

THE EVOLUTION OF IRAN AS A NATIONAL STATE

JOHN ANDREW BOYLE

The Persian Empire, the foundation of which by Cyrus the Great we are now celebrating, was dissolved as the result of the Greek invasion under Alexander; it was restored, some five and a half centuries later, by the native dynasty of the Sassanians, who like the Achaemenids before them, had their origins in the south-western province of Fārs or Pārs, which has given Iran the name by which it is known in the West. The Persian Empire thus restored disputed with the heirs of Alexander, the rulers of Rome and Byzantium, for the possession of Western Asia. The later phase of this struggle is referred to in the Koran: "The Greeks have been defeated in a land hard by: but after their defeat they shall defeat their foes." This is a reference to the war waged against the Byzantines by the Sassanian Emperor Khusrau Parviz, who in the course of a war of more than twenty years' duration, was to extend the boundaries of the Persian Empire to where they had lain in the days of Darius, on the shores of the Mediterranean and the Aegean; it is also a prophecy of the Byzantines' ultimate victory with the triumphal entry of Heraclius into Jerusalem in 629. Both Empires were now to reel before the onslaught of a new and unknown force, the Muslim armies of Arabia led by Muḥammad's successors Abū Bakr and 'Umar. The conquest of Persia, begun with the Arabs' victory at Qādisīya (635) in Iraq, was completed with the decisive battle of Nihāvand (624); and with the death of Yazdigird III (651) as a solitary fugitive the 400 years of Sassanian rule came to an end, and Persia, like Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia became a province of the great Empire of Islam.

Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia (i.e. Iraq) are to-day Arab countries. How Persia preserved her identity and finally under the Ṣafavids achieved the national unity denied her since Sassanian times is a long and complicated story. It is above all the survival of

¹ XXX, 1 (Rodwell's translation).

the Persian language that saved the Persian nation. It underwent vicissitudes similar to those that the English language suffered as a result of similar conditions in the period following the Norman Conquest. Just as English was impregnated with Norman French words, so Persian was permeated with Arabic words, and the mixed language which thus evolved became the vehicle of a magnificent poetical literature for which we find no precedent in what has survived from the Sassanian period. The creation of a common literary language, what the Germans call a *Hochsprache*, gave to the Persia of Ḥāfiz, as to the Italy of Dante or the Germany of Goethe, a cultural unity at a time when national unity was an ideal set in the future or not yet dreamt of. Paradoxically enough, the very fragmentation of the country contributed to the flourishing of poetical talent, creating as it did a number of rival courts competing with one another for the service of panegyrists. One thinks in particular of the age of Ḥāfiz, than which one cannot imagine a more desolate period in Persian history, the country, as a consequence of the collapse of the Il-Khanid state, being split up into a number of petty kingdoms and the chaos arising out of their internecine struggles being further aggravated by the purely destructive invasions of Tīmūr; and yet Ḥāfiz was only the greatest of a whole galaxy of poets who flourished at a time which, like England under the Heptarchy, was filled with "battles of kites and crows." There is, however, one figure whose contribution to the moulding of the national consciousness of the Persian people transcends that of all his fellow poets: this is, of course, Abul-Qāsim Firdausī, who in his *Shāh-Nāma* or "Book of Kings," has preserved for all time the myths, legends and traditions of pre-Islamic Persia. It is because of the *Shāh-Nāma* that the ordinary Persian, unlike the ordinary Egyptian, Syrian or Iraqi, knows, and has always known, that the history of his country does not begin with the flight from Mecca to Medina; he can trace it back through the historical Sassanians and an Iranicized Alexander (the son of Philip by an Iranian princess), not indeed to Cyrus the Great, but to the legendary Jamshīd and Ferīdun, who are in fact Aryan deities. Persepolis, actually constructed by Darius I, is to the Persians Takht-i Jamshīd "Jamshīd's Throne." The main theme of the National Epic is, however, the century-long struggle between Iran and Turan, from which Iran eventually emerges victorious. By Turan was meant

