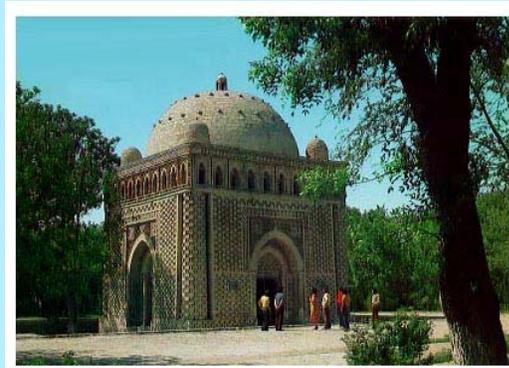


# Samanid Renaissance and Establishment of Tajik Identity

by

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The mausoleum of Isma'il Samani in Bukhara

## Arabs and Non-Arabs

### Introduction

Providing the backdrop for the activities of the Samanid amirs, wazirs, officials, military generals, scientists, and poets as they cooperate to reconstitute the unraveled fabric of Iranian civilization, this part examines pre-Islamic Arabia, the lifestyle and capabilities of the Bedou, and the degree to which the Bedou could have contributed to the rise, development, and maintenance of the powerful Islamic Empire.

The harsh treatment of the non-Arabs by the Umayyid rulers and their officials is well known. The intellectual, religious, and political resistance that the independence-seeking Iranians had created in Transoxiana and Khurasan is also well known, in spite of the intense, repressive measures taken by the Umayyids and their minions. During the rule of the Samanids, two issues--struggle for independence and suppression of freedoms--came to a head, resulting in an ambivalent age. It was an age of security, progress, and unprecedented achievement in government, the arts and sciences on the one hand, and an age of decadence, barbarity, and intrigue, on the other hand. The ambivalence was the consequence of the convergence of three major forces: the Iranians' intense desire to reestablish their heritage within an Islamic framework; the caliphs' desire to maintain Arab solidarity and Arab rule by any means necessary; and the Turkish guards, the unruly element in the caliphate itself and in its satellites.

The role of the Turks in the administration of the caliphate, especially in the management of the affairs of the Empire's client states, has not received the attention it deserves. In this context, an attempt is made to show that the Arabs and the Buyids, rather than the Turks--who are usually cited as the cause of the fall of the Samanid Empire--brought the Empire to its end. The caliphs issued the orders and, through intrigue, made and unmade amirs and wazirs. The Turks were a tool, albeit a powerful one, in the hands of the caliphs.

The articles in Part Two provide ample information on the achievements of the Samanids in various fields. A brief survey of those achievements in relation to the sources of

knowledge on which the Samanid scientists and artists drew, i.e., the repository of knowledge bequeathed by the pre-Islamic civilizations of Egypt, Iran, Greece, Rome, and India, ends this part.

### **Pre-Islamic Arabia**

At the time of the rise of Islam, Arabia was divided into three geographical and cultural zones: the south, the center, and the north. The mountainous south, tucked between the sea and the desert, was virtually inaccessible. The home of the ancestors of the present-day Yemenites, it was supported by Sassanian Iran. Before this time, the Ma'arib dam had contributed to its prosperity.

The center, consisting of the Hijaz and the Rub' al-Khali (empty quarter), had great potential for development, especially, due to the reserves of animal and human power, the Bedou that surrounded it. In fact, the landscape of Hijaz was lined with caravan routes and dotted with oases and towns connecting Arabia to Europe and Asia. The city of Mecca accommodated some 300 gods at its Ka'ba or cube. Allah's three daughters: al-Lat (the goddess), al-Manah (fate), and al-'Uzza (power) were the most prominent of these pagan deities. Yathrib (later, Medina), populated by the Aws, Khazraj, and some tribes of the Ghassanids, was politically active; the Jews exerted a great deal of influence in its affairs.

