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EVANGELIZING THE ORIENT:
AMERICAN MISSIONARIES IN IRAN, 1890-1940

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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ABSTRACT

American missionaries were continuously active in Iran from 1832 until 1979 and yet their foundational role in shaping the relationship between America and Iran has been largely ignored. The missionaries brought with them to Iran an ideology of mission that informed their actions. Although their primary objective was the "evangelization of Iran in this generation," they also undertook other secular enterprises in support of evangelism. The missionaries believed that both Christianization and Westernization were interrelated and sought to bring the blessings of Western civilization and the Christian faith to Iran. As a result, the missionaries were both consciously and unconsciously agents of Western cultural transmission in the country.

The missionaries' work took shape along evangelistic, medical, and educational lines. In addition to administering churches, the missionaries also opened many hospitals, dispensaries, and schools throughout northern Iran. The schools especially provided missionaries with significant influence among Iran's elite.

The missionaries tried unsuccessfully to remain aloof from Iranian and imperial politics. As long as the Iranian central government remained weak, the missionaries were able to carry on their work without much government interference. With the rise of Reza
Shah, however, their work was gradually curtailed, resulting in the closure of all American missionary schools in 1939.

The missionaries impressed Iranians of all classes with their sacrificial service to a country that was not their own. One American missionary, Howard Baskerville, died a martyr to Iran's Constitutional Revolution and was honored by subsequent generations of Iranians as the "Lafayette of Iran." American missionaries also provided great service to Iranians during World War I. As a result, the missionaries raised Iranian expectations of the United States to an unrealistic level and contributed to the disillusion of many Iranians toward America in the post-World War II era.

This dissertation is based on primary documents from the Presbyterian Historical Society, the Princeton Theological Seminary, the National Archives and Record Administration, the British Public Record Office, and the University of Oregon Archives. This study also draws on both primary and secondary published Persian-language sources.
Dedicated to Holly Davis
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I transliterated all Persian words into English according to the style recommended in the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. In the case of familiar or oft-repeated place names, such as Urumia, Tehran, Tabriz, and Alborz, I used the most common form instead.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

AMERICAN MISSIONARIES IN IRAN: THE FORGOTTEN FOUNDATIONS OF THE AMERICAN-IRANIAN RELATIONSHIP

As John K. Fairbank wrote in 1969, the missionary is truly the "invisible man of American history." That statement remains true 30 years later. There are few in-depth and systematic studies of American missionaries outside of China and the Far East. Diplomatic historians have also generally ignored or misrepresented the role of non-governmental actors in American foreign relations. Lost in the debate between orthodox, revisionist, and post-revisionist diplomatic historians is the idealism that motivated the actions of many Americans abroad, most of whom were not officially connected with the government. While highly critical of Wilsonian idealism, realist scholars such as George Kennan have argued that an idealistic American foreign policy would be detrimental to American interests in the Cold War and advocated a foreign policy based on a "realistic" assessment of American power and policy objectives. Revisionist scholars such as William Appleman Williams and Walter LaFeber maintain that economic self-interest drove American foreign policy and that seemingly idealistic policy statements such as the
Open Door Notes covered for imperialism. Post-revisionists such as John Gaddis argue that American policy makers generally acted out of national security concerns and that economic self-interest played a minor role in official policy. More than any other single non-governmental group, missionaries have shaped the course of American foreign relations with other countries, yet historians generally have ignored or misrepresented their role.

The historiography of American foreign relations with Iran reflects the lack of attention to both the work of missionaries and the idealistic strand in American foreign relations. Most diplomatic historians have ignored the long involvement that Americans had in Iranian affairs before World War II, perhaps because American foreign policy makers themselves paid scant attention to Iran before 1942. By focusing almost solely on American foreign policy and ignoring the Iranian perspective, diplomatic historians have left untold the important story of American foreign relations with Iran. Indeed, the story of American-Iranian relations began not with the arrival of American troops in Iran in 1942, or even with the arrival of the first permanent American diplomatic representative in 1883, but with the arrival of American Congregational missionary Justin Perkins in 1832. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the missionaries founded the Iranian-American relationship and, in many ways, shaped and defined it as well long before the United States had any official interests in the country.

Missionaries and diplomats were not the only Americans in Iran before 1942. American financial advisers also served in the country on three separate occasions. Although Morgan Shuster (1911) was the most famous, the most influential financial adviser was undoubtedly Dr. Arthur Millspaugh, who served in Iran on two separate
occasions (1922-1927 and 1943-1945). Both Shuster and Millspaugh advocated American Progressive-style reform in that country. Oil company representatives and business interests concerned with establishing economic or commercial links were also present in Iran before World War II, although their impact on Iranian-American relations was more modest.

In an area of limited official U.S. interest, individual American citizens and non-governmental organizations, such as the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, played a significant role in American-Iranian relations. For the most part, an ideology of mission motivated these Americans, especially the missionaries and financial advisors. Whether opening schools and hospitals or taking evangelistic tours across the country, American missionaries were concerned primarily with preaching the Christian Gospel to Iranians. American missionaries enjoyed a continuous presence in Iran from 1832 to 1979; however, the peak of their influence came during the period of 1890-1940. The dramatic increase in the number of American missionaries to Iran coincided with the "outward thrust" of American foreign policy in the 1890s that included the Spanish-American War of 1898 and inaugurated an era of increasing American involvement, and an emerging imperial role, in world affairs.

Although the convergence of the dramatic expansion of American missions abroad and the dawning of American imperialism in the 1890s was more than coincidental, it is problematic to see missionaries as synonymous with American imperialism. Earlier generations of historians, sharing the worldview of the missionaries and somewhat less critical of imperialism, lauded the missionaries as humanitarians and the bearers of the blessings of civilization to the unenlightened. The New Left rightly
challenged this simplistic viewpoint but replaced it with an equally simplistic one by arguing that the missionary enterprise was essentially an imperial one. The key term employed by the New Left was that of “cultural imperialism”, a loosely-defined notion that has defied all attempts at precise definition. More recently, historians, taking their cue from a shift in the debate over cultural imperialism, have portrayed missionaries in a much more sophisticated fashion. Eschewing the simplistic earlier approaches that either uniformly lauded or condemned missionaries, these historians have noted the ambivalent, yet highly important, role that missionaries played in the history of international and transcultural relations. In this study, I intend to argue that although the missionaries were not imperialists *per se*, they often tapped into imperial networks of power and used imperial institutions, such as the British diplomatic network, to further their evangelistic, humanitarian, and educational ends.

Although American missionaries were active in Iran for almost 150 years and laid the foundations for the American-Iranian relationship, no historian has systematically surveyed the activities of American missionaries in Iran in the years leading up to World War II. The missionaries were the only Americans present in any significant number in Iran during this time, opened stations all across the northern half of the country, and carried out extensive evangelistic, humanitarian, and, most importantly, educational efforts. Through the numerous schools they opened throughout the country, the missionaries were important agents of cultural transmission. They communicated their own notions of American culture to various subsections of the population of Iran. Many of these Iranians trained in American mission schools became high-ranking government
officials in the post-war era while others worked for American and British diplomats, as well as the missionaries themselves.

Far more than just the genesis of Iranian-American relations, the study of American missionaries opens a window on imperial, monarchical, provincial and local power relations in Iran as well. Turn-of-the-century Iran was a highly fragmented and complex country. The most powerful forces in the country were Tsarist Russia and Great Britain, who were locked in an imperial struggle over parts of the Middle East and Central Asia. Diplomats, military units, and business interests acted on behalf of the imperial powers throughout Iran. They were not all-powerful, however. The Qajar shahs (Nasir al-Din, Muzaffar al-Din, Muhammad Ali, and Ahmad Shah) exercised considerable power, but for the most part only in and around the capital of Tehran. Outside of the capital, the Qajar shahs were represented by provincial officials, often with kinship or client-patron ties to the monarchy. The farther they were from Tehran and the more interested the imperial powers were in what was going on, the weaker they were. More important on the provincial and local level and in daily affairs were other nodes of power. The ‘ulimā, the Muslim clerical elite, exercised both moral and legal influence over Iranian society. They adjudicated disputes, interpreted the law, and, as most scholars of modern Iran would agree, occasionally rallied the people against the central government in Tehran or the activities of the imperial powers in Iran. Local notables, scions of the ultra-rich but non-noble families in Iran that owned the majority of the land, comprised another node of power. Their power was based in the provincial cities and towns. Another power within the villages were village chiefs and heads of the various minority communities in Iran, such as the Armenians, Nestorians, and Jews, who
comprised a significant portion of the population. Outside the cities and towns, however, the various tribes exercised the greatest degree of power. The tribes enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy and, as a result, were courted by both the imperial powers and the central government in Tehran as a source of influence and power in the provinces. Relations with the tribes not only affected the power of the central Qajar government vis-à-vis the provinces, they also affected relations with neighboring empires as well. The Kurds, a major tribal confederation, enjoyed a homeland that was divided between the Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian empires. Most other tribal confederations also crossed the frontiers of Iran with relative ease. Trouble on one side of the border inevitably resulted in a reflection of that disorder on the other.²

This study of American missionaries will provide valuable information regarding power relations in Iran, including those between the center and the periphery, the imperial powers and the ruling monarchies, the minorities and the central government, the tribes and the state, and the imperial powers themselves. Missionaries crossed the fluid boundaries between these various groups, especially in the frontier region of northwestern Iran. Missionaries worked with the tribes, with Iran's religious minorities, and with the Muslim communities; they lobbied local, provincial, and central authorities; and they sometimes called for imperial intervention in Iranian affairs. Missionaries were profoundly influenced by the balance-of-power within Iran. The relative strength of various powers had a direct impact on the nature and the scope of American missionary activities. The stronger the Qajar government was, the less missionaries were able to work with the majority Shi'i Muslim population. As a result, at first the missionaries focused primarily on the non-Muslim minority population, such as the Armenians,
Nestorians, and Jews. Conversely, the weaker the Qajar government became, the easier it was for missionaries to work with the Muslim population; however, the weakness of the Qajars allowed the tribes to enjoy greater autonomy, which affected mission work in the villages of northwestern Iran profoundly. Missionary relations with the Pahlavi dynasty were somewhat different. Before Reza Khan (Reza Shah after 1925), the missionaries worked with both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities quite freely. After Reza Shah consolidated his autocratic hold over Iran, however, he drastically limited the nature and scope of missionary work by seizing all mission school property.

In addition to providing insight into the international implications of their work and their impact on modern Iran, the study of missionaries provides insight into the domestic American context out of which the missionaries came. Although the link between the outward thrust of American foreign policy and the missionary enterprise has often been noted, the link between the so-called Progressive movement and the missionary enterprise has been largely ignored, despite the fact that missionaries bear a closer resemblance to Jane Addams than they do to Theodore Roosevelt. The missionary was a kind of religious social worker, concerned with reforming and remaking other countries, but with a decidedly religious and millenarian twist. The rise of mission work was a certainly a distant cousin to the political changes of the 1890s, which resulted in a greater involvement in world affairs and an embrace of an global imperial role for the U.S. Although the expansion of the missionary enterprise was partly the result of changes within the American Protestant establishment, the social changes embodied by the Progressive movement were probably the key secular impetus. Indeed, much of the non-religious activities of missionaries in Iran mirrored the social reforms of their Progressive
counterparts in the U.S. The key to uncovering this important link is a comparison of the missionaries' ideology of mission with various currents within the Progressive movement.

The study of American missionaries to Iran will also shed light on the gendered worldviews of missionaries and the society in which they operated. Women comprised a majority of American missionaries to Iran and were integral to mission operations in the country. Their diaries, letters, and other writings provide valuable insights into the role that gender played in shaping the history of the American mission movement, as well as the ambivalent relationship between the first women's rights movement and women who were active on the mission field. In addition, both male and female American missionaries made the reform of gender relations in Iran one of their highest priorities. The missionaries sought to reshape Iranian society by campaigning against the marriage of prepubescent female children to much older men, condemning legalized prostitution, promoting the education of women, and facilitating a more prominent role for Iranian women in public life.

Missionaries were also the primary conduit through which Americans viewed Iran before World War II and comprised the major source of information for how Iranians viewed the U.S. during this period. Missionaries conveyed various images of Iran to the American people through their mission organizations, "stump speeches" delivered while they were on furlough, and their regular correspondence with home churches that supported them. Through schools, hospitals, humanitarian enterprises, and evangelical endeavors, missionaries also conveyed an idealized, and probably unrealistic, image of the U.S. to the Iranians with whom they came into contact. As a result, the social and
cultural worldview of the missionaries is immensely important to understanding the origins and future course of the Iranian-American relationship.

The Ideology of Mission and Civilization

The ideology of mission, a concept that can be used to describe the involvement of Americans in Iran, can best be visualized as a spectrum. On one side of the spectrum was the ideology of missionaries. Most missionaries were concerned primarily with evangelizing the world and secondarily with providing humanitarian aid and education. The "civilizing" impulse, which often entailed the transmission of American values and culture (a process often referred to as "Americanization"), constituted a distant, and often subconscious, third priority. This ideology varied between missionaries and their parent organizations but one can characterize their sense of mission as primarily philanthropic and humanitarian. Even their desire to evangelize the world grew out of a concern to redeem humanity from everlasting punishment. Missionaries also utilized non-religious means, such as hospitals and schools, as evangelistic tools. In addition to teaching religious themes, many missionaries also inculcated values that they deemed essential to the workings of modern civilization, including honesty, efficiency, and hard work, values that were also esteemed by the Progressive movement. Their primary goal, however, remained evangelization.

At the other end of the spectrum were business interests, who were motivated both by a search for profit as well as a sense of mission. In what historian Emily Rosenberg characterizes as "liberal developmentalism," business interests carried an inherent faith in free market capitalism, support for the Open Door, and a belief that other
countries should be encouraged to adopt America’s economic and political system. They genuinely believed that other countries should adopt the American model of development and abandon all alternative models. This approach would immeasurably benefit business interests by availing them of access to raw materials and foreign markets for their commodities. As a result, it seems probable that this idea of mission served as a justification for their actions, rather than a motive. Although American business interests did not become involved with Iran in any depth until the 1950s, the American financial missions to Iran embodied these beliefs, even though the financial advisors were probably more concerned with bringing about reform for its own sake than with opening additional markets for American goods. Indeed, the American financial advisors did not stand to profit from their actions in any perceivable way. Right or wrong, they advocated reform along liberal developmentalist and Progressive lines because they believed that Iran stood to benefit from such reforms.

The link between the two in practice, particularly in the Iranian case, is the notion of “civilization.” Both the American missionaries and financial advisors believed that they were aiding the people of Iran by “civilizing” them. The term “civilization,” which both parties regularly employed, was elastic enough to encompass many different, even conflicting, concepts. Although all agreed that the West, particularly the United States, was civilized and that Iran and the rest of the East was not, both the missionaries and the financial advisors identified different sets of problems to address first before Iran could take its rightful place among civilized nations. For the missionaries, the primary problem was a religious one; until Iran became Christian, or at least came under the influence of Christian values, it would remain uncivilized. After Iran addressed its root spiritual
problem, at that time it would be able to address its political and economic problems. For the financial advisors, civilization was understood more in economic and structural terms rather than religious. The financial advisors believed that if Iran were to foster a market economy open to free trade, which honest and efficient managers would regulate, then civilization along Western lines would inevitably follow.

The way Americans perceived Iranian culture and society sheds much light on their ideology of mission. The missionaries’ perspective on Iranian culture, for example, was somewhat ambivalent, but trended toward the negative. The missionaries saw much to admire but more to detest in Iranian culture and subscribed to a worldview best described as Islamic Orientalism. On the one hand, they greatly admired some of the outward edifices of Iran’s culture, such as its grand pre-Islamic past recorded in the Bible, its archeological ruins, its food, the ethnic and religious diversity that characterized Iranian society, its handicrafts, its poetry, and, of course, Persian rugs. On the other hand, they also viewed Iran as backward and uncivilized, a state of affairs they attributed to the influence of Islam, which in view of their emphasis on evangelism was not surprising. From the oppression of women to the lack of a democratic heritage, the missionaries attributed everything negative to the prevalence of Islam in the country while ignoring all other pertinent factors, including the disruptive role of Western imperial powers in Iran. Some missionaries, owing in part to Presbyterian theology, believed that the reason why the U.S. was so prosperous and powerful in comparison with Iran was because America was a Christian nation while Iran was mostly Muslim.

As a result of their emphasis on evangelization and their general opposition to the influence of Islam in Iran, the missionaries engaged in cultural engineering to transform
Iranian culture and make it more amenable to Christianization. Their notion of civilization encompassed both Christianizing and Americanizing/Westernizing tendencies. The missionaries tried to simply Christianize Iran at first but when their efforts did not bear as much fruit as they had hoped, they sought to remove or modify the social, cultural, and political obstacles to evangelization. This process cannot necessarily be grouped under the term Americanization, although that certainly was part of it. Just as the missionaries were critical of Iranian society, they also criticized American culture for being overly materialistic. Since their overall goal was the Christianization of Iran, the missionaries alternately promoted aspects of Iranian culture they believed would aid this transformation and inculcated American/Western values that they believed would make Iranian society more conducive to Christianity. In addition, even when “Americanizing” Iranians, which mostly took place in the schools, the missionaries did not try to recreate America in Iran; instead, they tried to create an idealized vision of America, cleansed of atheism and materialism. In other words, they aspired to create in Iran a cultural order based on their highest ideals while avoiding perceived negative characteristics present in contemporary American culture. Indeed, during the Progressive era, the missionaries’ domestic counterparts similarly tried to civilize the United States through social reforms, such as temperance and anti-vice campaigns, and revivalism. In a sense, then, the missionary enterprise in Iran was utopian as well as religious. Missionary educators taught their notions of American values to Iranians through the schools, which at times taught up to 4,000 students per year. Their activities in this regard were explicitly designed to counter what they perceived as the negative impact of Islam on Iranian
society. By transforming Iranian society and culture, the missionaries believed that they could bring not only personal salvation to Iranians, but national salvation as well.

Surprisingly enough, race did not play a primary, or even important, role in the missionaries' notion of civilization or their ideology of mission. One reason for this, which was perhaps unique to the Iranian situation, American missionaries and Iranians viewed themselves as "brothers" with common Aryan roots. Iranians accepted this view generally while Europeans and Americans were exposed to this view, which missionaries accepted, through the writings of Arthur Gobineau. Although some missionaries may have adhered to a notion of racial hierarchy, these notions had no perceivable impact on their work in Iran. Indeed, American missionaries were far more likely to decry race prejudice, whether in Iran or in the U.S., as an obstacle to the evangelization of the world. Social Darwinist notions of racial hierarchy directly conflicted with the concepts of civilization and the ideology of mission. In Social Darwinist theory, racial categories are permanently fixed; as a result, the social and economic problems stemming from the inferiority of "lesser races" were intractable. In contrast, American missionaries and financial advisors believed that Iran's "problems" stemmed from religion and organizational development respectively, not race, and thus could be addressed through evangelization and education.

The ideology of mission comprised a ideological link between the missionaries and American financial advisor to Iran through the influence of the Progressive movement, particularly its idealism, its emphasis on reform, and its belief that positive change could be achieved through Western technology, rationalism, and progress. Both Shuster and Millspaugh, two American financial advisors during this period, considered
Iran to be "backward," sorely in need of progressive change, but willing to reform. Their mission, as they saw it, was to reform Iran along the lines of American Progressivism so that it could enter the world of nations as an equal and civilized partner. Like the missionaries, the financial advisors (whose staff included many Iranian graduates of American mission schools) were intensely idealistic and dedicated to reforming, even remaking, Iran. Although the financial advisors were little interested in evangelism and the missionaries were little interested in economic matters, both parties believed that their proposed reforms would aid their own programs and create a more civilized country in the process.

Sensing the idealism that motivated the Americans with whom they came in contact, Iranians formed opinions of all Americans based on the actions of missionaries and advisors. Many Iranians believed that the United States as a whole did not harbor any imperial intentions toward their country and would aid in its transformation into a constitutional democracy. On the eve of American expansion in Iran in 1942, they felt a genuine feeling of friendship and faith in America's anti-colonial rhetoric. Unfortunately, the image of the U.S. that missionaries and financial advisors conveyed did not match the goals and objectives of an increased official U.S. presence in Iran during the postwar period. With a growing concern over Iran's strategic position, its significant natural resources, and the rise of inter-Allied tensions that resulted in the Cold War, the influence of those who were motivated by an ideology of mission gave way to American diplomats and businessmen who were concerned with short-term economic and strategic self-interest. The shift to an official American foreign policy based on strategic and economic concerns was abrupt and fundamentally differed from the ideology of mission.
Unfortunately, the goodwill that missionaries and financial advisors had amassed greatly aided American expansion in Iran despite their best intentions.

Although there has always been an idealistic strain present in American foreign policy, U.S. foreign policy after the 1920s began to gravitate more toward economic concerns. While avoiding the direct involvement of the federal government, Herbert Hoover and others advocated the use of private business interests to accomplish foreign policy goals. As corporatist scholars Michael J. Hogan and David Painter have demonstrated, functional elites in business and government began to cooperate to a large degree with regard to American foreign policy in general. During the transitional period of 1920-1945, the foreign policy establishment's sense of mission moved toward liberal developmentalism and eventually beyond it. After World War II, as Cold War concerns overshadowed other U.S. interests in Iran, foreign policy makers largely abandoned any idealistic sense of mission. No longer would they try to make the world "safe for democracy," in the words of Woodrow Wilson; rather, they would try to make the world safe for American interests and use the rhetoric of mission to justify their actions. Such concerns fundamentally transformed the nature of American involvement in Iran from a primarily humanitarian and private presence before World War II to an increasingly imperial presence during the Cold War.

Missionaries, Imperialism, and Cultural Imperialism

Although American missionaries have been active on almost every continent, historians have written relatively little about them, partly because the relationship between the missionaries and official U.S. interests was ambiguous. Were they
autonomous and concerned only with advancing Protestant Christianity or did they act in
tandem with businessmen and diplomats to establish American economic and strategic
hegemony over a given region? Most historians agree that the primary goal of
missionaries was to evangelize the world. In Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats, Paul
Varg argues that the global evangelization impulse largely resulted from various religious
reform movements, such as the Second Great Awakening and the revivals of the 1890s.
Individual missionaries were not wild-eyed fanatics but rather motivated Christians who
wished to serve their faith and satisfy adventurous urges. William Hutchison, in an
important and more recent work, echoes many of Varg's contentions. Hutchison, whose
parents were educational missionaries to Iran, argues that the missionary movement
originated both in Christian zeal for evangelization and a belief in American
exceptionalism. His main theme is the tension between the evangelizing and civilizing
impulses present within the American mission movement. As a result, Hutchison argues,
American missionaries had an ambivalent relationship with American imperialism.
While they were primarily interested in saving souls, they also believed that America was
unique in the history of the world and that other countries would benefit both
economically and spiritually from American influence. Many missionaries believed they
could domesticate American imperialism and turn it to the advantage of the missionary
movement. Hutchison argues that this ambivalent attitude, not embracing yet not
condemning, has caused historians to puzzle over the role of the missionary. In general,
missionaries were too admirable to be treated as villains and too self-righteous to be
treated as heroes. Hutchison believes that historians should treat missionaries like the
abolitionists of the nineteenth century; although many abolitionists were racists, their efforts to end slavery were still laudable.  

The key case study for historians of the missionary movement is China because it occupied the attention of missionaries more than any other country. China was also a target for American military, political, diplomatic, and economic activities. Varg's book, one of the first on the subject, greatly influenced subsequent historiography. Varg argues that missionaries used American military and diplomatic power to further the ends of their mission and, in doing so, became unwitting tools of American expansion in China. As a result, in spite of much of the humanitarian work that missionaries were doing, the Chinese saw them as symbols of Western imperialism. When Chinese nationalists attacked missionaries or their property, missionaries reinforced this perception by calling for American military and diplomatic support. Subsequent work supports many of Varg's conclusions. Stuart Miller argues that American missionaries saw every act of force inflicted upon China by the West as an act of Providence. Michael Hunt maintains that in spite of their claims to the contrary, the missionaries hid behind treaties and diplomatic protection, which further alienated Chinese nationalists. Most historians agree that although missionaries were not imperialists from a political or military perspective, they were definitely tools of American imperialism. Not all historians have seen missionaries in this way, however. Patricia Neils notes that seeing missionaries as tools of American imperialism in China originated in the combative climate of 1960s and 1970s historiography. She advocates a more nuanced look at mission activities instead and states that “the role [of American missionaries in China] has not always been positive, consistent, or decisive, but overall it has most definitely been significant and
calls for further study." Most recent accounts of missionaries have dealt with American missionaries to China in a similar fashion: they avoid any sweeping praise or condemnation for the mission enterprise as a whole and deal with its various components on a case-by-case basis.

A key concept in connection with missionary activities since the 1960s has been the term "cultural imperialism." In his monumental work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argues that the idea of European superiority permeated Western perceptions of the "Orient." Easterners who sought a Western education either within or outside their own country were educated in terms that reinforced their own inferiority. Antonio Gramsci describes a similar phenomenon when he speaks of "cultural hegemony." Historians have tried to apply this broad concept to American missionaries, conveniently ignoring that most missionaries outside of China were outspoken opponents of imperialism and often operated independent of any official protection from the U.S. government. Cultural imperialism, which they maintained could be independent of political, economic, or military power, became a convenient means to condemn missionary activity as an attack against a foreign culture.

Paul Harris however, notes that the term has defied any rigorous definition and doubts whether it offers any new perspectives on the relationship between the missionary enterprise and the history of Western imperialism. Harris also states that "[c]alling missionaries 'cultural imperialists' has served mainly to announce that we no longer share the view that non-Christian religions are false, deluded, and corrupt systems destined to be superseded by Christianity." Since the term came into vogue, some historians have tried to more rigorously define it. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., for example,
defines cultural imperialism as "the purposeful aggression by one culture against the ideas and values of another" when accompanied by political, economic or military pressure, which more accurately resembles the traditional definition of political imperialism. Harris tries to bridge the gap between an amorphous definition and the more traditional one of Schlesinger by defining the term as "the active expression abroad of a culture that had been shaped by the experience of aggressive expansion and dominance." Harris proposes to link missionaries to imperialism through their common origins in an "imperial culture" and posits that what is required is an expanded definition of force that would include the "voluntaristic, persuasive methods of the missionary." The problem with this approach, however, is that Harris' notion of culture is far too simplistic. He seems to assume that all of American culture can be subsumed under "imperial culture" ignoring that culture varies by race, gender, religion, ideology, and profession, and continually transforms and modifies itself over time. To speak of one overarching American imperial culture without ever defining that culture is problematic. Additionally, many things that have an active expression abroad emerged from the same imperial culture, such as the Red Cross, the international women's movement, anti-slavery societies, and even the New Left. By Harris' definition, anything that emerges from an imperial culture and has some kind of expression abroad is evidence of cultural imperialism. By trying to avoid the definitional vagueness that characterized earlier approaches to cultural imperialism, Harris falls into the same trap.

Many historians have recognized the problems in existing notions of cultural imperialism and have chosen instead to abandon the term altogether. John Tomlinson, for example, notes this definitional vagueness and posits a definition of culture designed
to reflects its complexity in the real world. Tomlinson notes that cultural imperialism assumes a simplistic relationship between a well-defined dominant culture and a weaker subaltern one. In reality, he argues, all cultures are hybrids, vary widely within the boundaries of a given nation-state, and are subject to revision from various sources. What is constant, however, is cultural change or cultural transmission, which he defines as the transmitting of ideas across cultural boundaries. While the relationship certainly can be coercive, it does not have to be. In addition, cultural transmission does not usually flow in a single direction but rather in multiple directions. Some historians of American missions to China have applied this concept to their work. Charles W. Weber, for example, uses the concept of cultural interaction in his study of Baptist educational work in China in the nineteenth century. According to Weber, “mission schools became a means of communicating one culture to another, and in this process the comparisons between the West and China become apparent as divergent customs and values come into contact with one another. In the effort of missionaries to foster their religious beliefs nurtured in their own cultural and historic traditions, the difficulties of transplanting these beliefs into another cultural milieu became manifest.... The missionary was the agent for both this clash and cultural interaction.”

Diplomatic historians have somewhat problematically tried to get beyond the volatile question of imperialism as well and have proposed a host of concepts to replace it. Some, such as Edward Crapol, argue that the word imperialism should be a descriptive rather than a pejorative term. Others recommend the more neutral terms expansion or hegemony. Richard H. Collin advocates the concept of symbiosis instead of hegemony. According to Collin, symbiosis “emphasizes cultural affairs more than
strategic and economic ones and looks for contextual interrelations in a broad international perspective to help explain conflicts between specific nations.” Symbiosis does not have the negative overtones of imperialism. Collin argues that “Latin American reverence for American writers like Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, . . . love of baseball, and the idea of republicanism are examples of symbiosis.” The problem with symbiosis is that it ignores the coercion and force that marked what other historians have labeled imperialism, which includes the political, economic, and military variety as well as the cultural. Not every interaction is a cultural one. Although the term cultural imperialism does indeed seem to be questionable one, imperialism is a valid concept, albeit with widely varying definitions. Imperialism, however, must always be tied to power. Historian Frank Ninkovich argues that imperialism occurs when “an important aspect of a nation’s life is under the effective control of an outside power.” The workable definition of imperialism I employ in this dissertation is the use of political, military, or economic pressure by an individual, a group, or a government to force another state to submit to something it opposes within its own borders. Certainly, forcing a government to take economic action that is not in its own self-interest is imperialistic, as is direct military occupation. Forcing a government to remove an official from power for perceived slights, insults, or a lack of efficiency when the host government does not agree with the accusations is another example of imperialism. Forcing a government to pay an indemnity for property damaged in a riot that was not incited in any way by that government is an example of imperialism as well. The forceful limiting of the range of available options of a state for the direct benefit of another company, group, or state constitutes imperialism.
At the same time, however, I avoid the term cultural imperialism altogether, preferring instead the concept of cultural transmission as defined by Tomlinson. Indeed, not only were American values transmitted to Iranians through the schools, many missionaries absorbed values from Iranian culture. In addition, there were several readily identifiable subcultures within both the American and the Iranian camp. On the American side, there were conservative and liberal missionaries with varying goals. Conservative missionaries were concerned primarily with evangelization while liberal missionaries embraced educational and humanitarian work. In addition, there were differences between the men and women missionaries, both in terms of the cultures from which they came and also in terms of whom they could contact in Iran. Iranian culture was even more complex. The missionaries worked with various cultures in northwestern Iran, such as the Armenian, Nestorian, Jewish, and Shi’i Muslim communities. Even within the Muslim community, there were various tribes, such as the Bakhtiyari, the Lors, the Kurds, the Shahsevan, the Qashqais, and numerous others. The area of Iran in which the missionaries concentrated their efforts, northwestern Iran along the Ottoman (later Turkish) border, was a cultural, ethnic, and religious frontier. In addition, gender roles varied between these various cultures. The work of American missionaries represents the interaction between various cultures, both within and outside Iran.

Although I avoid the term cultural imperialism, I do analyze American missionary activities in the context of imperialism as defined above. One cannot study the history of Iran in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries without discussing the impact of Western economic, political, and military imperialism. Iran was increasingly coming under the control of Western imperial powers, especially Tsarist Russia and Great
Britain. Both countries sought natural resource concessions, monopolistic control over Iranian trade, free access through various regions of the country, and extraterritorial rights for their citizens. In the nineteenth century, northern Iran increasingly came under the control of the Russians while southern Iran came under the control of the British. This informal state of affairs was made official by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. British and Russian imperialism in Iran directly affected Iran’s politics, sovereignty, and economy. Indeed, outside the capital city of Tehran, the British and Russians exercised a greater degree of control than the supposedly absolutist monarchy of the Qajar dynasty. Britain and Russia surely qualify as imperialist powers in Iran during the nineteenth century and beyond. The U.S., by contrast, wielded little official power in the country before World War II. To the extent that the U.S. government was imperialistic in Iran (and it was on occasion), it did so with the support of the British; however, the U.S. became an imperial power in Iran after World War II.

American missionaries were not unaware of this state of affairs and realized that they had entered into a complex web of power relations characterized by imperial, monarchical, and provincial/local nodes of power. Due to a common cultural heritage with Great Britain, the Anglo-American entente that emerged in the late nineteenth century, and a historical antipathy to the Russians, the American missionaries in the north gravitated toward the British. The British, in turn, looked after the interests of American missionaries even after the U.S. opened a legation in Tehran in 1883. While it would be presumptive to label the missionaries imperialists, especially in view of their official neutrality, their emphasis on humanitarian work, their reliance on local goodwill, and their ideological opposition to imperialism, the missionaries nonetheless tapped into
imperial networks of power and influence when it suited their objectives. For example, the missionaries appealed to the British for aid and support on several occasions, including twice when missionaries were murdered, and several other times when the Iranian government denied their petitions to open new mission stations or schools. Such a relationship suggests an ambivalence on the missionaries' part toward imperialism.

American Missionaries in Iran

Unfortunately, few historians have looked at the activities of American missionaries and most of them have focused overwhelmingly on China. Diplomatic historians have paid little attention to the work of American missionaries in other regions of the world, especially the Middle East. No one has done a systematic study of the activities of American missionaries in Iran. Michael P. Zirinsky is the only scholar who has considered the subject in any depth. Since 1986, Zirinsky, who specializes in Middle Eastern and European history, has published four articles dealing with various aspects of the American missionary enterprise in Iran. Zirinsky focuses primarily on the Presbyterian educational enterprise in inter-war Iran, the relationship between American missionaries and the rise of Reza Shah, and American women missionaries. Zirinsky's pioneering work, however, underscores the need for more research on the topic as he fails to put the American missionaries in the larger context of the Progressive era or U.S.-Iranian relations; he largely ignores the question of their impact on modern Iran (with the exception of the rise of Reza Shah); and he does not utilize Persian sources.

Some historians have dealt with the problem peripherally in works on other topics. Abraham Yeselson, for example, in a study of U.S.-Iranian relations from 1883 to
1921, praises the missionaries for their humanitarian and educational work in Iran and maintains that such work was not in any way imperialistic. On the contrary, when American missionaries infrequently chose to interfere in political affairs, they sided with nationalists and reformers. Missionaries focused primarily on the evangelization of Iranians, a campaign that met with very little success. In a more recent work focusing on Protestant diplomacy in the Middle East from 1810 to 1927, Joseph Grabill argues that missionary work in Iran and throughout the Middle East encouraged nationalist feelings among minorities. The reform impulse of the Progressive movement influenced most missionaries and their initiatives in the Middle East constituted another example of the Progressive "search for order." Grabill also states that the American impact on the Middle East through education was immensely important but has been largely overlooked by historians.

Iranian historian Sayyid Ali Mujani has also dealt with the missionaries to an extent in his 1996 book, Barrisi-yi Munāsibat-i Airân va Amrîkā az Sāl-i 1854-1925 [An Investigation into American-Iranian Relations from 1854-1925]. In this work, based on documents from the Iranian Foreign Ministry archives in Tehran, Mujani argues that the missionaries were basically well-meaning and provided some humanitarian aid to Iran but that their impact was quite negative overall. He asserts that the missionaries stirred up a lot of unnecessary trouble within Iran's minority communities, weakened the Qajar government, and strengthened British power and influence in Iran. Mujani also criticizes American Baha'i organizations for trying to proselytize in Iran. Mujani's book is useful because of its use of largely inaccessible Iranian archival documents but lacks analytical
depth, research in pertinent American sources, and contextualization in the larger literature.

The Progressive Movement

Although much has been written on the American Progressive movement, there is little agreement over who the Progressives were and what they were trying to accomplish. Richard Hofstader argues that the Progressives were mostly middle-class reformers suffering from "status anxiety" who advocated moralistic and largely unrealistic structural reforms. Robert Wiebe also sees Progressivism as a primarily middle-class movement whose primary concern was to bring order to a chaotic society. The middle class put their faith in professionals and experts to reform the ward system and eliminate "bad" trusts and inefficiency in business and government. Nell Painter argues that fear, especially of labor radicals and immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, motivated most Progressive reforms. Alan Dawley maintains that Progressivism was an attempt by people in various sectors of society to resolve the imbalance between classical liberalism and a new emphasis on equality and social justice. Such wide disagreement among historians stems from the fact that Progressivism encompassed a wide variety of groups and conflicting reforms under one movement. This dissertation will not attempt to resolve the controversy but rather to demonstrate that both missionaries and American financial advisors embodied various aspects of the American Progressive movement. Their attempts at Americanization clearly had their origins as much in Progressive themes as in Protestant theology.
Arthur Link and Richard McCormick argue that evangelical Protestantism, in combination with the influence of the sciences, inspired many specific reforms, including Prohibition and anti-vice crusades. As Ruth Rosen demonstrates, Progressives campaigned against prostitution in order to impose morality on a society that had been negatively influenced by industrialization. American missionaries in Iran embodied this strain of progressivism and applied their own morality to the Iranian scene. Missionary opposition to ṣīqih, or legalized prostitution, opium addiction, and plural marriages in Iran paralleled Progressive opposition to prostitution and alcohol consumption at home. The natural and social sciences also inspired the reformers' faith in experts and in the idea of progress. Progressives tried to reform urban politics by bringing in non-partisan, apolitical experts to administer urban affairs and root out corruption. Arthur Millspaugh considered himself to be a Progressive-era city-manager projected onto the Iranian scene and tried to implement "scientific" reforms that would set Iran on the road to progress once again. This amounts to a uniquely Progressive internationalism, defined as the application of Progressive-era principles to the international scene. This dissertation provides some insight into how latter-day Progressives tried to impose their vision of reform outside the United States.

American diplomatic historians have dealt with the international aspects of the Progressive movement, especially in the works on Woodrow Wilson and on the 1920s. Most historians of Wilson, including the orthodox historians, the New Left, and more recent writers, have seen him as trying to apply Progressive-era principles abroad. The most notable recent work in this regard is Thomas Knock's *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (1992). Knock, like his orthodox mentor
Arthur Link, notes the key Progressive elements of Wilson’s foreign policy philosophy, especially in his ill-fated quest for a League of Nations. Other historians, including Michael J. Hogan, Carl Perrini, Joan Hoff, Frank Costigliola, and Melvyn P. Leffler, have noted the elements of Progressivism within the business community and in Hoover’s associationalist political philosophy during the 1920s. Although American diplomatic historians have done an excellent job of describing progressive internationalism as it relates state-to-state relations and foreign policy elites, they have largely ignored the role of non-governmental actors. The study of missionaries and the ideology of mission offers new insights into the history of American foreign relations during the Progressive era.

**Women Missionaries**

Another interesting but neglected dimension of missionary work is the role of women. A few historians, such as Jane Hunter, have begun to study the role of women missionaries. Hunter, noting that roughly 60 percent of the missionaries who went to China were women, injects the neglected issue of gender into the study of American missionaries in China. She argues that work on the mission field in a foreign land provided these women with the opportunity to put their desire for self-liberation into action. Both American and Chinese women experienced their greatest degree of freedom at the borders of their respective cultures. Despite their active role abroad, however, these women continued to advocate a more traditional role for American women at home and, interestingly enough, for Chinese women as well.
Just as Hunter found with respect to missionaries in China, female missionaries outnumbered their male counterparts in Iran. The documents pertaining to American missionaries in Iran indicate that women comprised the majority of American missionaries to Iran, sometimes an overwhelming majority. Virtually every male missionary that came to Iran was married; however, a significant proportion of the missionary staff, approximately one-third, was composed of single women. At various mission stations, women missionaries outnumbered their male counterparts by as much as four to one. Much in the same way that Jane Hunter suggests, evangelistic zeal and adventurism motivated these women missionaries. Missionary activity provided an outlet for women that was denied them in American society. In addition, since male missionaries did not enjoy any access to Muslim women whatsoever, women missionaries were essential to reach Iranian women and children. The half dozen or so female doctors who went to Iran as medical missionaries were also able to provide medical care to Iranian women, something their male counterparts could not do. In addition, women missionaries considered themselves to be radical egalitarians fighting for gender equality in Iran. They lamented the condition of women in Iranian society and used their evangelistic, humanitarian, and especially educational work to preach not only the Gospel of Christ but also the equality of the sexes. They participated in the re-making of Iranian society just as willingly and enthusiastically as their male counterparts, albeit with slightly differing goals.

Women missionaries faced not only a gender-segregated system in Iran, they faced one within their own mission as well as male missionaries occupied the majority of leadership positions. While men served as pastors of newly-founded churches, deans of
the schools, and committee chairs, women played active but generally supporting roles within the missions, such as teachers, committee members, and helpers. Some women, however, were occasionally able to break through these restrictions that were imposed upon them, mainly as a result of necessity. While denied the leadership positions within the mission, women exercised enormous informal control over the course of mission activities. Women's influence within the missions was stronger during the period 1890-1920, and remained strong in the provinces, but weakened in the years following 1920 in Tehran. The impact of the women missionaries on the American missionary effort in Iran will be an important secondary theme in this dissertation.

The American Financial Missions to Iran, 1911-1945

Historians have also paid little attention to the Shuster and Millspaugh financial missions, and largely ignored the administrative and ideological links between the missionaries and the financial advisors. Many works on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution consider the role of Morgan Shuster. The best source on the Shuster mission, however, is Shuster’s own recollection, *The Strangling of Persia*, which is still widely read both in Iran and the U.S. Shuster not only sees his mission as part and parcel of the Constitutional Revolution but also explicitly condemns British and Russian imperialism in Iran.

Most historians who deal with Millspaugh often misinterpret his actions. Bruce Kuniholm, for example, perceives Millspaugh as a direct extension of the American government. Kuniholm argues that the American government withdrew support for him as tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States mounted in late 1944 and
early 1945. Emily Rosenberg also deals with Millspaugh peripherally. Although Millspaugh did not take orders from the U.S. government directly, Rosenberg argues that he epitomizes her concept of liberal developmentalism and further contends that his actions provided American business interests with access to Iranian oil.

Mark Lytle advances a similar theme in *The Origins of the Iranian-American Alliance*. In an otherwise excellent book, he argues that the initiative to send Millspaugh to Iran in 1943 originated in the U.S., an assertion that contradicts both American and Persian sources on the matter. He also argues that Millspaugh represented America's "New Deal" to Iran and that he cultivated close contacts with the American embassy while alienating reform elements within the Iranian government. According to Lytle, the Iranian people did not want Millspaugh-style reform. Many of Lytle's contentions regarding Millspaugh are questionable. One of Millspaugh's greatest complaints was that the American embassy failed to give his mission any support. Based on Persian sources, this study will also demonstrate that Millspaugh was largely supported by Iranian public opinion. Lytle misinterprets Iranian public opinion because he did not look at Persian sources.

Iranian historians have looked at Millspaugh in more depth but with little more success. Some argue that the Millspaugh missions in Iran, as well as American missionary schools, were part of an American capitalist plot to exploit Iran's natural resources and commercial markets. According to post-revolutionary Iranian historian Maryam Mir-Ahmadi, Millspaugh consciously and cynically tried to undermine democracy in Iran. Mir-Ahmadi argues that all American actions in Iran both before and after 1953 were exploitive. Other Iranian historians portray Millspaugh as incompetent
rather than conspiratorial. In a leftist interpretation, N. Jami argues that Millspaugh's stated objective of improving the financial situation of the country utterly failed and actually made matters worse. Other post-revolutionary historians, such as Abd-ol-Hushang Mahdavi and Iraj Zawghi, stress Millspaugh's good intentions during both missions but point to outside factors that inhibited his success. Eskandar Dildam agrees that Millspaugh acted selflessly in the first mission but argues that during his second mission, Millspaugh directly interfered in Iranian affairs and paved the way for the exploitation of Iran's markets and natural resources. 32

Both Iranian and American historians have ignored the significant links that existed between American missionaries and the financial missions. First, the overwhelming majority of support staff for Shuster and Millspaugh were Iranians who had been educated in American missionary schools as neither Shuster nor Millspaugh spoke Persian. As a result, their perceptions of Iran were filtered through and shaped by the perceptions of American missionaries and their clients. Second, American missionaries themselves served as a vital repository of information about Iran for Shuster and Millspaugh. Third, some missionaries, such as Dr. Samuel Jordan of the American High School (which later became the Alborz College of Tehran), mobilized student opinion in support of the Shuster mission and allowed his students to demonstrate in the streets on the American's behalf. Finally, and most importantly, the reform impulse of the financial advisors and the missionaries came from a common source. On the surface, their objectives differed; missionaries were primarily concerned with the evangelization of Iran while Shuster and Millspaugh were concerned with reforming Iran's finances. At the same time, however, both American missionaries and financial advisors adhered to an
ideology of mission that was remarkably similar to and emerged from the reform impulses of the American Progressive movement and their common desire to civilize Iran. Unfortunately, no effort has been made in the literature to connect the two groups. Clearly what is needed is a more systematic comparison of the activities of American missionaries and American advisers in Iran, as well as their impact on Iranian society and culture.

Sources

One understandable concern of historians who deal with non-governmental actors is the general lack of availability of primary sources. In the case of American missionaries in Iran before 1945, however, sources are plentiful. Although there are over a dozen places that contain unique and relevant primary source material, the main source base for this dissertation is the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, the chief repository for Presbyterian mission documents. The overwhelming majority of American missionaries to Iran after 1871 were Presbyterians. The PHS contains many different manuscript collections of American missionaries to Iran during this period. The key and largest collection is the Board of Foreign Missions Secretaries’ Files of the Iran (Persia) Mission, 1881-1968 (Record Group 91). RG 91 contains the annual reports of the various mission stations, the missionaries’ personal reports, personal correspondence, detailed statistical reports, home letters, information on the activities of other missionaries in Iran, budgets, maps, baptismal records, church records, and institutional correspondence. RG 91 is the most significant and comprehensive source relating to
American missionaries in Iran, most of which has never before been examined by historians.

In addition to RG 91, the PHS contains numerous smaller personal manuscript collections of individual missionaries and their families. These collections contain valuable correspondence both between missionaries in Iran, to and from family and friends at home, missionary letters to home congregations, photographs, bulletins, personal histories, diaries, magazine articles, and newspaper clippings. Some of the manuscript collections contain Persian-language items. For example, the John Elder Collection (RG 189) includes pertinent newspapers clippings, religious tracts, bulletins, missionary school newspapers and promotional material for the Alborz College of Tehran, all in Persian. In addition to its manuscript collections, the PHS also has dozens of rare books, unpublished manuscripts, and pamphlets in their stacks, including the published biographies and autobiographies of various missionaries to Iran, Persian-language hymnals used in mission churches and schools, unpublished manuscripts, descriptive and travel literature relating to Iran written by the missionaries, several films from the 1940s and 1950s of American missionary buildings and activities, two voice recordings of interviews with American missionaries, and many photograph albums.

Without a doubt, the PHS is the by far the largest single repository for documents relating to American missionaries to Iran.

Several other archives contain useful records as well. The Princeton Theological Seminary is the repository for the William McElwee Miller papers, a large collection that spans half a century of mission work in Iran. The PTS also holds the papers of missionary statesman Robert Speer, who had a close connection with the Iran mission as
General Secretary for the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Other colleges that contain pertinent collections are the University of Oregon, Dartmouth, Wheaton College, Mount Holyoke College, and Amherst. Other pertinent collections are housed at the Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Historical Societies. All in all, there is no shortage of documents relating to American missionaries in Iran.

Official government records documenting the U.S. diplomatic presence in Iran from 1883-1927 and from 1939-1979 are concentrated in the National Archives of the U.S. in College Park, Maryland. American diplomatic documents are included in Record Groups 59 and 84. A more important official source is documents pertaining to the British diplomatic establishment in Iran during this period, deposited at the Public Record Office in London. Although the U.S. inaugurated official diplomatic relations with Iran in 1883, it did not open a consulate in Tabriz or any of the other outlying cities outside Tehran where missionaries were most active. As a result, missionaries often looked to the British for aid and support. The British, for their part, were willing and even eager at times to act on behalf of the missionaries. The key link between the British and the American missionaries was the British consulate in Tabriz.

Persian-language primary and secondary sources are crucial to gaining a clear view of the Iranian side of the story. Perhaps the best Persian sources are collections of archival documents and memoirs (*khātirāt*) written by Iranians who converted to Christianity or were educated by the missionaries. There have been several published collections of Iranian diplomatic documents, most important of which is Sayyid Ali Mujani's *Guzdih-ye Asnād-i Ravābit-i Airan va Amrīkā (1851-1925)* [A Selection of Documents Pertaining to American-Iranian Relations, 1851-1925] (1996). The vast
majority of documents in this volume were taken from the Iranian Foreign Ministry Archives, a source largely inaccessible to Western scholars. Other document collections cover Anglo-Iranian, Russo-Iranian relations, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, and various specific topics. Another very valuable resource has been the writings in Persian of Iranian converts or students of missionaries. For example, Said Rushdiyah wrote *Mard-i Khudā* [Man of God], a biography of Presbyterian missionary William McElwee Miller, who aided in converting him from Islam to Christianity. Shukrallah Nasir, a graduate of the Alburz College of Tehran, wrote *Ravish-i Duktur Jordan* [The Method of Dr. Jordan] (1945), a biography not only of Dr. Jordan but an Iranian insider's description of the inner workings of Alborz College itself. Various Persian-language sources are also housed at the Presbyterian Historical Society. Another important source is Persian-language newspapers, which were primarily Tehran-based, concerned with political matters, and contained important information about the American financial missions. These and other sources provide valuable and often ignored perspectives on American missionary work that are not to be found in English-language primary source material.

With the exception of documents from the National Archives and the Public Record Office, the vast majority of source material relating to American missionaries in Iran has never before been studied by historians. Some of them, such as the William Miller papers, have only become accessible to historians in the last couple of years. As a result, based on these sources, the study of American missionaries adds significantly to our knowledge of American-Iranian relations, tribe-state and imperial relations, the
history of American missions, international Progressivism, and gender in American foreign relations.

