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Deposited in DRO:

12 May 2006

Version of attached file:

Published Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Lambton, A. K. S. (2001) 'Local particularism and the common people in pre-modern Iran.', Working Paper. University of Durham, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Durham.

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LOCAL PARTICULARISM AND THE COMMON PEOPLE IN PRE-MODERN IRAN

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by

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Durham Middle East Paper No. 67
December 2001

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PROFESSOR A.K.S. LAMBTON HONORARY LECTURE SERIES

(Published in cooperation with the Centre for Iranian Studies)

Ann K.S. Lambton obtained her PhD from the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, in 1939, and subsequently served with the British Embassy in Tehran during the Second World War, during which she was awarded the O.B.E. She resumed her academic career after the War and rapidly progressed to occupy the Chair of Persian at the Univeristy of London in 1953. This was a position she occupied with great distinction until her retirement in 1979. Among the academic honours bestowed upon her were a D.Lit. from the University of London (1953), a Fellowship at the British Academy (1964), an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Durham (1971), and Honorary Doctorate from the University of Cambridge and Honorary Fellowship of one of its colleges (1973), and in 1983, an Honorary Fellowship of the School of Oriental and African Studies. In 1999, Professor Lambton was made an Honorary Fellow of the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, following which an annual lecture was inaugurated in her honour. Professor Lambton delivered the first lecture in 2000.

My subject, local particularism, or particularity, and the common people in pre-modern Iran is a broad one and I shall be able to touch only upon a few aspects of it. I shall look at the question in the light of the documentary evidence and my interpretation of that evidence based on my experience. Anyone who has travelled widely in Iran and spent prolonged periods in different regions cannot fail to have been impressed by the regional differences. Each town, each village, each tribe is unique. Some, if not all, of these differences will have existed in the past. I am aware, however, of the danger of distortion which comes from reading the present into the past and of projecting the demands and views of present-day society on to the past. I shall, I hope, avoid this. To argue that the past ought to have been different is to advertise a failure to understand it. If we would understand it, we must read the sources carefully and consider the factors which produced them. So far as the daily life of the people in general is concerned the sources are meagre. Detailed statistical information is lacking. The fragmented and disjointed nature of the evidence forbids more than tentative suggestions. Moreover, what is true of one district is not necessarily true of another, and nor is what is true of one time necessarily true of another.[1] Also, it must be remembered that technical terms change their meanings at different times and in different places.

The documents reveal the essential continuity of the forms of administration but there is a general lack of material illustrating the motives and thoughts of statesmen and others. In the absence of records it is difficult to see the common people as they saw themselves. Only occasionally is it possible to glimpse in the demands put forward and grievances expressed perceptions of a reality different from that of their rulers. The common people had certain strongly held notions of justice, and when these were offended beyond what was felt to be bearable, action followed. It was not only, or primarily, deprivation that caused direct action by the common people; it was also what was seen as outrage to their moral assumptions.

A detailed examination of *hisba* literature, *waqfiyyas* and inscriptions on tombstones may throw more light upon the lives of the common people. The historical literature seldom reveals details about the common people except at times of natural disasters, riots and public disorders, and so what emerges tends to

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[1] Aubin points this out in his article 'Elements pour l'étude des agglomerations urbaines dans l'iran médiéval', in Hourani and Stern (eds.), *The Islamic City*, 65-76. Bruno Cassirer, Oxford, 1970.

be a distorted picture. Riots and revolts tend to figure prominently in references to the common people and so may create the impression that the common people were unduly prone to revolt and that their history is mainly a matter of unsuccessful uprisings.[2]

By local particularism I mean those features which distinguish one group from another, features which may be geographic, ethnic or social. By common people I mean primarily the *'amma* in contradiction to the *khassa* or the *a'yan* (a term applied to the notables in general), but the dividing line between them is not clear-cut. While the more important government officials, powerful *mamluks* who differed little from governors, large landowners, large merchants, and prominent *'ulama'* belonged to the *khassa*, lesser government officials, small landowners, small merchants, shopkeepers and artisans, and lesser *'ulama'* belonged to the *'amma*, together with the mass of the rural and urban population, labourers and peasants, of whose life and conditions we know very little. Women straddled both groups. Generally speaking the distinction between the *khassa* and the *'amma* was recognised and recognisable. They both lived in the same world; but neither was monolithic. Society was mobile, both upwardly and downwardly. All Muslims were equal in the sight of God, but society was marked by gross inequalities of privilege and wealth. Nevertheless it was, perhaps, the possibility of rising from obscurity to the highest positions in the state that made the inequalities of society more tolerable than would otherwise have been the case. For example, Ya'qub b. Layth, who started life as the hired workman of a coppersmith at 15 *dirhams* per month,[3] succeeded in making himself master of most of Persia in the 5th/11th century. There are also numerous examples of men from humble backgrounds outside the well known bureaucratic families rising to high ministerial office. Many rose from obscurity to power and fame. The sources, however, tend to speak of them with disparagement. There was no place for self-made men in the ideal theory. But theory and practice differed.

For the *khassa* the ideal was a world resting on an ordered hierarchy of privileges, sanctified by a government, or monarchy, legitimised by God. For the *'amma*, on the other hand, at least among the mass of the rural and urban population, society may have conveyed bigotry, injustice and suffering. There was a perennial fear among the *khassa* of uprisings by the lower classes; and the term *'awamm'* (the

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[2]   J.F.C. Harrison, *The Common People*, Flamingo edition, 1984, 119.

