia, had earlier funded the colossal temple of Artemis in the Ionian city of Ephesus in western Anatolia, which became one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Cyrus defeated the Lydians by daringly invading Sardis, their capital, after Croesus had disbanded his army for the winter. Because Cyrus seized 17 tons of gold and 250 tons of silver from Lydia, that conquest changed the balance of power in the Near East. Cyrus then went on to conquer Bactria and other parts of northeastern Iran and Central Asia between 544 and 540.

Wealthy Babylonia fell next, in 539, when its populace welcomed Cyrus the Great as a liberator from their unpopular king, Nabonidus. Desperate to retain control of his kingdom, Nabonidus had transferred the sacred idols of Mesopotamia's outlying cities to Babylon to prevent Cyrus from seizing them. But that policy had alienated the city-dwellers who felt they had lost their divine

protection. As a result, Syria, Phoenicia, Israel, and Palestine – former vassals of Babylonia – entered the expanding Achaemenid Persian Empire, and Persia gained control of the critical Phoenician fleet of ships. Cyrus installed Persian governors, but permitted Babylon and its former possessions to retain their religious and political institutions.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient_near_east_540_bc.svg>

The Achaemenid Persian Empire (Light Green) and Chaldean Babylonia (Dark Red), 540 BCE

Cyrus founded his capital in Pasargadae, the site of his victory over the Medes, in the heart of his Persian homeland.

Cyrus' iconic architectural feature was the use of capitals with double lions. He had at least two wives (Cassadane, an Achaemenid Persian, and Amytis, a Mede), only two sons (Cambyses and Bardiya), and four daughters (Atossa, Artystone, Roxana, and Meroe).

For political expediency, the Persians governed benevolently and embraced local institutions and cultures. Cyrus recorded his ruling principles in the Cyrus Cylinder (538) – equality of ethnic groups and religions, freedom of repatriation of peoples to their homelands, and restoration of cities and temples. The Cyrus Cylinder contains 45 lines of Babylonian cuneiform script in which Cyrus explains to the conquered Babylonian people that he is their legitimate ruler, sent by their primary god, Marduk, and that he will respect their religion, culture, sanctuaries, and institutions. His policy of religious tolerance was a departure in the Near East, but it was consistent with Zoroastrian principles of promoting stable government to maintain order (*Arta*) in the world.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cyrus_Cylinder.jpg>

The Cyrus Cylinder, 538 BCE, Cyrus the Great, Achaemenid Persia – History's First Human Rights Charter

A replica of the Cyrus Cylinder, a clay-fired barrel cylinder that is about 10 inches long and 4 inches thick, is displayed at the entrance of the United Nations headquarters in New York City. Although the Cyrus Cylinder does not contain direct references to human rights, some contemporary historians and politicians consider the Cyrus Cylinder to be the world's first charter of basic

human rights. The main body of the Cyrus Cylinder, containing the first 35 lines of the inscription, was discovered in the Imgur-Enlil wall in Babylon in 1879 by a team from the British Museum and has been on display at the British Museum since that time. A small fragment of the original cylinder, with lines 36 through 45 of the inscription, was identified at Yale University in 1971 and has been on loan to the British Museum since then. Two fragments of Achaemenid copies of the original Cyrus Cylinder were identified at the British Museum in 2009 and 2010, indicating that the inscription might have been intended for wide distribution in Babylon.

King Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylonia had forcibly resettled about 30,000 Jews in Babylonia between 597 and 581 BCE following rebellions for Jewish independence. After conquering Babylon in 539, Cyrus sponsored the repatriation of Jews to Israel (about 10,000 Jews chose to return), he returned their temple

vessels, and he subsidized the restoration of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cyrus_II_le_Grand_et_les_H%C3%A9breux.jpg>

Cyrus the Great, Liberating the Jews of Babylonia – Painting by Jean Fouquet, c. 1470

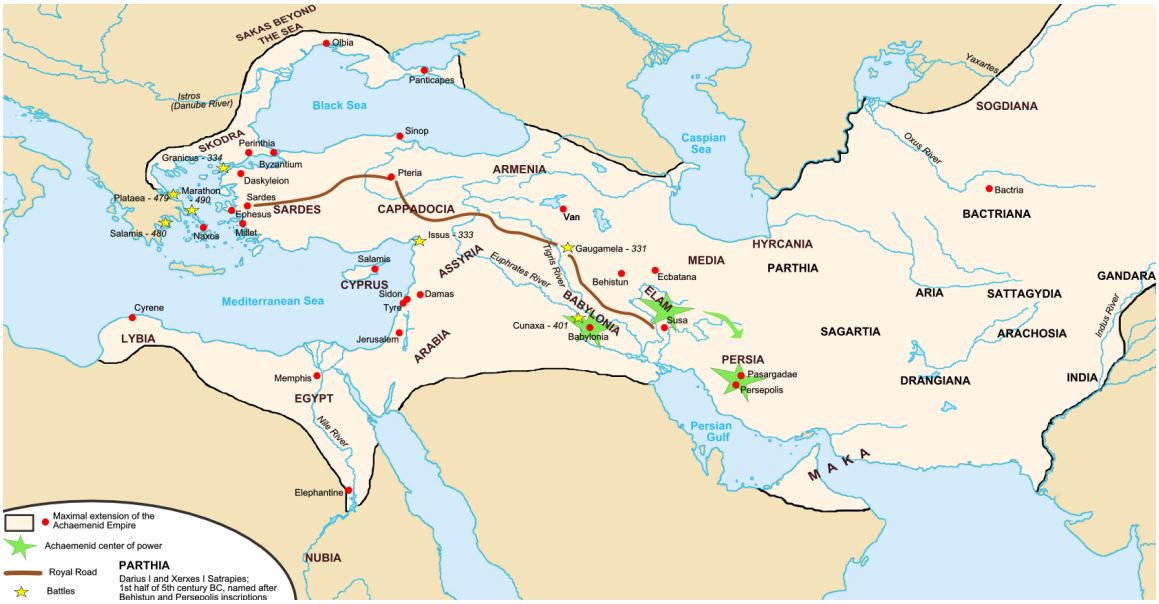
The Persians ruled Israel (539-332) as part of their Abarnahara (Beyond-the- Euphrates-River) Province.

Cyrus was well aware that nomadic invasions in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE had devastated Persian agricultural settlements. When the fierce Massagetae, a sub-tribe of the Saka Tigrakhauda, threatened from the north-east in 530, he massed his troops to quell the foreign threat to his centralized rule. Cyrus was killed in battle in 530 and buried in a mausoleum in Pasargadae.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CyrustheGreatTomb_22057.jpg>

Tomb of Cyrus the Great (575-530 BCE), Pasargadae -- His Imperial Capital

Darius the Great (522-486 BCE). Cambyses (ruled 530-522 BCE), Cyrus's son and successor, conquered Egypt in 525 and had himself named Pharaoh of the 27th Egyptian Dynasty (525-404 BCE).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_achaemenid_empire_en.png>

Expansion of the Achaemenid Empire, 550-525 BCE

Following the death of Cambyses, who had no heir, the empire faced a succession crisis. Darius I, an Achaemenid noble and distant cousin of Cambyses, won the struggle through brilliance, organization, and guile.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Darius_In_Parse.JPG>

Darius I (the Great), King of Persia and Pharaoh of Egypt – 522-486 BCE

Darius spent two years quashing nine rebellions by fighting nineteen large battles to gain the support of Persians, Medes, and Parthians. His success was due to extraordinary leadership, a loyal Medo-Persian army, and fractious enemies. Darius celebrated his victorious succession by marrying two of Cyrus's daughters and carving a triumphant relief in Mt. Bisitun. The Bisitun Inscription is the sole extant narrative Achaemenid Persian royal inscription.

That Inscription, written in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian, much later served as the key to the modern decipherment of the cuneiform script.

After reuniting the Achaemenid Persian Empire, Darius conquered the Punjab and the Sind (in India) in 518, and he took control of Thrace and Macedonia (in southeastern Europe) in 513. He thus created the world's first global empire.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
< https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Achaemenid_(Persian)_Empire_-_Circa_480BC.png>

The Achaemenid Persian Empire At Its Peak, c. 490 BCE

Under Darius' leadership, the military elite was a battalion known as the Immortals, whose strength was kept at 10,000 by replacing lost or wounded warriors with other well-trained men from prominent families.

Darius was an administrative genius. He codified the diverse legal systems of all imperial regions. The Achaemenids established twenty governing units (satrapies), each led by a Persian noble (satrap) in charge of tax collection and military recruitment. In the empire's twenty satrapies, Darius installed inspectors to oversee fiscal administration and military recruitment and thus to check the power of satraps (regional governors) and keep the empire at peace (*pax persica*). He introduced an Achaemenid royal currency, consisting of *darics* (gold coins) and *shekels* (silver coins). The gold darics were prestige items employed in large-scale commerce, whereas the silver shekels were used in everyday exchange. To reduce the prospect of revolts, Darius rotated his government among four seasonal

capitals – Babylon (winter), Susa (spring), Ecbatana (summer), and Persepolis (fall).

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sphinxes_from_the_Palace_of_Darius_I_at_Susa.jpg>

Persian Sphinxes –
Palace of Darius I, Susa (Spring Capital)

Achaemenid Persia's cultural identity was anchored in Persepolis. Annually during the Persian New Year (*No-Ruz*) at the Spring equinox, representatives of all thirty of Persia's subjugated ethnic groups would pay homage to the king by bringing gifts to

the *Apadana* (throne hall) in Persepolis. The *Apadana*, a square hall (200 feet per side) with 36 columns, contains sculptures of a procession of all of the empire's subject peoples, each in distinctive dress, bringing tribute to the Achaemenid King. The symbolic message represents the political legitimacy and royal power of the Achaemenid rulers.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Takhteh_Jamshid.jpg>

Apadana, Persepolis –
Processions of Conquered Nobles with Tribute for the King

Darius continued Cyrus's policy of religious tolerance and the absence of theocratic government. The main religion in the Iranian center was Zoroastrianism. The principal god, Ahuramazda, represented the Truth and goodness, whereas his opposite, Ahriman, stood for the Lie and evil.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Darius_I_the_Great%27s_inscription.jpg>

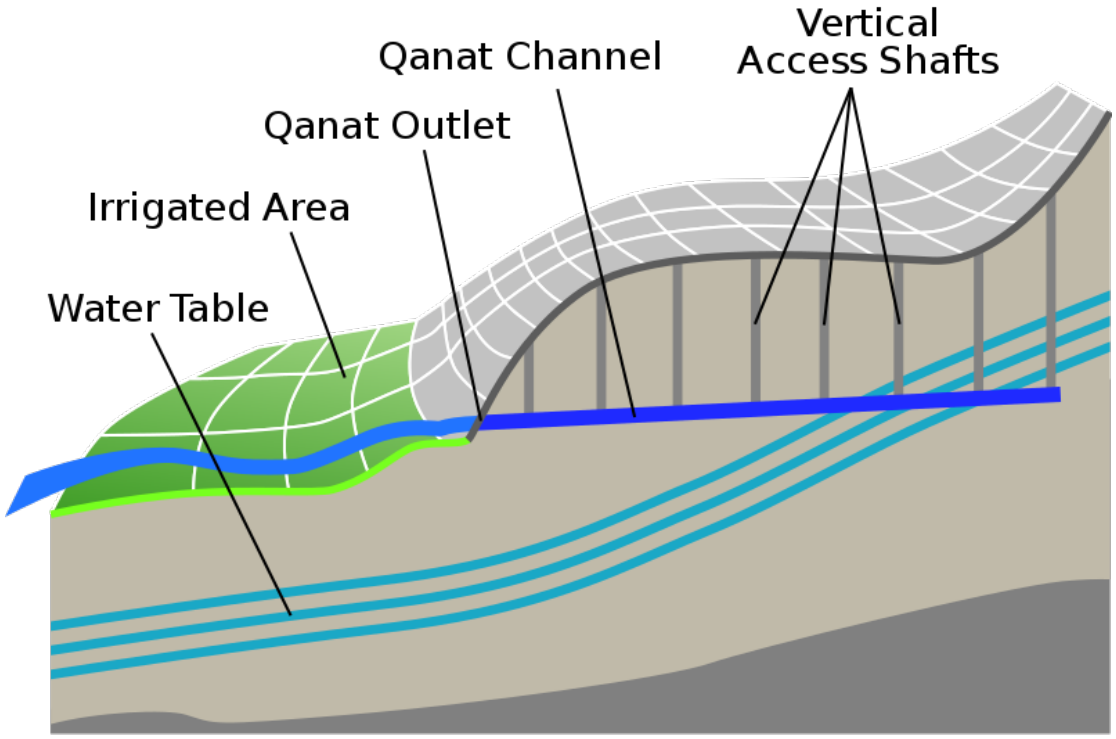
Winged Symbol of Ahuramazda and the Prophet Zoroaster – Wall Relief, Behistun Inscription, Mount Behistun, Kermanshah

Rulers and common people had to make personal choices between good and evil, truth and fiction, morality and immorality. The

sacred elements were earth, fire, and water. To avoid defiling those elements, corpses could not be buried, burned, or drowned. Hence, the dead were exposed openly in sacred places to be disposed of by animals or birds of prey. Although Achaemenid rulers claimed to receive their divine right to govern from Ahuramazda, they practiced religious tolerance and permitted their subjects to worship more than a dozen Iranian, Mesopotamian, and other deities.

Sources of Achaemenid Wealth. Agriculture was the principal source of wealth in the Achaemenid Empire. Farming and herding provided food, and the government taxed land and agricultural production. The main Persian agricultural innovation was the introduction of *qanats*, underground aqueducts that moved water from mountain bases to alluvial plains and increased farmed area, crop choice, and yields. Each agricultural village was structured around a *qanat*. Most land was farmed by small-scale free-holders. The imperial government granted land to royals (men

and women) and to nobles for large-scale estates. Landholdings were registered and taxed extensively. Cyrus built the Royal Canal between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Mesopotamia.

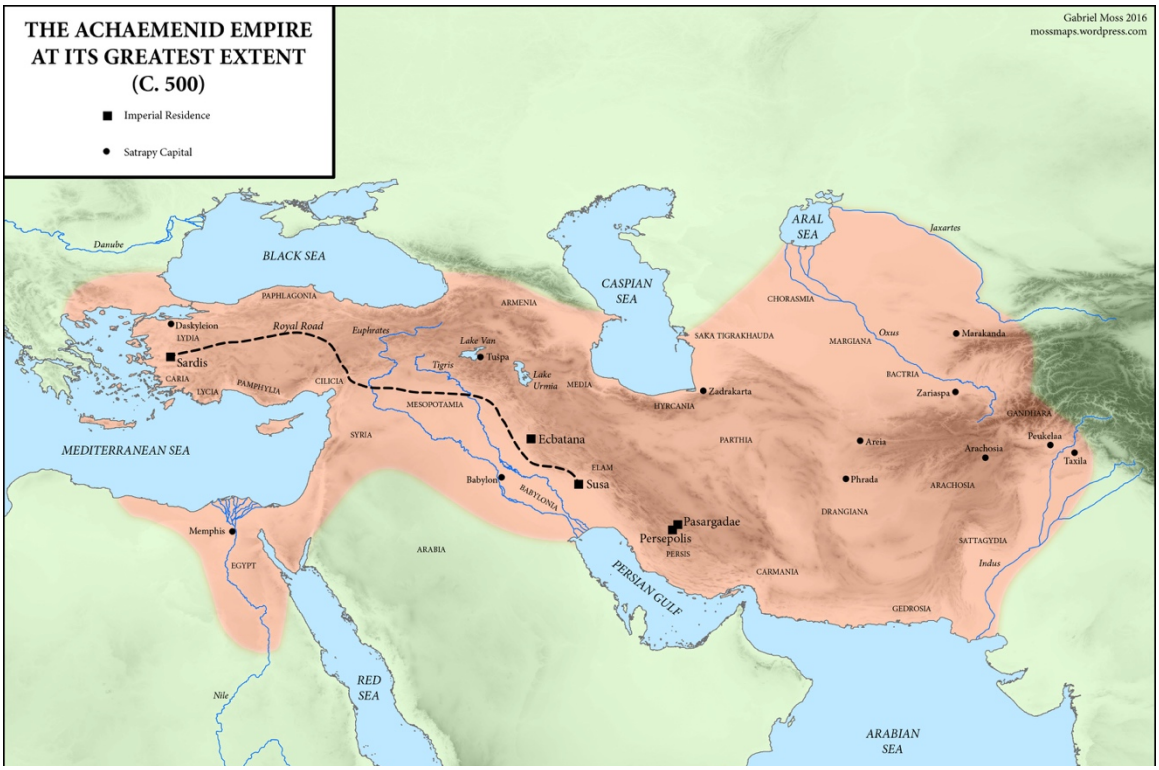


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qanat-3.svg>

Persian Qanat System of Irrigation – Moved Water From Mountain Bases to Alluvial Plains in Underground Channels

Foreign trade was a secondary source of Achaemenid wealth. The Persians imported raw materials and specie, exported artisanal manufactures, and taxed trade at borders. To enhance land-based trade, they constructed public infrastructure – a 1700-mile Royal

Road (from Susa in southwestern Persia to Sardis in western Anatolia) with 100 caravanserais, a Pony Express-like postal system in service to the kings, a series of inns at 15-mile intervals, and a chain of fire towers for signaling. Following conquests, "foreign markets," led by non-Persian merchants, appeared in most conquered towns and cities.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Achaemenid_Empire_at_its_Greatest_Extent.jpg>

The Royal Road in the Achaemenid Empire, c. 500 BCE – 1700 Miles From Susa (Southern Persia) to Sardis (Western Anatolia)

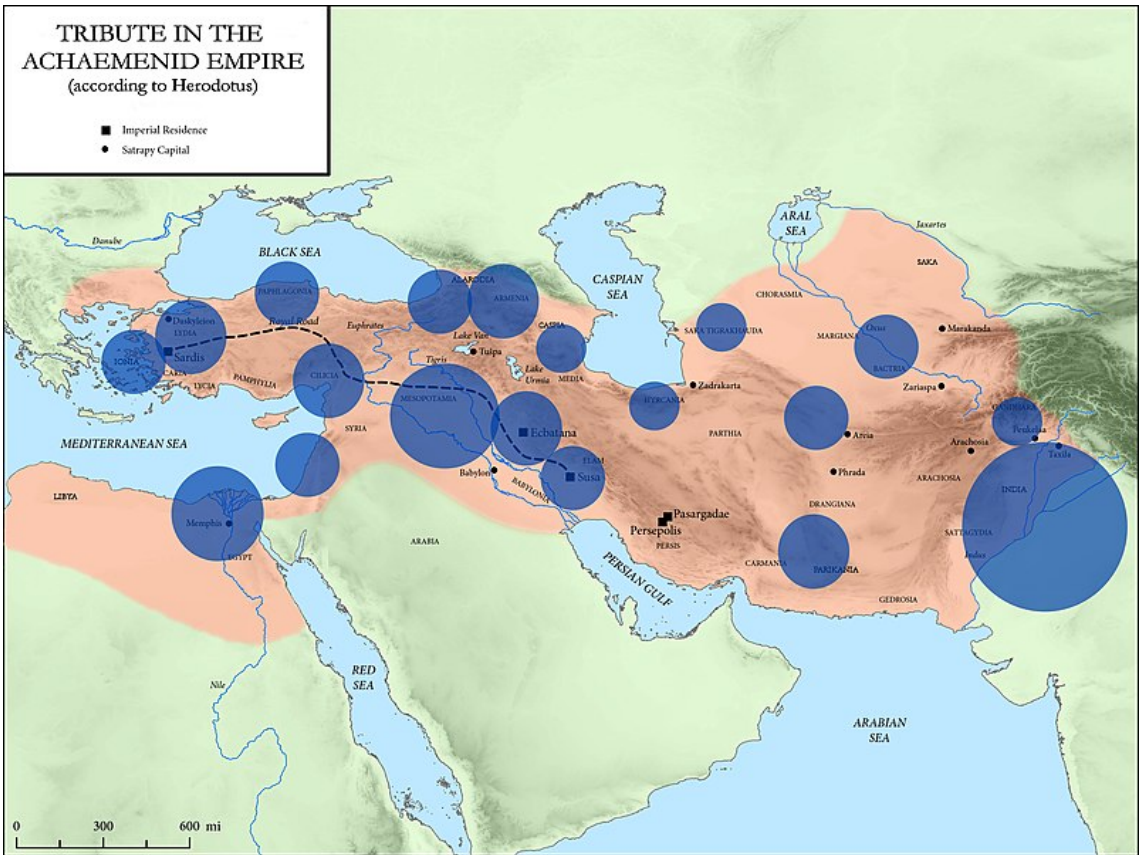
To expand maritime trade, the Achaemenid Persians utilized Phoenician ship-builders, built ports in key coastal sites, and completed a canal in Egypt to link the Red and Mediterranean Seas. The principal traded goods were textiles, carpets, metal tools, gold, and silver. The main domestic sources of gold were Lydia and Bactria, and gold was imported from India.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armlet_from_the_Oxus_Treasure_BM_1897.12-31.116.jpg>

Achaemenid Gold Armlets, with Leaping Lion-Griffin Terminals – One of a Pair, Oxus Treasure, British Museum, London

The Achaemenid leaders created their empire through foreign conquest to control subject peoples and transfer wealth to the

Persian center. With an army no larger than 80,000 soldiers, they conquered the major wealth- producing states in the Near East – Babylonia, Egypt, Lydia, and Phoenicia. Imperial wealth transfers went through three stages – booty (upon initial conquest), tribute (from vassal states), and taxation (of directly-controlled satrapies).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tribute_in_the_Achaemenid_Empire.jpg>

Tribute in the Achaemenid Persian Empire – According to Herodotus

The Persians also transferred technicians from conquered areas to the center. To compensate Iranian soldiers and expand their agricultural tax base, the Achaemenids created military settlements in fertile conquered regions. For two centuries, the Achaemenid Persians developed and exploited the agriculture and trade of their conquered regions.

