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978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF IRAN

IN EIGHT VOLUMES

Volume I

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Frontmatter

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THE CAMBRIDGE
HISTORY OF
IRAN

Volume I

THE LAND OF IRAN

edited by

W. B. FISHER

Professor of Geography, University of Durham



CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

“Considering the immense number of books which have been written about Persia”, observed E. G. Browne in 1902, “it is strange that so few attempts should hitherto have been made to set forth in a comprehensive yet comparatively concise and summary form the history of that ancient and most interesting kingdom.” It was partly in order to remedy this defect that Browne embarked upon his greatest work, *A Literary History of Persia*. Yet despite the many virtues of that splendid opus, and the writings of Sir Percy Sykes and others in the meanwhile, J. H. Iliffe could still write in 1953, “The neglect which has engulfed Persia and Persian history is the more remarkable when the range and splendour of her achievements are considered”.

When I undertook to edit a volume of essays on Persian culture and civilization, *The Legacy of Persia*, my purpose was to produce a volume of moderate size which would adumbrate, and little more, the contributions made by the Iranian people in the various fields of human endeavour, in a form acceptable to the general public. That book fulfilled and continues to fulfil its limited aim. But the experience gained during that by no means light labour more than ever made me realize the justice of Browne's and Iliffe's words, and stimulated the ambition to create something more substantial.

During the years when His Excellency Qods Nakhai was Ambassador of Iran in London, I discussed with him on a number of occasions the desirability of having a full-length work on the history and cultural achievements of his country; and naturally (for His Excellency is after all a Persian, and therefore both poet and artist, and lover of poetry and art) our discussions disclosed an admirable unanimity of opinion. At this juncture I was reminded of the remark of the Second Merchant to Angelo in *A Comedy of Errors*: “I am bound for Persia, and want guilders for my voyage.” To my intense gratification, His Excellency was soon able to convey to me the offer of a most handsome subsidy from the National Iranian Oil Company towards the costs of compiling and publishing a large-scale History of Iran. The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, being informed of this offer, speedily matched it by a like generous undertaking; and so the idea of a *Cambridge History of Iran* was born.

The next step was to constitute a Board of Editors. I was very

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Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

fortunate, and immediately secured the consent of a number of eminent scholars to join with me in setting up a Board. The Board at its first meeting agreed upon a plan of work, and the Syndics accepted their recommendation that the enterprise should be completed in eight volumes of some 500 pages each. Each individual volume was to be planned by a Volume Editor; and here again the scholars invited to undertake this arduous task, involving correspondence with many authorities of many lands who would (it was hoped) write the respective chapters, accepted the call with encouraging celerity.

The entire enterprise has prospered so remarkably—a model, one dares say, of international co-operation—that now in 1968 this first volume of the eight is published; to be followed immediately by the fifth. The scheme (to quote from the Notes for Contributors) is as follows:

Volume I	Physical and Economic Geography; Anthropology and Demography; Flora and Fauna.
Volume II	Prehistory; the Archaeological Periods; Iran in relation to the Ancient World.
Volume III	The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanid Periods.
Volume IV	The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs
Volume V	The Saljuq and Mongol Periods.
Volume VI	The Timurid and Safavid Periods.
Volume VII	The Eighteenth Century to the Present.
Volume VIII	Bibliography; Notes on Folklore; Survey of Research; Indices.

Volumes II–VII are classified according to major events and dynasties in Iranian history for convenience only: the series is not intended to be simply a history of Iran. It is intended to be a survey of the culture which has flourished in the Iranian region, and this culture's contribution to the civilization of the world. In addition to history, the religious, philosophical, political, economic, scientific and artistic elements in Iranian civilization will be described, with a measure of emphasis on the geographical and ecological factors that have contributed to this civilization's special character.