[3]   Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol invasion*, p. 238.

plural of *'amma*) was often used in a pejorative sense. For example, Nizam al-Din Shami, describing a riot in Isfahan, instigated, he alleges, by hooligans (*awbash wa ardhal*) after Timur's entry into the city in 788/1380, quotes the aphorism "a hundred years of tyranny and oppression by kings is better than a few days of evil, disturbance (*shur*) and anarchy by the common people (*'awamm*)".[4] But the distinction between the *khassa* and the *'amma* was not necessarily marked by prosperity and happiness on the one side and its reverse on the other. For the governing classes right belief was of paramount importance; and society at large lived with a vivid expectation of the next world. Men expected substantial profit from royal or governmental service but low standards of conduct combined with arrears and confusion in government accounts made plausible accusations of corruption. Wassaf (663-735/1264-1334), writing of Shiraz in the Ilkhanate, states, "Wretched the man whose stock in trade is learning and virtue (*hunar*) and whose livelihood is from diwan office."[5] The distinction between the *khassa* and the *'amma* also concerned power, which belonged to the former and rested broadly on ideological, cultural and economic factors and military and political sanctions. Influence derived in different degrees at different times from these factors and their interdependence.

The notables, the *a'yan*, of a town or province comprised landowners, tribal leaders, religious dignitaries and merchants. Marriage alliances between them were common. Government officials often used their official position to acquire land and wealth locally, to settle locally and to become part of the local *a'yan*. Thus it is not always easy to decide what was the basis of a family's influence, whether it was government office, trade, land-ownership or religious leadership, for all might be combined in one family. Lesser government local offices, such as the *kalantar* (the headman of the town), the *kadkhuda* (the headman of the quarter or the village), and the *mustawfi* (the head of the local finance office), were usually, though not invariably, filled by local men and there was often a hereditary tendency in these offices. Movements of trade and the vicissitudes of political life from time to time brought about the rise of some families and the fall of others.

Local particularism is not peculiar to Iran, but it is a specially marked feature of the country and is closely associated with local patriotism, an outstanding feature of which is the proliferation of local histories, written in Arabic in the early Islamic

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4   *Zafar-Nama*, ed. F. Tauer, Prague 1937, i, 104.

5   *Tarikh-i Wassaf*, ed. M.M. Isfahani, lith., Bombay, p. 198.

centuries and from the 5th/11th century in Persian. The fragmentation of the great empires along geo-political lines and the emergence of local dynasties encouraged the writing of local histories. But, paradoxically, the cultivation of local history may, in part, have been a reaction to the centralising tendencies of the great empires, which were often felt to be oppressive and were, therefore, resented by the regions. The writing of local histories may consequently have reflected a wish to underline the fact that the contribution of the regions was worthy of record and represented the vigour and strength of Muslim society.[*]

In some cases regional differences were compounded by ethnic differences; and in some parts of the country physical conditions imposed a semi-nomadic life upon their inhabitants, which distinguished them from their settled brethren. There were also linguistic differences. As well as the broad divisions between Persian, Kurdish, Luri, Turkish and Arab speakers, there were innumerable local dialects. Different peoples have invaded and settled in the country at different times; and there have been displacements of population by deliberate government policy. The size of the population of the towns and regions has fluctuated enormously, not only because of political events and massacres by invaders, but because of famine, disease, droughts, floods and earthquakes. The rise and fall of trade and changes in international trade routes have also affected the distribution of population.

Until recent times communications were rudimentary, though trunk roads, notably the Great Silk Road, ran through the country. But they were seldom paved. Traffic was by mule, camel, horse and donkey. There were no carriage roads and remote districts were connected with the outside world only by tracks. Nevertheless there was a constant stream of merchants, pilgrims and armies along the trunk roads.

Apart from geographical and other elements making for particularism, two factors in particular gave an over-arching unity to society. First there was the sense of Persian identity (iraniyyat), of being heirs to the ancient civilisation of Persia, embedded in myth as well as history. This was explicit in the case of the educated, but, perhaps, only intuitive among the common people. Secondly there was the sense of belonging to the wider Islamic world over against the non-Islamic world, universalist and all-embracing, though from the 16th century onwards the unity

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[*] See further Lambton, *Persian local histories* in B. Scarcia Amoretti and Lucia Rostagno (eds.), *Yad-nama in memoria di Alessandrio Bausani*, Rome 1991, i, 227-38.

given by Islam was fractured, or modified, by the Sunni-Shi'i divide. This Islamic identity was something deeper than mere political allegiance or shared interests. It was rather the sense of belonging to an enduring and unshaken world created by the final revelation of God through the prophet Muhammad.[7] One of the features of Islamic civilisation was a respect for learning, by which was meant primarily knowledge of the religious sciences. This accounts in part for the honoured position of the '*ulama*' in society.

So far as the sense of being heirs to the ancient civilisation of Persia can be documented in the early centuries, it was expressed in the Shu'ubiyya movement and through literature, especially the great national epic, the *Shah-nama*, the *Book of Kings*. Ancient festivals such as the *Naw Ruz*, the New Year, celebrated at the vernal solstice, and *Ispand* (*Sipand*), celebrated at the autumnal solstice survived. The former continued to be the major annual festival. The latter was less widely celebrated and eventually virtually died out. In 1065/1655 it was still officially celebrated in Isfahan, when entry to the bazaars and the shops were decorated.[8]

In all probability many of the stories of the national epic were appropriated into popular culture, but how deeply the concept of being heirs to the ancient civilisation of Persia had penetrated among the common people, or to what extent, if any, it was a factor which held them together, we do not know. Loyalty to the locality or group was probably a stronger feeling than loyalty to the country or ruling dynasty. The common people almost certainly tended to identify themselves by the village, town, province or tribe to which they belonged, or, after the conversion of the country to Islam, simply as Muslims.