The following chapter provides the historical background to the American missionary movement in Iran, which actually began in 1832. That chapter also places missionary activities in the context of the social, economic, and political situation of Iran in the nineteenth century. Chapter three considers in greater detail the ideology of mission that motivated both American missionaries and financial advisors, especially Arthur Millspaugh, who served in Iran on two separate occasions. Chapter four looks at the crucial period of 1890 to 1907, marked by a high degree of instability in Iranian society, which had a direct impact on missionary work. During this period, two missionaries were murdered in two separate incidents, setting off diplomatic and political struggles that persisted for years. Chapter five marks a key turning point in the history of modern Iran, the Constitutional Revolution, and records both the role that American missionaries played in it and the impact the revolution had on the expansion of American missionary work in the country. Chapter six tells the remarkable story of how American missionaries provided food, shelter, and protection to tens of thousands of Iranian refugees during World War I. The war itself would decimate half of the American mission but set the stage for the dramatic expansion of the missionary effort in the postwar years. Chapter seven discusses the expansion along educational lines, the apex of which was the Alborz College of Tehran, a missionary-run school that had a major impact on American-Iranian relations at all levels. This chapter also discusses the rise of Reza Shah's dictatorship and his final closing of all American missionary schools on the eve of World War II.
Notes


2 On relations between the Qajars and the Bakhtiyari khans, see Gene Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiyari in Iran*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); on the Shahsevan, see Richard Tapper, *Pasture and Politics* (1979); for the Qashqai, see Lois Beck, *A Year in the Life of a Qashqai Tribesman*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); for a good general introduction to the topic of tribes and states in the Middle East, see Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, eds., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), especially the introduction and the chapter by Lois Beck on tribes in Iran.


5 Arthur Gobineau, *Lettres Persanes* [Persian Letters], (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957) and Gobineau, *The World of the Persians*, (Geneva: Minerva, 1971). Gobineau was a significant propagandist for the superiority of the Aryan race, whose homeland he traced to Persia/Iran. His beliefs regarding Iran's racial heritage came to be widely accepted by Persian Iranians as well as by most Europeans and Americans. Iranians viewed this brand of European racist theory as a point of pride, which constitutes a kind of Saidian Orientalism in reverse. Instead of Orientalist racial theory stressing the inferiority of a non-Western people, it instead served to stress its equality with Europe. My thanks to Dr. Richard Davis of Ohio State University for his insights on this point.


16 Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism*, p. 5.


For a recent work of American diplomatic history that is based in part on research in Persian-language sources, see James Goode, *The United States and Iran, 1946-1951: The Diplomacy of Neglect* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), passim. Also Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of Mussadīq* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), pp. 4, 13. In this latter volume, Goode argues that Millspaugh had become bitter toward Iranians after his second mission and severely criticized them. While this is certainly true, one should compare this negative portrait with Millspaugh’s first book, in which he portrays Iranians in highly flattering terms.

Qudrathā-yi Buzurg dar Jang-i Jahānī-yi Dovom: Pazhūhishi dar Bārih-yi Impīrīyālīm
[Iran and the Great Powers During the Second World War: Experiment for Imperialism]
In 1832, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) sent missionaries H.G. Dwight and Eli Smith to Iran to gauge the prospects of permanent mission work there. Because of restrictions against proselytizing among the majority Muslim population of Iran, Dwight and Smith naturally gravitated toward the Christian minorities of the northwest. There they were in for a pleasant surprise. The Nestorians, a Christian sect that had suffered at the hands of the Muslim majority, welcomed the Americans with open arms and encouraged them to send full-time missionaries to live and work among them. In describing the prospects of a mission to Persia in his report to the ABCFM, Smith wrote, "[T]his field is white and ready for the harvest. In all my journeys I have seen no people as willing to accept the gospel as the Assyrians [Nestorians] of Persia. It is a good field for the work." 

The Iran mission that followed was the culmination of trends within the history of American missions in general and the history of Iran in the nineteenth century in particular. The American missionary movement as a whole emerged out of the evangelical fervor of the Second Great Awakening. Prior to the nineteenth century, the
evangelical movement within American Protestantism had concentrated on the evangelization of American Indians in the West. With increased emphasis on reaching the world after the Second Great Awakening, American Christians looked beyond North America to the Far East, the Middle East, and Oceania. Persia, or Iran, was one of the first targets of the American missionary movement.

Iran faced great challenges throughout the nineteenth century as a result of its confrontation with the West. At the beginning of the century, Western involvement in Iran’s internal affairs increased dramatically as a result of a series of wars with Russia. The Qajar dynasty, which came to power in 1796, had consolidated its power but was forced to deal with the ever-increasing Western threat to Iran’s sovereignty and independence. The monarchy, dominated in the second half of the nineteenth century by Nasir ad-Din Shah (1848-1896), vacillated between reform and reaction, centralization and decentralization, and cooperation and conflict with the West. Despite the opposition of most Iranians to Western economic and political penetration, they welcomed Western educational reforms. Many Iranians, from anti-Shah reformer Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani to reformist Prime Minister Amir Kabir (1848-1851), believed that they could adopt Western innovations as a means to combat the West itself and safeguard Iranian sovereignty.

Historical circumstances within Iran and the United States drew increasing numbers of American missionaries to Iran throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. From the arrival of the first American missionaries in the 1830s, to the 1890s, the missionaries opened a series of mission stations, schools, and hospitals across northern Iran. Although their presence was not on par numerically with similar missionary efforts
in China and India, it was at least as firmly established before the turn of the century.
The American missionaries, mostly Congregationalists and Presbyterians, had also
reached a comity agreement with the British missionaries, Anglicans from the Church
Missionary Society who decided to concentrate on southern Iran. In addition to carving
out a spiritual sphere of influence for themselves, the missionaries also furthered their
work by cultivating relationships with various political entities inside and outside Iran.
These relationships, which helped the missionaries to sustain and expand their work
during the nineteenth century, set the stage for the period of expansion that followed.

The American Missionary Movement in the Nineteenth Century

A sense of mission has pervaded American culture since the founding of the first
colonies. Certainly, part of the impetus for colonizing the New World was the desire to
bring lost souls to Christ from at least the time of the Puritan experiment in New
England. John Winthrop, for example, explicitly stated the missionary nature of New
England Puritanism when he called for the establishment of a “city upon a hill,” which
would function as a beacon of true Christianity to both the Old World and the New. Most
American Protestant denominations concentrated on mission fields close to home before
1800. The initial targets of colonial missionaries were Native Americans, who comprised
one of the most important mission fields of the 1800s, albeit one that was not known for
its many converts.2

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought many changes for the
American missionary enterprise. The American Revolution split American Protestant
denominations from their British parent organizations. The Church of England became
the Episcopal Church in the United States, while other mainline denominations, such as the Methodists and Presbyterians, formed governing bodies separate from the mother country. Political change caused the American missionary enterprise to focus inward for a short time and led to a rethinking of goals and objectives.

The more important social changes brought about by the Second Great Awakening drove the expansion of foreign missions, however. The Second Great Awakening was a series of revivals that swept the United States in the early nineteenth century and directly influenced the formation of a wide range of reform movements, such as abolitionism, temperance, anti-vice, and women’s suffrage. With regard to foreign missions, the emphasis on personal revival and evangelistic expansion caused many American Protestants to look beyond North America in their effort to carry out the Great Commission, Christ’s final earthly command to his followers to preach the Gospel to all nations.³

As historian Randall Balmer points out, the main theme in nineteenth century American Protestantism was postmillennialism, due in no small part to the influence of the Second Great Awakening. At its most basic level, postmillennialism is the eschatological concept that Jesus Christ would physically return to rule after his kingdom had been established on earth. The premillennial counter-argument was that Christ would take with him to heaven all true Christians before onset of the Great Tribulation, a period of seven years that would precede Christ’s physical return to earth to rule for a period of 1,000 years. Essentially, postmillennialists were optimistic that human beings, guided by God’s will, could reform themselves, while premillennialists believed that all such reform was a waste of time since Christ was to return before the Millennium.

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Although both post- and premillennialists would send missionaries abroad, postmillennialism was the predominant order of the day among missionaries for most of the nineteenth century. At its core, postmillennialists assumed that the expansion of Christianity through mission work would be the key to establishing Christ’s perfect kingdom on earth. In the United States, the high degree of prosperity, a general sense of optimism, and a belief that the intransigent problems that plagued the Old World could be resolved in the New all combined to reinforce postmillennialism. The same postmillennial optimism that grew out of the Second Great Awakening helped to spawn a wide variety of reform movements in addition to the expansion of the missionary movement abroad. All were part and parcel of the idea that God’s Kingdom could be established on earth by means of extensive reform at home and evangelization abroad. At least in the minds of missionaries, the mission movement was yet another part of the social reform movements of the day.

Another impetus to the expansion of the mission movement was the example of British missionaries, such as Hudson Taylor (China) and Henry Martyn (India and Iran), who had fired the imaginations of American evangelicals for reaching lost souls for Christ. British missionary societies began to actively encourage American missionary efforts and formed sister organizations in the United States. For example, the British Foreign Bible Society spawned an American counterpart and the two cooperated in their effort to translate the Scriptures into foreign languages and distribute them either free or at a nominal charge to non-Christians.

The key foreign missionary organization to emerge during this time was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Although the
Congregational denomination dominated the ABCFM, the organization as a whole was intended to be an ecumenical and cooperative effort to spread the Gospel to non-Christians. Indeed, many different congregations, including the Presbyterians and Methodists, participated in the ABCFM in an effort to pool their financial resources to support foreign missions. The organization sent missionaries to four general fields; the American West, the Hawaiian Islands, China, and the Middle East.  

From an ideological viewpoint, the ABCFM’s central and overriding concern was the Christianization of the world. The unprecedented degree of ecumenical cooperation within the organization did not stem from theological liberalism but was rather a reflection of the evangelical homogeneity that existed in the United States throughout much of the nineteenth century. The main tension within the organization, and indeed within most missionary movements, was the dual concepts of “Christianization” or “civilization”, or as historian William Hutchison terms it, Christ or culture. The civilization model assumed that the only way to reach foreign cultures for Christ was to instill within their culture the elements of “Christian” (meaning Western) civilization. As a result, “civilizing” missions focused on humanitarian and educational programs first and evangelism second. Missionaries who employed this model emphasized putting their faith into practice by alleviating suffering and restructuring “native” societies along Western lines. Schools and hospitals were the chief institutions of such an approach. The evangelization model, on the other hand, saw culture as a hindrance, not an aid, to spreading the Gospel. Evangelical missionaries believed that their sole objective ought to be to preach the Gospel to as many people as possible and avoided even the appearance of being Western. They immersed themselves in foreign languages, lived in the same
conditions as the people who they were trying to reach, wore native dress, and tried to remove any and all cultural obstacles that stood in the way of others accepting Christ.7

Of course, in practice these two ideals were rarely implemented in their pure form. Most missions combined the two in various ways but generally privileged one of the approaches over the other. Missionaries adhering to opposing approaches often coexisted within the same mission station. Many missionaries also recognized the interrelationship between the two approaches, which, though they differed over means, they nonetheless shared the ultimate goal of global evangelization. Most of those who believed in Christianization first also believed that cultures that had accepted Christ would ultimately become “civilized” along Western lines. Those who looked to civilization first believed that the transformation of foreign cultures would create an atmosphere more conducive to the spread of Christianity.

The early missions to Native Americans and Hawaiians convinced many mission theorists that the civilization model was flawed. In the American West, they noted that despite the massive “civilization” campaigns that had been carried out, there were very few converts to Christianity among Native Americans and in Hawaii, the missionaries’ civilizing responsibilities had greatly complicated evangelization by drawing ostensibly neutral missionaries into political affairs. As a result, the model employed by ABCFM commissioner Rufus Anderson was evangelization above all else, a notion epitomized by his slogan “nothing but Christ”. Anderson, who served at the head of the ABCFM from 1832-1866, privileged evangelization over all other mission enterprises, including schools. The ABCFM only supported educational activity insofar as it was aimed at raising up native Christian workers to take over the work of evangelization. Indeed,
indigenization, or the eventual handing over of control of native churches to native pastors and teachers, was the primary goal of most ABCFM missions.\(^8\)

As the nineteenth century wore on, however, and the institutional dominance of the ABCFM over foreign missions met with serious challenges, the emphasis on spreading the Gospel alone was replaced by a new approach that emphasized the importance of both Christianization and civilization. One of the reasons for this was the rise of separate mission boards alongside the ABCFM. The Reformed Dutch, German Reformed, and New School Presbyterian denominations each withdrew from the ABCFM, partly as a protest against Congregational predominance within the organization and also because of their desire to form mission boards under their own control. The new model that these mission agencies would follow after the 1870s saw the simultaneous civilizing and Christianizing of foreign cultures as two means toward the same end, the Christianization of the world.\(^9\)

The mission board that would embody the new approach was the Board of Foreign Missions (BFM) of the Presbyterian Church of the USA. The Presbyterians, though interested in foreign missions, had focused on “home missions” (evangelical work within the United States) before the 1870s. The domestic focus stemmed in part from their organizational union with the Congregationalists, which lasted until 1852 (which some referred to as “Presbygationalism”). Under this arrangement, foreign missions fell to the mostly Congregational ABCFM, while the Presbyterians concentrated on domestic reforms, such as abolitionism (among northern Presbyterians), temperance, anti-vice campaigns, and women’s suffrage. The deep division between the northern and southern Presbyterian congregations over slavery and other sectional concerns also inhibited
foreign missionary activities. After the plan of union between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians failed in 1852, it was only a matter of time before the Presbyterians pulled out of the ABCFM and formed a mission board of their own.10

The deep involvement of the Presbyterians in the social reform movements that emerged from the Second Great Awakening was reflected in the methodological stance advocated by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. As William Hutchison demonstrates, the BFM civilized and Christianized simultaneously. This was in part a reflection of the times. Western superiority in all realms was largely unquestioned. Although many were critical of elements of Western imperialism, such as the primacy of material and economic over spiritual concerns and the import of the Western vices, the missionaries believed that they could domesticate imperialism through foreign missions. They used the imperial world system as a tool to evangelize foreign cultures while at the same time trying to eliminate its harsher elements.11

**Iran and the West in the Nineteenth Century**

While trends in American evangelicalism contributed to the export of missionaries abroad, changes within Iranian society during the nineteenth century attracted some of them to live and work in Iran and had a major impact on their work. Several factors would have an effect on the Iran mission throughout the nineteenth century. These included the country's ethnic and religious diversity, the relations of various groups with the state, the increasing penetration of Iran by Western powers, the attitude of Iranians toward Western ideas and education, and the rise of a mass-based reform movement that would provide the foundation for Iranian nationalism.
Contrary to the stereotype that portrays Iran as monolithically Islamic, the country enjoys a large degree of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and social diversity. As historian Ervand Abrahamian notes in his major work *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, nineteenth century Iran was a land of “infinite variety, of social complexity, and of regional diversity.” In 1850, Iran’s population of 10,000,000 was 20% urban, 55% rural village-based, and 25% nomadic. At the same time, the social composition of each of these categories varied widely. Iran’s major cities (Tabriz, Tehran, Isfahan, Mashad, Yazd, Hamadan, Kerman, Urumia, Kermanshah, Shiraz, and Qazvin), were further divided into separate communities for Iran’s many ethnic and religious groups. The dominant class in Iran, especially the cities, was the Persians, who comprised roughly 40% of the population in 1850. Collectively, the Persians and Persian (Farsi)-speaking ethnic groups, comprised 64% of the population. Linguistically, the remaining 36% was composed of Turkic-speaking tribes and ethnic groups (29% of the total population), Arabs (4%), and non-Muslims (3%). Further complicating mission work, several languages were often used exclusively in the same area. The urban populations of the central plateau spoke Persian while the villagers spoke the Bakhtiyari, Luri, and Armenin in addition to Persian. The nomadic tribes communicated in a host of tribal dialects. In the northwest, where the missionaries initially focused their efforts, the dominant language was Azeri, a Turkish dialect, and several Kurdish dialects instead of Persian. As a result, missionaries were often required to learn up to four languages (for example, Syriac, Azeri, Persian, and a Kurdish dialect) over the course of their career in order to communicate effectively with those around them.
Tribal ties dominated Iranian society in the nineteenth century, particularly in rural areas, and had a significant impact on the shape of mission work in the country. Indeed, the Qajar dynasty, which ruled Iran from the late-eighteenth to the early-twentieth centuries, was of tribal origins. The Qajars, however, were simply one among many tribes throughout Iran. The Bakhtiyari, whose tribal homeland was southwestern Iran, numbered over 250,000 in 1850, comprising 2.5% of the total population. The Qashqayi, centered in southern Iran, had a population of 264,000 in 1850, almost 3% of the total population. One of the largest tribal confederations were the Kurds, who numbered 800,000 in Iran alone and were concentrated in the northwest, the center of early American missionary activity. The tribes, especially the Kurds, were only nominally under the rule of the central government. Each tribe was divided into several dozen semi-autonomous sub-tribal organizations. Loyalty was accorded first to family, then to tribal unit, and then to the tribe, thereby engendering much communal conflict. Until the 1930s, most tribespeople were either nomadic or semi-nomadic. Indeed, the continual search for water and pasturage for livestock often caused conflict between and among the tribes.

The religious picture is similarly diverse. In some areas of Iran, the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism survives to this day, such as the city of Yezd. Zoroastrianism, which originated in and dominated Persia until the Arab invasion of the seventh century, is based on the notion of a dualistic battle between good (the god Ahura Mazda) and evil (the devil Ahriman) and bears a striking similarity to Judaism and Christianity. There has always been a Jewish minority living in Persia who maintained their religious identity, albeit with some limitations. The Jews, both for reasons of preference and law, lived in
segregated and semi-autonomous all-Jewish communities. The city of Hamadan, for example, had a large Jewish quarter during the nineteenth century. Virtually all of Iran's major cities had a Jewish quarter as well.

Christianity as well has existed continuously in Iran since the origins of the faith. The Magi, the wise men of the story of the birth of Christ, are widely believed to be Zoroastrian astrologers from the Persian Empire. In Acts 2:9, Paul refers to Persians converting to Christianity under Peter’s preaching on the day of Pentecost. Nestorian tradition maintains that these new converts returned to Iran and planted the seeds of Christianity there. According to Nestorian tradition, St. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, and St. Bartholomew came to Iran on a missionary trip and also planted some churches.¹⁴

Whatever the truth about the origins of the church in Iran, Christianity was well-established as a significant minority religion in the Persian empire by the second century A.D. Despite periodic oppression at the hands of Zoroastrian priests and the association of Christianity with the Roman Empire (when Rome was the chief political rival to Sassanian Persia), Iranian Christianity grew. The Nestorians officially broke off from the church in Rome at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, which marked division between the Eastern and Western branches of the church.¹⁵ During its peak, the Nestorian church sent out missionaries of its own as far as India and even China during its peak. The Christian communities in Iran survived the Islamic invasion, primarily due to Islam’s recognition of Christianity as a legitimate minority religion along with Judaism. The Mongol invasions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries constituted a blow from which the Nestorian church never recovered, however.¹⁶ Thereafter, Nestorian Christianity
survived in northwestern Iran around Lake Urumia, although it was a shadow of what it once was.

Historically there has also been a sizable Armenian community in Iran. Christian Armenia was originally part of various Persian empires, including that of the Safavids. Shah Abbas, a Safavid monarch who reigned from 1587-1629, increased the breadth if not the quantity of the Armenian Church in Iran when he forcibly removed 10,000-30,000 families from Armenia to Isfahan and the area around present-day Tabriz in 1604. Like the Jewish and Nestorian communities, the Armenians lived in segregated villages or in all-Armenian quarters within the city of Tabriz.

The most important and dominant religion in Iran, however, is Islam, which swept the country after the Arab invasion in the seventh century. Initially, most Iranians adhered to Sunni, or orthodox, Islam but adopted Shi‘i Islam after the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in 1501. Shah Ismail, the founder of the Safavid dynasty who had come to power with the support of militant Sufi tribesmen called the Qizilbash, imported Shi‘i clerics from what is now Iraq as a means to consolidate his power at the expense of the native Sunni ‘ulimā in Iran. Shi‘i Islam spread all across Iran and rapidly became the majority religion in the country. Indeed, Iran remains the largest Shi‘i country in the Islamic world.

One other religion played a major role in Iran in the nineteenth century and had a great impact on American missionary work. Baha‘ism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and expanded despite Qajar attempts to suppress it. The founder of the faith, Sayyid ‘Ali Muhammad Shirazi, declared himself to be the Bab or “gate” of revelation in 1844, a doctrine which directly challenged one of the key tenets of Islam, the idea that the
prophet Mohammed was the last in a series of messengers of divine revelation. The message that the Bab carried was that of universalism and challenged the predominance of Islam in Iran. The Bab also claimed to be both the embodiment of Christ’s prophesied Second Coming as well as the incarnation of Shi’ism’s occultated Twelfth Imam. Although the Qajar state executed the Bab in 1850, setting off a series of riots across Iran and ensuring that relations between his followers and the Iranian state would be perpetually hostile, the religion he founded grew not only inside Iran but outside it as well. Baha’ism proper emerged from the majority splinter group under the leadership of Baha’ullah, who emerged after the Bab’s execution. Baha’ism continued to be an important, but oppressed, force on the Iranian scene and gained an indeterminate number of converts throughout the nineteenth century. 19

Northwestern Iran, the most diverse part of a diverse country, was home to a majority Turkish-speaking population that resided primarily in the provinces of Eastern and Western Azarbaijan. A substantial proportion of the population was part of various pastoral-nomadic tribes that dominated the rural mountainous regions of northwestern Iran. One of the largest tribal groups in the country, the Kurds were a tribal confederation whose homeland crossed into the Ottoman Empire. Both the Ottoman government and the imperial Iranian government had great difficulty in controlling the Kurds, who would often raid villages and fomented frequent uprisings against both states.

The relations between the tribes and the Iranian state has been a major theme in Iranian history for thousands of years. Most of the ruling dynasties in Persian history had their origins in some tribal confederation or alliance that put them into power. The Qajar dynasty, which ruled Iran from 1796-1925, was at first dominated by tribal ties but, as
historian Abbas ‘Amanat notes, the entire Qajar period was marked by the loosening of these ties and their replacement with traditional patterns of monarchy and bureaucracy. The Qajar state was initially highly decentralized and depended on vassals and clients to effectively administer the provinces. There was little coordination between the provinces and the center at the newly-established capital of Tehran. Tribal and religious minorities ruled themselves although they were required to pay taxes to the state.

Iran’s increasing contact with the West was a significant impetus for social, economic, and political change in the nineteenth century and had a direct impact on missionary work. Indeed, the entire history of the Qajar dynasty is inextricably linked with the West. The two wars Iran fought with Imperial Russia and lost had the deepest impact and set the stage for the rest of the nineteenth century. The end of the second war in 1828 brought the Treaty of Turkmanchay, which ceded large portions of Iran’s Caucasian provinces to Russia, opened the country’s fragile economy to a flood of cheap European goods, and provided Russian citizens with extraterritorial rights that were later extended to the British as well. A further condition of the treaty was the recognition of ‘Abbas Mirza, a pro-Western Qajar prince, as the successor to the throne, setting the stage for direct Russian and British interference in Iran’s internal affairs.

The other European power that had a direct interest in Iranian affairs was Great Britain, who became involved in Iran to maintain lines of communication with its imperial possessions in India and to forestall the Russian threat. The nineteenth century would be marked by the so-called “Great Game,” the imperial rivalry between Russia and Great Britain over the vast territory of Central Asia and the Middle East. Both Iran and the Ottoman Empire would be the primary chessboard upon which the game would be
played. While the Russian empire was primarily interested in annexing the outlying provinces of the Ottoman Empire and Persia, Great Britain was concerned with maintaining the status quo to ensure that the Russians did not gain a foothold in the Middle East or South Asia, which would threaten their imperial holdings. Both powers fought several wars with Persia in the nineteenth century in pursuit of their respective imperial goals. Both the British and the Russians would regularly interfere in Iran's internal affairs during times of peace.

The Qajar dynasty as a whole faced increasing European involvement in their affairs and various monarchs, especially Nasir ad-Din Shah (ruler from 1848-1896), believed that its best means of defense against this encroachment was not to openly resist the two but rather to play them off against one another. Nasir ad-Din enjoyed great success in this regard and the degree of sovereignty that the Qajar dynasty during his reign enjoyed was largely due to this policy. But on the other hand, it often meant that the Iranian government was forced to provide various concessions to one or the other of the imperial powers to sustain their rivalry against the other. The end result of the policy was the maintenance of a limited degree of Iranian sovereignty accompanied by a steady decrease in its autonomy in economic matters over the course of the rest of the century. The Iranian government granted various natural resource concessions to British and Russian citizens in return for loans that increased Iran's dependence on imperial powers. This, in turn, caused a great deal of public hostility against both the Qajar regime and the imperial powers and brought on the Constitutional Revolution in 1907.

Another aspect of Iran's confrontation with the West was in the intellectual arena. Increased contact with the West brought with it an increased interest in Western ways.
As early as the eighteenth century, young Iranian men were sent abroad to European schools in France and England to receive an education while the Iranian government hired Europeans to teach Iranians in Western methods, especially in military matters. In 1851, Nasir ad-Din Shah and his reformist Prime Minister Amir Kabir opened the Dār al-Funūn [House of Sciences], a high school staffed by European (mostly French) instructors who provided a Western secular education for the sons of Iranian nobles.25

Several factors account for the widespread Iranian interest in the West. Iranian culture, more than most cultures, is syncretistic and adopted elements of many cultures over the centuries all the while maintaining a distinctive, if constantly changing, identity. Another impetus was Iran's military losses to Western powers in the nineteenth century. One of the main reasons that Great Britain and Russia won the wars they fought with Iran stemmed from the superiority of their military technology. Many among the Shah and his court believed that the best way to protect Iranian sovereignty from the West was by adopting its methods. Iranian and Islamic reformers would adopt the same line of reasoning by the late nineteenth century. Many, such as Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, a sworn enemy of the Shah, advocated the adoption of Western technological innovations while rejecting the religious and moral values of the West, ideas which would become the hallmark of Islamic revivalism in Iran. The wealthy nobility and upper strata of the merchant class as well as the growing intelligentsia were the most enamored with Western ideas.26 The distinction between Western technology and Western imperialism would create a fertile and receptive atmosphere to American missionary schools.

As the nineteenth century wore on, most Iranians, whatever their religion or ethnicity, believed that the country was being sold piecemeal to foreigners in exchange
for spending money for Nasir ad-Din Shah on his series of pleasure tours of Europe. For example, the Iranian government in 1872 granted British citizen Baron Julius de Reuter exclusive rights to factories, irrigation, all untapped natural resources, agricultural improvements, new means of transportation, and all future enterprises. After public outrage (and Russian opposition) the Shah was forced to renege on the agreement and paid enormous penalties to Reuter for the breach, all of which placed additional financial hardship on Iran. The debacle did not prevent the Shah from granting other later concessions, including one on tobacco, a key domestic industry, that granted sole rights to produce, export, and sell all Iranian tobacco to a British citizen. This concession sparked an outright revolt led by the intelligentsia, the 'ulimā, and the bazārī merchant class that forced the Shah to renege on this concession as well in order to save his throne. The dissatisfaction with Western imperial penetration and with the Qajar monarchy's seeming complicity with it would spur the rise of a mass-based reform movement that would culminate in revolution.

All of these trends, the country's ethnic and religious diversity, increasing economic and political penetration of Iran by the West, widespread interest in Western ideas, and the rise of a mass-based reform movement would combine to provide a generally receptive but volatile climate for American missionaries in the nineteenth century. The American missionary movement in Iran was the culmination of trends that had occurred within the history of the mission movement within the United States and would benefit from the political and cultural changes that swept Iran in the nineteenth century.
Western missionary involvement in Iran began with Portuguese Catholics in the sixteenth century. Most of their early work, however, was temporary in nature and aimed at the Christian populations of the northwest. Iranian Muslims saw the Catholic missionaries both as agents of a foreign power and an alien religion. At the same time, the Nestorians and Armenians resented the Catholic missionaries for trying to get them to leave their own churches and embrace the Catholic faith. Although the Catholic mission as a whole, which included various orders from several different European countries, had a continuous presence in Iran until the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the scope of their work was highly limited, with the notable exception of the schools that the French Lazarist fathers opened in northwestern Iran in the 1890s. The Catholic missionaries were the sole representatives of Western Christianity in Iran until the eighteenth century.  

Early Protestant missions in Iran followed the pattern established by the Catholics of a very small-scale mission, generally composed of a few touring ministers who worked mostly with the Christian minorities. The first abortive Protestant attempt came in 1747 when two German Moravians came to the country but were robbed twice on the way to their first destination and barely escaped with their lives. The first Protestant missionary to have a lasting impact on mission work to Iran was Henry Martyn, who came to Iran in 1811. Martyn, who was part of the British Church Missionary Society (CMS), came to Iran from India as part of his effort to translate the New Testament into modern Persian. Martyn completed his task early in 1812 and died of disease later that same year.
Martyn had a lasting impact on both Iranians and later missionaries to come to Iran. The Iranian reaction to his presence was primarily one of curiosity. Some thought that Martyn was a “sincere seeker after religious truth who had come to [Iran] in order to study and adopt Islam.” Others thought he was a British spy who had come to prepare the way for a British invasion. The ‘ulimā, however, recognized that Martyn was a devoted Christian and wrote anti-Christian tracts to counter his effort to spread Christianity in Iran. There were two factors that made Martyn’s short mission highly influential for future Protestant missionary efforts in the country. First was his translation of the New Testament into Persian, which served as the starting point for most future translations of the Bible into Persian and greatly aided later missionary efforts in this regard. Second was Martyn’s concentration on the Muslim population of Iran. The first person to receive a copy of Martyn’s New Testament was Fath ‘Ali Shah, ruler of Iran from 1797-1834. Martyn himself distributed copies of his translation to many Muslims in the months before he died. His decision to translate the New Testament into Persian was a conscious effort to work with the majority Muslim community of Iran. Although future missionary efforts would ignore the Muslim community in favor the minority Christian communities in the short run, the missionary effort in the long term echoed Martyn’s attempts to evangelize the majority Muslim population.

Although there were several subsequent short-term Protestant visitations to Iran throughout the next two decades, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions initiated the first sustained Protestant presence in 1832. While political changes within Iran made it seem a spiritual field ready for the harvest, it was the Second Great Awakening in the United States, combined with the postmillennial optimism of social
reformers, that provided the impetus for the initial American missionary effort in Iran. The ABCFM, which was the most important American missions organization in the 1800s, selected foreign mission fields on the basis of their openness to foreign missions and good prospects for evangelization. The ABCFM selected Iran as one of its mission fields on the basis of Smith and Dwight’s earlier positive reports about the prospects of mission work in Iran. The arrival of the first American missionaries came only four years after the Treaty of Turkmanchay, which had expanded Russian influence in Iran and provided Europeans with extraterritorial rights. It was probably only as a result of the imperial opening of Iran that American missionaries were able to begin a sustained and extensive effort at evangelization in the country, despite their ambivalence toward imperialism itself. In addition, the new Iranian interest in Western society and culture only increased the appeal of missionaries to some elements of Iranian society. The Persian government had an additional reason for welcoming American missionaries as the United States was seen as a potential lever that could be used against the influence of Russia and Great Britain. Although this idea would become prominent by the 1850s, and result in an overly optimistic treaty of trade and friendship between the two countries, the origins of this policy could be seen as early as the 1830s.\textsuperscript{32}

Unlike Martyn and his focus on evangelizing Muslims, the first American missionaries in the country initially decided to focus solely on the Christian minorities. One reason for this calculated decision was that it was illegal to convert Muslims to Christianity. Additionally, according to Islamic (Shari'a) law, anyone who apostacizes from Islam was subject to the death penalty, a law that was rarely enforced. Another legal obstacle to evangelistic work among Muslims was that friends and family could
confiscate the property of any Muslim who had converted to Christianity, a law that would remain on the books until the twentieth century. Yet another obstacle was a general Muslim intellectual and doctrinal resistance to Christianity, despite their initial curiosity.\textsuperscript{33}

Although the resistance of Muslims was part of the reason for focusing on Nestorians, other reasons originated within the organizational ethos of the ABCFM. As previously mentioned, the chief emphasis of the ABCFM as evidenced by the statements of Corresponding Secretary Rufus Anderson, was on evangelization to the exclusion of all else. In other words, evangelization and indigenization were the chief objectives of the early American missions. With regard to the Nestorians and Armenians, the ABCFM adopted the long-term objective of using them to reach their Muslim neighbors. This was also a much more cost-effective means for the ABCFM to operate. As a result, their short-term goal was “to enable the Nestorian Church, through the Grace of God, to exert a commanding influence in the spiritual regeneration of Asia”, which meant instilling in the Nestorians a zeal for spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to their countrymen. From Anderson on down to the missionaries, all wanted to spread the Gospel first with an eye toward indigenizing the Christian missionary effort and expand into the untouched Iranian Muslim field. The missionaries’ goal at first was most decidedly not to convince individuals to leave the Nestorian or Armenian churches but rather to convert individuals and through them, their churches, to evangelical Christianity.\textsuperscript{34}

Although Dwight and Smith, who visited Urumia in 1832, organized the “Mission to the Nestorians,” the permanent work would begin in 1834 with the arrival in Iran of Justin Perkins and his wife. They worked primarily in the cities of Tabriz, which
remained an important economic and cultural center despite the Qajar transfer of the capital to Tehran, and Urumia, which was the cultural and political center of Iran’s Nestorian population. Urumia would remain the most important foci of American missionary work in Iran until World War I.

The United States, of course, had not yet established diplomatic relations with Iran and would not officially do so until 1883. As a result, Perkins and missionary doctor Asahel Grant, who joined Perkins in 1835, requested and received official protection from the British consulate. After Great Britain and Iran went to war in the 1840s, however, the missionaries sought and received protection from the Russian consulate, although after the Anglo-Persian war ended, the missionaries returned to British protection. Although the missionaries were generally safe in Iran and their 150-year presence in the country was marked by surprisingly few violent incidents against them, it is clear that their enterprise depended to some extent on British imperial protection. Even after the United States established relations with Iran, the missionaries outside of Tehran often preferred to seek redress of local disputes through the British consulates instead of their own diplomatic representatives.

Perkins, in keeping with the Christ-only philosophy of the ABCFM, adopted the native Assyrian dress, which included wearing a two-foot tall sheepskin hat, and immersed himself in the Syriac language and Nestorian culture. Perkins indeed was the first to reduce modern spoken Syriac into a written language. He also brought in a printer and a press with which to print and distribute Christian literature in Syriac. The missionaries printed the New Testament in both modern and ancient Syriac script as well.
as a Christian periodical called *Rays of Light*, which remained in print for over a century.\(^{36}\)

One of the major problems confronting the early missionaries to Iran was the abject poverty and high illiteracy rates among the Nestorians. Even though they wanted to preach the Gospel only, they were forced to open some schools, albeit with a primarily evangelistic focus. As a response to the interest of the Nestorians in education, Perkins opened a boys' school in 1836 whose primary focus was the training of Assyrian evangelists. Presbyterian missionary John Elder reported that 92 of the 99 students who had graduated from the school by 1865 had accepted Christ.\(^{37}\)

One hallmark of the early educational efforts were the reports of periodic revivals similar to the emotion-oriented revival meetings of the Second Great Awakening. In 1846, for example, the most celebrated revival in the early years of the mission swept over both the male and female students of the mission schools in Urumia. Before that time, according to Elder, the missionaries had been dissatisfied with the spiritual result of their efforts, especially considering that “they themselves had been converted in great soul stirring revivals... They felt that the young people were being educated and civilized, but were not yet born again.” Early in 1846, however, the teachers of both the male and female students reported that a large number of their students experienced the emotional recognition of their own sinfulness and decided to turn their hearts over to Christ. Perkins reported that the student converts brought the revival back to their home villages where many more underwent conversion experiences. Elder reported that between 1846 and 1862 there were twelve more revivals that originated in the schools.\(^{38}\)
Another key innovation introduced by the American missionaries was an unheard-of emphasis on education for women. The missionaries followed up the opening of the boys' school with the opening of a girls' school a few years later. They squarely confronted the common prejudice that it was both a disgrace for a woman to study and useless since she could not become a member of the clergy. The first teacher of Iranian women and primary example for women's intellectual abilities was Mrs. Asahel Grant, the wife of the mission doctor. During her tenure in Iran, she learned to speak Turkish, to read ancient Syriac, and became fluent in modern spoken Syriac. She also amazed male onlookers, according to Elder, by referring to the New Testament in its original ancient Greek text to resolve points of theological dispute. Mrs. Grant began teaching Nestorian girls with the blessing of the local Bishop in 1838 but the work stopped for a time when she died of disease in 1839. The work with girls she began resumed in 1844 with the arrival of Fidelia Fiske, a graduate of Mt. Holyoke College.\textsuperscript{39}

The educational enterprise as a whole continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century. In the decade of 1837-1847, 24 mission schools were in operation with a combined total average of 530 pupils. By the decade of 1877-1887, the number of schools had grown to 81 with an average number of 1,833 pupils.\textsuperscript{40} The schools in Urumia were the center of the missionary educational effort for the early years of the nineteenth century but the vast majority of the mission schools described above was the result of an active plan to establish village schools in strategic locations. Although the initial enrollment of the schools was primarily Nestorian boys, the schools branched out to include girls (albeit in segregated classrooms to placate traditional concerns), then Armenians, Jews and finally Muslims.
The third focus of mission work, in addition to evangelistic and educational work, was the medical work. The medical aspect of missionary work was by far the most popular among the Christians and Muslims of Iran alike. While the schools were an expedient response to high illiteracy rates among the Nestorians, the ABCFM had intended to launch a medical mission complementary to the evangelistic work from the beginning. The philosophy behind missionary medical work was straightforward. In addition to emulating the example of Christ with regard to healing, the general popularity of medical work provided further opportunities for evangelistic work. Missionary doctors were often welcomed into areas that other evangelists were not. While the missionary doctors did not require that their patients convert to Christianity as a condition for treatment, they often took advantage of the opportunity to preach the Gospel to them.41

The first American missionary doctor to come to Iran was Dr. Asahel Grant, who died of disease in 1844. Grant was succeeded by the arrival of many mission doctors over the course of the next decades, including several women doctors. The need for women doctors was great since custom and Islamic law forbade the male missionary doctors from touching female patients for any reason. In addition to using female doctors to treat female patients, the mission also used women doctors to challenge existing notions of female inferiority.42 In fact, it is probably not too much of an exaggeration to say that female missionary doctors did more for Iranian women up to that time than any other missionary or Western institution, which were generally male-dominated.

The missionaries’ impact on the existing Christian churches in Iran was less beneficial. Although the missionaries did not originally intend it, schism in the Nestorian
and Armenian churches resulted from their actions to “revive” the ancient Christian churches of Iran. As previously mentioned, their intention was to work from within the Nestorian church and at first, their actions, especially the medical and educational work, were welcomed by the Nestorian priests. Indeed, Mar Yohanan, a high-ranking Nestorian bishop in the 1840s, sent his own daughters to the American missionary school for girls in Urumia as an example for his parishioners to emulate. The initial converts were encouraged by the missionaries to remain in the Nestorian church rather than to form a new one. As the American mission and its influence in the Nestorian community expanded, however, local and priestly opposition to their work grew.43

There were some early signs of problems. Many of the missionaries’ actions had unintended consequences that stemmed from their lack of deep understanding of local relations between the various minority groups. For example, Dr. Grant’s well-meaning attempts to provide medical treatment impartially to both Kurds and Nestorians in the mountains of the northwest played a role in sparking a Kurdish massacre of several thousand Nestorians in 1846, two years after his death. The Kurds, who were predominantly Sunni Muslims, were jealous of the attention that the Americans were paying the Nestorians, who had assumed that the American presence meant a degree of American protection against the Kurds.44

The Nestorian massacre of 1846 was the beginning of the separation. The revivals that swept the school that same year exacerbated the differences between the Nestorians and Americans. The final separation would take place gradually and relatively peacefully, although not without controversy, over the next dozen or so years. In 1854, the converted Nestorians asked the missionaries if they could worship with the
American missionaries. Elder states that "those judged to be truly converted were welcomed" and formed a separate church. The new evangelical church organized a separate presbytery in 1862, which included 158 members, 762 communicants, 9 native pastors, 52 evangelists, and 83 regular meeting places with an average attendance of 3,000.45

Although the American missionaries argue that such a separation between the two churches was tragic but inevitable, other missionary observers criticize the Americans for unwittingly and unwisely introducing schism into the beleaguered Nestorian church. British CMS missionary Reverend E.L. Cutts criticized the Americans in 1876 for refusing to accept Nestorians for membership who drank alcohol in any quantity. Cutts noted that the missionaries secured ordination for their pastors from one of their own priests in the evangelical church rather than from priests within the Nestorian church. It should be noted, however, that Cutts was part of a CMS effort to establish a mission in the same field that the American missionaries already occupied, an initiative that failed after a few short years.46

The 1870s would mark the end of an era for the early American mission and the beginning of a period of limited expansion across northern Iran, as well as the beginning of the first significant efforts to evangelize groups in addition to the Nestorians. The last of the first missionaries died in 1869 having seen very little of the harvest of souls they had envisioned. Instead of revitalizing the Nestorian Church along the lines of American evangelical Protestantism, they had instead succeeded in creating a separate church and were far from their original goal of Christianizing the rest of Iran.
Within the ABCFM, there was also dissension that resulted in the withdrawal of that organization from the Iran field. In 1870, the Presbyterians withdrew from the ABCFM, which officially became a Congregationalist missions organization, and formed their own Board for Foreign Missions (BFM). Despite their differences, the two mission boards agreed that the ABCFM would maintain the work they had begun in the Ottoman Empire among the Armenians while the Presbyterians would take over the Iran mission. Although the missions personnel remained the same for the most part, there were some very significant changes in the overall mission’s goals and objectives and set the stage for the future. The BFM changed the name of the Iran mission from the “Mission to the Nestorians” to the “Mission to Persia”. The name change reflected the failure of mission work among the Nestorians, although it would continue and even expand until World War I, and was an open recognition of the overall mission goal to evangelize all of Iran, especially the majority Muslim population.47

Real change in mission practice along the lines described above did not take place right away but was definitely observable over the next two decades. Reflecting their new objective to reach all of Iran and not just Urumia, the missionaries opened a series of new mission stations across northern Iran. In 1872, Presbyterian missionary James Bassett opened a mission station in Tehran, whose primary focus was on the Armenian, Jewish, and Muslim populations of the growing capital city. The conscious decision to adopt Persian, the majority language of Iran, as the official language of the Tehran mission station was evidence of the new goal of reaching Muslims. Reverend J.W. Hawkes opened a mission station in Hamadan in 1879 to work among the Jewish population. Despite the many years of temporary work in the city, an official and permanent station
was opened in 1873 in Tabriz, still the most important city of Iran, and focused on the Armenian and Muslim population.48

There was another significant, yet subtle, change that accompanied the transition from the ABCFM to the Presbyterian BFM in 1870. The breakup of the ABCFM marked the end of the emphasis on Christ-only mission work in Iran. The temptation that had long existed for the missionaries was to take advantage of the growing interest in Western education and use it to expand mission work and influence in the country. Up to the 1870s, the missionaries largely resisted that temptation and limited their educational work to complement, not supercede, the work of strict evangelism. The Presbyterian mission adopted a somewhat different worldview with regard to missions. The "civilizing mission" of the church, which had previously been de-emphasized under the Anderson policies, gained new respectability as a result of the seemingly triumphant expansion of Western civilization across the globe. Student-led missionary organizations, such as the Student Volunteer Movement that swept the colleges of the northeastern United States before the turn of the century, adopted as their goal the evangelization of the world in their own lifetimes. As historian William Hutchison notes, the term evangelization came to encompass both the civilizing and Christianizing functions of the missionary movement by the end of the nineteenth century.49 As a result, the expanded Presbyterian missionary effort in northern Iran was marked not only by a geographical and ethnic expansion, but by an ideological expansion as well. The practical result of this ideological change was the new importance of educational work. The opening of schools was seen not only as an important corollary to evangelistic work, but also as a means of
creating a Western-influenced cultural atmosphere that would be more conducive to Christianity.

**Conclusion**

The American foreign missionary movement as a whole originated within the changes the Second Great Awakening wrought on the American religious scene. The Second Great Awakening, with its emphasis on personal choice for salvation and its inherent postmillennial optimism, pushed Americans to expand their work beyond the evangelization of American Indians. The missionary movement in the minds of most social reformers in the early to mid-nineteenth century was part and parcel of the host of other social reform movements that dominated the political scene, such as the abolitionist movement, the temperance movement, anti-vice campaigns, and the first women's rights movement. The most important outgrowth of the missions emphasis of the Second Great Awakening was the ABCFM, the most important missions organization of the nineteenth century.

The ABCFM, a cooperative evangelical missions effort dominated by the Congregationalists, sent foreign missionaries to the Far East, the Middle East, and Oceania in the nineteenth century. From the leadership on down, the ABCFM adhered to the guiding objective to spread “nothing but Christ” to the world, in effect trying to evangelize without changing or influencing cultural attitudes. The ABCFM, with this organizational ethos, initiated the first sustained Protestant missionary effort in Iran.

Iran in the nineteenth century had undergone many changes that made it appear to casual observers to be “a field white unto the harvest”. If changes within nineteenth
century American evangelical Protestantism provided the push, changes within Iran attracted missionaries to the country. Iran, especially the northwestern region of the country, was a cultural, ethnic, and religious frontier marked by a high degree of diversity. In addition to its majority Muslim population, there were significant pockets of Christianity and Judaism, not to mention adherents of the emerging and suppressed Baha’i faith. This diversity constituted a workable field in a country where the conversion of Muslims was prohibited by law. The most important trend in nineteenth century Iran, however, was the increasing economic and political penetration of the West, especially the competing British and Russian empires. The power and influence of Western imperial powers provided a level of protection to the missionaries that they otherwise would not have enjoyed. The increasing contact of Iranians with the West also created a widespread interest in Western ideas, which provoked an attitude of curiosity toward the missionaries, especially their educational programs. The increasing penetration of the West also provoked hostility toward both the imperial powers as well as the Iranian government. The Iranian government, for its part, tried to play the imperial powers against one another and saw a definite advantage in encouraging the activities American missionaries, whose government they wished to use as a third force against Great Britain and Russia.

The American missionary movement in Iran itself, which began in the 1830s, initially focused solely on the Nestorian Christian community and hoped to use it to evangelize the rest of Iran and the Muslim world. Instead of creating a separate church, they wished to reform and revive the entire Nestorian church along the lines of American evangelical Protestantism. By the 1850s, however, they had utterly failed in this
endeavor. Although they did indeed have converts, they succeeded only in creating a new and separate church rather than transforming the old one along the lines they had envisioned. Division within the ABCFM as well resulted in a split between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians, who took over and expanded the American mission in Iran.

The Presbyterian mission expanded geographically to include not only the entire population of Iran as its evangelistic objective, but also ideologically by embracing the "civilizing" function of mission work alongside the work of strict evangelism. The expanded geographical and ideological focus of the Presbyterian missionary effort ushered in a period of dramatic overall expansion for the mission. Their ideology of mission, the focus of the next chapter, shaped the course of the next half-century of mission work in Iran.
Notes

1 John Elder, “A Brief History of the Iran Mission of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.”, unpublished manuscript, 1950s, Record Group 189 [The Elder Family Papers], Box 1, File 2, Presbyterian Historical Society, p. 1.


3 Douglas Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986): pp. 11-12; Randall Balmer, *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999): pp. 1, 10. The Great Commission, which is found in Matthew 28: 19-20, is Christ’s command to spread the gospel to all nations and underscored the fact that Christianity was to be a universal religion, not relegated to a select group of people.


5 Elder, “History of the Iran Mission”, p. i.


17 Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*, 62-64.


24 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 50-57, 73.
25 Ibid., pp. 53-55, 64; Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, pp. 52-54.


38 Ibid., pp. 6-10; Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*, pp. 109-110.


Mansoori, “American Missionaries in Iran”, pp. 63-65, 68; Waterfield, Christians in Persia, pp. 135-140.


CHAPTER 3

THE IDEOLOGY OF MISSION: AMERICAN MISSIONARIES, FINANCIAL ADVISORS, AND THE IDEOLOGY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM

The actions and enterprises that Americans, both missionaries and financial advisors, undertook in Iran can only be understood within the context of their ideology of mission. For the missionaries, this ideology had many sources: strains in evangelical Protestantism, the influence of revivalist movements, millennial theology, the Progressive movement, and campus movements such as the Student Volunteer Movement. Overall, there was remarkable consensus among the missionaries with regard to their mission, which was nothing less than "the evangelization of Iran in this generation." American financial advisers in Iran during this period, though not seeking to spread the Christian Gospel, were secular missionaries of a sort as they sought to Westernize and modernize Iran's financial system.

Virtually all of the missionaries' activities were connected with evangelism in one way or another. Believing that Islam was an inadequate means of achieving salvation, the missionaries focused their attention on spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire population of Iran. For example, their educational work, widely praised by Iranians and
Westerners alike, aimed at making Christianity more acceptable to Muslims and preparing the ground for the establishment of religious freedom. Through their work with Christian minorities they intended to bring about a revival along American Protestant lines so that Iranian Christians would evangelize their Muslim neighbors. Their medical work, the single most popular missionary effort among all classes in the country, gave missionary doctors access to areas denied to evangelists and educators.

