2. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS OF IRAN

2.1. Some Main Features of the Iranian Historical Background

The political history of Iran is marked by the repetition of closed periodical cycles of events, creating a chain, which started in the earliest periods and reaches up to the modern times. This cycle of events constitutes: invasion, centralized or decentralized despotic rule, anarchy, followed by a new invasion. Iranian history has been generally divided into pre- and post-Islamic periods. When the latter period is put into consideration, it is found that all the invasions have been made by nomadic tribes.\(^1\)

The conflict between nomadic and sedentary peoples is the oldest and the most decisive factor in the formation of Iranian history. This conflict from the early periods has been reflected in Zoroaster's dualism and the Iranian epics of Šāhnāme, both strongly inspired by the continuous struggle between Iranian sedentary people and nomads of Central Asia and Arabia.\(^2\)

The main reason for the persistence of this conflict has been the survival of nomadic life in the surrounding regions of Iran due to climatic conditions there. In Central Asia, we find that dry mountains, the scarcity of

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\(^1\)This also was the case of the pre-Islamic period with the exception of the Greek invasion. However it has been argued that the Greek invasion also must have increased the desire of Zoroastrians for the coming of a savior who would re-establish the Iranian sovereignty. (Cf. Samuel Kennedy Eddy: The King is dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism, Lincoln, 1961, p. 10ff.)

water and agricultural land make cultivation a difficult task. Seasonal rainfall provides only temporary pasture on the slopes of the mountains. Such natural conditions make only seasonal dry cultivation possible. As the land available for grazing and also for dry cultivation has been small, the nomads have had to move from place to place. Population increase has been mainly controlled through inter-tribal wars, which were usually inflamed by the conflicts over grazing land.

The hard nomadic way of life makes it necessary for the nomads to develop military skills. So the social structure of the nomads is essentially primordial in its nature and encourages the customs and traditions that bind the members together. These are the qualities, as already observed by Ibn Khaldun,\(^1\) which make the nomads victorious in war against the sedentary population. The nomadic mode of production requires a strong cooperative endeavour which ultimately encourages the formation of a more egalitarian and democratic social structure which is usually unknown to peasant societies.\(^2\)

A natural catastrophe, such as insufficient rainfall or flood, directly affects the routine life of a "Naturvolk". External factors may help rival tribes to unite, especially against the sedentary population. Factors like scarcity of land and water as well as population increase, that cause inter-tribal wars and

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other crises, may in some historical moments
(especially at the times of decline in military
efficiency of the sedentary population) bring several
small tribes under a single leadership. ¹

The historical records that are available suggest
that these nomads possessed some other military
advantages, to mention only the desert Dromedary of
the Arabs which enable them to penetrate into arid
regions, ² whereas Turkish mountain camels were very
efficient in mountainous areas.

"In the Bactrian camel the Turks possessed
a beast of burden whose bio-climatic needs
accorded with their own inclinations. Although
in origin an animal from flat and sandy
terrain, the pure-bred Bactrian camel was an
incomparable instrument with which to effect
the occupation of the mountains, whereas the
hybrids in varying degree of the Dromedary
and the Bactrian camel were only developed
when there arose a need for animals equally
adapted to the heat of the plains. The Bactrian
camel was covered by a thick fleece and was
thus resistant to the cold. Of good size, yet
long rather than tall it was sturdy-footed and
thus well adapted to the mountains and, in a
general way, to stony soils and difficult,
precipitous country." ³

Like the nomadic Arabs the nomadic Mongols were
able to keep on moving because they had large numbers

¹A charismatic leader or a religious ideology making
the community charismatic, further strengthens tribal
solidarity as was in the cases of Islam for the
Arab tribes.

²Xavier de Planhol: The Geographical Setting. In: The
p. 447.

³Planhol: Aspects of Mountain Life in Anatolia and
Iran. In: S.R. Eyre and G.R. Jones (ed): Geography as
Human Ecology, Methodology by Example, London, 1966,
p. 302. The Arabs were dependent on the Dromedary an
animal of the hot plains, always ill at ease in the
mountains. Ibid.
of horses which they could use alternatively days after days. They possessed several other advanced war equipments and techniques. ¹

There were several factors which made the sedentary population weak in the war against nomadic hordes. An important one was obviously their relative immobility. The farmer was tied to the soil, and the military duties were performed by small groups, dispersed throughout the country with different affiliations. An army could be a realistic deterrent to nomadic raiders, if it was controlled by a strong centralised power. This was never a situation in Iranian history. ² Both natural conditions, and the character of agricultural life, as well as the political subjection to groups of alien peoples, had compelled the peasantry to take refuge in village communities. The village community, with its peculiar social mechanisms provided some measure of protection to its members from natural limitations, social oppression and economic exploitation, but it had at the same time its drawbacks. Since each village community was more or less self-sufficient and autonomous the possibilities of inter-village cooperation as well as of offering collective resistance against the invaders were dismal.

¹Cf. Accounts of John de Plano Carpini, (C, 1182 - 1252), after his journey to Central Mongolia, in: John Andrew Boyle: The Mongol World Empire 1206 - 1370, London, 1977, pp. 8 - 9; and Mathew Paris (1200 - 1259), in: Boyle, op. cit., pp. 6 - 7. The Mongol army was subject to a strict code of discipline in which desertion and similar offences were punishable with death (Accounts of Carpini, in: Boyle, pp. 8 - 9).

The first phase of the cycle of nomadic invasions of Iran is marked by:

a) Destruction of all that had been achieved in the socio-economic field, i.e. destruction of the previous social formations, and their replacement with a more backward one.

b) Destruction and plundering of accumulated material wealth.

c) Depopulation of both urban and rural areas, through compelled migration as well as massacre.

Let us now elaborate further the abovementioned points.

a) Historically, it is evident that each invasion on Iranian soil by the nomadic tribes brought about destruction of intellectual, scientific and economic achievements of Iranian people which they accomplished during the centuries in the past. The nomads did not find any meaning in the sedentary way of life, and they only strove to get hold of pasture land and so forced the farmers to flee.¹ Some, like Chengis (d. 1304) and Timur (d. 1405) indulged in wild destruction; they also stripped Iran off its artisans, scholars and artists, whom they carried off to Central Asia and left Iran disorganized.

The common vandalism of the invaders throughout Iranian history took the form of the burning of libraries,

the flattening of the great cities and the destruction of agricultural lands.

"There were considerable reversions from the sedentary way of life after these medieval invasions and, above all, the Mongol ravages which affected vast expanses. The prevailing general insecurity associated with these events brought about the return of a nomadic way of life, so that peasants who practised short distance migration in search of pasture were henceforth obliged to abandon their villages and thus came to form the main part of such Persian-speaking nomad confederations as that of the Bakhtiyari."¹

b) To highlight the enmity of the nomads with the sedentary way of life we can just mention that they not only took away all that was transportable, but also tried to destroy every sign of settled life. They razed cities, cut down forests, overthrew fortresses, pulled up vines and destroyed gardens.² This was not done by one or two groups of invaders but by almost all. Thomas of Metsop illustrates the repeated looting of the North-western regions of Iran by the Turkomans and the famine of 1430. Thomas who himself witnessed the events, says that the Turkomans in the course of their invasion of Armenia, Urmia and Van Lake regions, "looted, destroyed and left no bread, and no grass on the earth."³ As they left, taking away many children as slaves, the severe famine of 1430 – 31 took

¹Planhol: Aspects of Mountain Life...., p. 292.
their place, compelling the people to eat flesh of dogs and carrion and even their own children. "In Tabriz alone a thousand cases of secret and open cannibalism occurred."¹ While the people were in desperate need of money and time to repair the damages caused by the famine, the Turkomans again appeared, and cut down the fruit trees and vines.²

c) Destruction of the population in rural and urban areas was generally resorted to by the nomadic hordes during the course of their invasions. For example when the Mongols captured Marv (A.D. 1220), the whole population of the city was driven out into the open countryside and the process of eviction continued for four days and nights. About four hundred artisans and a number of children were sorted out to be taken away as slaves; and the order was given that the entire remaining population, men, women and children, should be put to the sword. The population were so apportioned to the troops, that each individual soldier could be responsible for the execution of three to four hundred people.³

There is an ample historical evidence indicating that the Mongols gave similar harsh treatments to the Iranian sedentary population on repeated


²Ibid., p. 20. Ibn Khaldun points to the destruction caused by Arab nomads, through which civilizations were wiped out and settlements were depopulated in such way that "the very earth there turned into something that was no longer earth." (Ibn Khaldun, The Muzaddimah, Vol. I, Chap. II, p. 304).

occasions. ¹Jovayni narrates that in the Khorāsān area as well as in the Central part of Iran, every town and village has been several times subjected to pillage and massacre and has suffered this confusion for years, so that even though there be generation and increase until the Resurrection, the population will not attain into a tenth part of what it was before.²

Timur devastated innumerable towns and cities and slaughtered countless thousands of people building pyramids with their skulls.³

The Turkoman, Jahānsāh, who led his army into Georgia (then a part of Iran), built a tower with 1,164 heads at the gate of the town and took away 9,400 persons as prisoners.⁴

When the Afghan tribesmen surrounded the capital city of Esfahān for about six months in 1722, the people of the city "who were subjected to the famine, consumed cats, dogs, mice and even human flesh. The streets were piled high with rotting corpses. At least 80,000 people died from starvation and disease

¹For example, Balkh became a ghost town. In the case of Nishāpur, the town was laid waste in such a manner that the site could be ploughed upon, in such a way that seven centuries later, Sir Percy Sykes shot sandgrouse within the walls of ancient Nishāpur and saw barley growing there. (Sir Percy Sykes: A History of Persia. Vol. I/II. London, 1951 (¹1915), II, p. 81). In Herāt "no head was left on a body nor a body with a head." (Ata-Malik Juvaini, in Boyle, op. cit., p. 621).

²Juvaini, op. cit., p. 615.

³Spuler: The Disintegration of the Caliphate…., p. 170.