Volume I (as now presented) will be a demographical and geographical study forming a compendium of information about Iran (physically speaking) not hitherto collected concisely and accessibly in a single work. Inevitably, so rapid is the course of modern developments, particularly in regard to land reform and oil technology, judgments

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Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

reached in certain chapters will have been overtaken by events. Whereas, therefore, the remaining volumes have been entrusted to the editorship of specialists in the human history and culture of Iran, the editor appointed for this first volume is a distinguished geographer of the Middle East.

When the reader thus surveys the majestic panorama of the history of Iran, disclosing a continuous civilization of nearly three millennia, he cannot fail to wonder at the persistent integrity of that culture. Though the broad lands of Iran have been ravaged not seldom by foreign invaders, and from time to time held in captivity by alien rulers, the indigenous rulers and people of Iran have never lost faith in the high destiny of their nation. Ideas from abroad, if proven valuable by the test of years, have been readily, indeed eagerly *iranized*, to accumulate an ever richer inheritance. Physical disasters—the destruction of beautiful cities and the slaughter of their inhabitants—have served often as a challenge and a spur to national revival. Throughout all these centuries of turbulence the Iranian people have remained true to themselves and their most prized ideals.

The Board of Editors desire to express their hearty thanks to all those who have made possible the realization of their plan: first, to His Excellency Qods Nakhai and the Directors of the National Iranian Oil Company; next, to the many scholars who have agreed to participate in this undertaking; finally, to the Syndics of Cambridge University Press, the Secretary of the Press, and his staff.

It may be taken as a happy augury, not only for the success of this enterprise, but for the prosperity of other like tasks in which Great Britain in the reign of Queen Elizabeth II joins hands with Iran, that this work has been begun and, God willing, will be completed during the reign of His Imperial Majesty the Shahanshah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

A. J. ARBERRY

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>List of Plates</i>	<i>page</i> xiii
<i>Volume Editor's Preface</i>	xv
<i>Units of measurement</i>	xix

PART 1: THE LAND

I PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY	3
<i>by W. B. FISHER, Professor of Geography, University of Durham</i>	
2 GEOLOGY	111
<i>by J. V. HARRISON, University of Oxford</i>	
3 GEOMORPHOLOGY	186
<i>by K. SCHARLAU, Late Professor of Geography, University of Marburg</i>	
4 THE ORIGIN OF THE ZAGROS DEFILES	195
<i>by T. M. OBERLANDER, University of California, Berkeley</i>	
5 CLIMATE	212
<i>by M. H. GANJI, Director General of the Iranian Meteorological Service, and Professor, University of Tebrān</i>	
6 SOILS	250
<i>by M. L. DEWAN, Land and Water Development Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, and J. FAMOURI, Director, Soil Institute, Ministry of Agriculture, Iran</i>	
<i>Note on Clays by R. H. S. ROBERTSON</i>	
7 HYDROGRAPHY	264
<i>by T. M. OBERLANDER, University of California, Berkeley</i>	
8 VEGETATION	280
<i>by H. BOBEK, Professor of Geography, University of Vienna</i>	
9 MAMMALS	294
<i>by X. DE MISONNE, Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique, Brussels</i>	
10 ZOOGEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE LIZARD FAUNA OF IRAN	305
<i>by S. C. ANDERSON, Department of Amphibians and Reptiles, California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco</i>	
11 ORNITHOLOGY	372
<i>by S. JERVIS READ, Foreign Office, London</i>	

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

PART 2: THE PEOPLE

12	EARLY MAN IN IRAN	<i>page</i> 395
	<i>by E. SUNDERLAND, University of Durham</i>	
13	GEOGRAPHY OF SETTLEMENT	409
	<i>by X. DE PLANHOL, Professor of Geography, University of Nancy</i>	
	<i>Note on sources by JUDITH A. BROWN, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge</i>	
14	POPULATION	468
	<i>by J. BEKNAM, Social Research Institute, Tebrān</i>	

