

Relations between the Safavid State and its Non-Muslim Minorities¹

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ABSTRACT *The article outlines the history of relations between the Safavid state and its dhimmī minorities. Important policies derived from and peculiar to Ithna ‘Asharī doctrine are also discussed as well as the importance of the ruler’s discretion in the application and enforcement of the policies within the region. Particular attention is paid to the period of rule under ‘Abbās I in which multiculturalism and tolerance were prevalent throughout the kingdom. The more hostile relations of the state to its non-Muslim minorities before and after ‘Abbās I’s reign are attributed to the eventual decline of the state.*

Introduction

Theological and Juridical Background

The Qur’ānic proof texts on relations between Muslims and adherents of other faiths send a mixed message. On the one hand, we have Q. 2:256: *la ikrāha fī al-dīn*, ‘there is no compulsion in religion’, which has been interpreted to mean that Muslims should be tolerant of other faiths; and 109:6: *lakum dīnakum wa-lī dīnī*, ‘to you your religion and to me my religion’, which appears to indicate acceptance of religious pluralism. On the other hand, we have 5:54: *yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū lā tattakhidhū al-yahūda wa-al-naṣārā awliyā’a ... wa-man yatawallahum minkum fa-innahum minhum*, ‘take not the Jews and Christians for friends ... He among you who taketh them for friends is one of them’, which does not seem to augur well for inter-faith dialogue.

However, the point of departure in any discussion about relations between a Muslim state and its non-Muslim minorities has of necessity to be the *dhimma*, the contractual relationship that granted to some, but not all, non-Muslim minorities, a degree of protection of life and property under the Sharī‘a in return for payment of the *jizya*, or poll tax. This poll tax was in force until the nineteenth century, and was ‘never at anytime or anyplace allowed to lapse’.² The *dhimma*, which defined the ‘legal status of non-Muslim subjects in Islam, was modeled largely on the position of the non-citizen groups in the Eastern Roman empire’.³ It did not spring into being fully fledged. In addition to payment of the *jizya*, non-Muslims were subject to certain restrictions, for example with regard to their dress. In the period immediately after the Muslim conquests of the first/seventh century, the dress of the Arab conquerors clearly distinguished them from their subjects, but as time went on, this difference became less marked, and various restrictions were imposed on *dhimmīs*, or persons covered by the *dhimma*, to distinguish them from Muslims. For example, Jews and Christians were required to wear a yellow patch on their outer garment, and/or a girdle called *zunnār*, and a turban, ‘usually blue for the Christian, yellow for the Jew’.⁴ Other discriminatory

regulations governed the use of places of worship, the height of buildings constructed by *dhimmi*s, and the kind of animals they were allowed to ride, etc.

The contractual relationship of the *dhimma*, and consequently that degree of protection afforded by it, was available only to those religious minorities defined by Muslim tradition as *ahl al-kitāb* ('People of the Book'), that is, those possessing a Scripture recognized by Islam as a valid divine revelation, albeit one declared to be superseded by Islam. The term *ahl al-kitāb* originally referred only to Jews and Christians, possessors of the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospel. It was later extended to embrace two other groups, neither of which possessed a Scripture recognized as a valid revelation by Islam: first, the Sabaeans, who are mentioned in the Qur'ān in the same breath as Jews and Christians (2:62; 5:69); and second, the Zoroastrians, who of course constituted most of the population of Iran at the time of the Muslim conquest. The Sabaeans comprise two rather mysterious sects in early Islamic times about whose identity scholarly controversy and speculation still rage.⁵ The Zoroastrians are mentioned, along with Sabaeans, Christians, and *mushrikūn* (lit. 'those who associate other persons with God', i.e. 'polytheists'), in Q. 22:17, which reads: 'Lo! Those who believe [this revelation], and those who are Jews, and the Sabaeans and the Christians and the Magians and the idolaters—Lo! Allah will decide between them on the Day of Resurrection. Lo! Allah is witness over all things' (Pickthall's translation).

During the caliphate of 'Umar (13–23/634–44), however, one of the Companions of the Prophet, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, apparently persuaded the Caliph that Muhammad had accepted *jizya* (poll tax) from a group of Zoroastrians in eastern Arabia, and thus a precedent was created for granting Zoroastrians the status of *ahl al-kitāb*.⁶ Possibly as a result of acquiring this quasi-*dhimmi* status, Zoroastrians in Iran were allowed to keep their fire temples, although in Iraq they were confiscated.⁷

The dhimma in Practice during the Period of the Historical Caliphate (41–656/661–1258)

How rigidly were the Qur'ānic and juridical restrictions on non-Muslims described above enforced in practice? During the period of the caliphate, the position of *dhimmi*s was 'in general tolerable but insecure'.⁸ Claude Cahen considers that 'on the whole the condition of the *dhimmi*s ... was until about the 6th/12th century in the west, and the 7th/13th century in the east, essentially satisfactory, in comparison with, say, that of the admittedly smaller Jewish community in the neighbouring Byzantine empire'.⁹ However, as Bernard Lewis notes, 'discrimination was always there... inherent in the system and institutionalized in law and practice'.¹⁰ To generalize, it was the 'ulamā' and the Qur'ān commentators who called for the most rigorous interpretation of the regulations regarding *dhimmi*s. For example, when the *jizya* was collected, said the jurists, the principle of the ritual humiliation of the *dhimmi* should be upheld. They based this principle on their interpretation of the words *wa-hum sāghirūna*, which occur at the end of the Qur'ānic proof text 9:29, which reads: 'Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and his Messenger have forbidden—such men as practise the religion of Truth, being of those who have been given the Book—until they pay tribute out of hand *and have been humbled* (Arberry's translation; my italics).

Pickthall renders *wa-hum sāghirūna* as 'being brought low'; Savory as 'jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient soumis'; Rodwell as 'and they be humbled'. In other words, payment of the *jizya* was not only payment of a tax but a symbol of submission.¹¹ In brief, although in practice the enforcement of the regulations governing *dhimmi*s 'fell very much short

of the programme of the purists',¹² nevertheless the position of *dhimmi*s was far from secure. If the 'ulamā' did not engage in active persecution of non-Muslims, they could when opportunity offered engage in harassment of them. Muslim rulers, who in general favored peaceful co-existence as long as the *dhimmi*s acknowledged their inferior position and the dominance of the Islamic state, might on occasion display intolerance from an excess of personal religious zeal, or to win popular acclaim, or at the instigation of some member of the religious institution. *Dhimmi*s were always at the mercy of mob violence incited by some bigoted official, although they could, of course, appeal to the *qāḍī*s' courts for redress, citing their protected status under the *dhimma*. If *dhimmi*s were perceived as becoming too rich or powerful, they ran the risk of becoming targets of the authorities. Finally, after the Reconquista and the Crusades, Christians ran the special risk of being seen as collaborators with the enemies of Islam. Non-*dhimmi*s, of course, such as the Manichaeans and Mazdakites, had no redress if persecuted. In broad terms, such was the situation that obtained under the caliphate.

The Position of Non-Muslim Minorities in Iran in the Pre-Safavid Period

Under the Rule of the Mongol Il-Khans (654–754/1256–1353)

The destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 AD, and the putting to death of the 'Abbāsid caliph, dealt a body-blow to the Islamic world. The establishment of the Mongol state in Iran and Iraq had an important effect on the non-Muslim minorities in those regions, because Mongol rule radically changed their status *vis-à-vis* the state. The traditional Mongol policy of non-identification with any particular faith translated in practice into official tolerance of all religions. Bar Hebraeus, in his *Chronicon Syriacum*, says: 'There is neither slave nor free man, neither believer nor pagan, neither Christian nor Jew, but [the Mongols] regard all men as belonging to one and the same stock'.¹³

As a result of this official attitude, 'there was a marked improvement in the position of Christian and Jewish communities and an increase of their influence'.¹⁴ As a corollary, the position of Islam in the Il-Khanid state was weakened, and the protection afforded by the *dhimma* became largely irrelevant as far as non-Muslim minorities were concerned, until the accession of Ghazan Khan (1295 AD). The Il-Khan Teguder, who came to the throne in 1282, had adopted Islam and the name Aḥmad, but does not seem to have changed the *status quo*. Profiting from this new atmosphere of religious freedom, many Jews rose to high office; a notable case was that of the *vazīr* Sa'd al-Dawla. However, when Sa'd al-Dawla appointed members of his own family to a number of high offices of state, this proved too much for the amirs to tolerate, and they made their displeasure known.

The death of the Mongol Great Khan Qubilay in 1294 AD, and the resulting loss of cohesion in the Mongol universal empire, meant that the rulers of the major sub-divisions of that empire felt that they either no longer needed, or could not obtain, legitimization of their rule from Peking. How could the Il-Khanid rulers of Iran obtain legitimization of their rule in the future? When the Il-Khanid ruler of Iran, Ghazan Khan, came to the throne the year following the death of Qubilay, his powerful adviser Amir Nawruz, the man to whom Ghazan owed his throne, argued that, since the majority of his subjects were Muslims, he should seek legitimization of his rule by adopting Islam. Ghazan Khan concurred. At Lar, on 19 June 1295, he announced his conversion to Islam,¹⁵ and on 3 November 1295 he adopted the Muslim name

Maḥmūd.¹⁶ Islam became the official religion of the Il-Khanid empire. Ghazan no longer described himself as Il-Khan, or ‘vassal Khan’, but as ‘ruler by the grace of God’. On 2 November 1297 Ghazan and his court formally adopted the Muslim head-dress (the turban) in place of the broad-brimmed Mongol hat. Having chosen Islam, Ghazan had a further choice to make: Sunnī Islam or Shī‘ī Islam? Although he chose the former, he was not unsympathetic toward the latter, and he made a point of visiting the Shī‘ī shrine at Karbala.