⁴Thomas of Metsop: On the Timurid-Turkman Wars, p. 25.
more than four times the number who fell in battle.¹

Whereas Nāder Shāh (dominabatur: 1736 – 1747) in his Qandahār expedition, had ordered the people of Kermān to carry the loads because there was the shortage of animals,² just on the eve of nineteenth century, Āghā Mohammed Khān, the head of the Qājār tribes, ordered his men to rape the women of the same city before killing them. It is also recorded that on his order 20,000 eyes of the citizens of Kermān were taken out. He had threatened that in case there was even one pair less, the eyes of the executor himself would be removed.³

It is also evident from a large number of records that each nomadic invasion brought about a widespread devastation in scientific, economic and cultural fields, particularly because they had no significance for the nomads.

The second phase of the already mentioned cycle of events marked by the establishment of monarchies or dynasties by the invaders on the ruins of the conquered land. Since they were no longer able to draw their income from plunder, the nomadic rulers had to establish the bureaucracy created with the help of natives, and were required to create a system of taxation to be operated by the same native people.

²Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 256.
During the course of time a new ruling class would emerge which could no more move from place to place with their tribes. Therefore, this class had to reduce its dependency on the tribal military force and as substitute they formed mercenary armies.

For the first time, in the post-Islamic period, contingents of Turkish mercenaries were formed by an Arab Abbasid Caliph al-Mut'tasim (dominantur: 833 - 842), for his own security, though it became a source of insecurity for his successors. And this practice of releasing himself from dependency on the nomads and of becoming increasingly dependent on a mercenary army was followed by each new nomadic invader. But this could not be useful to them, as a very practical proposal for them, because the country, which was already destroyed, depopulated and drained of its resources, could not generate surplus to support large armies, bureaucracy as well as a luxurious life style of the ruling class. This is what Weber called Patrimonialism. In his view, the ruler of a patrimonial society becomes increasingly dependent on his army and staff, and so he has to extract more and more taxes and thus he increasingly pauperizes the peasantry. But it should be noted here that even with maximum exploitation of the peasantry, through taxation and land farming, a large army and bureaucracy could in no way be supported by the ruler's limited income. Therefore, the study of Iranian history shows, contrary to what was supposed, that with the exception of brief periods, viz. under


Shāhpur I (dominabatur 240 – 271) and 'Abbās I (dominabatur 1587 – 1629) and their immediate successors, a high degree of centralization of political power did not emerge.¹ Shah Tahmasp (dominabatur: 1524 – 1576) the second ruler of the important Safavid dynasty, had such a weak hold on power that when the Ottoman Soltān Solaymān attacked the western border of Iran, with 90,000 men, he could raise only 7,000 men, and moreover the loyalty of many of those men was suspect.² After Baghdad had been invaded and Tabriz had been occupied on several occasions, Tahmasp was left with no other alternative except to shift his capital from Tabriz to Qazvin. And before the Safavids came to power the country was ruled by about 24 small rival dynasties.³ Similarly under the Qājār dynasty there was decentralization of political power because the country was divided even then into different parts, each ruled by a prince, who shared the collected tax with central government.⁴ The princes were also using the resources at their disposal to strengthen their hands to oppose the central government.

"There was no clear dividing line between the provincial governor, the tribal leader, the land owner, and the military commander. This facilitated rebellion and made the control of the Shah almost always precarious. Aghā Mohammad Khān's (1796 – 1797) total forces

¹Issawi: The Economic History of Iran, pp. 1 – 2.
²Savory: Safavid Persia, p. 404.
probably did not exceed 70 – 80 thousand men and his revenues were so small that he could not maintain them for more than six or seven months of the year.\(^1\)

The Qajar rulers were "despots, without the instruments of despotism"\(^2\) because their army was, "a paper organization", "whose pay was appropriated by its officers, while the men were essentially untrained and scarcely armed, and had to make their living at various trades in the town."\(^3\)

Without any fear of contradiction one would say that political power in Iran has remained oscillating between centralization and decentralization,\(^4\) but it must also be mentioned that the periods of centralization have been so short that they can even be overlooked. It must also be added that both the centralized and decentralized regimes were equally exploitative and torturing. For example, as said

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\(^1\) Lambton: Persia: The Breakdown..., pp. 436 – 437. Abrahamian describes the military and bureaucratic situation under other Qajar rulers as follows: "The standing army was no larger than a contingent of Qajar tribesmen and a bodyguard of 4,000 Georgian slaves. And the bureaucracy, if it can be called that, was nothing more than a haphazard collection of hereditary mustawafs and mirzas in the central and provincial capitals." (Ervand Abrahamian: Oriental Despotism: the Case of Qajar Iran, In: International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. V, 1974, p. 11).


\(^3\) Keddie: Religion, Politics and Society, p. 139. Keddie further adds: "The despotism of the Shah was felt by most people quite indirectly - chiefly through high and irregular taxes which were collected at several removes from any specific royal order."

earlier, the Safavid Abbas I could concentrate the political power in his hands by getting rid of the tribal chiefs. This he could do by creating a Corps of Georgian prisoners, converts from Christianity, similar to the Ottoman Janissaries and by using them as instruments of domination. As a matter of fact it is shown that the Safavid period was one of the bloodiest periods of Iranian history.¹

The despotic rulers are highly allergic to any dissidence or opposition. As we will see later on in the Pasikhani movement which was directed against the Safavid rule the opponents were tortured in a brutal way.² It is recorded that Abbas I had a group of cannibals in his court, whose job was to torture and consume the flesh of the victims while they were still alive.³ The dissident intellectuals, artists and others met with the same fate. Ironically, there is enough evidence to disprove the contention of the theory of "Oriental Despotism"⁴ put forth by some authors.

Despite the oppressive rule of the Safavids, Iran experienced some progress in the field of agriculture, industry and commerce as well as in the communication

¹Edward G. Browne: A Literary History of Persia: Modern Times (1500 - 1924), Cambridge, 1978 (1924), chapters II and III.
²Abbas I himself used to go to the suspected places in disguise to find and punish any kind of dissidence and opposition.
system, although it could not reach the high level of economic development which existed in the period before the Mongol invasion. ¹

Another particular feature of this phase is that though the dynasties used to get Persianized, they could never identify themselves with the native population. They always considered themselves invaders who were only there to plunder. Even in the later stages of Iranian history, although some of the Turkoman tribes had made the Iranian territory their abode for a number of years, they sustained their affiliation to their own and other Turkoman tribes. It is so not surprising to hear the Iranian Turkoman ruler, Nader (dominabatur: 1736 - 1747) calling even his enemy the Ottoman Soltan, the other Turkoman ruler, "the Caliph of the people of Islam and the lustre of the Turkoman race."²

Although this statement of Nader was politically motivated, one can easily discern a close sense of affiliation in his mind about the other Turkoman tribes.

In a somewhat similar case, the Afghan invader Ashraf (dominabatur: 1725 - 1730) put emphasis on the

¹Joint authors: Tārikh-e Irān, Vol. II, p. 566. Attempts were made to diversify agricultural production, e.g. by growing cotton and tobacco and by investigating improvements in the textile industry. Production in other industries such as porcelain, leather, dyeing, glass and pottery was also improved. They improved roads and constructed resthouses for the travellers, they repaired canals and artificial irrigation systems. (Cf. joint authors, pp. 570 - 591).

common religion and called the Ottomans to unite with him against the Shi'i Iranians. ¹

It is evident that all these nomadic tribes generally considered themselves invaders and Iran as an invaded land. A European traveller who visited Iran during 1821 - 1822, describes Fath 'Ali Shah (d. 1834) as a ruler who never considered Iran to be his native land, which he loved and wanted to protect. For him Iran was like a land on which he had an unlimited lease, and the population of the country was nothing more than a defeated nation whose resources could be drained. ²

The cultural implications of alien invasions cannot be neglected. Each invasion added a new cultural element to, disturbed the existing cultural harmony of, and resulted into further fragmentation and tensions in the Iranian society. To escape this cultural invasion, large numbers of the native population were forced to emigrate to remote mountainous areas and to far away regions in China ³ and India. ⁴ The Arab invasion made its impact by bringing about basic change in the combination of Iranian culture and in different fields.

³ Cf. Edward H. Schafer: China: Das Reich der Mitte, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1971, p. 106. E.g. the number of immigrant Zoroastrians in China was so large that they had four temples in Changan.
As the Turkish Oghuz tribes moved with their families, they were able to settle among the indigenous population and influence its composition, culture and language. This was another important invasion beside that of the Arabs to increase the heterogenity of Iranian culture.\(^1\)

The rulers generally followed a discriminatory policy based on religious and ethnic affiliations. During the rule of the Ummayyad Arabs, religion was not the only criterion for discrimination between their subjects which belonged to various ethnic groups.\(^2\) Among them the Arabs were privileged, on the grounds that they were the people chosen by God, who had sent one of them as a prophet to reveal His truth in the Arabic language.\(^3\) The Saljuq minister Nezām al-Molk,

\(^1\)Bertold Spuler: Iran in fruhislamischer Zeit, Wiesbaden, 1952, p. 239; Minorsky: Iran; Opposition..., p. 187. The process of Turkification of Azerbaijan was slow. The Persian language maintained its hold even after the second great phase of nomad incursions, and the decisive episode in the process took place after the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when numerous Turkomans from Anatolia retreated to Safavid domain. P.Sümer: Azerbaycanın türklemesi tarihine umumi bir bakış (A general view at the history of the Turkification of Azerbaijan), Belleten, XXI, 1957, pp. 429 - 447. In: Planhol: Aspects of Mountain Life..., pp. 305 – 306.