in the pre-Islamic tradition the Iranian tribes opposed to the teachings of Zoroaster or, in more general terms, those Iranian tribes to the north and north-east of the Persian Empire, who continued to lead the nomadic life of their ancestors and made frequent forays into the territory of their agriculturalist cousins to the South. Such a people were the Massagetae, at whose hands Cyrus the Great met his death. But to Firdausī and his contemporaries Turan was identified with another nomadic race that had long since displaced the Scythians and Sarmatians in the steppes of Northern Asia. These were the Turks, of whom various tribes and confederations had hovered on the eastern fringes of Iran since the 6th century of our era. From the 9th century onwards the bodyguard and household troops of the Caliph, and then of the various principalities of Eastern Islam, had been largely composed of Turkish slaves. The founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty - the dynasty of Sultan Maḥmūd, the patron for whom Firdausī wrote and to whom he dedicated his *Shāh-Nāma* - was a slave of this sort. But soon whole tribes of Turks, the Oghuz or Ghuzz, known later as the Türkmēn (Turcomans), of whom the most famous are the Saljuqs, were to spread southwards and westwards over Persia and dominate the whole of the Eastern Islamic world. Firdausī was born and lived the greater part of his life in the period which Minorsky has called the "Iranian Intermezzo," i.e. the period between the withdrawal of the Arabs and the coming of the Turks, "Had it not been," Minorsky says, "for this interval of Iranian domination, the national tradition of Iran would have become blunted and the Safavids would have found it infinitely more difficult to restore the particular moral and cultural character which distinguishes Persia from the Muslim neighbours²." That interval was in Firdausī's later life drawing to its close: in the East the Sāmānids had been ousted by the Qara-Khanid Turks and in the West the Būyids by the Ghaznavids; the advent of a far greater Turkish dynasty, that of the Saljuqs, he did not live to see. Firdausī's own feelings are expressed in the satire of Sultan Maḥmūd, which he added to the *Shāh-Nāma*, and in his offer to re-dedicate it to Shahriyār, the Iranian ruler of Bāvand in Mazandaran, who traced his descent back to Yazdigird, the last of the Sas-

² *Studies in Caucasian History* (London, 1953,) p. 110, note 1.

sanians. In his *Shāh-Nāma* he demonstrated to himself and to future generations of readers and listeners - for the *Shāh-Nāma* was and is as much recited as read - that Turan, whether in the shape of Saljuq, Mongol, Uzbek, or Ottoman, would be ultimately vanquished, and Iran victorious. There were occasions, as we shall see, when the victory might well have gone the other way.

The Mongol conquests of the 13th century had an initial impact upon Persia not less than those of Alexander and the Arabs; and yet their ultimate disruptive effect was infinitely less and they may even be said to have contributed to the evolution of a national state. The horrors of the invasion, in particular the great and systematic massacres which characterized the conquest of Khorasan are described in detail by the historian Juvainī. Time and time again he relates how after the capture of a city the population was slaughtered *en masse*, to each Mongol soldier being allotted the execution of several hundred persons. The total figures are incredibly high. According to Ibn al-Athīr 90,000 people were killed at Merv. According to Juvainī, a Muslim divine "together with some other persons passed thirteen days and nights in counting the people slain within the town. Taking into account only those that were plain to see and leaving aside those that had been killed in holes and cavities and in the villages and deserts, they arrived at a figure of more than one million, three hundred thousand." Even higher figures are given for Herat. At Nishapur, where a son-in-law of Genghis Khan had been killed in the fighting, it was ordered "that the town should be laid waste in such a manner that the site could be ploughed upon; and that in the exaction of vengeance not even cats and dogs should be left alive." Apart from 400 craftsmen reserved for transportation to Mongolia as slaves, the whole population was put to death. The heads of the slain were severed from their bodies and piled in heaps, those of the men being separate from those of the women and children. Ibn al-Athīr prefaces his account of the invasion by saying that for some years he had "continued averse from mentioning this event, deeming it so horrible that I shrank from recording it"; and he speaks of it as "the death-blow of Islam and the Muslims" and "the greatest catastrophe and the most dire calamity which

befell all men generally, and the Muslims in particular"³. Juvainī, who was in the Mongols' service, could hardly employ such language, but it is significant that upon occasion he is able to express his feelings by means of quotations from the *Shāh-Nāma*, in which he compares Genghis Khan with Afrāsyāb, the ruler of Turan, and his unsuccessful opponent Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn Khwārazm-Shāh, with Rustam, the chief hero of the Iranians and the final victor over Afrāsyāb⁴.