Decline in the Achaemenid Persian Empire. In the early 5th century BCE, the Achaemenid Persian Empire extended across Eurasia from the Indus Valley in the east to southeastern Europe in the west. Persia was the world's greatest power at that time. But the Greek city-states, led by Athens and Sparta, ended Achaemenid expansion into Europe. Darius's troops lost the Battle of Marathon (490 BCE) when Greek hoplite warriors, benefiting from better training, shields, and swords, outfought the Persians in hand-to-hand combat. For Darius, however, the defeat at Marathon was a minor setback at the end of a successful punitive expedition.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Greco-Persian_Wars-en.svg>

The Boundary between the Achaemenid Persian Empire and the Greek City-States – Before the Battle of Marathon, 490 BCE

Xerxes' invasion of Greece a decade later, however, resulted in two military disasters for Persia – the naval Battle of Salamis (480 BCE) and the land Battle of Plataea (479 BCE). Xerxes had succeeded his father as King of Persia after Darius died in 486. Xerxes' invasion of Greece began well in 480 BCE with a victory

at Thermopylae Pass and a retributive sack of Athens. But thereafter, Greek commanders used superior strategy to offset Persia's much larger troop strength. The Greeks had learned that it was to their advantage to fight at close quarters in confined spaces where the Persian cavalry could not operate effectively. At Salamis, Themistocles, an Athenian admiral, tricked the Persian navy into fighting in shallow waters that favored the superior maneuverability of the Greek ships. At Plataea, the better-armed Greek hoplite warriors outfought the larger Persian force. Those defeats stemmed Persian expansion in southeastern Europe. But they did not threaten the stability of the Persian Empire.

The gradual decline of the Achaemenid Empire was triggered by internal erosion, a steady weakening of imperial government. Provincial rebellions began after Xerxes reversed Darius's approach of tolerance and introduced oppressive policies in the 480s BCE. Royal succession crises precipitated a civil war in 401 BCE (Artaxerxes II defeated his younger brother, Cyrus the

Younger, and his army of Greek mercenaries in the War of the Brothers) and the regicide of Artaxerxes IV in 336 BCE (Darius III acceded to the throne). When Egypt re-gained its independence from Persia (404-343), the Achaemenid Empire lost significant tax revenues.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Western_part_of_the_Achaemenid_Empire.jpg>

Achaemenid Persian Control of Egypt, 525-404 and 343-332 BCE

The suppression of rebellions in Babylonia, Bactria, Phoenicia, and Ionia was very costly. The imperial bureaucracy also splintered as satraps (regional governors) revolted against central authority, most importantly in Anatolia (366-359 BCE).

The erosion of governmental control made the empire vulnerable to external threats. In 336 BCE, Philip of Macedonia crossed the Hellespont and invaded western Anatolia under the guise of liberating the Greek city-states of Ionia from Persian rule. Philip's son, Alexander the Great of Macedonia (ruled 334-323 BCE), invaded and captured the Achaemenid Empire. Alexander was a charismatic, military-and-organizational genius. He won a series of critical battles over the Persian forces of Darius III to gain control over key pieces of the empire.

At the Battle of Granicus River (334 BCE, near Troy in northwestern Anatolia), Alexander gained access to Anatolia by trapping the Persian cavalry after narrowly escaping death. At the Battle of Issus (333 BCE, near Tarsus in southeastern Anatolia),

Alexander took control of the Cilician Gates, collapsed the Persian cavalry, and thereby gained easy access to the Levant and Egypt. At the Battle of Gaugamela (331 BCE, near Nineveh in northern Mesopotamia), Alexander won a hotly contested conflict and opened the way for his forces to take Babylonia. Alexander completed his conquest of Persia by winning the Battle of Persepolis (330 BCE, in Fars in modern southwestern Iran).

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander1256.jpg>

Alexander the Great, 3rd century BCE statue, Istanbul Archaeology Museum – Conquered Persia, 334-323 BCE

Later in that same year, Bessus, the satrap of Bactria and a cousin of Darius III, assassinated Darius in hopes of replacing him

as leader of the Persian resistance to Alexander. Alexander then astutely portrayed himself as the avenger of Darius and thus a legitimate successor to Achaemenid kings. Alexander sent Darius's body to Persepolis for a royal burial, and he captured and executed Bessus. Alexander then spent nearly a decade solidifying his control of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, which fell gradually but completely.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-alexander-empire.png>

Alexander the Great's Empire – After Defeating Achaemenid Persia, 323 BCE

The Parthian and Sasanian Empires (330 BCE-651 CE)

Alexander and the Seleucid Kingdom. Alexander the Great of Macedonia conquered the Achaemenid Persian Empire between 334 and 323 BCE. Alexander (Iskander in Persian) was an adroit public administrator as well as a brilliant militarist. Along his route of conquest, he established a series of Macedonian colonies, often led by Persian *satraps* (regional governors). Within ethnic Persia, Alexander adopted a Persianization policy to gain political legitimacy. In Susa in 324, he organized a mass wedding of Macedonian leaders and Persian aristocratic women.

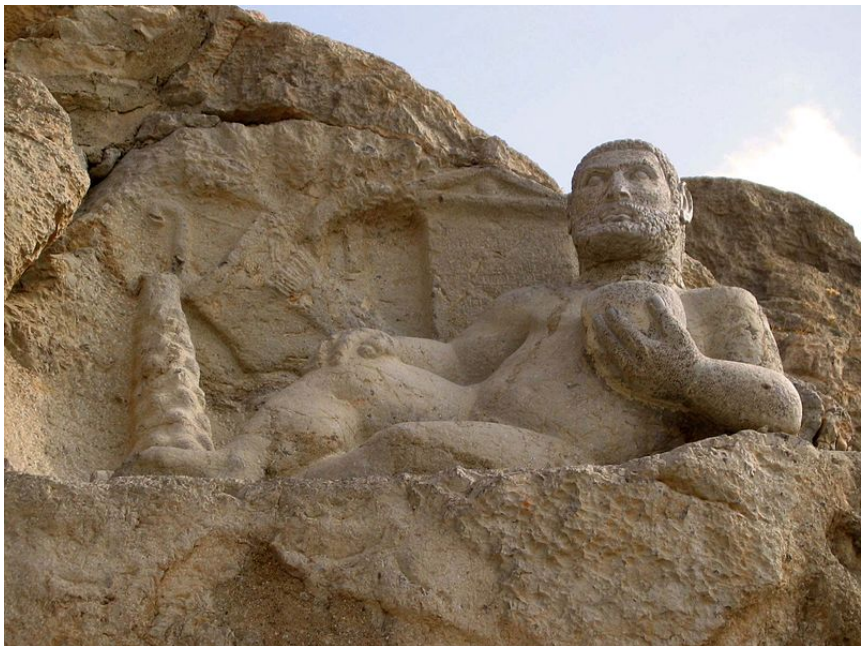
But Alexander died of a fever (possibly malaria) in 323 at the age of 33. His generals murdered his Bactrian wife and son and struggled for power. Following the Wars of Succession (301-280), Alexander's empire was divided into three kingdoms – Antigonid (centered in Greece and Macedonia), Seleucid (Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran), and Ptolemaic (Egypt and Cyrenaica).

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diadochi.png?

The Hellenistic (Seleucid, Antigonid, and Ptolemaic) Kingdoms, 2nd century BCE

Seleucus Nicator (312-281) was the founder of the Seleucid Kingdom, which spread from Anatolia through Persia. He ruled the eastern portion of his kingdom from Seleucia on the Tigris (in Mesopotamia) and the western half from Antioch on the Orontes (in Syria). The Seleucid kings gained wealth by establishing Greek cities on the main trade routes and taxing trade and by leaving agriculture in the hands of estate-owners and small-scale farmers and taxing land.

The Seleucids made little effort to Hellenize their non-Greek subjects. They courted the Persian nobility and local elites and governed through the Achaemenid satrap system. Wars with the Ptolemaic Kingdom and royal succession struggles sapped Seleucid strength. Secessions by Bactria (250) and Parthia (238) brought weakness in the east. The Seleucid Kingdom finally disappeared after the Roman Empire conquered Anatolia (130) and Syria (64).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bistoon_Kermanshah.jpg>

Seleucid Statue of Heracles, Sculpted in 148 BCE – Behistun, Kermanshah, Iran

Parthian Empire – Rise and Wealth. The Parthians were Indo-European-speaking people who lived in northern Iran (east of the Caspian Sea). A Parthian noble, Arcases I (247-217 BCE), founded the Arcasid dynasty in 247 and seceded from the Seleucid Kingdom in 238. He and his son, Arcases II (217-191 BCE), conquered nearby Hyrcania and successfully fought off Seleucid attempts to re-conquer Parthia. Mithradates I (171-138 BCE) and Mithradates II (123-88 BCE) expanded Parthia to create a regional empire at the expense of the Seleucids.

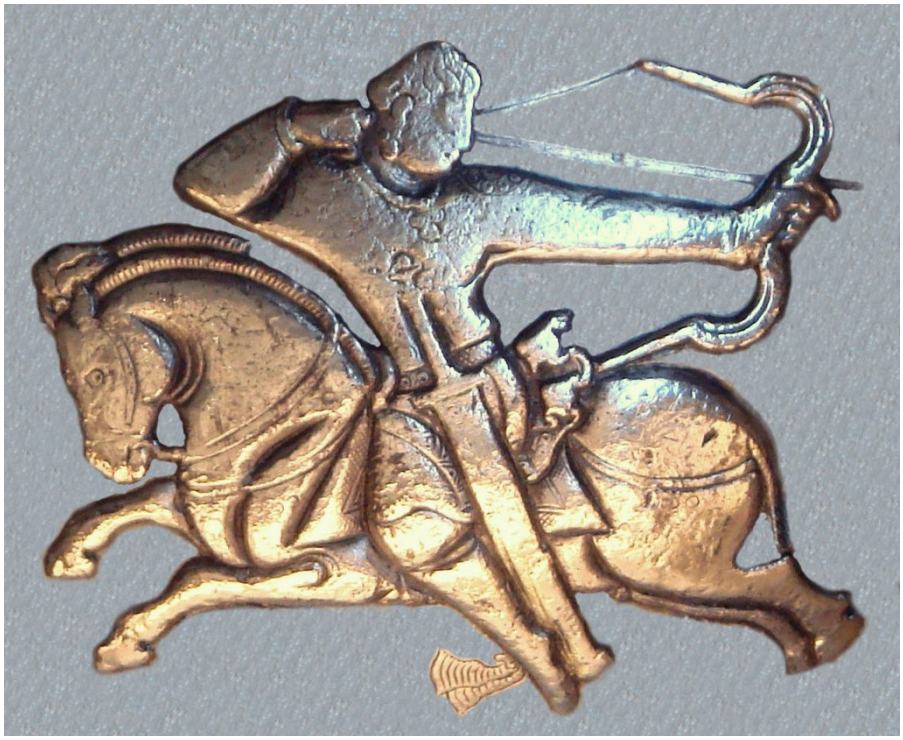
In the 140s, Mithradates I conquered Bactria (northeast of Parthia) and the Iranian heartland – Media, Persis, and Elam. He claimed Mesopotamia in 139, capturing its fertile agricultural basin. Mithradates II moved the Parthian border west to the Euphrates River in 113 and placed a Parthian king on the throne of Armenia (in the Caucasus region) in 95. When the Roman Empire expanded into eastern Anatolia and Syria in 64, the Euphrates

region and Armenia became the focus of incessant Roman-Parthian conflict.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parthia.png>>

The Parthian Empire At Its Greatest Extent, 1st century CE

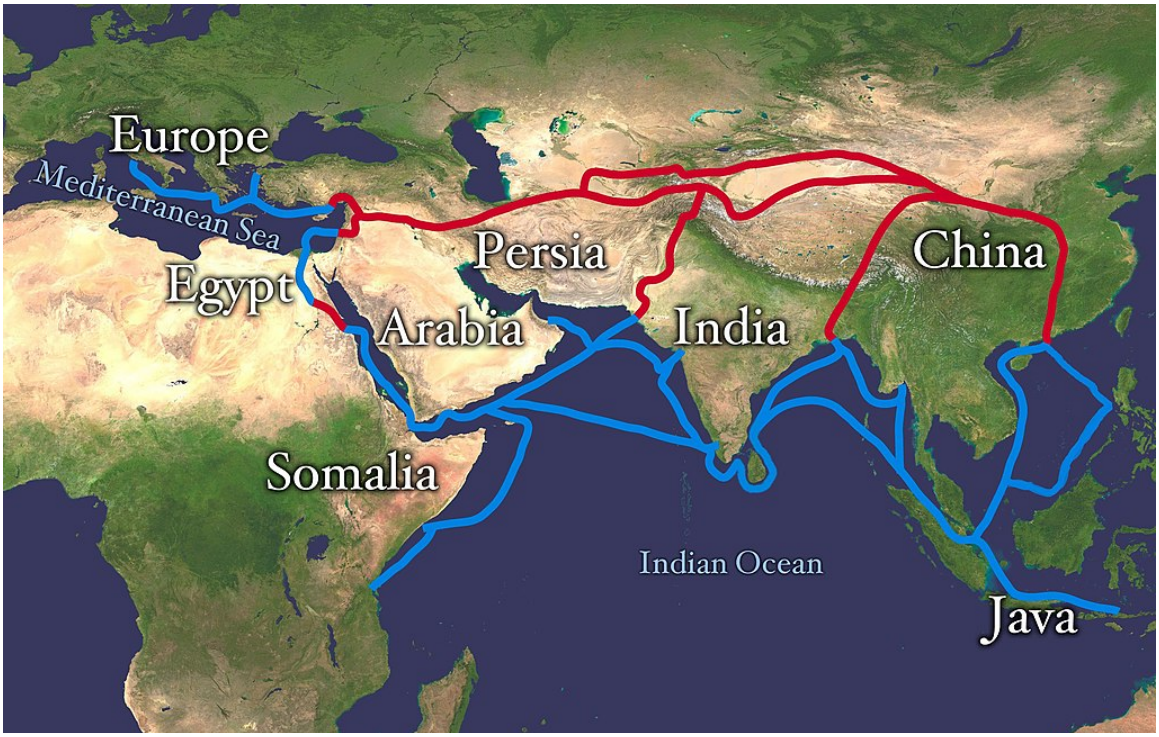
Parthian military prowess relied on armored cavalry (using newly invented horseshoes) and horse archers (specializing in the "Parthian shot," the ability to turn backwards and fire eight-to-ten arrows per minute accurately at full gallop).



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hephthalite_horseman_on_British_Museum_bowl_460-479_CE.jpg>

The "Parthian Shot" –
Horse-Archer Depicted on the Hephthalite Bowl, British Museum

The principal source of Parthian wealth was the taxation of trade. The Silk Road, a trade route linking Han China with Rome by land, opened after the Parthians signed a trade agreement with Han China in 115 BCE. The first caravan on the Silk Road left China in 106 BCE.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Silk_route.jpg>

The Silk Road – Linking the Han Chinese and Roman Empires Via Persia, 1st century BCE-3rd century CE

Up to 1000 Bactrian (double-humped) camels per caravan each carried 400 pounds of merchandise. Because of the high transport costs, most commodities traded on the Silk Road were luxuries of light weight and low bulk. Chinese silk (yarn, cloth, and textiles), porcelain, and jade were exchanged for Roman gold and glassware and Parthian horses. The Parthian kings also benefitted secondarily from land taxes. Underground irrigation channels

(*qanats*) expanded, but there were no key agricultural innovations during the Parthian era.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gansu_Museum_2007_257.jpg>

China Needed Persian Horses –
Bronze Flying Horse, Gansu, Western China (Silk Road Oasis)

Parthian Empire – Control and Fall. Parthian kings shared political power with the nobility. Because they supplied the armored cavalry, the nobles were empowered to confirm and remove kings and to serve as their closest advisers. Both royals and nobles practiced dualistic Zoroastrianism – supporting the

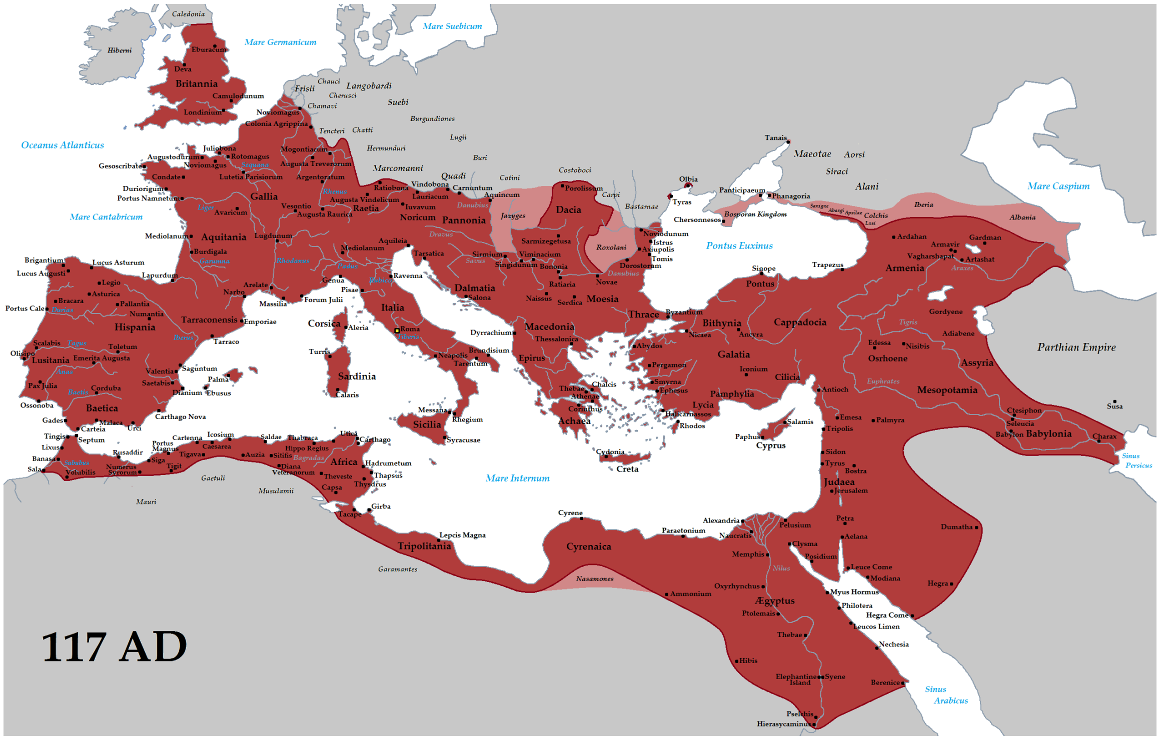
good god (Ahuramazda) over the evil god (Ahriman), lighting royal fires, and making animal sacrifices. Parthia was not a theocracy, and political legitimacy resulted from military and economic success. Central government was weak because the nobles had private armies and local autonomy. The nobles also controlled much of the trade on the Silk Road and invested their trade wealth in large feudal estates.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sarbaz_Nysa.jpg>

Parthian Warrior, Wearing a Hellenistic-style Helmet, 2nd century BCE – Parthian Royal Necropolis, Nisa, Turkmenistan

Because the nobles had an effective veto on the tenure of kings, Parthia suffered from royal succession crises and from civil wars between two contenders for the crown. The once formidable Parthian military strength thus was weakened, and the empire became ripe for overthrow.