\(^3\)Ibid. There are numerous records about the racial policy of the Ummayyads. The following example shows us the extent of racial discrimination: once the Ummayyads received the news that a non-Arab man wanted to marry an Arab girl. They ordered that his beard, hair and eyebrows should be shaved off, (that was the greatest insult at that time) and that he should receive two hundred scourges. Jorji Zaydān: Tārikh-e tamadon-e Eslāmi, Tehran, 1333 A.H. Vol. II, p. 116.
quotes a speech by his Turkish master, Alp Arslan (dominabatur 1063 – 1072), to his attendants: "We are foreigners in a land which we have taken by force. We are pure Muslims and these Persians (Irāqī) have a bad religion and favour the Daylamites (i.e. Iranian Shi’is)."¹

"In official documents relating to the period Turks and non-Turks (tājiks) are usually both mentioned, which suggests that there was a clear division between these two elements, as there had been formerly between Arabs and non-Arabs or Persians ('ajam)."²

During the Mongol period "ethnic antagonism between the Persians on the one hand and on the other hand the Turks and Mongols, who were at that time coalescing with one another in Persia because of a common adherence to Islam and the use of Turkish as their colloquial language."³

There was the same kind of distinction during the Safavid period as well as strong rivalry among the Turkoman and Persian elements in the administration.⁴

Neither the early nomadic leaders who succeeded in invading Iran and founding a dynasty nor their urbanized

¹Nezam al-Molk: Siyāsat nāmeh, p. 163 (Above translation is by Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 189).
²Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 57.
³Spuler: The Disintegration of the Caliphate..., p. 157. When the Mongols appeared many Turkish soldiers who should have defended Khorasan, deserted to the Mongols, because there were Turks in their ranks. (Ibid., p. 162).
⁴Savory: Safavid Persia, p. 407.
descendants, were able to rule the country without complete dependence on Persian bureaucrats and clergy: Until the triumph of Shi‘ism brought about by Safavids, Sunnism was regarded everywhere as the religion of a dominant caste, the religion of the state, the distinctive mark of the conquering aristocracy.¹

The Oghuz Turkish tribes, who were only partly Islamized, showed extreme Sunni fanaticism by putting down the Shi‘i movements in Iran with an iron hand.

Even the non-Moslem Mongol Ghāzān Khān (dominabatur: 1295 – 1304) found it in his interest to convert himself and his troops to Islam. Although Oljeitu (dominabatur: 1304 – 1316) attached himself to the Shi‘is whose importance was growing, his son found it better to choose once more Sunnism.²

Timur’s religion was a mixture of Sunni Islam and Shamanism which he had inherited from his ancestors. His son Shāhrokh (dominabatur: 1404 – 1447) rectified the religious deviations of his father and became a model of a "most Muslim monarch."³ His lawyers attempted to bring in discrete allusions of the continuing existence of the


²Spuler: The Disintegration of the Caliphate..., p. 167. As it was impossible to control vast territories with foreign and ethnically alien troops, Ghāzān Khān was advised to become a Muslim. Such a suggestion was made to Napoleon, centuries later, by the Arab Sheikh, who promised that it would bring him the obedience of millions of his followers. (Montholon. In: Minorsky: Persia: Religion and History, p. 258, note No. 24, and Minorsky, p. 249). Also see: Appendix Note No. 1 in this work.

³Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 192.
Islamic Caliphate in the person of their master, on the basis of the Qur'anic passage according to which God "gives the kingship to whom he will."\(^1\)

After the victory of the Safavids, the revolutionary and popular religion of their nomadic supporters opposed the newly established official religion and it was difficult to absorb them into a new elite-based administrative system. It is recorded that, "the religion that the Safavids followed while they were winning territory was quite different from the learned official twelver Shi'ism that they began to endorse once they came to power."\(^2\) Still the personality and religious poems of Shāh Ismā'īl (dominabatur 1499 - 1524) continued to exert influence on some of the surviving popular religions of the region.\(^3\) Once they came to power they even began to persecute the followers of Shi'ite extremist and popular sects. "Out of their fifteenth century heretical beliefs the Safavid Shāh labelled only that element that was useful to their own power - a claim of their own divine or semi-divine role."\(^4\)

This idea was tolerated by the official theologians, as well as the idea that the ruler can "be the representative of the religion or the shadow of God

\(^1\) Minorsky: Iran: Opposition.... pp. 192 - 193.


\(^4\) Keddie: op. cit., p. 220. Also see: Appendix Note No. 2 in this work.
on earth, was propagated even by jurists and members of the clergy throughout Iranian history. This "absence of a dualism between 'church' and 'state' and existence of a theoretical assumption of perfection or perfectability of the ruler, helped him to increase his despotic power." \(^2\)

In general it can be said that the clergy "favoured recognition of conquerors at any price and without delay, though they were all aware that marauders far from home were not likely to establish a permanent regime, but would exploit and pillage the helpless population." \(^3\)

Ghazzālī, the most eminent among the sunnite theoreticians, thus points out referring to a Hadith, that religion and worldly power are twins, therefore it is said, that religion is the foundation and power the protector. \(^4\)

The rulers were also completely dependent on the Persian bureaucracy for administration of their empire. As soon as they had established their empire, these nomadic ruling families had to drop their structure and

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3 Ira Marvin Lapidus: Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Age, Cambridge/Massachusetts, 1967, p. 133.

adopt the existing one. Since they knew nothing about complicated state organization, the Persian bureaucrats used to rush to become their servants, and thus carried over the Sassanian administration methods throughout Iranian history.

Despite all of this they were not able to stop the process of decline which each dynasty was destined to follow, and the ruling families lost the bravery characteristic of their ancestors. The nomadic invaders who were moving from one place to another could draw their income from plunder, whereas the small stationary army lost its efficiency.

Due to the empty treasury, the officers were paid through land endowment and the soldiers earned their bread through different occupations. We may attribute Ibn Khaldun's description of the sedentary phase more to the ruling class which could afford comfort and luxuries, and the military weakness of the common sedentary people should be attributed to their mode of production, which at the same time discourages group feeling which is a privilege of the nomadic society.1

The last phase was the period of anarchy when the

1In the sedentary phases of civilization, according to Ibn Khaldun, the comforts and luxuries of life increase due to the growth of crafts, science and arts. But at the same time people lose their bravery and warlike qualities and thus became vulnerable to conquest by any vigorous, uncivilized barbarians. Ibn Khaldun, thus discovers the essential contradictions of rural bedouin and urban life. But at the same time he stresses that it is the lack of group feeling in the city which makes it a prey to conquest. (Ibn Khaldun: Muqaddima, Vol. I, Chap. II, pp. 249 - 310).
dynasties had only nominal power in most areas of the country under their dominance. The actual power was practised by several principalities, which were continuously at war with one another.¹ For instance, when the period of anarchy began in the Abbasid dynasty, several Abbasid princes were assassinated, political and religious conflicts reached an all time high, and the Zanj revolution broke out. Several separatist movements grew up in the Iranian provinces of Khorāsān, Transoxania and Sistān, and a number of principalities sprang up in different parts, such as Gilāh, Azerbāijan, Kurdish and Mesopotamia. Continuous siege and plundering of cities and villages was the main source of income for the principalities, which were permanently at war, or were engaged in the suppression of numerous revolts.

The most important of these principalities was that of the Buyids, who were of the native Iranian origin and who made the Baghdad caliphate their dependency. Minorsky calls the period of their rule an "Iranian intermesso" within the long series of foreign occupation.² The Turkish Saljuqs, who invaded Iran put an end to all the principalities, and succeeded in establishing their own dynasty. However, they did not enjoy overall power even for more than three decades, i.e., during the reigns of Ḥāl Ārslān (dominabatur: 1063 - 1072) and Malek Shāh (dominabatur: 1072 - 1092). And this period was followed by a period of long struggles and wars among the epigones. The situation deteriorated still further after the death

¹Spuler: Iran in frühislamischer Zeit, p. 129.
of the Saljuq Sultan Sanjar (dominabatur: 1130 - 1157) and a chaotic state of affairs prevailed about three quarters of a century till the vanguards of Chengiz Khan appeared in Khorasân where numerous Turks joined them. However, the Mongols as well as the Turkomans and Safavid all had to face the same end. Iran thus experienced periodical cycles of the establishment of empires by nomadic invaders and their subsequent destruction by other nomadic invasions.

The third phase of the cycle is thus marked by a chaotic internal situation which paved the road for a new invasion. As each principality had to keep an army, the general level of military expenditure was high. Over-taxation and extortion were widespread. As "campaigning between rival governors and local leaders was a frequent occurrence, the tendency was for the population to be subject to frequent levies and much extortion. The Kharâj would often be levied several times over in the same year by the rival leaders."

For example, according to Ibn Esfandiyâr, in a part of the Caspian region, tax was levied three times in the

1 Spuler: The Disintegration..., p. 160.
2 Among the principalities which appeared in the last part of the Mongol rule, that of the republic of Sabzavâr is worth mentioning the Sarbadârân (Gallows-birds) who governed a small principality were professing to be Shia. In Minorsky's view "it was another example of the democratic traditions with which this form of heterodoxy was inspired on Persian soil." (Minorsky: Iran: Opposition, p. 192).
4 A kind of tribute.
5 Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 47.
same year. Such was the tyranny of the governors in these areas "that the people sold their estates and those who could, migrated."¹ Because of this repeated and multiple taxation levied on the same people by the leaders of different principalities, the people were greatly impoverished and had to live a miserable life.²

These particular historical conditions, marked by continuous invasions and alien domination, made insecurity the main feature of Iranian life. Not only the economy got deteriorated and the people were pauperized, but also a general syndrome of insecurity became the daily experience of the people.

The emergence of a large number of millenarian movements in Iran over the centuries can be understood and interpreted in terms of the syndrome of the invasions by the nomadic tribes, the establishment of dynasties by the ruling families of these tribes and the consequent perpetual sense of uncertainty and insecurity, anxiety and alienation which grappled the minds of Iranian people over the centuries. In general these movements aimed at creating another world in which they thought they would have less suffering, less fear, more stability and more freedom.


²Lambton: Landlord and Peasant, nn. p. 47.
2.2. **Rural Economic Structure**

a) **Agricultural Life**

The history of Iran tells us that a long time ago the Avestan people who were a part of the Aryan tribes and were migrating along with other tribes settled in Iran. At that time Iran was inhabited by aboriginal people who were living there from the unknown date. Naturally from the earliest time conflicts between the aboriginals and the new immigrants began. Due to these conflicts as well as some other reasons, the Avestan people were encouraged to concentrate themselves in settlements. "Only when in sufficient numbers could they defend themselves against the hostile aboriginals and protect themselves from wild animals."¹ "Thus in the earliest time the dominant type of settlement was the village."²

The Avestan people who continued to live their life in settlements followed agriculture as their occupation. They realized the significance of cultivation. In the course of time the Aryan beliefs in natural phenomena and Mithraism and Mazdaism was replaced by the religion of Zarathustra and Avesta became their important religious inscripture.