The ideology of mission that informed the missionaries' actions was also related to that of other influential Americans in the country, especially the American advisers hired by the Iranian government to administer and reform the country's finances. Morgan Shuster, an American lawyer and former financial adviser to the Philippines, served as Treasurer-General of Iran's finances in 1911 while Arthur Millspaugh served as Administrator General on two separate occasions, 1922-1927 and 1943-1945. Although Millspaugh was not a missionary, and had little, if any, interest in evangelism, his goals and objectives in Iran bore more than a superficial similarity to those of the missionaries. Millspaugh was on no less of a mission in Iran than his missionary counterparts and the zeal he brought to his work certainly matched their own. Instead of looking to religion as the means of personal and national salvation for Iranians, however, Millspaugh advocated the adoption of various Progressive-style economic reforms. As a result of the idealism of American financial advisers and the missionaries, Iranians received the impression that the United States was fundamentally different than European countries, who seemed determined to bend Iran to their will.
The Ideology of Mission

The ideology of mission can best be imagined as a spectrum with the religious ideology of missionaries on the one side and the secular reformist ideology of other groups, such as financial advisors, on the other. Most missionaries were primarily concerned with evangelizing the world first and providing humanitarian aid and education to foreign peoples second. Transmitting American values and culture constituted a distant, and often subconscious, third priority. The missionaries in Iran embodied this set of ideas. Although they undertook many enterprises that seemingly had little or nothing to do with evangelism, nonetheless, their writings and correspondence reveal that reaching Iranians with the Christian gospel was their primary objective. For American missionaries, their purpose was made clear in the manual of the Board of Foreign Missions: “The supreme and controlling aim of Foreign Missions is to make the Lord Jesus Christ known to all men as their Divine Savior and to persuade them to become his disciples; to gather these disciples into Christian churches which shall be self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing; to co-operate, so long as necessary, with these churches in the evangelizing of their countrymen, and in bringing to bear on all human life the spirit and principles of Christ.”

Historian Michael P. Zirinsky dismisses the missionary emphasis on evangelism as an effort to justify the large sums of money sent from home. He believes that American missionaries in Iran saw themselves as simply “servants sent to provide for secular needs,” who only incidentally and superficially attempted to evangelize Muslims. Contrary to Zirinsky’s interpretation, the American missionary effort in Iran can only
properly be understood within the context of evangelism. Indeed, not only their correspondence with the Board of Foreign Missions and home churches, but their private correspondence, diaries, memoirs, Persian-language literature, and other documents emphasized evangelism as well.

At the same time, in addition to direct evangelistic techniques, the missionaries employed various strategies, some more successful than others, to make Christianity more attractive to the majority Muslim population. These strategies often employed various secular non-evangelistic methods, such as free medical treatment in the cities and villages, a Western-style education that included a healthy, though indirect, dose of Christianity, and various public health reforms, such as water purification to prevent cholera outbreaks. The missionaries genuinely enjoyed helping Iranians in medical and educational areas but these were only a means to the end of evangelization. The medical aid that missionaries provided gave them access to peoples, especially conservative Muslims, who would never attend a church service, accept a Christian tract, or attend a Christian school. The schools allowed the missionaries to gain access and influence among the ruling classes of Iran and the Westernized intelligentsia. Through education, the missionaries hoped to pave the way toward the establishment of religious freedom and inculcate selective Western values that would make Iranians more receptive to the Christian gospel. Neither education nor medicine were ends in and of themselves.

At the other end of the spectrum in Iran were the American financial advisors, who were also motivated by a sense of mission not unlike that of the missionaries. Like the business interests, characterized by historian Emily Smith Rosenberg as "liberal
developmentalists," American financial advisors took with them to Iran an inherent faith in free market capitalism, support for the Open Door, and a belief that other countries should be encouraged to adopt America's economic and political system. They genuinely believed that Iran should adopt the American model of development and abandon all alternative models. The United States had no significant economic interest in Iran during the early twentieth century but unofficially sent financial advisors Morgan Shuster and Arthur Millspaugh. Millspaugh especially embodied these beliefs and was primarily concerned with bringing about reform for its own sake.

There is no evidence to suggest that Shuster and Millspaugh were motivated by a desire to spread Christianity; however, they were just as zealous in their desire to reform Iran's financial system and see it enter the community of nations as an equal and fully independent partner. Not surprisingly, they sought to reform Iran in the image of the West, specifically along lines that were advocated during the American Progressive movement. Shuster and Millspaugh both advocated the elimination of public corruption, the democratization of the political system, the establishment of an ordered economic and political system, and management of public affairs by experts. Millspaugh, especially, pursued a moral campaign against opium that paralleled some aspects of the temperance and Prohibition movement.

Although the missionaries pursued evangelization while the financial advisors sought Westernization, each group supported the reform movements of the other. The missionaries and the financial advisors spoke in glowing terms of one another. D.W. MacCormack, the Director of Internal Revenue during the Millspaugh mission, praised

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the missionaries for opening hospitals and schools across the country and improving the status of women in the country. Shuster saw the missionaries as key elements in shaping and reforming the character of young Persians for future service to their country. Both Shuster and Millpaugh were particularly grateful to the missionaries for providing them with a relatively large pool of English-speaking Iranians trained in American missionary schools to serve as reliable and trustworthy employees to the financial missions.\(^5\)

**Christianity and Islam**

Evangelism, the central feature of the missionaries' ideology, was deeply rooted in the fabric of nineteenth and early-twentieth century American Protestantism. Evangelism, or preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all peoples, as commanded in the Great Commission, did not necessarily mean that other people would accept Christianity but pointed to the duty of believing Christians to tell others the gospel (or "good news," the literal meaning of the word gospel in ancient Greek) of Jesus Christ. In the United States, a series of religious revivals led by Dwight L. Moody swept across American college campuses during the late-nineteenth century and restored enthusiasm to the missionary movement. These revivals stressed the doctrine of premillennialism, which underlay most of the mission work in Iran. Premillennialists believed that Christ would return before the 1,000-year millennium predicted in the book of Revelation but not until after the entire world had heard the Gospel of Christ. Premillennial theology lent a certain sense of urgency to missionary work.\(^6\)
Premillennialism and revivalism were concentrated in one particularly influential campus organization, the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM). The SVM was formed in 1888 by Moody and others and focused on leading college students to Christ and Christian missionary service. The SVM's motto was "The Evangelization of the World in this Generation." Most of the American missionaries who served in Iran who were not the sons or daughters of missionaries devoted their lives to missionary service as a result of the SVM.

An excellent example of this trend is William Miller, a missionary to Iran from 1919 to 1967. Miller was the son of a Protestant minister and attended Princeton in 1918-1919. Although he had been exposed to Christian service his entire life, it was not until attending the SVM national conference of 1913 that he decided on the mission field. He finally committed to Iran after hearing Robert Speer, a prominent lay recruiter for the missionary movement and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, deliver a lecture at Princeton about the lack of any mission to the Muslims of Iran. Miller was not the only missionary to be recruited from Princeton. According to historian James A. Field, Jr., Princeton was the primary source for foreign missionaries during this period. Another Princeton graduate dispatched to Iran was Howard Baskerville, who died a martyr to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1909.

The influence of the SVM and the influx of young missionaries in the early 1900s intensified the focus of American missionaries on the Muslim population of Iran. American missionaries and mission theorists believed that Iran was the "weak point in the citadel of Islam" for many reasons. First, according to missionary William Shedd,
Persians were Shi’ite rather than Sunni Muslims, who considered Shi’ites to be heretics, and thus seemed more likely to turn to the Christian West for support. Second, there were many sects and divisions among Persian Muslims. The missionaries felt that the lack of an orthodoxy among Iranian Muslims would aid the work of evangelization. Third, Shedd noted that Persians were naturally “more liberal and tolerant than any Moslem nation.” Finally, Shedd noted that there was a perception among Iranians that Islam had failed them, a perception that the missionaries encouraged.11

In keeping with their emphasis on evangelization, American missionaries believed that the people of Iran were, in the words of William Miller, "lost sheep and lambs" who needed a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.12 The American missionaries in Iran were not part of the so-called "modernist" branch of Protestant Christianity which held that all religions were equally valid and that the role of the missionary was simply to relieve suffering. The missionaries believed that if they did not deliver the Gospel message, the people of Iran would be condemned to eternal punishment in hell. They believed that they were commanded by Jesus Christ Himself in the New Testament to spread the Gospel message to the entire world.13 In general, a profound concern for the material welfare of the Iranian people also motivated their actions. They were not in Iran for material gain and were little interested in people who were. Religious idealism and evangelical fervor lay behind every action the missionaries took in Iran.

Missionaries founded churches and carried out limited revival campaigns to accomplish their goal of evangelizing Iran. William Shedd, a missionary in Iran from 1892 to 1918, toured the northwestern region of the country. Shedd, a second-generation
missionary to Iran, spoke fluent Persian, as well as Turkish and Syriac. He preached to rural Iranians in Persian and attempted to plant Christian churches wherever he could. Shedd, who grew up there, fully immersed himself in Persian culture and the tenets of Shi'a Islam. The premiere evangelist, however, was Miller. Upon his arrival in Iran in 1919, Miller learned the Persian language from Muslim clerics. He also tried to immerse himself in Persian culture, even to the extent of attending services at a local mosque, a move which he later regretted. While other missionaries often mixed evangelism with other activities, such as medical and educational work, Miller single-mindedly devoted himself to evangelism. He saw his one goal as preaching the Gospel to as many Iranians as possible. To the extent that he had a secondary goal, it was to plant Christian churches across Iran. Outside of his steadfast belief in evangelical Protestant Christianity, however, Miller remained somewhat flexible and tried not to offend the sensibilities of Iranians.

The missionaries' attitude toward Islam is complex but crucial to understanding their sense of mission. The missionaries spoke of some elements in Persian culture they admired. One missionary placed significance on Iranian Muslims' dedication to their faith. By and large, the missionaries also admired the dedication of Muslims to monotheism and credited Islam, along with Judaism and Christianity, with eradicating polytheism in the West and the Middle East. Although usually disdaining the tāʾzīyih, the passion play for the martyrdom of Hussein at Karbala, a major figure in Shi'a Islam, the missionaries also lauded the veneration that most Iranians held for Hussein and also Ali, the founder of the Shi'i sect of Islam. William Miller, in particular, noted several
aspects of Islam that he believed should be encouraged. Miller admired Islam’s emphasis on the sovereignty of God, the outward emphasis on moral purity, the dedication to regular worship, the deep attachment to the family of the Prophet, the doctrine of sacrifice (as evidenced by Hussein at Karbala), and the deep respect that Persians had for knowledge. Despite devoting his life to converting Iranians from Islam to Christianity, Miller had this to say of Islam:

Certainly one reason why [Muslims] have not responded more to the Christian message is that Islam is a highly developed religion, with a book supposed to be the Word of God, and a theology, and a long and in some respects a brilliant history. It contains much that is true and good. Its teachings are in some ways easier to understand and believe than are the mysteries of the Trinity and the divine-and-human nature of Christ. The duties required by Islam, though by no means easy, are in the range of man’s ability to perform.... For these and other reasons Muslims are convinced that their religion is the best, and meets their needs, and should not be abandoned for any other.

Despite the few positive aspects of Islam they saw, overall the missionaries viewed Islam as their chief adversary. Not suprisingly, the missionaries saw deep differences between Christianity and Islam. First and foremost was the meaning of Jesus’ life and death. There were some superficial similarities between Christianity and Islam with regard to Jesus. Muslims venerated Jesus as a Prophet sent to reveal God’s word to mankind. Muslims also believed that Jesus performed many miracles and that at least part of what is in the New Testament are his words. The similarity ended there, however. As Miller noted, “we must never forget that between Jesus of Nazareth and the ‘Isa whom the Muslim reveres there is a vast difference.” To call Jesus solely a man, even a prophet, was a point that the missionaries could not accept, just as Persian Muslims could not accept the notion of Jesus being simultaneously man and God. Additionally, to the
Christian, if Jesus was not the Son of God, then his death on the cross was meaningless. Indeed, Muslims do not believe that God would allow Jesus to be crucified and sent another, some believe Judas, to die in his place. As a result, the notions of sin, salvation, redemption, forgiveness, and good works had completely different meanings to a Christian missionary and a Muslim.20

The missionaries and Muslim clerics had completely different beliefs with regard to salvation. The concept of grace was crucial to the message the missionaries spread. Salvation, or getting right with God, was something that one could not earn; it was a gift to be received. To Muslims, the notion that God needed the sacrifice of an innocent party in order to forgive sins was ludicrous, if not offensive. Muslims believed that God would forgive whomever he desired at any time. Furthermore, Muslims also ascribed to the notion of works-salvation, the idea that the merit one built in this life through charitable giving, ritual prayer, pilgrimages, striving for Islam, keeping the fast, obeying the Shari'at, and so on, would gain one entry into Paradise. The missionaries' evangelical Protestantism and the Persians' Shi'i Islam could not be farther apart on this point alone. The missionaries condemned Islam as legalistic while the Muslim clerics condemned the missionaries' faith as unrealistic and illogical. Muslim clerics also pointed to the fact that Christian ideals, such as turn the other cheek or love your enemy as yourself, were beautiful but completely impractical and, therefore, not from God.21 Neither the believing Muslim nor the believing Christian could agree that their two faiths were in essential agreement, which they were not. Both the 'ulimā and the missionaries considered the faith of the other to be a false one. Indeed, some missionaries went so far
as to label Islam a Satanic religion since it seemed to be tailor-made to keep Muslims from accepting Christ and becoming Christians.\[22\]

Despite their theological differences, however, the missionaries, with few exceptions, sought to find common ground with the ‘ulimā and remain on good terms with them, particularly as the work with Muslims began to open up. The missionaries did not hate Muslims. They dedicated their lives to reaching them with what they believed to be the truth. Even when preaching the gospel to Muslims, the missionaries soon learned that they would have better results if they avoided explicitly condemning Islam and Muhammad and focused instead on the love of Christ. The records are full of accounts of theological debates between missionaries and Muslim clerics or hecklers. As interesting as they were, both to Muslims and Christian, none of these public and at times acrimonious debates ever yielded any fruit. The missionaries preferred to think of Muslims as friends to be reached with the truth than as enemies to be defeated.\[23\]

Although some of the missionaries’ Persian-language tracts did explicitly attack Islam, the vast majority did not, preferring instead to focus either on inspirational stories, explication of Biblical doctrine, or the use of allegories and parables to communicate Christian truths. Indeed, such confrontational tracts were written in an earlier time with a different focus. Sanjish-i Haqīqat [The Balance of Truth, sometimes referred to by its Arabic title Mīzān-ul-Haq], for example, which purported to prove that the Old and New Testaments were the unabrogated Word of God and that the claims of Islam to be God’s final revelation were unfounded, was written in the early nineteenth century by a German missionary to the Arab world, C.G. Pfander. Pfander adopted a distinctly confrontational
tone in his 338-page tract, which was meant to specifically challenge various aspects of Islamic doctrine, as well as standard Muslim responses to Christianity. Although the missionaries cautiously continued to use tracts like *Sanjis*, they preferred to use non-confrontational tracts, such as the *Bīyān-nāmīh* [Letter of Explanation], which explained the most attractive Christian doctrines without directly confronting Islam, or the *Da 'vat-nāmīh* [Invitation], which proved to Muslims from the Quran that the Bible was the revealed Word of God and that it was the duty of all Muslims to read it. The *Da 'vat-nāmīh* was only mildly confrontational in that it attempted to refute Muslim claims that the Old and New Testaments had been changed by Jews and Christians.

Conversion was a contested issue, both among the missionaries and Iranian Christians. At its most basic level, conversion simply meant accepting Christ as one’s personal savior and trying to lead a Christian life. It did not mean becoming an evangelical Protestant or a Presbyterian, *per se*; however, that often appeared to be the case over time. As previously discussed, the missionaries originally wanted to revive the native Christian churches of Iran but their efforts resulted instead in the formation of a separate Iranian Christian evangelical church, organizationally and theologically separate from the Nestorian and Armenian churches. As a result, by the late nineteenth century onward, conversion among Iranian Christians often meant the leaving of one’s ancestral church and joining the Iranian evangelical church, which the missionaries oversaw.

One key difference between the Iranian mission and Protestant missions in China and in the Philippines was the emphasis on building native churches. In China and in the Philippines, a major stumbling block to mission work was the unwillingness of
missionaries to indigenize their churches. In Iran, however, the missionaries were eager
to turn control over to Iranians. Why did the actions of American missionaries in Iran
differ so dramatically from their colleagues in the Far East? Racism may have played a
role. Although missionaries in the Far East perceived significant racial differences
between Asians and Americans, both Iranians and Americans pointed to the common
"Aryan" heritage of the two peoples. Another reason for the difference was that in the
Philippines and in China the missionaries had greater control over their position in the
country. The Philippines became a colony of the United States in 1898 to 1899.
American missionaries in China enjoyed not only extraterritorial rights but also the full
diplomatic and military support of the U.S. government. Missionaries in Iran operated
only as long as the Iranian government allowed them. Iranian law prohibited foreigners
from proselytizing among Muslims, making it easier for an Iranian to evangelize in the
country. In addition, missionaries probably realized that training native Iranian ministers
to take over mission work in their own country was the most effective way to spread the
Gospel. Iranian Christians were more adept at translating Christian concepts into forms
that would make sense in Persian culture.37

Although the missionaries' overriding evangelistic goal was to preach the Gospel
to Iran's Muslims, the conversion of Muslims to Christianity proved to be no simple
matter from any perspective. Many laypersons and missionaries in other fields believed
that devoting significant sums of money to evangelizing Muslims was a waste of time
since very few of them responded to the call. In the case of Iran, however, the
missionaries did convince many Muslims to accept Christ. Although the exact number is

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unknown (and probably unknowable), the missionaries probably converted three to five hundred Iranian Muslims to Christianity by 1940, not including those that reverted back to Islam as a result of community pressure, which was significant. When a Muslim became a Christian, he/she was subject to intense pressure from family, friends and community to revert to Islam. Indeed, an apostate from Islam could legally be put to death under Iranian law and a few of the missionaries’ converts died as a direct result of their conversion, most notably Mirza Ibrahim of Khoi. The vast majority of Muslim converts, however, were subjected to no more than family and community ostracism.

The question of how to determine a Muslim was a genuine convert and what to do with him/her proved to be a very contentious issue. First, the missionaries soon became suspicious of each convert from Islam because of their propensity to revert back to Islam after pressure had been applied and also because of potential ulterior motives for conversion, such as obtaining a job or charitable contributions. As a result, the missionaries set in place rather lengthy trial period for Muslim converts before they would be baptized and accepted into the church. Indeed, the churches, populated mostly by Iranian Christians, were unwilling to accept Muslim converts since the acceptance of a Muslim convert caused no end of trouble with the ‘ulimā. From the Muslims’ perspective, it often appeared that in order to become a Christian, he/she not only had to accept Christ, but also had to reject his/her Perso-Islamic heritage and embrace the culture of native Iranian Christians.

The slow process of ensuring that a conversion from Islam was genuine, the reluctance of Iranian Christians to accept converts from Islam, and the cultural barriers
between the Christians and Muslims in Iran greatly complicated the matter of conversion. When Miller came to Iran in 1919, he lamented this state of affairs and tried somewhat controversially to address it. Without a doubt, Miller converted more Iranian Muslims than any other missionary. During his early years especially, he also eschewed the long process of confirmation and publicly baptized his converts only a few short weeks after their conversion. His actions caused him much trouble with the native Iranian Christian churches in Tehran and with some of the more conservative missionaries there. Miller backed down from public baptisms of converts for a time but as increasing numbers of Muslim converts attended the churches, this prejudice broke down against the baptisms and Miller was able to resume them.\(^{30}\)

Although the evangelical consensus largely held in the American missionary community, the so-called modernist movement strained it somewhat. Until the late 1920s, all the missionaries agreed on several key elements of Christian doctrine, such as the inerrancy of Scripture, the authenticity of miracles, the divinity of Christ, and a literal interpretation of the Bible. The modernist movement, which originated in Europe and spread to the United States, caused major dissension within the Presbyterian Church by the 1920s. A key focus of the modernist attack was the mission field. In 1932, a group of Presbyterian laypersons issued a report attacking the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for being too-narrow minded and focusing solely on evangelism to the exclusion of addressing pressing social needs around the world.\(^{31}\) Even more controversially, the Laymen’s Report recommended that the church abandon the old idea that “there was but one way, the way of Christ” and instead try to “stand upon the
common ground of all religion.” In other words, the modernist movement within the Presbyterian Church advocated the abandonment of the historical doctrines of the church and missions. On the other side of the fight were the so-called fundamentalists, who defended orthodoxy with a zeal that dramatically raised the stakes of the struggle. The fundamentalist counter-assault was led by fiery Princeton Theological Seminary Professor J. Gresham Machen. Caught in the middle of the struggle was Robert Speer, the General Secretary of the BFM, who sought unsuccessfully to keep the debate over theological differences from turning into a schism. Both sides lambasted Speer and, ironically, though he was the chief defender of orthodoxy in missions, some fundamentalists labeled him a modernist, pulled out of the BFM, and set up their own independent and conservative missions board.

For the most part, the missionaries in the field, especially Iran, were insulated from this struggle and viewed it from afar with amazement and sadness. The majority of American missionaries in Iran held to conservative doctrines but the impact of the modernist-fundamentalist debate on the church as a whole concerned them. By the early 1930s, this largely academic debate hit home when several missionaries in Iran, most notably E.M. Wright, made clear their preference for the modernist position. The modernism of this small handful of missionaries caused a vociferous protest among a small handful of overzealous conservatives. Matters came to a head when Wright gave a sermon in the evangelical church in Tabriz that apparently underscored some modernist themes, in particular questioning the inerrancy of Scriptures. A few unnamed conservative missionaries reacted by convincing the Iranian Christian elders of the church
to write a letter of protest to Robert Speer at the BFM, urging him to investigate the matter. Speer, caught as usual in the middle of these two groups, investigated both sides but tried to get them to reconcile instead of ruling in favor of one side or the other. In the end, Wright and the few other liberal missionaries chose to leave the mission field. Such a move is not surprising especially when considering that the modernist position placed liberal missionaries entirely at odds with the other missionaries who emphasized evangelism.

The Missionaries' Secular Reform Efforts

One of the ironies of the modernist-fundamentalist debate was that missionaries, including those in Iran, had a significant, although secondary, emphasis on humanitarian social work. As previously discussed, although all seemingly non-evangelical efforts were intended to aid the work of evangelization to some extent, the missionaries entered into their work with great zeal. The missionaries especially used medical and educational work to aid evangelism by giving them access to Muslim communities that were closed to preachers and also to make Christianity more attractive to them. One of their greatest contributions to modern Iran was the introduction and expansion of modern medicine, including the opening of hospitals in almost every city in which the missionaries had a mission station. The medical missionaries also devoted much of their time to training Iranians to become doctors and nurses. The missionary doctor, which included both male and female physicians, were almost always the most popular and influential of the missionaries and greatly paved the way toward the work of evangelization.
When carrying out non-evangelistic reform efforts in Iran, the missionaries looked both consciously and unconsciously to the example of American Progressivism. Historians generally identify the origins of American Progressive reform in the tensions created by industrialization and urbanization in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Progressive reformers advocated a wide variety of reforms and looked to local, state, and, finally, the federal government, to enact them. One major focus of Progressive reform was in the social sphere. Reformers, especially women, sought to implement reforms to address perceived social problems, such as child labor, overcrowding in the cities, alcoholism, prostitution, education reform, and promoting better hygiene both through legislation and independent action. The settlement house is a prime example of how Progressive reformers sought to transform a society that had been negatively impacted by industrialization.36 Historian David B. Danbom argues that Progressives sought to address the “growing contradiction between private values and public life” by reinstituting Christian values into public life. He defines the essence of Progressivism as “the desire to force public behavior to conform to standards of value rooted in Christianity or science, to inculcate in Americans a higher sense of brotherhood and selflessness and a devotion to the public interest.”37 American missionaries in Iran, however, sought to bring about reform in Iran through both Christianity and Western science.

Although Iran had not undergone any significant level of industrialization, the missionaries nonetheless formulated their responses to Iran’s many social problems in a manner very similar to their Progressive counterparts at home. In addition to treating the
sick, medical missionaries also tried to prevent outbreaks of disease through education. While American Progressives taught modern hygiene to urban immigrants, American missionaries in Iran did the same through tracts and personal contact with patients. Where Progressives campaigned against vice in America, the missionaries railed against the institution of temporary marriage (*siqih*) in Iran. Instead of the settlement house, American missionaries ran medical dispensaries and village schools that accomplished the same goals. Where Progressive women advocated a new role for women in public life in America, American missionary women had long done the same in Iran. Indeed, historian Alan Dawley’s description of Progressive women can be applied to female American missionaries in Iran: “On the one hand, they brazenly violated the canons of ‘true’ womanhood by marching into the public domain to run settlements.... But on the other, they accepted much of the prevailing family ideology, glorified motherhood, and argued that women’s virtue would purify male corruption.”  

Although one must not lose sight of the crucial connection between evangelism and social reform in the missionaries’ eyes, their humanitarian activities certainly constitute an expression of American Progressivism abroad.

The missionaries’ educational work complemented and furthered the efforts of medical missionaries while opening doors to evangelism. Missionary schools allowed the missionaries to circumvent local laws prohibiting the evangelization of Muslims. As long as the stated purpose of mission schools was to educate rather than evangelize, local and national authorities allowed them to operate. William Shedd adopted this approach in Urumia when he opened a primary school for the Muslim boys of the region in 1904.
Shedd's main purpose was “to exert deep Christian influence on the Christless community . . . and particularly on the non-Christian pupils.” In addition, Shedd, influenced by the American Progressive movement, sought to “build up a community of industrial efficiency, moral excellence and sturdy intelligence.” Shedd believed that Iranian culture promoted inefficiency, laziness, dishonesty, a lack of integrity, and a reluctance to implement reform. Shedd saw a possible solution, in conjunction with Christianity, in the inculcation of an industrial morality based on efficiency, honesty, and hard work.39

The most famous missionary educator was Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan, who arrived in Iran in 1898. Jordan and his wife organized the Alborz College of Tehran, one of the first colleges in Iran. The Jordans also set up many primary and secondary schools as well as a college for Iranian women. Jordan and the rest of the faculty taught Iranian students English but also conducted classes in Persian. In addition, all students were required to take Bible courses; however, according to the missionaries, the faculty did not pressure students to convert. Jordan was most definitely an evangelical Protestant but allowed his students to accept or reject Christianity of their own accord. Jordan believed that the development of personal character, especially such traits as truthfulness, honesty and integrity, and the inculcation of Western values would create young men and women who would naturally be more open to Christianity. Jordan also taught students team sports, such as soccer, to inculcate cooperation and teamwork. One observer notes that Jordan forced his students to do manual labor to teach them the value of hard work. Finally, Jordan emphasized the development of patriotism in his students. He wanted his students to be proud of Iran and its culture and encouraged Iranian nationalism.40
of all the American missionaries, certainly made the greatest impact on Iran through his educational work. His schools produced scores of English-speaking Iranians. During the four decades that Jordan's schools operated, they trained thousands of Iranians, many of who later served at the highest levels of Iranian government. His emphasis on education and also on Iranian nationalism greatly influenced the opinions of Iranians regarding the United States. Jordan's name was synonymous with education, Iranian nationalism, and the goodwill of Americans toward Iran. Although Jordan intended the schools to be tools for evangelization, Iranians saw them as an opportunity to learn English and obtain a Western education.

The missionaries were also outspoken with regard to various social reforms, especially those that concerned the status of women in Iran. The missionaries explicitly blamed Islam for the inferior and oppressed status of women in the country. Missionary Annie Boyce described the status of women in Iran this way:

Locked in, shut in, veiled. Degraded, despised, ignored. Kept down and under and out. Classed with cows and donkeys. Bargained for in marriage in a way not very different from buying and selling live stock. Divorced, tossed aside, neglected, old beyond their years. Sad, hopeless, submissive. “Beat a girl till she sits on the ground and when she gets up, beat the place where she sat,” runs a Persian saying.

It all began with the Prophet of Arabia who took unto his inspired self nine wives and numerous concubines.... To Mohammed belongs the credit for the institution of the veil for the women of the Faithful. When the Sword of Islam conquered the followers of Zoroaster, the women of Persia were doomed.

The missionaries focused their attention on several key indicators of the inferior status of women in Iranian society. Because only the privileged few among Iranian women received any kind of education, a key point of continuity during the first century of the missionary movement was the effort to educate women. The missionaries opened
schools for girls in every mission station, sometimes even before they opened schools for boys. They also condemned the practice of marrying female pre-teen children to much-older men. Polygamy also came in for much criticism from the missionaries, which created problems when a Muslim with more than one wife converted to Christianity. The missionaries also harshly condemned sīghīh, a Muslim custom that allowed men to enter into temporary marriages with other women that could last anywhere from a few hours to a few months. In practice, missionaries argued, sīghīh amounted to little more than legalized prostitution. Although missionary opposition to sīghīh stemmed primarily from the New Testament's emphasis on monogamy, it may also have been rooted in the much-documented Progressive impulse to legislate and enforce sexual purity. Without a doubt, though, the missionaries deemed the veil, known in Persian as the chādur, which covered women from head to toe after the age of seven or eight, as the chief symbol of Islam's oppression of women. The female missionaries found the veil especially offensive and deemed it to be "responsible for most of the miseries of Persian women."

Of course, the missionaries were powerless to change these deeply-rooted and complex social customs, but they did try to change the attitudes of Persian men and women through education and literature. In the schools, the missionaries openly challenged traditional Iranian gender roles by having female missionaries teach male students, stressing the notion that women were the equal of men, educating men and women on the deficiencies of polygamy, and establishing magazines in Persian for women and those interested in women's rights, such as 'Ālim-i Nesvān [Women's World]. The missionaries used the graduation ceremonies of the schools as platforms to
speak on issues relating to women. According to Boyce, “at every graduation of every girls’ school, there are always one or two essays appealing for the freedom and education of women.” At the American High School, run by Samuel and Mary Park Jordan, “there is always one graduate in every class who on the Commencement stage takes up the cudgels for woman’s rights.” Not surprisingly, the missionaries welcomed Reza Shah’s edict in 1935 that outlawed the veil entirely.

The other major reform advocated by the missionaries was the establishment of religious liberty. Calls for religious liberty permeated virtually every book and memoir written by the missionaries. Of course, the granting of religious liberty would have greatly benefited the missionaries’ work of evangelism. Although the Iranian government never forced Christians or Jews to become Muslims, Muslims were not free to embrace Judaism or Christianity. The missionaries wanted abolition of the laws that condemned apostates to death. More importantly, they wanted to undermine the social structure of Islam that ostracized Muslim converts. The missionaries believed that if and when true religious liberty was established, the real harvest of Muslim converts would begin. Again, the missionaries were powerless to push religious liberty through on their own; however, they emphasized religious freedom in their schools, hoping to lay a foundation for its establishment in the future.

The Ideology of Mission and Millspaugh

Yet missionaries were not the only Americans in Iran before World War II. Although on the surface it would seem that the efforts of missionaries, concerned
primarily with converting Iranians to Christianity, and American financial advisors, who tried to place Iranian finances on a sounder footing, were widely divergent. Beneath the surface, however, an ideology of mission similar to that of the missionaries informed the financial advisors’ actions in Iran as well. Both Morgan Shuster and Arthur Millspaugh possessed an idealistic vision of how things ought to be in Iran and acted upon that vision.

Considering the similarity in their viewpoints, it is not surprising that the missionaries found much to admire in the financial advisers. Morgan Shuster, who will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five, served as Treasurer-General for less than a year as a result of a serious clash with Russia and, to a lesser extent, Great Britain. Despite his lack of sensitivity, particularly with regard to the fragile balance of power that existed between Russia and Great Britain in the country, Shuster impressed Iranians with his outspoken demands for Iranian independence and sovereignty while he was in office and afterwards in his book with the revealing title *The Strangling of Persia: A Study of the European Diplomacy and Oriental Intrigue that Resulted in the Denationalization of Twelve Million Mohammedans* (1912). The missionaries’ ambivalent attitude toward imperialism seems to have dovetailed nicely with Shuster’s attempt to import Western financial methods while at the same time criticizing Western imperial policies in the country. The missionaries also found common ground with Millspaugh especially during his first mission to Iran, which lasted from 1922 to 1927. Indeed, when one gets beyond religion, the actions of missionaries paralleled and complemented Millspaugh’s actions in Iran and underscored a positive image of the United States to Iranians.
As in the case of the missionaries, the Progressive movement influenced Millspaugh. He earned a Ph.D. in political science from Johns Hopkins University in 1916, taught political science for a year, and entered government service in 1918 as the economic adviser to the Office of Foreign Trade at the State Department. Millspaugh's interest in oil convinced some later scholars that he wanted to negotiate oil concessions for American companies more than to reform Iran. A deeper study of Millspaugh's two missions in Iran, however, reveals that financial and economic reforms that would help Iran to enter the democratic community of nations as an equal partner dominated his attention. Millspaugh considered himself to be the Progressive-era ideal of the non-partisan city manager projected onto a world stage. Financial and economic reform for their own sake, an ideology of mission that shared many parallels with that of the missionaries, motivated him far more than oil diplomacy.

Millspaugh first arrived in Iran in 1922 amid the chaos that accompanied Reza Shah's rise to power. The Iranian government suffered under massive debt, a high cost of living, an unfavorable balance-of-trade, and a corrupt tax system. The Iranian government, headed by Prime Minister Qavam al-Saltaneh, decided to hire an American financial mission to help resolve the situation. The turn to America was part of Qavam's "Third Power" strategy, designed to decrease the power and influence of the Soviet Union and especially Great Britain in Iran. Both Great Britain and Russia (Tsarist and Soviet) had long followed imperialist policies in the region. Qavam, who remembered the service that American financial adviser Morgan Shuster had rendered in 1911, hoped that bringing in the United States would decrease the strength of other imperial powers and
increase Iranian sovereignty. Qavam's primary motives for hiring an American mission were to implement significant economic reforms and to attract American investment and industry. Considering that many high-ranking members of the Iranian government were graduates of American missionary schools, Iranian leaders might have assumed that all Americans were as idealistic and as well-intentioned as the missionaries.

Reza Shah also supported the selection of Arthur Millspaugh as the head of the financial mission to Iran. Millspaugh perceived this as evidence of Reza Shah's commitment to reform and initially saw the Pahlavi monarch as a stern but honest military man with the best intentions of Iran at heart. In actuality, as Ervand Abrahamian points out, it is more likely that Reza Shah was simply trying to strengthen his own power base by hastening the departure of British troops from northern Iran. With the approval of the Majlis (the Iranian Parliament), Millspaugh resigned his State Department post and arrived in Iran in 1922.

From the very beginning, Millspaugh saw himself as a man on a mission. He considered Iran to be in a state of "arrested development" and in need of outside help to reform itself. He did not believe that the current state of affairs in Iran was the result of any inherent racial deficiencies. In fact, Millspaugh made much of the fact that "Persians are racially related to Americans, being Aryans as they are." Unlike some missionaries, Millspaugh did not condemn Persians as the victims of "Oriental psychology." Instead, he saw underdevelopment as Iran's main problem. According to Millspaugh, Iran possessed pre-industrial values that hindered its technological and industrial development. He compared the economic and political situation of Persia to America in
the late-nineteenth century. Millspaugh compared himself to a "city-manager" who was
called upon to reform the finances of an American city. Local officials could not be
trusted to enact true reform because they were too "political." Iran, like American cities,
needed a non-partisan and objective expert with the authority to implement reform
measures. It is clear that Millspaugh based his primary objectives in Iran on a

Millspaugh described his mission as implementing significant reform so that
"efficient government based on the will of the governed" would be achieved. He also
hoped to contribute to the "unification and stabilization of Persia and to its development
as an independent, self-governing nation." He had full confidence that Iranians were well
on their way to progress but that they needed a little help from outside. Millspaugh saw
evidence of the reform element within Iran in the Constitution of 1906, which he
compared to the American Constitution of 1787. During his first mission, he exhibited
an attitude of profound optimism that Iran would blossom under his tutelage and
experience American-style progress.

The Majlis granted Millspaugh sweeping economic powers as Administrator-
General of Iran's Finances. He was far more than simply an adviser. As Administrator-
General, he directly controlled the entire financial administration of the Iranian
government, including the appointment, promotion, demotion, and dismissal of all
personnel. He prepared the budget and any government expenditure had to be approved
directly by him or his staff. The Majlis bill also obligated the Iranian government to
consult Millspaugh before it made any decision of a financial nature or granted a
commercial or industrial concession. The initiative to hire Millspaugh and give him sweeping economic powers originated within Iran and constituted a clear mandate for reform.

Millspaugh implemented a host of specific reforms in several areas of Iranian life. Most importantly, he aimed to eradicate corruption from the collection of land taxes, a primary source of revenue for the Iranian government. For centuries the task of tax collection had been delegated to individuals who paid a predetermined amount to the government and kept any surplus they could collect, a system which was rife with corruption. In 1925, Millspaugh implemented a new Land-Tax law with the approval of the Majlis (the Iranian Parliament) that reassessed out-dated tax rates and used the Iranian Army under Reza Shah's authority to collect taxes. Although this was a much-needed reform, it incurred the wrath of the wealthy landowning families in Iran and set the pattern of dependence upon Reza Shah for the implementation of reform.

The balance-of-trade posed another problem. Iran imported far more than it exported. Many Iranian government officials and Majlis deputies recommended that the importation of luxury goods be prohibited. Millspaugh flatly rejected this option. According to an interview he published in _Itilā'āt_, Iran's most important and widely-distributed newspaper, Millspaugh stated that increasing exports, not protectionism, would resolve the balance-of-trade problem. Unfortunately, he failed to increase exports substantially or to attract foreign investment in Iranian industry.

A reform idea that Millspaugh shared with American missionaries and with many nationalist reformers was the elimination of the opium trade. The missionaries had been
especially outspoken in their public writings condemning the negative influence of opium addiction on Iranian society. The medical missionaries especially were first-hand witnesses of the damage that opium did to Persian families of all backgrounds. When Millspaugh arrived in Iran in 1922, the sale of opium comprised a significant source of revenue for the Iranian government. The Iranian government even enjoyed a monopoly on *soukhteh*, an opium product. Millspaugh saw opium as a moral, physiological, and economic menace but recognized that the abolition of the opium trade would have constituted a severe hardship on the Iranian government and a large segment of Iranian agriculture. Although Millspaugh repeatedly declared his opposition to the opium trade, he did not advocate the immediate prohibition of opium production. Instead, he advocated a plan to phase out opium production over a number of years, which provoked heated opposition among Iranian opium producers. In what Millspaugh revealingly referred to as the Persian "Whiskey Rebellion," opium producers in Isfahan revolted against the centralization of opium tax collection. Although Millspaugh never wavered in his opposition to opium, he could not eradicate it.

With foreign investment unavailable, Millspaugh tried to stimulate internal investment by encouraging political stability and creating confidence in the Iranian legal system. When asked by a reporter for a Tehran newspaper what Iran's single greatest problem was, he replied that a lack of confidence in the system prevented Iranians from investing in any commercial venture. In order to help create this confidence and to centralize the financial functions of the government, Millspaugh called for the creation of the National Bank of Iran. In that same interview, he stressed that a "desirable economic
situation" would result from political stability, security, and the services of competent and impartial government bureaucrats. 58

In the end, however, Millspaugh could only implement limited reform in Iran due to opposition from anti-reform elements, including wealthy landowners who saw him as a threat to their power. Opposition also came from abroad. While the British were generally supportive, the Soviets perceived Millspaugh as a threat to their interests, which mainly resulted from his role in a dispute over the Caspian fisheries and his fervent advocacy of Iranian interests. The main threat to his reforms, however, came from Reza Shah, whom he considered an ally. Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that Millspaugh viewed Reza Shah as amenable to reform. Instead, Reza Shah probably viewed him as a means to consolidate his control over Iran. Indeed, many of Millspaugh's reforms, such as the Land-Tax law, strengthened Reza Shah. When Millspaugh tried to reform the Iranian Army, Reza Shah's sacred cow, his days as Administrator-General were truly numbered. When his contract came up for renewal in 1927, the Majlis, on secret orders from Reza Shah, placed significant checks on his powers. Showing just how truly out of step he was, Millspaugh publicly claimed that Reza Shah was unaware of what the Majlis was doing and that he should be informed. Needless to say, Reza Shah had full knowledge of the Millspaugh affair. He apparently perceived Millspaugh's power as a threat to his own. Reza Shah supposedly said "There can't be two Shahs in this country, and I am going to be the Shah." With Millspaugh and the Majlis at an impasse, Millspaugh resigned. 59
What did Millspaugh accomplish during his first mission to Iran? Although he was able to achieve limited reform, which resulted in consolidating the autocratic rule of Reza Shah, he gained the reputation of a fearless, impartial reformer. While many, including Mohammad Mossadegh, an outspoken advocate of reform who would later become Prime Minister of Iran, disagreed with him on specifics, all agreed that he had what he considered to be the best interests of Iran at heart. Like the missionaries, he also generated a considerable amount of Iranian goodwill toward the United States. Most Iranians believed that the United States was fundamentally anti-imperialist and supported the rise of an independent, democratic Iran. Considering that Millspaugh was forced out by Reza Shah, in much the same way that Reza Shah would try to force out the missionaries in the late-1930s, Iranians saw him as a martyr to Reza Shah's totalitarianism, despite the fact that he unwittingly helped to create it.

The years following Millspaugh's first mission were stormy for Iranian-American relations. Reza Shah severed diplomatic relations in 1927 after the U.S. refused to apologize for unknowingly detaining an Iranian diplomat who enjoyed immunity. Although a minor incident, the two countries did not resume diplomatic relations until 1939, when the U.S. finally apologized for the misunderstanding. In 1941, when Reza Shah refused to expel German advisers, the combined forces of Great Britain and the Soviet Union invaded Iran and deposed him. Qavam al-Saltaneh became Prime Minister once again in 1943 and re-hired Millspaugh as Administrator-General of the Finances. It is unclear where this decision originated. Millspaugh, pointing to legislative approval of his invitation, stated that it originated in Iran. Others, pointing to Allied hegemony over
Iranian affairs and their desire for stability, argue that either the United States or Great Britain urged Iran to take on an American financial mission. In either case, the decision seemed to be a popular one among the Iranian people. The occupation of Iran by the Allies had awakened renewed fears of imperialism which many Iranians hoped that an American presence would alleviate. According to Iranian scholar Iraj Zawghi, most Iranians welcomed Millspaugh as a corrective to British and Soviet imperialism. Not only did they perceive American ideology as anti-imperial, Iranians also believed that the United States could not embark on a imperialist policy in the region because it was too far away. An additional factor may have been racial. Zawghi states that Iranians found Americans more palatable because, like Iranians, they too were Aryans but without the negative Anglo-Saxon characteristics of the British.

Press coverage was also favorable. In an editorial in Itilâ'ät on the eve of Millspaugh's arrival in Tehran, the editors stated, "Just mentioning the name America evokes a sense of peace." Itilâ'ät welcomed the arrival of Millspaugh and hoped that the other American missions to the army, police force and supply administrations would be able to implement significant reforms. The paper also expected that American-Iranian relations would become closer as a result of previous and current advisory missions. The next day, it stressed its hope that Millspaugh would be able to ease Iran's severe economic conditions resulting from the Allied occupation. Most Iranians also hoped that the presence of Millspaugh and other American advisers would result in greater Lend-Lease aid for Iran.
Millspaugh faced different and more difficult circumstances during his second mission. During the first mission, the chief obstacle to real reform was Reza Shah. On the second mission, the chief obstacle was the Allied occupation. The stationing of Allied troops in Iran caused massive inflation and a drastic increase in the cost of living. According to *Itilâ‘at*, Iran had the highest cost-of-living in the world. In addition, there were numerous shortages because the Allies requisitioned what they needed for their troops. There was also a growing black market that Iranian authorities were unable, or in some cases unwilling, to control. The Iranian newspapers made it clear that these were the most pressing problems and that it expected Millspaugh to do something about them immediately.64

Unfortunately, Millspaugh could not meet the high expectations of Iranian public opinion. He gave vague assurances to the press that the cost-of-living would decrease in the near future but was unable to effect any immediate change. Although somewhat older and certainly more pessimistic, Millspaugh persisted with the same course he had followed during his previous mission. His primary interest was in long-term reform in Iran rather than the alleviation of any short-term discomfort. Millspaugh summed up the objectives of the second American mission as "the democratic ideal and for service to the masses in order to promote the well-being of Iran and to prepare them for independent self-government." As a result, Millspaugh pushed for a new tax structure, tried to increase exports, encourage internal and external investment, and overhaul Iran's financial system. Millspaugh also fervently advocated the balancing of the budget, even if this
meant laying off government workers. These austerity measures did little to alleviate the everyday problems Iranians faced and indeed may have made matters worse.

One definite change in Millspaugh's outlook, however, was his assessment of Iranians. During his first mission to Iran, Millspaugh avoided placing blame on the "Iranian psychology" or Iranian culture for any problems he observed. His assessment of Iranians was much more critical during his second mission. Millspaugh stated that Iranians were of limited intelligence and that they "lack[ed] the apparatus that more advanced peoples developed to solve problems and engineer progress." Indeed, Millspaugh doubted the capacity of Iranians ever to run their financial affairs by themselves. According to Millspaugh, "[e]xperience has shown that these conditions cannot be met unless Iran puts its financial administration for a time under the supervision of impartial, neutral, non-political foreign experts." As a result of his lack of confidence in Iranian abilities, he proposed the so-called "Full Powers" bill, which provided him with additional economic powers. When the Majlis delayed its passage, Millspaugh accused the Majlis of opposing reform. While most of the delegates favored the bill, Millspaugh alienated some of his support by automatically assuming they opposed him. His pessimism about Iranian abilities and his lack of patience greatly hurt his reform program.

The Allied occupation of Iran ultimately doomed Millspaugh's second mission. In addition, the problems that beset most Iranians were probably unresolvable for the duration of the war. The biggest problem, according to Millspaugh, was the lack of diplomatic support extended to the financial mission by the American government. The
Majlis had approved the hiring of Millspaugh in part because it believed he represented the American government and would attract American aid to Iran. The State Department, on the other hand, was eager to distance itself from the financial mission. Millspaugh argued that the State Department should have provided the mission with more vocal support. Instead, he claimed, the State Department was ordered to refrain from giving any support to the financial mission whatsoever and undercut it whenever possible. He had several explanations for the lack of State Department support. First, the Department lacked a coherent policy toward Iran and sent incompetent diplomats to the country. He also accused the State Department of being more concerned with "appeasing the Soviets" than supporting the financial mission. With a surprising amount of venom, Millspaugh wrote that "a combination of intrigues and attacks by the Soviets and Iranians with an American appeasement policy and State Department ineptitude brought about the destruction of the key American Mission. Thus, the Department implemented its policy of stabilizing, developing and strengthening Iran!"  

Millspaugh resigned his post in February 1945.

Motivated as he was by an ideology of mission, Millspaugh could not understand why the American government would not support his actions. There is evidence to support Millspaugh's contention that the State Department failed to provide him with adequate diplomatic support; however, his belief that this lack of support stemmed from an incoherent policy and incompetent diplomats is questionable and indicates instead a greater disparity between Millspaugh's goals and American foreign policy. He assumed that American foreign policy aimed at stabilizing, strengthening, and developing Iran.
Many historians of American foreign policy doubt that was ever the case. During World War II, American foreign policy in Iran was to maintain the steady flow of Lend-Lease aid to the Soviets; however, from 1943 on, as Mark Lytle convincingly argues, the U.S. envisioned a greater role in postwar Iran because of its oil wealth, a new conception of American national security, and Iran's strategic position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Lytle argues that American officials began to see a direct correlation between oil and national security and initiated a policy that was designed to increase direct American control over Iran. American policy makers, according to Lytle, felt they could not respect Iran's independence in view of the upcoming conflict with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{70} Millspaugh represented the ideology of mission in Iran and a commitment to reform aimed at helping Iranians help themselves. Lytle is right that American foreign policy by 1944, on the other hand, aimed at enhancing American political and economic control over Iran. American policy makers did not necessarily oppose a stable, independent, and democratic Iran; however, that goal was secondary to other American interests and would be sacrificed to them when necessary. It became necessary to sacrifice Millspaugh's idealistic vision when his reform measures and his controversial manner threatened other American interests in Iran.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The ideology of mission the missionaries brought with them to Iran shaped and guided their actions in the country. Despite the great changes that occurred both in Iran and the United States during the period of 1890 to 1940, their ideology of mission
remained largely consistent. Indeed, from the beginning of American involvement in Iran in the early nineteenth century to its end in 1979, the missionaries’ one overriding goal was the evangelization of Iran. Although all other activities were either subordinate to or supplemental to this goal, their ideology caused them to undertake a wide range of actions and enterprises that had a significant impact on the development of modern Iran and laid the foundation for U.S.-Iranian relations.

On the surface, the missionaries seemed to have little in common with American financial advisors. Missionaries were concerned primarily with saving souls while financial advisors were charged with placing Iran on a sounder economic footing; however, a remarkably similar ideology of mission suffused the actions of both parties. The missionaries often used non-evangelistic means as part of their long-term strategy to make Iranian culture and society more open to the Gospel; at the same time, American financial advisors, especially Millspaugh, also believed that reforming Iranian society would provide it with the opportunity enter the community of nations as an equal partner. Although certainly both the missionaries and financial advisors stood to benefit from the specific reforms they advocated, they each believed fervently in the reforms they sought. The ideology of mission allowed their self-interest and their humanitarianism to coincide and compelled missionaries and financial advisors to identify strongly with one another’s goals.