Parthia had a longstanding conflict with the Roman Empire over control of the Euphrates and Armenian regions and hence of the Silk Road trade routes. Roman Emperor Trajan invaded Parthia in 116-117 CE and gained control of Armenia and Mesopotamia. Thereafter, those buffer regions shifted back and forth between the two competing empires. The Romans sacked the Parthian capital, Ctesiphon on the Tigris, three times – in 116, 164, and 198 CE – and gradually sapped Parthia's military resolve. But Rome never conquered Parthia.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_Empire_Trajan_117AD.png>

The Roman Empire At Its Peak, 117 CE –
Including Armenia and Mesopotamia, Taken From Parthia

In the 220s, Parthia was afflicted by a vicious civil war between two contenders for the crown, the Parthian brothers Ardavan V and Valaksh VI. A local ruler, Ardashir I of Persis, revolted, separately defeated both Parthian contenders by 230, established a new ruling dynasty and a stronger Persian empire – the Sasanian, and proclaimed himself *shahanshah* (king of kings).

Sasanian Empire – Rise and Wealth. After Ardashir I (224-240 CE) killed the Parthian king, Artabanus IV, at Hormozgan in 224, the Parthian Empire quickly disintegrated. Parthian nobles preferred Persian continuity to continuing conflict and shifted their support to the Sasanian dynasty (Sasan, a Zoroastrian priest, was Ardashir's grandfather). Ardashir's son, Shapur I (240-279 CE), was an expansionist empire-builder. A skilled military leader and strategist, Shapur helped his father assert control over the Iranian heartland in the 220s, and together they claimed Mesopotamia, the bread-basket and trade center, in 229. Shapur turned eastward and conquered the Kushan Kingdom (in contemporary Afghanistan, Pakistan, and western China) in 242, and he briefly occupied Syria and captured the Roman Emperor Valerian for ransom in 260.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bas_relief_nagsh-e-rostam_al.jpg>

Shapur I Captures Roman Emperor Valerian, Battle of Edessa, 260 – Bas Relief Sculpture, Naqsh-e Rostam, Fars Province, Iran

For four centuries, the Sasanian kings struggled to defend their borders against Roman incursions in the west and northwest and against threats from Hephthalites (Huns) and Turks in the north and east. In 560, they joined with the Turks to crush the Huns and conquer Bactria (northern Afghanistan). The Savaran, an elite cavalry that employed heavy armor and long lances, was

the core of Sasanian military might. The Sasanian army also was adept at siege warfare against Roman fortress towns.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sasanian_Empire_621_A.D.jpg>

The Sasanian Empire of Persia (230-651 CE) – At Its Greatest Extent, 621 CE

Like the Parthians, the Sasanians generated most of their wealth from foreign trade and agriculture. Trade on the Silk Road flourished, especially after the Sasanian King Khosrow (531-579 CE) negotiated trade treaties with China.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plate_of_the_Sasanian_king_Khosrow_I_Anushirvan.jpg>

Plate Depicting Reformer Khosrow I (531-579)

Sasanian and Roman/Byzantine leaders jostled to control trade routes and collect the 25 percent tax at borders. Agriculture continued to be a secondary source of wealth. The main crops were barley, rye, wheat, grapes, figs, and olives.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shushtar_Historical_Hydraulic_System_Darafsh_(6).jpg>

Remains of the Shustar Irrigation System, Shustar, Iran – Qanats Supplied Water for Sasanian Agriculture

Sasanian Empire – Control and Fall. The system of political control in the Sasanian Empire was similar to that in the Parthian state. Persian and Parthian nobles had a feudal aristocracy and checked royal power by deciding investiture and dethroning unsuccessful kings. The crown and nobility shared power with Zoroastrian priests (*magi*) who ran the judicial system. Although the elite were Zoroastrian, they permitted religious

freedom for the multi-ethnic populace. Following a short-lived, egalitarian revolt, King Khosrow I (531-579) introduced reforms of taxation and land use. But those changes were too little and too late. Trade and agriculture formed the basis of imperial wealth and power. Control of Mesopotamia, with fertile land and trade crossroads, was essential.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ctesiphon_01.jpg>

Archway of Khosrow, Ctesiphon – Sasanian Capital

But wealth generation required political stability. Between 540 and 629, the Sasanians fought a debilitating war with the

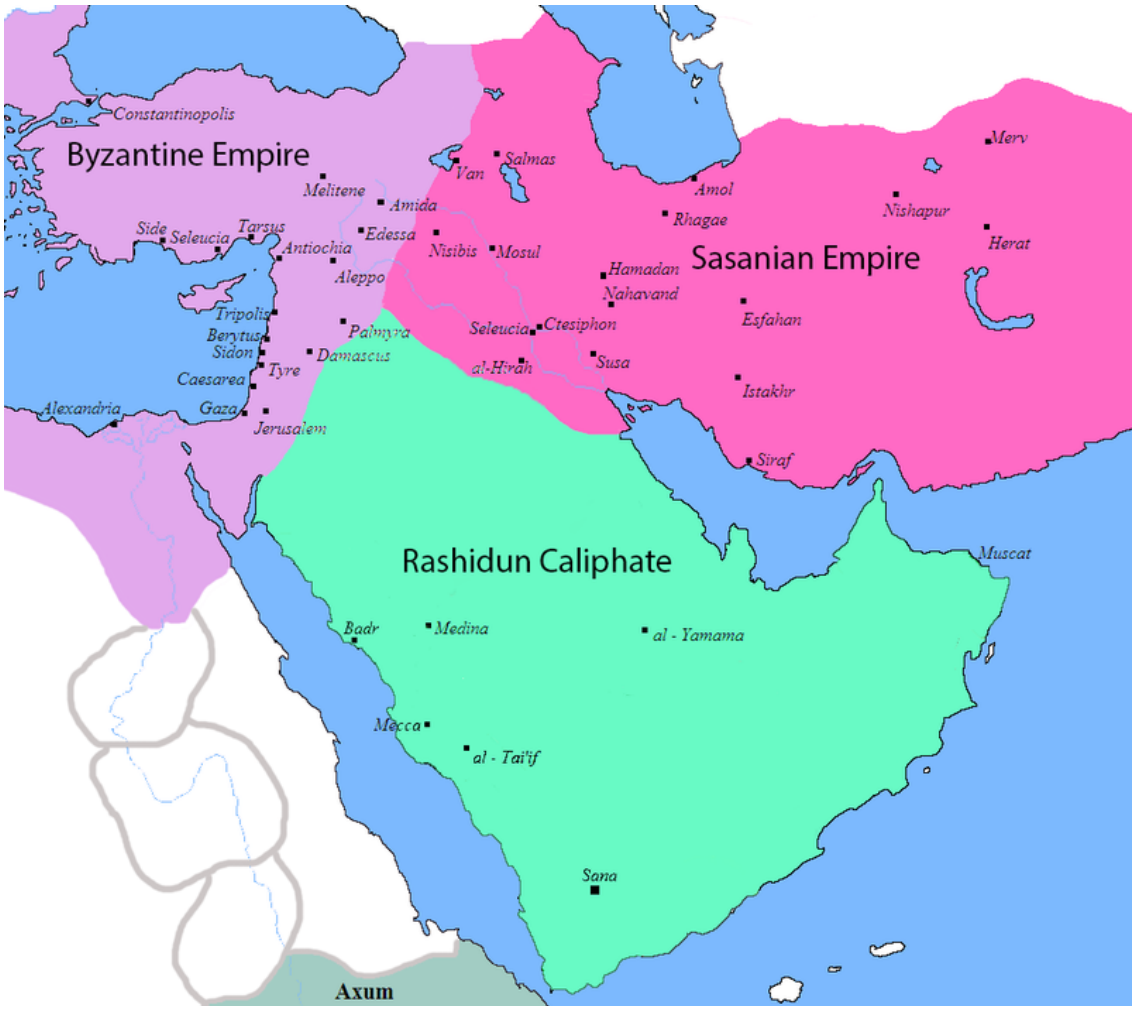
Byzantines from which neither side could extract permanent gain. Estimates of casualties in the 620s alone count 200,000 dead for each side.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Byzantine_and_Sassanid_Empires_in_600_CE.png>

The Sasanian (Persian, Yellow Area) and Byzantine (Eastern Roman, Purple Area) Empires, c. 600

While the Persians and Byzantines exhausted each other, militaristic but poorer neighbors – Turks, Khazars, and Arabs – awaited their chances to invade. The Arab Islamic Jihad struck first and overwhelmed Persia in the 630s. The turning-point battle was fought at Qadisiyyah in 637. By 700, the Arabs had

conquered all of the Sasanian Empire and much of Byzantium. Those two powers were vulnerable because of their incessant warfare with each other, plague infestations, and economic decline (caused by shrinking trade).



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IslamicConquestsIroon.png>

The Islamic Conquest of the Sasanian Empire, 7th century CE

The Arab invaders had many advantages in their sweeping conquest of territories from central Asia to Spain. Their Bedouin warriors were experienced, disciplined, mobile (with camel transport), and motivated to spread Islam and gain booty and land.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bedouin_and_camel_-_panoramio.jpg>

Bedouin Riding A Camel in Arabia –
Bedouin Warriors Were Motivated, Mobile, and Disciplined

Iran Under Arab, Turk, and Mongol Rule (651-1722)

Islamic Caliphates and Seljuk Turks (642-1220). The fifth Arab caliph (Islamic political and religious leader), Muawiyah, established the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus, Syria in 661. In

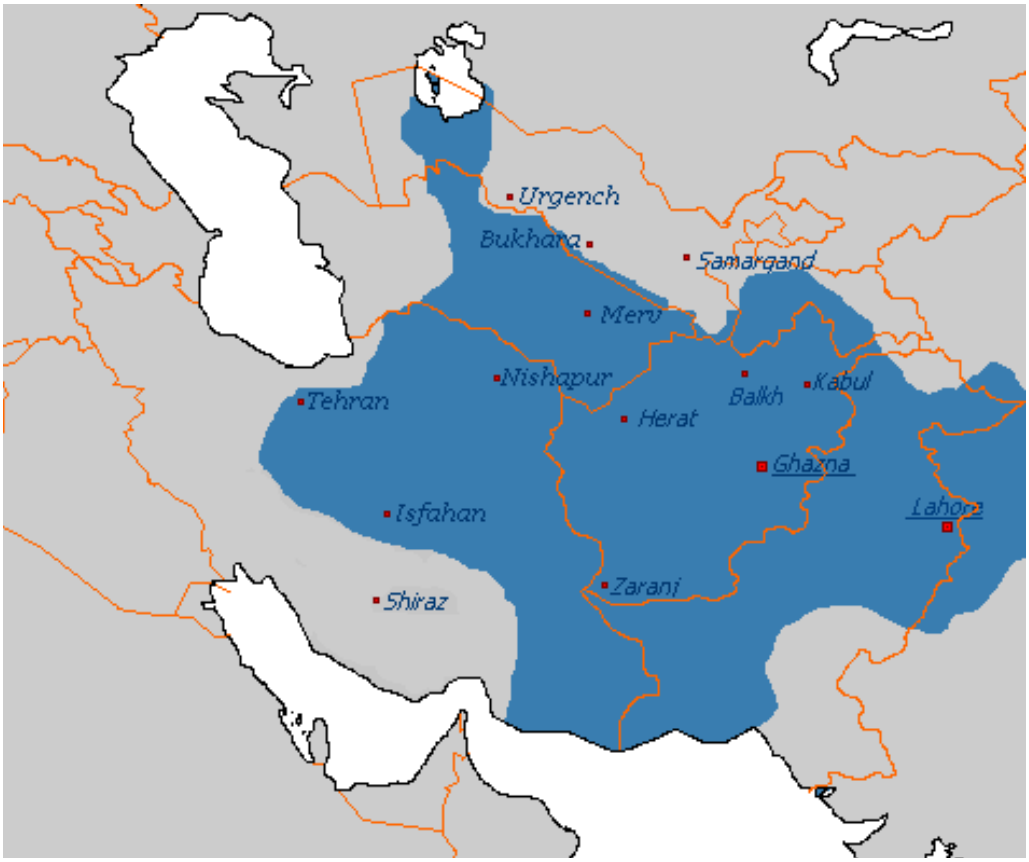
Iran, the Umayyad caliphs installed Arab governors but used Persian landed gentry to collect taxes. In 749, the Abbasids (from Khurasan in eastern Iran) set up a new caliphate in Baghdad, Iraq. Persian administrators and Turkish soldiers undercut Arab political power. Abbasid Islamic administration became Persian except for the Arab language. But independent dynasties soon arose under the umbrella of nominal Abbasid rule.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IslamicWorld850.png>

The Abbasid Caliphate – At Its Peak , c. 850

The 9th-11th centuries are known as the Iranian interlude. The Samanid Dynasty (874-999) in the northeast (Transoxania) was

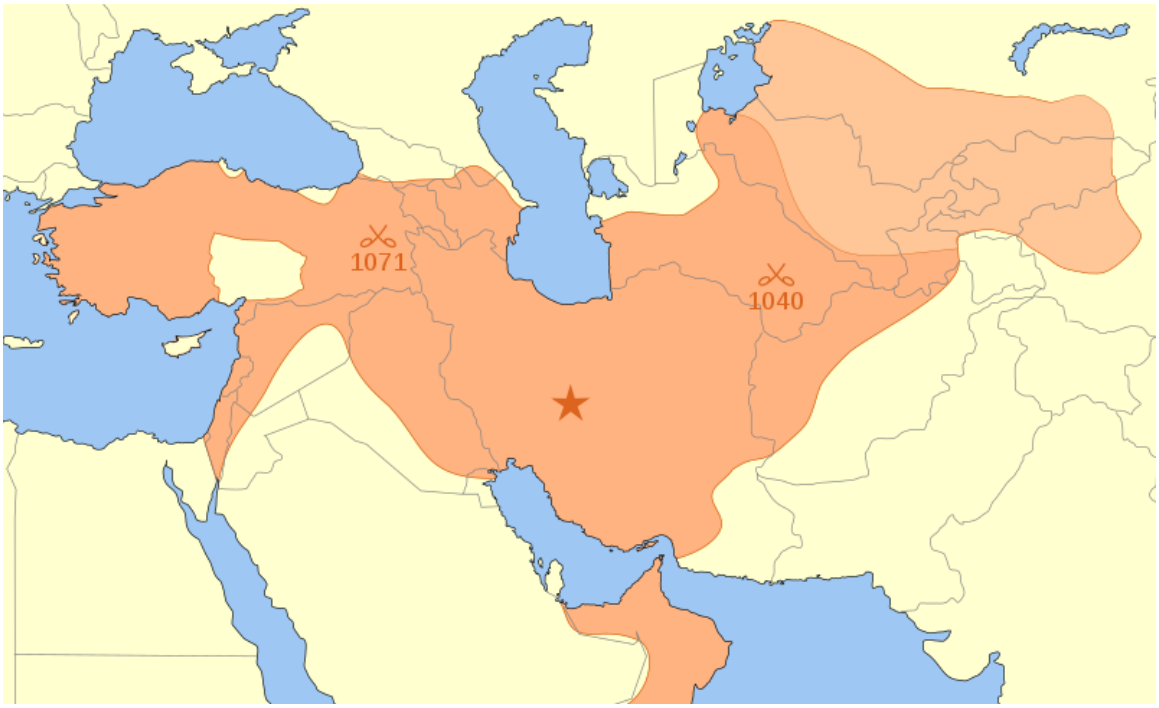
Persian-led and practiced Sunni Islam. In the mid-10th century, the Iranian region was divided between two powerful regional dynasties. The Ghaznavids (961-1040), a Sunni Turkish dynasty, ruled eastern Iran from Khurasan, whereas the Buyids (945-1055), a Shi'ite Iranian dynasty, controlled western Iran and Iraq from Baghdad.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghaznavid_Empire_975_-_1187_(AD).PNG>

The Ghaznavid (Turkish Sunni) Dynasty – 961-1040

The Seljuk Turks first enter recorded history as nomads in Central Asia who converted to Sunni Islam in the 10th century. Their skill as horse-based warriors allowed the Seljuks to conquer the Ghaznavids (1040) and the Buyids (1055). At the pivotal Battle of Manzikert (1071), Alp Arslan, the Seljuk leader, annihilated the Byzantine army and opened Anatolia to waves of Turkish migrations. The Seljuks set up capitals in Rayy (near Tehran) and Isfahan and permitted Iran to have regional autonomy. Nizam al-Mulk, a longstanding Persian vizier (chief minister), established an effective system of Persian administration throughout the Seljuk Empire. In 1194, the Seljuks were defeated and replaced by another Turkish dynasty, the Khwarazm-shahs from the Aral Sea region.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seljuk_Empire_locator_map.svg>

Seljuk Turkish Empire At Its Greatest Territorial Extent, 1092

Mongol Invasion and Ilkhanate Rule (1219-1335). In the 13th century, the Mongols conquered China and irrupted across the Eurasian steppes. For several decades the military progress of the Mongol and Turkish horse-based warriors seemed unstoppable. The tribesmen from the Asian steppes were incredibly quick and mobile, and their military tactics, notably the feigned retreat, are still studied today. The Mongols raided wealthy sedentary areas to obtain resources. During his invasion of Iran (1219-1223),

Genghis Khan devastated Khurasan, razed Herat, and ruined much agriculture based on *qanats* (underground irrigation channels).

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genghis_Khan>

Genghis Khan, Founder and Ruler of the Mongol Empire (1206-1227) – Portrait in National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

Hulegu Khan, Genghis's grandson, invaded Iran (1256-1260) to control the Abbasid areas and destroy the troublesome Assassin tribe. In 1258, Hulegu's army swept through Iran and Iraq and razed Baghdad. Against heavy odds, the Mamluk army of Sultan Qutuz stopped the Mongol advance in Syria in 1260. The Battle of Ayn Jalut ("Eye of Goliath") was fought reputedly at the site

where David slew Goliath. Hulegu Khan and his descendants established the Il-Khanate (1256-1335), one of the four khanates in the Mongol Empire, in Iran and Iraq.