The promulgation of Islam as the official religion of the Il-Khanid state brought to an end some 40 years of religious freedom for Iran’s non-Muslim minorities—both *dhimmīs* and non-*dhimmīs*. At Tabriz, ‘the first decree of the new Islamic regime was being enforced within the town, viz., that all churches, synagogues and Buddhist temples were to be destroyed here, at Baghdad and throughout the Il-Khan’s dominions’.¹⁷ In the case of *dhimmīs*, the restrictions governing them were again enforced. Moreover, the Christian communities, which had welcomed the Mongols as liberators from Islamic rule, and had tried to interest the Christian powers of Europe in the possibility of war on two fronts against the Islamic world (*dār al-islām*), paid the penalty for having collaborated with the Mongol conquerors:

The persecutions, and disgrace, and mockings, and ignominy which the Christians suffered at this time, especially in Baghdad, words cannot describe ... No Christian dared to appear in the streets or market, but the women went out and came in and bought and sold, because they could not be distinguished from the Arab women, and could not be identified as Christians, though those who were recognized as Christians were disgraced, and slapped, and beaten and mocked.¹⁸

Ghazan Khan eventually had to intervene himself to check the persecutions that Christians were suffering at the hands of vengeful Muslims. Many Nestorian Christians either became converts to Islam during this period, or retreated to the mountainous areas of the upper Tigris where they still live today.¹⁹ Not even conversion to Islam could necessarily save one from posthumous retribution. Ghazan Khan’s famous *vazir*, Rashid al-Din, who was the son of a Jewish druggist in Hamadan, became a convert to Islam at about the age of 30, probably to avoid being relegated once more to *dhimmi* status. *Sub specie aeternitatis*, however, this conversion did not prove adequate, because a century later, in 1407, the Timurid prince Miranshah ordered the exhumation of the bones of Rashid al-Din and their re-interment in the Jewish cemetery at Tabriz,²⁰ so that the *vazir* ‘might not share peace with true believers [i.e. Muslims]’.

As was only to be expected in such a hostile religious climate, it was non-Muslim minorities who were not *ahl al-kitāb*, and therefore lacked even the protection of the *dhimma*, in particular the Buddhists, who were hardest hit.²¹ ‘The Buddhist temples were transformed into mosques, former Muslim properties were restored to their original owners, and the Buddhist priests, of whom only a few remained in the country, were divested of their privileges.’²² The harshness of this persecution is the more remarkable when one considers the high favor accorded to Buddhists by generations of Mongols, and recalls the fact that Ghazan Khan himself was brought up as a Buddhist. Once again, it was the bigoted Amir Nawruz, to whom as already mentioned Ghazan owed his throne and to whom, therefore, he presumably felt indebted, who seems to have been the prime instigator of this persecution. In fact, the persecution of Buddhists began in Khurasan while Ghazan Khan was still governor of that province under the tutelage of Amir Nawruz; for example, the Buddhist temple at Quchan was destroyed

during that period. Ghazan Khan's new policies were carried out ruthlessly in the face of revolts in 1295–6 by Mongol amirs who opposed them. In one year, Ghazan Khan executed five Mongol princes of the blood and 38 amirs. Not inappropriately, his victims eventually included even the king-maker, Amir Nawruz.

Almost incredibly, Ghazan Khan concealed his conversion to Islam so successfully that in 1300 he could still be considered in the West as 'a friend of Christianity'. Ghazan's successor, Oljeitu (703–716/1304–16), was baptized as an infant with the name Nicholas, but subsequently became a Sunnī Muslim of the Ḥanafī school.²³ In the winter of 1309–10, apparently wearied by tedious juridical disputes between the scholars of the Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī schools, he suddenly announced his conversion to Ithna 'Asharī Shī'ism. Just before he died in 1316, he switched allegiance yet again, and ordained that the names of the 'rightly guided' Caliphs be restored to the *khufba*. Like his brother, Ghazan Khan, before him, he concealed the fact of his conversion to Islam from the Western rulers, notably King Edward II of England and Pope Clement V, with whom he was trying to negotiate alliances against the Mamlūks. The Pope said that Oljeitu's letter to him 'strengthened him like spiritual food',²⁴ but, once the West realized the truth (in about 1308), it lost interest in the idea of a military alliance. Nevertheless, the Pope apparently continued to be attracted by the possibility of missionary activity in Iran, and in 1318 he founded the archbishopric of Sultaniyya in northwestern Iran; the first incumbent was Francis of Perugia, who was succeeded in 1323 by William Adam.²⁵ The last effective ruler of the Il-Khanid dynasty, Abū Sa'īd (716–36/1316–35), restored Sunnī orthodoxy.

In the Fifteenth Century: a time of political turmoil and religious ferment

The history of the central Islamic lands, particularly the Irano-Turkish cultural area, during the ... period from the decline of Mongol power in the mid-14th/8th century to the rise of the Ottoman, Safavi and Uzbek empires at the beginning of the 16th/10th century remains extremely obscure in many of its fundamental aspects. This unfortunate state of affairs is in part due to the extraordinarily complicated political decentralization of the period.²⁶

As already noted, one result of the Mongol state's policy of non-identification with any particular religion in Iran, prior to the accession of Ghazan Khan, was that non-Muslim minorities obtained greater freedom, and members of the Christian and Jewish communities especially acquired more influence and rose to high office in the state. A possibly unforeseen consequence was that non-Sunnī Muslims, above all Ithna 'Asharī Shī'īs, also became more influential, and the spread of Shī'ism in Iran during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, not infrequently under the guise of Sufism, was a major factor in making possible the promulgation of Ithna 'Asharī Shī'ism as the official religion of the new Safavid state in 1501.

The collapse of any sort of centralized authority in the Il-Khanid state after the death of Abū Sa'īd (1335) led to the appearance of a number of minor dynasties in various parts of Iran. One of these, the Sarbadar dynasty in Khurasan, has been accurately called 'a revolutionary Shī'ī polity without effective dynastic succession'.²⁷ All these were swept away by the 'barren and destructive campaigns of Timur in Iran between the years 783–807/1381–1404, which created a political and social vacuum in South-Western Asia'.²⁸ Some of the popular religious organizations which moved into this vacuum were of a militantly messianic character, but the history of the fifteenth

century, after the death of Timur in 1405, is essentially a struggle for supremacy in Iran between the descendants of Timur, who initially held central Iran (‘Iraq-i ‘Ajam), Fars, Khurasan, and Transoxania, and the two Turcoman dynasties, the Qara Qoyunlu and the Aq Qoyunlu, which established themselves in succession in northwestern Iran and soon successfully challenged the Timurids for control of central Iran.²⁹ The Timurid rulers considered themselves to be champions of ‘orthodox’ (i.e. Sunnī) Islam, and saw their ruler as heralding a return to ‘orthodoxy’ after a period of Mongol rule, during which the *yasa* (the traditional Mongol code of customary law) was superimposed on the Sharī‘a (Islamic law) and introduced practices which contravened the latter. But even in Khurasan, the heartland of the residual Timurid empire in Iran, *dā‘īs*, or proselytizing missionaries, devoted to the Safavid cause were active. In fact, the sectarian violence between Sunnīs and Shī‘īs at Harat, the chief city of Khurasan, was bitter and frequent, both under Timurid rule and later, after Shah Isma‘il had incorporated Khurasan into the Safavid empire in 916/1510. The religious views of neither the Qara Qoyunlu nor the Aq Qoyunlu rulers seem to have been extreme. The Qara Qoyunlu were not militant Shī‘īs, but, taking advantage of the prevailing wind in Iran, they tried to ‘unify their adepts on a shi’a platform’.³⁰ The Aq Qoyunlu, on the other hand, were nominally Sunnīs, but were not averse to making a political alliance with Calo Johannes, the Christian Emperor of Trebizond, through the marriage of Uzun Hasan, the most powerful of the Aq Qoyunlu rulers, to the Emperor’s daughter, Despina Khatun. As John Woods rightly says: ‘It is no exaggeration to say that the prevailing religious winds during [the 15th century] were popular, Shī‘ī and ‘Alid, even in circles nominally Sunni. This confessional ambiguity may be seen in many facets of life in the central Islamic lands before the rise of the Safavis’.³¹

In other words, the religious ferment of the fifteenth century in Iran was preparing the ground for the transition from Sunnism to Ithna ‘Asharī Shī‘ism under the Safavids, whose militantly Shī‘ite *da‘wa* (religious propaganda) was being greeted enthusiastically by the Turcoman tribesmen in the northwest of Iran, in Azerbaijan, and in the Armenian highlands. Little is known of the situation of the non-Muslim minorities in Iran during this period, but one may hazard a guess that, in the absence of any oppressive Islamic central government, their lot was not unfavorable.

Relations between the Safavid State and its Non-Muslim Minorities

In the Early Safavid State

According to the *Ahsam al-Tavarikh*, when Shah Isma‘il entered Tabriz in 1501, one of his first acts was to order the *khaḫībs* to introduce into the *khutba* the names of the Twelve Imāms of the Ithna ‘Asharī Shī‘ī rite, and to use the Shī‘ī formulae *inna ‘aliyyan walī allāh*, and *ḥayya ilā khayri al-‘amal*, which had not been used in the lands of Islam since the coming of Tughril Beg—that is, for four and a half centuries.³²

Did the establishment of the Safavid state, and the promulgation of Twelver Shī‘ism as its official religion, change the pattern of relations between the Muslim rulers of Iran and their non-Muslim minorities which had obtained in general, with the exceptions under Il-Khanid rule already noted, during the preceding eight and a half centuries? During that long period, the attitude of successive Muslim governments had been one of tolerance/indifference/contempt (choose your word), punctuated from time to time by outbursts of religious severity which rarely escalated to the point of actual persecution:

The enthronement of the Safavids, a militant Shī'ite dynasty with Messianic claims, in Iran at the beginning of the sixteenth century also led to a worsening in the position of the non-Muslims, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. Under the Safavid shahs, they were subject to frequent vexations and persecutions, and at times to forced conversions.³³

Before examining the evidence for this statement, I would like to suggest a couple of theological and ideological reasons, peculiar to Ithna 'Asharī Shī'ism, as to why this change in attitude might have occurred:

- the doctrine of *najāsāt*, or 'ritual impurity', which might be termed the Shī'ite 'added touch';
- the special Ithna 'Asharī doctrine of the Imāmate and its messianism.