The Avesta extols the settled life of the peasant and the careful tending of cattle and recognizes a religious merit in the cultivation of the soil, and in the reclaiming of land still lying waste.³ Zarathustra says in the

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³Geiger, p. 12; Lambton, p. 10.
Gathas: "I learned from the True Religion that Mardā, the Creator of the world, is the father, His son the good-natured farmer, His daughter the good-natured earth." ¹

Zoroastrians attached so much importance to agriculture and domestication of animals that Zarathustra had some place in his songs criticizing those Karapans Aryans who used to sacrifice animals for the gods, because the animals were not created for that purpose but for the purpose of cultivation. ²

The process of settlement and consequently cultivation of land and the spread of agricultural way of life ultimately culminated into making Iranian society a feudal society particularly during the reign of the Parthians. Parthians were Avestan people who established the great Parthian empire in pre-Islamic Iran. The most important feature of the economic and social life of the Parthian empire was the "feudal structure of both social and economic life with the great feudatories leading, with the minor feudal lords holding cities and villages, with small free landowners cultivating their holdings and with bondmen working for both large and small landowners." ³

The main features of the Parthian feudal system were

¹E. Purdavudī, Gathas, Sorud-hā-ye payghambar-e irān sepītaman zartosht, Bombay, 1952, Yešna 45, p. 92. There are several songs in Avesta, in admiration of cultivation and settled life as well as tending of cattle, e.g. Yešna 31(15), Yešna 44(20), Yešna 45(9), Yešna 46(19) and Yešna 51(5). Also see Appendix Note No. 3, in this work.

²Ibid., Yešna 44(20), p. 88.

inherited by the Sassanian dynasty, the last Iranian dynasty which was defeated by the Arabs. This system was able to survive in more or less the same form under the Arabs.\footnote{One might say that a feudal tradition of society and a consequent class structure have been as characteristic of Iranian history as the oasis is of landscape.\ldots\ The Parthian period of Iran's history is usually cited as the highpoint of 'feudalism' but some form of 'feudalism' seems always to have been present.}

\textbf{b) Land Tenure}

The special character of landownership gave rise to the theory of the Asiatic Mode of Production and subsequently to other concepts about Oriental stagnation and despotism. Referring to the Oriental society Marx points out: "Der Staat ist hier der oberste Grundherr. Die Souveränität ist hier das auf nationaler Stufe konzentrierte Grundeigentum. Dafür existiert dann aber auch kein Privatgrundeigentum, obwohl sowohl privat- wie gemeinschaftlicher Besitz und Nutznießung des Bodens."\footnote{Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Berlin, 1969, Vol. III, p. 799.} Massarat, an adherent of this theory, considers Iran a typical example of Asiatic Mode of Production.\footnote{M. Massarat: Asiatische Produktionsweise (Iran). In: Studien über die Dritte Welt (Geographische Hochschulmanuskripte), Heft 4, Göttingen, 1977, p. 38.} Marxist critics of the Asiatic Mode of Production, who tend to accept unilinear development theory, drop this theory and divide the pre-capitalist stages of production relations into primitive communism, slavery and feudalism. On the basis of this classification, some Soviet Orientalists divide Iranian history up till the 19th
century into two phases. The first phase starts from the beginning to the Arab invasion. This they consider the period of slavery,\(^1\) and the second phase starts from the period of Arab invasion to the beginning of this century which they describe as the period of feudalism.\(^2\) It must be pointed out that the implication of Hindess and Hirst's position according to Turner is that if the Asiatic Mode of Production is theoretically inadequate, the principal mode of production, dominant historically in Asia and the Middle East, was the Feudal Mode of Production in one of its variant forms.\(^3\)

Through the valuable and detailed study of Ann Lambton in 1953, we get a better picture of the agrarian relations in Iran. According to her, in the entire Iranian Islamic history three different types of land-ownership existed more or less simultaneously. They were,

a) state
b) private
c) churchlands

\(a) \textbf{State ownership}\)

Although the main features of Parthian and Sassanian "feudal" system were able to survive during the Islamic period, under the influence of nomadic tradition the level of state ownership increased. It was just after the first Arab invasion on Iran that the Arab leader Caliph Omar appropriated for

\(^1\) Joint authors: \textit{Tāriḵ-e 伊朗, Vol. I, Chap. I, p. 2.}

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 270ff.

the state (or for himself) not only the Sassanian
crownlands but also all the land of the people of
Khosro's\textsuperscript{1} house, the land of those killed in war,
the land of those who had fled, all the swamps,
and all of Dair Yazid.\textsuperscript{2} The process of bringing
the land under the state control continued during
the Ummayyad period. The amount of previously
appropriated land also went on increasing due to
the law that one fifth of the booty should be set
aside for the Caliphs.

They also enlarged their land by usurpation, freely
or forcibly buying land or taking it as gift from
the nobility who preferred to give a part of their
property to the Caliphs in return for protection,
or to enable them to get rid of "the lawless
elements or unjust tax-collectors."\textsuperscript{3} In addition
to cultivated land, a lot of pasture land was
usurped by the rulers for their flocks, remounts
for the army and animals used for post, etc.\textsuperscript{4}

According to Tarikh-e Qumm "pastures were preserved
in every village in the neighbourhood of Nehavand
for the beasts of the Caliph; the author mentions
their usurpation by one of the military leaders."\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1}The Sassanian King.

\textsuperscript{2}Al-Baladhuri: Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān (ed. Goeje, Leyden,
and the Poll-Tax in Early Islam, Cambridge/Massachusetts,

\textsuperscript{3}Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 25 - 26.

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 27.

\textsuperscript{5}Hasan b. Muhammad b. Hasan al-Qummi: Tārikhi Qumm,
In: Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 27.
This policy was later on continued by the Abbāsids as well as by the rulers of principalities. However, under the influence of the Turkish nomadic tradition, the state land\(^1\) increased so much that the Turkish Sultans became the main landowners.

According to this Turkish nomadic tradition, ultimate ownership of land was vested in the Saljuq tribes and the Sultan as their representative. That is to say that according to this tradition all the inherited and acquired material possessions of the tribe were becoming a part of the property of the Sultans. Therefore this tradition was so much accepted that the practical jurists like Ghazāli had to uphold the will of the Sultans due to their de facto power, even though it was contrary to the Islamic rules.

b) **Private ownership**

Despite increasing proportion of the state land, the private landholding remained an important form of landownership. The private property has the Islamic religious sanction and probably because of that there was still wider prevalence of private ownership of land. Owing to different reasons, some provinces like Fars which had under the Sassanians been in the hands of the landed aristocracy, preserved its feudal character into Islamic times. As late as the tenth century it appears that the greater part of the province was still in the hands

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\(^1\)Crown lands (Khāleseh, Khās, Inju) and state land (Divāni) were in practice one and the same, and are not clearly distinguished.
of the old landed proprietors. Similar was the situation in the province of Esfahan at the end of ninth century. One could easily discern also a kind of cycle of expansion and contraction of privately owned lands in different phases of the already mentioned cycles of events in the Iranian history.

During the period of invasion and expansion there used to be decline in the size of private land-ownership, because a large part of it was usurped by the invaders, and during the decaying period of each dynasty, private ownership used to get augmented. In the later periods much of those lands which were assigned to individuals by the rulers on hereditary basis, were transformed into private ownership by the assignees.

c) Churchlands (Vaqf):
Another form of landholding which became important later was "vaqf", i.e. res extra commercium. "Vaqf" lands (Pl.: Auqāf) are those immobilized for charitable or other purposes and "Vaqf" is an essentially Islamic institution.

The Islamic jurists recognize two types of "auqāf", charitable and personal. Charitable "auqāf" was used for various purposes, ranging from the upkeep of shrines and religious schools to the support of the descendants of the prophet and others of the religious classes, etc. The personal "auqāf" were of different types, among them the property placed under the control of a trust for use of the descendants of an individual or the settler.

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1 Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 33.

2 Ibid., p. 230.
Generally the size of all kinds of landownership was subject to changes. State land could be converted to private by way of assignment and gifts, or it could be converted to "vaqf" land, (as was done in the Safavid period), if the ruler wished. So, similarly the "Vaqf" land could be converted into the state land, as done in the Mongol period, or it could be converted to private land by individuals.

The private land could be converted to state land by occupation, usurpation or confiscation, and to the "vaqf" land if the owner so wished. This in short means that state land could be increased mainly by force.

c) System of Land Assignment

As was previously explained, the process of dynasty-building and institutionalization compelled the ruling families to dis-associate themselves from the nomadic tribes and establish mercenary armies. But taxation and land revenue were generally not adequate enough to support their heavy military expenditure and their luxurious lifestyle. This brought about a great change in pattern of economic-social relations and the emergence of the institution of "eqta" i.e. assignment of land.

"The origins of the 'eqta' go back to early Islamic time, but it was not till the rise of the Saljuqs in the eleventh century that this type of holding became the most important form of landholding in the country."\(^1\)

Under the Islamic law the existence of private property was both recognized and approved of.\(^2\) However

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\(^1\) Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 28.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 16.
when the Muslims found themselves faced with the necessity of reconciling theory with practice some changes were made.

In the early Islamic period, landownership was mainly of two main kinds:
1. It was private property, and
2. The land was considered as belonging to the Muslim community,¹ but was in the actual possession of the de facto ruler of the time.

As it was already pointed out, under the influence of nomadic tradition the Turkish Saljuq ruling family became the main landowner. However, like their Arab predecessor they found it very difficult to control and administer their large empire.