The performance of the daily prayers, the Friday prayers, the annual fast, religious feasts and the pilgrimage, which were shared by all Muslims, must have impinged on the life of the common people to a far greater extent than the sense of being heirs to the civilisation of ancient Persia and have reinforced the over-arching unity provided by Islam. Clearly all did not, and could not, go on the pilgrimage, but some did and those who came back to the towns and villages enjoyed the honoured status of *hajji* and doubtless related their experiences to their fellows.

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[7]   Hourani, *A history of the Arab peoples*, 256-7.

[8]   Muhammad Tahir Wahid Qazwini, '*Abbas-nama*, ed. Ibrahim Dihgan, Arak AHS 1329/1950-1, p. 198.

The transacting of the things of faith at the physical point of their occasion in event and story, was of great importance for piety.[9] Pilgrimages to the shrines of local saints were therefore common among all sections of society. Holy persons were regarded as intercessors with God, and from them blessing (*baraka*) was sought by medieval Muslims of all sorts. Pious visits to tombs and pilgrimages to locally recognised shrines were widespread from early times. Such pilgrimages, although they lacked the authority of the Qur'an and the *sunna* of the Prophet, brought together the *khassa* and the common people. Among those who performed such pilgrimages there were not only the common people but also scholars, theologians, sultans and local rulers.

For Shi'is the veneration of saints was a more central part of religious doctrine and belief than among Sunnis and was enshrined in the traditions of the imams, especially Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth imam (d.148/765).[10] The shrines of the imams and the tombs of their descendants (or what were believed to be their tombs), known as *imamzadas*, were found through the length and breadth of Persia. The Safawid divine, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (1037-1110/1627-98) states that the custom of visiting the tombs of holy men, including the descendants of the imams, was sanctioned by the learned doctors of the faith.[11] Miracles and special properties were attributed to many *imamzadas*. Like mosques, they became, by custom, places in which asylum (*bast*) could be taken. Criminals and fugitives from justice often had recourse to them.[12] With the conversion of the majority of the Persian population to Shi'ism in the 16th century and after, the Muharram processions, *rawda-khwanis* and *ta'ziyas* (the recitation of passion plays) became widespread -- they had formerly been common only in districts with a Shi'i majority -- and reinforced the sense of unity of the population and their separation not only from the non-Islamic world but also from the Sunnis. As in the case of pilgrimages to shrines and tombs, all sections of the population took part in these activities.

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[9]   K. Cragg, *The historical geography of the Qur'an* in *Journal of Quranic Studies*, 1/1 (1999), p. 81.

[10]   J.W. Meri, *The Islamic cult of saints and medieval popular culture*, in *al-'Usur al-wusta*, xi/2 (Oct., 1999), pp. 34-5.

[11]   Donaldson, *The Shi'ite religion*, London 1933, p. 258.

[12]   Lambton, *Imamzada*, EI, 2 iii, 1969-70).

Like mosques and madrasas, the *imamzadas* were funded by endowments (*waqf*, pl. *awqaf*). As an institution, the *waqf* played an important part in the life of society, economically and socially. In its simplest form it is the withdrawal from circulation of the substance (*'ayn*) of a property owned by the founder and the spending of the proceeds (*manfa'a*) for a charitable purpose. An essential feature is the permanence of its purpose which may be anything not incompatible with the tenets of Islam. Income from many *awqaf* provided for purposes of public welfare, for example, feeding of the poor on the occasion of religious festivals and on other occasions. Some *awqaf* provided funds for minor charitable purposes and would seem to have been inspired by compassion towards the less fortunate members of society. Among the purposes on which the funds of the charitable foundations of the Ilkhan Ghazan (694-703/1295-1304) were to be spent were the distribution of woollen cloaks to the deserving poor, the support of orphans and waifs, the funeral expenses of strangers who died in Tabriz, the supply of carded cotton to destitute widows, grain to be scattered for birds during winter and, the replacement of water-pots and ewers in charge of slaves and children which might have been broken.[13] Many, and especially the smaller foundations, after the conversion of Iran to Shi'ism, were for the provision of refreshments on the occasion of the holding of *ta'ziyas* and *rawda-khwanis* in Ramadan, Muharram and Safar, occasions which would have been attended by the people of the village, the town or the quarter. *Awqaf*, ranging from large and valuable foundations to very small foundations, instituted by the rich and powerful and by the common people, were to be found all over the country.

Both in pre-Islamic Persia and Islamic Persia, society was seen to be hierarchically ordered. Philosophical, historical, literary, and even some religious works all reflect this; and the presumption is that they were, at least to some extent, describing the actual situation, though theory and practice were not necessarily exactly the same. According to legend, Jamshid is supposed to have divided the people into four classes, (i) those distinguished by grace, wisdom, intelligence and knowledge, some of whom he ordered to learn the art of the secretary (*dabir*) and accountancy (*hisab*) so that they might organise the kingdom and collect the taxes, (ii) warriors, (iii) artisans and cultivators, and (iv) those who performed menial tasks such as carpet-sweepers (*farrashes*) and muleteers (*kharbandaha*) and door-

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[13]   Lambton, '*Awqaf* in Persia 6th-8th/12th-14th centuries', Islamic Law and Society, 4/3 (1997), 316-17.