The Il-Khanate Mongols, who converted to Islam in 1295, used efficient Persian bureaucrats to run the government, ensure security, and collect taxes. *Qanat* agriculture, sericulture near Tabriz (the Mongol capital), and Silk Road trade created significant wealth in the Il-Khanate. But the Mongol state was short-lived. Succession struggles and corruption drained government revenues. Political fragmentation occurred after the weakened central government paid its soldiers with land grants (*iqta*), and those local vassals opted for independence. The Il-Khanate state disintegrated after the last Il-Khan ruler was assassinated in 1335.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asia_in_1335.svg>

The Four Khanates of the Mongol Empire – Yuan Dynasty, Chagatai Khanate, Ilkhanate, and Golden Horde, 1335

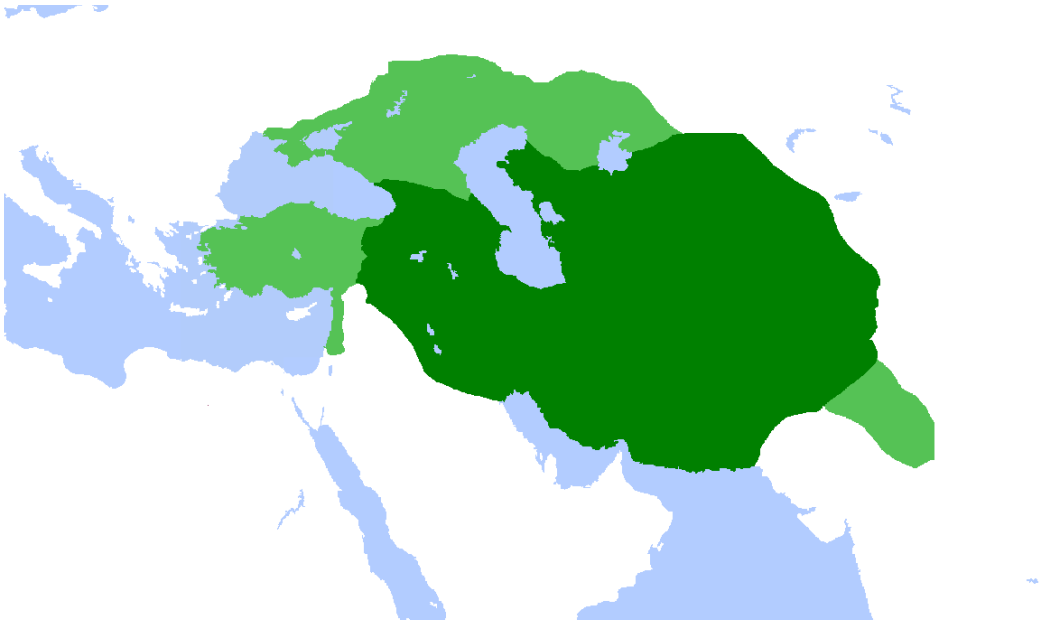
Temur's Empire and Timurid Rule (1381-1501). Temur (or Tamerlane) was born in 1336 in Transoxania of Turco-Mongolian heritage. Like Genghis Khan, Temur was a man of extraordinary intellect and organizational skill who was quick to carry out incredible brutalities for political purposes.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Timur_reconstruction03.jpg>

Sculpture of Temur, From Skull Found in His Grave – by M. M. Gerasimov

In the 1370s, Temur consolidated his control over the many factions within the Ulus Chaghatay, a confederation of steppe-nomadic tribes. In imperial administration, Temur divided the powers of Persian bureaucrats and Chaghatay emirs so that each would check the other. He campaigned for territorial expansion so that he could buy off his followers with booty from raids. Temur, a military genius, conquered mainly good agricultural areas.

Most foreign trade within the Timurid Empire occurred internally – linking Transoxania with Persia, Iraq, India, and southern Russia. Temur rewarded artisans engaged in making a wide range of goods – from glassware to armor. He took 10 percent of all production for his treasury.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
< https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Timurid_Empire_Map.png>

Temur's Empire – At His Death, 1405

Since Temur refused to share power, a series of succession disputes occurred after his death in 1405. His anointed successor, a grandson, could not take effective control. Following 15 years of bloody struggle, Tamerlane's son, Shahrukh, gained control of a

much reduced and weaker Timurid Empire. He was succeeded by his son, Ulugh Beg, a brilliant intellectual but weak administrator.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulugh_Beg_observatory_3.JPG>

Observatory of Ulugh Beg, Temur's Grandson (the Astronomer King) – Built 1424-1429

In Iran, the Timurid rulers controlled only the eastern provinces. During most of the 15th century, western Iran, Iraq, and eastern Anatolia were ruled by two competing Turkmen dynasties (originally from Anatolia) – the Qara-Qoyunlu (Black Sheep) and the Aq-Qoyunlu (White Sheep). Both Turkmen dynasties relied

on Turkish troops, used Persian administrators, practiced Sunni Islam, and spoke Persian.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diyarbakirwalls2.jpg>

Aq-Qoyunlu (White Sheep) Castle – Diyar-i Bekir, Turkey

Safavid Empire (1501-1722) – Rise and Wealth. The Safavid order, a militant religious brotherhood, was created by Sheikh Safi (1252-1334) to promote Sufiism (mystical Islam). Shah Ismail I (1501-1524) founded the Safavid Empire by leading Qizilbash (Turkmen) warriors in a series of conquests, starting in Tabriz (1501). Ismail's hopes of adding eastern Anatolia to his

new empire were quashed by the Ottoman Sultan, Selim I, at the Battle of Chaldiran (1514).

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battle_of_Chaldiran_(1514).jpg>

Ottoman Turkish Cavalry, Defeating Ismail's Safavid Army, Battle of Chaldiran,1514 – From Chehel Sotoun Palace, Isfahan, Iran

Shah Abbas I (The Great, 1587-1629) consolidated the Safavid Empire. Abbas secured imperial borders by conquering Khurasan (from the Uzbeks), Azerbaijan and Iraq (Ottomans), and Kandahar (Mughals). He used Persian administrators to underpin

his royal absolutism, and he created an elegant capital at Isfahan. Shah Abbas introduced two key reforms to counter the power of troublesome Qizilbash warriors who had become a land-holding elite. He created a permanent army, using Caucasian ex-slaves and gunpowder (firearms and cannons), and he introduced *tuyul* land grants, which were linked to offices rather than individuals and thus were not hereditary.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ShahAbbasPortraitFromItalianPainter.jpg>

Shah Abbas I (The Great, 1587-1629) –
Expanded and Consolidated the Safavid Empire

The Safavid Empire was less wealthy than its two neighboring Muslim adversaries – the Ottoman and Mughal Empires.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Islamic_Gunpowder_Empires.jpg>

The Ottoman (Red), Safavid (Lavender), and Mughal (Yellow) Empires, c. 1700

The Safavids' main source of wealth and key export was silk (raw and textiles). Shah Abbas captured Gilan (near the Caspian Sea), the main region of sericulture, and he imposed a monopoly on silk trade and organized the leading Armenian merchants to enforce it.

The Armenian traders dominated land-based trade (to the Levant, Anatolia, and Russia), and Indian merchants handled most maritime trade. The Safavid shahs imposed taxes on trade, agriculture (land, crops, and animals), peasant labor (corvée), and non-Muslims (the *jizya* head tax).

Safavid Empire (1501-1722) – Control and Fall. Political legitimacy for the absolutist Safavid shahs rested on three pillars – military power (Qizilbash warriors and later Caucasian soldiers), Persian bureaucrats, and the Twelver Shi'ite religion. Followers of Shi'ite Islam believe that only descendants of Ali (Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law) could be legitimate caliphs (whereas Sunni Muslims believe that descendants of all original followers of the Prophet could become caliph). Shi'ites annually remember the death of Hussein, Ali's son, in 680 at the Battle of Karbala, when Sunnis slaughtered Shi'ites. The Iranian followers of Twelver Shi'ism believe that beginning with Ali there were twelve imams

between 680 and 874. The twelfth, Muhammad al-Mahdi, is expected to appear in the future to bring justice to the world.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masjed-e_Shah_5.JPG>

Shi'ite Islam in Iran – The Imam Mosque, Isfahan

After the death of Shah Abbas I (1629), most Safavid shahs were weak. Succession crises, royal waste and corruption, and growing support for Shi'a religious endowments created a revenue shortage and a weakened military. In the provinces, this downward cycle led to local revolts, highway robberies, less regional trade, and political fragmentation. The Safavid Empire

thus declined due to gradual internal erosion. In the early 18th century, the Safavids were at peace with their two principal adversaries – the Ottoman Empire and the Uzbeks.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Safavid_persia.png>

The Safavid Persian Empire (1501-1722) – Disputes with Ottomans (Purple) and Uzbeks (Green)

Invasion and downfall, instead, came from within. In 1722, Mahmud, a leader of the Ghilzai Afghans from Kandahar, out-maneuvered and defeated a much larger Safavid army at Gulnabad,

laid siege to Isfahan (the Safavid capital), and six months later gained the crown. Thereafter, the Russians claimed the western Caspian region and the Ottomans took Azerbaijan. The Safavid Empire ingloriously disappeared from history.

Iran under the Qajar and Pahlavi Dynasties (1796-1979)

Qajar Dynasty (1796-1926) – Rise and Wealth. After the Safavid Empire collapsed in 1722, Iran suffered seven decades of civil war, widespread chaos, economic decline, and population loss (from 9 million to 6 million). Nadir Shah (1736-1747), a Turkic, Sunni warrior, briefly reunited the country, but his costly campaigns exhausted Iranian resources. Southern Iran enjoyed stability under Karim Khan Zand (1751-1779), the region's first Iranian leader in a millennium, who re-introduced Shi'ite Islam in his capital at Shiraz.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nader_Shah_Afshar_(cropped).jpg>

Nadir Shah Afshar (ruled 1736-1747) Briefly Reunited Iran – Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Agha Muhammad (1779-1796), a Turkic Qajar, was the founding king of the Qajar Dynasty (1796-1925). He gained the support of Turkic tribes in the north, conquered Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, reunified Iran, and declared himself shah in 1796. The Qajar consolidator was Nasir al-Din (1848-1896), who ruled for half a century but modernized reluctantly and introduced few lasting reforms.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Naser_al-Din_Shah_by_Abul_Hasan_Ghaffari_1854.jpg>

Nasir al-Din Shah (ruled 1848-1896) – Portrait by Abul Hasan Ghaffari, 1854

Qajar political stability and economic progress resulted in a population gain – from 6 million in 1800 to 10 million in 1914. More than half of Iran's people were sharecropping peasants who worked on estates owned by the crown, the aristocracy, or religious foundations. The production of cash crops for export expanded rapidly during the 19th century, making private land ownership

more attractive. The principal exports were silk (exported to Europe), cotton and rice (Russia), opium (China), and carpets (Europe).

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asalem_Khalkhal_road_-_Zalzareh_-_panoramio_(1).jpg>

Asalem Khalkhai Road in Gilan Province, Northern Iran – Silk Production Region Until the Late 19th century

Following the introduction of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and France, machine-made textiles became Iran's leading import. Other key Iranian imports were cereals, sugar, and tea. But Qajar Iran's total trade (exports plus imports) was small – only $93

million in 1913, less than a third of that in Egypt or Turkey. Iran thus entered the 20th century with limited sources of wealth and government revenue.

Qajar Dynasty (1796-1926) – Control and Fall. The Qajar shahs had little political control and directly governed only the area surrounding Tehran, the capital. They were prototypical "Oriental despots," relying on local magnates to rule most of Iran. Their nine nominal ministries had few effective bureaucrats. The Qajar military had only 8,000 regular troops and 200,000 tribal irregulars. At the turn of the 20th century, the government of Iran was bankrupt and depended on loans from Russia.

Fearing a Russian takeover, Iran's upper and middle classes rebelled in 1905. During the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), the shah was forced to create a parliament (Majles), which wrote a constitution and changed Iran into a constitutional monarchy. This important expression of Iranian nationalism was the first effort in the Middle East to create a representative

government. But the new Majles was unable to implement economic reforms, because the central state still had no viable structure.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ahmad_Shahs_Pavilion.jpg>

Tehran Palace of Ahmad Shah – Last Qajar King

Iran's weakness in part resulted from the Great Game, the 19th-century rivalry between Russia and Britain over control of Central Asia. Each power limited the other's activities in Iran, and neither built needed railroads. Russia expanded southward at Iran's expense, conquering Azerbaijan and Georgia in 1813 and Armenia in 1828. To protect British India's frontiers, Britain

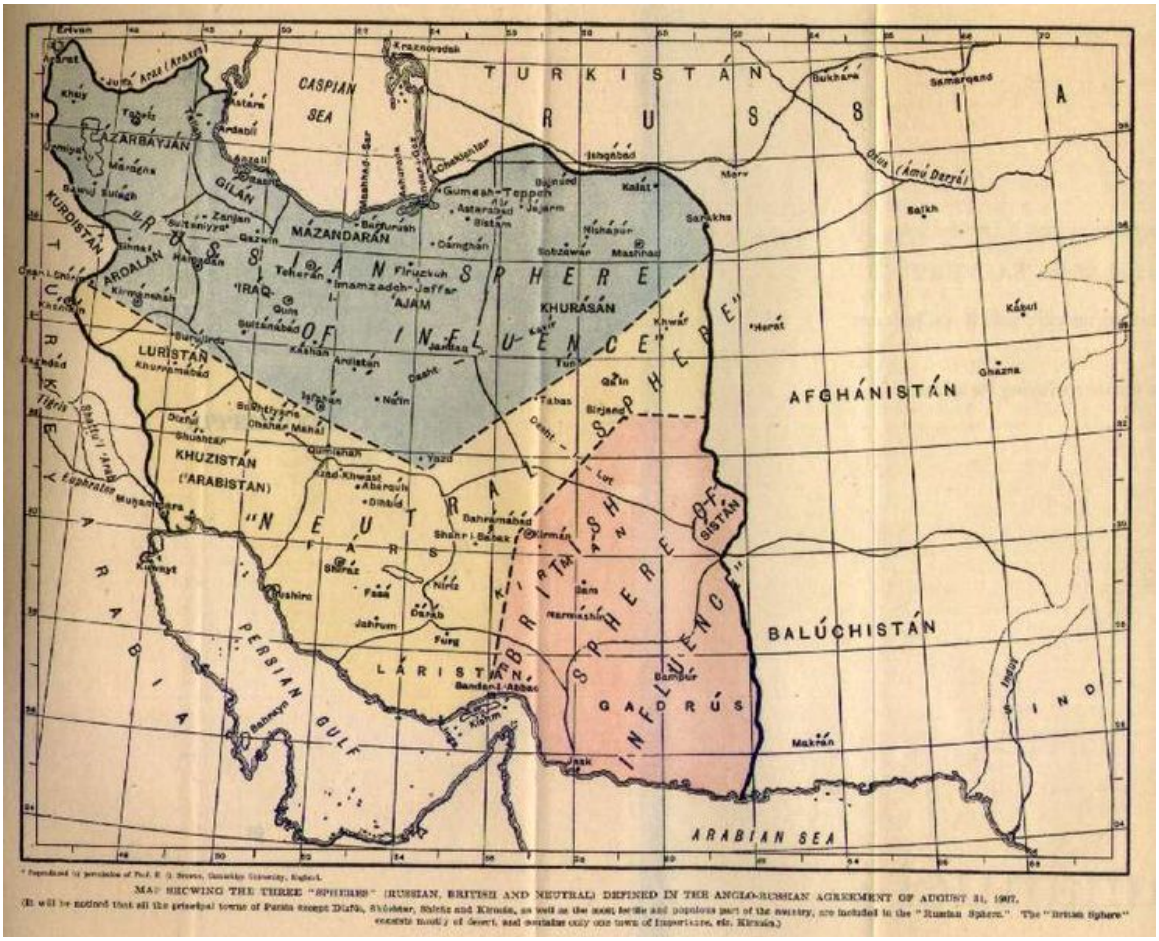
resisted Russian expansion, created an independent Afghanistan in 1857, and claimed Baluchistan from Iran in 1872.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Iran_1900-en.png>

Qajar Iran in 1907, After Territorial Losses to Russia and Britain

As part of the creation of the Triple Entente against Germany, Britain and Russia signed the Anglo-Russian

Convention (1907) in which they partitioned Iran into Russian, British, and "neutral" spheres of interest. British drillers discovered oil in Khuzestan (southwestern Iran) in 1908, and for the next half-century Iran – and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later British Petroleum) – led the Middle East in oil production.



MAP SHOWING THE THREE "SPHERES" (RUSSIAN, BRITISH AND NEUTRAL) DEFINED IN THE ANGLO-RUSSIAN AGREEMENT OF AUGUST 31, 1907.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
< https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Russo-British_Pact_in_1907.jpg>

Russian (Blue) and British (Red) Spheres in Iran, 1907-1919

Pahlavi Dynasty – Reza Shah (1921-1941). Between 1917 and 1921, two million Iranians died from war, disease (cholera, typhus, and influenza), and starvation. Iran was a failed state, threatened by British and Soviet plans for imperial control. In 1920, Lord Curzon, the foreign minister of Great Britain, tried to make Iran a British protectorate, but the Majles rejected the Anglo-Persian Agreement. Reza Khan, an officer in the elite Persian Cossack Brigade from a family of obscure origins, gradually took control in a series of three well-planned coups d'état with British concurrence.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7_%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86_%D9%88_%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4.jpg>

Reza Khan, 1924 – with His Twins, Muhammad Reza (1919-1980) and Ashraf (1919-2016)

In 1921, Reza Khan installed a new premier, became minister of war, and successfully suppressed three regional rebellions. Then in 1923, he took over as premier and signed the Soviet-Iranian Agreement, through which the Soviet Union withdrew from

Iranian territory and cancelled all Tsarist loan obligations. Two years later, Reza Khan deposed Ahmad Shah, and he was crowned Reza Shah in early 1926.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reza_shah_uniform.jpg>

Reza Shah Pahlavi, Shah of Iran (1925-1941) – Depicted in Full Military Uniform, c. 1931

Reza Shah adopted the dynastic name, Pahlavi (the language of pre-Islamic Iran), and ruled absolutely for 16 years. His system of political control had two pillars – the military and the bureaucracy. Reza Shah established a large permanent army to

defend Iran and back up his police state, and military spending expanded ten-fold. He created an effective bureaucracy with both central and regional authority and increased its budget by 17 times. To underpin his expanded state structure, Reza Shah introduced several new sources of government revenue – oil royalties, higher tariffs, taxes on consumer goods, income taxes, and state monopolies.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rafabadan.jpg>

Abadan Refinery – British-Owned Anglo-Persian Oil Company Became Anglo-Iran Oil Company in 1935

Reza Shah left a controversial legacy. He created an effective centralized government, imposed law and order, introduced modernization, built railroads and roads, established new industries, and expanded agricultural output. His secularizing reforms were modeled after those carried out by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey. But Reza Shah ruled oppressively and brutally, especially in suppressing Iran's tribes, permitted widespread corruption, and accumulated a vast personal fortune (including a bank account of L3 million and estates of 3 million acres). Most Iranians were happy to see him forced out of power and exiled in 1941.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RezaShahBozorg1.jpg>

Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878-1944) –
Saadabad Palace, Tehran, Iran, 1941

Pahlavi Dynasty – Nationalist Interregnum (1941-1953).

The British and Soviets jointly invaded Iran in August 1941. The Allies wanted to establish a land corridor from the Indian Ocean to the Soviet Union and to control Iran's oil. Iran then was the world's second leading exporter of petroleum and had the third largest reserves of oil and gas, and the British navy obtained 85 percent of its fuel from Iranian oil. Reza Shah was forced to

abdicate in favor of his son, Muhammad Reza Shah, and went into exile in South Africa (where he died in 1944). The new shah supported the Allies, because they gave him control over an 80,000-man army and guaranteed Iran's territorial integrity.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CrownPrinceMohammadRezaPahlavi1.jpg>

Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, Crown Prince – 1939, Age 20

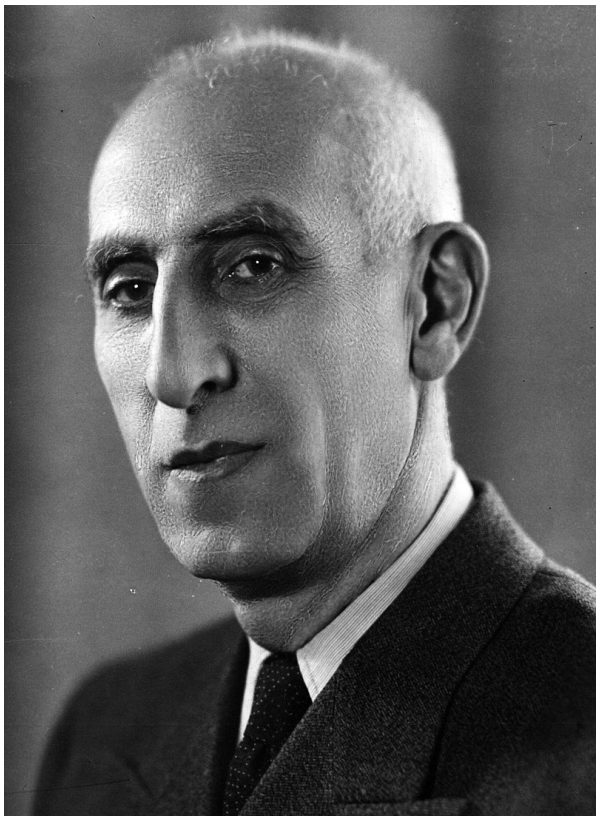
Between 1941 and 1953, the landed elite wielded political power by controlling the parliament (Majles). But the elite were forced to share power with the urban masses. In the 1940s, the

Tudeh (Masses) Party, a socialist party supported by the urban middle class, gained an increased following.

In the early 1950s, Muhammad Mossadeq, a charismatic politician, created the National Front, a coalition of nationalist parties, gained control of the Majles, and nationalized oil in 1951. Mossadeq had argued that Iran should receive a higher return from its oil production, since a 50/50 division of profits was becoming the standard in other oil-producing countries. But the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, supported strongly by the British government, refused to renegotiate and precipitated a crisis. Mossadeq took over the oil-production areas in Khuzestan, and the British navy blockaded Iranian ports to prevent oil exports. The Truman administration in the United States initially blocked British plans to invade and take over the Iranian oil fields, but then switched positions.