The north and the Fertile Crescent, although mostly arid, were the home of the musta'rab (Arabized) nomads who handled the region's wars as well as trade. They also participated in the region's cultural exchanges with Byzantium and Persia. The city of Palmyra was a major center of trade in the north.

The people of the peninsula shared the same ethnic heritage, i.e., Semitic. Linguistically, however, they were somewhat divided; the language of the north was Arabic while that of the south was Sabaean. Additionally, thanks to the Ma'arib dam, the south had commanded a successful agriculture and, thereby, continued to enjoy a prosperous economy through trade. Using terraces and dams, the Yemenites irrigated large tracts of inhospitable land, mostly on the slopes of mountains. Their main crops consisted of aromatic plants.<sup>1</sup>

With frankincense and myrrh in abundance, Yemen entered the spice trade that connected India with the Byzantine and Persian Empires. In fact, it became a port of entry for goods arriving from India and Somalia while contributing its own, gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the trade.<sup>2</sup>

In time, the spice trade that had promoted Yemeni commerce caused its downfall. In the sixth century, Ethiopia, interested in selling its own ivory in the Byzantine and Persian markets, made a bid to control the Spice Route by invading Yemen. Helpless, Yemen called on Sassanid Iran for protection. The Persians obliged. Rather than by Ethiopia,

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<sup>1</sup> Rashid, 1970, pp. 16, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Yemen was occupied by the Persians for the next 50 years, virtually until Yemen was included in the Islamic Empire.

The rise and fall of the Yemenite civilization is a major event in the history of Arabia. It is also important for our purposes because, as we shall see, it is in this milieu that the Bedouin tribes of the desert find their fortune and it is out of this set of circumstances that they rise to the pinnacle of success as the overlords of an Empire stretching between Cordoba in Spain and Kashghar, and Ghazna in present-day Central Asia and Afghanistan, respectively.

The political dynamics of Pre-Islamic Arabia can be summarized in the interactions among three major forces: the Ghassanids, the Lakhmids, and the Kindah.<sup>3</sup> The Ghassanids were clients of the Byzantine Empire and the Ethiopians; the Lakhmids were allied with the Persians; and the Kindah cooperated with the Yemenites. As mentioned, this political trio is important because, it is out of the interactions of the Bedouin tribes and the leaders of these kingdoms that the early Islamic community and, later, the Islamic Empire, emerge.

The Ghassanids, a south Arabian tribe, the Banu Ghassan, migrated north during the third and fourth centuries--mostly after the breakup of the Ma'arib dam mentioned above--and settled in the region of Damascus. Christian by religion, they became a vassal of Byzantium. They also agreed to protect the southern flank of the Byzantine Empire against the intrusion of Arab tribes. This alliance held well throughout the wars between the Byzantine and the Persian Empires. In the sixth century, as Byzantine power declined, many Ghassanids defected to the increasingly dominating Arab tribes in the heartland of Arabia. In fact, in the seventh century, the Muslim Ghassanids facilitated the invasion of Syria by Muslim forces.

The Lakhmids, also known as the Hira, were Nestorian Christians who were affected by Zoroastrianism. The small Arab kingdom, with its capital at al-Hira, near present-day Najaf, ruled a region that extended to the Persian Gulf. The same type of master-client relationship that was explained for the Ghassanids was also true of the Lakhmids and the Sassanids of Persia. Predictably, in the sixth century, they, too, defected to the dominating Arab side. In fact, it is believed that the Lakhmids facilitated the defeat of the Sassanids at al-Qadisiyyah.

Finally, the Kindah, in Central Arabia. This population consisted of Jews and others affected by Judaism. During the wars of the Byzantine and the Persian empires, this population controlled the region south of the Ghassanid and the Lakhmid territories. After the intense struggle for the control of Armenia exhausted the energies of Byzantium and Persia, and after the withdrawal of the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids from the scene, the Kindah retired to Yemen.

The departure of the two major empires of the time and their client states from the scene opened the way to the Bedouin Arabs who poured into central Arabia from all corners and took control of the growing wealth and prestige of the region. By default, as it were, the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 25; Hitti, 1970, pp. 80-86.