One would seek in vain in the later historian of the Mongols, Rashīd al-Dīn, for such veiled criticism of his masters; but conditions had changed. When Juvainī wrote, the horrors of the invasion belonged to the not too distant past, and the Mongol state of Persia was in its infancy. Rashīd al-Dīn flourished in the high noon of the *pax Mongolica*, the vizier of a Muslim ruler, the gifted Ghazan, famous for his victories over the Mamelukes, for his fiscal reforms designed to protect the sedentary population from the rapacity of the nomad aristocracy and above all for his patronage of Rashīd al-Dīn's own work, the *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh*, the first world history in the full sense ever written. In his correspondence the Il-Khanid vizier does not hesitate to refer to his master as the "Emperor (Khusrau) of Iran and the heir to the kingdom of the Kayānids"⁵. Professor Browne speaks of Persian friends, who went even further than Rashīd, seeking "to claim as compatriots not only Timur, but even Chingiz and Hulagu, those scourges of mankind, of whom the two last mentioned in particular did more to compass the ruin of Islamic civilization, especially in Persia, than any other human being"⁶. This is the attitude we adopt in England towards the Norman invaders. In the century and a half that followed the Norman Conquest there was, Macaulay says, "to speak strictly, no English history." And yet "almost every historian in England has expatiated with a sentiment of exultation on the power and splendour of her foreign masters," there being a strong

³ The whole passage is translated by E. G. Browe, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. III, 427-430.

⁴ See J. A. Boyle, *The History of the World-Conqueror* (Manchester, 1958), Vol. I, xxxii and note 3.

⁵ See I. P. Petrushevsky, "Rashid al-Din in Persian Historiography of the Middle Ages" in *Papers presented by the U. S. S. R. Delegation to the XXVII Congress of Orientalists* (Moscow, 1967), p. 8.

⁶ *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. III, ix.

tendency in most people's minds to associate the greatness of the ruler with the greatness of the country he rules. Macaulay particularly singles out the exploits of Richard the Lionheart⁷. One might with equal justice - or lack of it - condemn the celebration by Rashīd al-Dīn and Vaṣṣāf of the victories gained by the Il-Khan Ghazan over more or less the same adversaries, the Mameluke successors of Saladin. The struggle with the Mamelukes for the possession of Syria had begun in the time of Hulagu; the last campaign was launched by Ghazan's brother and successor Oljeitu in 1312-3. Throughout this period the Il-Khans had sought in vain an alliance with the princes of Europe against their common foe. Ghazan's grandfather Abaqa (1263-81) had been in correspondence with the Pope and Edward I of England; his father Arghun (1284-1303) had addressed himself also to Philippe le Bel of France. Ghazan himself in a letter to Boniface VIII apparently refers to a detailed plan for the invasion of Syria which he had previously proposed to the princes of Europe and continues: "as for now, we are making our preparations exactly in the manner [laid down in that plan]. You too should prepare your troops, send word to the rulers of the various nations and not fail to keep the rendezvous. Heaven willing we [i.e. Ghazan] shall make the great work [i.e. the war against the Mamelukes] our sole aim⁸. The significance of this correspondence has not yet been properly evaluated. It was now for the first time since late Antiquity that a centralized state occupying approximately the same area as the Sassanian Empire entered into direct relations with the Christian West⁹. The Il-Khans might, if they had survived longer, have become a truly national dynasty, as the Normans, or rather the Angevins, did; but the line came to an abrupt end, not because of any effeteness but simply from a shortage of heirs. Of the slaughter of the princes of the blood that preceded or followed the accession of an Il-Khanid ruler we know from the pages of Rashīd al-Dīn and Vaṣṣāf. We are told by the Egyptian encyclopedist 'Umarī, on the authority of an informant who had been in the service of the Il-Khan Abū Sa'īd

⁷ *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, ch. I.

⁸ See A. Mostaert and F. W. Cleaves, "Trois documents mongols des Archives secretes vaticanes," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. XV/3-4, pp. 419-506 (471).

⁹ On these relations see now Jean Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," *Journal of Asian History*, Vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 45-57.

(1316-35), how possible candidates for the throne would conceal themselves among the common people and adopt a trade or handicraft, becoming weavers and tanners, selling barley as cattle fodder, and so on. And yet, despite these precautions, it was the opinion of 'Umarī's informants that Muḥammad, the puppet set up in 1336 by Ḥasan-i Buzurg, the founder of the Jalayir dynasty, was the last of the line of Hulagu¹⁰. By contrast, the Ottomans, though it was long the custom for the Sultan, upon succession, to have his brothers put to death, contrived to reign in unbroken succession for 600 years.