In 1953, the American CIA and the British MI6 organized a military coup in which about 300 Iranians were killed. Mossadeq

was placed under house arrest (he died in 1967), General Fazlullah Zahedi became the head of government, and the Shah returned to Iran. The legacy of the coup was manifold – the Shah re-introduced autocracy, the democratic nationalists were destroyed, the Americans and British were stained with oil-based imperialism, and the way was paved to Islamic Fundamentalism.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mohammed_Mossadegh_in_middle_age.jpg>

Muhammad Mossadeq, Prime Minister of Iran, 1952-1953 – Overthrown in Coup in 1953, Died Under House Arrest in 1967

Pahlavi Dynasty – Muhammad Reza Shah (1953-1979).

Muhammad Reza Shah quickly established autocratic control. He blew through $55 billion of oil revenues to establish a control system similar to that used by his father. The Shah built the world's fifth largest army by spending 35 percent of Iran's budget on the military ($7 billion in 1977). The core of the Shah's government bureaucracy was SAVAK, the intelligence service, whose 60,000 agents terrorized the Iranian people with censorship, torture, and executions. The Pahlavi Foundation used its $3 billion of assets to distribute court patronage – although its wealth paled in comparison to the Shah's personal portfolio of $20 billion.

In 1963, the Shah instituted the White Revolution – land reform, women's suffrage, improved literacy, and privatization of state firms. But results fell far short of expectations. Land reform alienated the landed elite (the main supporters of the crown). Meanwhile, those gaining land, his potential new supporters, were frustrated by the Shah's policy of enforced low food prices to gain

favor in urban areas. Based largely on burgeoning oil revenues, annual rates of economic growth averaged about 8 percent between 1963 and 1975.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Azadi_Tower_(29358497718).jpg>

Azadi (Freedom) Tower, Tehran – Built in 1971 by the Shah to Celebrate 2500 Years of Monarchy

The Shah created the Resurgence Party in 1975 to widen state control, and the government began to hassle the bazaaris (shopkeepers and small businessmen) and the clerical establishment. By then, the Shah's attempt to assert control had alienated most of Iran's people. They were fed up with governmental corruption, SAVAK oppression, maldistribution of

oil wealth, and the perceived uneven relationship with the United States.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jimmy_Carter_meets_Mohammad_Reza_Pahlavi_for_dinner_in_1978.jpg>

The Shah Had a Special Relationship with the United States – With President Jimmy Carter (Left), Washington, 1978

A marked demonstration of the Shah's profligacy was his gala two-day celebration in October 1971 of 2500 years of Iranian greatness, which was catered by Maxim's of Paris, consumed 25,000 bottles of imported wine, and cost $100-300 million.

A combination of populism, nationalism, and religious radicalism led to the collapse of the Pahlavi Dynasty. In January

1978, an offensive article in *Ettela'at*, a government newspaper, triggered a series of demonstrations, riots, mass strikes, and revolution. The Shah and SAVAK appeared puzzled by the outbreaks, because they had expected that leaders on the far left would lead the opposition. Demonstrations in December attracted at least a million participants daily in Tehran and more than 6 million throughout the country.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Statue_of_Shah_Revolution.jpg>

Revolution of 1978 –
Removal of A Statue of the Shah in Tehran University

The Pahlavis had built their dynasty around the military, the bureaucracy, and court patronage. But the military was immobilized, the bureaucracy joined the revolution, and court patronage became a political embarrassment. On January 16, 1979, the Shah went into exile. He was suffering from cancer and undergoing chemotherapy, but his illness remained unknown to the Iranian public. The Shah died from cancer in Egypt in July 1980.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coronation39b.jpg>

Muhammad Reza Shah –
Wearing the Pahlavi Crown At His Coronation, 1967

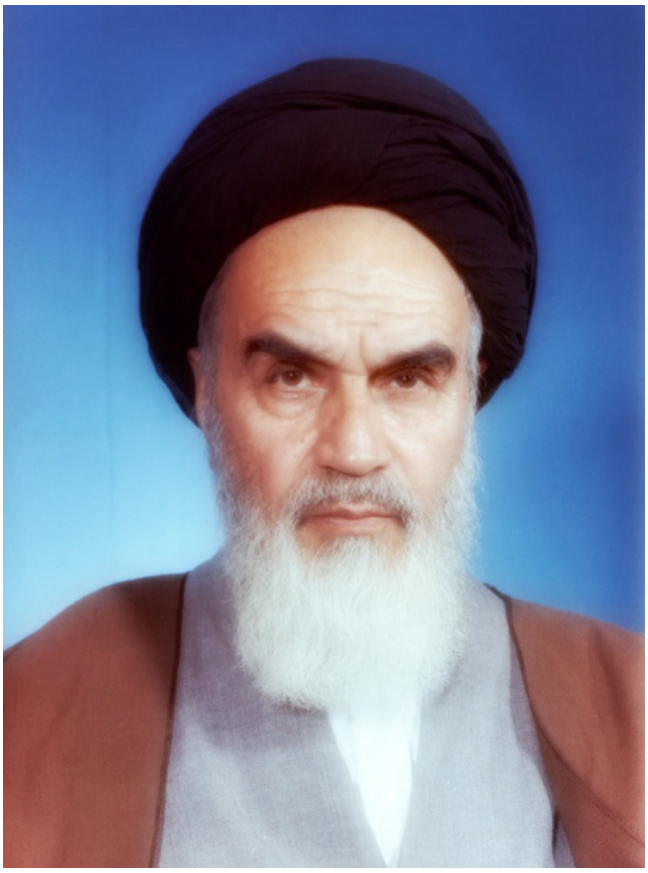
The Islamic Republic (1979-present)

The Islamic Revolution. How did the Shi'ite clerics in Iran hijack the 1979 revolution? For centuries, while awaiting the appearance of the Twelfth Imam, Shi'ite *mojtaheds* (clerical scholars) had formed a hierarchy in his absence to interpret *sharia* (Islamic law). Ali Shariati, a French- educated, Iranian social scientist argued in the 1960s and 1970s that Shi'ites were obligated to revolt against oppression and seek martyrdom – revolution would lead to salvation. Shariati died in England in 1977.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dr_Ali_Shariati.jpg>

Dr. Ali Shariati – Social Scientist and Creator of Doctrines Underlying Political Islam

Concurrently, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) introduced clerical populism. Khomeini argued that since only *mojtaheds* could interpret *sharia*, the clerical hierarchy had the right and obligation to oppose monarchy and to rule.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Ruhollah_Khomeini.jpg>

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-1989), Depicted in 1981

The 80,000 clerics, however, were only one segment of a diverse coalition of interest groups that had come together in 1978

to overthrow the Shah. That coalition included radicals – university students, communists, ethnic minorities, and some clerics – as well as conservatives – other clerics, bazaaris, businessmen, and nationalists. The initial post-revolution government was made up of experienced technocrats, led by Mehdi Bazargan as prime minister.

During the first half of 1979, the clerics astutely hijacked the revolution. In January, the Shah departed and the army and police drifted without clear leadership. Khomeini, who since 1963 had been in exile in Turkey, Iraq, and France, returned to Iran in February and set up residence in Qom, the Shiite religious headquarters south of Tehran. Publicly, he claimed, astutely and hypocritically, that the new government of Iran should be democratic and that the clergy should have no role in it. In March, a referendum to establish an Islamic Republic passed with a 97 percent affirmation, but it was unclear what that entailed.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mass_demonstration_in_Iran,_date_unknown.jpg>

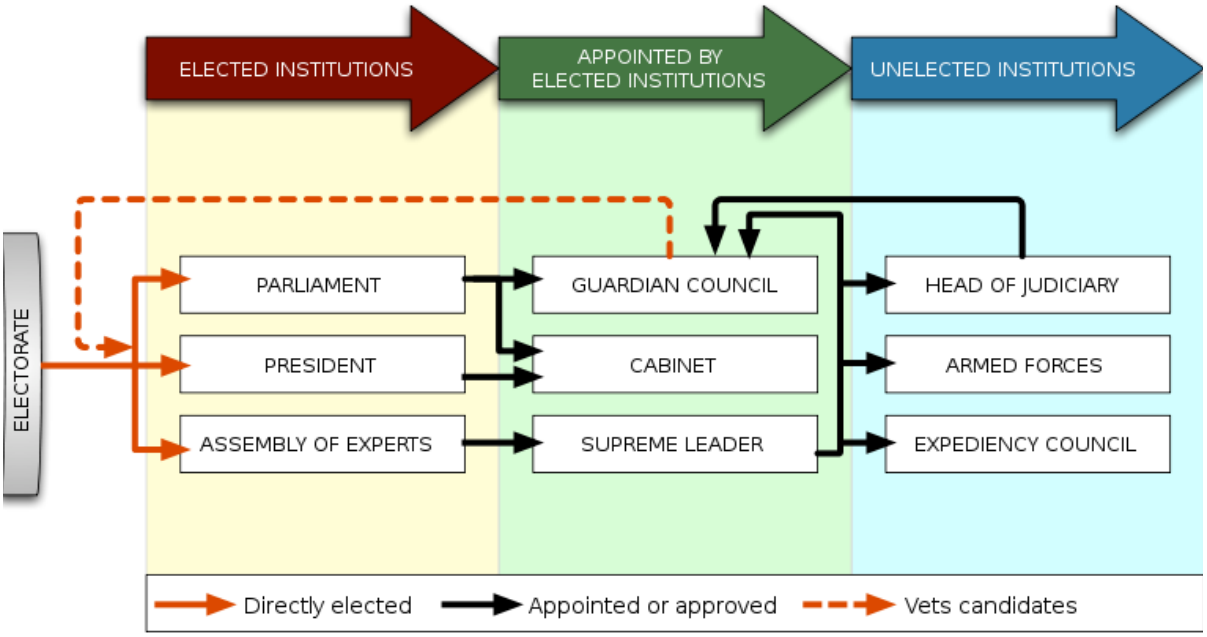
Referendum to Establish an Islamic Republic, March 1979, Followed Earlier Mass Protests – 97% in Favor

The clerics set up the *Pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) in May to provide protection against a possible military coup by the regular armed forces. The clerics sealed their takeover of power in July, when they won two-thirds of the seats in the election for the Assembly of Experts, which would draft the new constitution. Ironically, the moderates very likely would have secured a freer constitution if they had not insisted on having it

debated by an elected constituent assembly. In the event, the moderates lost out, and the hope for free institutions disappeared.

Parallel Governance. The constitution of 1979 established a theocracy in the Islamic Republic of Iran by creating a system of parallel institutions through which the clerics wield ultimate power. A president, limited to two terms, is elected every four years to run the government. But a supreme leader sets the domestic and foreign policy agendas, has full veto power, and makes decisions that are not subject to appeal. A unicameral parliament of 290 members is elected every four years to legislate. But a 12- member Council of Guardians vets parliamentary candidates and can reject legislation deemed to be contrary to Islamic principles. A civil judiciary is run by secular judges with legal training who rule publicly. But a parallel system of Islamic courts enforces *sharia* law with cleric judges operating in secret. The conventional military of 400,000 troops has less power than the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of 125,000 troops

supplemented by the paramilitary Basij. In all instances, the appointed clerical institution has greater power than the counterpart elected branch of government.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iran_gov_power_structure.svg>

Parallel Governance in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Islamic Republic inherited a bureaucracy of 300,000 civil servants in 1979. By 2017, the bloated civil service employed 3.7 million people, 17 percent of the labor force. The new Ministry of Intelligence and Security, which replaced the despised SAVAK, is even more invasive than its predecessor was. The

Republic has created numerous *bonyads* (religious foundations), which provide power bases for many of the 600,000 clerics. Those tax-free, business conglomerates use political connections to obtain licenses, contracts, and subsidized credit, and they operate firms that constitute 20 percent of Iran's economy. The largest, the Mostazafen (Oppressed) Foundation with $20 billion of assets, took over the holdings of the former Shah's Pahlavi Foundation.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Azadi_Cinema_Complex_1655.jpg>

Azadi Cinema, Tehran – Ceded to the Mostazafen Foundation (1979), Iran's Largest Conglomerate

Political Leadership. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini served as Supreme Leader until his death in 1989. Khomeini was an all-powerful leader who brutally suppressed his enemies to consolidate the revolution. He arranged for a protégé, Ali Khamenei, to become his successor and be appointed for life.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Ali_Khamenei,_October_2016.jpg>

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – Supreme Leader (1989-present)

Khamenei, who had served as president between 1981 and 1989, was never considered a distinguished religious scholar. But he has

been an unyielding defender of the theocracy during his more than three decades as Supreme Leader.

The next three presidents also served two terms each. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) was a centrist cleric, an entrepreneur, and a king-maker who facilitated Khamenei's ascendancy.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Akbar_Hashemi_Rafsanjani_Portrait_(5).jpg>

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, President (1989-1997) – Wily Politician and Skilled Entrepreneur

Muhammad Khatami (1997-2005) was a distinguished clerical scholar, a charismatic reformer, and a weak politician. Mahmud

Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) was a populist engineer, a former appointed mayor of Tehran, and a hardline conservative. The current president, Hassan Rouhani, elected in 2013 by a majority of 51 percent, is a moderate centrist, former nuclear negotiator, experienced insider, and avowed economic reformer. Rohani was re-elected in 2017, winning 57 percent of the votes, and is barred from running for a third term in 2021.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hassan_Rouani_2017_portrait.jpg>

Hassan Rouhani, President (2013-present) – Insider, Negotiator, and Reformer

The popularity of reformism – the desire to open Iran to wider debate and invigorate the economy – has ebbed and flowed in Iran. Reformism reached a peak in the late 1990s. Khatami won the presidency in 1997 (taking 70 percent of the vote) and was re-elected in 2001, reformists won the majority of the 200,000 positions in municipal elections in 1999, and they took 195 of the 290 seats in the 2000 parliamentary election.

Thereafter, the hardline conservatives struck back. The Guardian Council vetoed reform bills passed by the parliament and then barred more than 2000 candidates, including 87 sitting parliamentarians, from running for parliament in 2004. The Islamic courts closed reformist newspapers. Frustration caused supporters of reform to boycott the parliamentary election in 2004 and the presidential election of 2005. In June 2009, after Ahmadinejad was declared re-elected in a disputed election (ostensibly with 63 percent of the votes cast), riots and a

clampdown ensued. The future of reform in Iran remains in doubt.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iran_election_(1).jpg>

Millions Demonstrated in Tehran, June 2009

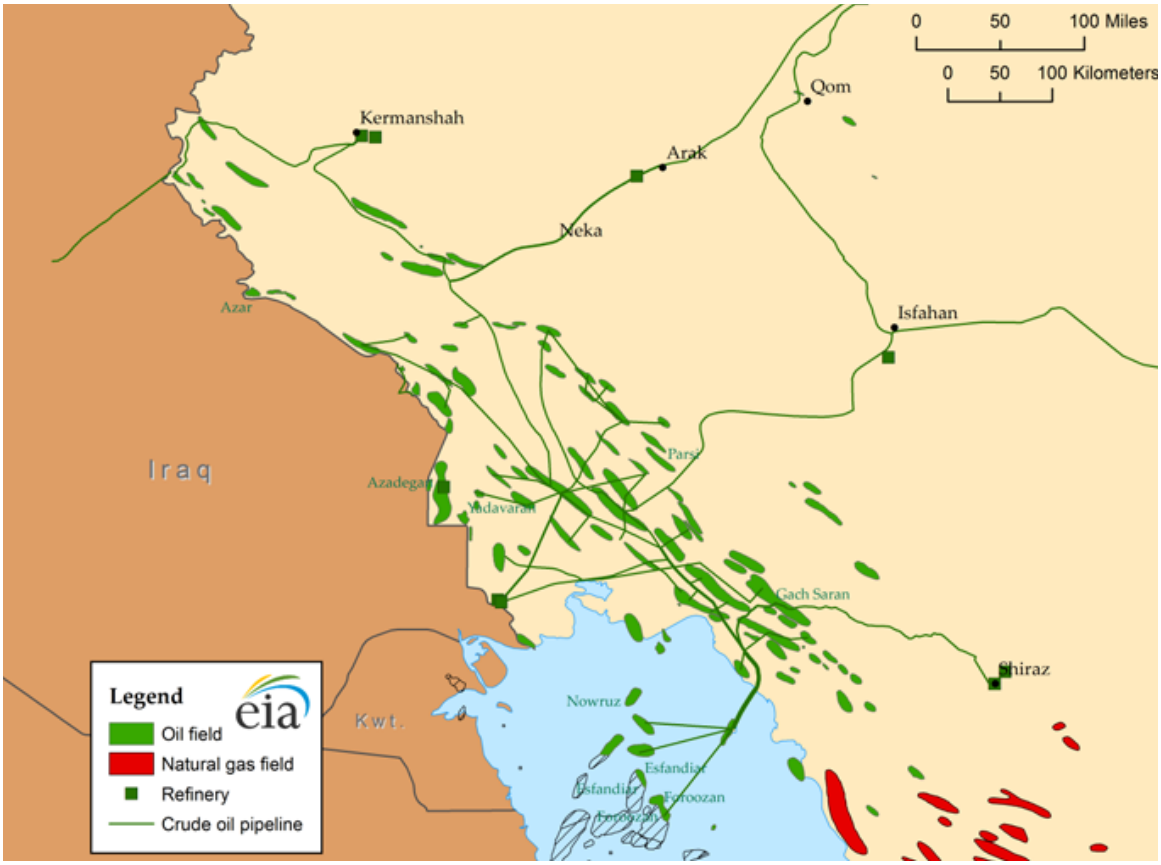
The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Economic progress was stifled in the 1980s because of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Saddam Hussein of Iraq initiated the war in hopes of capturing Khuzestan, the Arab-speaking province that produces most of Iran's oil. But he was forced to withdraw and seek peace in 1982. Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam's rival for regional supremacy, continued the war for six more years, hoping to capture the Shiite region, shrines, and oil of southern Iraq. The terrible, drawn-out

war ended in a stalemate of human tragedy with no border changes. Each side suffered about 400,000 dead, 700,000 wounded, and costly devastation. The timing of the war conferred political advantages on the clerics, because it permitted them more easily to overcome political opposition and to consolidate revolutionary institutions. Iran eventually recovered, although the war with Iraq cost Iran an estimated $200 billion.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iran-Iraq_war-gallery.png>

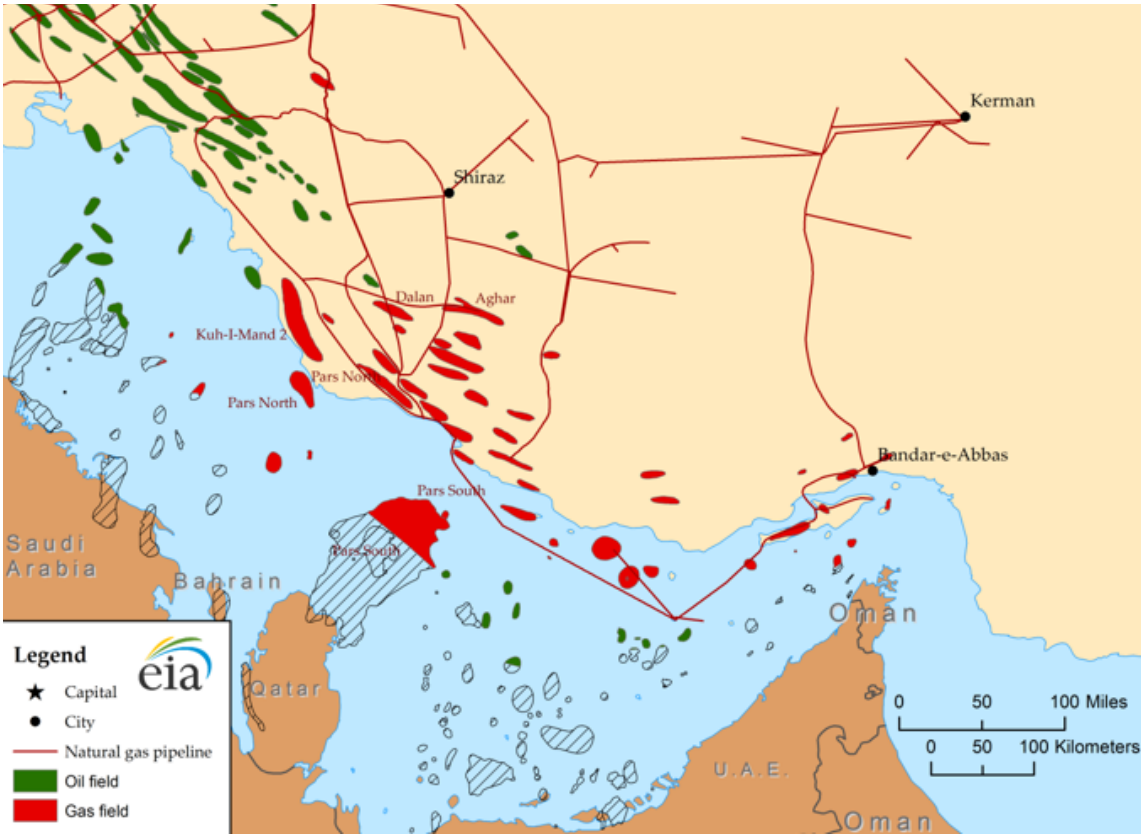
Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) –
800,000 Dead, 700,000 Wounded, and Costly Devastation

Economic and Quality-of-Life Indicators in 2019. Iran's land area, 636,368 square miles, is 8 percent larger than that of Alaska. The Iranian population of 82.9 million is ethnically Persian (53 percent), Azeri (16 percent), or Kurdish (10 percent). Eighty-nine percent of Iranians practice Shi'ite Islam, and 9 percent (mostly Kurds) practice Sunni Islam. Iran has a petroleum economy, benefitting from high oil income but dependent on fluctuating world-oil prices. Oil export earnings peaked in 2007 at $80 billion, oil provides 60 percent of government revenues, and high oil prices have allowed Iran to build up $86 billion of foreign exchange reserves. In 2019, Iran was the world's ninth largest producer of petroleum and had the fourth highest global oil reserves and the second largest global deposits of natural gas.