In practice, the missionaries’ ideological motivations, which drove them to try to transform Iran from a Muslim to a Christian society, necessitated their reluctant involvement in political affairs at times. Their activism brought them in conflict not only
with the "ulimā and the Iranian central government, but with Western imperial powers as well. As subsequent chapters will show, the missionaries had an ambivalent relationship with imperialism. While they did not hesitate to tap into imperial networks of power when necessary to achieve their goals, they were also often outspoken in their criticism of Western imperialism in Iran.
Notes

1 Manual of 1927, p.5, as quoted in William McElwee Miller, "Are We Bold Enough in Our Work," Record Group 91, Box 2, File 17, PHS.


3 See chapter 7.


5 D.W. MacCormack to Nesbitt, New York, 10 November 1927, RG 91, Box 16, File 4, PHS; Morgan Shuster to Samuel Martin Jordan, New York, October 1912, as quoted in tract "Wanted: A College for Persia," Record Group 59, M715, Roll 9, National Archives and Records Admistration; Hoffman Phillips to Secretary of State, Tehran, 5 October 1927, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4628, Folder 2.


7 Ibid., p. 92.


10 See, for example, Robert Speer, "The Awakening Orient," SCP 29174, PTS and Speer, "Our Work in Moslem Lands," New York, Board of Foreign Missions, SCP 28990, PTS.


13 For the Biblical basis of missionary work, see Matthew 28:19-20, Scofield version. These verses are more commonly known as "The Great Commission" and epitomize the motivation behind most missionary work; a direct command from Jesus Christ to spread the Gospel to the world.


17 William McElwee Miller, Notes—Early Years in Meshed, n.d. [ca. 1919-1923], Miller Papers, Box 11, Princeton Theological Seminary.


20 Ibid. pp. 58-60.


22 Miller, *Christian's Response to Islam*, pp. 104-105. Miller himself does not say this but attributes this idea to other missionaries.


See chapter 2 "A Good Field for the Work".


Miller, A Christian's Response to Islam, pp. 94-98.


C.B. Allen to Robert Speer, Hamadan, 3 September 1925, RG 91, Box 3, File 22.

Speer to George Luccok and President of Wooster College, New York, 23 April 1936, RG 91, Box 11, File 1, PHS; Frederick Coan to Robert Speer, Princeton, 11 November 1935, RG 91, Box 10, File 15, PHS; Cady Allen to Robert Speer, Hamadan, 30 March 1935, RG 91, Box 10, File 15, PHS; E.M. Wright to Speer, New York, 21 February 1929, RG 91, Box 5, File 7, PHS; E.M. Wright to Speer, New York, 25 February 1929, RG 91, Box 5, File 7, PHS.


39 Mary Shedd, The Measure of a Man, pp. 97-117.

40 See the fuller discussion in chapter 7. See also Miller, My Persian Pilgrimage, pp. 41-45, 47. For a good general discussion of Jordan's work in Iran, see Waterfield, pp. 134-135.


42 Annie Boyce, “Chapters from the Life of an American Woman in the Shah’s Capital,” RG 91, Box 18, File 11, PHS.


45 Annie Boyce, “Chapters from the Life of an American Woman in the Shah’s Capital,” RG 91, Box 18, File 11, PHS.

46 Ibid., p. 6.


49 Hassan Mojtehi, Arthur C. Millspaugh’s Two Missions to Iran and their Impact on American-Iranian Relations Ph.D. dissertation (Ball State University, 1975), pp. 42-43.

50 Mahdavi, pp. 13-14.

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53 Ibid., pp. vii, 49-51, 82, 110.


60 Mahdavi, pp. 47-48. This matter was particularly galling to Iranian officials because previously when an American businessman was killed by a mob that had no connection whatsoever to the government, Iran apologized profusely and paid indemnities to the man’s family. This seems to be the most reliable explanation of the break in relations, not, as James Goode and Mark Lytle describe, because Reza Shah was offended by unfavorable newspaper articles. Lytle, p. 6. Goode, *In the Shadow of Mussadiq*, p. 5.


Millspaugh, Americans in Persia, pp. 73-74.


Lytle, pp. xvii, xix, 16, 43, 215.
The last decade of the nineteenth century was a significant turning point in the history of modern Iran. Popular mass protest in the provinces and in the capital city of Tehran forced the Shah to repeal the hated tobacco concession and marked the beginning of popular protests in the years to come. The period of 1890 to the beginning of the Constitutional Revolution in 1907 was transitional, marked by a high degree of political uncertainty, the weakening of the monarchy, further inroads by the imperial powers, increasing interest in the West, and a large degree of social unrest, especially in the northwest. The incursion of the imperial powers in Iran contributed to the further weakening of the Qajar monarchy. Long before Nasir al-Din Shah’s long reign over Iran abruptly ended with his assassination in 1896, his rule over the provinces had been challenged and superseded by various mountain tribes, landlords, tax collectors, the nobility, and foreigners. The fluid political situation in the provinces opened the door to a great deal of social unrest, tribal raids of outlying villages, and mob violence against
minorities. The lack of a strong central government to impose order on the provinces combined with the newfound activism of the Iranian people certainly fed into the Constitutional Revolution that followed this period.

The American missionary movement in Iran also changed during this period. The last of the pioneer missionaries to come to Iran in the formative years of the 1830s and 1840s died in the late 1880s. The first stage of the missionary movement, marked by an exclusive focus on the Nestorian, Armenian, and Jewish minorities, ended with their deaths. In its place, the second generation of missionaries, many of whom were the children of the first generation, looked to expand their missionary work beyond the minorities to the majority Muslim population of the country. Actual expansion, however, was checked by the lack of social order in the provinces. As a result, the period of 1890 until 1907 would prove to be one of transition from the older, more limited, missionary activity of the first generation to the period of expansion that would follow World War I.

The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions had divided the Iran Mission in 1871 into the East and West Persia missions, which differed not only in organization but also in objectives and methodology. There were several good reasons for this decision. Even though the missionaries only covered the northern half of Iran, it was still a sizable geographical area to cover, especially considering that the only way to travel in between cities was by horse, donkey, or by foot across often mountainous terrain. This effectively prevented any meaningful and regular communication between Tabriz and Tehran, the respective centers of the two missions. Religion, however, proved to be a more significant factor in this regard than geography. The West Persia Mission, which included Tabriz, Urumia, Hamadan, Salmas, and Mosul, focused primarily on the
Nestorian and Armenian minorities of the northwest. The East Persia Mission (founded in the 1870s), however, was aimed primarily (although not initially) at the Muslim majority population of the rest of the northern half of the country and included stations in Tehran, Resht, Qazvin, and later Kermanshah and Meshed. Although the older East Persia mission stations of Tehran and Resht focused on the minority quarters of those cities, their clear intention was to train the native Christians to evangelize their Muslim neighbors. While West Persia and the mission for minorities was the far more dominant of the two until World War I, the East Persia mission for Muslims would be dominant after that.

The two most important events during this period were the murders of two missionaries in the West Persia mission: Shushan Wright in 1890 and Benjamin Labaree in 1904. These two events highlighted several important themes, such as the reliance of the missionaries on British protection and the limitations inherent with working primarily among Iran's religious minorities. Although official mission policy was to remain aloof from political affairs, the missionaries' close identification with the minorities caused the missionaries gradually to take on the role of defenders of Iran's oppressed minorities. In keeping with their ideology of mission, the missionaries maintained that the work of evangelization and civilization could not take place without some level of order. The fallout from these two murders dramatically demonstrated the problems the missionaries faced in working with the minorities. It also marked the beginning of the eclipse of the West Persia mission and underscored the ineffectiveness of its old approach.
The Politics of Race and Gender and the Murder of Shushan Wright

John Wright was certainly one of the more controversial and interesting characters among the community of missionaries who worked in Iran. He was the son of Dr. Austin Wright, M.D., a medical missionary who died in the 1870s from typhoid fever after serving for 24 years as a missionary in Iran. The senior Wright, like other medical missionaries, was noted by Christians and Muslims alike for his service to patients who needed medical assistance during the many cholera epidemics that swept Iranian cities at that time.\footnote{1} The younger Wright did not follow his father’s footsteps in the medical field but chose instead to focus on evangelical work. He traveled to the United States to receive an education, married an American woman, and returned to Iran in the mid-1870s to become part of the West Persia mission, Tabriz station.

Wright soon became a controversial figure in Tabriz. Although most of the missionaries acknowledged that he had an easygoing and pleasant personality, they deemed his work ethic to be deficient. His focus on evangelism appeared to be a mistake since he himself admitted that he had no aptitude for preaching and was not able to strike up spiritual conversations comfortably. As a result, with no experience in medicine, no facility with evangelism, and no apparent interest in education, Wright gravitated toward translation work and soon assumed the position of the editor of the missionaries’ Syriac language evangelical publication *Rays of Light*. Because of his unwillingness to pursue direct evangelical work, his fellow missionaries viewed him as a burden who could not carry his own weight in the mission station. This, of course, strained his relations with fellow missionaries. Things apparently deteriorated to the extent that Wright’s comrades transferred him to the pioneer outstation of Salmas in 1884.\footnote{2}
Far more controversial, however, was Wright's decision to marry a Nestorian woman after his American wife died from fever in 1879. This violated a number of unwritten rules. For one thing, the missionary community expected male missionaries to marry American women before coming to the field rather than marrying the many single female missionaries in the field. The missionaries generally felt that the development of romantic relationships between missionaries could cause personal conflicts, gossip, or even scandal. Also, if the relationship did indeed lead to marriage, the two would have to be stationed together, which could disrupt the balance of skills that existed in any one station. A marriage between two doctors, for example, would create pressure to assign both at one station to the detriment of another post.

Generally speaking, the vast majority of male missionaries on the field were married while female missionaries were just as likely to be single or married. Statistically, then, during this period, virtually all male missionaries came to the field already married or married an American on their first furlough back to the United States, which generally came after five years of service. While very few of the male missionaries were single, nearly half of all the women missionaries during this period were unmarried and remained that way for their entire missionary career. During this period, while female missionaries overall outnumbered males by a factor of three to two on the mission field, single females outnumbered single males by a factor of five to one at any given time. What accounted for this difference? Certainly, the missionaries' perception of gender differences played a role, as did the overall importance of single women to the missionary movement. Males were perceived as being unable to control their sexual urges outside of the institution of marriage. Women, on the other hand, were
seen as inherently more virtuous than men and thus able to control their sexual desires. For missionaries in general, the idea of a male missionary seducing a female among the population with whom they were working was a real threat while the idea of a single female seducing a male among the population was apparently preposterous.\

There was another reason for this phenomenon. The number of single females who applied for mission work far outnumbered the single males, which stemmed from restrictive notions of gender roles in American society in the nineteenth century. Women did not enjoy the right to vote and their career choices were largely limited to the home and charitable work. Once a woman married, her husband became her legal overseer in social, economic, and political matters. Missionary work provided an important outlet for women who were independent and adventurous, were not necessarily interested in marrying, and yet did not want to challenge directly the gender structure that had been imposed upon them. As a result of the scarcity of workers, women were able to do things on the mission field that they were unable to do at home. For example, forty to fifty percent of the missionary medical doctors in Iran during this period were single women. Considering that Iranian custom prohibited male doctors from treating Iranian females, female doctors were desperately needed to treat half of the population. The work of female doctors greatly aided efforts to evangelize Iranian women. The dominance of women in missionary work in Iran also mirrored the prominent role that women played in the Progressive movement in the United States.\

In addition to notions of gender, race and religion played both direct and indirect roles. Race did not play as large a role in Iran as in other mission fields during this time because, as previously stated, Iranians perceived themselves to be Aryans, a notion which
the missionaries accepted. For the missionaries, differences between Americans and Iranians had more to do with culture and religion than with race. In addition, the perceived race bias of Iranians against one another compelled the missionaries to make what they called racism one of their primary targets in the schools. Nowhere was Iranian society more segregated than along religious lines, although gender segregation ran a close second. The various religious minorities lived in segregated communities both in the villages and in the cities. They were each legally subject to their own sets of laws. Each felt a great deal of hostility and suspicion towards other groups, which constituted a major obstacle to missionary work with the minorities and with the Muslim community.\(^9\)

More directly, however, there was undoubtedly some level of residual racial prejudice in their almost universal opposition to marriage with Iranians. The missionaries, to their credit, believed that Iranians could be their equal with enough education and appointed Iranians as pastors of their own churches, medical doctors who served on staff, itinerant evangelists, and elders and deacons within the churches. They also vehemently condemned race prejudice in their letters to the Board of Foreign Missions. There were only two areas where their treatment of Iranians differed; the level of pay and intermarriage. Iranian workers hired by the mission were paid far less than the missionaries themselves, a fact which had far more to do with the economic realities of mission work in Iran than it did with race.\(^{10}\) The intermarriage issue, however, did stem from notions of race. The fact that only one missionary (Wright) during the period of 1880-1950 married an Iranian suggests strongly that race was a factor in such decisions.
There was another aspect to the race factor, however, other than racial prejudice. The unwritten rule against marrying an Iranian also stemmed from a practical recognition of the rampant race and religious prejudice that existed in Iran. Many of the missionaries believed that a marriage between a foreign missionary and an Iranian would greatly increase the level of jealousy against the missionary and his native spouse, which would complicate mission work. For example, if a missionary married an Armenian, the Nestorians would automatically be suspicious and even hostile toward the missionary couple, and that could effectively prevent the missionary from working with other minority groups.\textsuperscript{11}

When John Wright married Shushan Oshana in 1885, he violated all of these unwritten taboos and increased the level of estrangement from his colleagues. His relationship with Shushan probably resulted in his transfer from Tabriz, the largest of the mission stations in Persia at that time, to the relative obscurity of the pioneer substation of Salmas in 1884. Shushan Oshana was herself at the crossroads of several different cultures as a result of her contact with the missionaries. Her father, Kasha Oshana, was a Nestorian who converted to evangelical Christianity in the 1840s. Oshana then preached Christianity to the mountain Nestorians in Kurdistan for many years and also served as a teacher at the Presbyterian Memorial School in Tabriz. Shushan’s mother, Shawa Oshana, was one of the first female students at Fidelia Fiske’s seminary in the late 1840s. According to missionary records, Shushan spent her childhood years in the “wild mountains of Koordistan”, where her father was an itinerant evangelist. Like many other Nestorians and Armenians, Shushan then emigrated to the U.S., where she received theological training at Ferndale Seminary. After graduation, she returned to Iran, worked
as a teacher in an English-run orphanage for a time and then as a teacher’s assistant at the Presbyterian school for Armenian and Nestorian girls in Tabriz. It was there that she met and married John Wright.

Other than her transfer to Salmas with Wright, the missionaries all seemed to treat her the same as one of their own while maintaining their opposition to intermarriage in principle. The missionaries spoke of Shushan’s faith and abilities in glowing terms. At the same time, however, none of the other mission stations were willing to receive Mr. and Mrs. Wright when it was determined that he had to leave Tabriz. Several missionaries at various stations threatened to resign if Wright and his Nestorian wife were transferred there. Only J.C. Mechlin, a senior missionary evangelist and educator at Salmas agreed to receive him. Even Mechlin had his reservations, however, but after their arrival his chief problem with John Wright was his work ethic and his habit of spending his time “studying words” instead of preaching. All of the preaching and teaching responsibilities consequently fell on Mechlin.

For those missionaries who opposed intermarriage because of the impact it might have on missionary work, the circumstances surrounding the murder of Shushan Wright justified their beliefs. As was the established practice throughout the mission field, Mechlin and John Wright decided to open a school in Salmas for Nestorian and Armenian children who wished to attend. Needing teachers, they wrote to Tabriz and asked the missionaries there for a suitable Armenian or Nestorian candidate who had graduated from the Memorial School. The Tabriz missionaries sent a 20-year-old Armenian named Minas to Salmas, where he immediately took up teaching duties in the school and stayed in a room at the mission compound. Very little is known about
Minas except that he came from a mixed Armenian-Nestorian background. As such, he probably wandered on the edge of both communities and saw the American missionary school as an opportunity to procure an education in order to emigrate to the United States or find a teaching job within the mission. When the missionaries at Tabriz offered him a job teaching at Salmas, Minas jumped at the opportunity and left immediately.

Problems arose when Minas developed an intimate relationship with a Nestorian nurse employed by the mission. The nurse, Asli, was already married and had several children. At first, both John and Shushan Wright believed that Minas’ interest stemmed from a desire to marry one of Asli’s daughters. Shushan, however, suspected that Minas and Asli were “criminally intimate”. Shushan warned Minas about it and told him to move from the mission compound to a room at the school in order to put some distance between the two alleged lovers. On the night of 13 May 1890, however, Shushan observed Minas surreptitiously leaving Asli’s quarters.16

Shushan, who was pregnant with her third child with Wright, then informed her husband who, after conferring with Mechlin, decided to dismiss Minas from their employ. On 14 May 1890, John Wright summoned Minas and informed him that his services were no longer required. Minas asked if he could receive his wages he had earned up to that point. Wright agreed and went to the next room to retrieve the funds. Immediately after Wright left the room, Minas ran to the dining room where Shushan was sewing with her sister-in-law, stabbed her several times, including twice in the face and at least once in the back. As Minas fled, Wright did not give chase and stayed to render aid to his wife, fearing that she would die if he did not stop the bleeding.17
Wright and Mechlin, neither of whom had any medical training, tried in vain to stop the bleeding. They sent for a doctor from the other mission stations but the first on the scene, an Armenian trained by the missionaries, did not arrive until over two days after the stabbing. Shushan Wright hung on for two weeks but finally died of infection on 1 June. According to Dr. Mary Bradford, a single female medical missionary from Tabriz, the fetus died in Shushan’s womb the day of the stabbing and then caused a secondary infection that cost Shushan her life.\(^\text{18}\)

Initial efforts to apprehend Minas were sorely deficient. As soon as Shushan’s wounds were stabilized, Wright and Mechlin went to the Governor of Salmas to petition him to bring Minas to justice. The governor, however, was out of town and nothing was done. Four days after the stabbing, the British Consul General in Tabriz, Colonel C.E. Stewart, arrived in Salmas and took charge of the effort to apprehend Minas at the missionaries’ request. Stewart rode to where the governor of Salmas was vacationing and threatened that if nothing were done to apprehend Minas, Stewart would inform the governor of the province and the American and British legations in Tehran of his negligence. The governor then halfheartedly assembled a party to pursue Minas while Stewart assembled another party of four Kurds who knew Minas and offered them a reward for his capture. This group captured Minas with the help of the Persian Vice-Consul at Bashkalla on the Turkish border on 22 May.\(^\text{19}\)

The explanations for the murder that emerged in the days and months to come did much to confirm the missionaries’ unofficial prohibition against marrying Iranians for fear of the effect on mission work. Upon hearing the events that led up to the murder as put forward by J.C. Mechlin, John Wright, and Asli the nurse, it became clear that Minas
blamed Shushan for costing him his job and apparently his relationship with Asli.

Among the missionaries and diplomats who became involved in the case, a consensus emerged that the entire affair would not have occurred if John Wright had married an American instead of a Nestorian. In their correspondence with the Board of Foreign Missions, most of the missionaries, including Mechlin, who observed relations between Shushan and Minas firsthand, noted that Minas was jealous of the elevated position that Shushan enjoyed and deeply resented her involvement in his affairs. When her interference cost him his job as well, he became enraged. According to Asli, the paramour of the accused, Minas had planned to kill both Mr. and Mrs. Wright in their sleep the night before the attack but that she talked him out of it. Their deepest fears confirmed by tragedy, the missionaries ultimately blamed the murder on John Wright. As fellow missionary Benjamin Labaree stated, “The murderer of Mrs. Wright would I believe never have conceived of such a course against an American or English lady.... It is a sad outcome of a foolish step on his part.” Wright never accepted this version of events and to the horror of his fellow missionaries married another Nestorian less than three years later.

Although Minas’ motive and guilt were clearly established, the questions of trial and punishment was much more difficult. On the one hand, the Armenian community rallied around Minas, alternately denying his guilt in the affair and demanding his release in any case. John Wright received death threats from Armenians in Salmas in an apparent attempt to intimidate him to drop the case. On the other hand, because Mrs. Wright was a naturalized American citizen married to an American missionary, the British and American diplomatic establishment got involved and demanded the death
penalty for Minas. The central Iranian government was caught in the middle. The monarchy by this time had become quite weak and sought to administer the provinces with as little resources and trouble as possible. As a result, the Persian government desired to resolve the affair without inciting the Armenian community against the central government or alienating the American missionaries or the British and American legations. It was caught between the demands of the Armenian community for Minas’ release and the foreigners’ demands that he be executed.

The affair aptly demonstrated the missionaries’ traditional dependence on British diplomatic support for their work. Before 1883, American missionaries depended on the British for diplomatic support and protection. Indeed, even after the first American minister arrived in Tehran in 1883, British-missionary relations changed little, mostly because the American diplomats had very little power in the country and were unwilling to open a consulate in Urumia or Tabriz. With regard to any case that involved consular support, the British consulate was the first line of defense for American missionaries until the U.S. opened a permanent consulate in Tabriz in 1906. The Wright case was no exception. If not for the intervention of the British Consul General, Colonel Stewart, Minas might never have been apprehended. Furthermore, correspondence between the missionaries and Colonel Stewart illuminates just how close a relationship they enjoyed with one another. For one thing, Colonel Stewart, who was normally stationed in Tabriz, attended Sunday services at the American missionary chapel there. The American missionaries held three Sunday services, one in Turkish for the Armenians, one in Syriac for the Nestorians, and one in English for the foreigners resident in the city. In addition, Stewart took his responsibilities with regard to protecting American missionaries very
seriously. He visited the American mission stations at Urumia and Salmas regularly, and took great interest in the missionaries’ evangelistic work. The missionaries described him as “a noble Christian man” who reportedly told Mechlin, “Much as I love my country and want to serve her, I love my God more.” This, of course, goes far in explaining Stewart’s extraordinary response to the murder.

Other factors motivated the British to protect American missionaries as well. The American missionaries with few exceptions were pro-British and anti-Russian because they felt that further Russian inroads in the area would lead to the immediate closure of American Presbyterian missions in northern Iran. The Russian Orthodox mission was the only substantial competition to the Presbyterian effort in northern Iran and the missionaries repeatedly cited instances where Russian priests, who they deemed to be agents of Russian imperial expansion, openly used force to gain converts. Another reason for Anglo-American missionary cooperation was a deeper cultural and linguistic affinity for one another than for the Russians. Since the American missionaries often taught English in the schools and ideals that did not necessarily threaten the British presence in Iran, the British probably considered it advantageous to support American missionaries.

In addition to wanting justice done for what was certainly a heinous crime, the immediate cause for Stewart’s vigorous response to the murder of Shushan Wright was that the breakdown of law and order in the provinces threatened foreigners in Iran. Both the missionaries and the British believed that if Minas was allowed to escape with little or no punishment, then the lives of Westerners in Iran would be endangered. Even though Shushan Wright was an Iranian by birth, she was a naturalized American citizen so
closely associated with the American Presbyterian mission. A weak response to her murder would be perceived as a blow to Anglo-American prestige in Persia.

As a result, the British pursuit of an appropriately severe and public punishment for Minas was vigorous. The night before Shushan died, Colonel Stewart informed American Minister Spencer Pratt that he believed and would recommend that Minas be publicly flogged for stabbing Mrs. Wright. After she died, Stewart and Pratt agreed that Minas should be executed specifically for the purpose of setting an example to the Armenians "that had lately become imbued with a spirit of such utter lawlessness." Pratt also asked Stewart to portray Minas as a double murderer under Quranic law since Shushan was pregnant at the time of her death. The missionaries pressed both the British and American diplomats to demand the death penalty for Minas.

As a result of Anglo-American pressure, the Iranian government approved the transfer of Minas from Salmas to Tabriz for trial. Furthermore, the trial took place at the British consulate and Colonel Stewart served as the prosecutor, charging Minas with two counts of murder and two counts of attempted murder. Over the course of four days, Stewart tried the case against Minas before the Imīr Nizām, the governor of Tabriz, producing eyewitnesses to the crime and also witnesses to Minas' subsequent confession to his captors and at least one missionary. Although Minas' guilt was clear, the question of punishment was because the Iranian government was in a quandary over the case and wanted to settle it with as little trouble as possible. As a result, despite Anglo-American pressure to the contrary, the Shah decided to sentence Minas to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.
The sentence of life imprisonment was a shrewd move on the part of the Iranian government. The sentence was perfectly acceptable to the Armenian community, which quieted down after its declaration. Although anything short of the death penalty was unacceptable to the American and British diplomats and, to a lesser extent, the American missionaries as well, they lacked the position and the will to press the matter further. Stewart protested the sentence to the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs and urged the American minister to join with the British minister and send a note of protest to the Shah. American Minister Pratt also protested the sentence but the State Department, fearing any further identification with the British in Persia, decided to let the matter rest.\textsuperscript{31} Although the British and American diplomats were dissatisfied with the sentence, their governments were unwilling to expend any further resources and prestige on the murder of non-native born American.

The lack of a death sentence caused some disagreement among the missionaries as well. Although the missionaries wanted the death penalty for Minas, they mostly settled for the sentence of life imprisonment. The major exception, as can be expected, was John Wright himself. Wright urged the Board of Foreign Missions to lobby the State Department to pressure the Shah to upgrade Minas' sentence to death. Wright argued that in Persia, where jailers could be bribed, a sentence of life imprisonment meant a jail sentence of two to three years and then a convenient escape. Wright further noted that American prestige in the area and the safety of American lives was on the line in the matter.\textsuperscript{32} The Department of State declined, however, and as he predicted, Minas escaped from jail less than two years later and was never heard from again.\textsuperscript{33} The truth of
Wright’s other prediction would be verified 11 years later when another missionary, this time American-born, would be murdered.

**The Labaree Murder**

Although the effort to evangelize Muslims would not take off until after World War I, the seeds for the work were planted long before 1914. Indeed, according to missionary John Elder, the impetus to come to Iran in the first place was not to work only with the minority Christians of the country but rather to use them as a means to the end of evangelizing all of Muslim Iran and, eventually, the entire Muslim world of the Middle East.

There were of course some very serious obstacles in the way of preaching the Gospel to Muslims. For one thing, part of the unspoken agreement between the Shah and the powerful Shi’a clergy was that the Shah would protect Islam; in return, the clergy would support the monarchy. In practice, this meant that missionaries were allowed in the country only as long as they worked with the non-Muslim minorities. Although non-Muslims had the right to convert to Christianity, Muslims did not. Legally, a Muslim convert to any other religion could be put to death, although in practice very few were executed for apostasy. In addition, the missionaries were not legally allowed to own property until the early 1890s, forcing them to rent or buy property through Iranian proxies. A more serious obstacle was the social ostracism that faced any Muslim convert to Christianity. Such a person could expect to be separated from his family, lose his job, be harassed by relatives and neighbors, and subjected to kidnappings and regular beatings until he recanted and returned to Islam. For those few converts who resisted
such harassment, the result could be death. Even after death, the convert’s corpse was often taken by his relatives and given an Islamic burial. As a result of such persistent persecution, only a handful of Muslims during this early period converted to Christianity. Fewer still remained Christians under such pressure but those who did were by far the most steadfast and effective evangelists for the missionaries.

A good example of the problems that faced Muslim converts was the case of Mirza Ibrahim. During a visit to one of the village churches organized by the missionaries near the city of Khoi, John Wright reported that the congregation received Mirza Ibrahim, formerly a Muslim, into the church “on profession of his faith in Christ.” Ibrahim had attended the church for about year and asked many times for baptism. Some in the church initially believed that Ibrahim, being very poor, wanted to convert out of a desire for material gain. Nonetheless, in a controversial move, Presbyterian missionary J.C. Mechlin baptized Ibrahim publicly in early March 1890 (two months before the murder of Shushan Wright), which implicitly constituted an explicit and public repudiation of Islam. Ibrahim immediately encountered trouble from the governor of the region, whom Wright previously had described as friendly toward the missionaries, and from Muslims in the street, who pressured the governor to punish Ibrahim.

If there were any remaining doubts as to the genuineness of Ibrahim’s conversion, all were dispelled over the course of the next two years. During this time, the entire Muslim community of Khoi subjected Ibrahim to an ever-increasing set of trials and persecutions aimed at getting him to renounce Christianity and return to Islam. According to missionary John Elder,
The mullahs reasoned with him, threatened him, and offered him a comfortable place in one of their shrines if he would recant. His wife left him, taking all his property, his son and his daughter. He had hoped his daughter might join him but she became a bitter and reviling enemy. He began to preach in the villages, was arrested and brought before the Sarparest [the governor].

Ibrahim was questioned by the governor and testified to his faith in Christ. The governor ordered him to be beaten and sent to the governor of Urumia to decide what to do with him. In the meantime, a mob had formed and demanded that Ibrahim be punished for publicly insulting Islam.

Ibrahim would spend the next two years languishing in jail. The missionaries were at first very fearful not only for Ibrahim's safety but also the effect on their work if Ibrahim, who had so publicly converted, publicly recanted. Mechlin informed the Board of Foreign Missions that Ibrahim's public confession of Christianity and his steadfastness had opened up new opportunities with Muslim inquirers, who wanted to discuss the claims that Ibrahim had made. Ibrahim seemed to arouse two responses; either overt hostility or respectful curiosity. In June 1892, Ibrahim was transferred to Tabriz for trial before Crown Prince of Iran Muzaffar al-Din, who became Shah in 1896.

The Crown Prince, apparently in consultation with the Shah, did not want to execute Ibrahim and decided instead to keep him in jail in the hope that he would eventually recant. While in prison, Ibrahim received frequent beatings from the jailer and his cellmates. The missionaries, who visited him frequently and provided him what medical attention they could under such circumstances, feared for his survival under such conditions and finally asked the American Minister in Tehran to petition the Shah on Ibrahim's behalf. The American diplomatic establishment was unable to intervene in any way, however, because Ibrahim was an Iranian citizen and the matter was purely a
In May matters finally came to a head. According to missionary accounts, Ibrahim's fellow prisoners took turns choking him demanding that he deny Christ. Ibrahim refused and was finally strangled to death on 14 May 1893 after enduring three years of constant persecution.

The Ibrahim affair certainly had repercussions for the entire West Persia mission. In July 1892, the Shah temporarily shut down the missionary publication *Rays of Light* (which was in Syriac, not Persian) because he had heard that it was attacking Islam. A more serious threat occurred when the government closed the doors of the Protestant church and school in Tabriz in October 1892, a few months after Ibrahim had been transferred to Tabriz. As the missionaries later discovered, the ultimate source of the troubles were the Armenian bishops, who felt threatened by American missionary activity in the area, and reported to the Crown Prince that the missionaries were receiving Muslims into their school and preaching sermons in Persian. Although the closing was carried out by a low-ranking secretary at the Foreign Ministry, the missionaries soon discovered through personal contacts that the Crown Prince was behind the affair. The senior missionary in Tabriz, Dr. W.S. Vanneman, petitioned the British and American legations in Tehran for help, which they provided through informal petitions to the Iranian government. The Iranian officials soon discovered that the accusations were false, although in all probability there were some Muslims attending the church services. As a result of British and American diplomatic intervention, the doors to the church and school were reopened in December.

These and other incidents not only indicate the missionaries' deep-seated desire to evangelize the Muslim community, but also the attitude of the Muslim clergy toward the
missionaries. For the most part, the missionaries reported having good relations with the Muslim clergy and enjoyed far better relations with them than they did with the Nestorian and Armenian bishops. This was probably because before the 1890s, the missionaries were unable to do any significant work with the Muslim majority; however, toleration turned to vocal opposition when the clerics perceived that the missionaries were making inroads with Muslims. Ibrahim’s public conversion to Christianity was a wake-up call to some among the Muslim clergy, who feared more of the same.

This growing suspicion within the Muslim community combined with traditional rivalries between the Muslim majority and the various Christian minorities in and around Urumia to intensify Iranian animosity toward the missionaries in West Persia. When the missionaries first came to Iran, they were openly welcomed by the embattled Christian minorities. While the clerical elite among the Nestorians and the Armenians soon saw the missionaries as rivals, the minorities themselves often turned to the missionaries for protection and support. As the power of the Qajar state weakened over the course of the nineteenth century, law and order began to break down in northwestern Iran. The Christian villages on the Urumia plain became prime targets for thieves and for tribal raids primarily perpetrated by the Kurds. Robbers and raiders knew they had a better chance of escaping punishment for their crimes if they attacked Iranian Christians instead of Muslims.44

The Nestorians and Armenians around Urumia and Tabriz turned to the missionaries for help and protection from raids. This put the missionaries in a somewhat difficult position. They had the choice of either standing by while many of those with whom they worked were robbed or killed or they could intervene by petitioning British
and American diplomats for support and occasionally providing an unofficial (and illegal) asylum to the minorities. Over time, they chose the latter course and acted in many ways as the defender of Nestorians, Armenians, and Jews against Persian and Kurdish oppression. This role, of course, did not endear the missionaries to the Muslim clergy and would have a drastic impact on mission work at the turn of the century.

Although the missionaries publicly proclaimed their neutrality, they often intervened and requested diplomatic intervention in clearly domestic matters. For example, in June 1896, Presbyterian missionary Frederick Coan (a son of missionaries to Iran) informed the American legation in Tehran of the horrendous murder of 14 Nestorians, including Nestorian Bishop Mar Gavriel of Urumia. According to Coan, the perpetrators of the affair were Kurds living on the Ottoman-Iranian border, who cut off the noses, lips, and ears of their victims. Coan requested John Tyler, the longtime charge d’affaires and interpreter at the American legation in Tehran, to petition the Iranian government on behalf of the Nestorians.45

Over next decade, as atrocities against the Nestorians and Armenians in the area mounted, Coan and the controversial head of the mission at Urumia, Dr. Joseph P. Cochran, a second-generation missionary to Iran, made detailed reports to British and American diplomats and asked them to pressure the Iranian government to provide some level of protection and justice for the Christian minorities of the region. The Anglo-American diplomatic establishment relayed the reports of these atrocities to Persian authorities, but otherwise refused to intervene. The American diplomats did not have the power or the inclination to intervene in Iran’s internal ethnic and inter-tribal rivalries. The British, including the extremely competent and pro-missionary Consul General in
Tabriz, A.C. Wratislaw, had the power to intervene but believed that such intervention would actually exacerbate the situation.\textsuperscript{46}

The role that the missionaries had implicitly played as protector of the oppressed minorities, combined with the evangelistic inroads into the Muslim community as evidenced by the Mirza Ibrahim affair, began to embitter the good relations the missionaries enjoyed with leading Shi’a clerics in Tabriz, Urumia, and Hamadan. Hamadan was a special case because the oppressed minority in that city were Jewish. The proximate cause of the trouble that erupted in that city in 1896 was the adultery trial of a wealthy Jew who had converted to Islam. The leading cleric, Akhund Abdullah, and other mullahs brought the unfortunate man before the governor of the city, the İmîr-i Nizâm. In the meantime, mob violence erupted against the sizable Jewish quarter in that city and many Jews were beaten and their homes burned. The disorder led to widespread looting of Jewish shops and homes in the weeks that followed. The missionaries, especially Dr. George W. Holmes, who counted the Shah and the royal family as well as provincial nobles and rulers among his regular patients, reported the matter to both British and American diplomats. In addition, Holmes used his connections with Persian authorities to get troops sent to Hamadan to halt the looting. In the end, Holmes served as a third-party arbitrator between the Jewish community, the local Persian authorities, and the clerical elite of Hamadan to bring about peace.\textsuperscript{47} As the Hamadan incident indicated, the missionary protection of oppressed minorities spread beyond the Christian community and embraced the Jewish community as well. As the next two chapters demonstrate, missionaries even intervened on behalf of Muslims when the opportunity presented itself.
Although the missionary intervention in Hamadan had a positive outcome, Urumia was a different matter. Urumia, the oldest of the American mission stations and the second largest in West Persia, was the most important station in the entire Iran Mission for many years. Urumia was home to the largest concentration of Nestorian Christians in the country but was situated square in the eastern heartland of Kurdistan along the Ottoman-Iranian border. If Urumia was one of the oldest missions, Labaree was one of the oldest names among the missionaries. Benjamin Labaree, Sr., had been a missionary in West Persia since the 1870s. Labaree's two sons, Benjamin Jr. and Robert, also became lifelong missionaries to Iran. When Benjamin and Robert both came of age, they returned to the United States to attend college and seminary. After graduation in the early 1890s, they both returned to the Urumia station to join their father. Robert would later move on to Tabriz. Both men, like their father, dedicated their lives to the missionary objective of evangelizing Iran.

Communal violence in Urumia, incited by similar events in the Ottoman province of Van just over the border, continued and drew the missionaries in squarely on the side of the Armenians and Nestorians. Missionary intervention in turn elicited British and American diplomatic interest and concern, although as long as the violence was against non-native born Americans and British citizens the Anglo-American diplomatic establishment refused to intervene beyond making reports to Persian authorities. One single event, however, drastically changed this state of affairs and raised the interethnic violence to a new level. In April 1904, Benjamin Labaree, Jr., left Urumia with a servant to visit the Christian community in Khoi. Along the way, Kurdish bandits robbed him and his servant, shot his servant dead, took Labaree a few miles into the wilderness, then
brutally stabbed and shot him to death as well. The robbers took all that the two had, including their clothes and then scattered to avoid detection.

The murder came as a complete shock to almost everyone. Never before had an Iranian murdered a native-born American missionary. The worst persecution that missionaries had suffered before this was robbery, occasional social ostracism, and the rare and temporary closure of mission schools, all of which amounted to little more than petty harassment. The robbery and murder of Labaree and his servant immediately spurred the missionaries, the American legation in Tehran, and the British consulate to take action.

At first, the head of the Urumia mission reported the murder as a robbery that went terribly wrong. It happened in the no-man’s land outside of Urumia, an area in which robberies occurred regularly. Two factors soon convinced the missionaries that more than mere robbery was afoot. When they inspected the corpses, it became clear that Israel, Labaree’s unfortunate servant, had been dispatched quickly while Labaree had been tortured before he died. Israel was shot in the head once and left to die by the side of the road. Labaree, however, had been stabbed thirteen times several miles away where the murderers took him so that they could kill him at leisure. According to American missionary Dr. Joseph Cochran, usually thieves in the area killed only when they met with resistance, which the missionaries never offered, and when they killed they did it as quickly as possible.48

The discovery of who carried out the murder, however, convinced the missionaries and diplomats that the motive for the murder was not robbery, but rather religious hatred. As the missionaries soon discovered through their extensive contacts...
throughout the Nestorian, Kurdish and Armenian villages, the murderers were a group of 14 Dasht Kurds, including the leader of the group, Sayyid Mir Ghaffar (sayyid was a term of respect indicating that he was a lineal descendant of the Prophet Mohammad).

Mir Ghaffar was a notorious rapist, thief, and murderer who preyed solely on the Christian minorities. He had also recently clashed with the missionaries over a previous murder of one of their native evangelists, Reverend Mooshie Daniel. Daniel was born in Persia, emigrated to North America, received an education in the U.S., became a Canadian citizen, and then returned to preach the Gospel to his countrymen in Iran, where he worked in the Urumia Presbyterian mission as an evangelist. In December of 1903, according to four separate eyewitness accounts, Mir Ghaffar approached Daniel and ordered him to turn over his watch and, after he refused, Mir Ghaffar murdered him. Because Daniel was technically a British citizen, Consul Wratislaw intervened and endeavored to get the murderer arrested and punished for his crimes, but ultimately succeeded only in getting the Persian government to pay a small indemnity to Daniel’s wife and two children.49

Mir Ghaffar escaped without any punishment whatsoever in the Daniel murder because he was under the protection of the highest-ranking Shi’a cleric of Urumia, Mirza Hussein Agha. Mirza Hussein was a mujtahid, a high-ranking position within the Shi’a clerical elite that allowed him to use reason and the principles of jurisprudence to arrive at independent judgments on points of religious law.50 Mirza Hussein was also deeply involved in the series of violent confrontations between the Muslim and Christian communities of Urumia.51 In June 1903, according to Cochran, a Nestorian shot a young Kurdish chief and the Kurds retaliated by attacking a Christian village after being incited.
to do so by Mirza Hussein. Mir Ghaffar was the leader of the Kurds who attacked the
village. The Persian government did nothing to stop the attack or to punish the
perpetrators. After he escaped the murder of a British subject without any punishment
whatsoever, Mir Ghaffar must have believed he was completely beyond the law.

Upon discovery of the identity of the murderer and his accomplices, the
missionaries and British diplomats urged that the Persian authorities take them into
custody. Mir Ghaffar, however, first took refuge in the house of Mirza Hussein and then
fled across the Ottoman border. He would not be arrested until two months after the
murder. The arrest of his accomplices, however, was a matter far more difficult to
undertake. While no one except Mirza Hussein seemed to be overly concerned with the
fate of Mir Ghaffar, the entire Dasht Kurd tribe rallied around the other accomplices and
refused to hand them over. The question over what to do with Mir Ghaffar and Mirza
Hussein and the attempts to bring his accomplices to justice were issues that persisted
through the next few years and created a series of international crises leading to a short
border conflict between Persia and the Ottoman Empire.

The missionary reaction to the murder, although certainly understandable,
dramatically increased the stakes of the affair. The combined effect of their previous
experiences in the area, from the murder of Mrs. Wright, to the many instances of
robbery against them, the frequent massacres of Nestorians and Armenians, the murder of
Mooshie Daniel, and the near murders of other missionaries, convinced the missionaries
that something drastic needed to be done in order to restore law and order in the region.
The British and American diplomats needed little convincing that unless something was
done, the lives of all foreigners in the area were in jeopardy. While the missionaries and
the diplomats were willing in past cases to accept a compromise with regard to punishment, such as in the case of Mrs. Wright and Moosie Daniel, they now wanted Mir Ghaffar and his accomplices punished to the maximum extent of the law, namely execution. More controversially, they also demanded that the Persian government remove Mirza Hussein from his post in disgrace and either imprison him or make a public example of him in another way.\(^54\)

One matter complicating the affair was the lack of eyewitness evidence against the accused, although the circumstantial evidence against Mir Ghaffar and the Dasht Kurds was very strong. Several Kurds and Christians reported seeing Mir Ghaffar before the murder with the Kurds in question and after the murder with the personal effects of Labaree and Israel, including their horses and saddles. Although the Kurds later destroyed most of this evidence as the international reaction to it heated up, some Christian servants of the suspects were able to produce some of Labaree’s stolen things.\(^55\) Much more difficult to determine was the complicity of Mirza Hussein in the matter. The missionaries claimed that the mujtahid was behind the entire thing, based on his previous association and protection of Mir Ghaffar as well as rumors that Mirza Hussein had ordered Mir Ghaffar to murder missionary Dr. Joseph Cochran in retaliation for his intervention on behalf of the Nestorians after the Kurdish raid on their village. The missionaries alleged that Mir Ghaffar had killed Labaree by mistake, waiting in ambush to kill Cochran.\(^56\) The evidence for the complicity of Mirza Hussein as instigator of the murder before the fact, however, was weak and based entirely on hearsay. It was far more certain Mirza Hussein provided shelter and protection to Mir Ghaffar after the fact. 

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and facilitated his escape across the border. As a result, the missionaries and the Anglo-American diplomatic establishment demanded his removal and punishment.

All of these circumstances placed the Persian government in a severe bind. It was well aware of the social disorder along the Ottoman-Iranian frontier but was largely powerless to stop it. Nasr al-Din Shah had been succeeded by Muzaffar al-Din Shah, a much weaker Shah. Of course, the Iran that he had inherited in 1896 was not as strong as that of his predecessor. The imperial powers had made such inroads, both economically and politically, that completely independent action was impossible. The demands of the Russian and British governments could not be entirely ignored. On the other hand, the corresponding weakness of the central government to impose order had led to disorder in the provinces, which in turn manifested itself as communal feuds along the Ottoman-Iranian border. In addition, the Kurdish/Turkish-Armenian struggle within the Ottoman Empire spilled over into Persia and exacerbated tensions there. The Persian government knew that any upset of the careful balance between these various factions could result in a civil war in the provinces or in a border war with the Ottomans. If the Persian government completely carried out the demands of the missionaries and the Anglo-American diplomatic establishment, the Kurds might rise in complete rebellion against the Persian government. As a result, the Persian government once again tried to balance the demands of the missionaries for severe punishment with the demands of the Kurds for exoneration in an effort to maintain an uneasy stability of sorts, such as followed the murder of Shushan Wright. This time, however, it was not nearly as successful and many of the government’s worst fears were realized.
The punishment of Mir Ghaffar was the easiest of the three issues to resolve. The Persian government followed the same course it had previously in connection with Minas, the murderer of Mrs. Wright. Mir Ghaffar was tried for his crimes and sentenced to life imprisonment. Unlike Minas, however, Mir Ghaffar was not allowed to escape. He was kept under very close supervision in jail, where he served three years and then died, probably as a result of harsh prison conditions. His death solved one of the problems facing the Persian Government as the missionaries and diplomats had repeatedly urged the authorities to execute Mir Ghaffar for his heinous crimes.

Much more difficult to resolve was what to do with Mirza Hussein. The controversial mujtahid knew that he was in serious trouble and was probably surprised by the vehement Anglo-American reaction to the Labaree murder. In the months that followed the murder, he tried to keep as low a profile as possible. The missionaries repeatedly pointed to Mirza Hussein as the source of all their problems and urged that he be dealt with harshly. The American and British diplomats urged the Shah and the Crown Prince and governor of the province of Azerbaijan, Mohammad Ali (later Shah from 1906-1909), to remove Mirza Hussein from office and punish him publicly. The Persian government was unwilling at first to force the mullah to leave Urumia in such disgrace so obviously at the pressure of the British and Americans, who insisted upon it every bit as much as the apprehension and punishment of Mir Ghaffar and his accomplices. Finally, in the face of constant pressure on this point for over a year, the Persian government suggested to Mirza Hussein that he take an extended pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reza in Meshed, located in the extreme northeastern corner of Iran. Mirza Hussein, knowing that the game was up, agreed but not before begging both the
missionaries and British Consul Wratislaw to let him stay, which they refused to do. The ruse of a pilgrimage to Meshed fooled no one. All knew that the removal of Mirza Hussein came about as a direct result of American missionary and Anglo-American diplomatic pressure on the government.59

The apprehension and punishment of the accomplices caused by far the most trouble. Even under the best of conditions, the Kurdish tribes of the northwest were only nominally under the control of the Persian government. Under such conditions as existed around the turn of the century, however, the Kurds were able to operate with relative impunity in Iran. The Dasht Kurds in particular moved freely across the Ottoman-Persian border, evading the imperial rule of both. All parties involved soon realized that the only way to apprehend the remaining accomplices in the Labaree murder would be for the Persian government to mount an expensive and heavily armed expedition. The Anglo-American demands for the capture of the murder suspects soon expanded into a demand for the general pacification of the Kurds.60 The Persian government made little effort at first to carry out this demand, fearing that it was entirely unable to carry it out at all. Various Persian officials demanded that the Dasht Kurds turn over the murder suspects for trial but the Kurds refused to do so.

By the summer of 1905, it was clear to all involved that apprehension and punishment of Mir Ghaffar's accomplices was not going to take place in the near future, if at all. As a result, the American government changed tacks and demanded that the Persian government pay a large indemnity to Mary Schauffler Labaree, Benjamin Labaree's widow. To this end, the State Department sent a special envoy to Urumia to ascertain the situation and conduct the indemnity negotiations with the Persian
government. The Anglo-American diplomatic establishment believed that an indemnity was the only remaining way to make an example of the affair and motivate the Persian government to maintain order in the area. The missionaries and diplomats all held the Persian government financially liable for not maintaining a safe environment for foreigners in the region. As a result, Consul Norton, the American special envoy, negotiated the payment of $50,000 in gold to Mary Labaree, which could be reduced to $30,000 if the guilty Kurds were “swiftly punished.” If they were not, the Persian government would be liable for the remaining $20,000.\(^1\)

Most of the missionaries, like Dr. Cochran, supported the indemnity as necessary for the further safety of the missionaries. Mrs. Labaree, however, openly disagreed with her colleagues and with American diplomats. In a letter to the State Department, she categorically refused the indemnity, fearing that Iranians would see the payment as “blood money”, which according to Persian custom was the amount paid by a murderer to the family of his victim. She also considered the amount asked for to be disproportionately large, noting that similar cases in Iran and in China called for far smaller sums. Finally, she argued that the Persian government would raise such an exorbitant sum by levying a tax on the landowners, who in turn would squeeze what they needed from the poor, both Muslim and Christian, who were “innocent and already distressed”. According to Mrs. Labaree,

\[\text{I believe ... that the great mission cause to which my husband and I dedicated our lives – and which has become even dearer to me because of the terrible sacrifice I have been called upon to make for it – I believe that this may receive serious injury if my children and I accept an indemnity for this murder. The matter would not be understood by the great mass of the people in this district who would inevitably know of it, as the Persian idea of ‘blood money’ is so different from our civilized understanding of an indemnity. Thus serious and lasting injury might be done to the mission cause for which we have already sacrificed so much,}\]
that I prefer to waive my rights as an American citizen rather than to see this cause suffer. 62 Her fellow missionaries and American diplomats, however, informed her that she had no right to refuse the indemnity and insisted upon it anyway. In the end, the Iranian government paid $30,000 to Mary Labaree who reluctantly accepted the money. The Iranian government, unable to capture the remaining accomplices in time, paid the remaining $20,000, which was used to build a hospital in Tabriz. 63

Mary Labaree was among the first to sense the beginning of a serious backlash against the missionaries' role in the demand for punishment. From the beginning, the missionaries' reaction was governed by a desire to see justice done to the murderers of Labaree and that the work of evangelization and civilization could not be carried on under such chaotic conditions. Their fervent efforts in this regard, however, had a negative impact on their actual mission work in the area. Both the Cochrans and the Wrights reported that their lives were in danger several times. Dr. Cochran's house was surrounded and pelted with rocks on several occasions. He was informed on another occasion that someone was waiting outside the gate with a pistol to kill him. Cochran believed fully the reports that Mir Ghaffar actually wanted to kill him instead of Labaree and lived the rest of his days in fear. Cochran was an older man and the strain of the entire affair was too much for him. Just before Mir Ghaffar's trial, Cochran died and, according to fellow missionary Frederick Coan, "at last escaped the Kurdish bullet he so long feared." Coan further maintained that Cochran ultimately died of the additional stress that had been placed upon him since the murder. 64 The rest of the missionaries in West Persia felt the backlash as well. It became increasingly clear that the harder the line the missionaries took with the Dasht Kurds, Mirza Hussein, and the indemnity, the more
difficult it would be to resume their mission work. As a result, they changed tacks and tried to adopt a more conciliatory and forgiving tone.