To take these points in order: first, if one religion, in this case Islam, considers the adherents of other faiths to be unclean (*najīs*), it is hard to argue that relations between the two can be based on goodwill and mutual respect. Bernard Lewis argues that 'obsessive concern with the dangers of ritual pollution by unclean persons of another group is virtually limited to Iranian Shī'ism and may be influenced by Zoroastrian practices', and he asserts that 'it is unknown to mainstream Islam'.³⁴ However, the concept that those who have rejected, or have not yet accepted, the revelation vouchsafed to the Prophet Muhammad are unclean is certainly not absent from Sunnī Muslim tradition. Toshihoko Izutsu cites the celebrated story from Ibn Iṣḥāq's *Biography of the Prophet* about Fāṭima, the sister of the pious 'Umar, who became the second caliph. Fāṭima, a recent convert to Islam, refused to allow her brother 'Umar to touch a manuscript page of the Qur'ān that she was reading because he, being still a polytheist (*mushrik*) was unclean (*rijs*).³⁵ The Qur'ān is quite specific that unbelievers are 'unclean' and Izutsu points out that 'the only semantic difference between [*rijs* and *najīs*] is, according to some Arab philologists, that *rijs* is used mostly in reference to things that are 'filthy by nature', while *najīs* means mostly things that are 'filthy according to Reason or Law'.³⁶ Arberrv translates *rijs* as 'an abomination', but Savary translates the word exactly as 'immonde'. Nevertheless, it is true that Ithna 'Asharī Shī'īs have always laid greater emphasis on the 'uncleanness' of infidels than have Sunnīs, and, with the resurgence of the power of the religious classes in Iran this century, the issue has once again come to the fore. In 1907 a local shaykh in Kirmanshah, with the support of the merchants and artisans, revived the traditional restrictions governing Jewish *dhimmi*s. In addition (the Ithna 'Asharī 'added touch!'), Jews were forbidden to go out of doors when it rained, for fear that a Muslim passerby might be rendered ritually unclean by coming into contact with rainwater that had been in contact with the bodies of Jews.³⁷ More recently, of course, Ayatullah Khumaini restated the Ithna 'Asharī position on impurity with uncompromising harshness; among the eleven things he listed as impure are non-Muslim men and women.³⁸

A couple of vignettes will show that the principle of *najāsāt* was on occasion upheld in Safavid Iran. The first concerns the visit to the court of Shah Tahmasp in 1562 of the Elizabethan adventurer Anthony Jenkinson. Jenkinson was not, of course, an indigenous non-Muslim. The Shah, on being told that Jenkinson was not a Muslim, exclaimed: 'Oh thou unbeliever, we have no need to have friendship with the unbelievers'. This attitude seems to be a reflection of Q. 5:51: 'Take not the Christians and Jews for friends'. Then came the Ithna 'Asharī 'added touch': as Jenkinson left the audience chamber, he was disconcerted to notice a servant following behind him 'with a bassinet

of sand, sifting all the way that I had gone within the said palace'.³⁹ In other words, the footprints of the infidel were deemed to have polluted the ground upon which he had walked. The second vignette comes from the French traveler Jean de Thevenot, who was in Isfahan in 1664, toward the end of the reign of Shah 'Abbās II. Christians, he noted, were not allowed to enter the coffee-houses, or to use the public baths, because they were *najis* ('impure'), and if they were apprehended in the Royal Mosque they were 'driven out with cudgels like a dog'.⁴⁰

My second point concerns the peculiar Ithna 'Asharī doctrine of the Imāmate and the messianic ideology which developed from it. The doctrine of the Imāmate was born soon after the death of the Prophet in 632 AD and the subsequent schism between the Sunnīs, who chose one of the Prophet's Companions to be his successor or caliph, and those who considered that 'Alī, his cousin and son-in-law, was his rightful successor. The latter constituted the *shī'at 'alī*, or 'Party of 'Alī [Shī'īs]'. 'Alī became the fourth caliph and, after his death in 661 AD, the Shī'īs gave their allegiance not to the ruling Sunnī caliph but to the descendants of 'Alī in the male line, whom they termed Imāms. In 260/873–4 the Twelfth Shī'ī Imām disappeared from earth while still an infant, and went into occultation. For about 70 years, until about 940 AD, the 'Hidden Imām' was represented on earth by a series of four *vakils*, or 'vicegerents', the fourth of whom died without designating a successor. The Shī'ī community then had to face the serious problem of who should be its leader. The consensus of the community was that the *mujtahids*, that is, the most eminent jurists and theologians of the time, should represent the Hidden Imām on earth until his Second Coming. The Hidden Imām thus became a messianic figure known as 'The Lord of the Age', whose return will herald the Day of Judgement and will usher in an era of justice and equity on earth.

Shī'ī messianism might appear to have no direct bearing on the relations between the Safavid state and its non-Muslim minorities, but, before one accepts this proposition, two things must be borne in mind. First, Ithna 'Asharī Shī'īs, because of this messianic ideology, tend to regard any form of government other than that of the Hidden Imām to be illegitimate. In the continuing absence (*ghayba*) of the Hidden Imām, the *mujtahids*, by general consensus, are considered to be his representatives (*nā'ib*) on earth. It therefore follows that, in a Shī'ite state, the *mujtahids* should be regarded as the only legitimate authority. Second, in the course of time, the *mujtahids* not only arrogated to themselves the role of *nā'ib-i imām*, but also one of the Imām's attributes, namely his *'iṣma*, 'sinlessness' or 'infallibility'. This still might not have had any relevance to the governance of Iran unless the *mujtahids*, who later adopted the title of *Āyatullāh*, or 'miraculous sign of God', were ever to be in a position to exercise the Imām's authority and wield actual governing, that is to say political, power in Iran. If this ever happened, because their authority could not in theory be questioned, it would have necessarily a significant impact not only on their Muslim subjects but also on their non-Muslim minorities. Such proved to be the case after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979.

Under Shah 'Abbās (1588–1629)

So far, we have been concerned primarily with the theological and juridical aspects of the relations between the Safavid state and its non-Muslim minorities. The policies introduced by Shah 'Abbās I, however, attached much greater importance to interaction between the two on different levels, namely the political and commercial. They marked a radical departure from the religious bigotry, already alluded to, of Shah

Tahmasp, whose reign of 52 years was longer than that of any other Persian ruler except that of the Sasanid monarch, Shapur II (309–79 AD).

Before we consider the impact of these policies on the non-Muslim minorities, perhaps we should spell out exactly who constituted these minorities. At the time of ‘Abbās I, the indigenous non-Muslim communities in Iran comprised Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Hindus (Indians). The Christians may be broken down into the following groups: Armenians, Georgians, Syrians (Jacobites), and Chaldeans (also known as Nestorians or ‘Assyrians’). The largest group of Christians, the Armenians, must be further sub-divided into the Uniates, those who were in communion with Rome though keeping their own liturgy; and the majority, termed ‘schismatics’ by the Roman Church, who rejected the ‘real supremacy and infallibility of the Pope’,⁴¹ and were subject to the Armenian see of Echmiadzin. These latter were known as Gregorians, taking their name from Gregory the Illuminator, who established the first Armenian Church in the fourth century AD.

‘Abbās’s new policy of religious tolerance was not altruistic. His main objectives were twofold: first, to make Iran strong enough to expel all the Ottoman and Uzbek forces from Persian soil and to defend its borders against future invasions; and second, to make Iran economically strong and prosperous. Iran had fallen into relative isolation as a result of the expansion of the Ottoman empire, which lay across its natural lines of communication and trade with the West. In all things a pragmatist, ‘Abbās realized that a good way to circumvent this virtual blockade would be to develop political and diplomatic relations with the Christian powers of Europe. He was astute enough to see that the best way to achieve this would be to create a religious climate favorable to Christians in Iran as a whole and particularly to those in his new capital city, Isfahan. And what better way to create this new climate of religious tolerance than to allow Catholic orders to establish themselves in Iran, to open religious houses at which the faithful could celebrate mass, and to proselytize. The Christian powers of Europe were not slow to respond to the Shah’s overtures and by the middle of the seventeenth century, the following Catholic orders were operating in Iran: Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites, Jesuits, and Capuchins. The Catholic orders were thus direct beneficiaries of ‘Abbās I’s policy of religious tolerance. The Jesuits were the last of the Catholic orders to establish themselves in Iran, in 1653, during the reign of ‘Abbās II. They had only one house, at Julfa, and their efforts to plant themselves there aroused strong opposition from the Armenian ‘schismatics’, who seem to have been the primary target of their proselytizing zeal. Since the Carmelites and Capuchins had been active in Isfahan for many years, the Armenian ‘schismatics’ thought that the mission field there was overcrowded, to the point that they petitioned Shah ‘Abbās II to have all the ‘Frank’ Fathers expelled from Julfa, accusing them of trying to ‘pervert’ his subjects and ‘make Christians of Muhammadans’—a charge, commented the Carmelites, that ‘was enough to have us ejected not from Julfa only, but from all the realm of Persia’. The Shah, however, rejected the Armenians’ petition, reminding them that it was his own father, Shah Safi, who had allowed them to make churches ‘in the very houses of the king himself’.⁴² We have already noted that the relationship between the Carmelites and the Augustinians was one of rivalry. And the relations between the Carmelites and later arrivals from other Catholic orders was anything but harmonious, as the following sour comment by the Carmelites makes clear:

It is hard to conjecture the motives which led them [the Jesuits] to dissipate, for a whole century, energy in a small mission in Julfa... when the field of work

had already become congested after the arrival of the Capuchins ... one is forced to the supposition that emulation with the other Orders was partly reason for their coming.⁴³