On the Persian language and literature the Mongol conquests unlike those of Alexander and the Arabs, produced no lasting effect, and the influence of the Il-Khans was in one respect positively beneficial. Arabic had hitherto been the normal vehicle of historical writing, but with the encouragement of the rulers, the Mongol period became the golden age of Persian historiography, with which we associate the names of Juvainī, Rashīd al-Dīn and Vaṣṣāf, and henceforward Persian was destined to be the language, not only of Iranian, but also of Indian and (for a time) of Ottoman historians. The great poet Sa'adī, it should not be forgotten, flourished during this period; Ḥāfiẓ, as has already been pointed out, lived in the period of disintegration that followed the collapse of the Il-Khanid state, a period satirized for its moral degradation by the pen of Ḥāfiẓ's older contemporary, 'Ubaid-i Zākānī, "perhaps, the most remarkable paradist and satirical writer produced by Persia."¹¹ Of the various incursions made by Tīmūr into Persia during this unhappy period it is sufficient to say that these campaigns, with all the massacres, pyramids of skulls and other atrocities that characterized them, produced no lasting result whatsoever; they were as politically futile as they were militarily brilliant. Of Tīmūr's descendants, who for a while retained control of Eastern Persia, our judgement must be very different: their contribution, if not to the political, at least to the cultural evolution of Persia, was of the first importance. They were great patrons of the arts, and Herat, the capital of Shāh-Rukh, Abū Sa'īd and Sultan Ḥusain b. Baiqara was, as a centre of letters, art and learning, comparable with the cities of Renaissance Italy. To Sultan Ḥusain's court were

¹⁰ See Klaus Lech, *Das mongolische Weltreich* (Wiesbaden, 1968), p. 104.

¹¹ Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. III, 230.

attracted Jāmī, conventionally regarded as the last of the great classical poets, and Bihzād, the famous miniature painter. Sultan Ḥusain, it is true, wrote poetry in Chaghatai Turkish, and his minister, the famous Mīr ‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī, is one of the classical writers in that language¹²; and the Tīmūrīds might in the end have become an exclusively Turkish dynasty.

It is the Turks, or rather two Turcoman dynasties, that dominate both Persia and indeed the greater part of the Middle East throughout the 15th century. This is one of the “intermediate periods, between the more clearly defined epochs” of Persian history to which it was the merit of the late Professor Minorsky to draw our attention. The role played by these Turcomans in supporting Shah Ismā‘sil and so contributing to the establishment of Persia as a national state is not even now fully appreciated. The origins of the two confederations - the Qara-Qoyunlu “Those of the Black Sheep” and the Aq-Qoyunlu “Those of the White Sheep” - are obscure. Minorsky regards them as the descendants of tribes that had arrived with the Seljuqs in the 11th century, whose presence, after the Mongol conquests of the 13th century, had become “temporarily masked by this new stratum of conquerors.”¹³ He plausibly argues that the Iwe Turcomans, whom we know to have been active in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 13th century and whose ruler, Sulaimān-Shāh, was the commander-in-chief of the Caliph and the unsuccessful defender of Baghdad against the Mongols, may at a later stage have formed the nucleus of the Qara-Qoyunlu¹⁴. This confederation, when they first emerged into the light of history, had their headquarters on the Armenian plateau, near the N.E. shores of Lake Van, while their rivals, the Aq-Qoyunlu, occupied the region of Diyarbekir and Mardin in what is to-day Southern Turkey. In 1410 the Qara-Qoyunlu Qara-Yusuf became the independent ruler of Tabriz, which his family had previously held as vassals of the epigone Mongol dynasty of the Jalayir; he and his sons were engaged in largely successful warfare against the Tīmūrīds of Eastern Persia. Jahān-Shāh (1437-67) was also a

¹² On Mīr ‘Alī Shīr see V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, transl. V and T. Minorsky, Vol. III (Leiden, 1962).

¹³ *Persia in A. D. 1478-1490* (London, 1957), p. v.