Although the missionaries' about-face would temporarily embitter their relationship with American diplomats, the British diplomats fully understood and approved of their course of action. The British diplomats, Minister Arthur Hardinge, Consul Wratislaw, and special envoy Captain Gough, each had wanted to adopt a slightly more conciliatory tone months earlier, but felt constrained to back up American demands for a harsh punishment. The British diplomats felt the backlash as well and believed that the longer the affair went on, the more it would play into the hands of Russia. The British diplomats also had a much more realistic vision of what was possible in Iran and tried to convey their greater knowledge of the country and its politics to the Americans who, with few exceptions, refused to listen. 65

The greatest obstacle to a softer line, however, was American Minister Richmond Pearson who, by the end of the Labaree affair in 1907, was disliked by everyone, including his own staff. In 1905, at the height of the efforts to bring the Kurdish accomplices to justice, Pearson sent an uncoded telegram to the special envoy in Urumia that indicated he considered the Labaree affair to be closed upon the payment of the indemnity. The contents of the telegram, of course, were provided to the Persian government and completely undercut the efforts of American missionaries and British diplomats to have the accomplices arrested. Conversely, after the missionaries felt the backlash and wanted to take soften its stance, Pearson felt personally betrayed by them. Pearson told the missionaries that the U.S. government would in no way ease up the pressure on the Iranian government in any way and accused the missionaries of
ingratitude and hypocrisy. Relations deteriorated to such a point that in 1905 the missionaries wrote a joint letter directly to President Theodore Roosevelt demanding Pearson’s dismissal on the grounds of incompetence and public drunkenness.66

One instance dramatically illustrated the great gaps that had developed between the American minister and the missionaries. In 1906, while Pearson was still pressing for a punitive expedition against the Dasht Kurds, Tabriz missionary William Shedd sent a letter to Pearson in which he implied that he was willing to provide those same Kurds with asylum. Shedd had been informed by the Crown Prince that the Kurds seeking asylum with the missionaries would end the trouble for all concerned. Shedd agreed but Pearson replied that he thought the missionaries were incredibly stupid to even consider such a course of action, that the U.S. government would continue to press for the punishment of those same Kurds, and that the missionaries had no right to provide asylum in any case, which effectively ended consideration of the matter.67

The problems with Pearson ultimately had an impact on relations between the British and American legations and between the British and the missionaries. Consul Wratislaw, who the missionaries gave the highest praise, went to extraordinary lengths, including paying money out of his own pocket, to protect American missionaries and pursue their objectives with regard to the Labaree case. Wratislaw stated that in every instance when the missionaries or Minister Pearson asked for help, he went to great lengths to provide it; however, when the British asked for American help and support in pursuing the same objectives, Minister Pearson refused it, citing an American desire for neutrality. The rank hypocrisy of Pearson’s actions exasperated Wratislaw so much that he asked that any responsibility for the protection of American citizens be taken from
him, a request which was refused by the Foreign Office but which underscores just how strained relations between the American and British legations had become.  

The continual stream of problems out of Urumia and the great strain between Minister Pearson and the missionaries spurred the U.S. State Department to open a permanent consulate in Tabriz. The Department appointed William Doty, formerly a Presbyterian minister in California, to the post, a move that was intended to mend fences with the missionaries. Doty was unable to do much to redress the situation, however. In July 1907, the Iranian government at the urging of Minister Pearson finally mounted a campaign against the Kurds. The expedition was not well-organized and the Kurds easily defeated it. More seriously, the Ottomans used the skirmish as an excuse to invade west Persia and sack several of the Nestorian villages around Urumia. The Ottoman troops quickly withdrew but not until it had taken much plunder from Urumia and the defeated Persian troops. The Labaree affair finally ended some months later when, after U.S. Minister Pearson had been replaced by John B. Jackson, the U.S. informed the Iranian government that it had no objections to issuing a pardon to the Dasht Kurds implicated in the murder, most of whom had died in skirmishes with Iranian or Ottoman troops.

Conclusion

The West Persia Mission had for many years been the most important part of the Presbyterian mission to Iran. The entire modus operandi of the mission had up to that point been predicated on access to and work with the Christian minorities of the northwest. The East Persia Mission, on the other hand, was still in its infancy but had much potential because its overall goal was to train Iran’s minority populations to be
evangelists and to reach out to the Muslim majority of Iran. In 1890-1907, the strengths, weaknesses, and potential obstacles of both approaches were readily apparent.

One definite weakness was that working primarily with the minority Christian populations of Iran, the missionaries became enmeshed in the widespread communal conflicts of the time. Their evangelistic work with the minorities, although not without its fruits, turned the Nestorian and Armenian clergy against them. In addition, instead of reforming the native Christian churches from within, they instead created separate rival organizations that further divided those communities. Those that did join the Presbyterians were often alienated from their own communities, such as both Shushan Wright and Minas. At the same time, it is important to note that the missionaries did not create the ethnic hatred that often degenerated into massacres in the northwest. Their actions, however, often unwittingly exacerbated existing rivalries, even while they tried to alleviate the situation.

Missionary relations with the Muslim majority both expanded and deteriorated during this period. It was, however, during this period that evangelical work with individual Muslims began to take hold. Both native Christian evangelists and the missionaries worked to preach the Christian gospel to individual Muslims. Several dozen Muslims, such as Mirza Ibrahim, converted to Christianity and suffered incredible persecution as a result. Another issue in this regard was the missionaries’ adopted role as protector of the minorities. When faced with the unpalatable choice of standing by while those with whom they worked were killed or robbed with impunity, or getting mired in local politics to protect them, the missionaries, motivated by an ideology of mission
emphasizing both evangelism and civilization, chose the latter. The unfortunate result was that this role turned some within the Muslim community against them.

One other theme in the history of the West Persia mission during this period was the deep identification of the missionaries with the British. The reactions to the Wright and Labaree murders both indicate just how much the missionaries depended on the British for survival in the often hostile climate of the Iranian northwest. Their role as protector of the minorities in many ways depended on the willingness of British diplomats to back them up. The Labaree affair, however, pushed the relationship as far as it would go and resulted in alienation between the missionaries and American diplomats and also between the U.S. and British legations. The fact that the missionaries turned to Iranian, British, and American authorities for help was analogous to the Progressive-era belief that government could create an atmosphere in which civilization could flourish. In the absence of a strong Iranian government (and an American government unwilling to get overly involved), the missionaries turned to the British. Unlike their Progressive counterparts, however, the missionaries realized as a result of these incidents that bringing in outside support, particularly from an imperial power, hurt their cause more than it helped.

The Labaree affair also exemplified the failure of American missionaries to achieve their bedrock objectives -- revitalizing the native Christian churches and reaching the Muslim community of Iran. The West Persia mission ran into greater problems as it expanded into work with Muslims. The next two chapters will demonstrate how the East Persia mission gradually eclipsed the West Persia mission. The Constitutional Revolution would change the entire climate of mission work in Iran, as well as to define
the relationship between American missionaries and Iranian nationalism. World War I, however, would ultimately push the role of missionaries as protectors of the minorities as far as it would go and reduce the West Persia Mission to a shadow of its former self.
Notes

1 John Elder, “A History of the Iran Mission,” The Elder Family Papers, Record Group 189, Box 1, File 2a, Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS), p. 11.

2 J.C. Mechlin to Reverend Samuel Jessup, Tabriz, 28 June 1890, Microfilm Reel 123, Princeton Theological Seminary/Presbyterian Historical Society (PTS/PHS), West Persia, Correspondence, 1889-1890; J.C. Mechlin to Reverend John Gillespie, Salmas, 23 August 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to John Mitchell, Salmas, 10 October 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

3 “List of American Citizens in Persia”, 1893, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, M862, Reel 482, National Archives and Records Administration; Arthur Brown to Robert Bacon, New York, 8 August 1907, RG 59, M862, Reel 482, NARA.


5 Hunter, The Gospel of Gentility, xv-xvi, 13, 46, 51, 255, 265; Graham, Gender, Culture and Christianity, 89.

6 “List of American Citizens in Persia”, 1893, RG 59, M862, Reel 482, NARA; Arthur Brown to Robert Bacon, New York, 8 August 1907, RG 59, M862, Reel 482, NARA.

7 Dr. Mary Bradford to Dr. Arthur Mitchell, Tabriz, 18 May 1891, West Persia, Correspondence, Volume 8, Roll 124, PTS/PHS; Singh, Gender, Religion, and ‘Heathen Lands’, 216-218.


10 The question of pay levels for native workers plagued the entire history of the American mission. For typical problems during this period, see J.C. Mechlin to Dr. Arthur Mitchell, Salmas, 21 February 1891, West Persia, Correspondence, Volume 8, Roll 124, PTS/PHS; Miss C.O. Van Duzee to Mitchell, Salmas, 21 February 1891, West Persia, Correspondence, Volume 8, Roll 124, PTS/PHS; J.H. Shedd to Mitchell, Urumia,
28 February 1891, West Persia, Correspondence, Volume 8, Roll 124, PTS/PHS; Benjamin Labaree to Mitchell, Massachusetts, 11 July 1891, West Persia, Correspondence, Volume 8, Roll 124, PTS/PHS.

11 Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 24 May 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Benjamin Labaree to Mitchell, Urumia, 14 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Jessup, Tabriz, 28 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Mitchell, Salmas, 26 September 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Mitchell, Salmas, 10 October 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

12 Benjamin Labaree to Dr. Arthur Mitchell, Urumia, 14 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

13 Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 24 May 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Benjamin Labaree to Mitchell, Urumia, 14 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Mitchell, Salmas, 26 September 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Mitchell, Salmas, 10 October 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

14 Mechlin to Jessup, Tabriz, 28 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Mitchell, Salmas, 10 October 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.


16 Quote is from John Wright to Pratt, Salmas, 2 May 1890, FRUS 1890: 662-664. See also Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 15 May 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Wright to Jessup, Salmas, 8 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

17 Ibid.

18 Wright to Jessup, Salmas, 8 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

19 Consul-General Stewart to the Marquis of Salisbury, Tabriz, 10 August 1890, FO 60/516, PRO; Wright to Jessup, Salmas, 8 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Colonel C.E. Stewart to Pratt, Urumia, 24 May 1890: 662.

20 Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 15 May 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Jessup, 24 May 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Pratt to Blaine, Tehran, 26 May 1890, FRUS 1890: 660-661; Stewart to Pratt, Tabriz, 14 June 1890, FRUS 1890: 671.

21 Quote is from Benjamin Labaree to Mitchell, Urumia, 14 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS. For similar sentiments, see Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 24 May 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Jessup, Tabriz, 28 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Mitchell, Salmas, 26 September 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

22 Wright to Jessup, Salmas, 8 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.
Cecil G. Wood to U.S. Minister Hardy, Tabriz, 3 April 1899, FO 450/9, Embassy and Consular Archives, Iran, PRO; Wood to Wright, Tabriz, 21 October 1899, FO 450/9, PRO.

Quote is from Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 15 May 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS. See also Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 24 May 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Jessup, Tabriz, 28 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

For typical examples, see Frederick Coan to Mitchell, Urumia, 5 February 1892, Volume 8, MFR 124, PTS/PHS; John Tyler to John Hay, Tehran, 27 March 1899, RG 59, M223, Roll 9, NARA; Charles A. Douglas to Robert Speer, Tehran, 10 February 1903, Volume 186, PTS/PHS.

Stewart to Pratt, Tabriz, 2 August 1890, FRUS 1890: 686; Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 16 August 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

Stewart to Pratt, Urumia, 31 May 1890, FRUS 1890: 667.

Pratt to Stewart, Tehran, 12 June 1890, FRUS 1890: 668.

Pratt to Stewart, Tehran, 14 June 1890, FRUS 1890: 669; Wright to Jessup, Salmas, 8 June 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Wright to Jessup, Salmas, 16 August 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 16 August 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Wright to Gillespie, Salmas, 5 December 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

For transcripts of the trial, see FRUS 1890, pp. 676-683. See also, Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 16 August 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Pratt to Blaine, Tehran, 26 July 1890, FRUS 1890: 685-686; John Gillespie to James Blaine, New York, 16 September 1890, FRUS 1890: 692.

Pratt to Blaine, Tehran, 8 August 1890, FRUS 1890: 685-686; Stewart to Pratt, Tabriz, 3 August 1890, FRUS 1890: 687-688; Pratt to Stewart, Tehran, 8 August 1890, FRUS 1890: 689; William F. Wharton to Pratt, Washington, 198 September 1890, FRUS 1890: 691-692.

Wright to Gillespie, Salmas, 5 December 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Gillespie to Blaine, New York, 16 September 1890, FRUS 1890: 692.

John Tyler to J.C. Mechlin, Tehran, 24 November 1892, Volume 8, MFR 124, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Mitchell, Salmas, 2 December 1892, Volume 8, MFR 124, PTS/PHS.


36 Wright to Jessup, Salmas, 28 March 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.

37 Mechlin to Jessup, Khoi, 9 April 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Jessup, Khoi, 12 April 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS; Mechlin to Jessup, Salmas, 17 April 1890, MFR 123, PTS/PHS.


40 S.G. Wilson to Watson R. Sperry, Tabriz, 15 May 1893, RG 59, M223, Roll 6, NARA; Rev. Josiah Strong to Secretary of State, New York, 14 April 1893, RG 59, M223, Roll 6, NARA.

41 Wilson to Sperry, Tabriz, 11 May 1893, RG 59, M223, Roll 6, NARA; Elder, “History of the Iran Mission”, 27.


44 J.P. Cochran to Robert Speer, Urumia, 12 September 1903, Volume 198, PTS/PHS; Jennie Dean to Robert Speer, Urumia, 1903, Vol. 198, PTS/PHS.

45 Frederick Coan to John Tyler, Urumia, 28 June 1896, RG 59, M223, Roll 8, NARA; “Report”, Coan, 28 June 1896, RG 59, M223, Roll 8, NARA; J.P. Cochran to John Tyler, Urumia, 4 September 1897, RG 59, M223, Roll 8, NARA.


49 O.H. Parry to A.C. Wratislaw, Urumia, 13 December 1903, FO 449/8, Embassy and Consular Archives, Persia, PRO; Grant Duff to Wratislaw, Tehran, 4 January 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; Wratislaw to Duff, Tabriz, 18 January 1904, FO 449/8, PRO.


52 J.P. Cochran to Robert Speer, Urumia, 15 April 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS.

53 Wratislaw to Duff, Tabriz, 31 March 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; Tyler to the Mushir-ed-Dowleh, 2 June 1904, *FRUS* 1904: 664.

54 Home Letter of Mary Schaufler Labaree, Urumia, 19 March 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS; Wright to Speer, Tabriz, 29 March 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS; J.P. Cochran to Richmond Pearson, Urumia, 18 March 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; J.P. Cochran to A.C. Wratislaw, Urumia, 28 March 1904, FO 449/8, PRO.

55 Wratislaw to Pearson, Tabriz, 22 March 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; Cochran to Pearson, Urumia, 18 March 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; Wratislaw to Hardinge, Urumia, 16 June 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; W.A. Shedd to Robert Speer, Urumia, 2 June 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS.

56 Cochran to Speer, Urumia, 4 April 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS; Cochran to Pearson, Urumia, 4 April 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS; Cochran to Speer, Urumia, 15 April 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS; Cochran to Wratislaw, Urumia, 23 April 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS; Cochran to Fred Jessup, Urumia, 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS.

57 "Evidence in the Murder Case of Rev. B.W. Labaree of Urumia," J.P. Cochran, Urumia, 7 May 1904, FO 449/8, PRO.

Cochran to Pearson, Urumia, 4 April 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; Wratislaw to Hardinge, Urumia, 22 May 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; Wratislaw to Hardinge, Urumia, 5 June 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; Wratislaw to Hardinge, Urumia, 22 June 1904, FO 449/8, PRO; Tyler to Hay, Tehran, 8 August 1904, RG 59, M223, Roll 11, NARA; Tyler to the Eyn-ed-Dowleh, Tehran, 7 August 1904, *FRUS* 1904: 672-673; Pearson to the Secretary of State, Tehran, 23 February 1906, *FRUS* 1906: 1213-1214; Hardinge to Valiahd, Tehran, 28 February 1905, FO 449/8, PRO; Wratislaw to Hardinge, Tabriz, 13 March 1905, FO 449/8, PRO; Wratislaw to Hardinge, Tabriz, 25 March 1905, FO 449/8, PRO; Wratislaw to Hardinge, Tabriz, 30 March 1905, FO 449/8, PRO; J.P. Cochran to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 29 April 1905, Vol. 200, PTS/PHS.

Shedd to Speer, Urumia, 19 March 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS; Tyler to Hay, Tehran, 21 September 1904, *FRUS* 1904: 673-674; Hardinge to Wratislaw, Tehran, 2 May 1904, FO 449/8, PRO.


Mary Schauffler Labaree to Pearson, Urumia, 6 December 1905, *FRUS* 1905: 724-725.


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J.P. Cochran to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 29 April 1905, Vol. 200, PTS/PHS.

O.H. Parry to Wratislaw, Urumia, 31 January 1905, FO 449/8, PRO; Hardinge to Wratislaw, Tehran, 28 February 1905, FO 449/8, PRO; J.P. Cochran to John Tyler, Urumia, 17 January 1905, RG 59, M223, Roll 11, NARA; Pearson to J.L. Potter, Tehran, 7 November 1905, RG 59, M223, Roll 11, NARA; Pearson to Hay, Tehran, 25 May
1905, RG 59, M223, Roll 11, NARA; Benjamin Laberee (Sr.) to Robert Speer, Urumia, 11 April 1905, Vol. 200, PTS/PHS; Home Letter of Mary Laberee, Urumia, 12 March 1904, Vol. 199, PTS/PHS; Grant Duff to Foreign Office, Tehran, 8 October 1905, FO 449/9, PRO.

67 W.A. Shedd to Pearson, Urumia, 16 March 1906, RG 59, M223, Roll 11, NARA; Pearson to Shedd, Tehran, 5 April 1905, RG 59, M223, Roll 11, NARA.

68 Wratislaw to Hardinge, Tabriz, 11 June 1905, FO 449/9, PRO; Cochran to Pearson, Urumia, 18 June 1905, FO 449/9, PRO; Wratislaw to Hardinge, Tabriz, 9 July 1905, FO 449/9, PRO; Hardinge to Wratislaw, Gulahek, 22 July 1905, FO 449/9, PRO; Wratislaw to Pearson, Tabriz, 1 August 1905, FO 449/9. PRO.

69 J.N. Wright to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 16 December 1907, Vol. 202, PTS/PHS.

CHAPTER 5

THE LEGEND OF HOWARD BASKERVILLE: AMERICAN MISSIONARIES AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION OF 1907-1911

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1907-1911 was a watershed both in the history of modern Iran and of American missionary involvement in the country. For modern Iran, the Constitutional Revolution was the culmination of social and political protest against monarchical totalitarianism and imperial encroachment that began in the 1890s. For the missionaries, the revolution marked a change in attitude among the Iranian people toward the West and, to a lesser extent, Christianity as well. Although the missionaries tried unsuccessfully to remain aloof from politics, their political involvement during the revolution actually aided their work afterwards.

Several events occurred during the revolution that greatly increased the stock of the missionaries among the Iranian people. The most famous of these events was the "martyrdom" of short-term educational missionary Howard Baskerville, who resigned his post as a mission teacher and enlisted with the nationalists but died in his first military engagement on their behalf. After Baskerville's seemingly pointless death, Iranian nationalists created a legend around the young American that gave the impression that all Americans, unlike their European counterparts, were freedom-loving revolutionaries.
willing to die for the cause of democracy. The arrival of another young American, financial advisor Morgan Shuster in 1911, reinforced this impression. During his short term as Treasurer-General of Iran, Shuster, like Baskerville, clashed dramatically with the imperial powers in the country, especially Russia, which earned him the admiration of the Iranian people. Finally, although there were notable exceptions, the missionaries overall favored the nationalist forces over the royalists during the revolution and provided shelter and asylum to the families of nationalists during the conflict.

The Constitutional Revolution changed the entire course of the missionaries’ activities in the country and opened doors that were previously closed to them. Prior to the Constitutional Revolution, the missionaries focused their efforts on Iran’s Christian and Jewish minorities, hoping to reach Muslims indirectly through them. After the revolution, the missionaries’ hope of working directly with Muslims gradually became a reality. The missionaries reported that the Constitutional Revolution had created a “New Persia,” in which the prospects for preaching the Christian Gospel directly to all of Iran seemed brighter than ever.

The Constitutional Revolution and Baskerville

One of the key events in the history of modern Iran was the Constitutional Revolution of 1907-1911, which was a cousin to the failed Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Young Turks revolt of 1906. The Constitutional Revolution was led by an unlikely coalition of the intelligentsia (which was largely Western-educated or influenced), members of the dissident clergy, the bazārī merchant class, and the Bakhtiyari tribal confederation. The nationalists (also known as constitutionalists)
demanded the promulgation of a constitution that would clearly delineate the powers of
the monarchy and give the people a direct role in their own governance through the
establishment of a parliament or Majlis.

The uprising was anti-imperial as well. Iran was a key piece in the so-called
“Great Game”, the imperial rivalry between the British and Tsarist Russian empires over
the vast territory of Central Asia and the Middle East. As a result of the periodic
presence of foreign troops on Persian soil and the granting of monopolistic concessions to
foreign individuals and governments, most Iranians believed that Iran was being sold
piecemeal to foreign powers. In 1907, the ailing Muzaffar ad-Din Shah agreed to the
promulgation of a constitution based on the Belgian model. He died days after signing
the Fundamental Law, however, and his successor, Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar, assumed
the throne. Mohammad Ali, with the help of Russian troops, bombarded the Majlis in
1908, setting off a civil war between the Royalists, with the help of the Russians, and the
Constitutionalists, a diverse group of reformers who enjoyed indirect support from the
British.

It was in this revolutionary atmosphere that Howard Baskerville, a short-term
mission schoolteacher who taught in Tabriz during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution,
entered Iran. Born in 1885 in Nebraska, Baskerville apparently entertained ideas of
becoming a Presbyterian minister. After receiving his Bachelor’s degree in History from
Princeton University in 1907, he applied to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions,
which decided to send him to the mission-run Memorial School in the northwestern city
of Tabriz. There he taught English, history, and science to Iranian high school age young
men for a two-year term that began in 1907.

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The city of Tabriz was in a state of general upheaval during most of Baskerville’s time at the school. A local revolutionary movement arose in tandem with the rise of the national constitutional movement. Although the Valiahd, or Crown Prince, administered the city before the revolution, a local council (anjuman) administered all civil affairs after the adoption of the Fundamental Law in 1907. Nonetheless, the state of affairs in Tabriz was relatively calm until 1908 when Mohammad Ali Shah suspended the Constitution, closed the Majlis, and bombarded the Parliament building with the aid of Russian troops. This action sparked an immediate military uprising in the provinces, including Tabriz. Mujāhidīn, or fighters as they were called in Persian, organized themselves into voluntary militia units and fought the Russian-trained forces of the Shah. As Tehran fell completely into the hands of the monarchy, Tabriz remained the most important outpost of constitutionalism in Iran. As a result, the Shah sent several military expeditions to the provincial capital to force it to submit to his rule. Each of these military campaigns degenerated into lengthy sieges of the city proper, resulting in a great deal of physical hardship for all residents of Tabriz.

As a mission teacher at the Memorial School, Baskerville came into daily contact with people and events connected with the revolution. The Iranian teachers at the school were uniformly in favor of the constitutionalists. In fact, Baskerville’s fellow teacher and friend, Mirza Husayn Sharifzadeh, was a key figure in the constitutional movement in Tabriz until his assassination in 1908. By all accounts, Baskerville was greatly affected by his friend’s death. In addition, the school drew its student body from the bazārī class, intelligentsia, the nobility, and a few from the clerical class, precisely the same factions (with the exception of the nobility) that composed the constitutional coalition. As a
result, most of Baskerville’s students were either active in or sympathetic to the revolutionary movement.⁶

Official mission policy, as well as the neutral role in Iran for the United States as proscribed by the Persian-American Friendship Treaty of 1856, prevented Baskerville from providing anything more than his private sympathy for the nationalist movement.⁷ As a result, Baskerville remained outwardly neutral until the second siege of Tabriz, which began early in 1909. At the outset of the siege, Tabriz appeared to be the sole remaining bastion of resistance to the Shah and had only enough food to hold out for three months. The constitutional forces, headed by Bagher Khan and Settar Khan, appeared to be on the verge of failing, particularly in view of the likely invasion of regular Russian troops from the north.⁸

Despite mission regulations preventing missionary involvement in political affairs, Baskerville resigned from his position at the Memorial School on 1 April 1909 and joined the mujāhidīn as the city’s food supplies neared depletion. Despite his complete lack of prior military experience, he immediately turned his attention to teaching American military tactics to a force of 100-200 recruits, most of whom were his former students. After “drilling” this mostly raw force, which Baskerville named the fauj-i nījāt, or “Salvation Regiment”, for about three weeks, his unit was called into action at the battle of Sham Ghazan. The night before the battle, half of Baskerville’s force deserted him and most of the rest broke ranks and fled when his unit came under fire, leaving the mission teacher with only about a dozen troops. Baskerville, however, advanced on a heavily-defended Royalist artillery position manned by Russian-trained Persian Cossacks. When he came into sight of the enemy’s position, he emerged from a
position of cover to lead the final charge. He was immediately shot in the chest, after firing only one shot of his own. He gave the order for his remaining troops to take cover and then died.⁹

The constitutional forces for which Baskerville fought and died did not carry the battle that day. The siege was lifted a few days later after the Russian and British consuls in Tabriz negotiated a deal between the Royalist forces and Settar Khan, the leader of the nationalist forces in Tabriz. Under the terms of the agreement, the siege would end and food would be transported into the city in exchange for the reimposition of royal and Russian authority. The nationalist forces, running low on both food and supplies, had no other choice but to submit at that time, especially in view of the fact that Russian troops were threatening to intervene en masse in support of the Shah. Although initially a defeat for the constitutionalists, nationalist factions marched on Tehran later that same year and deposed the Shah in favor of his young son Ahmad, who swore to honor the constitution as a precondition to his inauguration.

Despite the insignificance of Baskerville’s sacrifice from a military perspective, Baskerville’s death had an enormous impact on how Iranians viewed Americans and revealed the underlying tensions between American missionaries, diplomats, and Iranian nationalism. Missionaries, diplomats, and Iranian politicians all crafted various self-serving mythologies out of the Baskerville affair that continued to circulate for decades after his death and had a positive impact on mission work.
Baskerville’s Motivations

In view of the importance of Baskerville’s own motivations in the competing legends that emerge after his death, it is important to establish what drove him to sacrifice his life for Iranian constitutionalism. Several considerations influenced Baskerville’s decision to resign from the Memorial School. Undoubtedly, his pro-nationalist sympathies played a much more central role than the protection of American lives, which he claimed was his sole motivation. He also entertained an overly-optimistic opinion of his own abilities and underestimated the fighting abilities of the Iranians on both sides. Finally, the tensions inherent within the ideology of mission that permeated missionary activities in Iran had a deep impact on Baskerville and may have even played a part in his death.

According to Baskerville’s official correspondence with American diplomats, his primary motivation was the protection of American missionary lives and property. The perception among some of the missionaries was that their personal safety was in jeopardy as a result of the lawless conditions that reigned during the revolution. During the siege, some especially feared that if the Royalists prevailed, a ruthless pillaging of the city that threatened all who resided in it would certainly follow. Some missionaries pointed out that the Royalists could not prevent their own troops, especially the Qareh-Daghi tribe, from pillaging towns loyal to the Shah. Baskerville cited one such incident in his resignation letter to the American Consul in Tabriz, William Doty, and attributed his decision to fight for the nationalists to his desire to help the constitutional government protect all the citizens of Tabriz from “lawless raping and murder”.10
In view of other missionary documents, however, and his correspondence with American diplomats, the protection of missionary lives and property seems to have been only a secondary motivation at best. What is more, the threat of personal injury to missionaries and mission property, appears to have been quite modest. Most missionaries and diplomats in Tabriz believed that American citizens and their property were quite safe in spite of the general disorder that prevailed. The nationalist forces that controlled the city were on very good terms with the missionaries, who had given shelter to war refugees and even the families of prominent nationalists during the fighting. Both before and after Baskerville’s death, various missionaries reported in their official correspondence with the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions that Americans were quite safe, despite the upheaval. Immediately after Baskerville’s death, U.S. Ambassador John B. Jackson reported that he believed the danger to Americans during the struggle to have been “considerably exaggerated”.

Furthermore, Europeans were generally left alone because they were protected by the series of Capitulations that had been forced upon Iran during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. American citizens were not officially protected by the Capitulations but the U.S. government made it clear that in the event of any damage to the lives or property of its citizens, it would seek redress through reparations, as it had done on previous occasions.

Neither side had anything to gain from killing Americans or Europeans. As a result, it appears that Baskerville’s claim that he was fighting to protect American lives and property in Tabriz was an effort to legally justify his intervention to U.S. diplomats, who openly opposed his actions.

A more important motivation for Baskerville was his deep sympathy with the goals of the movement itself. Liberal nationalists, mostly Iranians who had received a
Western-style education, were one of the most important factions to participate in the Constitutional Revolution. While the religious faction among the revolutionaries wanted to create a constitutional regime based on the precepts of Islamic law, the liberal nationalists advocated a constitutional monarchy based on the notions of equality, political liberty, democratic participation in civil affairs, and the separation of church and state. Baskerville saw the Constitutional Movement as evidence of an awakening in the East and the continuation of the same elements that resulted in the American Revolution. He also saw nationalist military commander Settar Khan as the George Washington of Iran.

In addition to Baskerville's youthful idealism and his enthusiastic support of the constitutional movement, his paternalistic notion of the inferiority of the Iranian constitutionalists also played a role and may have contributed directly to his death. In keeping with the ideology of mission that motivated the missionaries, Baskerville brought to Iran an unquestioned belief in Western superiority and sympathized with the Constitutional Revolution in part because the result was to make Iran more like Western Europe and the United States. Specifically, he believed that a major reason why the constitutional forces in Tabriz were losing was because they lacked the discipline and training necessary to press the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. This is one reason why he believed that the mujahidin were desperately in need of Western-style military training. Although it is unlikely that Baskerville had any prior military experience, he naively believed that a regiment of Iranian soldiers trained by him could end the siege of Tabriz in no time. One of his fellow missionaries, Frederick Coan, reported that "[h]is
hope was to be able to drill a few troops into such state that they could break through the investing lines and relieve the situation."^16

The reality of the situation would be far different. Baskerville made two crucial mistakes that turned out to have fateful consequences for him. On the one hand, he underestimated the military capability of both the mujāhidīn and the Royalist forces. Perhaps stemming from the recent American victory over the Spanish empire in 1898, Baskerville entertained dreams of heroism that were given credence by the opinions of his fellow missionaries. Most of the other missionaries in the Tabriz station had a low opinion of the fighting abilities of Iranian soldiers on both sides. They argued that if the Constitutional troops were trained in Western fighting techniques, then the Royalist forces would not stand a chance, a notion that Baskerville accepted without question. As a result, Baskerville pictured himself at the head of a military regiment under his command, leading a heroic charge against the forces of despotism, and championing the cause of freedom and justice in the East.^17 In reality, the long standoff in Tabriz was less the result of Iranian ineptitude than it was the unique circumstances of the siege.

His second mistake was in overestimating his own military capabilities. Despite his beliefs to the contrary, Baskerville was not up to the task of training 200 raw recruits in the short space of three weeks. Most of his troops were his former students who had never seen any kind of military training, much less combat. All were true believers in the cause but woefully ill-prepared to fight. The kind of training Baskerville oversaw did not improve their capabilities. In keeping with his low opinion of Iranian soldiers, he emphasized the importance of military discipline through drill. In other words, he taught them how to stand and march in formation, follow simple instructions (such as left-face,
right-face, and about-face). When there was enough time and ammunition, he also taught them how to fire their rifles.

Few, if any, of the constitutionalists shared Baskerville's optimistic vision of his regiment although they enthusiastically welcomed his help. In fact, according to Settar Khan, the troops in the Salvation Regiment were more pampered boys than soldiers. Baskerville, moreover, probably pressured Settar Khan into making a premature attack on the blockade at Sham Ghazan and allowing the Salvation Regiment to take the lead in the fighting. In order to hedge his bets against Baskerville's inevitable failure, however, Settar Khan refused to provide him with any cannon, fearing their probable capture by the Royalists. Baskerville's own troops did not share their leader's opinion of their abilities. Of course, the Salvation Regiment proved to be no match for the Russian-trained Royalist troops manning the blockade. In the end, Baskerville's low opinion of Iranian fighting techniques and his high opinion of himself cost him his life.

The Missionaries and Baskerville

Although Baskerville's political leanings were in line with most of the American missionaries, the extreme course of action he chose was unique. In many ways, Baskerville's relationship with the missionaries after his resignation reflected the complexity of the relationship between missionaries and the Iranian nationalism during the revolution. Outwardly, the Presbyterian missionaries adhered to the rule of political non-involvement. In private, however, they freely shared political opinions that often influenced their work and occasionally led them to play an open, albeit low-key, political role in Iranian affairs.
As previously discussed, American missionaries in Iran were motivated by an ideology of mission that was primarily, but not solely, religious in nature. Their stated objective was to Christianize Iran and the vast majority of their actions were aimed at that end. As a matter of law, the missionaries were prohibited from evangelizing the majority Shi’a Muslim population. During the first stage of their occupation of Iran (1832-1900), they concentrated their efforts on the minority Christian populations, such as the Nestorians and Armenians who predominantly resided in the northwest. The missionaries wanted to use these Iranian Christians as evangelists to reach the Moslem population of Iran. Although Iranian Christians too were prohibited from evangelizing Muslims, they were culturally more familiar with the Iranian population at large. Despite the official prohibition, American missionaries worked with the Muslim population of Iran directly and through the mediation of native Christians, both converts from Islam and Christian minorities.\(^{19}\)

The Constitutional Revolution was a key turning point for the American missionary movement. The liberals, as opposed to the ‘ulimā and the bazāris, used Western-inspired ideas to achieve Iran’s political independence from Great Britain and Russia, and to establish a constitution that limited the power of the Shah and allowed for a greater degree of democracy in government. The constitution itself was modeled on Belgium’s, in many ways foreshadowing a six-decade long infatuation of Iranians with all things Western.\(^{20}\) Iranian nationalists greatly admired Americans in particular and considered the United States to be “a free country,” unlike Iran, which was oppressed by foreign imperialists from without and royal dictatorship from within. The American Revolution against the British Empire, which remained one of the two great imperial
powers active in Iran during this time, greatly impressed the liberal nationalists. Both American missionaries and diplomats made much of the fact that the United States was ostensibly anti-imperial in its outlook. Iranian liberals also noted with approval the progressive ideas that missionaries taught in their school, such as political equality and democracy, because these ideas mirrored their own goals.^^

Missionaries fell into one of two camps; open but indirect support of the nationalist movement (the majority view) or contempt for the constitutionalists (the minority view). Not surprisingly, most of the missionaries recognized the importance of the constitutional movement and privately supported it. Although they refrained from giving direct support to the nationalists, their schools were often havens for revolutionary leaders, the curriculum mirrored the objectives of the constitutionalists, and they often provided unofficial asylum to the constitutionalists and their families. Considering the Constitutional Revolution's open embrace of Western ideas combined with a rejection of imperialism, it is not surprising that the majority of missionaries supported it. Indeed, according to U.S. Ambassador to Iran John B. Jackson, the "notorious sympathy of the missionaries in Tabriz (and elsewhere) with the nationalist cause" may have put Americans in Iran in jeopardy during the revolution.^^ A vocal minority of missionaries, such as J.N. Wright, dissented from the majority's support of the constitutionalists, however. Although the anti-constitutionalist missionaries were not in favor of reestablishing royal despotism in Iran, they were highly contemptuous of the constitutionalists, who, in their view, could not understand, much less implement, a Western constitution. The anti-constitutionalist missionaries were highly critical of their pro-nationalist colleagues. Indeed, one missionary called the Memorial School in Tabriz
where Baskerville taught a “hotbed for revolutionary activity” and blamed Baskerville’s death on pro-nationalist sentiments among the missionaries. Both the pro- and anti-constitutionalists among the missionaries were motivated by the same ideology of mission; the pro-constitutionalists, however, were more optimistic about the prospect of Iranians being able to reform themselves.

In Tabriz, the Baskerville affair brought all of these tensions within the missionary community and within their ideology of mission out into the open. Outwardly, the missionaries disavowed Baskerville after his resignation and publicly urged him to return to his teaching position at the school; privately, however, they gave him moral support for his actions by continuing to worship with him at church, to invite him to their homes for dinner, and to exchange information with him. In one case, some missionaries even sent their children to watch Baskerville train his troops. Such actions surely indicated their de facto approval of his action. The pro-nationalist missionary opinion of his actions can be summarized as follows; mission regulations required them to officially disapprove of his action but they admired him privately for it. The anti-constitutionalist missionaries, however, condemned his action and attributed it largely to the actions of their pro-constitutional colleagues. They blamed the pro-constitutional missionaries not only for fostering a pro-nationalist atmosphere that predisposed Baskerville to be sympathetic to the constitutionalists, but also for undermining the efforts of American diplomats to convince him to leave the nationalists and return to the mission.

It should be noted, however, that the gulf between the pro- and anti-constitutionalist missionaries was not quite as wide as it would appear. Although both
sides shared a belief in the inability of Iranians to sustain reform along Western lines through their own efforts, the pro-constitutionalists were much more optimistic about the cause of reform. In their eyes, the movement was probably destined to fail, due to Iranian incompetence and the opposition of the imperial powers, but it was still a step in the right direction. The pro-constitutionalists believed (and probably unconsciously inculcated this belief in Baskerville) that the main thing that was missing in the movement was Western leadership. They often noted the incompetence of the well-meaning but inexperienced constitutional military commanders and political leaders.

The missionary reaction to Baskerville’s death is instructive in this regard. The pro-constitutionalists held that Baskerville had done his best with what he had and had died as a result of Iranian incompetence. The harshest missionary criticism fell on Settar Khan, who they alternately labeled a coward, an opportunist, a reckless commander, or a superstitious fool. Some argued that the nationalist general deliberately let Baskerville charge without giving him the proper support. Others reported that Settar Khan had ordered a premature attack directly in opposition to Baskerville’s advice. In the most interesting, although almost certainly false, charge, one missionary stated that a superstitious Settar Khan had launched the ill-advised attack because the lots that he had cast were favorable. This entire line of thought portrayed Baskerville as superior, both morally and militarily, to Settar Khan, a superstitious, ignorant Iranian who had little idea how to fight a war.  

There are two important points to make in this regard. First, the Baskerville affair revealed the extent to which the official policy of the missionaries and their private actions varied. Second, the Baskerville affair revealed the contradictions inherent in the
ideology of mission. Although they were pro-reform and ostensibly pro-nationalist, they still viewed Iranians in a paternalistic way, believing that true reform in Iran required leadership and instruction from the West. This paternalistic viewpoint caused Baskerville to overestimate his own abilities and to underestimate those of the Iranians, which undoubtedly led to his death. For the missionaries, it meant that the pro-nationalists would place the blame for his death on the shoulders of nationalist leaders, such as Settar Khan.

**Baskerville and American Diplomats**

Just as American missionaries were the main focus of U.S. diplomatic activity in Iran, so Baskerville became the chief concern of the American consul in Tabriz early in 1909. American diplomatic relations with Iran were initiated in 1856 with the Treaty of Trade and Friendship, which mandated a neutral role for the United States in the country, and an American ambassador arrived in Iran twenty-six years later. The main concern of American diplomats in Iran was twofold; first, to look to the interests of the significant number of American missionaries residing in Iran; and second, to try to increase trade links between the two countries. Trade links, however, would not emerge until after the Second World War. As a result, most American diplomatic activity in Iran during this period focused on the missionaries.

Contrary to the view that sees missionaries as a direct extension of the U.S. government, the relationship between American diplomats and the missionaries was a rocky one. The missionary effort to convert Iranian Muslims, which was prohibited by Iranian law, caused no end of diplomatic problems, many of which required the
ambassador in Tehran to petition the royal court on behalf of the missionaries. The missionaries, for their part, largely condemned the diplomats for not sharing their goals for Iran and also for appearing reluctant to protect missionary lives and property. As a result, the missionaries sometimes sought aid and support from the British, who tried to use the missionaries as pawns to involve the United States more deeply in Iranian affairs on behalf of the British against Tsarist Russia. American ambassadors, in keeping with their official policy of neutrality, refrained from any joint ventures with the British and came to resent the missionaries. The missionaries also deemed the diplomats and their staff to be men of low personal character and condemned them for hosting parties in which there was widespread dancing, drinking, and the playing of cards, all of which was prohibited by Islamic law. Their opposition to these activities stemmed from the missionaries’ realization that Iranians judged Christianity on the behavior of individuals from so-called Christian nations (the U.S. as well as Great Britain and Russia). Although the missionaries led lives that adhered to their highest standards, the diplomats often did not.

In 1884, reflecting the strong missionary presence in northwestern Iran, the U.S. government opened a consulate in Tabriz. Because the first few consuls were unable to get along with the missionaries, the United States in 1906 sent Presbyterian-minister-turned-diplomat William Doty to mend fences with the missionaries in Tabriz. Unlike the American ambassador in Tehran, Doty personally shared in the ideals and evangelistic objectives of the missionaries. Despite his private sympathies, however, he loyally carried out the orders of the ambassador and tried as much as possible to ensure that the missionaries adhered to the American policy of neutrality. Doty was able to
balance these conflicting tensions for some time and the missionaries thought highly of him, at least until the Baskerville affair, which dashed improving relations between missionaries and diplomats. 29

The first signs of trouble ahead were the missionaries’ insistence on giving aid to refugees in the struggle and the decision on whether or not to fly the American flag over missionary property. The flag issue proved to be the easier of the two issues to resolve. When the civil war broke out in 1908 and there was widespread fighting in and around Tabriz, European and Ottoman citizens would fly the flags of their respective countries over their houses, giving notice that they were under the protection of that government. In the case of British and Russian citizens, this meant that they had extraterritorial rights in Iran. Despite their lack of extraterritorial rights, the American missionaries wished to fly the American flag for protection as well. At first, Consul Doty refused to give them permission, fearing that doing so would be a violation of American neutrality. After the missionaries appealed to Washington and Doty sought guidance from his superiors, the State Department authorized native-born American citizens to fly the flag over their households 30, while at the same time denying the privilege to the significant number of Armenian and Nestorian naturalized American citizens who resided in Tabriz. 31

A much more difficult problem was that the missionaries often provided shelter to refugees. The act of asylum, or bast-nishin as it was called in Persian, was of course an overtly political act and, as Doty suggested, in direct violation of the Treaty of Trade and Friendship. 32 The practice of bast had a long history in Iran. In the past, those accused of a crime could take refuge temporarily in a mosque without fear of molestation. 33 By this time in Iran, however, the preferred place to take refuge was in a foreign consulate in
Tehran or Tabriz. Britain and Russia took full advantage of this by providing shelter to political factions only when it was in their own best interests. For example, in 1907, the British embassy provided temporary refuge to several thousand demonstrators who issued demands for a constitution to the Shah from within its walls. This overtly political act by the British was apparently a decisive factor in the Shah’s decision to adopt the constitution. The United States, however, was anxious to avoid even the slightest hint of what the Russian and British embassies did as a matter of routine, fearing that if America was perceived as acting in alliance with either Great Britain or Russia, the other power was sure to be upset and would result in repercussions outside of Iran. Thus, American diplomats did everything they could to prevent the missionaries from informally providing refuge to revolutionaries or their families. Officially, there was a legal difference between the U.S. government providing refuge for political reasons and private American citizens providing refuge for humanitarian reasons but that distinction was a fine one and few individuals or governments paid much attention to it.

Indeed, American diplomats perceived the missionaries’ decision to provide shelter to refugees to be an overtly political act while the missionaries themselves insisted they were doing nothing more than providing shelter to the homeless and food for the hungry. Doty noted that the missionaries’ aid went overwhelmingly to constitutionalists, including some prominent nationalist leaders, and the missionaries also employed leading constitutional activists in their schools, such as Sharifzadeh. The State Department instructed Doty to order the missionaries to cease such activities but the missionaries deemed the order to be an unwarranted governmental interference in their private affairs. In addition, they believed the U.S. government was more concerned with maintaining
good relations between itself and Russia, Great Britain, and the royal government of Iran
than it was in promoting justice, alleviating suffering, and supporting the cause of
constitutional democracy. This bone of contention between the American consulate in
Tabriz and the missionaries was never satisfactorily resolved.34

Long before his resignation, Baskerville’s actions brought him into direct conflict
with American diplomats and the official policy of neutrality. Baskerville was
dissatisfied with the limited aid the missionaries gave to the constitutional forces and
sought to go further. At first, he limited himself to giving Settar Khan military
information. Doty reported several weeks before Baskerville’s resignation that the young
missionary provided the nationalist general with information on how to make bombs.
Doty ordered him to cease and desist, which Baskerville seemed to do. It was not long
after, however, that Baskerville resigned from the mission and enlisted with the
nationalists. Doty immediately went to Baskerville and urged him to reconsider. He also
asked the headmaster of the school, S.G. Wilson, to pressure him in this regard.
Although Baskerville wavered for a bit, he ignored Doty’s petition.35

As previously mentioned, Doty cared for Baskerville as a friend and was greatly
concerned for his safety. He considered Baskerville’s action to be rash and foolhardy and
feared that it put the lives of other Americans in Iran in jeopardy. Doty acted as
decisively as he could to try to get him to change his mind. At first, he informed
Baskerville that he would no longer be under the protection of the American government
in case of trouble. This had no effect, especially since it appears that the mission teacher
had little regard for his own life. Then Doty threatened to try Baskerville in consular
court for violating American neutrality and deporting him to the United States. This was,
however, an empty threat since any direct action against Baskerville probably would have violated American neutrality even further by portraying the United States as sympathetic to the Royalist cause. At any rate, Doty had no one at his disposal who could carry out the arrest. When this gambit failed, Doty asked Baskerville to at least turn in his passport and declare himself to be a man without a country. Baskerville refused, saying that as an American citizen he was free to do whatever he wished. In addition, he viewed his action to be completely in line with American support for freedom and democracy and its opposition to imperialism.36

Doty failed to get his friend to change his course of action. It was Doty, interestingly enough, who foresaw the end result of his rashness. He reported a week before the battle of Sham Ghazan that he feared for Baskerville’s life. Unlike Baskerville or the missionaries, Doty recognized Baskerville’s youthful naivete and did not believe that Baskerville’s rash actions could have any but negative results. Doty also divined a secret motivation for Baskerville’s action. He reported in a confidential letter to Ambassador Jackson that Baskerville had been in love with the 16-year-old daughter of Samuel G. Wilson, the headmaster of the Memorial School and senior missionary at Tabriz. Although it is clear that Wilson had a high regard for the twenty-five-year-old Baskerville, he forbade the relationship between them because of the disparity in their ages and also because his daughter still needed to go to the United States for an extended period to receive an education.37 Doty reported that Baskerville was heartbroken by this development and moved out of the Wilsons’ house. Doty believed that Baskerville had little regard for his own life after his relationship with Agnes ended. While this is an intriguing explanation for Baskerville’s actions, there is no other independent
confirmation of his relationship with the younger Wilson. What is clear from the letters of both Samuel Wilson and his wife Annie Rhea Wilson, is that they thought the world of Baskerville and were greatly grieved to hear of his death. Seyyid Hassan Taghizadeh, a prominent constitutionalist who later became Iran's representative to the U.N., noted that when he delivered the news of Baskerville's death to Mr. Wilson, that he turned away toward the window while streams of tears rolled down his cheeks.

Doty himself was greatly grieved by the entire affair and although he deeply disagreed with what Baskerville had done, he could not help but admire him for it. A few months after Baskerville's death, the State Department transferred Doty out of Iran, probably at his own request. At any rate, his relations with the missionaries had become quite strained and some even held him responsible for the young missionary's death, despite the lack of any logical basis for such a claim.

The Rise of the Baskerville Legend

Although part of Baskerville's significance lies in the tensions the affair revealed within the missionaries' ideology of mission, the complexity of their relationship with Iranian nationalism, and the troubled state of missionary-diplomat relations, the most enduring feature of the Baskerville affair was the mythic proportions which his legend took on both inside and outside of Iran. The first wave of myth-making came immediately after his death. The second wave would peak on the fiftieth anniversary of his death and continue to reemerge, especially in Iranian literature, throughout the twentieth century. The legend of Howard Baskerville varied from group to group and
each of their respective legends, or at least the morals they purported to demonstrate, contradicted one another and bore little resemblance to what actually happened.