To achieve his second goal, that of making Iran a prosperous nation, ‘Abbās I proposed to take advantage of the well-known commercial expertise of the Armenians and other Christian groups, such as Georgians, Syrians (Jacobites), and Chaldeans, whom he had just liberated from Ottoman rule in northwestern Iran and the southern Caucasus regions. As the *Chronicle of the Carmelites* puts it, members of these communities had been ‘found’ by ‘Abbās I:

in towns he had conquered back from the Turk,⁴⁴ and transplanted to Isfahan—there are many of these scattered about the kingdom, living according to their rites. The first transplantation was in 1602 ... before that there were no Christians to be heard of, neither in Isfahan or anywhere else in the kingdom, but only Jews in fairly large numbers, who had, and still have their synagogues... by far the greater number of Christians living in Persia are Armenians ...the Jacobites were formerly in large numbers, but were forcibly made Muslim, and of those who renounced Christ the Fathers have reconverted some... and at present there live more than 600 households of them in the Catholic faith... they have their churches, where all come to Mass and are called Syrians; although, because they have increased in numbers they have been put outside the city by the king, so that they may build houses. But they have no church there, and are urging the Fathers to construct a church for the assistance of their souls... About 2,000 Georgians who had become renegades, have been persuaded by Fr John Thaddaeus to return to their faith.⁴⁵

Eventually the Shah transferred several thousand Armenian families from Julfa in Azerbaijan to a new suburb of his recently developed and beautified capital, Isfahan; this suburb was named ‘new Julfa’:

His purpose was to enlist the industrious and thrifty nature and the commercial expertise of the Armenian merchants in the service of the Safavid state. To compensate them for being uprooted from their homes, Shah ‘Abbas granted the Armenians special privileges. They were allowed to practise their Christian religion without let or hindrance, and the Shah even donated funds for the decorating of Saint Joseph’s Cathedral, which was constructed in 1605. By granting Armenians the right to be represented by a *kalantar* (mayor) of their own nationality, the Shah made them a virtually self-governing community.⁴⁶

Many Armenian merchants became extremely wealthy, and the office of *kalantar* was ‘clearly a lucrative one, for Tavernier mentions that the estate of one Khwaja Petrus ... included 40,000 tumans of silver, not to mention houses and country properties, jewels, gold and silver plate and furniture’.⁴⁷

In considering the relations between the Safavid state and its non-Muslim minorities, one must make a clear distinction between the state’s treatment of its indigenous minorities, particularly the Jews and Christians, and that of the foreign religious. The latter, if harassed, could, and did, appeal, however ineffectually, to the Christian princes of Europe, such as the King of Spain. The former, as Iranian subjects, were just as much under the authority of the Shah as were his Muslim subjects, and the one thing calculated to throw ‘Abbās I into a towering rage was any suggestion by emissaries from Europe, whether lay or ecclesiastic, that the Christian powers of Europe had any

jurisdiction whatever over the Shah's indigenous Christian subjects such as the Armenians. The Carmelites record an incident in 1613 precipitated by the Portuguese Augustinian Antonio de Gouveia, who had been sent by 'Abbās as an ambassador to Philip III of Spain in 1608. The Pope had unwisely acceded to a demand by King Philip that de Gouveia be sent back to Iran as Apostolic Delegate to the Armenians of Isfahan, with the titular rank of Bishop of Cyrene. The arrogant and tactless behavior of the Bishop on his return to Iran in 1613 nearly had dire consequences for the Armenians.⁴⁸

The Jewish community in Isfahan, though not as numerous as the Christians, was also allocated its own quarter of the city by 'Abbās I. The Zoroastrians, those 'honorary *dhimmi*s', had their own suburb dubbed 'Gabristan'—*gabr*, anglicized 'guebre', being a pejorative term used by Muslims to denote the Zoroastrians. The remaining non-Muslim minorities in Isfahan, the Indians, known as 'banians', established themselves in the city toward the end of the reign of 'Abbās I, and increased in numbers under his successors Safi I and 'Abbās II. Being Hindus, they were not 'People of the Book' but, on the contrary, were considered *mushrikūn* or polytheists, and therefore did not qualify for *dhimma* protection. Consequently, they were at the mercy of rapacious Safavid tax officials, who took advantage of their non-*dhimmi* status to milk them of additional taxes in return for turning a blind eye to certain Hindu practices repugnant to Muslims, such as suttee. They were, however, granted freedom of worship.

The Catholic religious were not only concerned with the cure of souls, but of necessity soon became involved in the political and commercial rivalries of the day. They soon became astutely knowledgeable about the Byzantine workings of the Safavid bureaucracy, and were able to use their knowledge to good advantage. On the other hand, it is clear that there was a fundamental misunderstanding between them and the Shah. The Shah thought he could use the religious to bring pressure on the Christian princes of Europe to further his plans for an anti-Ottoman alliance on two fronts and, when his hopes were disappointed, he could vent his anger on the religious. The first Carmelite fathers had arrived in Isfahan in December 1607, and two more, Fathers Benignus and Redempt, arrived in May 1608. They had their first audience with Shah 'Abbās only a few days later, and the Shah at once expressed 'his indignation and disgust at the princes of Christendom and the Pope for deceiving him about operations against the Turks'.⁴⁹ Fortunately, the Shah's anger was of short duration, but this incident well illustrates the way in which the Shah overestimated the political influence of the Catholic fathers. Both parties also underestimated the logistical problems involved in trying to mount any joint military operations against the Ottomans. The same syndrome had been apparent 300 years earlier, when the Mongol Il-Khanid rulers of Iran had tried in vain to organize an alliance with the Christian powers of Europe against their common enemy, the Mamlūk rulers of Egypt and the Levant. Communications between western Europe and west Asia had not noticeably speeded up in the intervening centuries. 'It took a minimum of two years for an exchange of diplomatic notes to take place, and it was impossible to project plans far enough ahead to allow for this time-lag.'⁵⁰ In the interim, circumstances might well have changed in Iran, or in Europe, or both. The classic example is the letter sent by the Emperor Charles V to Shah Isma'īl in 1529—the Emperor being unaware that Isma'īl had died five years previously. Nevertheless, there was a considerable amount of goodwill on both sides, and hope continued to spring eternal. That the hope of organizing a second front against the Ottomans was never far from Shah 'Abbās's mind is clearly shown by his

jocular remark to the Carmelite religious that they could have his palace 'if the Christians really made war'.⁵¹

The fact that Shah 'Abbās I was serious in his desire to create a congenial climate in which the Carmelite fathers could work and establish chapels is indicated by his generosity in allocating quarters to them in Isfahan. Properties allotted to the Carmelites were usually on crown land (*khalisa*), and so the Carmelites could not purchase them but simply enjoyed their usufruct. Initially, their temporary possession of these properties was by no means plain sailing, and a variety of Safavid officials, such as *vazirs*, the *mihmandar* (an official whose duty it was to look after foreign residents in Iran), and the local *darugha* (governor), constantly intervened to frustrate the Shah's intentions. The Carmelites soon learnt the necessity and the value of the 'appeal unto Caesar' for redress against the petty tyrannies of officials. Not only were the Catholic religious subjected to harassment by such officials, but the persons already in possession of the properties, who had been evicted to accommodate either the Carmelites or the Augustinians, were not surprisingly constantly lobbying the Shah and his officials to reinstate them. On occasion, the reaction against the religious could be violent, as when the Carmelites discovered the first house allocated to them in ruins and the church turned into a stable. There was unseemly rivalry between the Carmelites, who had the support of Rome, and the Augustinians, who were the protégés of the King of Spain, and the criterion frequently used by the Carmelites in judging the property allocated to them was whether it was better or worse than that allocated to the Augustinians! The Shah himself, probably tired of this bickering, could be arbitrary. For instance, Father Juan had accompanied the Shah on an expedition for the express purpose of petitioning him to grant the Carmelites a better property, and had returned to Isfahan well satisfied, with the Shah's *farman* in his pocket ordering the *darugha* (governor) of Isfahan to make over to them the house of a 'scrivener' (*munshi*), 'one of the best in the city'. However, when the Shah himself returned to the capital a few days later, he sent 150 men to evict the Carmelites from their existing (second) dwelling, and ordered them to share the house inhabited by the Augustinians. The Augustinians refused to share their accommodation, and the Carmelites were obliged to put up at a caravanserai. Eventually, matters were resolved to the satisfaction of the Carmelites, and in June 1609 mass was said for the first time in their new quarters, an excellent house originally 'bought by the King to lodge ambassadors from [foreign] princes'. The property had 'a constant supply of water flowing to the gardens of Allahverdi Khan⁵² and the Chahar Bagh', the main thoroughfare of Isfahan. Fr Thaddaeus, carried away by the beauty of his surroundings, and by the prospect of a more settled tenancy, planted 25,000 trees in the gardens, but was reprimanded by Rome for planting a vineyard! A further coup was the acquisition of ground for a Christian graveyard. The inscription 'House of God and Jesus Mary' was written in both Persian and Latin over the door of the house, 'so that Muslims passing in the street and reading the names of Jesus and Mary often made signs of respect towards it'. The Carmelites report that the church was used by, 'besides the few Franks', Syrians (Jacobites), Armenians, Georgians, Arabs, and Chaldeans (especially since the marriage of the European traveler, Pietro della Valle, to a Chaldaean).⁵³

To sum up the situation obtaining during the reign of 'Abbās I, it seems that relations between the state and both its indigenous non-Muslim communities and the Catholic religious orders were tolerably good. The Shah needed the commercial expertise of the Armenians, who constituted the largest number of Christians in Iran, in order to achieve his goal of making Safavid Iran a prosperous state; their widespread inter-

national contacts were invaluable to him. The emphasis he placed on trade was such that the Carmelite Fr Eusebius dubbed him the 'prince of traders' (*principe de mercantanti*).⁵⁴ As for the foreign religious, the Shah continued to hope that they could help him in his political and diplomatic relations with European powers.

Given this general situation, the action of 'Abbās I in ordering the forcible conversion to Islam of a considerable number of Armenian and other Christians in the year 1030/1621–2 seems an anomaly. This being so, it is worth quoting *in extenso* the detailed account of the contemporary Safavid chronicle the *Tārikh-i 'Ālam-ārā-yi 'Abbāsi* of Iskandar Beg Munshi:

This year the Shah decreed that those Armenians and other Christians who had been settled in Faridun, on the borders of Bakhtiari territory, and had been given agricultural land there, should be invited to become Muslims. Life in this world is fraught with vicissitudes, and the Shah was concerned lest, in a period when the authority of the central Government was weak, these Christians, if they preserved their status as *dhimmi*s, might be subjected to attack by the neighbouring Lur tribes (who are naturally given to causing injury and mischief), and their women and children carried off into captivity. In the areas in which these Christian groups resided, it was the Shah's purpose that the places of worship which they had built should become mosques, and the muezzin's call should be heard by them, so that those Christians might assume the guise of Muslims and their future status be assured.