¹⁴ *Studies in Caucasian History*, p. 152, note 2.

patron of the arts; he was the builder of the famous Blue Mosque in Tabriz. He was killed during an expedition against Uzun Ḥasan, i.e. "Long Ḥasan," (1453-1478) of the Aq-Qoyunlu, who now possessed themselves of their rivals' territory. As the result of two great victories over the Tīmūrids Uzun Ḥasan found himself master of the whole of Persia and, encouraged by the Venetians, who tried to supply him with artillery, he dreamt of conquering Constantinople, then only recently captured by the Ottomans. Had this dream been realized the Ottoman Empire might, for a time at least, have been superseded by a Turcoman Empire stretching from the Bosphorus to the confines of Central Asia; and the unification of Persia under the Ṣafavids might have been long delayed if not rendered altogether impossible. However this dream was shattered by his defeat in 1475 at the hands of the Ottomans; and in the event the Turcomans, including some of the Aq-Qoyunlu, were to play a leading part in setting Shah Isma'īl upon the throne.

The history of the Ṣafavids goes back to the 13th century and the times of the eponymous founder of the line, Ṣafī al-Dīn (1252-1334), the chief of a religious order with its headquarters at Ardebil. He was held in high esteem by Rashīd al-Dīn, the vizier and historian of the Mongols, who, as we know from his correspondence, was accustomed to sending him presents. The leadership of the order, which was at first orthodox Sunnī, passed from father to son, and won many supporters among the Turcoman tribes of Asia Minor and Syria. It became Shī'ī under Junaid (1447-60), the grandfather of Shāh Ismā'īl. Expelled from Ardebil by the Qara-Qoyunlu Jahān-Shāh, who apparently saw in him a possible rival, Junaid passed six years in exile (from 1449 to 1456) in Syria and Anatolia, moving amongst the Turcoman nomads and undertaking an unsuccessful expedition against the Empire of Trebizond. He finally sought refuge with Uzun Hasan of the Aq-Qoyunlu, who despite his own strict Sunnism, welcomed the exiled shaiḫ and even gave him his own sister in marriage. At the head of his Ṣūfī followers Junaid tried to re-establish himself in Ardebil; failing in this he engaged in holy war against the Christians of Daghestan. One successful raid would have been followed by a second, but the Shīrvān-Shāh, the ruler of what is now Soviet Azerbaijan, opposed the passage of his forces through his territory, and Junaid fell in battle (1460). His son Ḥaider, the nephew

of Uzun Hasan, was installed in Ardebil by his uncle, who afterwards gave him in marriage his own daughter by a Trebizond princess. Following his father's example Haidar engaged in three successive expeditions against the "Circassian infidels"; like his father, he clashed with the Shīrvān-Shāh, and, the latter appealing for aid to Sultan Ya'qūb, the son of Uzun Hasan, he was killed in battle by Aq-Qoyunlu troops. He left three young sons, all of them involved in the struggles of the Aq-Qoyunlu epigones. The youngest, Ismā'īl, was hidden by his followers in the forests of Gilān, from which he emerged at the age of 12 to rally the friends of his family, the Sūfī followers of his father Haidar; two years later he defeated the remnants of the Aq-Qoyunlu and, making Tabriz his capital, proceeded to conquer the rest of the country and to found the state of Persia as we now know it¹⁵.

It was to the fervour of his followers, recruited largely from the Qara-Qoyunlu and the now leaderless Aq-Qoyunlu, that Ismā'īl owed his throne. Known as *shāhi seven* or Lovers of the King - the expression bore a double meaning, for shah referred both to the Šafavid monarch and to 'Alī, the cousin of the Prophet - this body of men may be compared, with its combination of religious enthusiasm and excellent fighting qualities, to Cromwell's Ironsides. Shī'ism now became the national religion of Persia. It was by this differentiation from her neighbours that she preserved her nationhood. The Ottomans in the West and the Uzbeks on her North-Eastern frontier were orthodox, not to say bigotted Sunnīs, and, threatened on either side, Iran would, as the great authority on her history, the late Professor Minorsky, has said, "have ended by being submerged in these waves of Turkish assaults. The new religion with its ecstatic character helped to consolidate the central power, and, on the other hand, the new doctrine, which in itself had no connection with Persian *nationality*, provided the platform upon which the Persian people could maintain its rights against absorption into an abstract Islam and in practice, into the Turkish ocean"¹⁶. It is paradoxical that Persia should have

¹⁵ On Persia in the century preceding the establishment of the Šafavid dynasty — "une époque dont les complexités n'ot pas été toutes débrouillées" — see Minorsky, "La Perse au XV^e siècle" in *Iranica* (Tehran, 1964), pp. 317-326.