PART 3: ECONOMIC LIFE

15	MINERALS	489
	<i>by J. V. HARRISON, University of Oxford</i>	
16	INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES	517
	<i>by A. MELAMID, Professor of Geography, New York University</i>	
17	COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT, RETAIL TRADE AND SERVICES	552
	<i>by A. MELAMID, Professor of Geography, New York University</i>	
18	AGRICULTURE	565
	<i>by H. BOWEN-JONES, Professor of Geography, University of Durham</i>	
19	WATER USE IN NORTH-EAST IRAN	599
	<i>by D. J. FLOWER, University of Alberta</i>	
20	PASTORALISM, NOMADISM AND THE SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF IRAN	611
	<i>by E. SUNDERLAND, University of Durham</i>	
21	LAND REFORM IN IRAN	684
	<i>by K. S. MCLACHLAN, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London</i>	

PART 4: CONCLUSION

22	THE PERSONALITY OF IRAN	717
	<i>by W. B. FISHER, Professor of Geography, University of Durham</i>	
	<i>Bibliography</i>	741
	<i>Conversion Tables</i>	765
	<i>Index</i>	767

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PLATES

BETWEEN PAGES 192-3

- 1 Lake Rezá'iyeh, with Shāhī Island.
- 2 The Zagros in the region of Kāshān.
- 3 (a) The central Zagros in winter.
(b) The north-eastern Alburz.
- 4 (a) Duplicated faulting in the region of Bīsītūn.
(b) The Gākūn region of southern Iran, showing a salt dome.
- 5 (a) A mud volcano of the viscous type.
(b) The cone of a mud volcano of the fluid type.
- 6 Tang-i-Tāsar, in the Zagros, an ideal tang formation.
- 7 (a) A waste of "badlands" in the eastern Makrān.
(b) Wrinkled flysch at Kūh-i-Nārān in the eastern Makrān.
- 8 (a) Pillow lava in the flysch at Āb-i-Rāzī (Makrān region).
(b) The Kūh-i-Giriveh, near Pul-i-Kul in the Zagros Mountains: a mountain preserved by an eroded syncline.
- 9 (a) A quartz porphyry plug called Mil-i-Farhād extruded through Tertiary sediments in the Makrān.
(b) "Schuppen" structures produced by strong shearing of beds of uneven competence, at Sartap in the coastal Makrān.
- 10 (a) The north-east side of the Zagros Range at Du'l-Qarīb, where upper limbs of folds have been thrust to the south-west and a vestige of the volcanic belt is exposed.
(b) Karaj town and the Alburz Range.
- 11 Mount Damāvand, Alburz Range.
- 12 (a) Outskirts of Iṣfahān: irrigation cultivation.
(b) Irrigated cultivation near Iṣfahān, showing a qanāt.
- 13 (a) Junction of the Shaṭṭ al-'Arab and the Kārūn River in the upper Gulf area above Ābādān.
(b) Gurgān (Māzandarān) showing typical house-type.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF PLATES

- 14 An ancient qanāt on the outskirts of Tehrān, now partially over-run by suburban expansion.
- 15 (a) Deforestation on the northern Alburz slopes, Māzandarān province.
(b) Tehrān; a modern quarter.
- 16 The Royal Mosque at Iṣfahān, built by Shāh ‘Abbās I.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

VOLUME EDITOR'S PREFACE

It would be normal to expect that in approaching the study of a region so extensive, isolated, and incompletely known as is Iran, there would be much convenience in having at hand some kind of atlas or gazetteer to which reference could be made regarding location and distribution. This is in one aspect the basic function of a volume that appears as chronologically the earliest in a series entitled *The Cambridge History of Iran*: to set the physical stage for the human events that have unrolled their remarkable pattern over so long a period; and to render in some degree comprehensible the varied natural elements that together produce the overall physical environment of Iran. In this way it is hoped that volume I will in certain measure furnish support and function as a companion for the remainder of the series.