keepers.[14] Somewhat similar divisions are found in later writers. According to Nasir al-Din Tusi, the first three orders of society were men of the pen, men of the sword, and merchants, while the basis of this hierarchical order was formed by husbandmen, such as agricultural labourers (barzigaran) and peasants (dahaqin), those who planted trees and carried on agriculture, who prepared the food of all and without whom continued existence would be impossible.[15] The faculty of discrimination, which kept each individual in his proper place, was regarded as one of the qualities of the ideal ruler.[16]

Concepts of authority deriving from ancient Persia and from Islam, different though they were in origin, both contributed towards the acceptance of the exercise of power by whomsoever wielded it and discouraged rebellion against authority whether duly constituted or obtained by seizure. In the 16th century when Shi'ism of the Ithna 'Ashari rite became the dominant religion of Persia, the concept that all government in the absence of the Hidden Imam was illegitimate reinforced existing tendencies to political quietism, though in certain closely defined circumstances it was held that rebellion against unjust government, that is government without the due sanction of the law, might be a duty. The ruler, having derived his power from God stood above the people entrusted to him. The people had nothing to do with the conferment of his office and such power as officials had was simply a matter of concession. One of the consequences of this was to impress upon the servants of the government and the common people in general that they were dependent upon the goodwill of the ruler. The belief that they could not, in effect, call him to account, was, of course, tempered in some measure by custom and by Islamic law, but only marginally.

Diplomas and farmans frequently asserted that the purpose of rule was the wellbeing of the subjects but this was perhaps little more than a form of words. Nevertheless it pointed to an ideal. For example, a farman of Tahmasp (930-84/1524-76) inscribed in the Friday Mosque in Isfahan states that the essential purpose in undertaking the administration of affairs and the general purpose of the exercise of rule are to care for the generality of the subjects and (to provide) easy

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[14]   Ibn Balkhi, Fars-nama, ed. G. Le Strange, London 1921, 30-1.

[15]   Akhlaq-i nasiri, Lahore, lith. 1865, 180-1.

[16]   Nizam al-Din Shami, Zafar-nama, 9.

conditions for them all.[17] But in actual fact no rights or liberties attached to the individual person. He had no right to any acting function or position unless it was granted or conceded to him.[18] His only obligation was to serve God (Allah) in accordance with his revealed will. This demanded unqualified obedience to the ruler. In early Islamic times the individual's fundamental loyalty was theoretically to the law and not to the ruler, and his allegiance to the ruler was dependent upon the legitimacy of the ruler.[19] It was not long, however, before the doctrinal legitimacy of the ruler ceased in practice to be a requirement, or was pushed into the background, and competence and/or force became the criterion. This was reinforced by *hadiths* (fabricated or otherwise) such as 'sixty years of an unjust imam are better than one night without orderly government (*sultan*)';[20] and later by the theory of the ruler as the Shadow of God upon earth.

Rebellion, as distinct from the seizure of power by each despot from his predecessor, was rare. Many *hadiths* taught that even a wicked government must be obeyed and that it must be left to God to cause the downfall of rulers of whom he disapproves,[21] though the Quranic phrase 'God gives his kingdom to whom he wills'[22] could be, and no doubt was, used as a kind of justification for the seizure of power. As well as the Qur'an, numerous *hadiths* played an extremely influential role in the formation of public opinion. *Hadiths*, such as those quoted by Abu Yusuf in the *Kitab al-kharaj*,[23] contributed to an attitude of quiescence in the face of tyranny. Such revolts as occurred, provoked by tyranny and oppression, tended

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[17] Hunarfar, *Ganjina-i athar-i tarikh-i Isfahan*, Isfahan AHS 1344/1966-7, pp. 152-3.

[18] Ullman, 'The Bible and principles of government' in *The Church and the Law in the earlier Middle Ages*, Variorum Reprints 1975, 205.

[19] H. Siegman, 'The State and the individual', *The Muslim World*, civ (1964) 15, 23.

[20] Quoted in Ibn Taymiyya, *Siyasa shar'iyya*, Cairo 1951, 173.

[21] Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ii, 93-4.

[22] Qur'an, vii, 128.

[23] See A. Ben Shemesh, *Taxation in Islam*, iii, Leiden - London, 1969, 42-43.

to be led by local personages.[24] Urban uprisings on the death of a ruler and riots against price rises and food shortages by the common people were not uncommon, but they were usually put down without much difficulty. Though the causes of the grievances of the common people were partly, or mainly, economic, the rioting often took on a religious colouring.

Throughout the pre-modern period in Persia there was a perennial acceptance of "the despot". This was not only due to the theory of rule, but, perhaps, even more to a desire for peace and security in a world distracted by invasion and the break-up of empires. The despot gave a measure of safety from external attack and a measure of internal security. On the whole, the intervention of the central government before the Safawid period in the country generally outside the capital and its environs was not great and so the hand of the despot was not felt to be unduly heavy except by perversion and in times of conquest. Even in the Safawid period, Chardin, while emphasizing the despotic nature of the power of the Safawid ruler, whose slightest wish (whether sober or drunk) was, he alleges, immediately executed, states that it was the court and nobles who were in constant danger of his caprice not the common people with whom he seldom came in contact.[25] However, it must be remembered, that provincial governors also tended, like the rulers, to be despotic. Cases are recorded of local people having recourse to the ruler against alleged extortion by provincial officials, but they are few; records of recourse to the provincial governor against his subordinate officials are more frequent. Accessibility of the ruler was therefore of great importance as a factor making for stability. Its effectiveness was limited not only by the personal qualities

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[24] The Sabardarid revolt in Sabzawar in the middle of the 8th/14th century has been considered by some scholars to have been a revolt of peasants, urban poor and artisans. Masson Smith, by a careful examination of the sources, has shown that the leader of the revolt, a certain amir named 'Abd al-Razzaq, was an important personage of the town of Bashtin in the district of Sabzawar and that its causes were probably the tyranny and oppression of which 'Abd al-Razzaq had complained. The revolt, he maintains, was the reaction of small local landed proprietors to Mongol anarchy and, since Sabzawar was a Shi'i centre, they were Shi'is. They were not, as some have supposed, precursors of the Safawids (*The history of the Sarbadar dynasty 1336-1381 A.D. and its sources*, The Hague, Paris 1970.