¹⁶ "Persia: Religion and Hoistory" in *Iranica*, pp. 242-259 (252).

been saved from being Turkicized by the Turcoman Shāhi Seven or Qīzīl-Bash, whose very names proclaim their Turkishness.

The Shāhi Seven met their first check at Chāldirān (1514), and Ismā'īl lost the battle, and for a time his capital at Tabriz, to the Ottoman Turks, not because of the enemy's superior valour but because of their artillery and hand guns, weapons with which his own troops were not equipped and which indeed they regarded as unmanly and cowardly¹⁷. It is fortunate that his great grandson 'Abbās the Great (1587-1629) did not share these old-fashioned chivalrous prejudices; his armies, provided with the best fire arms then available, recovered the territories held by the Turks and for a time occupied Baghdad. He found it necessary to reduce the numbers of the Shāhi Seven, who by now had become a Pretorian guard in every sense; to counterbalance them he created a cavalry corps of "slaves", i.e. Caucasian converts, armed with muskets instead of lances, a corps of musketeers on foot, these latter being recruited from the Persian peasantry, and a corps of artillery¹⁸. His military achievements and reforms consolidated the foundations laid by Ismā'īl, foundations on which the Şafavid dynasty, without producing another ruler of outstanding ability, was able to survive in peace and prosperity until its overthrow by the Afghans in 1722, nearly 100 years after 'Abbās's death. It is, however, as a builder that 'Abbās has left his most enduring monuments: the city of Isfahan as we know it to-day, the roads he constructed or improved, in particular the great causeway traversing the wooded province of Mazandaran from one end to the other, and the caravanserais in lonely spots and difficult mountain passes, where the traveller could shelter from the snow and rain. It is significant that Shāh 'Abbās, alone of the Islamic kings of Persia, has found a place in folk memory alongside the mythical figures of Farīdūn and Jamshīd.

The national state created by the Şafavids might, like the Achaemenid and Sassasian Empires before it, have been dissolved with the fall of the dynasty. It was saved by the genius of Nādir Shāh, the last of the great Asian conquerors, whose victories in India,

¹⁷ See R. M. Savoy, "The Sherley Mtyh," *Iran*, Vol. v, 73-81 (74).

¹⁸ See Minois, *Tadhkirat al-Muluk* (London, 1943), pp. 32-33; *idem*, "Storia dell' Iran islamico" in *Civiltà dell' Oriente* (Rome 1956), Vol. I, 461-513 (496-497).

Central Asia and Iraq restored to Persia for a while the frontiers she had held under the Achaemenids. However transitory these conquests - they included the whole of what is to-day West Pakistan ceded to Nādir by the Moghul Emperor - they restored Persia's prestige after the humiliation of the Ṣafavid collapse and, by weakening her enemies, allowed her to survive the long period of internecine strife that preceded the establishment of the Qajar dynasty. Of the Qajars there is time to say but little, nor is there much that can be said in their favour. They gave the country during the 19th century an internal peace and security denied it during the previous century; but such political and national progress as was achieved was achieved in spite of the regime. The modernization of Iran as a deliberate policy became possible only with the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty by His Imperial Majesty's father, Reḡā Shāh the Great. The greatest of the Qajars was unquestionably, despite his barbaric cruelty, the founder of the dynasty, Aqā Muḡammad Khān. "His knowledge of the character and feeling of others," says Sir John Malcolm, "was wonderful; and it is to this knowledge, and his talent for concealing from all the secret purposes of his soul, that we must refer his extraordinary success in subduing his enemies. Against these he never employed force till art had failed; and, even in war, his policy effected more than his sword"¹⁹. I have referred to the importance of the *Shāh-Nāma* in moulding the national consciousness of the Persian people. It was apparently the custom in the wars of the 18th century for "persons to recite animating verses, from the *Shāh-Nāmeḡ*, at the commencement of and during the battle." Malcolm was able to listen to the performance of an old groom who had made such recitations for the Zand rulers 'Alī Murād and Luṭf 'Alī; and he remarks that "the late king, Aga Mahomed, was particularly fond of this usage, and bestowed marks of his favour on such minstrels"²⁰. We may assume that this practice obtained in earlier times also and that the chanting of passages from the National Epic contributed to the victories gained over the hosts of Turan by Shāh 'Abbās the Great.

¹⁹ Quote by Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. IV, 145.

²⁰ *Sketches of Persia* (London, 1827), Vol. II, 204.