"In due course, after the initial period of expansion, the basis of their power began to alter, in the same way as the basis of the power of the Caliphate had altered after the Arab expansion."² The Saljuq could no longer depend on their tribal compatriots for their support, and had to rely on armies composed of slaves and freedmen. But the Saljuq Sultans were not able to finance these mercenary armies. The total sum collected through taxation and crown land revenue was inadequate, mostly due to the economic decay and the poverty of the tax-payers. The remedy to the situation was the revival and development of the "eqṭā"-system. Under the "eqṭā" system the crown land was assigned to the people of various categories.

¹That part of the booty theoretically held in the name of Muslim community was called Sāvāfī (Pl. of Sefiyeh) during the Arab period. Practically it was included in crown land.

²Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 56.
The assignment of land was not limited to military officials alone. The land was assigned to members of the ruling family, and also to members of certain other tribes.\(^1\) It was also assigned to members of the administration,\(^2\) in return for money or furnishing the ruler with military contingents\(^3\) or simply as a kind of gift.\(^4\)

But this system, though designed as a temporary remedy, became a cause of the decline and downfall of the ruling families. The system of land assignment brought about further depletion of state revenue from agriculture. The main reason for the destruction of agriculture was the assignees' ignorance and disinterest in the land due to the fact that the land was assigned to them not permanently but for a fixed period of time. They squeezed as much as they could, out of the land in the shortest possible time whilst it was in their temporary possession. In the long run, this reduced the state revenue and consequently weakened the army, thus increasing the level of anarchy and creating a welcome situation for the new invasion. It is significant to know that the system of "eqta" was introduced in a repeated manner, as a part of the whole vicious circle of events, namely invasion, establishment and decline of dynasty, period of anarchy and new invasion.

From the early Islamic period until the constitutional revolution of 1905, the assignment of land was the main strategy which was followed by different ruling classes to

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\(^1\) Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 60.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 62.

\(^3\) Ibid.,

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 64.
rise revenue, to pay remuneration and to compensate, and it did not undergo any major change.\textsuperscript{1} However, the main change in the institution of land assignment was its gradual tendency towards hereditary assignment in the post Mongol periods. Minorsky, after having examined five different documents of land assignment, points to the "persistance of the administrative tradition from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries." He also speaks of some "immunities" accompanied by the hereditary assignment called Soyurghal. "The hereditary character of the institution stands out against the conditions of a toyul which only conferred on the beneficiary the right to collect the government taxes for his own benefit."\textsuperscript{2}

Lambton points out that the difference between hereditary and non-hereditary assignments can be traced back to Saljuq times. According to her, in the intervening period between the fall of the Mongols and the rise of Safavids, there was a tendency for all types of assignments, to become unified and to represent to the holders, grants of immunity from all interference by government officials.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1}Inspite of persistence of the institution of land assignment, the terminology used for it has gone through some changes adapting itself to the language of the ruling class. The Arab terms iqtā-al-istighlāl (i.e. assignment of the revenue of a piece of land) and iqtā-al-tamlik (i.e. assignment of land itself) was used until Mongol period. The term was then replaced by toyul (i.e. land assignment) which is seldom met within post Mongol times. The term Soyurghal (i.e. grant of land or its revenue) was used from Qara Soyunlu to Qajar periods.


\textsuperscript{3}Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 102.
The system of land assignment, according to Weber, is the characteristic of the patrimonial society. In his view "the special character of Islamic feudalism is related to its origin in an army of mercenaries and in the institution of tax farming. Patrimonial rulers without the necessary resources found themselves obliged to remunerate their mercenaries by assigning to them the tax payments of the political subjects." 1

Turner suggests that Iranian history is "the effect of the oscillation between (Weberian) Frebendalism and Feudalism in which the feudal mode of production is dominant." 2 This view rests on the function of "eqta" which gave a patrimonial ruler a greater control over his military generals, especially because "eqta" provides only a conditional right of ownership. Except in the periods of territorial expansion, when the rulers had fiscal problems, there was a pressure to convert prebendal land into feudal ownership. Weber describes the conversion of the Frebendal holdings of Saljuq and Mamluk slave troops into feudal landownership in this way:

"The feudalization of the economy was facilitated when the Saljuq troops and Mamluks were assigned the tax yield of land and subjects; eventually land was transferred to them as service holdings and they became landowners. The extraordinary legal insecurity of the tax paying population vis-a-vis the arbitrariness of the troops to whom their tax capacity was mortgaged, could paralyze commerce and hence the money economy; indeed since the period of the Saljuqs the oriental market economy declined or stagnated." 3

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2 Turner: Capitalism and Feudalism..., p. 75. Frebend was originally an ecclesiastical term signifying the stipend drawn from land granted to a canon from a cathedral estate. Weber uses this term to mean "allowance in kind" or "rights of use of land in return for services where these allowances or rights are not granted on a hereditary principle."

2.3. Urban Socio-Economic Situation

a) Urban Industry and Craft

An important feature of the Arab invasion on Iran was that in it though the nomads provided the military function, the leadership was provided by townspeople who had strong commercial interests and links. However, this was not the case with the later Turkish and Mongolian invasions. This is probably due to climatic differences between the deserts of Arabia and the Central Asian Highlands ¹ from where the Turkish and Mongolian invaders came. The situation in Arabia was favourable for the development of urban communities and a strong commercial class in them. This Arab urban population looked down on both nomadic and agricultural life, and considered it much below commerce, which they regarded as an outstandingly noble occupation. ² But the Turks and Mongols came from the mountainous areas in which both the growth of urban population as well as commerce was meagre and so their way of life was essentially dominated by nomadic mode of production.

Islam not only favoured town dwelling, but also centred most of its rituals such as Friday prayer, five daily prayers, the Ramadan fast, etc. around urban life. Therefore, due to its urban orientation, this religious ideology could penetrate into the urban then rural and nomadic areas. However, Weber diagnosed Islamic patrimonialism as an extreme case of political uncertainty, ³ under which autonomous cities, like those

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² Ibid., p. 447.
in Europe, could not exist.\footnote{Bryan Turner: Weber and Islam..., p. 13. Weber based his study of Islam on the research of Carl Heinrich Becker who emphasized the differences between European and Islamic feudalism. In his study of Middle East, he finds that rational formal law, autonomous cities, an independent burgher class and political stability were totally absent in Islam.}

It is historically true that there had been some urban development in Iran even prior to the invasion of the Arab tribes. Meanwhile, as it was pointed out earlier the Islamic religious ideology had potential to give impetus to urbanization. Therefore, along with the spread of Islam in Iran there had been sustained growth of urbanization, urban way of life and urban activities and even municipal dispositions were not entirely lacking.\footnote{Claude Cahen: Economy, Society, Institutions. In: The Camb. Hist. of Islam, Vol. II, p. 521.} Different industries and crafts were developed and goods such as soap, metal products, pottery and paper could be manufactured. But the textile industry was the basic industry which was started under the Arab Umayyad dynasty and got rapidly expanded. Many kinds of textile products were produced e.g. clothes, carpets, tapestries, upholstery and the like.\footnote{Bernard Lewis: The Arabs in History, London, 1966, p. 86.} Mineral resources were exploited for the metal industries in towns. In Iran mainly silver and precious stones were produced and Persian Gulf divers collected the celebrated pearls.\footnote{Cahen: Op. cit., p. 520.} The Islamic ideology left enough possibilities for different interpretations of economic concepts,\footnote{A. Ghanie Ghausyy: Die islamische Wirtschaftsethik und Wirtschaftslehre. In: Jahrbuch fur Sozialwissenschaft 34, 1983, p. 382.} and
Muslim scholars wrote on economic subjects.¹

However the Seljuq and other Turkish and Mongol nomads showed typical dislike to settled way of life and gradually undermined the importance of urban economy. It was later on only under the rule of the Safavid ’Abbas I that urban industries were revived.² But they could not reach the same level of development which existed during the periods before the Mongol invasion.³

Some scholars have emphasized that city feudalism and rent capitalism characterized by the urban landlords and domination of countryside by the city was a very common scene in Iran and other Islamic countries.⁴

b) **Guild system**

The existence of a large urban working population in Iran and also elsewhere led to the development of guilds which, as will be shown later, were closely

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¹S.D. Goitein: The Rise of the Near-Eastern Bourgeoisie in Early Islamic Times, In: Journal of World History, 1957, Vol. III, pp. 580 - 581. For example Shaibani (d. 804), who was the co-founder of the Hanafite School of Law, wrote a book called "On Earning" dealing with problems similar to those discussed by Steel. Goitein writes: "He like Richard Steel had to overcome deep-seated religious prejudices against making money, convictions made popular by mendicant ascetics, who might be compared to the begging friars and monks, against whom Steel wrote so eloquently."


³Ibid., p. 564.

involved in several important social movements. Lewis suggests that the Islamic guild was a continuation of the guild system of the Byzantine empire though entirely different from it.\(^1\) But according to Massignon it was the "Karmatian" movement (which will be discussed later on) that created the Islamic guilds and gave them their distinctive character.\(^2\)

Whatever the origin of the Islamic guild might be, it must be said that it was the product of the existing socio-economic conditions dominating the Asian and North African countries. It was especially during the period of Arab domination that a high level of economic development was achieved in these countries.

"The rise of an elaborate system of banking, with headquarters in Baghdad and branches all over the empire, served to keep the state well supplied with coined money and to maintain generally a monetary economy. Responding to the growing industrialisation, it resulted in a concentration of both capital and labour."\(^3\)

\(^1\) Lewis: The Islamic Guilds, p. 21. In: Massignon's view they were influenced by Byzantine as well as Sassanian guild system. However they were by no means a mere revival of it. The Muslim guilds were rather evidence of the violent social reaction of the vast herd of workmen labourers and peasants against the conquering class which had collected and enslaved them. (Louis Massignon: Islamic Guilds. In: Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, New York, 1937, Vol. VII, p. 214).

\(^2\) Louis Massignon: Islamic Guilds, p. 214: "The Karmatians (Garmatians) developed a vast Masonic society, which was extended among the merchants, peasants and artisans and which developed and diffused guild organization." Also cf. idem: arts. Sinf and Shadd. In: Enc. of Islam. Also see: Appendix Note No. 4 in this work.