[25] *Voyages*, v, 229-232.

of the ruler but also by the distance which protesters had to travel to reach the court of the sultan or the shah.

The cities were administrative, commercial and social centres. The city population had a common experience of city life but the cities were not united by any common political or civic bond. Their isolation was pointed up by their configuration: their walls and gates, found even sometimes between different quarters in the same city, marked them off from the outside world, but paradoxically their close union with their hinterlands was emphasized by the spread of the cities beyond their inner walls. Town and country were closely intertwined, as they had been in pre-Islamic Persia. Rural districts round the cities with their villages came within the orbit of the city administration. Many of those who lived in the city or town went out daily to work in the nearby fields. Often they also pursued some craft or trade as well as working the land. The distinction between peasant, artisan and shopkeeper was thus often blurred.

Within the cities, although there were great inequalities between rich merchants and the common people, partnerships between them in economic affairs were probably fairly widespread, enabling them to combine their resources and skills, though the rewards of such partnerships were much weighted in favour of the richer and more powerful party. The resources to be combined in this way might take the form of a cash investment or of goods and merchandise and skills, such as tailoring, dyeing and weaving. The fact that discussion of such partnerships is widespread in the works of the jurists suggests that these arrangements were extensive.[26] A good deal of industry, especially weaving, was carried on as a house industry, the merchant or middleman supplying the materials and the other party the labour.

Government intervention in economic affairs was generally low, at least prior to the Ilkhanate (654-736/1256-1335). However, royal workshops had existed in pre-Islamic Persia[27] and from early Islamic times royal factories for the production of *tiraz* existed. These were embroidered bands with inscriptions of the name of the caliph or the ruler, with which robes of honour (*khil'as*) were embellished. Their

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[26] A.L. Udovitch, 'Labour partnerships in early Islamic law', *JESHO* x, pt. 1 (1967) 64.

[27] See Pegulevskaya, *Les villes de l'état iranien aux époques parthe et sassanide*, Paris 1963, 175.

production was a state monopoly.[28] Royal workshops also existed under the Samanids and Ghaznavids[29] and later dynasties. Of their internal organisation we know nothing. State monopolies of various kinds existed from time to time also under the Safawids (907-1135/1502/1722).

During the Ilkhanate, artisans who made bows, arrows, swords and other weapons were given wages (*mawajib*), paid by drafts on the provinces in return for which they contracted to provide so many weapons annually. Because of the general corruption prevailing, the system did not work. Accordingly Ghazan Khan ordered the artisans of each craft in every town to be collected together, laying down the number of weapons to be provided by them for the royal establishment and their price. The allowances formally paid to them were abolished; they were to be provided instead with funds from the *diwan* with which to make weapons, in the same way that men in the bazaar made weapons for sale with their own funds. An overseer (*amin*) was appointed over each group. Rashid al-Din alleges that this arrangement was successful.[30] It is doubtful whether it survived the Ilkhanate (if, indeed, it was ever operative). Apart from the weapons, vast quantities of valuable garments were manufactured for the court and it seems that there were royal workshops in some cities concerned with this work. Again, we have no precise details.

The separation of towns and cities into different quarters and, in some cases, of the bazaars into different crafts, made for a sense of community among those who lived or worked in them. This sense was further fostered by the fact that the government tended to deal in matters of taxation with communities as a whole, rather than with individuals, whether the inhabitants of towns or quarters, or those who plied the same craft, as it did with villages. The government also used the leaders of such communities for the transmission of government orders and, possibly, also for the settlement of minor disputes.

That there was a sense of community among the different quarters of the cities and among the various crafts in the bazaars was also reflected by their largely spontaneous participation in the celebration of religious festivals. Moroever, so far

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[28] J.M. Rogers, 'The uses of anachronism', an inaugural lecture delivered on 17th October, 1991. SOAS, London 1994, 30-1.

[29] See C.E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, Edinburgh 1963, 137.

[30] See further, Lambton, *Continuity and change in medieval Persia*, 343ff.

as official celebrations, such as royal anniversaries or royal progresses were concerned, it was the practice of government itself to organise public acclamations by the local communities. There are many accounts of such in Safawid and Qajar times.

In many of the larger cities there were in the early centuries popular associations of *ayyaran*, which may have been linked to the *futuwwa* movements, the darvish orders and the people of the bazaar. Originally these associations appear to have had a moral basis, their purpose being to preserve the good name of the quarter (or the city) and to protect the weak. Perhaps they may have embodied the notion of justice in an unjust world. There was, however, a tendency for them to degenerate into mobs of hooligans (*awbash, ajamira*), and the term '*ayyar* came to be used synonymously with robber or bandit. The descendants of the '*ayyaran* in the 19th century were the *lutis* and *dashha*. Their associations also had originally a moral basis, but like the '*ayyaran* they, too, tended to degenerate into bands of hooligans. The *zurkhanas*, institutions in which certain types of wrestling and gymnastic exercises were practised, were in some cases closely connected with the *lutis*.[31] Wrestling champions were known as *pahlavans*.