Yet the influence of natural environmental factors goes far beyond that of merely providing an unmoved backcloth against which the human drama takes place. A highly significant trend in modern geographical studies has been to demonstrate that the natural setting exerts pressures and influences of widely differing kinds. This topic is developed at length as the final contribution to the present volume: here, the writer wishes merely to state his opinion that in some cases these environmental influences are of limited effect, whilst in others they could be held to amount to control. It is the thesis of volume I that the natural elements of location, geological structure, physiography, and climate would appear to shape in distinct and recognizable ways the course of human activity, on a global and also on a regional scale. Even in a highly evolved and sophisticated society of long standing, where the apparent influences of environment would seem to have been diminished or possibly removed by human progress and activity, the proposition still holds, as the present writer believes—though in subtler and more indirect ways. To whatever degree the ingenuity of man may seek to obscure or vary the situation, there is really no way round such hard facts as, for instance, that Switzerland has been for long more easily defensible than Belgium; that petroleum is present in larger quantity and exploited more cheaply in Iran than in Italy; or that the climate of California attracts a greater volume of human settlement than that of Qatar or Labrador. R. H. Tawney saw the rise of capitalism as the effect of particular opportunities for resource-

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

VOLUME EDITOR'S PREFACE

use in the special environmental and human situation of Western Europe. Marx and Lenin, whilst denying the total control of physical environment over human will, ascribed the driving force of history basically to material situations and distributions; and from certain points of view the ideas of Rostow on "take-off" imply at least close involvement with environmental conditions.

Moreover, a civilization or culture never occurs in total isolation: Heyerdahl demonstrated that even the remotest islands of the largest ocean in the world could have been touched by influences originating hundreds of miles away. Just as man is not in himself an island, any study of a community must consider the problems of relations to outside territories and their inhabitants. Some peoples may be held to be fortunate in having had fairly well-defined, defensible, and endowed regions in which to live, whilst others have had to struggle with ungrateful, constricted, or amorphous territories.

Iran offers the picture of sharp identity as a geographical unit that derives from overall similarities based on highly varied and often harsh natural conditions at local level. The concept of a mosaic often occurs in reference to Iran, since whilst the smaller, regional, pieces tend to be markedly different, in totality a clear and recognizable pattern emerges at national level. Because of the character of Iranian geography, its inhabitants have experienced considerable vicissitude, and elucidation of the complex relationships involved between terrain and people is a principal aim of the present volume.

As C. S. Lewis recognized in his *New Ignorance and New Learning*,¹ part at least of the forces or abstractions which bear the names "destiny" or "fate" can be resolved into influences of a natural kind that derive from the physiographical environment. Such a situation appears also to have been apparent to many of the early savants of Iran—the astrologer–astronomer–mathematicians who were conscious of a cosmological control that often to them appeared more concrete than anything implied in the expressions destiny and fate. This awareness appears to have led to a search for a means of escape, in personal terms, from the sub-firmamental pattern of existence imposed by the natural conditions of Iran. Much of the content of Iranian poetry, though expressed in a different idiom, could be regarded as deep yearning for escape from the realities of human existence as confined and rounded by inexorable realities of the physical environment. Such

¹ C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 1–65.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

VOLUME EDITOR'S PREFACE

limitations and controls imposed by cosmology we now translate in terms of climate, physiology, resources, and territorial location; but the continuity of thought and similarity of concept are there.

In this volume treatment of the general topic of the land and people in Iran has been of necessity selective. Besides the inevitable limitation imposed by space, there are gaps in knowledge and understanding concerning certain regions and topics. The problem has obtruded, sometimes critically, as to whether it would be justifiable to risk a statement made in broad general terms, in order to give a reasonable overall appreciation; or whether, because of variation in quantity and reliability of data, to confine the writing to those topics which could be held to have a secure factual basis. One other difficulty, normal in works of this kind, is the barrier of language. To find experts in specialized fields adept in the one, two, or even three Oriental language families current in parts of Iran may be asking over-much. Lack of objective data, the sheer physical obstacles to extensive field investigation, and paucity of resources—human and financial—reduce further the available source material.