Source: U.S, Energy Information Administration available at <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/IRN/background>

Major Oil Fields and Crude Oil Pipelines in Iran



Source: U.S, Energy Information Administration available at <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/IRN/background>

Major Natural Gas Fields and Gas Pipelines in Iran

Aided by high petroleum prices, between 1990 and 2011 Iran's GDP per capita (adjusted for purchasing power and measured in constant prices) grew at an annual rate of 2.3 percent and reached $18,009 in 2011 (about the same as the level in 1978, measured in constant prices). But growth turned negative after the imposition of UN economic sanctions in 2012, and the Iranian economy declined at an annual rate of 3.4 percent between 2012

and 2017 (the last year of available data). In 2017, Iran had a price-adjusted income level of $14,536 (82 percent of the world average).

Following significant investments in public health and education, Iran's life expectancy improved from 56 years (1979) to 76 years (2018) and the adult literacy rate rose from 58 percent (1979) to 86 percent (2016). This strong performance in health and education raised Iran's ranking in the UNDP's Human Development Index (65th of 189 countries) relative to that in the World Bank's listing of per capita incomes (90th of 187 countries). Seventy percent of Iranians use the Internet. But Iran ranked a woeful 127th of 190 countries in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business index and just 146th of 198 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index compiled by Transparency International. Iran thus is a challenging venue for private domestic and foreign investors.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pmiokl.jpg>

More Women than Men Attend Iranian Universities

The Iranian economy depends on petroleum exports ($66.7 billion), exports of petrochemicals, fruits and nuts, and other items ($44.4 billion), and international tourism ($4.6 billion from 7.3 million international-tourist arrivals). Iran in 2019 received relatively limited amounts of foreign direct investment ($3.5 billion), foreign assistance (0.2 billion), and personal remittances ($1.3 billion). The World Bank estimates that the poverty level in Iran, measured at the upper middle-income threshold of $5.5 per

day, fell to a low of 8 percent in 2013 but has increased moderately since then. Given the oil largesse, many Iranians are disappointed that economic progress has not been faster and shared more evenly.

Iran's oil-based economy faces difficult challenges. Unemployment is high (11.2 percent officially in 2019), inflation is regularly in double digits and shot up to average 40 percent in 2019, inefficient state-owned enterprises, controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, are impeding growth (10 percent of GDP), and direct cash transfers plus fuel subsidies are costly (20 percent of revenues). Economic sanctions, which limit oil and gas development and exports and impact Iran's access to the international banking network, continue to create enormous difficulties for the Iranian economy.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Iran_with_province_names_and_neighboring_land.svg>

Provinces of Contemporary Iran

Iran-US Rivalry. Iran and the United States have been at loggerheads since the Islamic Republic was established. In November 1979, Iranian students occupied the American Embassy in Tehran and took 52 diplomats as hostages. Calculating that anti-Americanism would help consolidate the revolution, Ayatollah

Khomeini supported the takeover for 444 days. On his list of American "crimes" against Iran were CIA planning of the 1953 coup, military aid to the Shah, and support for Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iran_hostage_crisis_-_Iraninan_students_comes_up_U.S._embassy_in_Tehran.jpg>

Iran Hostage Crisis (1979-1981) – Iranian Students Occupied the American Embassy in Tehran for 444 Days, Holding 52 Hostages

The US State Department cites two principal areas in which progress needs to occur before the US would resume normal relations with Iran. One is for Iran to cease subverting the Arab-

Israeli peace process. Iran has supported Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Palestinian territories, and Bashar al-Asad, the President of Syria. In addition, the Iranian Quds Force has supplied assistance to Shi'ite militias, Kurdish dissidents, and Sunni insurgents in Iraq. Iran, meanwhile, feels surrounded by American and Allied invasion forces in Afghanistan (since 2001) and Iraq (since 2003).

The other area is for Iran to suspend its enrichment of uranium and develop its nuclear energy program under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran claims that it is developing nuclear energy with Russian advisors and technology to conserve its oil resources for export (nearly half of Iranian oil produced in 2017 was consumed domestically). In 2002, IAEA inspectors found two undeclared nuclear sites in Iran, and in 2006, Iran began enriching uranium.

Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iran_nuclear_program_map-en.png>

Reported Sites of the Nuclear Program in Iran, As of 2012

The US and five allies then offered Iran economic aid if it would allow Russia to control enrichment. Iran rejected the offer, and the UN Security Council introduced sanctions. By 2012, the US and the European Union had declared additional restrictions that limit Iran's ability to export petroleum and natural gas, obtain Western technology to produce oil and gas, and make international transfers of funds through the SWIFT network. The sanctions also

froze Iran's access to more than $100 billion of Iranian assets held in Western banks. Iran's oil-dependent economy then contracted in 2012 and 2013.

In November 2013, Iran announced an agreement with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the US) plus Germany. Complicated negotiations were completed in July 2015. In return for the UN agreeing to lift the sanctions in 2016, Iran offered to extend its "break-out capability" to produce nuclear weapons to one year and to restrict its nuclear activity for at least a decade. Specifically, Iran agreed to put two-thirds of its 19,500 centrifuges in storage, reduce its stockpile of enriched uranium from 9000 kg to 300 kg, cap its enriched uranium 235 at 3.67 percent (90 percent is required for weapons), close its plutonium facility at Arak and cease work on heavy-water reactors for 15 years, convert its Fordow nuclear facility to a physics research site, and permit UN (IAEA) inspectors to have access to all Iranian nuclear facilities,

including military ones, in perpetuity. If Iran did not comply with the provisions of this agreement, the UN countries could re-impose sanctions (the "snap-back" provision).

Source: U.S, Energy Information Administration available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arak_Heavy_Water4.JPG>

Heavy-water Reactor under Construction in Arak, Iran, Depicted in 2012 – To Be Postponed for 15 Years

This break-through agreement (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA) then was ratified by all seven governments that negotiated it. In 2016, the UN certified that Iran was in compliance with all provisions of the JCPOA and, as promised in the agreement, lifted the international economic sanctions that had

been placed on Iran. However, in May 2018, US President Donald Trump announced that the US was withdrawing from the JCPOA and imposing bilateral economic sanctions on Iran. As a result, in 2019 Iran's GDP contracted (by nearly 8 percent), inflation soared to a level of 40 percent, and widespread demonstrations followed a decision to reduce subsidies on fuel. The Guardian Council then disqualified nearly 7,000 candidates, including 90 sitting members of the Majles, to ensure hardliner success in the February 2020 parliamentary election.

World Petroleum (1859-present)

American Dominance (1859-1945). Petroleum production began in 1859, after Edwin Drake successfully drilled for oil in northwestern Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's Oil Region was the dominant American supplier during the rest of the 19th century. Kerosene for lighting ("rock oil") was the principal product from petroleum. The refining of oil and marketing of kerosene (including exports to Europe) were increasingly controlled by John

D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, which obtained a near monopoly position by the mid-1880s.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jdr-king.JPG>

John D. Rockefeller, Founder of Standard Oil – Satirized in Puck Magazine, 1901

Russia (producing oil near Baku) was the main foreign competitor in the 1880s and 1890s. In Baku, Robert and Ludvig Nobel built the world's first oil pipeline and oil tanker, and the

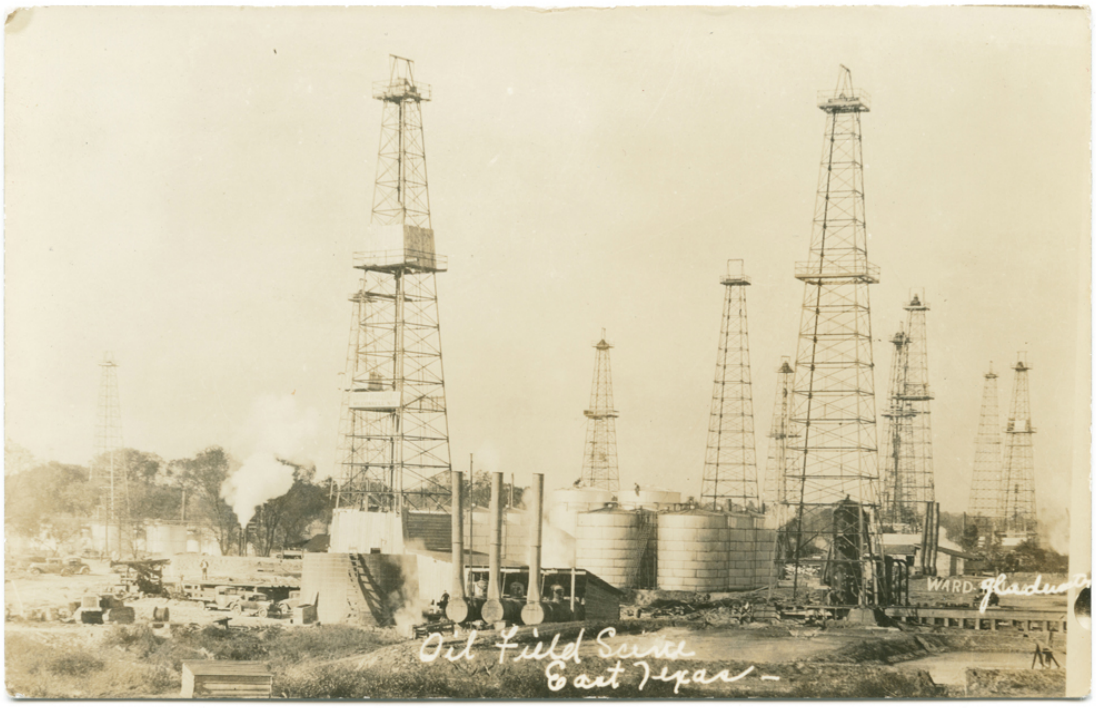
Rothschilds constructed a railroad to export kerosene via the Black Sea port of Batum. By 1900, Baku produced half of the world's petroleum, and kerosene was Russia's leading export. After 1905, gasoline (for automobiles) and fuel oil (for ships) became the principal petroleum products.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oldbaku2.jpg>

First Petroleum Fields in Bibiheybet, Near Baku, Azerbaijan – Late 19th century

Oil was discovered in Iran in 1908. Britain converted its navy from coal to fuel oil in 1914 and bought 51 percent of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), the concessionaire in Iran. American oil production shifted from Pennsylvania – to California

(1910s), Oklahoma (1920s), and Texas (1930s). The Black Giant field in East Texas (1930) was the largest discovery in North America.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oil_Field_Scene,_East_Texas_(7590755468).jpg>

Oil Field, Gladewater, East Texas, 1930 – Southern Methodist University Libraries

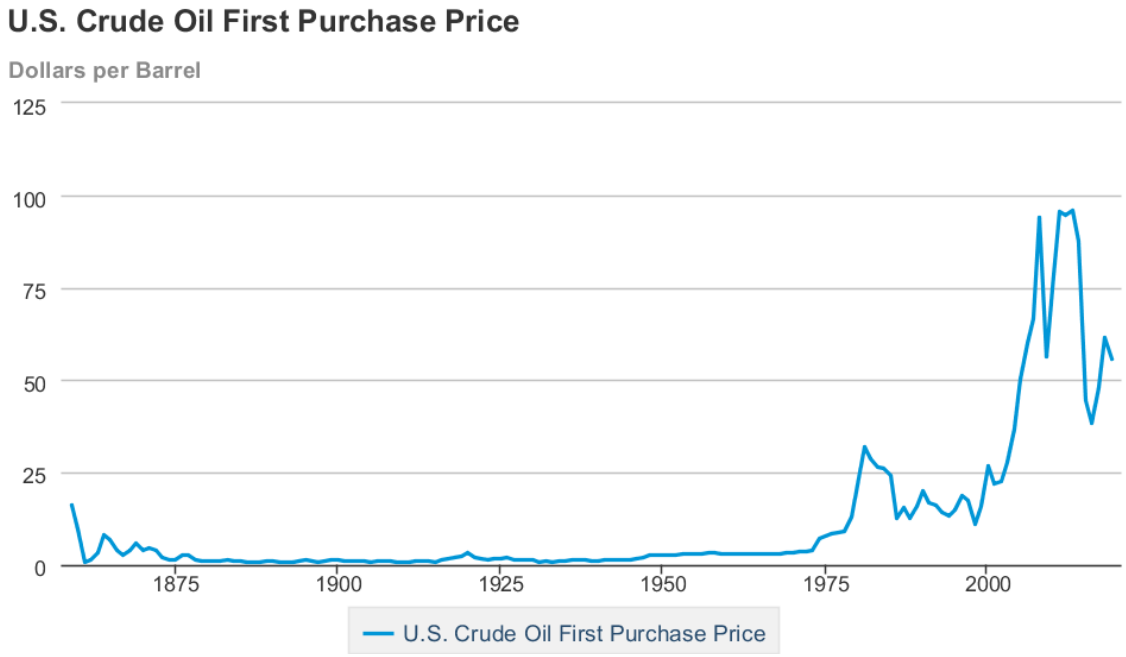
Following the break-up of Standard Oil in 1911, refining and marketing were dominated by multinational firms, led by Standard Oil of New Jersey (later Exxon), Royal Dutch/Shell, and Anglo-Persian (later British Petroleum). In the 1920s, first Mexico and

then Venezuela became the world's second leading oil producer. But the United States dominated and continued to produce two-thirds of world oil through 1945.

Multinational Majors (1945-1970). The world oil industry expanded rapidly between 1945 and 1970, under the direction largely of eight major petroleum companies. Five of the majors – Chevron, Exxon, Gulf, Mobil, and Texaco – were American, British Petroleum was British, Shell was British and Dutch, and the Compagnie Francaise de Petroles (CFP) was French. Crude oil production exploded six-fold to 40 million barrels per day (mbd), and proven reserves rose nine times to over 500 mbd. The geographic focus shifted to the Middle East, which in 1972 accounted for nearly half of the output (18 mbd) and 70 percent of the reserves (367 billion barrels).

Between 1948 and 1972, American oil production increased from 5.5 mbd to 9.5 mbd and U.S. proven oil reserves rose from 21 billion barrels to 38 billion barrels. Nevertheless, the American

global shares fell to only 22 percent of production and 7 percent of reserves. Although market prices (adjusted for inflation) steadily declined, they remained well above marginal costs and thus generated very high profits. The companies and exporting countries negotiated "fifty/fifty agreements" that were intended to divide the profits equally.



Source: US Energy Information Administration available at <https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=PET&s=F000000__3&f=A>

US Crude Oil Prices, 1861-2019 (Dollars Per Barrel, Prices Not Adjusted for Inflation)

In 1960, the five largest oil exporting countries (which together accounted for 80 percent of exports) – Iran, Iraq, Kuwait,

Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela – formed the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). During the 1960s, OPEC succeeded in defending the posted price (the reference price for calculating the revenues for exporting countries) and in forcing the companies to consult on pricing decisions. After 1960, country revenues came from excise taxes, which effectively set a floor under oil prices. By 1970, the oil-producing countries' share of oil profits had risen to about 80 percent.

Iran had the world's third highest levels of oil production and proven oil reserves in 1970. The 1953 coup, organized by the United States and Britain to restore Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to power, was motivated by a desire to protect those oil resources. Thereafter, British Petroleum and the other majors formed a new Iran Consortium through which British Petroleum retained only 40 percent of production rights in Iran and assigned the remainder to other multinational oil majors. The Shah used much of the rising

oil revenue to purchase military equipment and amass a $20 billion personal portfolio.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Reza_Pahlavi>

Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, The Shah of Iran – Visiting the Kharg Petrochemical Complex, 1970

First Price Shock (1970-1981). Between 1970 and 1981, world oil prices spiked twice as OPEC learned to take advantage of war and revolution. The process began in 1971-1972 when OPEC raised excise taxes in concert, set the world oil price at $2.18 per barrel, and negotiated with the oil companies to increase their

shares of oil profits to 55 percent. The October 1973 (Arab-Israeli) War interrupted oil supplies. Consumers panicked, hoarded oil inventories, speculated on price rises, and drove the oil price up. OPEC then unilaterally raised excise taxes to set the price at $5.12 per barrel. In 1974, despite falling demand and excess capacity, Saudi Arabia cut output and OPEC raised excise taxes to underpin a world price of $11.65 per barrel.

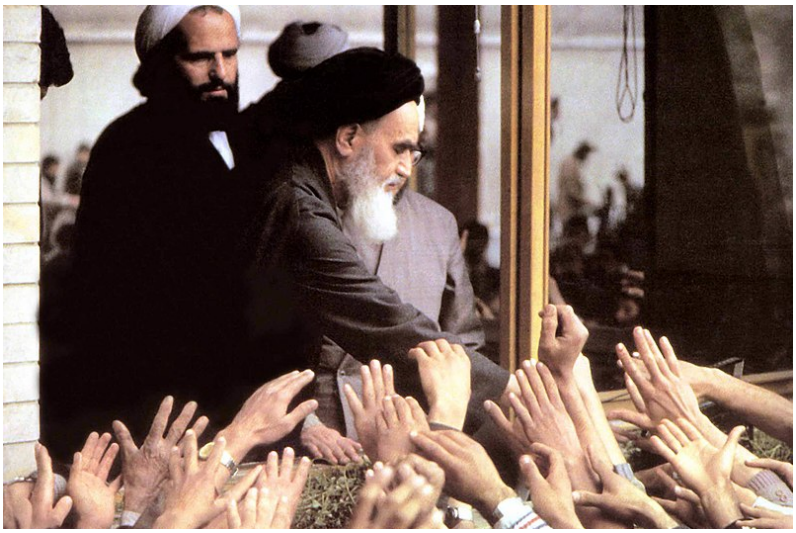
Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Nixon_shaking_hands_with_King_Faisal_of_Saudi_Arabia_following_talks_at_Riasa_Palace,_07-15-1974.gif>

Saudi Arabia Cut Output to Defend Prices, Despite Its "Special" Relationship with the US – President Nixon and King Faisal, 1974

Between 1974 and 1978, OPEC managed the world market successfully and raised the oil price to $12.70 per barrel. The petroleum earnings of the OPEC countries rose six times to $140 billion in 1977.