Artisans in the bazaars of the towns and cities appear to have had some sort of corporate existence from an early period, but there are conflicting views as to when this came into existence or what its exact nature was.[32] From the 5th/11th century, if not before, there were spontaneous groupings among the crafts. But they were not, strictly speaking, professional organisations.[33]

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[31] See further W. Floor, 'The lutis: a social phenomena in Qajar Persia', *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s. xiii (1971), 103-20.

[32] See further G. Baer, *Egyptian guilds in modern times*, Jerusalem 1964, 1-2 and C. Cahen, *Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen age*, Leiden 1959, 64, 67, 6n., 69-70.

[33] They may have had some similarity to the *futuwwa* movements. See F. Taeschner, *Futuwwa, eine gemeinschaftbildende Idee im mittelalterlichen Orient und ihre verschiedenen Erscheinungsformen*, in *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, Jahrg. 52, 1956, Ht. 2/3, 122-58, and idem, '*Akhi*', *EI²*, i, 321-3.

Ibn Battuta, who travelled in Persia in the 8th/14th century, mentions the rivalry between various crafts and associations in Isfahan and their attempts to emulate or out-do each other's achievements. He states that the members of each craft in Isfahan appointed one of their number as its headman,[34] and that in Shiraz "those engaged in each craft occupy the bazaar particular to that craft, no outsiders mixing with them".[35] His account does not suggest that they were professional guilds but rather that what was at issue was the capacity of a group to identify itself temporarily in a common purpose.

So far as these associations in the bazaars were transformed into professional guilds (though when this was we do not know), the transition was almost certainly made under the auspices of the government. In the middle and late Safawid period, at least for the capital Isfahan, we have clearer evidence for the existence of guilds from the accounts of European travellers and from administrative handbooks. Government control over the guilds was close and the administrative arrangements to supervise their activities were elaborate. Some crafts, such as the masons, were exempt from taxation, but in return they had to perform duties for the government; and some groups, though not specifically craft guilds, were used by the government as informers.

In Qajar times the guilds, although they were still to a considerable extent under government control, appear to have enjoyed greater freedom in their internal affairs, which were in the hands of the elders (*rish safidan*) of the guild and its head, known as the *kadkhuda, ra'is* or *bashi*. A variety of practice existed over the way in which the tax quota was fixed and paid.[36]

Insecurity was the dominant feature of urban and rural life, not merely insecurity arising from sudden crises such as civil war or raiding by nomads or attack by hostile forces, but insecurity because of the arbitrary nature of governmental power. The dividing line between security and disorder was at all times narrow

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[34]   *The Travels of Ibn Battuta A.D.1325-1354*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb, published for the Hakluyt Society, Cambridge 1962, ii, 295.

[35]   Ibid., 299.

[36]   See Floor, 'Traditional Crafts and Modern Industry in Qajar Iran, *ZDMG* 141 (1991), 317-352 and Thomas Philipp, 'Isfahan 1881-1891. A Close-up View of Guilds and Production', *Iranian Studies* XVII/4 (Autumn 1984), 391-411.

and felt to be so. Since the protection of Quranic legislation against injustice was largely illusory and appeals to the sultan or the shah were often impractical because of the distance involved, the only effective defence of the population was either to place themselves under the protection of someone more powerful, as many small landowners did, or to form organisations for mutual help based on their religious, ethnical and professional affinities. Only so could they protect themselves and obtain favours and concessions from their rulers. But the protection of these groupings was often largely illusory and offset by a perennial tendency towards faction, which was a marked feature of life throughout the centuries, both in the cities and the smaller towns. In the 5th/11th century in Nishapur factional strife took the form of Hanafi/Shafi'i strife.[37] Similar factions existed in Rayy, Isfahan and other cities. In Safawid times and later, factional strife often took the form of two artificial groupings which were probably originally fostered by the government.[38] They were known as Haydaris and Ni'matis respectively, and were particularly strong in Isfahan, Qazwin and Shiraz.[39] Their recruitment and organisation was based on the quarter. There is not much information as to their leadership, but it would seem clear that the majority of their supporters were drawn from the common people.

Although the nature of rule was arbitrary, the ruler, or the governor and his officials, the *sahib shurta*, the *shahna*, the wazir, the *mustawfi*, the *qadi*, the *muhtasib* and other functionaries were exposed to pressures from those they ruled, for without the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the *a'yan*, they could not carry the common people with them. So the *a'yan* were able to exercise a certain

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[37] See R.W. Bulliet, *The patricians of Nishapur*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972.

[38] Fasa'i, *Fars-nama-i Nasiri*, ii, 22. See also *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, London 1939, i, 51, Malcolm, *History*, ii, 429, Gulriz, *Bab al-jinnat-i Qazwin*, 382ff., Sheil, 323, Shamim, *Iran dar dawra-i saltanat-i Qajar*, 297, Lambton, *'Islamic Society in Persia'*, 15ff.