\(^3\) Lewis: Op. cit., p. 23. Thus according to Massignon the economic progress was not due to technical invention. "The concentration of labour was the result of the colonial slave raids subsidized by (these) bankers, under the pretext that they were holy wars, in order to furnish labour for the workshops in the towns and for the plantations." (Massignon: Islamic Guilds, p. 214).
It was necessary for the artisans of different crafts to come together to protect their common interests. In Cohen's view, it is difficult "to see whether, as in Byzantium and earlier in Rome, they were set up by state control, or, as in the guilds of the later Middle Ages in Europe, they were spontaneous associations playing an important part in the general lives, both public and private of their members." In any case the state seems to have tried to control the guilds, whose connection with anti-Caliphate movements they found so threatening that "under Sunni rule, the guilds were persecuted, submitted to a thousand restrictions, deprived of any legal rights."  

The craft-guilds became one of the most interesting and important socio-economic phenomena of the Islamic societies, including Iran which survived through the centuries up to the modern period. Information about the interior organization of these guilds is available mainly since the post-Mongol time. Every guild had its code of rules, customs and form of ceremony. This code was called Dostur or Dastur (a Persian word meaning instruction, rule).

The head of the guild was elected by the master craftsmen. He also had the functions of a treasurer and a scribe. He was at the top of the guild's hierarchy and under him came the elders among the craftsmen, the head artisan (Ustad), the journeyman (Sani) and the apprentice (Mobjadi or Shagerd) in that order.

There was no fixed period of the apprenticeship.

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1 Cohen: Economy..., p. 528.

2 Lewis: The Islamic..., p. 25.
This situation still exists in Iran and according to Lewis it was generally the case in other countries also at that time. During the period of apprenticeship the apprentice receives no salary, but probably accommodation and food are provided to him. The members usually perform their religious duties in the local mosque, from where their annual religious processions also begin.

Another important feature of the guilds which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter was the relationship of craft-guilds with socio-religious movements, as well as with fraternities. Lewis points out the following difference between Islamic guilds and the European guild system:

a) Contrary to the European guild, which was administered by public authorities, the Islamic one was spontaneously developed from below, in response to the social requirements of the labouring masses. It mistrusted and was often openly hostile to the state.

"How deep is this anti-authoritarian feeling is shown by its sudden revival in the twentieth century, exemplified in the important part played by the guilds in the Persian Revolution, by the startling development of the Islamic guilds into a mass revolutionary organisation in Indonesia, by close connection established by some of the guilds with European Socialism and Communism."

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1Lewis: The Islamic Guilds, p. 30. Massignon presents another variant of groupings in each guild including workman which is also called "gūnī". Accordingly "the apprentice becomes a master in a semi-Masonic ceremony, in the course of which a sash or some piece of material is knotted around him after he takes a solemn oath. The ceremony is followed by a banquet. For the last forty years this ritual has tended to disappear even in Persia." (Massignon: Islamic Guilds, p. 215).

2Lewis: The Islamic Guilds, p. 36.
b) The Islamic guild did not experience the efflorescence of the European guild, culminating in the crystallisation of masters and journeymen into two distinct and hostile classes. In Islamic countries, "master, journeyman and apprentice remained essentially of the same class, in close personal contact."\(^1\)

Free from the inner social differences that split the European guild, the Islamic guild thus retained the popular and equalitarian character imprinted upon it in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when it came into existence in its typical form as an artisan revolt against the rising commercial and financial capitalism of the day.

c) In contrast to the European guilds, which excluded even heretical Christians, the Islamic guild is marked by its interconfessionalism, being open to Jews, Christians and Muslim alike.

d) "Unlike the European, the Islamic guild was never a purely professional organisation. From the days when the guilds formed a part of the masonic system of the Qarmatis, until the present day, they have always had a deprooted ideology, a moral and ethical code, which was taught to all novices at the same time as the craft itself."\(^2\)

It was the peculiar conditions of social life in the

\(^1\) Lewis: The Islamic Guilds, p. 36. "The Moslem craft guilds" Massignon points out "which had originated as democratic organizations always retained this character. They never went through a process of stratification as in the West." (Massignon: Islamic Guilds, p. 215).

\(^2\) Lewis: p. 37.
Near East which made the character of the guilds different from those in Europe, but at the same time they had some features in common.

With the decline of crafts, throughout the nineteenth century and the growth of central government, the excessively large amount of imported products manufactured in Europe, the introduction of machinery and European industrial organization destroyed the Islamic guilds, although in some places they still persist. The taxation of the trades has been one of the oldest methods of raising revenue, since the Arab conquest. Notwithstanding political turbulences the amount collected from each trade was rarely altered. "Each trade was taxed according to some general computation of profit gained in the course of the year."^{2}

N.A. Kuznetsova^{3} points out that in early nineteenth century Iran, the craftsmen could not be assured of their subsistence from their professions only, and therefore had to seek additional employment in market such as gardening and truck farming. These craftsmen who were also engaged in farming, paid additional garden tax. The craftsmen also paid indirect taxes the sum of which often exceeded that of direct taxes. Forced labour was also practised. The authorities made the craftsmen work on different construction projects, which imposed a great burden on them. "Those who suffered most from such forced labour were men in the building trades."^{4}

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The fact that the tax-paying classes fulfilled their labour obligations enabled the construction of the Shāh's (the ruler of Iran) palaces, of bridges and even of whole towns. The Shāh's arsenals and military workshops were also staffed by forced labour.

In addition to the free craftsmen who were in majority, two other groups of craftsmen existed. One group was attached to the Court and the other group was attached to individual feudal lords. It was the free craftsmen who came together in the guilds (Hamkārs or asnāf). Some also began to be employed as workers later on instead of as apprentices and that marked the birth of the capitalist enterprises and not of the hierarchy within a guild.2

In Iran too, the internal management of guilds was not free from interference by government and stronger governments like that of Safavid, used to put strong pressure on the craft organisation.3

c) Taxation System

Although in the cyclical rotation of the historical events, this taxation system was also repeating itself, the level of its implication changed in different phases of this so-called cycles. For the purpose of recalling, it should be mentioned again that we have earlier identified the phases of cycles of events in Iranian

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1 N. A. Kuznetsova: Materialy..., p. 287.
2 Ibid., pp. 290 - 291.
3 Ibid.
history such as the invasion by alien tribes, establishment of the dynastic rule, the period of centralization or decentralization followed by the period of anarchy.

It can be said that during the period of establishing dynasty, and especially the centralized one, the distortion was less than in the period of anarchy.

It was also subject to variation due to the geographical location of each area. For instance the nomadic tribes used to enjoy more immunity, compared with the farmers who were under a continuous pressure of the tax-collectors.

The archetype of the Iranian tax system was the one applied by the Sassanians, in the pre-Islamic period, but the same remained mostly unchanged during the Islamic period. The Arabs distinguished between the provinces which had surrendered voluntarily and those which had been seized by force. They took over the administration of the latter provinces, whereas in case of the former, they allowed the old ruling classes to remain, on the condition that they paid annual tributes. Although in both cases the Sassanian administrative system remained unchanged, the population of the surrendered provinces had to pay a higher tax.

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1 The term Kharāj, applied to mean tribute, has been used in Iran for several thousand years. It is originally derived from the neo-Babylonian word "Alako" meaning "submission" and "obedience".

2 Dennett: Conversion and the Poll-tax..., p. 118. Therefore in Khorāsān, a surrendered land, the chiefs and princes collected the taxes and paid the tribute to the Arabs. They extracted taxes as they pleased, keeping for themselves whatever they wanted, and thus, comparatively, impoverished the population more.
During the Sassanian period, two main types of taxes existed, namely tax on land and poll tax. After the reform, as a result of the Mazdakite revolt, the former tax was no longer levied on the basis of the harvest, but the land was divided into unit areas and then tax was fixed on each unit. The poll tax was exacted from individual males according to their annual income. But it must be mentioned that the higher strata of society was exempted from paying poll tax, which was considered "a badge of degradation and a mark of social inferiority."  

This system of taxation remained unchanged, with the difference that in the early Islamic time the Muslims were exempted from the taxes. This became the basis of the theory of the fall of the Arab Empire put forth by Julius Wellhausen. According to him, the economic motive of the tax exemption induced a large number of people to get converted to Islam. An increase in conversion thus meant a decline in revenue for the government and consequently its weakness. At the same time many poor converts immigrated to the cities in the hope of receiving state pensions. This resulted into a depletion of the work force in rural area causing fall in the production thereby fall in the state revenue. This caused unmanageable stresses and strains on the

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2Dennett: Conversion, p. 15. Thus, the "Seven ruling families," the nobility, who were administrative chiefs (Vozorgan), soldiers, priests, secretaries and finally those in the service of the King were exempted from poll tax.

state and consequently brought about its downfall. Later, the viceroy of Iraq, al-Hajjāj b. Yusof tried to solve this problem, by forcibly sending the farmers back to their villages.  

As suggested by some historians there was a connection between the conversion of the nobility and poll tax. Al-Balādhrī mentions, that the nobility of Esfahān was willing to pay tribute, but since they disdained to pay the poll tax (which they considered as a mark of social inferiority), they became Muslims. It must be mentioned here that the nobility who had interest in maintaining social inequality remained Sunni Muslims while the masses were attracted to Shiism which promised them equality.

The following description apparently highlights the modus operandi of collecting tax in the rural areas, and brings forth the misery in which the peasantry had to live:

1Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 23.

2Al-Baladhrī: Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān (Liber expugnationis regionum), ed. R. J. Goeje, Leyden, 1866, p. 314. In: Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 184; and in: Dennett: Conversion and the Poll Tax..., p. 32. According to Dennett, "Kharāj" and "Jezeyeh" were terms used either synonymously meaning general tax or each of these words had a specific meaning: "Kharāj" meant land tax and "Jezeyeh" poll tax. (Dennett, pp. 12 - 13).