Worker strikes in Iran in late 1978 resulted in a net loss of 2 million barrels per day (mbd), 4 percent of free-world consumption. Consumers and oil companies again panicked, hoarded, and speculated as market prices briefly reached $42 per barrel. Companies, utilities, and motorists built massive oil inventories, totaling 3 mbd above normal demand. OPEC took advantage of the market disarray, raised excise taxes, and set the official oil price at $34 per barrel. Saudi Arabia once more cut output to underpin the new price structure. During Iran's Islamic Revolution (1978-1979), Iranian oil exports declined from 4.5 mbd to 1 mbd before recovering by mid-1979. Iran's oil industry incurred severe damage when Iraq invaded oil-rich Khuzestan in 1980. But in the 1970s, OPEC retained its dominance of the world

oil market. OPEC member countries supplied nearly two-thirds of world totals throughout that turbulent decade.



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Ayatollah Khomeini Meeting the Iranian People – Iranian Oil Production Declined after the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War

Price Decline (1981-2000). OPEC had miscalculated. The oil market adjusted quickly. Between 1979 and 1983, the demand for oil fell 6 mbd due to conservation and fuel switching (to coal, nuclear energy, and natural gas), non-OPEC oil supplies increased by 4 mbd (from the North Sea, Alaska, Mexico, and Egypt), and oil companies and consumers dumped their 3 mbd of expensive

inventories. OPEC exports thus fell precipitously – from 31 mbd in 1979 to only 18 mbd in 1983.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prudhoe_Bay_oil_fields_1971_FWS.jpg>

Non-OPEC Petroleum Supplies Increased – Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, Photographed in 1971

The oil ministers of the OPEC countries decided to impose a cartel, setting export quotas to defend oil prices. At a meeting in London in 1983, OPEC cut its price from $34 to $29 per barrel, set a quota of 17.5 mbd, and agreed that Saudi Arabia would act as a swing producer to enforce the quota. After two years of rapidly

declining exports, Saudi Arabia stopped acting as the swing producer and began cutting prices to regain its market share. In 1986, the oil price fell to $8 per barrel and OPEC was in disarray.

OPEC officials met in Geneva and agreed to defend a price of $18 per barrel with a quota of 17.3 mbd. Each country would honor its market share, and Saudi Arabia would not be a swing producer. That agreement held up until 1990, when Iraq's invasion of Kuwait led to the Gulf War and removed 4 mbd from the world oil market. The Gulf War crisis was resolved when Saudi Arabia increased its output by 3 mbd while the United Arab Emirates and Venezuela also added extra supplies.

World oil consumption expanded in the mid-1990s, and in 1997, OPEC raised export quotas by 2 mbd. But the Asian financial crisis, which started in that year, interrupted economic growth in Southeast Asia and South Korea, and oil consumption in the Asian tigers plummeted. The world oil price collapsed – briefly to $10 per barrel.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Suharto_resigns.jpg>

President Suharto of Indonesia Resigned, May 1998 -- Following the OPEC Meeting in Jakarta and the Asian Financial Crisis

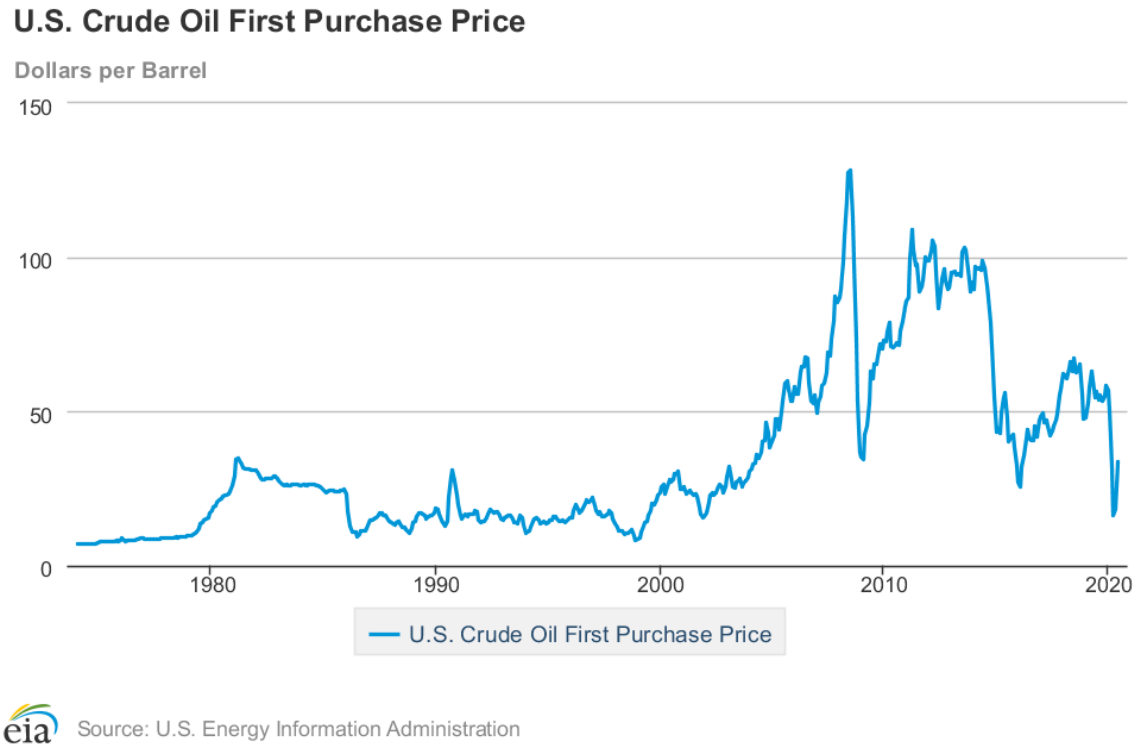
In spite of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), Iran managed to earn about $15 billion annually from oil in the 1980s. Iran's oil production recovered to 4 mbd by 1993, and in 1995 Iran began contracting with foreign oil firms, initially from France, Malaysia, and Russia, to produce Iranian oil and natural gas in return for a share of production.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jack-up-rig-in-the-caspian-sea.JPG>

Oil Rig in the Iranian Portion of the Caspian Sea

Second Price Shocks (2000-present). Since 2000, world oil prices have shot up to inflation-adjusted levels much higher than those of the 1970s and then collapsed to record lows. A part of that price increase can be attributed to unrealistic expectations, unrelated to oil supply-demand fundamentals. American relations in the Middle East have been complicated by the 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001, the wars in Iraq and Syria, and Iran's nuclear threat. But most of the oil price rise reflected market shifts. In the two decades starting in 1990, global demand for oil increased 30

percent, India's oil demand doubled, and China's tripled. Between 2004 and 2012, the costs of developing oil fields doubled due to shortages of equipment and skilled personnel. The price of oil ranged between $90 per barrel and $110 per barrel between 2011 and 2014.



Source: US Energy Information Administration available at <https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=pet&s=f000000__3&f=m>

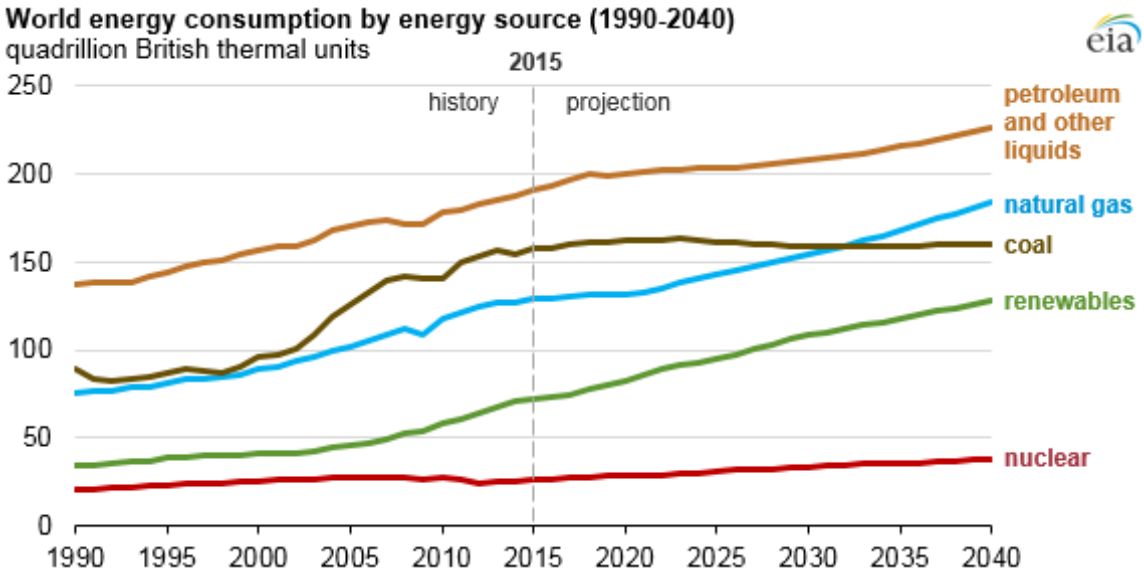
US Crude Oil Prices, 1861-2020 (Dollars Per Barrel, Prices Not Adjusted for Inflation)

However, between mid-2014 and mid-2105, the oil price fell by half to $45-55 per barrel, reflecting enormous increases in U.S. shale oil production and a fall-off in the growth of energy consumption in emerging markets, especially China. The oil price stayed in the range of $40 per barrel to $60 per barrel through 2019. Then in 2020, the oil price declined to a range of $20 per barrel to $50 per barrel with an average price level of about $40 per barrel. Additional downward price pressures were exerted by a rapid expansion of output by Saudi Arabia and Russia, hoping to put higher-cost American shale producers out of business, followed by the beginning of the global economic downturn (and reduction in demand for energy) induced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Future oil supplies and prices will depend on cost and demand. In both 2018 and 2019, global oil production and consumption were each 101 mbd, whereas proven oil reserves were estimated at 1.7 trillion barrels (half in the Middle East).

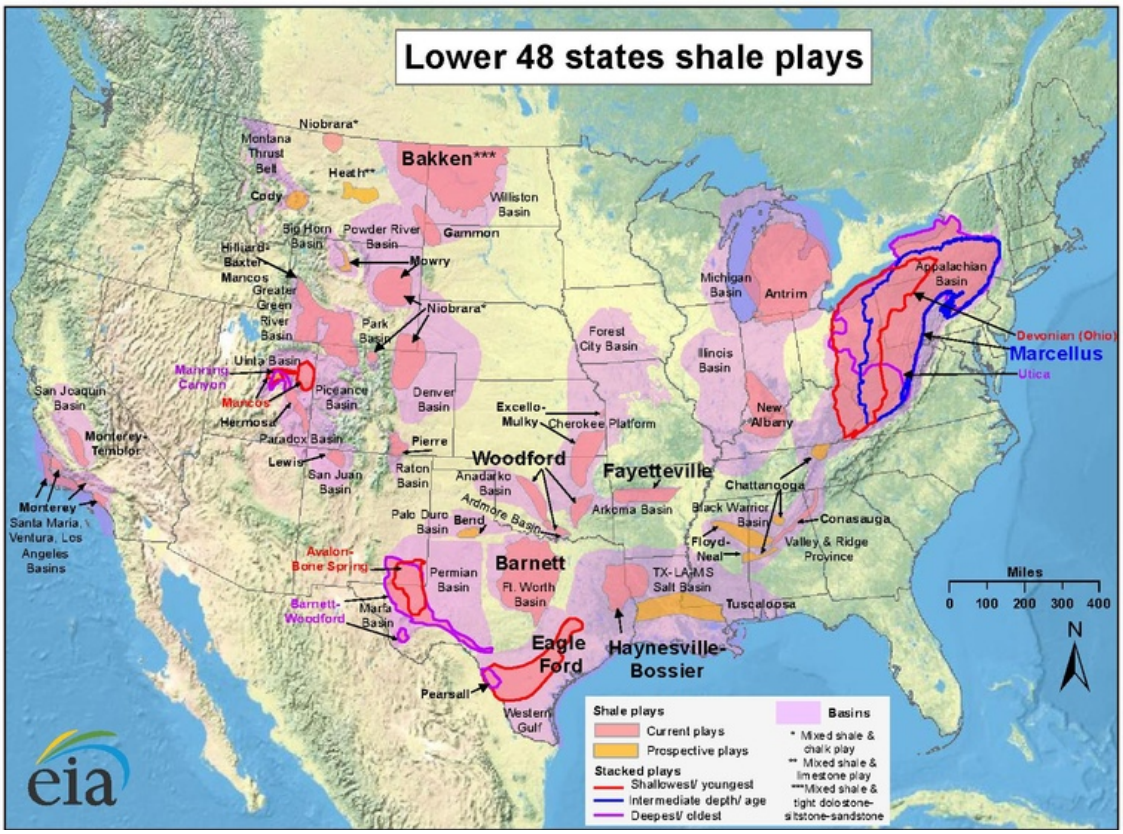
Future oil prices also will be influenced by the economics of producing unconventional oil and natural gas (from shale, oil sands, and deep offshore deposits) and by the ability of consuming countries to improve energy efficiency (which doubled between 1975 and 2010). Energy demand in the U.S., Europe, and Japan has already peaked.

Daniel Yergin projects an 18 percent increase in world oil output – from 93 mbd in 2010 to 110 mbd in 2030 – with contributions from conventional (Kazakhstan's Kashagan and Brazil's Tupi fields) and unconventional (U.S. shale oil and Canadian oil sands) sources. He expects that global oil production will peak about midcentury and then decline gradually. The US Energy Information Administration projects a 20 percent increase in world energy consumption between 2015 and 2040 – all occurring outside of North America and Europe. Both of these projections were made prior to the onset of the global pandemic.



Source: US Energy Information Administration available at <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=32912>

US Energy Information Administration Projects a 20 Percent Increase in World Energy Consumption Between 2015 and 2040 – All Occurring Outside of North America and Europe



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:United_States_Shale_gas_plays,_May_2011.pdf>

US Energy Information Administration Assessment of Principal Regions of Shale Plays – Fracking For Petroleum and Natural Gas

Lessons for Contemporary Powers

What lessons for contemporary powers can be drawn from the experiences of the Achaemenid Empire in Persia and of earlier rulers of Iran? A key lesson emerges from the downfall of Sargonid Assyria (911-612 BCE), a predecessor power to

Achaemenid Persia. Assyria had a holy war ideology based on a belief that the Assyrian god, Assur, demanded that their kings assert universal rule through conquest. The Assyrians assembled the most powerful army that the world had ever seen and conquered the weaker city-states in the Levant. But in their attempt to conquer Egypt, the war- maddened Assyrians neglected to cover their rear flank in the east and were wiped out of existence by a coalition of neighboring Medes and Babylonians. The ancient Assyrian experience provides two related lessons – militaristic ideology based on extreme religious tenets is dangerous for the health of empires, and attempts to control distant regions should not be made if there is potential trouble at home and next door.

A second lesson arises from the early Achaemenid leaders' close attention to the needs of ethnic minorities and practice of religious tolerance. Cyrus the Great (ruled 550-530 BCE), the founder of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, was both a brilliant military leader and a skilled public administrator. For political

expediency, the early Achaemenid Persians governed benevolently and embraced local institutions and cultures. Cyrus recorded his ruling principles – equality of ethnic groups and religions, freedom of repatriation of peoples to their homelands, and restoration of cities and temples – in the Cyrus Cylinder (538 BCE), history's first human rights charter. Cyrus sponsored the repatriation to Israel of 10,000 Jews who had been forcibly resettled in Babylonia, and he subsidized the restoration of their temple in Jerusalem. Achaemenid Persia prospered for a century – so long as Cyrus's principles of human rights and religious tolerance were followed.

Peaceful succession of rulers is necessary for imperial continuity. Succession struggles foment palace intrigues, drain the treasury, cause military disaffections, lead to civil wars, and undermine efforts to defend against foreign enemies. Herein lies a third lesson. The decline of the Achaemenid Empire in Persia was triggered by royal succession crises. Disputes over who would rule next evolved from court intrigues (in the 460s BCE) to a civil

war (401 BCE) and to a regicide (336 BCE). The suppression of rebellions in Babylonia, Bactria, Phoenicia, and Ionia was very costly. The imperial bureaucracy also splintered as regional governors revolted against central authority, most importantly in Anatolia (366-359 BCE). The erosion of governmental control opened the empire to external threats. Alexander the Great of Macedonia (334-323 BCE) invaded, ended the Achaemenid Empire, and claimed rule of Persia.

Iran Time Line

2700-550 BCE	**Ancient Persia**
c. 2700-646 BCE	Elamite Kingdom – Elam people – Susa, Anshan
c. 2000-800 BCE	migrations of Indo-Aryan peoples – Central Asia – Medes (northwest), Persians (southwest), Parthians (northeast)
625-550 BCE	Median Empire – Medes – Ecbatana
612 BCE	Media and Babylonia – defeated Assyria
550-330 BCE	**Achaemenid Persian Empire**
550-530 BCE	Cyrus the Great – Parsa – conquered Lydia, Babylonia
538 BCE	Cyrus Cylinder – Babylonia – principles
530-522 BCE	Cambyses – conquered Egypt
522-486 BCE	Darius the Great – conquered Punjab, Macedonia – Persepolis
490-479 BCE	Athens and Sparta – won battles of Marathon, Salamis, Plataea
334-323 BCE	Alexander the Great – Macedonia – conquered Persia
301-64 BCE	Seleucid Kingdom – Greek – Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia

238 BCE-230 CE	**Parthian Empire**
238 BCE-217 CE	Arcases I – seceded – founded Parthian Empire – Zoroastrian
171-138 BCE	Mithradates I – conquered Bactria, Persia, Mesopotamia
123-88 BCE	Mithradates II – conquered Armenia – expanded to Euphrates
106 BCE	first Silk Road caravan – China-Parthia-Rome
116-117 CE	Roman Emperor Trajan – took Mesopotamia and Armenia from Parthia
220s	succession war in Parthia – Ardavan V vs. Valaksh VI
230-651 CE	**Sasanian Empire**
230	Ardashir I of Persis – defeated Parthians – Sasanian dynasty
230-651	Sasanian Empire – Indo-Aryan – Persia, Mesopotamia, Bactria
240-279	Shapur I – expanded Sasanian Empire
531-579	King Khosrow I – crushed Huns – reformed taxation, land use

540-629	Sasanian-Byzantine wars – fruitless stand-off – debilitated both
637-651	Arab Islamic Jihad – conquest of Persia – Bedouin warriors
651-1501	**Arab, Turk, and Mongol Rule of Iran**
661-749	Umayyad Caliphate – Damascus – Arab leadership
680	Battle of Karbala – Sunnis slaughtered Shi'ites – death of Hussein
749-1220	Abbasid Caliphate – Baghdad – Persian, Turkish leadership
945-1055	Buyid Dynasty – Shiite Iranian – western Iran – Baghdad
961-1040	Ghazanavid Dynasty – Sunni Turkish – eastern Iran – Khurasan
1040-1194	Seljuk Turkish Empire – all of Iran – Rayy, Isfahan – Anatolia
1219-1223	Genghis Khan – invaded Iran – razed Harat – ruined *qanat*s
1256-1335	Il-Khanate Mongol Empire – Iran, Mesopotamia – Islam, 1295
1336-1405	Temur – Turco-Mongol – Transoxania – conqueror – administrator

1381-1501	Timurid Empire – Turco-Mongol – Anatolia to India – Sunni Islam
1405-1501	Qara-Qoyunlu, Aq-Qoyunlu Dynasties – Turkmen – western Iran – Sunni Islam
1501-1722	**Safavid Empire**
1501-1524	Shah Ismail I – founder – Turkmen conquests – Twelver Shi'ite Islam
1587-1629	Shah Abbas I – consolidator – Isfahan – exported Gilan silk
1722	Mahmud – Ghilzai Afghan – Gulnabad – ended Safavid Dynasty
1736-1747	Nadir Shah – Turkic warrior – Sunni Islam – exhausted Iranian resources
1751-1779	Karim Khan Zand – Iranian – Shi'ite Islam – Shiraz
1796-1926	**Qajar Dynasty**
1779-1797	Agha Muhammad – Qajar founder – shah, 1796 – reunification
1796-1926	Qajar Dynasty – Turkic – despotic political stability – large estates
1848-1896	Nasir al-Din – Qajar consolidator – little reform – export crops

1906-1911	Constitutional Revolution – weak constitutional monarchy
1907-1919	Anglo-Russian Convention – partition of Iran – stagnation
1908	discovery of oil – Khuzestan – Anglo-Persian Oil Company
1921-1926	Reza Khan – minister of war, 1921 – premier, 1923 – shah, 1926
1926-1979	**Pahlavi Dynasty**
1926-1979	Pahlavi Dynasty – Iranian – military – bureaucracy
1925-1941	Reza Shah Pahlavi – modernization – oppression
1941-1979	Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi – military – bureaucracy
1941-1945	World War II – Anglo-Soviet invasion – land corridor – oil
1951-1953	Muhammad Mossadeq – National Front – oil nationalization
1953	coup – US CIA, British M16 – control oil – restored Shah
1963	White Revolution – land reform, women's suffrage, literacy, privatization of state firms

1978-1979	Islamic Revolution – widespread support – Shah went into exile
1979-present	**The Islamic Republic**
1979-1989	Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini – Supreme Leader – brutal consolidator
1979-1981	Iranian students occupied American Embassy – held 52 diplomats hostage
1980-1988	Iran-Iraq War – costly losses – stalemate
1981-1989	Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – President – conservative, Khomeini protégé
1989-present	Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – Supreme Leader
1989-1997	Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani – President – political powerbroker
1997-2005	Muhammad Khatami – President – reformer
2005-2013	Mahmud Ahmadinejad – President – hardliner, populist
2006	UN Security Council – sanctions on Iran
2013-present	Hassan Rouhani elected President – centrist
2015	Lausanne Accord (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA) – Iran to defer nuclear weapons, UN to remove sanctions
2016	UN economic sanctions on Iran removed

2017	Hassan Rouhani re-elected President
2018	US withdrew from JCPOA – imposed bilateral economic sanctions on Iran
2020	Guardian Council disqualified 7,000 candidates, 90 sitting members – hardliners won solid majority in Majles election

Bibliography

I am offering below annotations on selected books that I found particularly helpful in understanding Iran's political and economic history. I have divided my recommendations into five categories – books that cover most of Iran's history, books on Achaemenid Persian history, books on Medieval Iranian history, books on modern Iranian history and culture, and biographies and articles on key recent events in Iran. In each category, I list two highly suggested readings and two supplementary readings.