[39] See Hossein Mirjafari,'The Haydari-Ni'mati Conflicts in Iran', *Iranian Studies*, 12/3-4 (1979) 135-162 and J. Perry, 'Toward a theory of Iranian urban Moieties: the Haydariyyah and Ni'matiyyah revisited', *Iranian Studies*, 32/1 (1999), 51-70.

influence and social power independently of the ruler and his officials and sometimes to mobilise the common people to put pressure on the government.[40]

Apart from the tax-collectors, the *shahna* or *darugha* and their subordinate officials, the official whose functions most closely impinged upon the common people was the *muhtasib*. He was, as it were, in charge of the public conscience. It was his duty to enjoin the good and forbid evil. He had oversight of public morality, public amenities and the proper conduct of commercial affairs. It was his duty to ensure the due performance of religious obligations, the upkeep of mosques, propriety of behaviour in the streets between the sexes, the application of discretionary measures against *dhimmis* (members of the protected communities) and the prevention of drinking, gambling, prostitution and other offences against the *shari'a*. He also supervised the provision of drinking water, street cleaning, and free passage in the streets; he was not to allow buildings to encroach upon the streets and to see that slaves were not ill-treated or animals over-burdened. He was entrusted with the supervision of markets and it was his duty to prevent dishonest dealing by merchants and artisans and to supervise weights and measures and to fix prices, to inspect conditions under which bread was made, to see that ovens were swept and kneading troughs washed down. He was usually a member of the religious classes. He was paid probably mainly by dues levied on shops in the bazaar. He was able to proceed independently of any complaint to investigate cases where he suspected illegality; but he had to rely on the officials of the temporal government, especially the *shahna* or the *darugha*, for the execution of his decrees and decisions. By the 19th century the office of *muhtasib* had virtually disappeared. His functions in relation to the craft guilds and public amenities were largely taken over by other officials and his function as the guardian of the public conscience was exercised by the *'ulama'*.[41]

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[40]   A.H. Hourani, *The Islamic city in the light of recent research*, in A.H. Hourani and S.M. Stern (eds.), *The Islamic city*, Bruno Cassirer and University of Pennsylvania Press 1970, 19. See also R. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and leadership in an early Islamic Society*, Princeton, 1980.

[41]   See further Lambton, *Hisba, III Persia, EI²*, iii, 490-1, M. Keyvani, *Artisans and guild life in the later Safavid period*, Berlin 1982, and W.M. Floor, *The market police in Qajar Persia: the office of darugha-yi bazar and muhtasib* in *Die Welt des Islams* xiii (1972), 212-229.

In addition to the officials of the central government there were also officials, notably the *ra'is* and the *kalantar* (both of which terms are used in a variety of senses), who, although they may have received diplomas of appointment from the government were, to some extent at least, representatives of the local people. The term *ra'is* means chief or head. Under the Ghaznavids he was a key figure in the towns of Khurasan. He was nominated by the government and formally installed, and was responsible for the internal security of the city.[42] Under the Saljuqs he appears to have been essentially the link between the government and the taxpayers and his duty was to reconcile, as far as possible, the interests of the two parties. Cases concerned with taxation were referred to his diwan. If he was to carry out his duties, it was necessary that he should be a man of local standing, but at the same time he needed the authority of the government behind him. There is no record of any formal procedure for his choice by the people; he probably emerged as the most suitable person to act on their behalf. There was a strong hereditary tendency in the office. He was often rich and powerful, as was Abu Hashim, the *ra'is* of Hamadan, who held office for 47 years and died in 502/1102.[43] Zarqan, *ra'is* of Tabriz, was probably also a rich man for he was fined 70,000 gold dinars by al-Dargazini, Toghril b. Muhammad's wazir.[44]

In the course of time the term *ra'is* in the sense of a city official disappears. By the 10th/16th century, if not before, there is mention in the sources of an official called the *kalantar*, who performed some of the functions of the former *ra'is*. Basically the word *kalan* means bigger or greater and in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries it came to mean leader or head and occurs especially with reference to the tribal and military classes. From the 9th/15th century onwards it also designates an official belonging to the "civil" hierarchy who was in charge of a town or a ward of a town. As such, like the *ra'is*, he was the link between the government and the taxpayers and it was his duty to reconcile the interests of the two parties. However, the analogy between the *ra'is* and the *kalantar* must not be pressed too hard. In some measure the appointment of the *kalantar* appears to have depended upon the satisfaction of the local people. In a document dated 1107/1695 for the dismissal of

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[42]   Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, 184-5.

[43]   Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, ed. Tornberg, x, 332 and see Lambton, *Continuity and change in medieval Persia*, 317-8.

[44]   Bundari, *Dawlat al-Saljuq*, Cairo 1318/1900-1, 148. This was probably in 526/1131-2.

a certain Khwaja Muhammad Taqi, the *kalantar* of Gilan Biya Pas (i.e. Rasht and its dependencies), and the appointment of Khwaja Muhammad Sa'id, who had apparently held the office of *kalantar* before, as his successor, it is stated that 2,127 persons had signified their desire for the reappointment of Muhammad Sa'id, and 938 of them had complained against Muhammad Taqi. Muhammad Sa'id was duly reappointed.[45] Two diplomas for the *kalantar* of Tabriz issued by Karim Khan Zand, dated 1177/1764 and 1187/1773 respectively, affirm that the wishes of the inhabitants had been considered in the matter of his appointment.[46]

Sir John Malcolm, writing in the early 19th century, describes the situation then prevailing in the following words: "The Kalantar, or chief magistrate of the city, and the Kut-khodahs or magistrates of the different wards, though nominated by the king, must be selected from the most respectable inhabitants... Although these officers are not formally elected, the voice of the people always points them out: and if the king should appoint a magistrate disagreeable to the citizens, he could not perform his duties, which require all the insight he derives from personal consideration to aid the authority of office."[47] Morier, also writing at the beginning of the 19th century similarly states that the *kalantar* was an officer of the crown and the medium through which the wishes and wants of the people were made known to the king. He writes, "He is their chief representative on all occasions and brings forward the complaints of the *Rayats*, whenever they feel oppressed. He also knows the riches of every *Rayat*, and his means of rendering the annual tribute; he therefore regulates the quota that every man must pay; and if his seal be not affixed to the documents which the *Rayat* brings forward in the time of the levy the assessment is not valid, and the sum cannot be received."[48] The fact that the *kalantar*, while acting as the spokesman of the people, was also to some extent integrated into the official hierarchy made it possible for him, as soon as the hand of the central government was removed, to use his power and influence to assert

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[45] *Bar-rasiha-yi tarikhi*, III/2, 80-2; also in *Yak sad wa panjah sanad-i tarikhi az Jala'iriyan ta Pahlavi*, ed. Jahangir Qa'im Maqami, Tehran AHS 1348/1959, 54; and see Lambton, '*Kalantar*', EI², iv, 475.