Bedou became the masters of the Spice Route and the directors of the caravan trade centered on the cultural hub of Mecca. In other words, the positions of power that had been filled by foreigners and the Yemenites were now held by such Arab families as the Quraysh, the family into which Prophet Muhammad had been born around AD 570.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Lifestyle of the Bedou**

In pre-Islamic times, populated by the Bedou, Arabia was one of the least known regions of North Africa. The Bedou lived within a tightly organized, self-sufficient community in the desert, consisting of vast expanses of sand-covered dunes with low-growing bushes. Although arid, the desert bloomed with grass and flowers following every rainfall. In search of grass for their herds, the Bedou migrated south in winter and returned to the north during the summer season.

The Bedou have been and continue to be herders. They live off what game is available in addition to their goats, sheep, and cattle. Although their sheep and cows constitute their primary sources of protein, the contribution of their camels, especially their rich milk, to the food supply is great.

The Bedou live in tents made of goat or camel hair. Each family tent is divided into two parts: women's and men's quarters. The men's quarters is about one-fourth of the tent and has its own fire. Guests are entertained in that quarter. The women's quarter also has its own fire. The affairs of the tent are regulated by the women.

In the life of the Bedou, marriages, which are made among the members of the same lineage and among equals, are arranged; love is not a factor in the marriage. Rarely is a Bedou married to an outsider. Divorce is a man's prerogative; it cannot be initiated by a woman. This does not mean that a woman cannot leave her husband's tent and return to her father's; because, unlike in the West, the new couple does not leave the family nucleus after marriage. Considering the humiliation that such an act accompanies, however, this is not a situation in which a woman would want to find herself.

It is not our purpose here to give a detailed account of the life of the Bedou. It is, however, necessary to understand the circumstances into which Islam was born. It is also important to examine the mind-set of those who took Islam to heart and exported it to the far corners of the globe. What was in Islamic teachings that persuaded these people to give up their pagan gods for Allah, accept to treat their women with respect, and abandon their practice of burying their daughters alive in the sand at birth?

The Bedou had always held a prominent place for loyalty to their household, clan, lineage, and tribe. Islam, however, dictated a new type of loyalty: absolute loyalty to Allah. Alongside their loyalty to their chief, the Bedou had always emphasized their 'Asabiyyah, or Arabism. The new faith dictated that emphasis should be shifted in the direction of faith

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

to the message of Allah. Drawing on the wisdom of their elders through consensus, a strong devotion to Arabism, and a united response to the call of the Prophet, the Bedou were galvanized. Dreams of reaching the Paradise that Allah had prepared for them led the Bedou to the dream of ruling empires, possibly even the world.

Although politically and spiritually ready, socially, and to a degree economically, the Bedou were not ready to step out of the Jahiliyyah.. Up until the time of Islam, going to the 'Ukkaz market (where they listened to recitation of poetry), and participating in razzias (raids on other tribes) had been their main experience of culture and adventure. They were proud of their muru'ah (manliness) and of the number of ghazwahs (wars) in which they had participated. Generosity, hospitality, and honor were their main concerns. In sum, the Bedou was an outsider to the world outside of Arabia, the informed world of theory and practice that was on the verge of being transformed into a mighty Islamic Empire.

It is being suggested here that, without looking carefully at the dynamics of the clash between the simple world of the Bedou and the powerful, affluent, and sophisticated worlds of the Persian and Roman Empires of the time, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand the many shades that Islam has assumed and the difficulties it has confronted. How else could a monolithic faith become fraught with so many social, political, economic, and ideological enigmas? After the conquest of Persia, for instance, the Bedou had to control the graduates of the University of Gundishapur, the administrators of Persia's Byzantine bureaucracy, court officials of Khusraus, and Zoroastrian mu'bads. The task was possible only at the expense of negating all the values of the conquered people. The Bedou had to subject the newly conquered peoples to the same rules that unruly camel herds were subjected to.