Knowledge in more detail of the upper atmospheric conditions over Iran, where extensive exchange of air-mass and energy takes place as two sharply dissimilar temperature contrasts develop seasonally, would greatly strengthen our appreciation of the varied weather conditions that affect the country. Similarly, we so far lack certain human data that would allow closer analysis of sociological situations among the populations of the country, though the situation is changing.

Mention has been made of difficulties and omissions. There has also been valuable and sustained assistance, both at a personal level, and from institutions. Certain contributors to this volume have been able to work in Iran thanks to interest from the Rockefeller Trustees, who generously supported proposals made from a relatively unknown university department. This initial interest was continued in a most timely way by the Hayter scheme which allowed further activities from Durham within the Middle East.

Travel in Iran is not always wholly straightforward, and the British Institute for Persian Studies, through its Director, Mr D. Stronach and Deputy Director, Mr B. Spooner, provided a welcoming and secure base from which field visits could be organized.

Grateful acknowledgment and thanks are also offered to the following organizations and individuals for the use (in whole or part) of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

VOLUME EDITOR'S PREFACE

reports, field material and learned articles made available to this volume either by private communication or general publication: the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the *AAPG Bulletin*, vol. XLII, no. 12, 1958 (P. E. Kent), and special publication, *Habitat of Oil* (1958) (N. L. Falcon); E. J. Brill, Ltd., Leiden, *Proc. 3rd World Petr. Cong.*, 1951; the British Petroleum Co. Ltd., London, for geological folder relating to S.W. Iran, 1956; the Geographical Association, Sheffield; *Geologische Jahrbuch*, vol. LI, Hanover, 1962 (R. Huckreide, M. Kursten, H. Venzlaff); the Institute of Petroleum, London, *Journal*, vol. xxx, 1944 (N. L. Falcon); Knapp Verlag, Halle/Düsseldorf; Laboratoire de Géographie Physique et de Géologie Dynamique, Paris, *Révue*, vol. VII, 1934 (A. Rivière); National Iranian Oil Co., Tehrân, Geological Map of Iran, 1959; Schweiz. Mineralogische u. Petrographische Gesellschaft, Basel, *Schweiz. Min. Petr. Mitt.* vol. XLII, 1962 (A. Gansser and H. Huber).

My colleagues in Durham have been willing to tolerate a certain remoteness and ineffectuality on my part when local interests were for a time superseded by Iranian preoccupations. To Professor H. Bowen Jones especially I owe much in that he has afforded advice, support, and material and intellectual sustenance during a period of stress in part at least related to the accordion-like expansions, halts, and contractions that now seem normal in British University life. Mr D. L. Dent and Mr R. G. Hartley have given much assistance in the preparation of maps and diagrams; and the whole process of writing owes a great deal to energy, helpfulness, and concern from Miss S. J. Pennington (now Mrs M. Billingham). Miss J. A. Brown, Dr J. I. Clarke and Dr D. F. Darwent have kindly allowed the use of some of their own work on Iranian cities. The task of functioning as Volume Editor was greatly lightened by the initiative, vision, and courtesy afforded by the General Editor, Professor A. J. Arberry, and I am glad especially to express my obligations to the Editorial Secretary of the Series, Mr P. W. Avery, for friendly comment, sustained interest, and unflinching understanding and welcome. Lastly, I also wish to record my deep appreciation of the hospitality regularly extended on frequent occasions over the past few years by King's College, Cambridge.

W. B. FISHER

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-06935-9 - The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran

Edited by W. B. Fisher

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

Use of units, whether metric or otherwise, has proved to be an awkward matter, the more so as Britain is currently edging towards wider employment of the metric system. The solution adopted throughout this volume is to regard the various systems as wholly interchangeable; and rather than give an equivalent alongside, which might unduly encumber the text, a particular system as used by an individual author has been preserved. Conversion tables to be found on pp. 765–6 will, it is hoped, allow such equivalents as may be wanted to be readily obtained.

W. B. F.