After naming the official appointed by the Shah to carry out this order, Iskandar Beg continues:

Some of the Christians, by God's grace, embraced Islam voluntarily, others found it difficult to abandon their Christian faith and felt revulsion at the idea. They were encouraged by their monks and priests to remain steadfast in their faith. After a little pressure [*bi andak tahdidi*] had been applied to the monks and priests, however, they desisted, and those Christians saw no alternative but to embrace Islam, though they did so with great reluctance. The women and children embraced Islam with great enthusiasm, vying with one another in their eagerness to abandon their Christian faith and declare their belief in the unicity of God [*tawhīd*]. Five thousand people embraced Islam. As each group made the Muslim declaration of the faith, it received instruction in the Qur'ān and the principles of the religious law of Islam, and all Bibles and other Christian devotional material was collected and taken away from the priests.

This forcible conversion was not restricted to the Christians of the Faridun area:

In the same way, all the Armenian Christians who had been moved to Mazandaran were also forcibly converted to Islam... Most people embraced Islam with sincerity, but some felt an aversion to making the Muslim profession of the faith. True knowledge lies with God! May God reward the Shah for his action with long life and prosperity!⁵⁵

One is struck by the relative honesty of Iskandar Beg's account. The reason he gives for the conversion of the Christians of Faridun sounds specious, positing as it does the Shah's concern that, at some point in the future, a Safavid ruler might not be able to protect his Christian subjects in that area from the depredations of the Lurs. On the other hand, he eschews the opportunity to engage in polemic against another faith, and

pays the Armenians the compliment of realizing the abandonment of their faith was an agonizing decision for many Christians. His comment that the benefit of conversion would be that their future status would be assured is an interesting admission of the practical limits of the protection afforded to non-Muslims by the *dhimma*.

If the motive given by Iskandar Beg for ‘Abbās I’s uncharacteristic attack on Christians is not credible, what could have triggered this outburst? According to an Armenian of Julfa, Khvajaverdi, ‘the principal cause was the secret hatred which the Shah has [for the Christian faith] ... which was fomented by a great Mulla named Shaikh Baha-u-Din, who said that it was expedient that all Christians should be made Muslims’.⁵⁶ We can instantly dismiss the claim that ‘Abbās I had a ‘secret hatred’ for Christians, on the testimony of the first Superior of the Carmelites, Fr Paul Simon, in his report to Rome in 1608: ‘He does not detest them [Christians], for he frankly converses and eats with them, he suffers us to say frankly what we believe about our Faith and his own; sometimes he asks us about this’.⁵⁷

The ‘great Mulla’ was Shaykh Bahā-al-Din Muhammad ‘Āmeli, known as Shaykh Bahā’i, ‘eminent theologian, philosopher, Qur’ān-commentator, jurist, astronomer, teacher, poet and engineer’.⁵⁸ Shaykh Baha’i ‘was active in the service of the Safavid state and advocated the expansion of the powers of the ‘*ulamā*’’.⁵⁹ *Though he practised taqiyya* (‘prudential dissimulation’) in his dealings with the Ottomans, there is no doubt that he was a zealous Ithna ‘Asharī Shī‘ī, defending the cursing of the three ‘rightly guided Caliphs’, and noted for his proselytizing efforts among non-Shī‘ite Iranians.⁶⁰ The Carmelites themselves, though they wrote down the allegations made by Khvajaverdi against Shaykh Baha’i, gave no indication that they agreed with them. In any case, Shaykh Baha’i fell ill on 22 August 1621, two days after the end of the persecution of Christians in Chahar Mahall,⁶¹ and died on 30 August.⁶² I know of no evidence of his advocating the forcible conversion of Christians.

The Carmelites give a quite different reason for the Chahar Mahall persecution. In June 1621 Fr Vincent, the Visitor General of the Carmelite Missions of Persia and the East, had a long and agreeable audience with ‘Abbās.⁶³ ‘Within months of those asseverations of respect for Jesus’, however, ‘the fickle monarch, presumably instigated, had let loose persecution of Christians.’ It is well known that Shah ‘Abbās was in the habit of wandering incognito through the streets and bazaars of Isfahan to find out for himself what people were saying as opposed to what his advisers fed him. In the summer of 1621, he had retreated to his summer quarters at Kuhrang, and on Friday, 7 August he was walking incognito through the countryside of Chahar Mahall when he ‘overheard some Armenian girls chattering together and using hard and rude words about himself ... he was consumed with rage and ordered all Armenians of the villages in the vicinity to be forced to become Muslims’. Males were forcibly circumcised, some dying ‘from the pain and the affliction of their hearts’. The Shah added a device to compel both males and females to apostatize: ‘he took their wives from the Armenians and gave them to Shī‘ī Persians, and he mated the wives of the latter to Armenians’. The persecution began in five villages, but eventually spread to 43. Some Chaldean families were also caught up in this victimization. The Armenians of Julfa, not surprisingly, feared for their own safety, and advised their co-religionists to send representatives from each village, including headmen and priests, to the royal palace at Isfahan to petition the Shah to end this persecution. This they did, and some 150 people assembled at the palace gate, and sent a petition to the Shah indicating their willingness to die for their faith, but adjuring the Shah ‘to allow them to live as Christians and order that their sacred book be restored to them’. The petition had a

sting in its tail: the Armenians said they had fled to Iran from the Ottoman empire 'because of the fame of the justice and good treatment which the Shah used towards Christians'. If he treated them ill, they said, they would once more flee 'wherever they might obtain better treatment'. The Shah returned to the capital on 20 August; he sent for a leading Armenian and gave him assurances that he would not molest the Armenians further 'on account of their religion'. In time, 'he went so far as to say that he would not be displeased, were those forcibly converted to revert to Christianity', but 'he showed his annoyance with the Carmelites for encouraging resistance, by procrastinating in giving a reply to the Brief from the Pope brought by the Visitor General'. An interesting footnote to this whole episode is the use by the Armenian merchants of Julfa of what we would today call 'strike action' in order to bring pressure to bear on the Shah. They halted their caravans of merchandise on the roads and, since the Shah personally profited from the silk trade, this weapon proved effective.⁶⁴

Under Shah Safi (1629–42) and Shah 'Abbās II (1642–66)

Since the well-being of the non-Muslim minorities in the Safavid state was entirely dependent on the goodwill of the reigning Shah, the death of 'Abbās I on 19 January 1629, and the accession of his grandson Safi, must have been an anxious time for both indigenous and foreign minorities alike. For the foreign religious, the extant *farman* of Shah Safi, dated 19 March 1629, must have come as an enormous relief.

This *farman* confirmed the *farman* of 'Abbās I dated Jumada II, 1027/May–June 1618,⁶⁵ and directed the *daruḡha* of Isfahan to ensure that:

In the place and abode assigned by the past governor of Isfahan, in which from time to time till now they have dwelt, they shall now too continue to dwell and perform Divine Worship according to their law and custom, [and] that they should be disturbed by no one in it.

They could also continue to bury their dead in the Armenian cemeteries. This extremely favourable *farman* must have encouraged the Carmelites to make plans for the expansion of their chapel, because we find these plans authorized by the Definitory General in Rome with the extraordinarily optimistic proviso: as long as it was paid for by the Shah 'or other lay folk ...or else in no wise may it be built'. Whether or not Shah Safi did pay for the work is not recorded, but it was completed by 1638. It had five chapels and 'is a little larger than that of the Augustinian Fathers'(!). The Carmelites were allowed to ring bells day and night in the house—'a privilege rarely conceded in Muhammadan lands'.⁶⁶

These halcyon days were not to last. With the accession of 'Abbās II in 1642, although the French traveler, Thevenot, who was in Iran in 1664, claimed the 'Persians give full liberty of conscience of whatsoever Religion they be',⁶⁷ it was not long before the Christian communities noticed a change in the climate, and the statement is by no means true in regard to the Jews.

The most egregious example of persecution of the Jews of Isfahan was their forcible conversion to Islam in 1656. Not only Jews resident in Isfahan but also those living throughout the Safavid empire were ordered to make public profession of their conversion. The instigator of this persecution was the *ī'timād al-dawla* or *vazir*, Muhammad Beg, described as a self-made man who rose to high office from humble origins, ambitious and vindictive.⁶⁸ He seems to have been appointed *vazir* in 1646. *The Chronicle of the Carmelites* records the apprehension felt by the Christians at his

appointment: 'Things are not going well at present for the poor Armenian and Syrian [i.e.] Jacobite Christians, because a new Grand Wazir has been made ... he is a bigoted Muhammadan and antagonistic to Christianity'.⁶⁹

The salient facts regarding this persecution are not in dispute. The Jewish community in Isfahan initially refused to convert; they were then ordered to leave the city, and were offered the choice of two uncongenial locations in the desert areas outside Isfahan. Again they demurred, and offered bribes to the *vazir*, who then said they could go and live in the Zoroastrian quarter of Gabrabad. The Zoroastrians, however, possibly incited by the *vazir*, refused to receive them, and drove them out. At some point the Jews appealed to the *ṣadr*, the head of the religious institution, who voiced the opinion that the Shari'ā does not sanction conversion by force. In the end, though, he appears to have washed his hands of the whole affair.⁷⁰ Finally, the Jews were ordered to embrace Islam under pain of death. Incredibly, the Jews still refused to submit unless they were rewarded for doing so. After some haggling, every convert received two tumans and, in addition, the community was granted the sum of 5,000 gold dinars from the *waqf* (pious endowment) of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones (the Twelve Ithna 'Asharī Imāms, the Prophet, and Fāṭima).

