

of mysticism. Fascinating to the Western reader is the link between Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (p. 115), whose *West-Oestlicher Diwan*, first published in 1819, was inspired by and named after the ghazals of fourteenth-century Hafez of Shiraz. But Goethe, who did not know Persian, worked from the German translations of the Austrian scholar Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall.

The political upheavals of the early Islamic period and Iranian involvement in the formation of early Islamic dynasties, particularly the 'Abbāsid caliphs of Baghdad, is discussed in chapter 3 and fittingly subtitled "The Iranian reconquest of Islam ...". It is here that, among other topics, the Iranian contributions to medicine, astrology, philosophy and science are discussed. Axworthy also deals with national uprisings and Iranian dynasties, which often claimed descent from pre-Islamic Sasanian kings (p. 87). Throughout, informative maps, covering an area far beyond the present borders of Iran, are used to help the reader with geographical names.

Chapter 4 combines two inseparable aspects of Islamic Iran: Shiism and the Safavids. Of great interest here are Axworthy's references to pre-Islamic, Mazdean practices, particularly the worship of saints (p. 129), which are prominent in Shiism. Surprisingly, this detailed chapter does not explain the role of the eighth imam, Imam Reza, and the significance of his burial place, which from the time of Shah Abbas I onwards gave Mashhad its significance as the most important Shiite centre after Najaf and Kerbela.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the "Fall of the Safavids", Nader Shah, the Qajars and the arrival of the Pahlavis on the political scene. Nader Shah, of course, has been extensively dealt with by Axworthy in *The Sword of Persia* (London, 2006), but he once again captures the reader in his analysis of the achievements of Nader, and his psychological analyses are brilliant. Equally fascinating and informative are the early decades of the twentieth century, Iran's confrontation with the ever-interfering British, the tragic ending of Dr Mossadegh's quest for democracy, and a misjudged shift towards the new superpower, the United States of America. Axworthy's description of Iran, and especially Tehran, of the 1970s, is realistic and objective, making it possible for the reader to understand the reaction towards foreign presence and interference since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

The reader may end up asking the same question again and again: how has Iran maintained its identity and language despite so many invasions and foreign interventions? Perhaps this is precisely why Iran is so resilient and has survived for millennia. Certainly to Iranians, it is neither a "Forgotten Empire" nor an "Empire of the Mind", but a living national and cultural entity.

**Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis**

DOMINIC PARVIZ BROOKSHAW and SEENA B. FAZEL (eds):

*The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies.*

(Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies.) xv, 283 pp. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. £70. ISBN 978 0 415 35673 2.

The situation of the Baha'is in Iran has received some media attention since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Despite being the largest non-Muslim religious minority, the Baha'i community is not recognized as one of the "protected" religious groups in the Iranian constitution and Baha'is in Iran have been

subjected to persecution and severe discrimination. While their plight is regularly discussed in media outlets and raised in reports on the human rights situation in Iran, the history of the Iranian Baha'i community and its place in modern Iranian society, with a few exceptions, has not been the object of serious academic scholarship. The articles in this volume serve the twofold purpose of providing new insights into the history of the Iranian Baha'i community and of discussing the role of the Baha'is in the development of modern Iran.

Two articles deal with conversion from minority religions to the Baha'i Faith. Mehrdad Amanat investigates the conversion of Iranian Jews to the Baha'i Faith, while Fereyduun Vahman discusses Zoroastrian conversions. Both authors are interested in the reasons why followers of these religions, already subject to severe discrimination, chose to follow a new religious movement which had roots in Shii Islam but which was not recognized as a religion by the Shii *'ulama'* and the Qajar state. Converting to the Baha'i Faith meant a deterioration of the social and legal status of Jews and Zoroastrians, who not only met the opposition of their own co-religionists but did not enjoy the same legal protection as members of the recognized *dhimmi* communities. Mehrdad Amanat attributes the conversion of Iranian Jews to the Baha'i Faith to messianic expectations which were seen to have been fulfilled in the new religion and to a sense of dissatisfaction with traditional Rabbinic Judaism which was perceived as being unfit to meet the challenges of the modern world. Vahman identifies as reasons for conversions from Zoroastrianism the universalist orientation of the new religion and the particular Iranian character of the Baha'i Faith, which adopted the pre-Islamic Iranian new year festival as a religious holiday and uses, in addition to Arabic, Persian as a sacred language.