3It seems that from the early Islamic periods till the triumph of the Safavids these two Islamic sects acquired class character. This historical fact belies the assumption that mainly belief determines social action. H. H. Robertson claims that Weber saw a psychological determination of economic events. (Cf. Hector Menteith Robertson: Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism, Cambridge, 1935 (1922), pp. XI - XIII).
"Over each village is placed an agent, who collects from the peasants first the rental for the landlord, secondly the annual tax, and thirdly a good reward for his own trouble... Land is assigned to the farmer on shares, with no certainty of his having the same plot the next year. When using his own seed, he gives one third in rental, when the owner furnishes the seed he gives two thirds of the crop. When oppressed or beaten the poor farmers have little hope of redress and as a last resort they abandon their village. Gathering up their few utensils and clothes, piling them on their oxen and donkeys, and driving a few sheep before them, the family seems subsistence under a new landlord. At times the whole village is thus depopulated."

It can be broadly said that the taxation system in Iran which was archaic in its origin and full of minutiae, has been subjected to variations from time to time. Similarly, there has been corresponding changes in the application of tax system.

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2.4. Geography

a) Geographical Setting

Montesquieu was one of the first to make several references to geographical and climatic conditions in his discussions on Oriental despotism. Marx and Engels had also already emphasized the significance of these factors as the explanation of state involvement in irrigation and defence and emergence of bureaucracy. They concurred with the view that Oriental despotism had arisen due to the need to provide artificial irrigation.

The role of irrigation became the central thesis of Wittfogel about the "hydraulic economy". According to him the origin of centralization of political power and despotism in Asian countries can be traced in the system of artificial irrigation of the land. The "hydraulic societies" had been ruled by despotic governments, with strong permanent armies and complex

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2 George Lichtheim: Marx and the "Asiatic Mode of Production". In: Saint Antony's College Papers, No. 14, 1963, p. 91. Plekhanov in his interpretation of Russian history and under the influence of Solov'ev pointed out, that due to the lack of diversity of natural conditions, in contrast to Western Europe, the level of economic development on the Russian plain remained very low. Although Plekhanov considered the effect of Mongol invasion on the history of Russia, and Russian despotism, his explanation was based on the shift of population to unfavourable regions. (Cf. Marian Sawyer: Plekhanov on Russian History: A Marxist Approach to Historical Pluralism. In: Science and Society, Vol. 39, 1975, pp. 296 - 301).
bureaucratic systems. The despotic rule was possible and also was strengthened because of the government's managerial function in the field of irrigation. They could supply and distribute river water efficiently among the peasantry who did not own their land.¹

It would be worthwhile to see how far the observations made about the role of geographical conditions and of irrigation system in the emergence of "Oriental despotism" and "Patrimonial bureaucracy", including Wittfogel's thesis can be applied to Iran. Therefore attempts will be made in the following two sections to examine: a) Geographical Conditions in Iran; and b) Irrigation System in Iran.

a) Geographical conditions in Iran:

Iran is a vast country with a great variety in natural conditions. The size of the land, even with the reduced frontiers which it has today, covers 1,645,000 square kilometers, an area larger than the nine major European countries.² A large part of it is covered by mountain chains with many peaks rising to a height of 10,000 - 14,000 feet, and in its centre lies a huge desert with less than 5 inches rainfall per annum.

¹ Karl Wittfogel: Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power, New Haven, 1957. It is, as a matter of fact, an over-simplification of the social and economic system to search for despotism and centralization in the irrigation methods. As Lichtheim points out: "Oriental society clearly is something more complex than a system of canals." (Lichtheim: Marx and..., p. 93).

² Italy, France, Switzerland, Western Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Great Britain and Ireland combined.
Lambton makes a broad classification of Iranian clima
tic conditions, dividing it into five major clima
tic regions as given below:
a) Upland districts with unirrigated farming
b) Upland districts with insufficient rainfall
   where only oasis cultivation is possible
c) Lowland coastal belts of the Caspian Sea, with
   thick forests and heavy rainfall
d) Northern shores of Persian Gulf, with oppressively
   hot climate and inhospitable hinterland
e) Iranian plateau. The greater part of Iran is
   situated on the plateau which falls away in the
   centre and east to the great central desert, an
   arid, uninhabited, untracked salt desert.¹

The large surface area and its ruggedness, and the
variety of climatic conditions, could be considered as
factors contributing to the emergence of decentralization
rather than centralization of political and economic
power. Wittfogel mentions Iran, among other countries,
as a case illustrating his argument with regard to
"hydraulic economy". According to him Iran has had
experienced continuously centralized rule and he gives
examples of centralized government in Iran during the
pre-Islamic period. He also argues that this despotic
rule in Iran was made possible because of the "hydraulic
economy" that is the economy based on artificial
irrigation system. But we have pointed out earlier that
historically Iran always experienced oscillation between
the centralized rules and decentralized rules, and there

¹Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 1.
were very few historical moments when Iran has had really organized centralized government. This climatic and geographical variations mainly came in the way of centralization of power. It was always difficult for a centralized government to cross over natural barriers such as high mountains, rivers, forest and the like, and maintain perpetual hold on the people in far and wide areas. It also needs to be emphasized that Iran has no large rivers like the Nile in Egypt. These small rivers could not be of any great use for the purpose of navigation and irrigation. The absence of large rivers has also deprived Iran of the inexpensive and reliable method of flood-irrigation practiced in the Nile-Valley, and except in Khuzestān - even of the more elaborate and fragile system of perennial irrigation by canals and weirs traditionally used in Mesopotamia.¹

The irrigation system in Iran, as will be explained in details was not only very expensive but also the sources of water supply were so numerous that they could not in any way be controlled by the despotic rulers. So in this respect also Wittfogel's thesis could not hold true about Iran. The explanation of the sporadic emergence of centralized rules in Iran needs to be given in terms of some other factors. However, centralized rules were limited to two very short periods in the whole Iranian history, and must be considered as exceptions. Therefore we can conclude that decentralized political power was the typical political organization in Iran. This kind of decentralization of political power was caused by certain historical and geographical

¹Issawi: The Economic History of Iran, p. 2.
factors which have been already explained in this work.

b) **Irrigation System**

Although the abovementioned regions vary from each other in climatical and geographical conditions, they are, with the exception of the Caspian region all subject, to a greater or lesser degree, to one limiting factor, namely inadequate rainfall and consequent scarcity of water.

Due to the limitation set by inadequate rain and scarcity of water for almost 2500 years, a peculiar system of artificial irrigation known as "Kariz" or "San`at" has been used in Iran.\(^1\) Wells are sunk to tap the underground water sources especially in the upland valleys. These wells which are two to three hundred feet apart are joined by a tunnel, through which the water flows, until it finally comes to the surface of the ground on the lower plain.\(^2\)

The "Kariz" are mining installations, using galleries called cross-cuts (travers-bancs) to extract waters in the underground pools.

"Not only does the digging of the shafts and cross-cuts pertain to mining technique; the search for the Kariz and the determination of its site - especially the mother well are

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\(^2\) Wilson: Persian Life..., p. 278.
carried out by excellent hydrogeological methods, obviously more or less unformulated but not in the least using the dubious methods of the water-diviners.¹

This function is traditionally performed by specialists called Moqannis,² who search for sources of water by means of highly skilled and time and labour consuming operation.³ The depth and length of the "Kārizes" varies according to geographical factors. Some are only a few hundred metres long, and do not go deep down, but there are some in the Yazd region which are over 43 kilometres in length and others, near Gunabad, which reach down to more than 300 metres, a length of 5 to 10 kilometres, with a depth of the order of 100 metres, is a common average.⁴

The cost of construction also varies according to the length and depth of the "Kāriz", as well as the nature of the soil. But in general it can be said that the cost is very high. Not only the construction of the "Kāriz" requires a large capital investment, but also


²In Afghanistan they are called Kārizkan. (Cressey: Anats, Karez..., p. 29).


for its upkeep, "the cost is almost always heavy."\(^1\)

But unlike other traditional irrigation devices, a "Kāriz" requires no power source other than gravity to maintain the flow.\(^2\) The office of the water master (Mirāb) quoted by Wittfogel,\(^3\) which was an important institution during the Middle Ages, was peculiar to some regions such as Marv and Esfahan, because, in these areas, the distribution of water was a complicated matter. This was also the case in areas where water would become scarce at certain periods in the year, and it was thus necessary to appoint some officers to organize distribution. Appointments were made on temporary basis just to cover the period of scarcity. It must be mentioned here that this Kāriz system of irrigation and water supply is still in operation in Iran.

\(^{1}\) Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 220; Cressey: Canals, Karez..., pp. 36 - 38. Wilson says: "The value of a fountain is often the equivalent of the village, which without this supply would revert to the wilderness." (Wilson: Persian Life..., p. 278). English mentioning the high cost of building a "Kāriz" adds that in "Iran each leader was evaluated on the basis of the number of qanats (and mosques) constructed during his reign." (English: The Origin and Spread..., p. 178). It is worth mentioning that we hear about such activities, on a considerable scale, only during the rule of some powerful, centralized regimes such as that of 'Abbas I.


\(^{3}\) Wittfogel: Oriental Despotism..., p. 53.
In many other areas the distribution of water is entirely in the hands of the peasants themselves. This is the case in Ardistan. In Khorasan, where irrigation is by kariz, it is not usual to appoint a mirab, this is also so in Kurdistan, where even in the case of river water a mirab is seldom appointed.\textsuperscript{1}

The ownership of "kariz" is widely diffused throughout the population, because of rapid fragmentation in ownership.\textsuperscript{2} Due to the great labour and high costs often involved in their upkeep, a vast number of "karizes" have gone out of use in the past centuries.\textsuperscript{3} Still even in modern times, the "kariz" is the major source of irrigation water as well as of water for domestic use of many cities in Iran. It is estimated that nearly 15 million acres of cultivated land, one-third to one-half of the irrigated areas are watered by some 37,500 "karizes" of which an estimated 21,000 are in fully operating order and 16,500 are in use but need repairs.\textsuperscript{4} Their aggregate length has been estimated to be more than 160,000 kilometres and their total discharge is said to be of 20,000 cubic metres per second.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1} Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 223.
\textsuperscript{2} English: The Origin and Spread..., p. 179.
\textsuperscript{3} Lambton: op. cit., p. 221.
\textsuperscript{4} Farhad Ghahraman: The Right of Use and Economics of Irrigation Water in Iran, Ann Arbor, 1958, pp. 44 - 45.
\textsuperscript{5} E. Noel: Qanats. In: Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society, No. 31, 1944, p. 191. The same suggestion has been repeated by Cressey: Qanats, Karaz..., p. 39. According to Cressey the number of karizes in Iran reaches 40,000 and their aggregate length has been placed at 100,000 miles.
The sources of water supply through "Kārīz" are so numerous that it is said that even the small area of the Nishapur plain has about 12,000 springs fed by 12,000 Kārīzes.¹

Irrigation by well has also been used in several parts of Iran. The wells are worked by 1, 6 or 8 oxen and each ox has two men working with it. This method which has been used since centuries in widely dispersed areas, is still very laborious and inefficient, and mostly for the cultivation of summer crops.