### **Arabs and Non-Arabs**

According to Islam, the world is divided into two abodes: the abode of peace, or dar al-Islam, and the abode of war, or dar al-harb. Another name for the latter is the abode of the irreligious, or dar al-kufr. Both the dar al-Islam and the dar-al-harb had laws and regulations according to which society was organized and the individual's role was specified. In the dar al-Islam, although in the eyes of Allah all Muslims were of equal standing, a distinction was made between those who had accepted Islam before the Hijra, especially those who had emigrated with the Prophet, leaving their families, homes and businesses, and the Arabs of Medina who, necessarily, accepted Islam after the Hijra.

The Muhajirun or emigrants, about 150 in number, were a privileged population in that all their sins were automatically forgiven (Qur'an: iii, 105). In the wars, they received the lion's share of the booty to compensate for their losses in Mecca where they had promoted the message of Allah and protected His messenger. Additionally, as the most esteemed members of the ummah (community), they were very active in the succession process, both as promoters and as potential office holders.

The population of Medina, after the entrance of the Prophet to that city, was divided between the Ansar, or helpers, and the Munafiqun or hypocrites. The Ansar, although instrumental in saving the life of the Prophet and, thereby, preserving his message, were rarely included in the succession deliberations. In fact, as a rule, they were not included among the candidates for succession. The requirements for consideration were to be knowledgeable, just, capable, sound in body and mind, and from the tribe of Quraysh. All these requirements were within human achievement except the last. The Ansar could console themselves by taking pride in their pre-Islamic ties to the civilization of southern Arabia, but within the dar al-Islam, their status remained low. In fact, in a formal division of the ummah, the caliph Umar placed the Ansar in the second category among those entitled to hold possessions of their own. Below the Ansar were the Munafiqun, i.e., those among the people of Medina who called themselves Muslims, but who, in reality, endeavored to sabotage the faith.

This brief discussion of the dynamics of the early Islamic community in Medina is presented in support of the view that even before the Muslims ventured out of Arabia, they were predisposed to discrimination. In fact, discrimination was built into their socio-political world view. We should not be surprised, therefore, to discover that, in the eyes of the Arabs, the non-Arab Muslims--Sabaeans, Romans, and Iranians--ranked slightly higher than slaves. Called the Mawali, these recent converts were assigned to menial tasks such as the postal services, accounting, book keeping, and farming, tasks that were considered to be beneath Arab dignity.

Job discrimination, of course, was not the only difficulty that the Mawali had to cope with. There were other restrictions. For instance, the Mawali were not allowed to lead the prayers or receive booty even if they had participated in battles and distinguished themselves. They were not allowed to ride horses, marry into Arab families, or administer governmental or religious affairs. Even the offspring of mixed marriages were not exempt. The Mawali did not have the right to walk alongside an Arab; if a Mawali met an Arab carrying a load, he had to carry that load to the Arab's home without expecting any payment. If a Mawali were riding a horse and saw an Arab, he had to dismount and allow the Arab to ride instead. In fact, he had to take the Arab to his destination. Furthermore, the Mawali did not have the right to marry their daughters without prior permission from their Arab masters. Even in death rituals, there was a distinction. As a rule, Arabs did not participate in funerals held for the Mawali and the Mawali were not allowed to perform funeral prayers for a deceased Arab.

The Dhimmis, or those who lived in the dar al-harb, were either ahl al-kitab (people with scriptures), like the Christians, Jews, Sabaeans, and Zoroastrians, or they were Dahrīs (materialists). The Dahrīs were enslaved. As idolaters, once defeated in battle, they lost all their rights. The ahl al-kitab, on the other hand, because they were not guilty of absolute denial, were allowed to purchase freedom and protection in the dar al-Islam. This was done by paying jizyah (pole-tax) and kharaj (land tax). Women, old men, the poor, slaves, and children were exempt. These payments, however, did not free the Dhimmis altogether.