Dominic Brookshaw provides a survey of different letters that Baha'ullah and 'Abdu'l-Baha sent to women in the Iranian and Indian Baha'i communities. These letters usually praise the addressees for their conversions to the new religion and encourage them to assume a more active role in the Baha'i community. The rise of Baha'i schools in Iran in the early twentieth century is discussed by Moojan Momen. Together with Christian missionaries, the French Alliance Israélite, and Parsi initiatives, the Baha'is played an important role in introducing a modern educational system. Momen provides an overview of the various Baha'i schools which were closed by the government in 1934. He primarily attributes the involvement of Iranian Baha'is in these educational initiatives to the particular stress on education in the Baha'i writings. He does not discuss why the religious minorities in particular played a central role in the advancement of modern education. An emphasis on education can be attested to all these religions including Islam and does not suffice alone as an explanation for the strong involvement of the minority religions in promoting a modern education.

A survey of Baha'i health initiatives is provided by Seena Fazel and Minou Foadi. The emphasis is placed on hospitals that were run by Baha'is until the Islamic Revolution. Kavian Milani's contribution provides a discussion of the attitudes of the Iranian Baha'is to the Constitutional Revolution (1906–11), which challenges traditional assumptions. While a sceptical if not oppositional role to the Constitutional Revolution is usually attributed to the Iranian Baha'is in that period, following Edward G. Browne's scholarship, Milani shows that the leaders of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'ullah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, had adopted pro-constitutionalist attitudes in their writings and that therefore most Baha'is viewed the revolution favourably. 'Abdu'l-Baha in particular intended for the Baha'is a mediating role between the different political factions. However, as the political divide hardened, anti-constitutionalist *'ulama'*

presented the revolution as a Baha'i plot and Baha'is suffered from persecutions as a consequence, "the Iranian Baha'i community adopted a course of political non-involvement" (p. 152).

Several articles deal with the marginalization, discrimination and persecution of the Iranian Baha'is. Eliz Sanasarian compares the situation of the Baha'is in post-revolutionary Iran with that of the other religious minorities. Abbas Amanat investigates the historical roots of the persecution of Babis and Baha'is in Iran, focusing in particular on attitudes of the Shii *'ulama'* and the Qajar authorities towards the Babis. Abbas Amanat attributes the anti-Babi and later anti-Baha'i sentiments in the religious and political establishment of nineteenth-century Iran to the Baha'is' "non-conformity" (p. 180) to an Iran conceived as a Shii nation.

H. E. Chehabi discusses the anti-Baha'i discourse of secular Iranian intellectuals during the Pahlavi era. While secular thinkers like Ahmad Kasravi considered the Baha'is instruments of foreign powers like Russia and Britain, secular opponents of the shah's regime perceived the Baha'is as supporters of the Pahlavis. Finally, Baha'i cosmopolitanism was seen as suspicious by those intellectuals who promoted a strong sense of Iranian nationalism. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi's article deals with the Islamist discourse against the Baha'is in the Pahlavi period. Various Islamist movements and their publishing activities against the Baha'is are discussed. Tavakoli-Targhi argues that the young Muhammad Reza Shah initially co-operated with the *'ulama'* in order to gain legitimacy for his rule and allowed leading representatives of the Shii clergy to agitate against the Baha'is until the mid 1950s. As the relationship between the court and the clergy deteriorated afterwards, the state support of anti-Baha'i activities decreased likewise.

The final article, by Reza Afshari, provides a detailed discussion of the history of the persecutions of Baha'is in post-revolutionary Iran. While extremely critical of the human rights record of the Islamic republic and acknowledging the severe persecutions of and discriminations against the Baha'is, Afshari is also sceptical of the suggestion that one can speak of systematic and centrally orchestrated persecutions of the Baha'is led by the government.

The articles collected in this volume are interesting for scholars of the Baha'i Faith and of the social history of modern Iran. The two articles on the conversion of Jews and Zoroastrians are particularly original, as are those on secular and Islamist anti-Baha'i discourses in the twentieth century. Afshari's contribution is also one of the first scholarly discussions of the persecution of Baha'is in post-revolutionary Iran. It is hoped that these articles will pave the way for a much-needed monograph on the history of the Baha'i Faith in Iran.

**Oliver Scharbrodt**

FARHAD DAFTARY:

*The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines.* (Second edition.)

xxi, 772 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. £40.

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In 1990 Farhad Daftary published his landmark study *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*. The first and, to this day, only comprehensive scholarly work on the complex and fascinating history of the Ismailis from the eighth