Interestingly enough, the group that had the most to gain from the Baskerville legend, the missionaries, used it the least. As previously mentioned, the missionaries in Tabriz were all greatly grieved by Baskerville's untimely death, despite their ambivalence toward his actions. As a result, they created a legend of their own about the exploits of the young American school teacher that served both to make sense of his death and to legitimize their own goals and objectives in Iran. The chief creator of the missionary version of the Baskerville legend was Presbyterian missionary Annie Rhea Wilson.

The missionaries' version of the Baskerville affair, recorded primarily in the correspondence between Wilson, the Baskerville family in Nebraska, and the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, is closely related to the ideology of mission that the missionaries brought to Iran, an ideology which espoused religious idealism and beneficent humanitarianism toward Iranians while conversely viewing them as developmentally inferior and in need of outside guidance. As a result, the missionary version downplayed Baskerville's pro-constitutional sympathies in favor of his religious idealism while the Iranian constitutionalists were portrayed as superstitious and incompetent.

Wilson ascribed Baskerville's actions to "his devotion to Christ and the Mission cause", which she deemed to be "the ruling motive of his life." According to this view, Baskerville's primary goal was to convert the Muslims of Iran to Christianity. In particular, Wilson and other missionaries attributed his support of the nationalist cause to
his desire to bring about religious liberty in Iran, which would greatly benefit the missionaries. They also portrayed Baskerville to Iranians, both at his widely-attended funeral and afterwards, as a Christ-like figure who died for Iran. Wilson and others saw Baskerville as a living, or rather dying, example of the Christian principle of self-sacrifice for the salvation of others. At his funeral, the missionaries preached an evangelistic message based on the biblical passage of John 15: 12-13, which stated “Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends.” Wilson also noted that some of the missionaries, most likely those who were anti-constitutional in their sympathies, sneered that the Persians were not worthy of his sacrifice. Instead of refuting the point, Wilson and others replied with Romans 5:8, which states “In that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”, thereby exaggerating the beneficence and wisdom of Baskerville’s sacrifice and conceding the unworthiness of Iranian nationalists.41

This latter point was made explicit by the way Baskerville’s rashness and naivete were cleansed from the text of the missionary legend and also how it portrayed Settar Khan and his troops. Indeed, Baskerville comes across as the lonely voice of restraint and wisdom within the ranks of the constitutionalists, who were portrayed as superstitious, cowardly, and incompetent. As previously mentioned, Wilson stated that Baskerville urged Settar Khan not to attack but that Settar Khan persisted because he had cast lots which were favorable. Wilson also asserted that Settar Khan turned coward at the last minute and withheld artillery support while letting Baskerville press on. Wilson and other missionaries also pointed out that most of Baskerville’s Salvation Regiment had fled by the time of the charge at Sham Ghazan.42
Some aspects of the missionary legend ring true while others do not. There is no doubt that religious idealism probably played some role in Baskerville’s course of action but their view of him as a martyr for the Christianization of Iran is a bit far-fetched. As previously demonstrated, it is clear that his support of the cause of constitutional liberty outweighed all other considerations. At the same time, it is clear that Baskerville’s sense of mission and the missionaries’ ideology of mission emerged from a common source. Baskerville certainly did sacrifice himself for a cause but it was not necessarily, at least not primarily, to convert Muslims. There is no indication whatsoever that Baskerville preached Christianity to any of his followers after his resignation. In addition, he never once mentioned the cause of religious liberty as a motivation for his actions in the few letters of his that have survived.

Missionaries were not the only ones to create a self-serving mythology out of the Baskerville affair. Iranian constitutionalists did the same thing, although their narrative was substantially different from that of the missionaries. The chief similarity between the two narratives is Baskerville’s role as a martyr. Instead of dying for religious liberty or spreading the Christian faith to Iranian Muslims, Baskerville died a martyr to the constitutional cause in the nationalist version of events. Probably the most influential work that shaped the perception of Baskerville, and the role of individual Americans in Iran, was Ahmad Kasravi’s two-volume work *Tārīkh-i Mashrūṭiy-yi Airan* [The History of the Iranian Constitution], first published in 1938. Kasravi’s work is in many ways the starting point for scholars of the Constitutional Revolution. It is both a secondary history and a primary source because Kasravi was a first-hand observer of many of the events he described and also because he quoted at length historical documents and interviews he
conducted. In this work, which set the stage for future interpretations of the struggle, Kasravi described the movement as a battle between the forces of despotism (the Shah and the imperial powers of Russia and Great Britain) and the forces of progress. He went into detail regarding Baskerville, relying on the testimony of eyewitnesses, including several of the surviving members of the Salvation Regiment, and correspondence with American missionaries. The result is probably one of the more accurate accounts of the events leading up to Baskerville’s death.43

Kasravi described Baskerville as an idealistic young man who joined the mujāhidīn out of a sense of solidarity with their struggle for liberation. For Kasravi, however, Baskerville did not appear as one who urges restraint to Settar Khan, but rather as a hopelessly idealistic young man fighting against great odds for a cause greater than himself. Kasravi did not overlook the fact that Baskerville was ill-prepared for the military role he took on for himself; however, this served only to enhance his reputation as a martyr or shahīd in a culture that honored martyrs, not unlike Christianity. Kasravi also described Baskerville as a fidāyī, or heroic fighter for the faith, in this case meaning not necessarily Islam but a nationalist movement that had appropriated Islamic symbols.44 Kasravi uses fidāyī and shahīd with regard to Baskerville as complimentary terms of the highest order.

The most interesting aspect of Kasravi’s narrative was his discussion of Baskerville’s funeral. The missionaries by and large described it as a chance to preach the gospel of Christ to a larger and more receptive audience than they ever had seen in the past. They noted with great pleasure the large crowds that had turned out to mourn the loss of one of their own. They can probably be forgiven as well for believing that
Baskerville's blood would water the seeds of the Gospel that they had been sowing for the last seven decades. As U.S. Consul Doty saw it, however, the funeral quickly got out of control and was marked by a large degree of anti-missionary and anti-American sentiment. He reported that the constitutionalists forced the idea of a large, public ceremony for Baskerville on the missionaries, who had little control over how it was conducted. The missionaries did indeed conduct the ceremony but the 3,000 Iranians in attendance, most of whom were mujāhidīn and prominent Constitutionalists, controlled the escorting of Baskerville's body to the graveyard and its interment. Doty made note of the fact that at least one speaker condemned the missionaries and the American government for the immoral policy of neutrality during this struggle between freedom and despotism. According to Kasravi, however, the funeral was neither of the above. Rather, it was the very public expression of grief by the city of Tabriz over the loss of a young American who fought and died for the freedom of a people who were not his own. Kasravi also used the metaphor of blood but instead of watering the seeds of Christianity, Baskerville's sacrifice watered the seed of political liberty.

Kasravi made no distinction between the U.S. government and the actions of Baskerville. Although he mentioned the efforts of Doty to convince him to return to his post at the Memorial School, there is no accompanying condemnation of the American policy of neutrality. In Kasravi's account, Baskerville's actions demonstrated that the U.S. was radically different from the imperial powers, especially when contrasted with the actions of British and Russian citizens in Iran. Baskerville's dedication to the ideals of freedom and democracy greatly impressed the constitutionalists, who honored Baskerville to an extent unheard of for any other westerner. Some of the
constitutionalists commissioned a rug to be woven commemorating his sacrifice at the battle of Sham Ghazan. In addition, Seyyid Hassan Taghizadeh, who at that time was a delegate to the Majlis, gave a speech in honor of the young schoolteacher in the opening session of the second Parliament on November 15, 1909.47

The Shuster Mission and American Missionaries

The Iranian nationalist version of the Baskerville affair would prove to be far more influential and widely accepted than the missionaries’ interpretation. Apparently, the Baskerville affair was so extraordinary that it did not fit easily into the missionary narrative and consequently the missionaries rarely invoked Baskerville’s memory at all. Indeed, the few missionaries who wrote about the history of the Iran mission during this period barely mention Baskerville. On the other hand, the growing Iranian nationalist movement did widely commemorate Baskerville, which had an short- and long-term impact on Iran’s relations with the United States.

The widespread currency of the Baskerville legend played a role in the decision of the Iranian Parliament to invite American financial advisor Morgan Shuster in 1910 to reform Iran’s financial affairs. The reasons that Iranian leaders cited for inviting an American reflect the image of America as portrayed in the nationalist version of the Baskerville legend. For example, in contrast to the anti-constitutional regime of Mohammad Ali Shah, the U.S. was ostensibly a free country in the mind of Iranian nationalists and hopefully would not let the revolution in Iran fail. In addition, the U.S. was seen as anti-imperial while Great Britain and Russia, who had officially divided Iran into spheres of influence in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, were seen as imperial
threats to Iranian sovereignty. The impression left by Baskerville and his missionary colleagues, who continually emphasized in their schools their support of freedom, democracy, and human rights, greatly influenced Iranian perceptions of the United States. Baskerville's personal and dramatic sacrifice in support of the Constitution impressed the Majlis of America's good intentions.  

In terms of actual results, Shuster, like Baskerville, accomplished little during his short stay of less than one year in Iran. The Majlis gave Shuster, who arrived in Iran in 1911, a mandate to serve as Treasurer-General and provided him with "full and complete powers in the handling of finances" that theoretically would enable him to carry out reforms. Shuster, an attorney from Washington, D.C. who had also served as the Treasurer-General of the Philippines, had no official connection with the American government. Unfortunately for Iran, several intractable problems confronted Shuster, most notably the opposition of the imperial powers, a bureaucracy opposed to change, and his own limited knowledge of Iranian affairs. According to historian M. Reza Ghods, Shuster's "zealous collection of taxes and customs duties in both north and south earned him the enmity of large landowners, tribal khans, and the shah's court, as well as Britain and Russia."  

Despite the opposition of domestic forces, the end of the Shuster mission was most directly attributable to imperial opposition. Great Britain and Russia had previously settled their imperial differences over Iran and elsewhere in the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907, in which they divided Iran into respective spheres of influence. Shuster's pro-constitutionalist sympathies put him at odds with Russia from the very beginning of his short tenure. Matters came to a head when Shuster appointed a British
citizen to serve as the head of a tax-collecting gendarmerie, which included as part of its jurisdiction the Russian sphere of influence as defined by the Anglo-Russian Pact. Russia responded to Shuster's plan with an ultimatum: either the Majlis expel Shuster from Iran or Russian troops would advance on the capital. The Majlis reluctantly complied and Shuster left Iran in December of 1911.51

Despite his failure, Iranian nationalists viewed Shuster as another American martyr to their cause, which aided the missionary cause as well. The missionaries identified strongly with Shuster and his reform efforts and did what they could to help him. The mission provided Shuster and the other American advisers with Iranian translators educated in American missionary schools. Shuster also developed personal friendships with some of the missionaries in Tehran, especially Samuel Martin Jordan. After the Russian ultimatum, the students at the American High School for Boys in Tehran, run by American missionaries, went on strike and demonstrated on the streets in support of Shuster. Despite the fact that the official link between the Shuster mission and the missionaries was tenuous at best, the Iranian public came to view all Americans as people deeply sympathetic to the cause of liberty and democracy in Iran. This good feeling enabled missionaries to make a concerted and open effort to preach the Christian gospel to Muslims.52

In the eyes of many Iranian nationalists, Shuster and Baskerville seemed to be cut from the same cloth. Shuster, like Baskerville, was motivated by an ideology of mission that informed his actions. While Baskerville and the missionaries were concerned primarily with Christianizing Iran, Shuster and the American financial mission were concerned with placing Iran on a sounder financial footing. Both entities believed that
their respective reform programs would benefit the other. The missionaries believed that reform on a Western model, which Shuster tried to implement, would result in an atmosphere more conducive to religious freedom and, consequently, the cause of Christianization. Shuster, for his part, saw the missionaries' effort to inculcate Christian values into Iranians as helpful to his task of reforming Iran along American Progressive lines. In fact, as previously mentioned, the vast majority of Shuster's Iranian support staff came from the missionaries' schools in Tehran. Indeed, Shuster's advocacy of Western-style reform combined with outspoken opposition to Western political imperialism dovetailed nicely with the missionaries' views.

Conclusion

Although the U.S. government would later develop a deep aversion to nationalism in the so-called Third World, including Iran, the sympathies of the missionaries during this time were overwhelmingly in favor of the constitutional movement. They deemed the Constitutional Revolution to be on a par with the American Revolution. The missionaries also believed that Iranians were not inherently inferior, just developmentally backward. Their ideology of mission, however, was riddled with contradictions. Although they believed Iranians were capable of reform, they by and large maintained that such reform had to be led or at least inspired by the West. These contradictory impulses, ideological support for the nationalist movement combined with a belief in their inability to pull it off by themselves, ultimately characterized the ambiguous relationship between the missionaries and Iranian nationalism and highlights one of the contradictions of their ideology of mission.
Baskerville embodied these contradictions and had an immense impact on how Iranians viewed America. After his death, he was widely celebrated as a national martyr, helping to create an enormous reservoir of goodwill among Iranians toward the United States. So too was Morgan Shuster, seen by many as another American martyr to totalitarianism and imperialism. Indeed, so ubiquitous was the public memory of Baskerville that even fifty years after his death, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the United States government tried to capitalize on the Baskerville legend in an attempt to make both their regimes more palatable to Iranian nationalists in the wake of the anti-Mossadegh coup of 1953.  

The Constitutional Revolution opened the door to direct missionary work with Muslims, but some obstacles within the missionary community remained. The divergence in goals and methods between the East and West Persia Missions constituted the chief obstacle. Simply put, West Persia, the numerically larger and older of the two missions, wanted to continue the focus on Iran’s minority communities while East Persia, more recently established, wanted to concentrate directly and primarily on Muslims. It would take another major conflagration, this time that of World War I, to fully commit all of the missionaries’ resources to directly evangelizing the majority Muslim population of Iran.
Notes


3 This term often carries religious implications. The root word is *jihād*, the Arabic word for holy war or struggle. *Mujāhid* is one who fights in a just and holy cause.

4 For the role of Tabriz in the Persian Constitutional Revolution, see especially Amir-Khizi, *Qīyām-i Azarbaǐjān va Satar Khān*. Rizazadeh-Shafaq, pp. 14-15; Arthur Moore, *The Orient Express*, (London: Constable and Company, 1914) pp. 1-3. Moore was an Irish journalist for the London Times who covered the Constitutional Revolution from Tabriz. He was the only other Westerner to take up arms with Baskerville to fight on the constitutional side. *The Orient Express* is his memoir of his time spent in Iran and Central Asia. See also Home Letter of Howard Baskerville, Tabriz, 11 April 1909, Volume 204, West Persia Correspondence 1909, Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS)/Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS).


6 John N. Wright to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 22 April 1909, PTS/PHS. See also Rizazadeh-Shafaq, pp. 15-16.

7 Missionaries did, however, provide refuge to the families of prominent nationalists, affording them de facto protection from the royalists. This was a matter that, of course, caused a great degree of tension between the missionaries and American diplomats, who expressly forbade such actions. For more information, see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1906-1910*. 

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8 Amir-Khizi, *Qīyām-i Azarbaštān*, p. 114; Home Letter of Howard Baskerville, Tabriz, 11 April 1909, Volume 204, PHS; Baskerville to William Doty, Tabriz, 1 April 1909, Volume 204, PHS.


11 William Shedd to Robert Speer, Urumia, 23 April 1909; Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Jackson to Root, Tehran, 1 February 1909, R.G. 59, NARA; item in quotes is from Jackson to Knox, Tehran, 24 April 1909, R.G. 59, NARA.


13 Yeselson, *United States-Persian Diplomatic Relations*, pp. 68-83, 175-177. Benjamin Labaree was an American missionary in Urumia who was murdered by Kurdish bandits in 1904. After a lengthy delay, the perpetrators were brought to trial and imprisoned for life. The American government, with the cooperation of the British government, put much pressure on the Iranian government to bring the perpetrators to justice and orchestrated the payment of a large indemnity to Labaree’s widow, against her wishes and those of the other American missionaries in the region.


15 Settar Khan’s reputation has seemed to swell with time. Although few would go as far as Baskerville did, most Iranian historians consider Settar Khan to be a significant nationalist hero of the Constitutional Revolution, a reputation which he largely deserves. For an alternative view of Settar Khan by the noted British Orientalist (and pro-Iranian nationalist) Edward G. Browne, see *The Persian Revolution*, p. 441. Browne refers to Settar Khan as a *lûtî* (brigand or scoundrel) turned *fīdāt* (devoted fighter for a cause). Browne argues that Settar Khan’s early military successes spoiled him. In conclusion, he
notes, “I have tried to be impartial, and I cannot admit either that Sattar is undeserving of praise, or that he merits the title of ‘the Persian Garibaldi’.”

16 Home Letter of Howard Baskerville, Tabriz, 11 April 1909, Volume 204, PHS/PTS; Baskerville to Doty, Tabriz, 1 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Annie Wilson to Dr. and Mrs. Baskerville, Tabriz, 20 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Quote is from the Bimonthly letter of F.G. Coan, Urumia, 5 June 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Bimonthly letter of the Tabriz Station, March and April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Kasravi, Tārīkh-i Mashrūthi-yi Airān, pp. 891-4.


18 Amir-Khizi, Qīyām-i Azarbājān, pp. 377-384; Rizazzadeh-Shafaq, Baskerville, pp. 16-22; Kasravi, Tārīkh-i Mashrūthi-yi Airān, pp. 894-896; Shedd to Browne, Urumia, 8 April 1910 (as quoted in Browne, The Persian Revolution, pp. 440-441).


20 Bayat, Iran’s First Revolution, pp. 36-37, 265; Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions, pp. 50-58, 61-69. Of course, the image of the West in Iran, as both Bayat and Abrahamian suggest, was far more complicated than either something to be emulated or execrated. Many who hated the encroachment of Western powers on Iran’s sovereignty believed that the only way to free Iran from imperialists was to adopt Western ways of doing things. The infatuation with the West in terms of technology and culture had almost completely waned by the 1960s. For an Iranian/Islamic viewpoint of Western culture on the eve of the Islamic Revolution of 1978, see Jalal Al-i Ahmad, Qarbzadegi, (Tehran: n.p., 1962).

21 Kasravi, Tārīkh-i Mashrūthi-yi Airān, p. 891; Sayyid Hassan Taghizadeh, Zindigi-yi Tāfāni: Khatirat-i Sayid Hasan Taqizadih (Teheran: Intisharāt-i Mohamad ‘Alī ‘Ilmi, 1989): pp. 31, 118-119, 120fn. Taghizadeh was an active nationalist who went on to have an active political career after the revolution and held such roles as Iranian ambassador to the U.N. after World War II. He was also a former student at the American mission school in Tabriz, where he learned English.

22 J.N. Wright to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 22 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; W.S. Vanneman to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, Tabriz, 17 February 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Quote is from John Jackson to Philander Knox, Tehran, 24 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Roll 483, NARA; William Doty to John Jackson, Tabriz, 13 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Roll 483, NARA. See also the voluminous correspondence in 205
FRUS and R.G. 59 over the controversy relating to missionaries taking in refugees, most of whom were nationalist in their political sympathies. W.F. Doty to Samuel G. Wilson, Tabriz, 28 July 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Roll 483, NARA; Robert Speer to Elihu Root, New York, 24 September 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Roll 483, NARA; Elihu Root to Robert Speer, Washington, 2 October 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Roll 483, NARA; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 28 December 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Roll 483, NARA; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 28 January 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Roll 483, NARA; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 9 February 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Roll 483, NARA.

23 Quote is from J.N. Wright to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 22 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS. Wright was the most outspoken of the pro-Royalist missionaries and was highly critical of the majority of his colleagues' nationalist sympathies. Somewhat paradoxically, however, in view of Wright's paternalistic viewpoints on Iranian politics, he was one of the few missionaries to marry an Iranian woman. His first wife, an American, died of disease soon after he arrived in Iran. His second wife, an Iranian Armenian woman, was killed by a disgruntled former teacher at the mission school in Tabriz, which resulted in an international incident involving the U.S. State Department. See chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of this incident. Some of the missionaries who would later entertain pro-nationalist sympathies attributed the incident to problems inevitably resulting from intermarriage with Iranians.

24 Baskerville to Doty, Tabriz, 1 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Annie Wilson to Dr. and Mrs. Baskerville, Tabriz, 20 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Bimonthly letter of the Tabriz Station, March and April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Home Letter of Frederick Jessup, Tabriz, 16 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; S.G. Wilson to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 19 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Annie Wilson to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 26 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Huntingdon Arlem to Robert Speer, telegram, Washington, 5 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Speer to Department of State, New York, 6 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Wilbur J. Carr to William F. Doty, Washington, 22 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 14 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Jackson to Knox, Tehran, 30 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA.

25 Annie Wilson to Dr. and Mrs. Baskerville, Tabriz, 20 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Home Letter of Frederick Jessup, Tabriz, 16 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS.


27 See especially the correspondence between the British embassy and the American legation in Tehran that resulted from the murder of missionary Benjamin Labaree in 1904. Foreign Relations of the United States 1904, pp. 656-677; FRUS 1905, pp. 722-734; FRUS 1906, pp. 1208-1217; FRUS 1907, pp. 941-948. See also Said Ali Mujani.
28 For an excellent example of this continuing issue of contention between the diplomats and missionaries, see J.N. Wright to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 30 January 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS.


31 Frederick Jessup to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 6 July 1908, Volume 203, PTS/PHS; Shedd to Doty, Urumia, 22 April 1908, Volume 203, PTS/PHS; S.G. Wilson to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 16 July 1908, Volume 203, PTS/PHS; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 9 February 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA.

32 Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 9 February 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA.

33 Even though *bast* was a common practice, it was also commonly violated by the state. For example, when Sayyed Jamal ad-Din al-Asadabadi [aka al-Afghani], the Iranian-born Islamic reformer, took refuge in a mosque in Tabriz to avoid arrest, Nasr-ad-Din Shah ignored tradition and had al-Afghani arrested and deported to the Ottoman Empire anyway.

34 W.F. Doty to S.G. Wilson, Tabriz, 28 July 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Robert Speer to Elihu Root, New York, 24 September 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Elihu Root to Robert Speer, Washington, 2 October 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Doty to the Assistant Secretary of State, Tabriz, 24 November 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; W.F. Doty to John B. Jackson, Tabriz, 28 December 1908, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; W.F. Doty to John B. Jackson, Tabriz, 28 January 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 9 February 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Frederick Jessup to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 6 July 1908, Volume 203, PTS/PHS; Shedd to Doty, Urumia, 22 April 1908, Volume 203, PTS/PHS; W.A. Shedd to Robert Speer, Urumia, 21 June 1908, Volume 203, PTS/PHS. See also Yeselson, *Persian-American Diplomatic Relations*, pp. 94-98.
Wilbur J. Carr (for Philander Knox) to William F. Doty, Washington, 22 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 5 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Baskerville to Doty, Tabriz, 1 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Jackson to Knox, Tehran, 14 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 14 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA.

Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 13 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA. Doty was the most prophetic of all the contemporary observers of the Baskerville affair.

There is no other corroboration of this relationship in any other reliable historical document. There is mention of it in another source, the Persian-language novel Baskarvîl va İnqilâb-i Airan, by 'Ali Kamalvand (Lalehzar Press, Tehran, 1957). Kamalvand based his research for the novel on interviews with those who knew Baskerville (mainly his former students and comrades-in-arms). In the fictional version, however, Baskerville and Agnes Wilson become engaged and their relationship is accepted by the Rev. and Mrs. Samuel Wilson, presumably to add a tragic romantic element to the story. It seems likely that there was a short-lived relationship between the two but it is impossible to determine just what impact it had on Baskerville's subsequent actions.

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Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 13 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Doty to Jackson, Tabriz, 14 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Shedd to Speer, Urumia, 17 November 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; Bimonthly letter of Tabriz Station, Margaret Holliday, 1 June–6 July 1910, Volume 205, PTS/PHS. Margaret Holliday noted that the missionaries "regret to lose [Doty]. He has been in cordial sympathy with the missionary work and by his upright conduct as a Christian gentleman has strengthened and upheld our hands."

Annie Wilson to Dr. and Mrs. Baskerville, Tabriz, 20 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; S.G. Wilson to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 19 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS;
See especially Annie Wilson to Dr. and Mrs. Baskerville, Tabriz, 20 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS. This lengthy letter describing the entire course of the Baskerville affair from the perspective of Mrs. Wilson, a close friend and admirer of Baskerville and the mother of his purported girlfriend, was addressed to Baskerville’s parents but was also forwarded to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in New York and excerpts of it were subsequently published for Presbyterian congregations in the U.S.

Kasravi, Tārīkh-i Mashrūtih-yi Airan, pp. 891-900.

Wilson to Dr. and Mrs. Baskerville, Tabriz, 20 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; J.N. Wright to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 22 April 1909, Volume 204, PTS/PHS; John B. Jackson to Philander C. Knox, Tehran, telegram, 23 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA; Jackson to Knox, Tehran, 20 April 1909, R.G. 59, M862, Reel 483, NARA.

Kasravi, Tārīkh-i Mashrūtih-yi Airan, pp. 899-900. For a foreigner to be given such an elaborate funeral in Iran was unheard of up to that time. It is no wonder that the funeral as a whole unsettled the missionaries and diplomats. The missionaries themselves ran the official aspects of the funeral, such as the service itself; however, a large crowd of thousands of Iranians waited outside the service and escorted his body to the cemetery, where the nationalists largely took over.


Although the Constitutional Revolution did not result in the complete triumph of Persian revolutionaries over the forces of monarchism and oppression, it nonetheless raised the hopes of American missionaries, who by and large supported the ideals of the constitutionalists. The Constitutional forces did ultimately defeat the ancien regime, as represented by Mohammad Ali Shah, after a series of protracted battles and repeated interference on the part of foreign powers. Contrary to the hopes of reformers, however, the ideals of the constitutionalists were never fully realized. The main obstacle to the establishment of a true constitutional monarchy in which the people would exercise some power in their own governance was the opposition of the imperial powers, especially Russia. The Russian ultimatum in 1911 that ousted American financial advisor Morgan Shuster marked the end of reform for more than a decade.

Nonetheless, the missionaries were excited at developments in Iran and felt that the door to the Muslim community, largely closed to them for the preceding 80 years, had finally opened. One reason for this new development was that the public largely viewed
the clergy as a whole as a bastion for reactionaries, although there were many clerics among the nationalists. While Islam itself was by no means discredited among the people, some of its leading practitioners were. Second, the Constitutional Revolution looked for inspiration to the West, particularly to France, Great Britain, and the United States. This infatuation with the West greatly increased the stock of the missionaries in the eyes of people whom they had never before been able to reach.

At least as important as the discrediting of the clergy was the public image of America in the eyes of most urban Iranians. During and after the revolution, Iranians came to view the United States and all its citizens in the country as staunch supporters of nationalism and reform. Although this viewpoint oversimplified the range of American responses to the revolution, it had some basis in fact. American diplomats were split between those who sympathized with the constitutionalists and those who sympathized with the royalists. Most American missionaries, however, supported the ideals of the revolution, although not to the extent of Howard Baskerville. At the same time, Iranians remembered Baskerville's martyrdom for the nationalist cause and assumed that all Americans thought as he. Shuster also shaped the Iranian viewpoint in this regard. His desire to modernize and reform the Iranian financial system met with defeat when the Russians demanded that the Majlis dismiss him. Although Shuster lived to tell the tale, he, like Baskerville, came to be viewed as a martyr for the nationalist cause. As a result, the stock of Americans rose dramatically and the stature of the missionaries, the chief and most numerous representatives of America in Iran, rose with it.
Although the constitutional cause faded for a time after 1911, the missionary effort increased. The missionaries received more funding from the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions and opened new schools and hospitals across northern Iran. The enrollment in existing schools increased across the board. Most important, the missionaries found increasing opportunities to preach the Christian gospel to Muslims. Although it is certainly true that the Constitutional Revolution removed few of the legal barriers that stood in the way of evangelistic efforts among Muslims, it eliminated the chief obstacle to such efforts: the general hostility toward and lack of interest in Christianity among individual Muslims.

The years immediately following the Constitutional Revolution were indeed full of opportunity for the missionaries to expand their efforts in Iran but the onset of World War I had a dramatic impact on the country for the following six years. Although Iran officially and repeatedly declared its neutrality during the war, neither the Central Powers nor the Allies respected it. Both sides alternately occupied Iran, and the turbulent northwest corner served as a battleground between opposing armies and ethnic groups. As the war played itself out in Iran, it degenerated into an ethnic civil war pitting Muslim against Christian, Armenian and Nestorian against Kurd and Persian, and town-dwellers versus marauding tribes.

The missionaries were drawn into the middle of these conflicts and, until the United States officially entered the war in 1917, provided unofficial, but effective, sanctuary for thousands of refugees, primarily Christians and often Muslims. The missionaries coordinated an international effort to distribute aid, shelter, food, and some
level of protection for tens of thousands of refugees, including as many as 50,000 at any one time.

This effort would take its toll on the missionary movement. The entire West Persia Mission, which included the longstanding stations of Urumia and Tabriz, were decimated by the war. At least a fourth of the foreign missionary force in West Persia died in Iran during the period 1915-1920, mostly of the diseases that raged through the refugee camps. The result of the war was the final eclipse of the West Persia Mission and, with it, the predominant focus on the minority religious and ethnic groups of Iran.

An Open Door in the “New” Persia

Before the Constitutional Revolution, the legal barriers established by the central government comprised one of the major obstacles to working with the majority Muslim population. As long as Christian missionaries had been in the country, it had been illegal for missionaries to preach the Christian gospel to Muslims. In fact, at times the government even considered preaching in the Persian language to be a violation, which apparently was one of the reasons why the central government temporarily closed the Protestant church in Tabriz in 1893.¹ The Persian government tolerated the presence of American missionaries, even welcoming them at times, as long as they confined their efforts to the Jewish and Christian communities. In practice, the government also did nothing to prevent the missionaries from preaching the gospel to Kurds and other Muslims in remote areas.
The attitudes of the Muslim community as a whole toward Christians and Christianity constituted a far more serious obstacle to preaching the gospel. In the early years of the mission, the Muslim attitude toward the missionary evangelists was an attitude of either mild curiosity or hostility. The surrounding Muslim community exposed those few who converted to Christianity to varying degrees of ostracism and even death, such as Mirza Ibrahim in 1896. Among the few Muslims who were interested in Christianity, the satisfaction of their curiosity was not worth the loss of their jobs, family, possessions, or even their lives. Nonetheless, there were a few converts from Islam who largely became reliant on the missionary or minority Christian community for support and worked as traveling evangelists, preachers, and translators.

The Constitutional Revolution undermined both the legal and cultural obstacles to the evangelization of Muslims. The Constitution’s official recognition of the legal equality of all peoples in Iran, regardless of their religious or ethnic background, established a degree of religious equality, but stopped far short of providing complete religious freedom. It was still punishable by law for a Muslim to convert to any other religion. It nonetheless dealt a serious blow to the legal obstacles and was a step in the right direction as far as the missionaries were concerned. The more important cultural obstacle gave way to a growing public interest in the West. Although anti-imperial to a large extent, the constitutional movement was also inspired in part by Western ideas. Indeed, even the Constitution itself was modeled on that of Belgium. This infatuation with the West was a boon to the missionaries as it broke down old prejudices against some foreigners and, by extension, against Christianity as well.
Politically, the revolution made it easier to work with Muslims as well. The actions taken by some Americans during the Constitutional Revolution gave Iranians the distinct impression that the United States was very different from its European counterparts. The missionaries themselves contributed greatly to this impression by devoting themselves to largely humanitarian and religious enterprises. Also, although striving to remain politically neutral, most missionaries made no secret of their deep-seated sympathies for the constitutional cause. The sacrifice of Baskerville, although atypical, burned into the hearts and minds of Iranians an image of the United States as a crusader for freedom around the world. The similar image of Morgan Shuster, an American financial advisor who served as Iran’s Treasurer-General in 1911, also contributed to this positive impression of Americans in general.

Despite their greater opportunities for evangelism, the missionaries did not believe that Islam was on the verge of complete collapse as a result of the Constitutional Revolution. Far from it, as Reverend Frederick Coan noted, the constitutional movement would never have gone as far as it had without the support of many prominent members of the Muslim clergy. Another American missionary, Reverend Louis F. Esselstyn, stated that one of the professed goals of the National Assembly was to “execute the laws of the holy prophet” and that the “Constitutional Monarchy shall be conducted consistently with the teachings of the Koran.” Nonetheless, the political changes were taking their toll on the power of Islam in Iran. In making a push for political liberty, the constitutional movement was also “promoting, though perhaps incidentally, every kind of liberty, including that which is religious. ... In a word, the effect of these political changes on
Islam is tending to break the fanatical power of that religion.” At the same time, Esselstyn also noted that the greater interest in the West, and particularly the interest in America, should not be construed as a “popular demand for Christianity as such.” Instead, most Iranian Muslims wanted “those results of Christianity which might be covered by the expression ‘modern civilization,’ provided they can get those benefits without the Christian religion itself.” Esselstyn argued that it was the responsibility of the missionary in New Persia to promote both material prosperity and spiritual renewal under a Christian framework, which was precisely what the missionaries had been doing in Iran for many years.5

The missionary expansion took shape largely along educational and evangelistic lines. American missionaries had always enjoyed a level of access to Muslims through medicine. The expansion along educational lines, however, was substantial and deserves to be dealt with on its own in the next chapter. Almost as dramatic was the expansion of direct evangelistic work with Muslims. The reports and correspondence during the years following the Constitutional Revolution until World War I are full of references to the expanding opportunities to preach the gospel to Muslims, ranging from the mundane to the dramatic. The report of the East Persia Annual Meeting of 1913 summarized the situation as follows: “After hearing and reading all the reports, we are convinced that now is the time for us to occupy Persia more intensively than ever before. The reports show that all parts of the field are open; never has less religious opposition existed, and never has openness of mind been so prevalent.”6
Some missionaries reported being offered access to areas formerly closed to them. During an evangelistic tour through the province of Gilan in 1909, for example, missionary J.D. Frame reported that a young, recently married Muslim invited him to spend the night at his house. Frame, who said that he had no expectation of seeing the man’s wife, was shocked when she entered the room, shook his hand, and sat down to talk with the two men. According to Frame,

[S]he was dressed in European style and had no veil or head covering of any kind. At first I thought she must be some Armenian friend of the family, but it finally began to dawn on me that this was his wife. I had to ask him, however, before I felt really certain that she was his wife and a Mussulman [Muslim]. The lady, meantime, seemed entirely at her ease, while I was somewhat embarrassed from astonishment. … I think my experience is the first of the kind in the history of the Mission.”

The records of similar itinerating trips across Iran are full of other examples of the greater openness of Muslims to the missionaries.

Probably the most dramatic example of the expansion of evangelistic effort to Muslims was the opening of a new mission station in Mashad, a northeastern city close to the Afghan border and well known throughout the Islamic world for its shrine to Ali Reza, the eighth Shi’ite imam. Mashad was and is one of the most important pilgrimage venues in the Shi’ite Muslim world and the only major pilgrimage site in Iran (the other two most important are Kerbala, Iraq, and Mecca, Saudi Arabia). By virtue of its religious significance and its proximity to Afghanistan, which was closed to foreign missionaries at this time, members of the Iran mission had long been interested in opening a mission station there. Various missionaries had made brief itinerating trips to Khurasan province, which includes Mashad, but met with responses ranging from
disinterest to open hostility. As recently as 1894, Esselstyn had made a trip to Mashad and attempted to preach in one of the marketplaces, where a mob formed and would have killed him had the British Consul General not intervened. In the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, the atmosphere had changed. J.D. Frame made an itinerating trip to Mashad in 1911 and his experience there convinced him that the time was right to finally open a mission station there.⁸

The Board of Foreign Missions approved the request made by the Persia Mission to open a permanent presence in Mashad. Although the missionaries wanted to open a separate Mission there entitled the “Persia and Afghan Mission”, equal in status to the East and West Persia Missions, the BFM deemed this unwise for a couple reasons. First, it lacked the manpower and funding to carry out such an enterprise in the near future. Second, the touchy political situation in Afghanistan concerned them. The British did their utmost at this time to keep Afghanistan off-limits to all foreigners, including missionaries, in order to maintain its status as a buffer state between Russia and India. As a result, the BFM made Mashad a station in the jurisdiction of the East Persia Mission, which included Tehran.⁹

The East Persia Mission appointed Esselstyn to open the station in Mashad. Esselstyn was a natural choice for both positive and negative reasons. On the positive side, he was reputed to be a gifted evangelist who enjoyed discussing and debating Christianity with Muslims. He was also fluent in Persian and used his quick wit to build rapport with Persian admirers and detractors alike. A negative reason, however, for sending Esselstyn was that during his time in Tehran he had developed conflicts with
other missionaries there and sending him to Mashad was a good way to resolve those conflicts.10

The British did not exactly welcome Esselstyn into Mashad, however. Esselstyn made no secret of his desire to use Mashad as a springboard into Afghanistan. As a result, the British ambassador in Tehran and the British Consul-General in Mashad both tried to talk the mission out of opening a station there, citing widespread “fanaticism” in the city, and disavowed any responsibility whatsoever for Esselstyn if he should so much as set foot in Afghanistan. Esselstyn tried to reassure them by promising he would be “reasonable and law-abiding” and that the mission to Afghanistan was an enterprise for the future, not the immediate present.11

Esselstyn, who spent his first four years in Mashad alone, became a legend among the missionaries for the work he accomplished until his death in 1918. The Muslim inhabitants and pilgrims of Mashad gave him a warmer welcome than the British diplomatic corps. Esselstyn was much more circumspect in his evangelism than he had been in 1894. Instead of preaching openly in the marketplace, he spent most of his time developing friendships with Muslims and selling copies of the New Testament in Persian at cost. One report notes that Esselstyn sold 15,000 copies of the Persian New Testaments in 1917-1918 alone. With his long red beard and foreign ideas, Esselstyn was apparently as eccentric a figure to the inhabitants of Mashad as he was to his missionary counterparts in Tehran. Additionally, his respect for Muslim sensibilities won him many admirers. According to one report, after the Russians bombarded the shrine in 1912, curious foreigners invited Esselstyn to accompany them into its sacred precincts.

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Esselstyn refused, saying that “since it was forbidden to Christians to go in, he would not offend his Moslem friends by going into the shrine without an invitation from them. Moslems knew of his refusal to profit by their misfortune and respected him for it.”

Like many missionaries, Esselstyn also refused to evacuate Mashad during epidemics and war. He finally died of typhus while treating some of the stricken inhabitants of Mashad during an outbreak in 1918. Esselstyn placed the Mashad station on solid footing and it remained in operation until 1979.

The establishment of the Mashad station epitomized the overall expansion of missions to Iranian Muslims in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution. It is no accident that the Mashad station was established in 1911; however, it was also no accident that the East Persia mission was at the forefront of efforts to reach out to Muslims. Although the West Persia mission was also expanding its outreach efforts to Muslims, its primary focus was still on the ethnic and religious minorities of the northwest. The onset of World War I would have a major impact on both missions, the efforts to evangelize Muslims, and the future course of the missionary effort in Iran.

**World War I**

World War I embroiled the Middle East and did not spare Iran, despite its declared neutrality during the conflict. Even though Britain and Russia, the two imperial powers who had the most influence over Iran, were allies, Persia’s proximity to both the Ottoman Empire and Russia, as well as the importance of its southwest oil reserves to a British navy that had recently converted from coal to oil ensured that Persia’s neutrality
would not be honored. Both the Central Powers and the Allies alternately occupied parts of Iran for the entirety of the war. A third factor that complicated the issue was the acrimony that existed between the various ethnic and religious groups of the northwest. As the fighting between the Entente Powers and the Central Powers spread to northwestern Iran, it degenerated into a kind of ethnic cleansing that pitted Christians against Moslems, as well as Kurds and Turks against Armenians and Nestorians! The chaos forced the missionaries to take actions that certainly would have seemed improbable and inadvisable in the summer of 1914.

As previously discussed, the Persian-American Friendship Treaty prohibited Americans from providing asylum or sanctuary to any citizen of Iran. A constant source of friction between American diplomats and the missionaries was the missionaries' tendency to get involved in political situations from time to time, including providing unofficial sanctuary to Iranian citizens, such as during the Constitutional Revolution. Although such situations were the exception rather than the rule, the missionaries were often faced with the predicament of following the letter of the law and standing by while those with whom they had worked for decades were mistreated or slaughtered or use their influence to alleviate suffering, regardless of the legal consequences. Those who had lived through the Labaree crisis and the Constitutional Revolution must have believed that they had seen the worst. They were wrong.

The war affected day-to-day operations of the entire Persia mission, just as it affected all of Iran. The missionaries were subject to rationing; chronic shortages of food, goods, and services; the cutting off of regular communications with the outside world; the
ending of all missionary furloughs to the United States and, after 1915 or so, of all travel abroad; and a dramatic limiting of missionary activities of all types.¹⁴ The West Persia Mission, especially Urumia Station, was disproportionately affected by the war. Urumia was at the center of the fighting and suffered several sieges and occupations from both sides.

Long before the onset of the war, imperial rivalry and factionalism within the government had greatly weakened the power and authority of the central government. The war itself made matters even worse by sparking numerous provincial uprisings. Although the authority of the central government held in Tehran during the war, occupying armies and rebel governments imposed the only order that existed in the rest of the country. This placed the missionaries and American diplomats in the country in a unique position. Because the United States alone of the powers involved in Iran would remain neutral until 1917, all sides respected the rights and property of American citizens in the country, not wishing to provoke an international incident.¹⁵

The existing tensions that characterized relations between the various ethnic and religious groups in and around Urumia greatly exacerbated the chaos of the war. Even during good times, the central government only tenuously controlled Urumia, which was under constant threat of invasion from the Ottoman Empire and their Kurdish clients. In addition, tensions between the Armenians and Nestorians, on the one hand, and the Kurds, Persians and Turkish-speaking Persians, on the other, were already high. The wounds incurred as a result of the Labaree affair and the Constitutional Revolution had not healed. When war broke out, the various communities armed themselves and
prepared for conflict. The Nestorian and Armenian Christian communities were by far the most exposed. The Christian communities had only two natural sources of protection: the Russian army and the missionaries. As long as the Russian army occupied or controlled the region, the Christian communities were safe. During the several periods when the Russians were forced to evacuate the area, the only remaining protection for these communities came from the missionaries themselves.

The first major event of the war in the region was the Russian withdrawal from Urumia in January of 1915. Complicating the matter further was the fact that the Russians had armed a small number of Armenians and Nestorians to defend themselves after the Russian army left. Supported by the Russian army, the armed Christian villagers had plundered a number of Kurdish villages while defending themselves from an attack in October of 1914. The outrages committed then had greatly incited the Kurds, who attacked and plundered Nestorian and Armenian villages as soon as the Russians left, killing well over a thousand non-combatants.16 With the Russian troops in full retreat, the Ottoman-Kurdish attack focused on the destruction of the outlying Christian villages, inhabited for the most part by unarmed noncombatants. Once the word of the slaughter got out, those who remained fled to the American missionary compound in Urumia for shelter. The missionaries took them in and prominently displayed the American flag. By the first week after the Russian withdrawal, the missionaries were taking care of more than 4,000 refugees at their own expense. Over the next week, the number of refugees under the direct care and protection of the missionaries grew to 12,000-14,000.17 The Urumia missionary compound, which included a hospital, a college, and living quarters
for the missionaries, was large enough to accommodate these and other refugees. The American compound would be home for many thousands of refugees for the rest of the war.

From the earliest days of the war, the missionaries faced the choice between maintaining their official neutrality and witnessing the slaughter of thousands of Iranians they had worked with for years, or selectively intervening with the means at their disposal to prevent further massacres. The missionaries increasingly chose the latter course far more often than they had in earlier years. The coming of the war was accompanied by the complete breakdown of order and governmental authority. The only authority that remained was moral authority, i.e. the authority derived from years of building personal relationships with various local leaders, and the authority derived from force, which the missionaries as unofficial representatives of a neutral power (the United States) were unable and unwilling to employ. The missionaries' moral authority allowed them to negotiate successfully with Muslims and Christians, and with Kurds, Armenians and Nestorians, for the safety of thousands of people.¹⁸

The missionaries used their moral authority to rescue Nestorian Christians at Geogtapa, a small village on the plains surrounding Urumia, from almost certain destruction. The missionaries had long worked with these Nestorians and had established a small church there, run by the Nestorians themselves. When the Kurds attacked the village in 1915 as a part of the raid that resulted in the wholesale slaughter of nearly 1,000 Christian villagers, the residents of Geogtapa defended themselves. All of the residents of the village fled to the safety of the Protestant and Russian churches and barricaded
themselves inside. When American missionary doctor Harry Packard heard that the 1,500 villagers or so were under siege and likely to be slaughtered, he rode to the village as fast as he could.\textsuperscript{19}

Packard originally came to the mission field in the 1890s and soon became one of the premier medical missionaries in West Persia. Not only did he have facility with the several languages required for his job, he was also able to build relationships with people across ethnic and religious boundaries. Packard had spent most of his time prior to World War I on medical tours of the mountains and plains of West Persia, providing treatment to all who needed it regardless of race or religion.\textsuperscript{20} The rapport that he built with Muslim and Christian alike came in handy during the war years and thrust Packard into a leadership role surpassed only by William Shedd.

Packard occupied a unique position to end the bloodshed in Geogtapa in 1915. According to his account of the affair, “It was a kind providence that led me to men with whom I was personally acquainted to do the gruesome bartering that was necessary that day. I knew every man whose word could determine the fate of the people of twenty-three villages who had collected in Geogtapa to make their last stand.” The battle between the Kurds attacking the village and the Nestorian defenders was raging when Packard arrived on the scene and advanced under fire into Kurdish lines. Not only did he know the leaders of the Kurds, many of them were his former patients in the American hospital in Urumia. For over four hours, Packard negotiated with the Kurds for the lives of villagers and finally convinced them to let the villagers leave with him provided they give up their weapons and all their possessions. Packard advanced to the Russian church
where the villagers were and eventually convinced them to lay down their arms. The Kurds proved true to their word and allowed Packard to take all of the 1,500 surviving villagers to the American missionary compound in Urumia. As Packard later stated, “We were all deeply thankful for the friendly relationships with the Kurds made by our medical work that made this rescue possible and formed the most effective basis for further negotiations with them.”

In the meantime, William Shedd, the leading American missionary in Urumia, took charge after the Russian evacuation. Shedd, like several of the American missionaries, was a second-generation missionary to Iran. He grew up in Iran, traveled to the United States to receive and attend college and seminary, and returned to Iran as a missionary. Shedd concentrated his efforts on evangelism and education throughout his career. According to the posthumous account written by his wife and fellow missionary Mary Lewis Shedd, whom he married after the death of his first wife in 1915, “Dr. Shedd was the man to whom everybody looked for leadership. He accepted the responsibility thus thrust upon him and for the next five months became the advocate and protector of thousands of helpless people who had no one else to whom to look.” Shedd got together with the leading men of Urumia, including the chief mujtahid, prominent Christian leaders, and the nobility to try to set up a provisional government in the city, but the existing divisions between these factions were too large to overcome.

During the events of 1915 and afterward, Shedd would exercise both official and unofficial leadership in the entire region. Soon after the Turco-Kurdish occupation had begun, Shedd requested the American ambassador in Tehran to send an official
representative to Urumia to look after the lives of American citizens in the area. Both the British and American governments deemed the situation to be too dangerous to send anyone to the city. Although Shedd initially suggested that someone from among the missionaries should serve as U.S. consul to Urumia, he himself refused to take on the post at this time. Despite his refusal to accept the position, he often acted in that capacity to the extent that he finally did agree to serve as U.S. consul in 1917.23

Nonetheless, the greatly increased public role the missionaries played during the crisis prompted them to set some guidelines regarding the relationship between themselves and foreign and domestic governments for the duration of the war. Although they adopted the general principle of political noninvolvement, they also explicitly expressed the desire to “indirectly ... influence political affairs to the benefit of the community” by maintaining cordial relations with both government and consular authorities. They appointed Dr. Shedd to take care of all governmental relations with the missionaries. In addition, they resolved not to favor the interests of any one group over another and explicitly stated with regard to the Muslim community their desire to be “conciliatory and just, avoiding partisanship for Christians and at the same time not condoning the terrible wrongs done.”24

Shedd clearly wielded the most power among the missionaries. As the leader of the American missionaries and a person who was able to move between the various factions with ease, Shedd served as a judge in civil and criminal matters. He settled financial disputes. He also became a liaison between the commander of the Ottoman occupying forces and the Christian refugees, securing the release of over 200 Nestorian
and Armenian girls who had been kidnapped by the Kurds during the invasion. Shedd oversaw the management of the refugee camps in the American missionary compound. His unofficial functions were, although probably necessary and understandable, a direct violation of his official responsibilities. American diplomats were treaty-bound not to provide official protection for any citizen of Iran, yet Shedd used the sanctuary provided by his status as a missionary and as an American consul to protect thousands of Iranian citizens for five months. He also extended American protection to all the foreigners who remained in the city, including some French missionaries and the Belgian customs-house officials.25

The camps created enormous difficulties for the missionaries. The missionaries borrowed thousands of dollars on their own credit to buy bread to feed the refugees. During the five-month occupation, the missionaries borrowed and spent $20,000 on behalf of the refugees. Although they somehow managed to feed the hungry during the 1915 occupation, disease was a different matter. With a lack of available sanitation, maladies such as typhoid and cholera swept the camps and claimed over 3,000 lives during five months. American missionaries were among the casualties. Of the 18 American missionaries in Urumia during this time, 14 came down with typhoid or typhus and three died, including Shedd’s second wife.26

One missionary described the five-month occupation of Urumia as the “most awful calamity which has befallen the Nestorian people in the ninety years of our mission work among them. About 1,000 had been killed and 2,000 had died of disease or fear up to the middle of March, just in Urumia itself, and the Nestorians here estimate that
perhaps as many more died on the flight to Russia or have died since. This would mean a fifth or a sixth of the 30,000 Nestorians who live on the Urmia plain. Their prosperous villages have all been pillaged and most of them burned, their churches destroyed. Of the survivors, half are refugees in great want in the Caucasus, the rest remain in Urmia in conditions of peril and fear and need which wring one’s heart.” Although the events of 1915 appeared to be among the worst to have ever befallen the mission, the events to come would be much worse.