How far was the Shah involved in this persecution? One Jewish source, the *Kitab-i Anusi* of Baba'i, quoted by Spicehandler, depicts the Shah as being neutral, and interprets his insistence that no force be used as 'almost a sign of benevolence'.⁷¹ Thevenot, who was in Iran only a few years after this incident, is in no doubt as to the provenance of the order. The *ī'timād al-dawla*, he says, 'procured an Order [i.e. a *farman*] from the Prince, prohibiting the exercise of the Jewish religion within his territories', but Thevenot maintains that the conversion of the Jews was purely nominal:

He [the *ī'timād al-dawla*] could not succeed in it, for ... they found that what external profession so ever they made of Mahometanism they still practised Judaism; so that there was a necessity of suffering them again bad Jews, since they could not make good Musulmans of them.⁷²

Between 1656 and 1658, the Jewish communities in other Persian cities were subjected to similar persecution. In Kashan, Qum, Ardabil, Tabriz, Qazvin, Lar, Shiraz, and Hurmuz, the Jews submitted, but in other cities they resisted conversion. A notable example was Farahabad in Mazandaran, where the Jews, despite being subjected to various forms of torture, refused to convert, and in the end the governor gave up the attempt and simply enforced the *dhimma* regulations regarding dress, etc.⁷³ Throughout the whole country, according to *The Chronicle of the Carmelites*, about 100,000 Jews were forced to convert to Islam.⁷⁴

What were the underlying reasons for this persecution in 1656 and subsequent years? The only contemporary Persian chronicle is the *ʿAbbasnama* of Muhammad Tahir Vahid Qazvini,⁷⁵ and the *ʿAbbasnama* concurs with the Jewish source *Kitab-i Anusi* in citing *najāsāt*, the impurity of Jews as non-Muslims, as the justification for the persecution. The *Kitab-i Anusi* quotes the *vazir* as saying: 'According to our religion you are all defiled and impure and yet you brush against our bodies'.⁷⁶ The *ʿAbbasnama* gives more details [my translation]:

From the beginning of their abode in Isfahan,⁷⁷ the houses of that community [*an jama'at*] and the houses of the Muslims were located adjacent to one another, and the Jews did not wear the special sign on their clothing which would have distinguished them from Muslims; the result was that Muslims

could not avoid them and the contamination resulting from their ritual impurity.⁷⁸

Spicehandler⁷⁹ postulates that there may have been some economic motive for the persecution of the Jews, but it is hard to surmise what this might have been. As the Jews pointed out to the *vazir*, ‘All of us pay the *jizya*’,⁸⁰ and most contemporary foreign travelers, for example Chardin, du Mans, and Thevenot, agree that the Jews in the Safavid capital, Isfahan, unlike the Armenians, were in general poor, although Tavernier ‘believed that this appearance was deceptive’.⁸¹ In the final analysis, ‘Abbās II seems to have decided that the attempt to convert the Jews was not worth the effort; he realized that they only became Muslims for outward show and because they were forced to do so, and so he allowed them to return to their own religion and live as they thought fit.⁸²

A number of Western historians have given ‘Abbās II a favorable report card in regard to his treatment of the Christian minorities in his realm. For example, Sir John Malcolm, in his *History of Persia*, says: ‘He was as tolerant to all religions as his great ancestor, whose name he had taken. To Christians, indeed, he showed the most marked favour’.⁸³ As an example of the Shah’s showing favor to Christians, one could cite the experience of Père Raphael du Mans, who accompanied the French traveler, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, to Isfahan in 1644, eventually became Superior of the Capuchin Order, and seems to have become a *persona grata* at court. Père Raphael learnt Persian well enough to act as an interpreter for the Shah whenever a Frenchman was received at court.⁸⁴ Laurence Lockhart says: ‘to sum up we may regard the reign of Shah ‘Abbās as the “Indian summer” of the Safavid era’, and he accuses Jewish sources like the *Kitab-i Anusi* of poetic license in exaggerating the persecution of the Jews by ‘Abbās II.⁸⁵ H. R. Roemer does not minimize the persecution of the Jews, but says that ‘the Christians emerged relatively unscathed because they were not pursued with any great rigour or stringency’.⁸⁶ The Carmelites, however, saw the *vazir*, Muhammad Beg, as just as hostile toward Christians as he was toward Jews. A report from Shiraz dated 20 August 1660 says:

Everything is done by one of his [‘Abbās II’s] ministers, called ‘Itimad-ud-Dauleh [*i’timād al-dawla*], who is very hostile to Catholics and Christians [*sic!*], whom he has expelled from Isfahan. Armenians in Julfa and the Hebrews he has forced to become Muslims, and many of the Armenians at the present time are becoming Muslims, especially the sons in order to inherit their fathers’ property, because they have made an accursed law, by which all Christians who become Muslims inherit everything.⁸⁷

The ‘accursed law’ in question was promulgated toward the end of the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I. It allowed Christians who converted to Islam to claim all the property and goods of their forebears back to the fourth generation, to the exclusion of other relations and kin.⁸⁸ If, in fact, Muhammad Beg was in origin an Armenian from Tabriz as stated by Roemer,⁸⁹ his motive for persecuting the Armenians of Isfahan must remain a matter for speculation. His name suggests that he had become a convert to Islam, in which case he may have made use of the ‘accursed law’ mentioned above, or, as a recent convert, he may simply have been ‘plus catholique que le Pape’. The appointment of Mirza Muhammad Mahdi to succeed Muhammad Beg as *i’timād al-dawla* did not bode well for the non-Muslim minorities in Iran, because he came from a family of Shī‘ī theologians. He had held the office of *ṣadr al-mamālīk* for more than ten years, and his appointment to one of the highest offices of state ‘may have been a concession to the

Shī'ī jurists'.⁹⁰ Certainly it portended the increased political influence of the 'ulamā' in general and the *mujtahids* in particular, a trend which reached its culmination under the last two Safavid rulers.

Under Shah Sulaymān (1666–92) and Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn (1692–1722)

Under these two shahs, the Safavid state entered a period of decline which lasted for more than half a century. 'The *mujtahids* fully asserted their independence of the shah, and reclaimed their prerogative to be the representatives of the Twelfth Imām and thus the only legitimate source of authority in a Shī'ī state.'⁹¹ Sulaymān (1666–94) was a weak ruler who abandoned all pretense of conducting the affairs of state. One Persian source states that he spent seven years in the harem without once emerging.⁹² All sources assert that he was an alcoholic. Chardin, for example, says that he had an unbelievable capacity for drinking wine and that no Swiss or German could hold a candle to him in this regard.⁹³ Weak government at the center meant that non-Muslim minorities were at the mercy of oppressive officials. In 1668, two years after the accession of Shah Sulaymān, King Jean Casimir of Poland sent a letter to the Shah 'desiring that the vexations caused by Muslims to the Carmelites at Isfahan should cease, and that Catholics in Persia should be allowed to practise their religion freely'.⁹⁴ This plea had little effect. The following year, 1669, the *darughā* of Isfahan, under orders of the *ī'timād al-dawla*, tried to sell the Carmelite house in Isfahan, saying that the Shah needed the money. The Carmelites, by dint of bribing various officials, obtained a number of documents attesting to their right to reside in this house and got them registered in the Safavid chancery, and thus hoped 'to be free of such vexations'.⁹⁵ In the absence of strong central government, non-Muslim minorities were also subject to harassment by the populace. In 1672 a Carmelite noted that since Shah Sulaymān came to the throne, 'Persia has been a country where tyranny, opprobrium and persecution have been the lot of Christians: would to God this were, to be exact, *in odio fidei* [in hatred of the faith], but it is mainly from motives of avarice, and of rage against our uncleanness (as they call it) ... In this connection, a bishop or Vartapet of the Armenians having publicly become a Muslim, *from that time onwards* with one accord in the streets they call out after all Christians and religious: "Dog! Become a Muslim": and the little children in the streets shout, "Cursed be the Franks".⁹⁶ The Carmelite author of the passage quoted above was probably right in ascribing motives of avarice to Safavid bureaucrats in their persecution of non-Muslims, but the second part of his comments show clearly that *odium theologicum* also played a part in this harassment. In May 1678 there occurred one of the worst instances of the persecution of Jews under Safavid rule. Shah Sulaymān, while under the influence of drink, was persuaded by some Muslim 'zealots' that 'the Jews and Armenians by the unbounded license of their tenets had contrived the harm' of Islam, and he ordered that some leaders of both faiths be put to death. Several rabbis were brutally put to death, but the Armenians, and other Jews, managed to escape death by lavish bribes.⁹⁷ Sulaymān does not appear to have been personally a bigot, but this incident makes it clear that, in the absence of a strong shah to curb the bigotry of the 'ulamā', the *dhimma* status of non-Muslim minorities afforded them no protection from persecution.

Just before his death in 1694, Shah Sulaymān is reported to have said 'If you wish peace and ease, choose as your sovereign Shah Sulṭān Mirza, but if, on the other hand, you wish the power of the monarchy to increase and the kingdom to expand, select 'Abbās Mirza instead'. The choice of Sulṭān Ḥusayn, made by his great-aunt Maryam

Bagum and the chief eunuchs, ensured more years of weak rule and spelt the doom of the Safavid dynasty. Two rival factions, the powerful *mujtahid* Mirza Muḥammad Baqir Majlisi and his supporters, on the one hand, and the royal women of the harem and the eunuchs, on the other, vied with each other for dominance over the complaisant Shah, whose standard reply when his advisers brought state matters to his attention was *yahshidir*—‘That’s OK!’ The Shah’s nickname of ‘Mulla Ḥusayn’ says it all.

Muḥammad Baqir Majlisi saw it as his mission to root out heresy wherever it might be found and, in the absence of the controlling hand of the Shah, not just non-Muslim communities, but all non-Ithna ‘Asharī Shī‘īs, suffered from his bigotry. Thus Sunnī Muslim groups, such as the Kurds and Sufis (Islamic mystics), became targets of his persecution. Many key Sufi doctrines and practices were denounced as *bid‘a*, ‘innovation’, the nearest Islamic equivalent of heresy. ‘The Shah was persuaded to sign a decree for the forcible conversion of Zoroastrians, and many Jews were forced to embrace Islam... The Christian minority groups ... suffered less’, but the ‘accursed law’ promulgated by ‘Abbās I and revived by ‘Abbās II, ‘entitling a Jew or Christian who became a Muslim to claim the property of his relatives, was from time to time enforced’.⁹⁸ Like Shah Sulaymān, Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn himself does not appear to have been intolerant, but he left bigots like Muḥammad Baqir Majlisi, who had been elevated to the new and powerful office of *mullabashi*, and his grandson, Mir Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khatunabadi, who succeeded him in that office in 1111/1699–1700, to carry out their policies unchecked.