[46] Nadir Mirza, *Tarikh-i dar al-saltana-i tabriz*, lith, Tehran n.d., 291, 292.

[47] *History of Persia*, ii, 324-5.

[48] *A journey through Persia and Asia Minor to Constantinople in the years 1808 and 1809*, London 1812, 235-6.

his independence, as happened in the 18th century in the case of Hajji Ibrahim, the *kalantar* of Shiraz.

The *kadkhudas*, or headmen, of the city wards were also to some extent pointed out by the respect in which they were held locally. Malcolm states, "in small towns or villages the voice of the inhabitants in nominating their Kut-khodah, or head, is still more decided [than in the case of the *kalantar*]: if one is named of whom they do not approve, their clamour produces either his resignation or removal."[49] Scott Waring, writing in 1802 of Shiraz, states that the most respectable man of the ward was usually given the office of *kadkhuda*. His duties were to acquaint himself with the trade and occupation of the different persons who resided in the ward and of their means of subsistence; and to arrange for the billeting of troops and the allocation among the inhabitants of any contribution laid upon the ward by the governor. It was also the *kadkhuda's* duty to bring minor disputes in the ward to an amicable termination. His business was to be a peacemaker and to exert himself for the good of the community over which he presided. The *kadkhudas* were the mediators between the government and the people; and often a degree of weight attached to their representations which served as a strong restraint on the oppression of the governor.[50]

The relationship of governor on the one side and the *kalantar* and *kadkhuda* on the other was a delicate one. So far as the *kalantar* or *kadkhuda* was singled out by local support, the governor had to treat him with circumspection, but in return a modicum of deference was expected from him, for if the governor allowed him a degree of independence such that he flouted the governor's authority, his own position would be unacceptably weakened particularly if the *kalantar* or *kadkhuda* could secure the support of the *lutis* or *pahlavans* of the town.

Another local official whose activities closely affected the common people was the *mirab*, the official in charge of the distribution of water. In the large cities, such as Isfahan, he was an important official appointed by the government. In the smaller towns, and in the different quarters of the large towns, he was usually appointed and paid by the local people themselves.

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[49] Op. cit., ii, 324-5.

[50] *A tour to Sheeraz by the route of Kazroon and Feerozabad*, London 1907, 64-5.

Much has been written about the position and functions of the *'ulama'*. At all times they played an immensely important role in society, but since some belonged to the *a'yan* and some to the common people, their role was ambiguous. Some received their appointment to office from the government; others refused any connection with the government. In general they received the allegiance of the common people and because of this both the government and the *a'yan* needed their support. The ruler also needed them to legalise his rule, and merchants and others to witness contracts and other documents. But the *'ulama'* for their part required the support of the government to carry out their public functions, and also of the *a'yan* because it was primarily they and the government who built mosques, *madrasas*, *khaniqahs* and *zawiyas* and provided funds for their upkeep. The *'ulama'* had many ties with the bazaar either through marriage or by participation in trade and there was also movement into the *'ulama'* from the merchant classes and artisans. Calls by the *'ulama'* to close the bazaar in protest at some governmental action, or to take sanctuary (*bast*) at some mosque or shrine, were an effective means of putting pressure on the government.

But the long-term interest of both *'ulama'* and merchants was in security and so there was a general reluctance to oppose the government and a tendency towards compromise. However, when the wider structures of government broke down, it was often one of the *'ulama'* who emerged as a local leader. The *'ulama'* were also allied by marriage and in other ways to the large landowners, with whom they had a certain common interest so far as they often administered large properties which had been constituted into *waqfs*. This, like their connection with the government, compromised, in some measure, their position in the eyes of the common people.

Sufi shaykhs had a wide following among the urban and rural population, both among the *a'yan* and the common people and the tribes. Rulers and their officials and prominent men patronized them and built *ribats* for them. These, later known more generally as *khaniqahs*, served as residences for the shaykhs and their disciples, and as centres of instruction and also as hospices for travelling Sufis and others who would join in the fellowship meal of the darvishes. Some *khaniqahs* were within the cities but more often they were situated on the outskirts of the cities or along the roads in the countryside. The power of the Sufi shaykhs depended to some extent upon worldly success and an ability to manipulate daily affairs. So they, like the *'ulama'*, needed the support of the government, just as the

latter needed their support. Their mutual relationship was thus delicately balanced.[51]

This has been a rather random exposition of some of the factors which affected the life of the common people. I have sought to show something of the complexity of society and the delicate balance which existed between government and society and between both and the common people, and the ambiguity in their relations with each other. Civic virtues and civic responsibilities were expressed in subtle and almost imperceptible ways, ways in which the common people shared; while government structures were necessary for the maintenance of security, the purposes of society were to a great extent expressed irrespective of the government.

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[51] See further Lambton, *Sufis and the state in medieval Persia*, in C. van Dijk and A.H. de Groot (eds.), *State and Islam*, Leiden 1995, 19-36.

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