The seeds for future problems were planted during the Russian occupation, which was at first welcomed by all sides. Renewed Russian occupation allowed the Christian refugees to return to their homes and rebuild their lives. Unfortunately, the return of the Russians did not necessarily mean a return to law and order in the region. As a result, many Christians took their revenge on the Muslim population for the pillaging, rapes, and murders that took place during the Turco-Kurdish occupation. Although it seems likely that these atrocities were the work of a small minority among the Nestorians and Armenians, it greatly embittered the Muslims against them.28

The missionaries reacted to this state of affairs in two ways: they openly condemned the violence against the Muslims in the very same way that they opposed the violence perpetrated against the Christians. Second, they provided aid and refuge to Muslim refugees. This state of affairs also created a relief alliance of sorts between the various Muslim clerics of Urmia and the missionaries, who distributed both money and food supplies to Muslim refugees in mosques around the cities, in addition to those who stayed in the mission compound. According to American missionary Robert Labaree, the
help that the missionaries gave to Muslims caused resentment among the Syrians and Armenians. At the same time, according to Labaree, “it has made a considerable impression upon Moslems of all classes and shades of belief; and in the end I hope it will give us greater influence with them. The same is true of our stand against all sorts of oppression and injury done to the Moslem population by Christians.”

During this interlude, however, things did not return to normal for the missionaries. For one thing, they had the continued burden of caring for refugees of all ethnic groups and religions. Missionaries helped establish and administer the Persian-American Relief Committee, which solicited funds from the United States and Europe and distributed aid to Armenians and Nestorians in Persia and the Ottoman Empire. They also used the funds available to pay off debts incurred during the 1915 occupation and saved some funds for future problems. The West Persia missionaries tried to rebuild the efforts they had begun before the war with some success, although most of their time was consumed by relief efforts. Shedd, in particular, was consumed by non-missionary matters.

Two events in 1917 completely changed the situation for the missionaries. The uneasy peace in northwestern Iran was predicated on a continued Russian presence; however, as the war drew on, the Russians fared badly until they finally prepared for evacuation. As the eventual evacuation appeared inevitable, Russian troops armed and trained the Nestorians and Armenians to help supplement their weakening forces. After the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917, Ottoman and Kurdish forces massed at the Persian border, waiting for the remaining Russian troops to leave before attacking.
other factor was the American entry into the war in 1917. As previously mentioned, a major factor in the American missionaries' ability to provide physical protection to the refugees in 1915 was the fact that the U.S. was officially neutral in the conflict and no one wanted to provoke an incident. Indeed, even during the occupation, Ottoman forces tried unsuccessfully to get the American missionaries to remove the American flags from the missionary residences and various other houses. It was such an effective means of protection that even many who were not connected with the missionaries placed American flags over their houses. One missionary noted in 1915 that parts of Urumia resembled an American town on the Fourth of July. After the U.S. entry into the war, however, American neutrality was no longer a protection to the missionaries. Their only protection lay in their own personal relations with the combatants. Recognizing the perilous status of American missionaries in the area should conflict spread to the region again, the American ambassador appointed Shedd Honorary Vice-Consul, effective January 1, 1918.33

The arming of the Armenian and Nestorian Christians by the Russians proved to be very controversial. The arming of the Christians was in the short run effective in defending the minority communities from the kind of depredations that had been inflicted upon them in 1915; however, in the long run the indirect support that the missionaries gave to Christian military forces led to the almost complete destruction of the Christian community in Iran. For one thing, some of those among the armed Christians turned again to committing atrocities against Turks and Persians, creating enormous animosity. Receiving arms and aid from Russia also discredited the Christian communities in the
eyes of Persians, who were generally anti-Russian and pro-German throughout the war. Finally, although the Russians provided the Christian villagers with arms, they could not provide much else, particularly considering that those Russians who remained were without a country of their own after the Bolshevik revolution. In the end, the armed Christians ran out of supplies and became defenseless, and the atrocities they had committed against the Muslims and their alliance with Russia completely turned the Muslim community against them.34

Shedd kept the two sides from fighting until a Kurdish leader named Simko assassinated Mar Shimun, the chief religious leader of the Nestorians. In February, the Kurds attacked but were repulsed by the Armenian and Nestorian forces. For a time, the Christian forces controlled all of Urumia and the Salmas plains. As previously mentioned, some of the Christian soldiers pillaged Muslim villages in retaliation for the murder of Mar Shimun, causing a panic among the Muslim population of the region. As a result, more than a thousand Muslims sought refuge in the missionary compound, while Shedd tried to bring the army under control. During this entire time, the number of people seeking refuge in the yards of the American mission compound grew.35

Despite the lack of supplies, the armed Christian forces fought remarkably well and held off superior Kurdish and Ottoman forces for many months. The beginning of the end came on July 8 when the greater part of the force defending Urumia went on an expedition to rendezvous with British troops. Unfortunately, the British never did meet up with them. As the force defending Urumia began to fail, the people in the city fled, including 50-80,000 refugees under the protection and care of Shedd and the
missionaries. At this time, Shedd and his wife decided to leave with the fleeing refugees while the rest of the missionaries stayed in Urumia to watch over the refugees who remained. Many Turks and Persians blamed Shedd for the atrocities that were committed against Muslim villages and he knew that he would not be safe when the city fell. The other missionaries believed that they would be safer in the mission compound than they would be out on the open road. At any rate, some of the missionaries had to stay behind with the refugees who refused to flee.\textsuperscript{36}

The flight to Sien Kala was a disaster for the refugees and especially for Shedd. The necessity to leave under such circumstances was a personal failure to Shedd. Nonetheless, during the flight he did what he could to protect the refugees. A small band of Kurds and Persians pursued the column and coordinated direct attacks at six separate points. Those at the rear were especially susceptible. Shedd often rode ahead of the column to negotiate the safety of the refugees with upcoming villages. They reached a small British force of 200 soldiers at Sien Kala on the fifth day of the march. According to Dr. Joseph M. Yonan, a Nestorian Christian who worked for the American missionaries, 12,000 out of the 75,000 refugees who began the flight from Urumia were either dead or missing.\textsuperscript{37} While on the road, Shedd also died of cholera. According to his wife, Mary Lewis Shedd, who was with him when he died, “The news of Dr. Shedd’s death swept along that line of suffering humanity like a wave of black despair. Day after day as I rode along on my horse, I was greeted by grief-stricken faces and the despairing cry, ‘What shall we do? Our father is gone, our back is broken; there is no one left on earth to help us. …’ And as they mingled their tears with mine and the moan of my own
heart found ten thousand echoes in their, I became one of them, and all knew the worst had come to us. 38

Things were little better for those who stayed in Urumia. As soon as the forces defending Urumia failed, Kurds poured into the city. There were about 800 refugees who remained in the city at the American missionary compound. The American flag provided no protection this time and the mission compound was immediately overrun. The attacking Kurds slaughtered 200 of the remaining refugees in open sight of the missionaries. Among the dead were several Nestorian preachers and translators employed by the missionaries for many years, including one who was sick in bed with typhus. The Kurds completely ransacked the mission compound. The Ottoman forces that followed after the Kurds arrested Dr. Harry Packard and Wilder P. Ellis. The rest of the missionaries fled with the remaining 600 refugees to the Persian governor’s compound, where they received temporary protection. 39

The Ottoman officers interrogated Packard and Ellis, trying to get them to confess that they were “involved in dire plots against Turkey and Moslems in general with unlimited financial resources from America and England with a fake Relief work to cover things up.” 40 The Turkish commander released Packard and Ellis after a few days to the custody of the Persian governor. The 600 refugees and American missionaries remaining in Urumia were rescued when U.S. Consul Gordon Paddock and American missionaries H.A. Muller and Dr. E.M. Dodd arrived in the city. With a combination of “daring, bluff and diplomacy”, they escorted the refugees and missionaries to the relative safety of Tabriz. 41
After his death, Shedd's actions came under a great deal of scrutiny within the missionary community and both American and British diplomats. While the Urumia missionaries supported Shedd and his decisions during his life, they criticized some of his decisions after his death. The first major criticism was leveled at his decision to accept the offer to serve as American consul in Urumia. Up to that time, the missionaries had done all that they could to keep the American mission nonpolitical in the eyes of the public, especially considering the increased but still informal political role played by the missionaries since 1915. When Shedd accepted the consular position, all pretense at political neutrality on the part of the missionaries was lost. To make matters worse, Shedd had no place outside the mission compound to keep office. The missionaries voiced their overall discomfort with such a direct political connection and even went so far as to request Shedd to remove the consular office and his residence from the mission compound. The relief committee even offered to pay his expenses but Shedd, citing personal danger outside mission grounds, asked permission to remain. The missionaries, "reminded of the long service of its honored senior member, and of the possible risk entailed in moving his residence, did not insist on its point; and he remained." Despite all of the years of missionary disavowals of any political connection between official U.S. interests and the missionary enterprise, for a short but very crucial time, the two became one and the same.

The opening of the American consulate by an American missionary on missionary premises exacerbated an already bad situation. Although Shedd and the missionaries had done what they could to protect Muslims from marauding Christians, the events of 1917
completely “compromised the mission in the eyes of the Moslems”, according to American missionary Dr. E.M. Dodd. Dodd outlined the prevailing Muslim feeling with regard to the mission just after the fall of Urumia in 1918. Most Muslims believed that the American missionaries, Dr. Shedd in particular, had political connections and mixed in military affairs under the façade of relief operations. With the outbreak of the war, Urumia was overrun by over 50,000 Nestorian refugees, some of whom robbed and killed Muslims. The refugees were “housed, fed and clothed with American money through American missionaries. Hence the Americans were responsible for them.” Muslims also viewed with suspicion the entire relief operation. In their view, it seemed that limitless funds arrived from the U.S., most of which went to Christian refugees. Furthermore, Muslims believed wrongly that most of the money was used to train and arm the Nestorian and Armenian soldiers. The Muslim inhabitants blamed Shedd personally for the outrages committed by Christian renegade soldiers. Most believed that Shedd was controlling and coordinating military campaigns and activities against the Turkish and Kurdish forces.\textsuperscript{43}

After the war, the American mission and American diplomats denied that Shedd and Persian-American Relief funds armed Nestorians and Armenians. In point of fact, the situation was far more complex than that simple denial. For the most part, it is true that Shedd and the relief committee avoided direct connections with military affairs. It is certainly false that Shedd coordinated military operations and there is no evidence whatsoever that Shedd had any connection with the atrocities that were committed by Christian soldiers. To the contrary, the documentary record indicates that Shedd sought
Shedd approved the use of relief funds for military purposes only during the waning days of the siege in 1918. At first, after the Christian army ran out of food, the relief committee provided the army with food and sums of money specifically to procure additional food supplies. Later, after Shedd had received what turned out to be false assurances that a British army was on its way to relieve the city and that the British government would reimburse the committee for any loans to the army for defense, Shedd made larger loans to the army to buy food with the stipulation that the money be used to reimburse both Christian and Muslims whose property was confiscated by the army for food and supplies. In all, the relief committee lent large sums of money to the army during the late spring and summer of 1918.

Shedd and the relief committee specifically earmarked the loans for food and supplies, not weapons, all the while knowing full well that the funds went to aid the defense of the town. Possibly anticipating such criticisms after the war, Shedd justified his actions by saying that nothing less than the existence of the Christians in Urumia was at stake. Shedd and other missionaries believed that the invading forces intended to kill all the Nestorians and Armenians. As a result, Shedd believed that “the support of the armed forces was the first aid possible for the refugees.” Dodd, despite his criticism of Shedd’s actions, nonetheless sympathized with the situation he faced. According to Dodd,

Should we have stopped when they [the Nestorian-Armenian army] first began to fight for their homes and incidentally to defend the lives of the American missionaries? … Should it have stopped for all when some committed lawless acts? … Should we have withdrawn in a body when we could and left the races to
fight it out, starve and flee as they chose? ... Is it begging the question to ask where self-defense stops and 'military' begins? ... I wish anyone who feels positively that we did wrong could have been with us when we were facing the Inferno.46

There is no doubt that there was some truth in the prevailing public opinion that Shedd played a role in military matters beyond his role as a missionary, chief administrator of relief funds, and even as American consul. It is clear, however, that the military role he did play was limited to granting loans out of relief funds to the army, and even that was done only at a very late date. Whether he did so appropriately is another matter. Missionary fears of an Armenian and Nestorian genocide were not unfounded. Earlier Turco-Kurdish invasions were marked by atrocities and the slaughter of well over a thousand non-combatants. In 1918, after Urumia fell despite the best efforts of the army, the slaughter, fueled by the intervening years of retaliatory atrocities committed by some Christians, was even worse. Thousands were murdered and more yet died of disease and exposure in the mass exodus that followed. The Christians who survived were forced to flee to Russia or to Turkey for shelter and were never allowed to return to the region. Although this falls short of genocide, it appears that Shedd's fears were well founded.

The overall impact of the war on the West Persia Mission was devastating. For one thing, the population that they served was completely decimated by the war. Before the war, the Christian minority populations of Iran were numerous, distributed throughout dozens of relatively wealthy villages in and around Urumia and the Salmas plain. One report places the number of Nestorians in 1850 at around 138,000, approximately 1.5% of the total population. By 1918, the overwhelming majority of native Iranian Christians
were either dead from massacres or disease, sick, or in refugee camps far from their ancestral homes. Nearly everyone and everything that the West Persia Mission, especially that of Urumia Station, had worked with was gone. The Muslims who remained were, for the reasons enumerated above, embittered against the missionaries. By the 1950s, the total number of Nestorians in Iran was a paltry 20,000, or .001% of the total population, mainly as a result of the devastation of World War I.47

Another significant factor was the material damage done to mission property and the debts that the mission had incurred during the relief effort. According to one account, the total of damages done to Urumia Station alone amounted to more than a quarter of a million dollars. The entire mission compound, including the Urumia College and the Fiske Seminary for women, was pillaged and destroyed. For some time, the missionaries considered the option of forcing Persia or Turkey to pay the American Mission damages for losses incurred during the war. The missionaries decided against pursuing the various claims for several reasons. First, the prospects for success were very limited. Persia correctly claimed that it was neutral and further that it was as much a victim of wartime depredations as the missionaries. The U.S. and the Ottoman Empire were never officially at war, either. In addition, the Turkish government would probably lay blame for the damages at the door of Persian irregulars with no connection to the Ottoman army. Second, and probably more importantly, the missionaries in West Persia were afraid of embittering Muslim opinion against them even more, especially in light of the fiasco in trying to get the Persian Government to pay damages in the murder of missionary Benjamin Labaree a decade earlier. In the end, the missionaries amassed a final list of all
damages and relayed the information to the Persian Government but declined to press the issue.\textsuperscript{48}

Ultimately, the relief committee assumed the debts incurred by the relief efforts and paid off its debts through fundraising efforts in the United States. The only other remuneration the missionaries received was for 40,000 tomans from the British Government, in payment for loans that Shedd had made to the Nestorian-Armenian army just before his death. The mission claimed that Shedd had actually loaned more than 40,000 tomans but the British government initially refused to take responsibility for more than 10,000, claiming that protecting the lives of the inhabitants of Urumia amounted to a “charitable enterprise” and a proper use of relief funds. After the relief committee protested to the Foreign Office in London, the Foreign Minister Lord Curzon finally authorized Sir Percy Cox, the British ambassador in Tehran, to release the funds.\textsuperscript{49}

At first glance, the devastation caused by the war would seem to have put the entire American missionary effort on its heels. Certainly from the perspective of the missionaries of West Persia, this could not be more true. The two leading stations of West Persia, Urumia and Tabriz, suffered enormous damage. Almost a third of the missionaries lost their lives during the war, mostly from the diseases that raged in the refugee camps. By the end of the war, they abandoned Urumia and fled to Tabriz, where the missionaries there cared for them and the surviving Christian refugees from Urumia. According to Mary Lewis Shedd, “In Urumia the missions, churches, schools, and homes of the Christians are a desolation, and for the first time in six or seven centuries, Christianity has apparently been exterminated. ‘And Urmi knows the Christ no more.’”\textsuperscript{50}
Although the impact of the war was devastating for West Persia, it actually benefited the East Persia Mission. The trend among the missionaries ever since the Constitutional Revolution was to focus more of their attention on Muslims. A major obstacle to that was the enormous amount of funding and effort devoted to the Christian minority communities of the northwest. As World War I dramatically demonstrated, one unfortunate byproduct of such close identification with the Christian minorities was that the missionaries often got embroiled into political affairs in ways that embittered the majority Muslim population. Even before the war, some of the missionaries advocated a pullback from the northwest and a new focus of attention on Tehran, East Persia, and the Muslim population around the country.

By 1919, both the East and West Persia Missions made requests to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for more missionaries and additional funding. While the two missions usually disagreed over where and how to apply limited resources from the U.S., the tone of the debate was very bitter. The debate centered along two lines: the opportunities available and the uncertainty of the situation in West Persia. The West Persia requests were largely centered on the relief effort and any future opportunities were predicated on the unlikely prospects of the repatriation of the Nestorian and Armenian refugees. In East Persia, the missionaries had long been focusing their efforts on Muslims and were able to expand their efforts even during the war. East Persia missionary J.D. Frame put in words what many other missionaries implied when he said, "For years I believe Urumia has been a hindrance rather than a help to the evangelization of Moslems in Persia." East Persia missionaries also cited the
very uncertain conditions in Azerbaijan. According to American missionary F.M. Stead in Kermanshah, “I am much surprised at the urgent requests from West Persia for reinforcements. In view of the uncertainty of conditions in Azerbaijan, hostile attitude to the British, threat of Bolshevism from Russia, probability that the Syrians may never be repatriated, more than probability that they will not be sent back for a long time, it seems to me, and I think to others in this Mission, that our force in East Persia should have the preference at this time.” The BFM agreed with the position of the East Persia Mission and sent the majority of new missionaries to West Persia, especially Tehran. It also decided to fund the establishment of an American college in Tehran, rather than Tabriz. Plans to build an American college either in Tehran, Tabriz or Urumia were in the works as early as 1911 but were put on hold by the war. The results of the war convinced the BFM to focus its efforts on the Muslims of East Persia rather than the Christians in the northwest for the first time in nearly a century of existence.

**Conclusion**

The post-Constitutional era brought great hope for the American missionaries in Iran. The new Persia seemed wide open to opportunities for the expansion of existing efforts and the opening of new stations that seemed impossible a few short years earlier. The most important element of the new Persia for American missionaries was the expansion of their work with Muslims. To that end, both the East and West Persia missions expanded their efforts by opening new schools and hospitals, taking itinerating trips to Muslim villages, and preaching and teaching in Persian. World War I had an
enormous impact on the work of both missions, especially on West Persia, but in the end it served to speed up existing trends.

In keeping with their ideology of mission, the missionaries sacrificed a major portion of their property and more than a few of their lives to aid and protect Iranians. The war destroyed Urumia station, the oldest Protestant mission station of its kind in the country. The missionaries there served the surrounding community to the best of their abilities during this time. In doing so, the missionaries once again became embroiled in local politics, this time to prevent the massacre of thousands. Massacres happened anyway, both Muslim on Christian and Christian on Muslim. In the end, it is likely that the involvement of men and women like William Shedd and Harry Packard saved many lives that otherwise would have been lost had the missionaries evacuated the country on the outbreak of the war. There is no doubt that the missionaries deeply cared for those they purported to serve.

Nonetheless, their efforts during the war had a mixed result for the mission as a whole. The war decimated the West Persia Mission, which would never fully recover. In addition to the substantial material damages, public opinion among those who remained in Urumia, predominantly Muslims, turned against the missionaries. Missionaries would eventually return to Urumia but the West Persia Mission as a whole would never again regain its former status, just as the Christian communities that once inhabited the region would not. The station would be inhabited by only a small handful of missionaries and was finally closed by the Persian government in 1935. What was West Persia's loss, however, was the East Persia Mission's gain. By 1919, the mass of funding and support
shifted from West to East Persia. In addition, Muslim bitterness against American
missionaries seems to have been limited to West Persia. The missionaries elsewhere in
Iran were able to continue their efforts to build relationships with and evangelize
Muslims, a process that began again with new eagerness after the war.

World War I marked the end of an era for the American missionary movement.
Where the old approach focused on the Christian communities, the new approach focused
on Muslims. The centers of the old efforts were in Tabriz and Urumia, while after the
war the focus shifted to Tehran. Medical work and evangelism were predominant in the
old approach; education was the focus of the new. Earlier missionary efforts operated
with only very limited interference from a weak Persian central government while later
efforts were confronted with the opposition of a strong central government in Reza Shah.
The new era would bring with it the greatest material accomplishments of the entire
missionary effort in the country, but many new problems as well.
Notes


2 See the earlier discussion of the Mirza Ibrahim episode in chapter 4.


6 As quoted in A Century of American Mission Work in Iran, 1834-1934 (New York: American Press, 1936): p. 34. The records are full of references to the growing openness of the field. For examples, in addition to the articles by Coan and Esselstyn in footnote 9, see also J.D. Frame to Speer, Lahijan, 17 June 1913, RG 91, Box 3, File 10, PHS; John Elder, “The Moral and Spiritual Situation in Iran,” Muslim World, April 1948, Collection 158, Boyce Papers, U. of Oregon Library.


8 “History of Meshed Station, 1911-1934”, pp. 1-2, RG 91, Box 23, File 6, PHS.

9 Ibid., pp. 1-4; Secretary of State to Board of Foreign Missions, Washington, 24 October 1911, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4627, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); British Embassy to U.S. Department of State, Washington, 19 October 1911, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4627, NARA; BFM to Secretary of State, New York, 2 November 1911, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4627, NARA.

11 Esselstyn to Speer, Meshed, 30 December 1911, RG 91, Box 3, File 8, PHS; Esselstyn to Speer, Meshed, 30 March 1912, RG 91, Box 3, File 9, PHS; E.K. DeWitt to Speer, Tehran, 14 February 1912, RG 91, Box 3, File 9, PHS; Secretary of State to Board of Foreign Missions, Washington, 24 October 1911, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4627, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); British Embassy to U.S. Department of State, Washington, 19 October 1911, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4627, NARA; BFM to Secretary of State, New York, 2 November 1911, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4627, NARA.


13 See the earlier discussion of this issue in Chapter 4.


16 Sir W. Townley to Sir Edward Grey, Tehran, 17 March 1915, Foreign Office 416/62, Confidential Print, Persia, Public Record Office (PRO); Townley to Grey, Tehran, 21 March 1915, FO 416/62, PRO; William Shedd to John Caldwell, Urumia, 14 May 1915, RG 59, M715, Reel 13, NARA; Home Letter of Frederick Jessup, Tabriz, 17 March 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; Robert Labaree to George T. Scott, Urumia, 13 March 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; Y.A. Sargis to Brother Masland, Tabriz, 4 August 1915, RG 59, M715, Reel 13, NARA; Tammadun, Awhz 'yi Iran, p. 117.


18 Home Letter of William Shedd, Urumia, 23 June 1915; Frederick Jessup to George T. Scott, Tabriz, 9 October 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; Hugo Muller to Speer, Tabriz, 8 February 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; Mary Lewis Shedd, The Measure of a Man: William A. Shedd of Persia, A Biography (New York: George H. Doran, 1922): 247.


21 Quotes are from "The Relief of Geogtapa," Dr. H.P. Packard, Urumia, October 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS. See also Shedd to Caldwell, Urumia, 14 May 1915, RG 59, M715, Reel 13, NARA; Platt, *War Journal*, pp. 6-8; "A Record of American Mission Service and an Appeal," Robert M. Labaree, Tabriz, 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; Home Letter of Frederick Jessup, Tabriz, 17 March 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS.

22 Mary Shedd, *Measure of a Man*, pp. 142-143.

23 Shedd to Caldwell, Urumia, 14 May, 1915, RG 59, M715, Reel 13, NARA; Shedd to Speer, Urumia, 26 May 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; American Consul to Secretary of State, Bagdad, 5 September 1918, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4627, 250-21-23, NARA; H.P. Packard to Gordon Paddock, Tabriz, 24 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

24 "Action of the West Persia Mission at its Meeting Regarding Political Relationships," n.p., 1 September 1915, Speer Papers, Box 130, Folder 1, PTS.

25 Mary Shedd, *Measure of a Man*, pp. 142-173; Platt, *War Journal*, pp. 14, 27; Packard to Paddock, Tabriz, 24 November 1918, Rg 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

26 Mary Shedd, *Measure of a Man*, pp. 177-179; Home Letter of E.M. Dodd, Urumia, 1 March 1917, RG 91, Box 5, File 20, PHS; Platt, *War Journal*, pp. 21-51; Coan to Halsey, Urumia, 7 December 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; B.S. Gifford to Scott, Tabriz, 9 July 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; E.T. Allen to Speer, Urumia, 8 November 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; Robert Labaree to Speer, Tabriz, 12 May 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS; George T. Scott to Relatives of Mrs. W.A. Shedd, New York, 1 June 1915, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS.

27 Home Letter of Frederick Jessup, Tabriz, 17 March 1915, p. 5, RG 91, Box 5, File 18, PHS.
Robert Labaree to Speer, Urumia, 11 February 1916, RG 91, Box 5, File 19, PHS; Frederick Coan to Speer, Urumia, 11 July 1916, RG 91, Box 5, File 19, PHS; E.M. Dodd to Speer, Tabriz, 1 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; McDowell to Dr. Judson (of APRC), Mosul, 19 December 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

Quote is from Labaree to Speer, Urumia, 11 February 1916, RG 91, Box 5, File 19, PHS. See also, Charles Pittman to Speer, Dilman, 9 March 1916, RG 91, Box 5, File 19, PHS; Mary Shedd, Measure of a Man, pp. 226-227, 234-237.

Shipley Jones to Foreign Office, Tabriz, 23 January 1917, FO 248/1175, Embassy and Consular Archives, Iran, PRO; C.M.M. to Lord Balfour, Tehran, 26 January 1917, FO 248/1175, PRO.

Mary Shedd, Measure of a Man, pp. 202-210.

E.M. Dodd to Speer, Tabriz, 1 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; Home Letter of Rev. E.W. McDowell, Bagdad, 6 September 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; W.P. Ellis to Speer, Tabriz, 4 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

Mary Shedd, Measure of a Man, p. 221.

E.M. Dodd to Speer, Tabriz, 1 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; McDowell to Dr. Judson (of APRC), Mosul, 19 December 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

“The Last Stand of an Ancient Race,” Assyrian and Armenian Relief Committee, New York, 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; McDowell to Speer, Tabriz, 1 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; Home Letter of E.W. McDowell, Bagdad, 6 September 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

Mary Shedd to Speer, Urumia, 2 April 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; Packard to Paddock, Tabriz, 24 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; McDowell to Speer, Tabriz, 1 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; Home Letter of E.W. McDowell, Bagdad, 6 September 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; W.P. Ellis to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 4 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; Mary Shedd, Measure of a Man, pp. 255-257.

Dr. Jesse M. Yonan, “The Assyrian People and Their Relation to the Allies in the Present War,” RG 91, Box 6, File 1, PHS. Yonan also cites the figure of 29-30,000 as lost during the trek. The figure of 12,000 is the conservative estimate.

Quote is from Mary Shedd, Measure of a Man, pp. 270-271. See also Home Letter of McDowell, Bagdad, 6 September 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; Packard to Paddock, Tabriz, 24 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; A.O. Wood to Foreign Office, Tabriz, 27 August 1918, FO 248/1216, Embassy and Consular Archives, Iran, PRO.
39 H.P. Packard, “Condition of Relations,” Tabriz, 1919, RG 91, Box 6, File 1, PHS; Packard to Paddock, Tabriz, 24 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; Ellis to Speer, Tabriz, 4 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

40 Ellis to Speer, Tabriz, 4 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

41 Quote is from Mary Shedd, Measure of a Man, p. 275. For a detailed report of the Paddock rescue, see Rev. Hugo Muller to Mrs. Muller, Tabriz, 22 June 1919, RG 91, Box 6, File 1, PHS.

42 Quote is from E.M. Dodd to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 1 November 1918, p. 17, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS. See also W.P. Ellis to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 4 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; H.P. Packard to Paddock, Tabriz, 24 November 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS; Coan to Speer, Whitehall, NY, 24 August 1918, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.

43 E.M. Dodd to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 1 November 1918, p. 16, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS. See also Persian Foreign Office to American Legation, Tehran, 1919, RG 59, M715, Reel 13, NARA, which mirrors exactly Dodd’s assessment of Muslim public opinion of the missionaries on the eve of the massacre. For a recent account in Persian saying much the same thing, see Tammadun, Awzā’-yi Airān, p. 118.

44 Sir Percy Cox to A.J. Balfour, Tehran, 7 December 1918, FO 371/3882, Foreign Office Political Records, PRO; “Assyrian Relief” memorandum, Sir Percy Cox, Tehran, 16 November 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO; “Resolution,” American Relief Committee, Hamadan, 17 September 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO; Paddock to Bristow, Tabriz, 21 October 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO; Henry Pratt Judson to E.S. Scott, Tehran, 23 November 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO; Packard to Paddock, Urumia, 13 June 1919, RG 91, Box 6, File 1, PHS; F.G. Coan to Robert Speer, Denver, CO, 18 January 1919, RG 91, Box 6, File 1, PHS; American Consul to Secretary of State, Bagdad, 5 September 1918, RG 59, 391.116, Box 4627, 250-21-23, NARA.

45 “Assyrian Relief” memorandum, Sir Percy Cox, Tehran, 16 November 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO.

46 E.M. Dodd to Robert Speer, Tabriz, 1 November 1918, p. 16, RG 91, Box 5, File 21, PHS.


49 Sir Percy Cox to A.J. Balfour, Tehran, 7 December 1918, FO 371/3882, Foreign Office Political Records, PRO; "Assyrian Relief" memorandum, Sir Percy Cox, Tehran, 16 November 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO; "Resolution," American Relief Committee, Hamadan, 17 September 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO; Paddock to Bristow, Tabriz, 21 October 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO; Henry Pratt Judson to E.S. Scott, Tehran, 23 November 1918, FO 371/3882, PRO; Foreign Office to Sir Percy Cox, London, 8 February 1919, FO 371/3882, PRO.

50 Mary Shedd, *Measure of a Man*, p. 279.

51 J.D. Frame to Robert Speer, Charlevoix, MI, 10 July 1920, RG 91, Box 3, File 17, PHS. See also Speer's reply, Speer to J.D. Frame, New York, 20 July 1920, RG 91, Box 3 File 17, PHS.

52 F.M. Stead to Robert Speer, Kermanshah, 2 December 1919, RG 91, Box 3, File 16, PHS.

CHAPTER 7

TILLING THE SOIL: SAMUEL MARTIN JORDAN, THE ALBORZ COLLEGE OF TEHRAN, AND THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL ENTERPRISE IN IRAN

When the anticipated harvest of Muslim converts predicted by the first American missionaries in Iran failed to materialize, the metaphor the missionaries applied to their work was that of “sowing the seed,” which they took from Christ’s parable of the sower and the seed (Luke 8:4-18). By sowing the seed of the Gospel, the missionaries believed that their efforts, though lacking significant results among Muslims in the short term, were setting the stage for a massive future harvest of Muslim converts to Christianity. The history of the West Persian mission and the experience of World War I convinced most of the missionaries, especially those in the East Persia Mission, of the need for another approach. They turned from sowing the seed to preparing the soil of Iran for a Christian revival through education. By educating the future ruling classes of Iran, many missionaries, of whom Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan was the most famous and influential, believed that they could establish religious freedom, weaken the hold of Islam, and create new conditions that would be conducive to Christian evangelism.

Based on the assumption that the positive values of Western culture were rooted in Christianity, the missionaries believed that the controlled Westernization of Muslim
youth would make the prospect of conversion to Christianity more attractive. Through education, educational missionaries embarked on a campaign of social and cultural engineering aimed ultimately at making Christianity more acceptable to Iranian Muslims. Educators like Dr. Jordan carried with them to Iran an unquestioned belief in the superiority of the West. Although the missionaries criticized the actions of specific Western powers in Iran, especially the overtly imperial policies followed by Great Britain and Russia, they never questioned the source of those policies. In their minds, the superiority of the West was stemmed from the predominance of Christianity in Western nations; conversely, the predominance of Islam in Iran accounted for its relative backwardness. Through education, the missionaries hoped to create high-level support for the establishment of religious freedom, by which they meant the complete legal and moral freedom to openly preach the Gospel to Muslims without any retribution or backlash. By bringing Christianity to Iran, they hoped to bring progress and reform as well.

The effort to create a new cultural atmosphere in Iran met with mixed results. On the one hand, the educational effort during the 1920s and 1930s marked the apex of American missionary influence in Iran. The upper middle class and intelligentsia wanted a Western education, especially if they could get one without leaving the country, and the missionaries routinely had to turn away potential students, even those from wealthy families, for lack of space. In addition, the mission schools contributed to a weakening of faith in Islam on the part of the students; however, instead of accepting Christianity, these students usually lost faith in all religion. Quite unintentionally, the missionaries created instead a new class of Westernized bureaucrats who mainly served as interpreters for
Western business interests, in the oil fields of the Anglo-Persian (later the Anglo-Iranian) Oil Company, and in the service of the Pahlavi dynasty. On the other hand, despite the prominence of many former graduates of the mission schools, the mission schools clashed with the authoritarian rule of Reza Shah. His xenophobic nationalism, combined with an unfortunate break in Iranian-American relations, resulted in the final closing of all American missionary schools on the eve of World War II.

The Educational Enterprise before the 1920s

The educational system in Iran in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was in very poor shape. No universal educational system existed in the country prior to the Constitutional Revolution and the schools that existed were poorly-funded, offered a limited curriculum, and employed ill-trained teachers. The educational situation among Nestorians and Armenians was quite poor in the nineteenth century. The vast majority of Iranian Christians were illiterate and schooling was limited to the few boys who wanted to enter the priesthood. The education for even those fortunate few, however, consisted mainly of memorizing Scripture in ancient Syriac, which greatly differed from modern, spoken Syriac. Before the American missionaries opened schools for Iranian Christian girls and boys, Nestorian and Armenian girls did not receive any education as a result of their ineligibility for the priesthood.

Education for most Iranian Muslims was not much better. There were two main types of schools for Muslim boys; the maktab and the madrisih, both of which were run by Shi’ite Muslim clerics. The maktab was somewhat equivalent to a primary school while those who wanted a career in the clergy went on to an education in the madrisih.
According to historian Ahmad Mansoori, "Maktabs had serious shortcomings. They had a limited curriculum which emphasized memorization, repetition, and discipline. Their instructors were poorly trained. Any person who could read the Quran could open a maktab. Higher education in Persia was only for men who intended to become clergymen."¹

Those who desired a better education for their children were forced to send them abroad or to the Dar ul-Funūn in Tehran. As early as the eighteenth century, young Iranian men were sent to schools in France and England while the Iranian government hired Europeans to teach Iranians in Western methods, especially military matters. In 1851, Nasir ad-Din Shah and his reformist Prime Minister Amir Kabir opened the Dar ul-Funūn [House of Sciences], a high school staffed by European (mostly French) instructors who provided a Western secular education for the sons of Iranian nobles.² As a result, a good education was available only to the children of the rich and powerful.

Even though the main thrust of American mission work in Iran in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been evangelical, education still played an important, though secondary, role. Many missionaries saw the schools as the key to future evangelistic work in the country. Since the government initially forbade any educational or evangelistic work with Muslims, the missionaries concentrated on bringing about a renewal among the native Christian churches. They believed that a revived Christian church, characterized by an outward focus on preaching the Gospel to their Muslim neighbors, would be instrumental to the Christianization of Iran. The missionaries of West Persia saw the function of the schools as the raising up of a future generation of
Armenian and Nestorian evangelists and pastors, who would in turn preach the Gospel to the surrounding Muslim communities.\(^3\)

Education enjoyed a privileged place from the very beginning in the work with Iran's Christians. The first generation of American missionaries tried to address the poor state of education among the Nestorians first by reducing modern Syriac to a written language, and second, by establishing schools. The early schools were open to all and did not charge any tuition. In fact, many of the students in the early schools received stipends to attend. Dr. Justin Perkins opened the first American mission school in Urumia in 1836 with seven students. By 1839, enrollment had reached 55 students.\(^4\)

For the first seven decades, the educational enterprise proved to be a moderate success on all fronts. Although the numbers at any one school usually stabilized at around 60 students or so, the number of missionary schools increased significantly. At the same time, the missionaries oversaw and supported the development of Christian village schools, the number of which grew by leaps and bounds. By the end of the nineteenth century, the average number of American missionary schools grew from 24 (with approximately 530 students) in 1837-1847 to 117 schools (with over 2000 students) in 1895.

The missionary educational system soon came to be characterized by a two-tiered structure. The village schools, run by Nestorian and Armenian teachers under the indirect supervision of the missionaries, served primarily as an elementary school system, while the missionaries directly operated smaller schools in the cities of Tabriz and Urumia. These smaller schools served as seminaries and were open primarily to those who were called to the ministry. The missionary schools also grew qualitatively as well
and largely fulfilled their primary function of producing evangelists and pastors. Out of
the 122 graduates from the boys' seminary in Urumia from 1836-1870, 80 devoted their
careers to the ministry. The ministers and evangelists produced by the seminaries
proved to be essential to the work of evangelism and accompanied the missionaries on
their many itinerating trips to both Muslims and Christian outlying villages, where they
translated for the missionaries and also preached on their own.

One of the problems associated with this approach was that those who received an
education from the missionaries expected financial support from them as well. This was
a constant point of irritation between the missionaries and native converts, particularly
over salaries. The missionaries had limited funds with which to pay native preachers,
pastors, and evangelists and encouraged their graduates to pay their own way as much as
possible. The native Christian workers, for their part, deeply resented the great difference
in salaries between what an American missionary received and what they received for
their work. They knew that in many ways the missionaries could not work in the
villages without them.

A more significant problem was the use of mission school graduates as
evangelists to the Muslim communities. Here the problem was more social than
economic. All throughout the nineteenth century, the Christian and Muslim communities
lived in isolation from one another and followed very distinctive proscriptions of dress
and protocol. While relations between them rarely turned violent, they were tense.
Muslims in particular resented the Armenians and Nestorians for openly selling alcohol, a
practice which the missionaries, almost uniformly pro-temperance, tried to curb. The
result of this cultural estrangement was that Iranian Christians were equally as alien to
Iranian Muslims as the American missionaries were; furthermore, few Iranian Christians were willing to risk the wrath that would result if they convinced a Muslim to renounce Islam. While the American missionaries had some protection by virtue of being Westerners, including a limited degree of extraterritoriality, the local Christians did not and usually preferred to work within their own communities to avoid potential persecution.

From the 1890s onward, however, growing numbers of Muslims expressed an interest in acquiring an education in American-run schools. At first, the missionaries refused to admit the few Muslims who were interested in attending their schools for fear of political reprisals. The few they did accept often had to leave after someone in the community lodged a protest. Near the end of the nineteenth century, this situation began to change. For example, in 1887, Reverend Samuel Ward accepted the first Moslem student in Tehran's boys' school only after he could produce a letter from an influential Muslim sponsor. In subsequent years, after he had received 20 such letters, he opened the doors of the school to any Muslim who wanted to attend.*

The Constitutional Revolution greatly increased Iranian interest in American schools. Some missionaries mistakenly believed that this greater interest indicated that a Great Awakening-style revival among Iranian Muslims was imminent. More sensitive missionaries realized that the growing interest in the West and its ways did not necessarily translate into a greater openness toward Christianity. As Reverend Louis Esselstyn, longtime missionary in Tehran and Meshed, stated in 1911:

Present conditions do not constitute an opportunity for the wholesale forcing of Christianity upon the Persians, but instead of that, we should carry on the work with great caution and discretion. Many of the Persians are willing and ready to let themselves and their children be influenced by Christianity and take their
chances as to whether these influences will ultimately lead to their becoming Christians. This fact is especially noticeable in the educational movement that has taken hold of the country. They are demanding modern education for both sexes; many of them are anxious to put their children into the mission schools even though they know that the Bible is regularly taught.9

Although there was significant demand for a Western-style education, existing Iranian institutions were unable to meet that demand. American missionary schools were in a unique position in the early part of the century to meet needs that the traditional Iranian educational system was unable to address and constituted an attractive alternative to sending one’s child to Europe. The Constitutional Revolution intensified the demand for Western methods of education. Indeed, the upper middle class and intelligentsia, particularly those with inclinations toward constitutionalism or liberalism, criticized traditional Iranian methods, such as the maktab and the madrisih, for being too provincial in outlook and deficient in curriculum. According to historian David Menashri, none of the schools taught the sciences and their curriculum was “totally irrelevant to the country’s needs.”10 As a result, the Majlis passed a law in 1910 that called for “compulsory elementary education, the collection of statistics, training of the teachers, and the publication of books.”11 As could be expected, however, Iran’s educational infrastructure at that time was unable to carry out the goal of a universal and compulsory elementary education on a Western model.12 The missionaries realized that the Iranian desire for a Western education gave them an unprecedented opportunity to reach Muslim youth.13

The combination of various factors significantly affected the aims and objectives of the educational mission and the curriculum that missionary educators employed. The opening of educational work with Muslims coincided with the expansion of evangelistic
opportunities as well as the eclipse of the emphasis on reaching the Muslim community indirectly through the Christian minorities. As Muslim demand for a Western education increased, the curriculum of the missionary schools shifted from an emphasis on producing evangelists to providing a solid primary and secondary education, thereby making a missionary education more attractive to Muslims. Where the West Persia mission especially had focused its efforts on poor Christian villagers in the outlying areas, the new method attracted the sons and daughters of predominantly wealthy and powerful Muslim nobles in the cities, especially Tehran.

Dr. Samuel Jordan, the chief American educational missionary in Tehran, and other educational missionaries shaped the new curriculum in response to what they perceived to be the failures of West Persia. Missionary educators in East Persia pointed out that the costs of working with Muslims through Christian evangelists far outweighed the benefits. For one thing, the social barriers between the Christian and Muslim communities were difficult to overcome. For another, the missionaries had become overly identified in the minds of Muslims with the interests of the Christian community, particularly in the role they played as the defenders of the oppressed before and during World War I. Another criticism that missionaries leveled at the previous method was that by focusing primarily on poor villagers, the social changes introduced by a Western education had little impact on the country as a whole.\textsuperscript{14}

In addition to focusing directly on the Muslim population, the new method aimed unabashedly at making the social and cultural atmosphere of Muslim society more open to Christianity. While it is tempting, particularly in light of the contemporary debate in Presbyterian circles over so-called fundamentalism and modernism, to conclude that the
goals of the mission had shifted from evangelization to civilization, this was not the case. The ultimate goal, preaching the Gospel to all of Iran, remained the same but the means of doing so had changed. The decades of previous experience with Muslims had convinced the missionaries as long as the prevailing culture of Iran inspired by Islam remained, Christianization on a mass scale would be unsuccessful. Instead of sowing the seed then, the missionaries turned to tilling the soil.

Although the missionaries still taught Christianity in the schools, their efforts at changing Iranian society, largely along the lines of American Progressive-era reforms, amounted to an unprecedented focus on social engineering. The goal of changing the culture, however, was not completely new. Missionaries had tried to do so in various areas through education for many years. One of the most notable areas of Iranian culture that the missionaries had tried to change was the role of women in society. The missionaries had routinely opened schools for girls the same time they opened schools for boys. Even in Iranian Christian society, most people believed that the education of woman was a complete waste of time and money. Of course, most American missionaries in Iran were women, who found this view to be objectionable and tried to remedy the situation through education. Indeed, missionary educators placed a high priority on changing the status of women and the ways in which Iranian men related to them, making their efforts truly radical from a conservative Iranian point of view. The missionaries directly challenged the notion that women were intellectually inferior by giving them essentially the same curriculum as the boys. They made the girls' graduation exercises into a demonstration to the community that women were the equal of men and deserving of better treatment. The missionaries emphasized these ideas in the boys'
school as well, assigning female as well as male missionaries to teach boys, reinforcing the notion that women were not inferior. One such teacher in the boys' schools was Mary Park Jordan, who often told the boys that "no country rises higher than the level of the women of that country."\textsuperscript{18}

**Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan and the Alborz College of Tehran**

By far, the most important missionary institution in the country was the Alborz College of Tehran. Synonymous with the college and American missionary education during this period was Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan, a name that became almost as famous as that of Howard Baskerville and Morgan Shuster. Through hard work and his considerable contacts with prominent Americans and Iranians, Jordan created an American-style college in the mid-1920s that the sons and daughters of the rich and powerful attended. In many ways, Jordan epitomized the new method of missionary work, as well as its contradictions. His career, which marked the apex of the missionary movement in Iran, ended in 1940 with the final closing of all missionary schools. The year 1940 marked the end of an era, not only for missionary education but for the missionary movement in Iran as a whole.

Jordan did not originally plan to become an educator. Born in 1871 in Stewartstown, Pennsylvania, he was aptly named after his great grandfather Samuel Martin, a prominent preacher. From an early age, Jordan felt the call to the ministry and he dedicated his life to the mission field while a freshman at Lafayette College. Through such campus institutions as the Student Volunteer Movement and the YMCA, thousands of young men and women like Jordan decided to devote their lives to preaching the
Gospel abroad. In addition to ministry, Jordan threw himself into athletics and excelled in football and track. Upon graduation from Lafayette in 1895, Jordan pursued his graduate theological training at Princeton Theological Seminary, another missionary stronghold. He received his M.A. from Princeton in 1897 and, just before he married Mary Park in 1898, applied to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for appointment abroad. According to family friend and co-worker Arthur Boyce, Jordan and Mary Park “expressed a preference for Korea which was then opening up in a wonderful way. Instead they were appointed to Teheran, Persia, where there was special need for a Principal of a school for boys.” In the summer of 1898, the couple married, Samuel Jordan was ordained, and the two left for a seven-year tour in Iran.

In more ways than one, the Jordans’ arrival in Iran marked the end of an old era in mission work and the beginning of a new one. They were among the last missionaries to make the arduous journey across the Alborz mountains from Resht to Tehran by caravan. A few years after the Jordans arrived, the Russians built a road fit for horse-drawn carriages, complete with a system of post houses, making the journey through northern Iran much easier. Another important change, which affected the Jordans during their first term in Iran, was the choice of what language to learn. When Presbyterian missionary James Bassett opened Tehran Station in 1871, he focused his attention on the Armenian and Jewish quarters of the capital city. As a result, the missionaries mostly worked in the Armenian language, unknown by the majority of Persian-speaking Muslims. By the 1890s, however, the educational work with Muslims in Tehran began to open. Consequently, the Jordans were among the last of the missionaries in Tehran to learn Armenian and among the first to work almost exclusively in the Persian language.
The Jordans devoted most of their time to language training, educational work, and evangelism. Directly challenging some of the social mores of Iran, the Jordans taught together in the mission school for boys, sending an implicit message to their students that women were the equal of men. Even as early as their first year, they sympathized with the plight of Iranian women and also opened schools for girls. They spent the rest of their time on evangelistic itinerating trips to outlying towns and villages. Accompanied by a senior missionary evangelist, a missionary doctor, and several Christian translators and preachers, they preached the Gospel to all who would listen. After a year or so of doing various jobs around the mission, the Jordans decided to devote their time exclusively to the Station's educational efforts. 

Their first furlough back to the United States came in 1906, after eight years on the field working in various capacities. On their way home to America, the Jordans represented the East Persia Mission to an intermission conference for missionaries to Muslim countries in Cairo. Other missionary colleges, such as the Syrian Protestant College of Beirut (later known as the American University of Beirut) and the American College in Cairo, gave the Jordans the inspiration to establish something similar in Tehran. While on furlough, Samuel Jordan spent a significant amount of his time raising funds for a future college. One of the major contributors of both money and personnel to the project was Jordan's alma mater, Lafayette College. Beginning with his furlough in 1906, Jordan initiated a program entitled "Lafayette-in-Persia", in which the students and faculty of Lafayette sent yearly contributions to his educational enterprise. In addition, 13 graduates from Lafayette served on the faculty of Alborz College. The President of Lafayette also served as the President of the Board of Trustees in America for Alborz.
Jordan also secured funding from other sources, such as the Board of Foreign Missions and private benefactors. The BFM heartily approved of the effort. Indeed, just before the outbreak of World War I, Tehran and Tabriz vied for the honor of establishing the first (and only) American college in Iran. Both William Shedd and Samuel Jordan presented proposals to the BFM and argued very similarly for the need for further education and the opportunities it presented for mission work.²³ Jordan’s proposal proved to be the stronger one and he won the Board’s approval as well as a limited amount of funding. Jordan did not stop there, however. Over the next several years, he undertook a massive public relations and fundraising campaign for the future college. He raised several million dollars, including a single large donation from a Mr. A.A. Rollestone, which enabled Jordan to buy land and begin construction on Rollestone Hall, the school’s main building.²⁴

Jordan used funding from the BFM and other sources to turn what began as the American Boys School into an American-style college. Tehran Station had opened the American Boys School in 1873 for Armenian and Jewish primary school-age boys. It took its first Muslim student in 1887. By 1896, enrollment reached 134 students, half of whom were Muslims. In 1902, the school expanded into a 10-year American High School and expanded to 12 years in 1913. The American High School became the American College of Tehran in 1925 and operated continuously until its closing in 1940. In 1935, the Persian government required all foreign schools to take Persian names. The faculty decided to adopt the name of the Alborz mountain range that ran across the northern half of the country, making it the Alborz College of Tehran (ACT).²⁵ No other
single educational institution in Iran at that time, except for possibly the Dar ul-Funun, was as influential as the ACT.