The impact of this adverse religious climate on the Catholic religious in Iran was, not surprisingly, ruinous. From 1696 onwards, most of the Carmelite religious moved to Julfa and devoted their energies solely to trying to reconcile the ‘schismatic’ Armenians. Only one lay brother remained at the convent in Isfahan. In 1722 Afghan invaders besieged the Safavid capital and starved it into surrender after the populace had suffered appalling hardships for six months. At an early stage of the siege, the Afghans occupied Julfa; it is noteworthy that the Armenians there put up a stout resistance without any help from the Safavid central administration. By 1724, no member of the Carmelite community was left at the Isfahan convent.

Conclusion

The introduction to this article briefly laid out the theological and juridical underpinnings of the *dhimma*, the all-important contractual relationship between a Muslim state and its non-Muslim subjects, and went on to summarize how this relationship worked out in practice in a *dār al-islām* during the period of the historical caliphate. As a prelude to the detailed discussion of the relations between the Safavid state and its non-Muslim minorities, the position of these during the pre-Safavid period has been considered: under the Il-Khans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and during the political decentralization and religious ferment of the fifteenth century.

From the evidence available in contemporary Persian chronicles, Christian and Jewish sources, and the works of European travelers to Iran, an attempt has been made to determine whether the promulgation of the Ithna ‘Asharī Shī‘ī form of Islam by Shah Isma‘il in 1501 as the official religion of the Safavid state materially changed the earlier pattern of relations between the rulers of Iran and their non-Muslim minorities.

The first Safavid ruler, Shah Isma‘il I, was too preoccupied with the problems of defeating his Sunnī rivals, the Aq Qoyunlu princes and the Uzbek khans, and with spreading the doctrines of the new official religion as rapidly as possible throughout his

dominions, to concern himself with his non-Muslim minorities. Furthermore, it is possible that he was favorably predisposed toward the Christian faith at least because his mother, 'Alamshah Begum, was the daughter of Despina Khatun, who was herself the daughter of Calo Johannes, the penultimate Christian Emperor of Trebizond. During the reign of his successor, Shah Tahmasp I, Iran remained relatively isolated from Europe, and the visit to the Safavid court by Anthony Jenkinson in 1562, already described, was a rare contact with the West. There seems no doubt that Tahmasp was a religious bigot. On every occasion on which the Shah had the chance to display religious tolerance, he failed to do so. His intolerance was directed not only toward non-Muslims, but also on occasion toward his fellow Muslims of the Sunnī persuasion. The most celebrated example of the latter occurred in 1544, when the fugitive Mughal Emperor Humayun sought refuge at the Safavid court. The Shah made any assistance to the Emperor conditional on his becoming a convert to Shī'ism. In addition, Tahmasp told Humayun that not only his own life, but the lives of 700 members of his entourage, were at risk if he failed to do so. Humayun was reluctantly forced to comply but, on his return to India, he reverted to his Sunnī beliefs. In contrast to the Shah's religious intolerance, Humayun's reputation as a man of liberal religious views led many Shī'īs from Iran to enter his service.⁹⁹

Between 1540 and 1553, Tahmasp carried out no fewer than four major campaigns against the mainly Christian people of Georgia. Georgia was not subject to Safavid rule at that time, and so its Christian population did not live in *dār al-islām*; they were beyond the pale, residents of *dār al-ḥarb*. As such, they were not entitled to the protection afforded by the *dhimma* to non-Muslims living under Muslim rule, who lie outside the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that, during Tahmasp's four campaigns in Georgia, Christian males were put to the sword (unless they converted to Islam), Christian churches were vandalized and looted and their priests killed, and Christian women and children were taken prisoner and transferred to Safavid territory.¹⁰⁰ Although these captives, on arrival in Iran, were required to convert to Islam, the introduction into the country of large numbers of people who belonged to neither of the two 'founding races' of the Safavid state, namely Turk and Tajik, but were Georgians, Circassians, and Armenians, in the course of time profoundly changed the nature of Safavid society.

The policies of Shah 'Abbās I, under whom the Safavid state reached the apogee of its power, toward his non-Muslim minorities, stood in marked contrast to those of Tahmasp, and have been discussed at some length. A clear distinction was drawn between the indigenous non-Muslim communities and those of the foreign Catholic religious who were encouraged by the Shah to establish houses in Iran. The circumstances of the uncharacteristic persecution by the Shah of the Christians of Chahar Mahall in 1030/1621–2 were described in detail. It was pointed out that the more tolerant attitude of 'Abbās was not altruistic, but was designed to further his political and economic goals. It is significant, however, that the Carmelites specifically mention Shah 'Abbās's flouting of the Ithna 'Asharī doctrine of *najāsat* as an important factor in producing a more congenial atmosphere for non-Muslims:

The Persians were formerly very superstitious and abhorred Christians, as if these latter were a foul race: thus they would not eat with them, nor from the vessels from which a Christian had eaten, nor did they allow them to tread on their carpets,^[101] nor to touch them: if a Christian were to touch the garment of one, the man would take it off and have it washed. Nowadays, because the

Shah shows great regard for Christians, passes his time with them and sets them at his table, they have abandoned all this and act towards them as they do towards their own people: only in some distant districts and among the common folk it is still kept up.¹⁰²

It should not be forgotten, however, that Shah ‘Abbās I was the author of the ‘accursed law’ which permitted Christians who converted to Islam to expropriate the property of their forebears back to the fourth generation—a law which was used with devastating effect against Armenians during the reign of ‘Abbās II.

After the death of Shah ‘Abbās I, this improved relationship did not last long, and the reign of Shah ‘Abbās II (1642–66) was marked by instances of persecution of both Christians and Jews, which were primarily instigated by a bigoted *vazir* but almost certainly had the imprimatur of the Shah. Finally, during the reigns of two weak shahs, Shah Sulaymān and Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn, the position of both indigenous non-Muslims and of the foreign religious deteriorated rapidly as the religious institution achieved dominance over the political institution. It became abundantly clear that, without the controlling hand of the Shah, the legal protection theoretically afforded by the *dhimma* to non-Muslim communities no longer obtained, and the latter were both maltreated by predatory tax collectors and subject to religious persecution by the ‘*ulamā*’. Shah ‘Abbās I’s grand experiment in the creation of a multicultural state, based on religious tolerance, an experiment which had raised the Safavid state to unprecedented heights of economic prosperity and artistic achievement, lay in ruin, but it may be salutary to remember that:

For Christians and Muslims alike, tolerance is a new virtue, intolerance a new crime. For the greater part of the history of both communities, tolerance was not valued nor was intolerance condemned. Until comparatively modern times, Christian Europe neither prized nor practiced tolerance itself, and was not greatly offended by its absence.¹⁰³

NOTES

1. A brief extract from this article was presented at the Conference on Pluralism and Religions in Iranian History and Civilization, 27–28 September 2000, at Georgetown University, Washington DC.
2. Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1984), 31; see also C. E. Bosworth, ‘The concept of dhimma in early Islam’, in: B. Braude & B. Lewis (Eds), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (New York/London, Holmes & Meier, 1982), 37–51.
3. N. J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law*, Islamic Surveys 2 (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1964), 27.
4. A. A. S. Tritton, *Islam Beliefs and Practices* (New York, Hutchinson’s University Library, 1951), 117–18.
5. T. Fahd, art. ‘Sabi’a’, *EI²*, vol. 8, 675–8.
6. M. Morony, art. ‘Madjus’, *EI²*, vol. 5, 1110.
7. *Ibid.*, 1110–11.
8. Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 32.
9. C. I. Cahen, art. ‘Dhimma’, *EI²*, vol. 2, 228.
10. Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 7–8.
11. For the Qur’ān-commentator al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of these words see Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 14–15.
12. Cahen, ‘Dhimma’, 228.
13. Quoted in Walter J. Fischel, ‘Azarbaijan in Jewish history’, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 22 (1953), 5. See the translation of Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum* by Ernest A. Wallis Budge under the title *The Chronography of Gregory Abu’l Faraj the Son of Aaron*,