In general it can be concluded, that throughout the centuries irrigation has been carried out by a variety of means namely seasonal rainfall, small rivers, "Kārīzes" and wells. It can be said that in Iran, in contrast to the Nile valley, the sources of irrigation have been numerous but dispersed.²

2.5. Slavery

While analysing the socio-economic background of the Iranian social movements it is necessary to dilate on the institution of slavery which emerged during the pre-Islamic period and continued till the recent past. At any moment of the history Iran has had a sizable


²Kuros: op. cit., p. 53ff.
number of slaves. These slaves were mostly negroes
kidnapped from the African continent and sold to
rich people, the noblemen and the kings.

Slavery was never a dominant mode of production,
however the slaves played considerably important roles
in the sphere of politics and the economy. A large
number of slaves have been enrolled in the mercenary
armies of the rulers since the reign of Abbasid Caliph
al-Mo'tasem (dominabatur: 833 - 842). Later on it
became a practice to have such armies of slaves for
those rulers who did not want to be dependent on the
tribal forces for support. A large number of slaves
were employed for household duties or urban crafts.
Those who were in the service of the influential and
of princes formed a special category and could even
lead to power being conferred on certain individuals.
There were Slav slaves who were of European racial
origin and they mostly worked as the managers of the
estates. The black slaves were generally given low
jobs such as guarding the harems as eunuchs. The
female slaves were generally the concubines of their
masters.

During the Abbasid period the slave trade was wide-
spread, many hundreds of thousands of slaves, both black
and white, were put to work in different parts of the
empire. This process was accelerated by a steady
increase in commercial and industrial activities.

Al-Haktafi (dominabatur: 902 - 908) had 20,000
slaves serving in his palace, 22,000 slaves working as
court servants and 4,000 slave girls.\(^1\) A historian

narrates that 1,000 nobles who attended a
meeting in the Abbasid court, were each possessing
1,000 slaves. 1 Moqtader, another Abbasid Caliph, had
among others 11,000 castrated slaves from Sudan and
Byzantine. 2

Baghdād and Samargand were two important centres
of the slave trade, where the captives, brought from
different parts of the world, were exhibited. Castrated
Turks and slaves from the Balkans were sold at higher
prices. 3 The castration of slaves was common among the
Assyrians, Babylonians and Egyptians and later on the
Greeks began to practice it in Europe. 4

But it became widespread among the Muslim rulers
who needed a large number of slaves to work in their
harems. It was the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid I (dominabatur:
680 - 683) who innovated the use of castrated slaves in
harems, 5 and thus set the pattern for other rulers.

Female slaves used to be trained to provide enter-
tainment. Most of the slaves had either been captured
in war, or were civilians who had been captured or
kidnapped. Sometimes the whole population of a city was
taken as slaves after occupation. 6 A certain number of
slaves were often given as a tribute by regional princes

1Hendushān b. Sanjar b. Abdollah Nakhjavānī: Tajāreb al-
salaf dar tāvārikh-e khulafā va vozarā-ye ishān, ed. by
2Ibid.
3Spuler: Iran in fruhislamischer Zeit, p. 439.
5Yadollah Niyāzmand: Tārīkh-e bardagi, Tehran, 1330 a.H.,
p. 89.
6Spuler: op. cit., p. 440.
to the central government.

During the Abbasid period a large number of slaves were imported from Africa by the merchants of Basra. These slaves who were employed on the sugarcane plantations of Lower Iraq, led the celebrated revolt of the Zanj in the middle of the ninth century.

There were also slaves attached to land, known as "gan", and were usually transferred along with agricultural land.\(^1\) The report of Rashid ud-Din reveals that during the Mongol period slaves were used to work on agricultural lands.

In a letter to his son Jalāl ud-Din, governor of Anatolia, Rashid ud-Din, the Mongol minister states that he had founded five villages near the city of Tabriz. One of them had no peasants. He accordingly asked his son to send him forty Anatolian slaves and slave girls to settle in and to cultivate the village.\(^2\) Similarly, in a letter to the governor of the Basra province, he asked that 200 slave boys and 200 slave girls of Indians, Abessinians, Qairovis origins, and black slaves of different sorts should be bought for him from his personal funds and sent to Tabriz as his property.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Zaydān: Tarikh-e tamadon-e Salām, Vol. IV, p. 46.

\(^2\) Quoted by Lisān ul-Mulk in Tarikh va Jughrāfiyā Dar as Saltanehyā Tabriz (Tehran, lithog. 1223), pp. 143 - 144 in Lambton: Landlord and Peasant..., p. 96.

In general, slaves were mostly used for household work. The institution of slavery survived up to the twentieth century. In the later centuries the slave traffic was carried on mainly through the Persian Gulf. The main source of slaves was Eastern Africa, the whole population of which was liable to be captured. ¹ "Those regions formed a preserve which was worked by the Arabs; the only exception were the Somalis inhabiting the country around Cape Cardafui," who were not lawfully held in bondage by the Muslims. ²

Kembell writes in 1844, that at this time, slaves were shipped to Zanzibar and the Red Sea, and sold in Turkey, Persia, Sind, the Arab states, and even in the territories on the Western Coast of India. ³

There is also evidence indicating that, the natives of India used to be kidnapped and brought to Basra to be sold. ⁴ The methods of transport appear to have been barbarous. From a report of the Times of India in October 1872 one could imagine the brutal method of slave transport. In one of the cases forty slaves suffering from small-pox, were thrown overboard. ⁵

It seems that the old practice of taking the native population of the region as prisoner survived up to the

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² Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., p. 223.
twentieth century. This is evident from the fact that in 1904–1905, out of ninetyfive slaves freed at Muscat, not less than sixty were Persians or Baluchis who had been exported from Mokrān to the Batina Coast of Oman.  

The institution of slavery in Iran was structurally different from the one that existed in Europe even in ancient times. In Europe the slavery was a major mode of production whereas in Iran it was not so. A large number of slaves were used for the purposes other than production. After Islam, slavery was legitimate only if the slaves were obtained through one of the following three ways:

a) Prisoner of war

b) Through purchase or payment for peace treaties or as a gift.

c) Female slave for the purpose of procreation with the view to increase the number of Muslims.

The war captives were divided among the soldiers category-wise, two-thirds of the slaves would be given to the cavalry and one-third to the infantry. They were allowed to keep, sell or hire out the slaves which they received.

A slave trade did exist between Europe and Islamic countries. The white slaves used to be brought from East and Middle Europe, through Spain and sold in the slave markets in Egypt and Syria.

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1 Wilson: The Persian Gulf..., p. 223.

2 Niyāzmānd: Tarikh-e bardagi, pp. 44–53.

3 Ibid., p. 67.

4 From this time the word "asklave" (arabised Saqlabi) was used in the Arabic language meaning white slave. Niyāzmānd: op. cit., p. 83.
After the Umayyad period, the number of prisoners of war increased so substantially that it was no longer possible to maintain all of them as slaves. During the Fatimid period, the older captives used to be beheaded and thrown into a well near Cairo, and the younger ones were sent to learn fighting skills.¹

Despite the large number of slaves, slavery was never a dominant mode of production. An important characteristic of slavery in Iran was the possibility of social mobility. There were several examples indicating the slaves reaching higher levels in the social pyramid.

This chapter aimed at presenting a picture of socio-economic situation in Iran from historical perspective in the context of which various millenarian movements that emerged in Iran from time to time can be understood and interpreted. As seen earlier the history of Iran has been characterized by the alien nomadic invasions. The Arab, the Turkish and other nomadic tribes invaded the mainland of Iran which was inhabited by sedentary population.

Nomads and the sedentary population had two different modes of production which had implications in terms of development of different cultures, worldview and interests. Nomads came to Iran mainly in search of land as pastures and they were opposed by the sedentary people whose land they wanted to capture. The nomads had no love for the culture of sedentary people so they destroyed disdainfully the cultural accomplishment of the sedentary people.

One also notices that there has been a cycle of events repeating itself throughout centuries. The phases of this cycle can be identified as invasion by an alien tribe, consolidation of its rule culminating into an establishment of a dynasty, decentralization of power followed by anarchy and then followed by another nomadic invasion.

There are extreme variations in the geographical and climatic conditions of Iran. This had induced people to take a sort of dualistic world view. The Iranians always considered that there co-existed two supernatural powers, the good and the evil and there is always conflict between the two. The religious ideology developed by Zarathustra is based on this dualistic perspective. This constant conflict between the invading nomadic tribes and the sedentary population created a dualistic world view in the Iranian culture, the world view which visualizes the conflict between good and evil. (This point will be discussed later on in detail).

Iran could not have had the centralized political power mainly because of particular geographical conditions. A large number of principalities fighting with each other could not offer any strong resistance to the nomadic intrusions which time and again brought about the destruction of all kinds of economic and cultural accumulations. The nomadic dynastic rulers had to depend upon the armies of the mercenaries and for their maintenance they had to adopt the oppressive tax systems. This resulted into the economic deterioration and social stagnation of Iranian society. It is in such historical situation that millenarian movement became the instruments of social change.