Echoing the attempted reforms of his Progressive counterparts, Jordan's chief objective for the college was to make Persian boys into men, capable of running their country in an efficient and democratic manner. Jordan loved to repeat a saying attributed to an unnamed Iranian villager that "The Americans have a factory in Tehran where they make men." This saying summed up Jordan's entire philosophy of teaching. Jordan maintained that Iranians were not inherently inferior but that the problems in Persian society stemmed from the lack of a good education with a strong moral component to it.

Long before the college was established, Jordan wrote,

The need of educated men for leadership in the nation has become especially manifest in these five years since the incoming of the Constitutional regime. Anew it has been proven to the world that self-government is not something that can be bestowed upon a people, nor something which they can suddenly seize for themselves and so take their place among the self-governing nations of the earth. For the nation as for the individual it is a process of growth, -- it is learning self-control, -- it is that attainment of character. The Armenian member of the last Majless addressing the boys of the high school in Teheran and pointing out to them the necessity of character well expressed it when he said that "the prime cause of the failure of the past years is that 'NO MAN WAS FOUND.' Truth compels us to admit that his diagnosis of the case was correct. ... [A]fter all, the great failure was not one of intellect primarily, but a failure in character, -- a failure in common every-day honesty and integrity, and not a few of the people agree with this Representative in recognizing the fact.

Jordan, like many Progressives and liberals, believed that changing the social environment through education, legislation, and moral suasion would enable one to effectively address deep-seated social problems. Jordan argued that Iran needed the American College of Tehran to do what neither the traditional Iranian educational system or European schools outside of Iran could not: provide Iranian youth with Christian influence and American know-how. He believed that the traditional cultural and
religious atmosphere of Iran was completely incapable of producing the type of strong man he envisioned. In particular, like most of the missionaries, he blamed Islam for ruining the essentially good raw material of Persian youth. Jordan was, if anything, even more dismissive of the ability of those who had taken an education in Europe or the United States to aid in this transformation. According to Jordan, Iranians educated abroad “cannot help getting out of touch with their own people” and “have been lost to Persia.” Echoing later Islamic critiques, he further noted that Westernized Iranians often “entirely miss the mark, mistaking the incidentals of Western civilization for the great essentials. They usually lose the good qualities of their own people and fail to acquire the best ones of the Europeans and so end in possessing the vices of both and the virtues of neither [italics are mine].”^29 By incidentals of Western culture, Jordan undoubtedly meant the trappings of the West, such as habits of dress, an emphasis on new technology, and the acquisition of material wealth.

According to Jordan, however, the essentials of the West that the missionaries tried to impart were its moral values, ultimately based on Christianity, which gave the West its material and economic prosperity. Jordan criticized the Western-educated progressive Persians who believed they could bring about a political revolution in Persia without addressing the moral problems at its core, which he believed only Christianity could resolve. Indeed, in that same article, Jordan goes on to argue that

The missionary institution having knowledge of both civilizations preserves all that is good in the old and brings in from the West the things that are essential to regeneration and reform. The young man is kept in touch with his home environment and in sympathy with his people. An intelligent patriotism is fostered and he is thus fitted to become a safe and sane leader. ... The Persian needs higher education and intends to have it — but his need is not for education of any sort but for Christian education which supplies the ideas and ideals which can generate and transform the individual and the nation. Greater than his need of
education is his need of Christ himself and there is no place where the intelligent classes can be reached so effectively as in the Christian school. 

In keeping with their Progressive sensibilities, Jordan and his fellow educators designed the entire curriculum of the schools with the intent of making Iranian men and women morally and physically strong, enlightened in the “scientific” methods of the West, and dedicated to Iran, but more to a vision of a Western-style democracy in Iran than the autocratic totalitarianism of the Pahlavi dynasty that emerged. The stated purpose of the college placed character formation at the forefront. According to Jordan, the purpose of the college was to prepare young men to enter public life with an intelligent understanding of world problems and to develop in them “an integrity of character which shall insure the stability as so essential for progress.” The college mission statement also emphasized that character development would be pursued inside and outside the classroom, including such areas as the boarding department, extracurricular clubs, and athletics. The “changing conditions brought about by the new day in Iran,” he reasoned, “demand more than ever that young men be trained to meet the need of just, strong, enlightened, and patriotic citizens.”

Although on the surface Jordan seemed more interested in spreading Western values to Iranians than Christianity, the reality was that “the church always came first.” Indeed, Jordan emphasized time and time again that “the ultimate and most important aim of education as of all other forms of our work is winning men to Christ and training them up into strong, Christian manhood.” Jordan was evangelistic in that his ultimate, long-range goal was to convert Iranian youth from Islam to Christianity. Even the most evangelistic of all the missionaries in Iran, William McElwee Miller, who had more success in preaching the Gospel to Iranian Muslims than any other missionary, vouched
for Jordan’s evangelistic credentials. Some missionaries believed that the main problem was the lack of true religious freedom in Iran. While Jordan agreed with this, he believed that true religious freedom could only be achieved by changing the hearts and minds of Iran’s youth, by undermining the culture of Islam, and by inculcating what he believed were Christian values.

The way Jordan defined “Christian values” sheds some light on the ambiguous relationship between his schools and Westernization. Most of the missionaries, including Jordan, criticized various specific aspects of Western culture while at the same promoting Western values in their curriculum. The missionaries were not unaware of this tension but claimed that their curriculum combined the best of what the West had to offer with the best that Iranian youth had to give. In other words, they were not trying to create another America in Iran, an America the missionaries believed to be too materialistic, too focused on the acquisition of material wealth, and unconcerned with spiritual and moral matters. Instead, they tried to apply what they believed were the best parts of American/Western culture to the Iranian scene. This had a direct connection with their goal of Christianization because they believed that the best of what the West had to offer originated in Christianity. Indeed, many of the missionaries attributed the ascendancy of Western Europe and North America to the predominance of Christianity in those countries.

In this account from E.T. Allen, a missionary working among the Kurds, the material prosperity of the West is directly linked with the predominance of Christianity in Western Europe and North America:
[A Kurd asked] leading questions that brought out discussions of the differences between Islam and Christianity.... I had remarked that the Kurds and the English are of one blood and that I liked to think of them as my brothers. A brave young fellow immediately asks: “If that is so why is it that you have gone so far ahead and we have remained so far behind in the world race?” That was a good question and I replied: “As I see it, it is this way – our fathers, if they were two brothers, started across the Steppes toward Europe. The brother who became your father turned south under the Caspian Sea, came into these parts, later embraced Islam, learned of his prophet the ways you follow – that is, they learned to rob, to kill, to steal, to have many wives and to live an idle life. The other brother went over to Europe, became a follower of Jesus Christ, learned of him his way, did the things he taught them – that is, to tell the truth, to work, to abhor idleness and to make men of themselves. What we are we have learned of our religious heads.... I have come to invite you to come with us and follow Him who gives the greater blessing.”

Allen’s views in this regard were typical of the unquestioned connection in the missionaries’ minds between Western superiority and its foundation in Christianity.

With this in mind, it is not hard to understand why Jordan believed that if he could teach his students the best of what the West had to offer, they would be much more open to the Christian Gospel. Notions of scientific management and progress, hallmarks of Progressive reform, permeated his thinking. In Jordan’s mind, Christianity and the notion of scientific progress were inextricably linked. In a speech at the laying of the cornerstone of the ACT’s science hall in 1931, Jordan cited a well-known Bible passage ("You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free," John 8:32) and used it as a springboard to argue that the truth of Christianity and the truth that comes through science are one and the same. Jordan stated that “We hold that all truths, in biology, Chemistry, physics, as well as in theology and religion, are His truths.” Later in the speech, Jordan compared the enlightened scientific standards of Americans with the unscientific methods of Iranians in the following anecdote:

A few years ago in company with one of the physicians of Teheran I rode out to see the great fortifications near the old city of Veramin. Noticing the huge
sundried bricks of which the ancient walls are constructed I dismounted and with
a small spring-tape measure which I carried along for such emergencies, I
measured one of the bricks and said, "It is 17 ½ inches long." The doctor then
took his riding crop and carefully measured the same brick, and further corrected
his measurements by spanning it with little finger and thumb and then solemnly
announced, "Yes, I would say it is somewhat longer than that, about 19 or 20
inches." 37

Jordan sarcastically noted that he "gazed upon the learned gentleman with wonder and
amazement, lost in admiration of one who could calmly overrule correct measurements
by aid of riding crop and rule of thumb." 38 Jordan ultimately believed that only the truth
of Christianity and the inculcation of those Western values inspired by Christianity could
address the backwardness that Islam had created in Iran.

At the same time, Jordan and missionary educators did not universally accept
everything that came from the West. Quite the contrary, Jordan and others were often
quite critical of the West and deemed the schools to be essential in combating its negative
influences. The missionaries considered agnosticism or irreligion to be the most
prominent threat from the West. Many pointed out that Iranians who went abroad to
receive an education came back not only with diminished respect for Islam but for any
religion whatsoever. Missionaries from all aspects of the work in Persia cited a lack of
any faith as a major problem in the years that followed World War I. Missionaries also
criticized the actions taken by Western nations in Iran. Jordan in particular was no fan of
Russia and felt betrayed by the actions of the British. Although they refrained from
doing so publicly, the missionaries criticized the actions of the imperial powers in Iran in
their private correspondence with the BFM and saw Western imperialism as negatively
affecting their work. World War I also tempered the missionaries' view about the
Christian nature of the West. After the war, they repeatedly made distinctions between

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Western/Christian values and Western politics. Indeed, Jordan's fondest dream was to raise up an entire generation of Iranian leaders, influenced by Christian faith, culture, and values, who would administer Iran independently in a rational and scientific manner, not to see it become a vassal or protectorate of a Western nation. He also hoped that the education Iranians received in the school would create a more tolerant religious atmosphere that would eventually lead to complete religious freedom, a universal political goal of the missionaries since they first came to the country.39

Jordan saw much to value in Persian culture as well and incorporated the elements he favored into the school and its curriculum. Although Jordan was not as accomplished a Persian scholar as William Shedd or William Miller, he admired Iran's rich cultural heritage, as well as its drive for independence and political autonomy. Jordan also valued Iranian nationalism and encouraged its growth in his schools. Throughout all of the college's papers, there are many references to Jordan's desire to create patriotic young men through education who would be willing to sacrifice for their country. Most importantly, wherever possible, Jordan tried to emphasize the many positive contributions of Persian culture. One example of this was Jordan's love of Persian poetry, which was among the courses taught at the College. Presaging a future theme of the Pahlavi dynasty, Jordan encouraged Iranian youth to take pride in their country's ancient heritage, all the while ignoring the Islamic aspects of Iran's past and present. Jordan even referred to Persia's imperial past in fundraising pamphlets.40

An excellent example of the combination of Persian and American elements in the school is the architecture of the main building of Alborz College, Rolleston Hall. In its design, Jordan consciously incorporated both Persian and American elements. He
described the building as combining “Persian architecture and charm with American substantiality and practicability. The arch which predominates in windows and doors is the old and famous Persian [i.e. Islamic] arch which is seen in the Taj Mahal and in the old mosques and palaces of Persia. Within the arches of the doorways are the [blue] tile mosaics which Persians love and high on the tower in the blank spaces which can be seen are to be tile inscriptions in the graceful Arabic writing which is an essential feature of every façade which is truly Persian. “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” is to be over the main door in Persian character [which was added by the early 1930s].... These features are not included without real purpose. Persian young men are to know that the American school is not for the purposes of making them Americans but for the purpose of making them into good Persians. The objective of our work is to take everything which is good in their culture and tradition and develop them in it and in them.”

At the same time, the mixture of Persian and American/Western elements was not of equal parts. The Persian elements were largely superficial while the core elements of the curriculum aimed at Westernization. It was a strategic move for Jordan to place all the unessential, but visible, elements of the school and education in a Persian setting while keeping the core elements of the curriculum American. As Jordan wrote in 1926, “We need to take care that we spend our strength for essentials and not for incidentals. We are not here to introduce either Western customs or Western costumes,” but rather Christian values. While Rollestone Hall appeared to be very Persian on the outside, for example, Jordan noted that American architects designed it and oversaw its construction. Although the appearance of the façade was Persian, the verse it quoted came from the
Bible (John 8:32), not the Quran. Indeed, as previously discussed, the “truth” to which Jordan referred was not only the Christian gospel but also the rational and scientific truth of Western methods. The ACT’s curriculum taught in the classrooms of Rollestone Hall aimed at remaking the Iranian youth culturally, socially, religiously, and even politically. It is true, however, that Jordan and the other missionary educators did not intend to make them into Americans but the entity they aimed at creating certainly was not historically Persian either.

In addition to the curriculum, other educational institutions affiliated with the college played a role in character formation as well. One such institution was the missionaries’ boys and girls boarding departments, which housed a majority of the students attending the ACT. From the days when they worked with the elementary school, parents of Iranian students urged the Jordans, who had never had any children of their own, to accept their children into their home. After seeing how effective this could be, the Jordans set up a larger Boarding Department as a supplement to the schools. Indeed, it was probably the Boarding Department even more than the elementary schools that shaped the formation and reputation of Alborz College. The Jordans paid close attention to it and selected the boys who occupied it very carefully. Since the boarding department had to be entirely self-supporting from the start, only the sons of the relatively wealthy could stay in it, although the Jordans made the fees high enough that one out of every ten boys could stay free of charge in case of need. As a result, the school’s population was comprised overwhelmingly of the pampered children of Iran’s rich and powerful, a fact that Jordan emphasized in promotional materials. Among those who boarded were the sons and daughters of the governing elite of Tehran and Tabriz, as
well as the children of tribal chieftains from the outlying provinces. In a promotional pamphlet from 1921, Jordan wrote:

One of the most remarkable things about this school and especially the Boarding Department is the class of pupils enrolled. While pupils from every grade of society and every race and creed are accepted without discrimination, an unusually large number are children of the nobility and the other most influential families of the country. More than one-fifth of the pupils are sons of government officials. Last year at one time among the sixty-odd boys living in our one double dormitory there were two brothers of the Prime Minister, the son of his immediate predecessor, six grandsons of the most prominent Prime Ministers who have governed Persia in the past fifty years…. In addition to these there are studying in the schools the sons of other cabinet ministers, of royal princes – first and second cousins of the Shah – of governors of provinces, of other high officials and influential men – boys, who, whether educated or not, will in future years be among the rulers of Persia.43

The missionaries used the boarding schools as a laboratory to teach the students character and integrity. As Annie Boyce, a missionary and teacher at the school, stated, “Alborz ideals for its resident students, as for all students, include a high health standard, sound scholarship, the development of Christian character built on reverence, honesty, tolerance, a love of work and the spirit of service.”44 The students carried out a significant portion of the schools’ administration and maintenance tasks. Jordan used the administration of the school as a laboratory to teach the dignity of labor to his students.

Jordan’s emphasis on the dignity of manual labor never failed to make an impression on the students and their parents and sometimes led to difficulties. Most students, however, seemed to appreciate the trust that Jordan placed in them to run the finances of the boarding school with little supervision. Also, even though they did not particularly enjoy manual labor, they did learn to appreciate it. One graduate of Alborz and attendee of the Boarding School, Shukrallah Nasir, commented that after Jordan had bought some new land for the school, he got the students together and told them that he
wanted to build a soccer field for the school on the new land. Jordan put a shovel and
pick on his shoulders, marched the boys out to the field, and they all threw themselves
into the work. According to Nasir, "this was pretty exceptional in those days in Iran
because [to] the mindset of the nobility, the khans [tribal chiefs], and the families of the
khans, who sat behind a desk all day, [even] the thought of picking up a rose-scented
envelope was difficult." After they had finished several hours of back-breaking work,
Jordan told the boys "I trust you realize what you have done. I want it to go down in the
history of the college that the first work on the new campus should not be done by
peasants but by the self-respecting students of the college who wished to show by action
as well as by words that a New Era had come to Iran and henceforth any kind of work
that is of service to mankind is honorable."^46

Although it never took the place of academics, one of the most popular of
Jordan's methods to inculcate character in Iranian boys was his liberal use of sports. In
addition to traditional Iranian sports such as wrestling, Jordan introduced tennis,
basketball, volleyball, track, and especially soccer. Jordan believed that sports helped to
create a sense of sportsmanship, teamwork, and hard work in young men. As an avid
athlete during his college days at Lafayette, Jordan prioritized athletics enough to import
teachers from the U.S. to concentrate specifically on physical education, such as
Lafayette alumnus and wrestling star Leroy Rambo. Sports were such a prominent
feature of the schools that, according to Nasir, the public perception was that all the
students did was play games instead of studying. In addition, Boyce reports that the
prevailing sentiment among the nobility was that the playing of games was beneath
them.48 Jordan consciously used sports as a means to challenge these elitist attitudes of
the nobility.

Another value that Jordan tried to emphasize in the boarding departments and the
schools was that of racial and religious equality. Long before the Persianization
programs of Reza Shah, Jordan fostered the notion of a single Persian identity common to
the entire diverse population of students. Nasir stated that the atmosphere in the school
was very “cosmopolitan” and egalitarian. “There were Turks, Lurs, Kurds, Arabs,
Chaldeans [Nestorians], Armenians, Americans, Muslims, and Indians who all lived with
one another. They all ate at the same table and slept in the same room.... The emphasis
... was on the fact that we all came from the same race and the same nation and
recognized that our common country was Iran.”49 This emphasis on national unity spread
to religious matters as well. Although Jordan sincerely hoped that each of his students
would adopt Christianity, and the Bible was used as a text in some courses at the schools,
nonetheless he did not force it on his students and even taught his students to respect the
religious beliefs of others.50 There was no overt pressure on his students to convert from
Islam to Christianity because none of the missionaries were inclined to exert it and, even
if they were, they would have encountered serious trouble with the government.

Jordan also emphasized the development of democratic values in the various
clubs and organizations supported by the school. The emphasis on democracy dovetailed
nicely with his desire to eliminate ethnic and religious rivalry among the students. Jordan
explicitly connected the abandonment of privilege by birth with the establishment of
democratic government.51 Through the clubs, sports, the boarding school, and the
curriculum, Jordan tried to inculcate a commitment to a democratic form of government
in his students. In addition to classes on government that openly advocated a Western-style democracy, Jordan often explicitly condemned past dictatorships in his classes. While at the same time promoting patriotism and Iranian nationalism, Jordan’s criticisms of Napoleon and Alexander the Great were thinly-veiled references to the contemporary dictatorship of Reza Shah. Jordan often prefaced these remarks with a popular Iranian saying equivalent to “the walls have ears” (dīvār mūsh dārad va mūsh gūsh), referring to the Shah’s open suppression of dissent and his reliance on the secret police to uncover it.\textsuperscript{52} Jordan’s open advocacy of democracy, combined with the influence and power of the alumni of the school in government and the role of the Christian religion in the schools themselves, caused him no end of trouble with Reza Shah.

\textbf{Missionary Schools, Reza Shah, and Nationalism}

From the beginning of their involvement in Iran until the early 1920s, American missionaries operated in a fluid and unstable political and social environment marked by a weak central government under the Qajar dynasty. Imperial encroachment, a revolution, unceasing communal violence, and Iran’s unwilling involvement in World War I fatally weakened the Qajar dynasty. As previously demonstrated, this social instability resulted in a constantly changing and unstable political environment. This fluidity led to a loss of property and even a loss of life, as evidenced by the death of Labaree in 1907 and widespread destruction of World War I. The instability of the war caused both Iranians and American missionaries to hope for peace and stability in a stronger central government.
The shape of Iranian central government in the postwar period was quite different. In the immediate postwar years, weak central rule continued under the unpopular and weak young Ahmad Shah, who retained his monarchical authority in name only and spent most of his time ensconced in his inner chambers or on expensive and wasteful trips to Europe. As a result, Reza Khan, the charismatic and powerful commander of the Russian-trained Cossack brigade, stepped into the vacuum and took the position of Prime Minister in 1923, at which time he invited the Shah to go on an extended European "vacation." In 1925, he persuaded the Majlis to depose the Qajar dynasty and declare him Shah, at which time he assumed the name Reza Shah and inaugurated Pahlavi rule. Contrary to his Qajar predecessors, Reza Shah’s rule would be marked by the growing strength of the central government, increasing independence from foreign influence, and a large degree of internal stability, all of which came at the cost of the absolute suppression of all dissent.

Reza Shah consciously tried to emulate his neighbor Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Indeed, before establishing the Pahlavi dynasty and declaring himself king, Reza Shah tried to turn Iran into a Turkish-style Republic, with himself as “President”, but met with the open and vociferous opposition of the clergy, which forced him to set his plan aside. Like Ataturk, Reza Shah turned his attention to reforming, secularizing, and modernizing the country, as well as creating a single, national identity. Unlike Ataturk, however, Reza Shah’s rule was formed less around an ideology of a secular autarchic nationalism than on a cult of personality. As a result, it is not surprising that the army became the key institution to Reza Shah’s power and that he expanded and rapidly modernized it. He used the army to suppress first the most visible representations of dissent, the quasi-
independent tribes. For many years, the Shah's army put down tribal rebellions, forced the semi-nomadic tribes to settle in one place, and extended the power of the central government over the countryside. Reza Shah also used the army and the police to suppress any kind of dissent against his personal rule and used the educational system to produce a generation of pliable, Westernized bureaucrats who would obey his orders without question.53

Reza Shah's rule also sought to impose a specific kind of nationalism from above on Iran. When speaking of Iranian nationalism, it is important to note that there were several varieties, each of which carried the same label. The nationalism of the constitutionalists, which differed little from that of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in the 1950s, opposed the twin pillars of foreign imperialism and the autocracy of the monarchy. In that form of nationalism, Islam, although still present and occupying a favored status, played a secondary role. The Iranian nationalism that the missionaries advocated opposed foreign imperial control of the country but favored Westernization. The missionaries also taught their Iranian students that government should be secular. Reza Shah's form of nationalism from above aimed at making Iran completely independent of all foreign influence but that establishing the Shah as supreme ruler. Western technology should be adopted but without the ideas and values that accompany them. Reza Shah was openly hostile toward the clerical class and went to extraordinary lengths to curtail their power, but without openly renouncing Islam. Reza Shah advocated the notion of a domesticated Islam that would support his rule without creating an independent ruling class that could potentially oppose him.
The missionaries viewed the rise of Reza Shah with ambivalence at first, and then (to the extent that they could get away with it) muted opposition. Michael P. Zirinsky claims that the missionaries overwhelmingly supported and approved of the rule of Reza Shah. He asserts that the missionaries “assumed that dictatorship was necessary under Iranian conditions and that the shah’s rule was progressive.” Such a characterization contradicts the evidence. Although the missionaries viewed Reza Shah’s initial rise with ambivalence, they, like the rest of Iran, viewed his subsequent governance, marked by xenophobic nationalism and authoritarian rule, with deep suspicion and fear. Furthermore, the more powerful Reza Shah became, the more restrictions he placed on their educational and evangelistic work, making the missionaries even less likely to be favorable toward him. At the same time, the missionaries came under the scrutiny of the secret police and could not express their dissent openly. The secret police even opened and read their correspondence with the Board of Foreign Missions, scanning it for any anti-Shah references. The veiled nature of their references to the Shah in their letters made it superficially appear they supported his rule when, in reality, they were well aware that he threatened their very existence in the country.

The missionaries were indeed cautiously optimistic about Reza Shah’s regime at first. They celebrated the fact that Iran “exchanged a worn-out dynasty for a new one, a spineless absentee king for an energetic giant” with the drive to establish peace and undertake reforms. They applauded his efforts at modernization, especially the creation of roads and improvement of communications. They also noted with appreciation the Shah’s open attack on the power of the clergy, including especially the law that outlawed
the veil in 1935, which was to the missionaries the very symbol of Islam’s oppression of women.

At the same time, even as early as 1925, the missionaries openly expressed their uneasiness with his rule, even before it directly threatened their work. In November of 1925, missionary C. B. Fischer openly questioned the legitimacy of Reza Khan’s accession to the monarchy. Fischer believed that the overwhelming majority of people opposed his rise to power but were unable to prevent it because of his control over the army. Missionary Elgin Sherk dismissed Reza Shah as nothing more than a military dictator. In 1928, R.C. Hutchison, a missionary and teacher at the college in Tehran, openly detailed the extreme lengths to which Reza Shah would go to stay in power:

A year or more ago seventy of the finer army officers made a league to overthrow the dictator and free Persia. On the day of the planned coup d’etat they were betrayed. The leader, father of two little boys in our school, was shot just three days ago, the Shah officiating. A brother of one of our Sophomores is condemned to fifteen years in prison, and another who is a graduate of the school is condemned to five years. And this morning at sunrise a murderer was hanged in the public square and his body left to hang for one hour. Elections for Parliament are near. The country is in turmoil; feeling is high, but bayonets will rule....

As Reza Shah’s power grew, the missionaries’ criticisms became more veiled or eliminated altogether for fear of repercussions on their work.

Reza Shah had many reasons to dislike the missionaries and to shut down their schools. He openly disliked foreigners and their influence in the country. He wanted some of the works and services carried out by foreigners, such as the educational and medical work undertaken by the missionaries, to be handed over to Iranians. Reza Shah’s secularism influenced his attitude toward Christianity as well as Islam. He appreciated the Americans’ educational efforts but disliked the religious “propaganda” that came with
it. Reza Shah also attacked American missionary schools as a way to mollify the Muslim clergy while he attacked their power base. Finally, Reza Shah was almost surely aware of the missionaries' not-so-well hidden opposition to his regime and that the democratic values that educators such as Jordan taught in the schools were aimed at the future establishment of a very different kind of government. Reza Shah's significant educational reforms aimed at creating a class of compliant bureaucrats, not potential democratic revolutionaries, and it is likely that he feared the influence of the missionary schools could lead to opposition.

Whatever his ultimate motivation, it did not take long for Reza Shah to clamp down on American missionary schools. Prior to his rise, almost all the opposition to the schools came from below, usually from a local cleric who claimed the missionaries converting Muslims to Christianity. After 1925, opposition came from above. The first major impasse occurred in 1927, when the Minister of Education presented four demands to all the American schools in Iran; that they had to adopt the government's course of study; that students had to take and pass a government proficiency exam at the completion of elementary and middle school education; that the missionaries had to discontinue the use of the Bible with Muslim students; and that they also had to teach the *shari'at* (Muslim religious law) to Muslim students in preparation for a proficiency exam on the subject. Considering that the overall goal of American missionary education was to make Muslim students more open to Christianity, according to Arthur Boyce, giving up the teaching of the Bible especially "seemed a total reversal of our whole purpose." The missionaries first tested the waters when C. B. Fischer, the principal of the American missionary school in Hamadan, refused to carry out the Ministry of Education's orders.
When his school was unceremoniously closed as a result, the missionaries decided to come to terms with the government.\textsuperscript{59}

After much discussion with Iranian authorities and American diplomats, the missionaries eventually reached a \textit{modus vivendi} with the Iranian government. They accepted the proficiency exams and the government’s general course of study. They refused to abandon the Bible as ordered, but did agree to use textbooks based on the Bible and even then only in classes entitled “Ethics.” The missionaries flatly refused to teach Muslim religious law themselves but did provide their Muslim students with opportunities to learn the \textit{shari’at} off-campus.\textsuperscript{60} These imperfect arrangements appeased the government for the time being.

In 1932, another storm arose when the Ministry of Education closed all foreign elementary schools in the country. Unlike the crisis of 1928, there was very little room for negotiation this time. At that time, around three to four thousand elementary students were enrolled in their schools. The closing of the schools was a very serious blow to their educational enterprise not only quantitatively, but qualitatively as well. The majority of all students in their high schools and Alborz College had attended their elementary schools.\textsuperscript{61} The missionaries tried to get around the order by turning over the elementary schools to Iranian Christians to administer and run; however, this effort was unsuccessful and convinced the Ministry of Education that Americans were trying to flout its rules.\textsuperscript{62}

Although not directly connected with the educational work, the final closing of Urumia (renamed Rezaiyeh by Reza Shah in 1933) Station in 1935 demonstrated how strong Reza Shah had become. Urumia station had continuously operated for over a
hundred years and had survived almost complete destruction during World War I. The missionaries returned in 1923 and reestablished a presence there, although neither as large nor as influential as before the war. In 1935, Reza Shah declared Rezaiyeh off-limits to foreigners, especially the missionaries, on the grounds that it was a military zone needed for operations against the rebellious tribes of the northwest. This decision was probably also a result of the lingering bitterness against the misunderstandings that resulted from the role the missionaries played during the war. Whatever the reason, Reza Shah had grown powerful enough to close down a missionary institution that had been in existence over a century.63

The subsequent period was marked by a general calm in relations with the Ministry of Education, followed by a blow from which the missionaries' educational system would never recover. From 1932 to 1939, the Ministry of Education and the missionary schools lived somewhat uneasily with one another but with little change. The Ministry of Education would make a demand, the missionaries would initially refuse but find some way to compromise, the Ministry of Education would accept the compromise, and the two would move on. One factor that changed the state of affairs a bit was the break in relations between the United States and Iran in 1935 over an insignificant diplomatic incident.64 The final blow came rather unexpectedly in August 1939, however, when Reza Shah ordered that all existing foreign educational institutions be handed over to the government within two weeks. The official reason for the move was that "the Iranian government did not wish to have any Soviet schools in the country and therefore had to deny the privilege to other nations."65 In reality, two factors probably led Reza Shah to believe that he could get away with such a bold move: the distraction of
the worsening political situation in Europe and the break in diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States.

Without any significant diplomatic support, the missionaries and the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions attempted in vain to stave off the inevitable. In the face of such serious opposition, they achieved only a postponement of the closing of the school until the end of the school year. During that year, the missionaries brought to bear every bit of influence at their disposal to rescind the decision to close Alborz College. Jordan himself petitioned the many graduates of Alborz College within the government to appeal to the Shah on behalf of the school but no one dared to do so. In a risky move, Jordan personally appealed to the Shah in a letter in which he argued that the Alborz College had served Iran faithfully for many years and had produced hundreds of loyal, patriotic, and obedient servants of the Shah. He insisted that the school had worked together with the Ministry of Education to implement the government’s program. Jordan also cited the school as the single most effective institution in strengthening U.S.-Iranian relations. His best efforts came to naught, however, and the Iranian government, after agreeing to pay the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions $1.2 million, took over all remaining mission school properties in the country. Not surprisingly, the closing of the school convinced Jordan to retire after 42 years of service in Iran.

Although the missionaries’ educational program would never recover from the blow it had been dealt, missionaries were able to continue to work in Iran until the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Jordan returned to Iran during World War II, long after the forced departure of Reza Shah, to encourage good will between Iran and the United States once again. Like Baskerville and Shuster, Iranians remembered Jordan fondly
years after he left the country in 1940. After Jordan’s departure, the Iranian government turned Alborz College into a high school, which is still in existence today. The government installed a bust of Jordan in the school in 1948.68 Jordan died four years later, still hoping that the Iranian government would allow the Presbyterians to reopen their schools.

Conclusion: Assessing the Overall Impact of the Schools

Any discussion of Alborz College would be incomplete without attempting to assess its impact. Jordan intended to carry out a “constructive revolution” that would change the cultural atmosphere of Iran to make it more conducive to Christianity. Certainly, the long-awaited Christian revival among Muslims never materialized but the College did have a dramatic impact in other areas.

The graduates of American missionary schools in Tehran formed an alumni association that until 1946 published a yearly directory. Jordan often boasted in College fundraising pamphlets that the graduates of American missionary schools went on to serve at the highest levels of Iranian government, although it is unclear whether graduates owed their positions to their American-style education or to their family connections. The documentary record confirms his assertion that Alborz graduates went on to become “the rulers of Persia.”69 In 1918 alone, for example, Jordan’s American High School graduating class included three future Cabinet Ministers, a future director of the Revenue Agency, a future U.S.-Iranian trade representative, three future employees of the Royal Bank, and five future high-ranking employees of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.70 This class was exceptional with regard to the number of high-ranking officials it
produced but not unique among the schools' classes as a whole. In fact, the alumni
directory of 1934 reveals that the schools produced four Majlis Deputies and some half
dozen Cabinet Ministers. The alumni directory also indicates what sectors of the Iranian
economy that Alborz alumni favored, especially government, the oil industry, finance,
and medicine. A handful of alumni became Christian pastors and evangelists. Many of
the graduates eventually emigrated to the United States. 71

On the basis of this incomplete data, it is very difficult to make a definite
assessment of the contributions of American mission school graduates. It seems clear,
however, that the schools created a reservoir of culturally-sensitive and bilingual Iranians
who acted as liaisons between Western and Iranian interests. This would explain why the
Anglo-Iranian Oil Company became the largest non-governmental employer of mission
school graduates, followed closely by the Imperial Bank of Iran, also a British-owned
organization. Both the Shuster and Millspaugh missions drew almost all of their Iranian
employees for their financial missions from among the graduates of the American
missionary schools. Both Millspaugh and Shuster reported that the mission school
graduates had skills that made them invaluable to their missions and, additionally, were
completely trustworthy.

Most of the graduates, however, went on to serve in Iranian government, often at
the highest levels. Why is this the case? Certainly, the fact that many of the school's
students came from prominent families accounts for part of the success of its graduates;
however, there are some additional factors at work here. Jordan's curriculum, which
emphasized patriotism and service to one's country, probably contributed to this trend.
The curriculum emphasized such useful skills as language training in English, Persian,
Arabic, and French, as well as accounting, typewriting, and a host of other practical skills useful to any government employee. Ironically, however, a significant reason that mission school graduates were able to flourish in the government was probably because of their lack of any significant connection with the clergy. The antipathy of both of the Pahlavi shahs to the Muslim clergy of Iran is well known. Reza Shah valued the mission school graduates not only because they were proficient in the ways of the West, but also because they had no apparent loyalty to the clergy. The schools did not succeed in making the majority of their students Christian but they made their alumni into even more nominal Muslims than they already were.

In the end, despite the large number of prominent alumni in the government, it was not enough to save Alborz College, the first and only American-run college-level educational institution in Iran. One of its graduates, Ali Asghar Hekmat, from the American High School class of 1914, served as the Minister of Education from 1933 to 1937. Hekmat and many others spoke publicly and eloquently in praise of the Alborz College and Jordan's educational efforts. Ultimately, however, power in 1930s Iran flowed from above. In spite of all the emphasis on democracy, religious freedom, character, and integrity, in the end only one voice counted, that of Reza Shah. The missionary schools were ultimately just one among many casualties of Reza Shah's dictatorship.
Notes


2 Ibid., pp. 53-55, 64; Keddie, Roots of Revolution, pp. 52-54.


12 Although David Menashri did not deal with American missionary schools in the text of his monograph, he does in the footnotes and acknowledges the important role they played in this area. See Menashri, Education and Modern Iran, pp. 40n, 41n, 53n, 107n.


14 J.D. Frame to Robert Speer, Charlevoix, MI, 10 July 1920, RG 91, Box 3, File 17, PHS. See also Speer’s reply, Speer to J.D. Frame, New York, 20 July 1920, RG 91, Box
For an excellent summation of the old method and a counterpoint to Jordan’s proposal for a college in Tehran, see William Ambrose Shedd, “Educational Ideals and Methods for the American School for Boys,” 1916, Urumia, RG 91, Box 5, File 19, PHS.


See, for example, the home letter of Harriet Pease, Tabriz, 20 July 1931, RG 91, Box 10, File 1, PHS.


Boyce, “Alborz College of Tehran,” pp. 11-12.


Nasir, Ravish-i Duktur Jordan, pp. 29, 58-59; “A Power Plant for Persia,” September 1921, RG 91, Box 17, File 10, PHS.

“A Power Plant for Persia,” September 1921, RG 91, Box 17, File 10, PHS.


33 William McElwee Miller to Mary Jordan, Tehran, 7 July 1952, Miller Papers, Box 15, PTS.


36 Jordan, “Address of President Jordan at the Laying of the Cornerstone of Moore Science Hall,” Tehran, 27 July 1931, RG 91, Box 16, File 9, PHS.

37 Ibid., p. 2.

38 Ibid.


41 Jordan, “Building of the American College of Tehran, 15 April 1927, RG 91, Box 16, File 5, PHS.


43 Jordan, “A Power Plant for Persia,” Tehran, September 1921, RG 91, Box 17, File 10, PHS.

44 Annie Stocking Boyce, “Dormitory Life at Alborz College,” Tehran, mid- to late-1930s, RG 91, Box 18, File 11, PHS.

45 Nasir, Ravish-i Duktur Jordan, pp. 18. The translation is my own.


55 *“A New Day in Old Persia”,* RG 91, Box 10, File 5, PHS.


57 Home Letter from R.C. Hutchison, Tehran, 23 February 1928, RG 91, Box 2, File 14, PHS.

58 Arthur Boyce, *“History of Alborz College,”* p. 22. See also Sir R. Clive to Sir Austen Chamberlain, Persia, Annual Report, 1927, pp. 21-22, FO 416/113, PRO.

59 Arthur Boyce, *“History of Alborz College,”* pp. 22-23.


61 George Zoeckler to North Church, Daulatabad, 22 January 1933, RG 280, The Zoeckler Family Papers, Box 1, File 8, PHS; Mary Lewis Shedd to Robert Speer, Philadelphia, 14 May 1931, RG 91, Box 10, File 1, PHS.


63 R.H. Hoare to Foreign Office, Tehran, 9 February 1934, FO 371/17909, PRO; Starhope Palmer to R.H. Hoare, Tabriz, 7 December 1933, FO 371/17909, PRO; Palmer to Hoare, Tabriz, 8 January 1934, FO 371/17909, PRO; Palmer to Hoare, Tabriz, 20 February 1934, FO 371/17909, PRO; Sir R. Hoare to Foreign Office, Tehran, Persia, Annual Report, 1933, p. 21, FO 371/17909, PRO.


66 Samuel Jordan to Reza Shah Pahlavi (in Persian), Tehran, 10 Ordibehesht 1318/1 May 1939, as quoted in an appendix in Nasir, *Ravish-i Duktur Jordan*.


68 See [www.alborzi.com](http://www.alborzi.com) for a website run by alumni of the high school. It includes a full-color portrait of Rolleston Hall, still standing after eight decades of war, revolution, and upheaval, a testimony to its founder.

69 Jordan, “A Power Plant for Persia,” Tehran, September 1921, RG 91, Box 17, File 10, PHS.


72 B.S. Gifford to Executive Committee, Tehran, 10 August 1936, RG 231, The Rolla E. Hoffman Papers, Box 1, File 5.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The 1930s were in many ways the best of times for the American missionary enterprise in Iran. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, it was during this period that the Alborz College of Tehran reached the apex of its influence. Up until the very year of its closure, the ACT grew both in enrollment and in the overall influence of its graduates. Iran itself, under the simultaneously reforming and oppressive rule of Reza Shah, was undergoing a period of modernization and Westernization. As a result, the skills of missionary school graduates were in very high demand. In addition, Pahlavi rule had finally established a degree of order in the country that allowed the missionaries to operate without fear of the tribal raids, massacres, and widespread disorder of the Qajar era. In addition, the long-sought objective of openly evangelizing Iran’s Muslims had finally been achieved, at least in theory. Definite obstacles still remained to evangelization but the missionaries had never been more free to preach the Christian gospel to Muslims, and some Muslims even converted to Christianity as a result. Although Muslim converts still had to endure social ostracism, gone (at least for the time being) were the days when Mirza Ibrahim was put to death in 1896 for converting to Christianity.
At the same time, the decade of the 1930s was also the worst of times for American missionaries in the country and proved to be as challenging a period they had experienced since World War I. Although Reza Shah’s rule provided a relatively stable atmosphere for missionary work, it did so at a price. As previously discussed, Reza Shah’s rule was totalitarian and, to a large extent, xenophobic as well, which had a direct and negative impact on mission work. Over time, as Reza Shah’s power increased, he gradually placed more restrictions on all aspects of missionary work in his effort to decrease the power and influence of foreigners in Iran. The most significant casualty of these restrictions was the educational enterprise, the jewel in the crown of missionary accomplishments. As missionary schools were placed under increasing restrictions, so too were missionary hospitals, doctors, and nurses. Reza Shah also required that all foreign doctors be licensed by the Iranian government, in part an attempt to curtail the activities of the so-called Ḥākim Ṣāhib, the missionary doctor who occupied a position of influence in both rural and urban Iranian society.¹ No longer would there be missionary doctors like Dr. J.P. Cochran, Dr. John Wishard, and Dr. George W. Holmes, who held informal positions of influence and prestige both in the courts of the Shahs, the households of provincial nobles, the offices of foreign diplomats, and among average Iranians, both Muslim and Christian alike.

External factors also weakened the American missionary enterprise. The missionaries’ funding came from the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, which, of course, relied on donations from churches and individuals to fund their work. The boom years of the 1920s funded a major expansion of American missions, not only in Iran but elsewhere as well. With the onset of the Great Depression, however, the funding for the
support of existing missionary work dried up. As a result, the BFM cut the American missionary force in Iran by almost a third, which had a major impact on their work. This trend dovetailed nicely with ideological trends within the churches that de-emphasized the necessity and importance of missionary work. Modernists believed that the spiritual concerns were subordinate to material concerns and, as a result, chose to devote more funding to relieving suffering at home rather than abroad. Without a concern for evangelism combined with the increasing need to address social problems at home caused by the Great Depression, the missionary enterprise as a whole shrunk to a shadow of its former self.

Collectively, the internal opposition of Reza Shah and the external lack of funds for mission work as a result of the Great Depression dealt the American missionary enterprise in Iran a blow from which it would never recover, although missionaries remained in Iran in reduced numbers and influence until 1979. With the onset of World War II and the Allied invasion of pro-German, but neutral, Iran in 1940, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate the throne. Although there was some half-hearted talk of reopening the missionary schools, the new economic realities and the war necessitated against such a course. As World War II escalated, the missionaries who were already in Iran were unable to leave for the duration while missionaries on furlough were unable to return. The missionaries who remained in Iran continued to focus on evangelizing both Iranian Muslims and Allied occupying troops.

World War II was a turning point in another way as well. Although the American missionary movement was in eclipse by that time, the American government’s interest in and influence on Iran was on the rise. During World War II, the strategic influence of
Iran was obvious: it was a source of oil, an all-important resource, and a crucial supply link to Russian forces in Eastern Europe. After the war, Iran's significance increased as the American relationship with the Soviet Union shifted from one of alliance to Cold War foe. Indeed, Iran was arguably the first battleground of a Cold War that would last for decades to come when the U.S. and Iranian diplomacy forced Soviet troops to evacuate northern Iran in 1946. From 1946 to 1979, the U.S. built up Iran as a bulwark against Soviet expansion into the Middle East. This would result in a U.S.-led coup to oust Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953 and the subsequent build-up of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi into a more powerful and dictatorial monarch than he could have ever been without American aid and support.

This is, of course, one of the key areas of significance of American missionaries in Iran. Their century of involvement in Iran prior to World War II laid the foundations for the American-Iranian relationship. Although the American policy toward Iran was one of client-patron after World War II, and certainly qualified as imperial at times, the relationship subsequent to that time was very different. The missionaries came to Iran motivated by a humanitarian ideology of mission that prompted the missionaries to pursue activities aimed at evangelizing Iran's majority and minority populations and, secondarily, bringing them the "blessings" of Western civilization. The missionaries spent their time, money, and effort trying to help hundreds of thousands of Iranians over the course of a century. In addition to evangelism, this help was expressed as providing free or low-cost medical treatment to both rural and urban Iranians; opening schools at all levels all across northern Iran; acting as advocates for Iran's oppressed ethnic and religious minorities; providing aid and support to tens of thousands of Iranian refugees of
All religions and ethnicities during World War I; trying to prevent communal violence by breaking down ethnic and religious prejudice through education; and promoting various social reforms, not the least of which was the emancipation of Iranian women.

By contrast, the American government’s interest in Iran during this time was twofold; first, to support and protect its citizens in the country, the majority of whom were missionaries; and second, to prevent its citizens’ extensive involvement in Iran’s affairs from involving the U.S. in the imperial struggle between Russia and Great Britain. As a result, the U.S. government gave the missionaries a free hand to define the American-Iranian relationship in any way they chose. Even the financial advisors, who certainly qualify as secular missionaries of a sort, were officially and unofficially independent of American government support. Like the missionaries, the financial advisors were also interested in uplift and civilization, but of a slightly different sort. While the missionaries focused primarily on spiritual concerns, the financial advisors stressed economic solutions to Iran’s material problems. Yet they, too, were motivated by an ideology of mission that stressed the importance of uplift and civilization for its own sake. The advisors stood little to gain personally from implementing economic reforms in the country. Iran was too far away from the United States and too small to serve as a significant market for American manufactured goods. In addition, most of the natural resources Iran possessed could be gained more quickly and cheaply inside the United States or Latin America. For example, the United States was at this time the world’s chief producer of oil. Instead of promoting personal gain or American economic advancement, the financial advisors, in the same way that Emily Rosenberg describes, were financial missionaries to Iran, exporting a liberal developmentalist ethic because
they idealistically, and perhaps a bit naively, believed that other countries would benefit if they modernized and Westernized along American lines.³

The missionaries and the financial advisors then were both wittingly and unwittingly agents of modernization in Iran. While the Pahlavi Shahs' modernization programs flowed from the top down, the missionaries sought to modernize from both the bottom up and the top down. In the schools, they promoted ideas that both supported and conflicted with the Pahlavi regime. On the one hand, they stressed habits of industrial morality, the superiority of Western methodologies, and de-emphasized the importance of the Islamic faith in public life, all of which aided Reza Shah. On the other hand, they also stressed independence, democracy, and political and religious freedom, which probably helped convince Reza Shah to close down the schools.

The key link between the financial advisors and the missionaries was the American Progressive reform movement that dominated the American political scene from the 1890s until World War I. Though motivated primarily by religious idealism and a desire to save the lost from spiritual destruction, the missionaries were also greatly influenced by currents within American Progressivism. Thwarted by both legal and social obstacles to evangelizing Iran's Muslims, the missionaries sought to reform the social and political atmosphere through education to make Iran more conducive to the spread of Christianity. In addition, the missionaries also brought with them to Iran an unquestioned belief in Western superiority. Indeed, most of the missionaries believed that the ascendancy of the West and the predominance of Christianity there were interrelated. As a result, they believed that if they promoted Western ways of doing things, it would also prepare the way for Christianity in Iran in addition to availing them
of legal access to Iran's Muslims. As a result, especially in the educational arena, evangelization and civilization were very closely interrelated. And the missionaries' attempts to civilize Iran largely echoed the reforms of their Progressive counterparts in the United States. Indeed, as historian David Danbom has noted, early Progressive reforms sought to apply Christian morality to public life. Somewhat reversing the order of things, the missionaries in Iran sought to apply Progressive-style reforms in Iran to prepare the way for the acceptance of Christian morality in private life. This is, of course, why the missionaries and the financial advisors, though pursuing seemingly divergent goals in Iran, found so much upon which to agree. The missionaries believed that the financial advisors' success would aid their goal of Christianization while the financial advisors believed that the more the missionaries were able to Christianize and Westernize, the more likely their reforms would succeed. In a sense, then, both the missionary movement and the financial advisors' attempted reforms were expressions of American-style Progressivism abroad.

Both the missionaries and the financial advisors were certainly idealistic and well-intentioned to the core. Yet even the best of intentions can sometimes cause negative consequences. Arthur Millspaugh's financial reforms, for example, greatly aided the rise of Reza Shah by unwittingly raising funds for the Iranian government that were funneled into the military, the key to Reza Shah's power. In a similar fashion, the missionaries promulgated an idealistic view of American intentions toward Iran that unwittingly paved the way for the dramatic rise in American influence and power in Iran after World War II. The vast majority of Americans with any reputation in Iran were missionaries who had dedicated their lives to uplifting and reforming a country that was not their own.
Even when Iranian nationalists disagreed with the missionaries over specifics, they admired their dedication to an ideal and remembered the sacrifice of such missionaries as Baskerville, the Jordans, Shedd, Holmes, Miller, Annie Boyce, Cochran, and Packard. Iranians naturally assumed that the American government held similar beneficent intentions toward their country and convinced them to open wide the doors to American governmental influence in the postwar years.

One typical Iranian who viewed the United States in this way was Settareh Farman Farmaian, a daughter of a Qajar noble who, along with her brothers, received an education in American missionary schools. Throughout her youth, Farmaian, an Iranian nationalist, had been taught the importance of justice, democracy and self-determination by dedicated and idealistic American missionaries. As a result, she supported the oil nationalization programs of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and was shocked to discover that the United States had played a key role in his overthrow. She remarks,

I was stunned. At first I did not want to believe that the same nation that had produced my cherished American friends and teachers, people like Dr [Samuel Martin] Jordan and Arlien Johnson, could have done such a thing.... America, I thought bitterly in my room that night, was a truly wasteful nation. It had thrown away our affection exactly the same way it threw away food it did not want. Thinking only of its fear of communism and of the interest of American oil companies, it had used its great power to stifle our nation’s aspirations to independence and dignity. The way we felt about the United States would never be the same again.5

By 1953, both the missionaries and their ideals of evangelization, uplift, and civilization had taken a distant backseat to more traditional great power concerns in the American-Iranian relationship. This deep sense of betrayal definitely contributed to the anti-American flavor of the Iranian Revolution of 1979.
Notes


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