Books that Cover Most of Iran's History

Highly Suggested Readings

1. Michael Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind, A History of Iran*, London: Hurst & Company, 2007. Axworthy is a British academic, a former Iranian specialist in the British foreign service, and a keen observer of historical and modern Iran. He writes insightfully and authoritatively on Iranian topics. This book starts with the peopling of ancient Iran and traces the Persian identity through the Islamic Revolution. It is especially good at tracing cultural continuities through centuries of political change in Iran.

2. Monika Gronke, *Iran, A Short History*, Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008. Gronke, a German scholar, teaches at the University of Cologne. She has published widely and written a full-length history of Iran. This fine little book neatly condenses the highpoints and trends of Iranian history into 150 pages. It is particularly insightful in covering the nearly 13 centuries when Iran was ruled by Arabs, Turks, or Mongols. The book offers a clear introduction to a very complicated history.

Supplementary Readings

1. Patrick Clawson and Michael Rubin, *Eternal Iran, Continuity and Chaos*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Clawson and Rubin are long-time scholars of Iran who have served as editors of the *Middle East Quarterly*. This well-researched book begins with the Medean Empire and traces Iranian history through the Islamic Revolution. In their analysis, the authors search for precedents and patterns and clearly interweave political, economic, and cultural factors, including the rise and influence of Shi'ite Islam.

2. Kaveh Farrokh, *Shadows in the Desert, Ancient Persia at War*, New York: Osprey Publishing, 2007. A Canadian historian and author born in Greece, Farrokh provides a welcome perspective in his detailed analysis of ancient Persian military and political history. He seeks to counter a pro-Greek bias in interpreting the battles between classical Greece and Achaemenid Persia. In this book, Farrokh extends his military history through the debilitating Sasanian-Byzantine conflict. A new book will continue the story.

Books on Achaemenid Persian History

Highly Suggested Readings

1. Matt Waters, *Ancient Persia, A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550-330 BCE*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Waters, an American professor of ancient history at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, has written an extremely helpful introduction to Achaemenid history. In just 220 pages, he explains the founding of the empire by Cyrus, Darius' expansion to the western Mediterranean and Indus Valley, the succession crises, and the final triumph of Alexander the Great.

2. Maria Brosius, *The Persians, An Introduction*, Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2006. This book is a very insightful, yet short (190 pages), history of the ancient Persian empires. Brosius is an extensively- published, German academic who has done research at Oxford University and now teaches ancient

history at the University of Toronto. Her expertise is eclectic, ranging from the Zoroastrian religion through Persian art to the workings of imperial economies in Parthian and Sasanian Iran.

Supplementary Readings

1. A. Bernard Knapp, *The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt*, Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1988. This wonderful book analyzes the rise and fall of dynasties in early Mesopotamia, dynastic Egypt, Achaemenid Persia, and the ancient Levant. Written by an anthropologist, the book provides comparative context by weaving together adroitly the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the cultures from which Western civilization stemmed. Copies can be found on used-book websites.

2. Richard N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, Munich, Germany: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1984. For half a century before his death in 2014, Frye was the world's leading scholar of Iranian studies. He taught Iranian and Middle Eastern history at Harvard University, served as mentor to many historians, and spoke eight languages fluently. This book focuses on socio-economic issues in ancient Persia – how taxes were collected, why roads were built, and how the rich controlled the poor.

Books on Medieval Iranian History

Highly Suggested Readings

1. David Morgan, *Medieval Persia, 1040-1797*, London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1988. Morgan, a British scholar and a Professor Emeritus of history at the University of Wisconsin, has specialized in studies of Islam and of the impact of Mongol incursions in the Middle East. This book, though dated, remains a classic study of seven centuries when Turkic- and Mongol-speaking outsiders ruled Iran. In it, Morgan carefully analyzes the rise, accomplishments, and fall of the Safavid Empire (1501-1722).

2. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010. It is rare that a detailed history book enjoys a lengthy stay on the New York Times bestseller list. This book fully deserves all of the acclaim that it has received. It gives an insightful analysis of the rise and spread of Islam and of its impact on the Arab peoples and the Middle East. This superb book places the history of Iran during the past fourteen centuries in a broad regional context.

Supplementary Readings

1. Rudolph P. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran, Silk for Silver, 1600-1730*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999. This book is a delight for those interested in learning economic history. Matthee, an award-winning professor of history at the University of Delaware, expertly analyzes the economic basis of the Safavid Empire, focusing on the role of silk production and export. He also identifies the key management roles of Shah Abbas and of Armenian merchants.

2. Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia, The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009. Daryaee is a distinguished professor of Iranian history at the University of California-Irvine. He began his career as an expert on Sasanian Persia (230-651) and later extended his studies to Achaemenid Persia and edited the Oxford history of Iran. In this book, he explains the rise of the Sasanians, their struggles with the Roman and Byzantine Empires, and their ultimate fall to Arab Muslim invaders in the 7th century.

Books on Modern Iranian History and Culture

Highly Suggested Readings

1. Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Abrahamian, an Armenian-Iranian by birth, is a distinguished professor of

history at the City University of New York. His numerous books on Iran have been published in six languages. In 200 pages, this excellent history astutely analyzes the rise of the Qajar Dynasty in the 19th century, the fall of the Pahlavis in the 20th century, and the reformist struggles in the Islamic Republic.

2. Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran, A History of the Islamic Republic*, London: Allen Lane, 2013. In a second splendid book, Axworthy zeroes in on the most recent turbulent century of Iranian history. This book, which neatly complements his earlier one, focuses on the opposition to the Shah, the takeover of the revolution by Khomeini and the clerics, the political struggles between hardliners and reformers, and Iranian nuclear capability and UN sanctions. But it predates the Lausanne Accord.

Supplementary Readings

1. Abbas Milani, *The Myth of the Great Satan, A New Look at America's Relations with Iran*, Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2010. Milani is a political scientist and a leading analyst of contemporary Iran, based at Stanford University. An Iranian-American, Milani writes and speaks widely and authoritatively on Iranian issues. This beautifully constructed, short book analyzes the ongoing conflicts between Iran and the United States since the formation of the Islamic Republic in 1979.

2. Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors, The Elusive Face of Iran*, New York: The Free Press, 2000. Sciolino is a writer, now based in Paris, who formerly was a journalist with *The New York Times*. Her well-written book on the culture and politics of modern Iran is wide-ranging and insightful. In it, she covers Shi'ism and the rise of Khomeini, the clerical takeover of the Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the rise and rule of Ali Khamenei, the struggles between conservatives and reformers, and the role of bonyads.

Biographies and Articles on Key Recent Events in Iran

Highly Suggested Readings

1. Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Shah of Shahs*, San Diego, California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1985. Kapuscinski was a Polish journalist who wrote penetrating short books on diverse topics, including Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, the Rwandan genocide, and Shah Muhammad Pahlavi of Iran. Kapuscinski died in 2007, after a career that many felt would lead to a Nobel Prize in literature. This brilliant short book starts with Reza Khan, explores the rise of SAVAK, and probes into the Shah's fall from power.

2. Reza Zarghamee, *Discovering Cyrus, The Persian Conqueror Astride the Ancient World*, Washington, DC: Mage Publishers Inc, 2013. This book is not for the faint of heart. Zarghamee, who is pursuing two careers as an attorney and a scholar of ancient Persia, has produced an academic tour de force, with 400 pages of text and 300 pages of appendices and footnotes. His book is stronger on politics and military conflicts than on economic developments. It is especially good on Cyrus' takeovers of Lydia and Babylon.

Supplementary Readings

1. Oliver August, "Iran, Special Report, The Revolution Is Over," *The Economist*, November 1, 2014. August, a reporter for *The Economist* of London, headed a team that authored a report on Iranian politics and the Iranian economy. The article argues that UN sanctions led to contractions of Iran's economy in 2012 and 2013, causing Iran to negotiate an agreement to defer nuclear weaponry in return for a UN promise to lift the sanctions. It analyzes the weaknesses and potentials of the Iranian economy.

2. "What You Need to Know about Iran's Landmark Nuclear Deal," *The Economist*, July 15, 2015. This article provides very detailed reportage on the Lausanne Accord of July 2015. It

explains how the UN sanctions have impacted the Iranian economy. It also sets forth the promises that the Iranian government has made to restrict its development of nuclear weaponry. It further details the "snap-back" provisions to re-introduce sanctions if Iran fails to comply with the agreement.

Sites Visited in Iran

Macro Polo Expedition
Stanford Travel/Study Program
October 2-25, 2016
Land-based and International and Domestic Flights

Tabriz, Iran

Tabriz, with 1.8 million residents, is the leading city in northwest Iran and the capital of East Azerbaijan Province. Tabriz has been occupied continuously for three-and-one-half millennia. After the in-migration of the Seljuk Turks and their takeover of Iran in the mid-11th century, Tabriz became the center of Turkish settlement. Today, most people in northwest Iran speak Azeri, a dialect of Turkish. Tabriz was the capital of the Mongol-led Il-Khanate (1256-1335), established by Hulegu, a grandson of Genghis Khan. Marco, Niccolo, and Maffeo Polo visited Tabriz in 1272 en route to China and in 1295 on their way back to Venice. The city was the first capital of the Safavid Empire (1501-1722), before the Safavids shifted their capital to Isfahan.

Our group visited three cultural sites in Tabriz – the Tabriz Bazaar, the Kabud (Blue) Mosque, and the Azerbaijan Museum. The Tabriz Bazaar, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the world's largest covered market. The Timurid-style Blue Mosque, which features cobalt blue tiles, was built in 1465 by Jahan Shah of the Qara-Qoyunlu (Turkmen) dynasty, but was largely destroyed in 1778 by an earthquake. The museum contains a stunning sculpture of a fertility goddess from the Caspian region, dated to the first millennium BCE, and some fine examples of Islamic pottery from the Ilkhanid period.

Isfahan, Iran

Isfahan was not an important administrative center in the last third of the 13th century, when the Polos visited Persia. In 1598, Shah Abbas the Great, the powerful Safavid king, moved his capital to Isfahan and transformed the city. Isfahan served as the capital of Persia until the Safavid Empire collapsed in 1722. Spectacular Isfahan now has a population of 1.9 million and is Iran's third largest city. Shah Abbas began his beautification campaign by constructing an immense central square, the Maydan-e Shah, at 500 by 160 meters the third-largest city-square in the world. That stunning square features three memorable sites – the Shah Abbas Mosque (now called the Imam Mosque) with majestic minarets, the Sheikh Loftallah Mosque (known as the Ladies Mosque) with a peacock in its decorated dome, and the Ali Qapu Palace, the highest building in 17th-century Persia.

Isfahan's two-mile-long bazaar begins at that central square and extends to the Congregational Mosque, located in Isfahan's original city center, which exemplifies eight centuries of Persian architecture. Shah Abbas moved many Armenian merchant families to Isfahan to control the silk trade. In New Julfa, the Armenian quarter, our group toured the Armenian Orthodox (Vank) Cathedral. We also visited the Chehel Sotoun Palace (Palace of Forty Columns), begun in 1647, whose stunning columns are reflected in a decorative pool.

Tehran, Iran

Tehran, the teeming capital of Iran, has 12 million people, 4 million cars, and daunting traffic. The city was only a minor village in Marco Polo's era. Founded in the late 18th century as the first capital of the Qajar Dynasty, Tehran is sited just south of the snow-capped Alborz Mountains. In Farsi, Tehran means "hot place," but our weather was pleasantly warm and dry. Tehran was a study in organized chaos. In two days, we visited six of Tehran's

finest museums and gained insights into Iran's rich and complex history.

Highlights were the exquisite 19th-century Hall of Mirrors and the Brilliant Hall in the Qajar Dynasty's palace and courtyard (Golestan Palace), an exquisite set of Ilkhanid tiles and ceramics (Islamic Museum), a four-millennia-old piece of painted pottery that recounts the classic epic of Gilgamesh (Glass and Ceramics Museum), a stunning themed collection of photos of Iranian deserts (Contemporary Art Museum), the impressive 6th-century BCE bas relief of Darius the Great from the Achaemenid Persian capital of Persepolis (Archaeological Museum), and an overwhelming collection of Iran's crown jewels, including the world's largest uncut diamond, the Sea of Light or Darya-i-Nur, and a priceless 19th-century massive globe on which the seas are emeralds, the continents are rubies, and Persia is a diamond (Crown Jewels Museum in the Bank Melli Iran Vault).

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Budapest to Tehran by Train
Stanford Travel/Study Program
March 26-April 13, 2016
Train, Aboard the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*

Kashan, Iran

Kashan is a small city (400,000 residents) located between Tehran and Isfahan on the edge of the Central Desert of Iran (Dashte Kavir). Historically, Kashan was a key oasis on the caravan trade route that connected Qom (north-central Iran) with Kerman (southeastern Iran). Kashan owes its existence to ample water supplies at the foot of the Zagros Mountains, 15 miles distant. The water is transported by gravity from the mountains to Kashan by means of a network of qanats – ancient underground water

channels, which continue to provide the basis for much of Persian agriculture. Although they are difficult to construct and maintain, the qanats limit evapotranspiration in hot, dry climates and make difficult the illegal diversion of water.

Our group toured the Tabatabaei Historical House, a magnificent residential estate of 40 rooms and two gardened courtyards, constructed between 1834 and 1844 for a wealthy merchant of hand-made carpets. We next visited Sialk Hill (Tepe Sialk), an archeological site that contains evidence of habitation 7500 years ago, the earliest settled site in Iran, and a newly-discovered ziggurat (temple of stacked rectangles), dated to 2500 BCE. Our last destination in Kashan was the 16th-century Fin Garden (Bagh-e Fin), an outstanding example of a classical Persian garden, using qanat-supplied water.

Persepolis and Shiraz, Iran

Our visit to Shiraz and its environs featured two significant sites from Persia's earliest empire, the Achaemenid (550-330 BCE). Cyrus the Great, the benevolent Achaemenid founder-king defeated his grandfather, Astyages, the King of the Medes, at the Battle of Pasargad in 550 BCE to establish the Achaemenid Empire. Darius the Great consolidated the empire and began construction of Persepolis (Parsa), the Achaemenid celebratory capital, in 518 BE. The leaders of 30 tributary states paid taxes every Spring equinox (*No Ruz*) in Persepolis.

We toured the impressive ruins at Persepolis and marveled at the bas reliefs at the Apadana Palace, which depict representatives from 23 tributary states. Nearby, we admired Naghsh-e Rostam, the necropolis where four Achaemenid kings are buried in huge tombs carved in the mountainside. In Shiraz, the homeland of the Persians and today a bustling city of 1.4 million residents, we visited the tomb and garden of Hafez, Persia's greatest lyric poet,

who lived for nearly seven decades in the 14th century, the citadel of Karim Khan Zand (1751-1779), the Shi'ite Persian king (featuring four towers, one leaning), Karim Khan's spectacular reception hall (now the Fars Museum), and the stunning 19th-century Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, decorated with a pink rose motif.

Yazd, Iran

Yazd is an ancient oasis city of 450,000 residents, located in south-central Iran in the Kavir desert. The town was created by Sasanian King Yazdgerd in the 5th century to service Spice Road caravans connecting Iran with India and Europe. Because of its remote location, Yazd has been a safe haven for followers of the Zoroastrian religion, practiced in Persia for 1200 years before the Arab Muslim invasion in the 630s. The dualistic Zoroastrians support the good god, Ahuramazda, over the evil god, Ahriman, their major tenets are good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, and they burn sacred fires perpetually.

We visited Iran's principal Zoroastrian fire temple in Yazd. To avoid defiling the sacred elements of earth, water, and air, Zoroastrians placed their dead in sacred open spaces to allow vultures to dispose of bodies. We climbed a hill to a 19th-century Tower of Silence, where priests (magi) helped the soul depart from the body. Yazd is a World Heritage site because of its unique Persian architecture. We visited the Dowlat Abad Garden, created in the 1750s by the governor of Yazd, and learned how ingenious *badgirs* (wind catchers) cool buildings by channeling wind from towers into rooms. We also admired the blue and white geometric designs on the 15th-century Congregational Mosque in Yazd.

Mashhad and Tus, Iran

Sited in the heart of Khorasan Province in northeastern Iran, Mashhad is the country's second largest city (3.5 million people).

Mashhad, "the place of martyrdom," attracts 27 million pilgrims annually. Imam Reza, who died in Mashhad in 818, is the sole imam in Shi'ite Islam to be buried in Iran (ten others are buried in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, while Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi is believed to be in occultation). The Imam Reza religious foundation has constructed a huge shrine on 200 acres in central Mashhad. Although non-Muslims are not permitted to visit the gold-domed mausoleum, we saw the stunning collection of Persian carpets and Qu'rans in the shrine's museum and walked the grounds of the shrine.

After lunch, we drove to the nearby town of Tus. Tus is the birthplace of Ferdowsi, Iran's celebrated poet, who wrote the *Shahnameh* (1010), a collection of 60,000 epic poems glorifying Persian history. All Iranian students memorize Ferdowsi's poetry. We visited Ferdowsi's mausoleum, where our mellifluous local guide recited Ferdowsi verses in an acoustic chamber. We later saw the tomb of Nadir Shah (1736-1747), a brutal, Turkic, Sunni king from Mashhad, who briefly reunited Persia, raided Delhi in 1739, and stole the Peacock Throne. But his costly campaigns exhausted Iran and led to a sharp decline in population.

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Iran Suitcase Seminar
Stanford Travel/Study Program
April 8-24, 2010
Land-based, with Domestic Flights

Kerman, Rayen, and Mahan Iran

Kerman is a medium-sized city (570,000 residents) located in the dry steppe of southeastern Iran, not far from the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kerman has a fascinating bazaar (market) renowned for high quality cumin, unusual needlework,

and a museum that is a converted public bath-house. We drove by bus 60 miles south of Kerman to visit the ancient citadel at Rayen. That huge (two-hectare), mud-brick fortress and caravanserai, once home to 7000 Persians, was constructed during the Sasanian Empire (3rd-7th centuries). The Rayen citadel served as a defensive fortress for the Sasanian nobles and as a key link on the Spice Road, the trade route on which South Indian pepper, cinnamon, and cardamom moved via Persia to Europe.

We next drove on to Mahan to have lunch at the exquisite Bagh-e-Shahzadeh terraced Persian garden, created in 1880 by representatives of the Qajar Dynasty. After lunch, we toured an important Sufi (Islamic mystic) shrine near Mahan dedicated to Shah Nematollah Vali, the 15th century creator of a powerful Sufi sect, on land donated by Temur the Great when he ruled Iran. Today, Sufi Islam is expanding in Iran (in part because it offers equal rights to women), and it now is practiced by perhaps 5-10 percent of Iran's people.

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