- the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus* (London, 1932), vol. 1, 490. Note the striking resemblance to St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, 3:28.
14. A. K. S. Lambton, art. 'IRAN. v.—history: (a) to the Turkoman invasions', *IE²*, vol. 4, 31. On the extent of the influence of Christianity at the Mongol court under the Il-Khanid rulers, and in Mesopotamia, see Bertold Spuler, *The Muslim World: a historical survey*, trans. F. R. C. Bagley, pt 2 (Leiden, Brill, 1960), 30–1.
 15. J. A. Boyle, 'Dynastic and political history of the Il-Khans', in: *idem* (Ed.), *Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. V. The Seljuq and Mongol Periods* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968), 378.
 16. *Ibid.*, 381.
 17. *Ibid.*, 379.
 18. *Ibid.*, quoting the continuator of Bar Hebraeus, 507.
 19. Spuler, *Muslim World*, 36.
 20. Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 101 and 208 n. 46.
 21. See for example the passage from the *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, quoted by A. Bausani in: 'Religion under the Mongols', in: J. A. Boyle (Ed.), *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, 542.
 22. Spuler, *Muslim World*, 36.
 23. For details see Boyle, 'Dynastic and political history of the Il-Khans', 401–2.
 24. *Ibid.*, 403.
 25. *Ibid.*, 413.
 26. John E. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu: clan, confederation, empire* (Minneapolis MN/Chicago MI, Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976), 1.
 27. D. Morgan, *Medieval Persia 1040–1797* (New York, Longman, 1988), 8.
 28. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History, Abridgement of Vols I–VI* by D. C. Somervell (London, 1949), 345.
 29. For details see 'The struggle for supremacy in Persia after the death of Timur', in: Roger M. Savory, *Studies on the History of Safawid Iran* (London, Variorum Reprints, 1987), I.
 30. V. Minorsky, 'Jihan-shah Qara-Qoyunlu and his poetry', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16 (1954), 274.
 31. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, 4.
 32. C. N. Seddon (Ed.), *A Chronicle of the Early Safavids, Being the Ahsanu-t-Tawarikh of Hasan-i-Rumlu* (Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1931), vol. 1, 61.
 33. Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 52.
 34. *Ibid.*, 34.
 35. Roger M. Savory, 'The foreign policy of Iran', *International Journal* 16:2 (Spring 1986), 421.
 36. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal, McGill University Press, 1966), 241.
 37. Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 198 n. 38.
 38. *Sayings of the Ayatollah Khomeini*, English edn trans. Harold Salemsen, ed. Tony Hendra (New York, 1980), 48. 'Every part of the body of a non-Moslem individual is impure' 51.
 39. R. M. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980), 111.
 40. Thevenot, *The Travels of M. de Thevenot into the Levant* (London, 1687), pt 2, 106.
 41. *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 2 vols (London, 1939), vol. 1, 454. The Chaldeans had had a checkered history. A Semitic people of Cushitic origin, distinct from Arabs and Aramaeans, inhabiting the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia, they eventually became part of the Babylonian empire in the time of Nebuchadrezzar. In the fifth century AD they became followers of Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople. The christological doctrines of Nestorius were condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD, and, after Rome, Antioch, and Constantinople were reunited doctrinally by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, his followers found themselves cut off from communion both with Rome and with the Byzantine Church. A Nestorian Church was established at Seleucia/Ctesiphon under a *catholikos* who entitled himself 'Patriarch of the East'. After the Islamic conquests, Nestorians were permitted to practice their religion in return for payment of the *jizya*; in other words, they became *dhimmis*. In 726 AD, the patriarchate moved to Baghdad, where it remained for centuries. In 1400 AD Timur sacked Baghdad, and those Nestorians who escaped death or capture fled to the mountains of Kurdistan and further north around the shores of Lake Urmieh in Azarbaijan. In 1552 there occurred a major schism in the Nestorian Church when many Nestorians came into communion with the Catholic Church. Pope Julius III (1549–55) created the patriarchate of 'the eastern Assyrians' for these Uniate Nestorians, as they were subsequently termed, and the

- patriarchs appointed by the Pope continued to convert Nestorians to Roman Catholicism. Nestorians living in Kurdistan, and near the northwest border of Iran, remained faithful to their original beliefs. In 1652, 14 heads of the Chaldean community 'had come to Isfahan' (to seek redress from the governor of that city from oppression by the Khan of Tabriz), but 'had not stopped long' (in Isfahan); 'all the Carmelites had been able to find out about them was that they dwelt four to six days' journey beyond the city of Tabriz' (vol. 1, 382). From this one may deduce that there were no non-Uniate Nestorians resident in Isfahan at that time. Scouting schismatics, the Carmelite Fr Dionysus of the Crown of Thorns made vigorous efforts to proselytize these 'Assyrians' of the northwest Persian frontier in 1654 AD, but the unfortunate accidental drowning of the Chaldean-speaking Fr Gioerida in the river Aras in 1654 dampened the enthusiasm of the Sacred Congregation (vol. 1, 388ff.).
42. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 379.
 43. *Ibid.*, 399.
 44. Probably after 'Abbās's great victory at the battle of Sufiyan, near Tabriz, in 1605. By 1607 the last Ottoman soldier had been expelled from Iranian territory as defined by the Treaty of Amasya in 1555.
 45. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 158 n. 1.
 46. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 174.
 47. *Ibid.*, 175.
 48. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 203ff. Spain ruled over Portugal from 1581 to 1640.
 49. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 1029–30.
 50. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 108.
 51. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 2, 1030.
 52. Allahverdi Khan was an Armenian Christian from Georgia, who first entered the service of Shah Tahmasp as a *ghulam* (see Savory, *Safavids*, index, under *ghulaman-i khassa-yi sharifa*) in the Royal Household. He was soon transferred to the military establishment, where he moved rapidly through the ranks until he held the rank of *qullar-aqasi*, the third highest office of state. In 1004/1595–6, he was appointed governor-general of Fars and *sipahsalar*, or commander-in-chief, of all the armed forces (for full details of his career, see Roger M. Savory, *The Office of Sipahsalar (Commander-in-chief) in the Safavid State*, in: *Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies, Held in Bamberg, 30th September to 4th October, 1991*, by the Societas Iranologica Europaea (Rome, 1995), 603–5).
 53. *Chronicle of the Carmelites* vol. 2, 1030–2.
 54. *Ibid.*, 1047.
 55. Eskandar Beg Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alamara-ye 'Abbasi (History of Shah 'Abbās the Great)*, trans. Roger M. Savory, 2 vols (Boulder CO, Westview, 1978), vol. 2, 1181–2; *idem*, *Tarikh-e 'Alamara-ye 'Abbasi* (Isfahan, Iraj Afshar, 1334–5/1955–6) [TAAA] text, vol. 2, 960–1.
 56. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 255.
 57. *Ibid.*, 161.
 58. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 155.
 59. E. Kohlberg, art. 'Baha-al-Din 'Ameli', in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York/London, 1989), vol. 3, 429.
 60. *Ibid.*, 430.
 61. On Chahar Mahall see article by Eckart Ehlers in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 4, 620–1.
 62. Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alamara-ye 'Abbasi*, trans. Savory, 1189.
 63. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 248–55.
 64. *Ibid.*, 255–7. The time-frame given in this book is awry. If the persecution started on 7 August, and the petitioners waited 45 days for a reply from the Shah, this does not tally with the date of 20 August for the Shah's return to Isfahan.
 65. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 1032 incorrectly gives the year 1617.
 66. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 1032–3.
 67. See Ezra Spicehandler, 'The persecution of the Jews of Isfahan during the reign of Shah 'Abbās II (1642–1666)', *Hebrew College Union Annual* 46 (1975), 338–9, quoting Tavernier, 110.
 68. *Ibid.*, quoting Tavernier, 560.
 69. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 364. H. R. Roemer describes Muhammad Beg as 'a Tabriz Armenian', who formerly held the office of *nazir-i-buyutat* (*Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), 294).
 70. Spicehandler, 'Persecution of the Jews of Isfahan', 342; Vera B. Moreen, 'The persecution of

- Iranian Jews during the reign of Shah 'Abbas II (1642–1666)', *Hebrew College Union Annual* 52 (1981), 288.
71. Spicehandler, 'The persecution of the Jews of Isfahan', 335.
 72. Thevenot, *Travels of M. de Thevenot*, 110, quoted in Spicehandler, 'Persecution of the Jews of Isfahan', 338.
 73. Moreen, 'Persecution of Iranian Jews', 304–6.
 74. Vol. 1, 364.
 75. Printed text (ed. Ibrahim Dihgan), Arak 1329/1950 [AN]. The text of the entry for the year 1066/1655–6 is reprinted in Moreen, 'Persecution of Iranian Jews', 279–80.
 76. Spicehandler, 'Persecution of the Jews of Isfahan', 333.
 77. Moreen's translation is incorrect at this point.
 78. AN, 218.
 79. *Ibid.*, 290
 80. *Kūtab-i Anusi*, quoted in Spicehandler, 'Persecution of the Jews of Isfahan', 333, line 18b.
 81. John Emerson, 'Ex Occidente Lux' (unpublished Cambridge PhD thesis, 1969), 270–1.
 82. Tavernier, quoted in Spicehandler, 'Persecution of the Jews of Isfahan', 339; AN, 298, 300.
 83. Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavid Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958), 28.
 84. *Ibid.*, 428.
 85. *Ibid.*, 29 and 28 n. 2.
 86. In *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6 (1986), 303.
 87. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 303.
 88. *Ibid.*
 89. In *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6 (1986), 294.
 90. *Ibid.*
 91. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 238.
 92. Muhammad Muhsin, *Zubdat al-Tavarikh*, f. 203a.
 93. 'On ne peut croire la force de ce prince à porter le vin; il n'y a Suisse ni Allemand qui lui tint tête.'
 94. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 2, 1034 n. 2.
 95. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 2, 1034.
 96. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 406; quoted in Lockhart, *Fall of the Safavid Dynasty*, 32.
 97. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 408.
 98. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 251.
 99. *Ibid.*, 66.
 100. Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alamara-ye 'Abbasi*, trans. Savory, vol. 2, 139–45; TAAA, vol. 1, 84–8. Shah Tahmasp is said to have characterized his campaigns in Georgia as jihād, or 'holy war' against the infidel, and the Shah himself is described as *padisha-i mujahid-i ghazi*, 'the king who is a holy warrior and fighter for the faith'. The Ottoman poet Ahmedi defined a *ghazi* as 'the instrument of the religion of God, a servant of God who cleans the earth from the defilement of polytheism' (see I. Melikoff, art. '*Ghazi*', *EL*², vol. 2, 1041), and it is interesting to note how the author of the *Tarikh-i 'Alam-ara yi 'Abbasi*, Iskandar Beg Monshi, when describing these campaigns, uses terminology which belongs purely to the realm of Muslim polemic. The term *jihād* occurs repeatedly; the Safavid forces are called *mujahidan-i sipah-islam* ('holy warriors of the army of Islam'), who are engaged in cleansing the region of the '*shirk*-polluted presence of polytheists' (*shirk*, or 'the associating of a partner or partners with God', is anathema to Muslims, and is a charge regularly leveled against Christians because of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity); Hell is said to be the destination of such infidels, and the phrase *vujud-i napak-i gabran* ('the impure presence of Zoroastrians') (*gabran* probably used here as a generic term for infidels) is a clear echo of the Ithna 'Asharī Shī'ī doctrine of *najāsāt* discussed earlier in this article. Iskandar Beg, in quoting Q. 9:36, makes a significant alteration to the text, changing 'fight the polytheists' (*al-mushrikūn*) to 'kill the polytheists' (see Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alamara-ye 'Abbasi*, trans. Savory, vol. 1, n. 161).
 101. Anthony Jenkinson discovered this!
 102. *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, vol. 1, 157.
 103. Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 3.