Like the Ansar, in the Arab community of early Islam, the Dhimmis had to abide by certain restrictions. These restrictions, which were imposed during the time of the caliph Umar, decreed that the Dhimmis should not speak ill of the Prophet, the Qur'an, or the Muslims in general. They were not to mingle with Muslim women, attempt to proselytize Muslims (Christian missionaries, e.g.), plunder Muslim property or kill Muslims, or assist spies or the enemies of the Muslim State. Besides, the Dhimmis had to wear clothes that distinguished them from the Muslims, and build their houses lower than those of the Muslims; in addition, they were not allowed to chime their bells, bring their pigs to the market, read their scriptures aloud in the presence of Muslims, or drink alcoholic beverages. They did not have the right to ride horses, carry arms, build new houses of worship, or display signs of their religion in public.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, as we shall see, by the ninth and tenth centuries, from among the Dhimmis great personalities rose whose contributions enriched not only the world of Islam, but the world at large. The question, however remains: Was this civilization, that gave rise to scientists like Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyyah al-Razi, Abu Ali al-Hussein ibn Abdullah ibn Sina, Abu Raihan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni al-Khwarazmi, and poets like Abu Abdullah Rudaki and Abu al-Qasim Firdowsi, an Arab civilization brought about by the Bedou?<sup>6</sup> Or was it a continuation of the Iranian civilization enhanced by the Bedou? If the latter, how much could the Bedou contribute and to what aspects? The rest of this chapter is devoted to an examination of the Iranians' intensive struggle for independence and to the civilization of the Samanid Era. An assessment of the contributions of the Iranians and the Bedou to medieval Islamic culture remains one of our major foci.

### **Struggle for Independence**

From the fall of Iran to the armies of Islam to the rise of the Samanids in the ninth century, three major periods can be distinguished. The first, or the conquest phase, coincides with the rule of the Rashidun Caliphs, especially after the rule of Umar ibn al-Khattab, who set the conquest into motion. This is necessarily a difficult phase to assess as both sides sought supremacy. Even after Arab victory was certain, the possibility of a backlash prevented the institution of clear lines of authority.

The second phase coincides with the Umayyid Dynasty's century of rule. This is, possibly, the most difficult phase for the Iranians: both those who had accepted Islam and those who had accepted to pay jizyah and kharaj. This is also the phase in which Iranians fought back Arab supremacy and tried hard to prepare the ground for the reestablishment of a semblance of independent Iranian rule. The harder they tried, however, the more complex their situation became.

From the moment that the Arabs had entered the palace of Ctesiphon, and divided among themselves the famous carpets the warp and woof of which were made of gold, lapis-lazuli,

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<sup>5</sup> Ravandi, 1976, pp.120ff.

<sup>6</sup> For comprehensive studies on the lives of Ibn-i Sina and al-Biruni, see Nasr, 1978.

carnelian, and other precious stones, the Iranians and Arabs had become bitter enemies. This enmity, of course, was predictable. The Arabs were violent, destructive, and tyrannical and, as was explained, they treated the Iranians, a civilized and sophisticated people, with harsh, Bedouin treatment. Out of necessity, the Iranians reacted with calculated, methodical, and ruthless moves; aiming at the very foundation of Arab supremacy, they intended to undermine the whole structure and bring it down. In other words, the Iranians were resolved to reestablish ties with their past; while the Umayyids, a monolithic group following the dictates of 'Asabiyyah, cared for nothing but the Arab race and Arab rights.<sup>7</sup>

Under the Umayyids, Arabs did not like to engage in discussion of the sciences. Indeed, they had neither the tools nor the know-how to undertake such tasks. Poetry continued to be their most cherished subject of interest. This, however, did not mean that Arabs like 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (646-705) for whom the language and culture of the non-Arabs were a source of hatred and detestation, remained passive. Upon coming to power, in an attempt to consolidate the empire internally, 'Abd al-Malik replaced the Greek and Pahlavi writings on coins with Arabic. In the case of Iran, following his dicta, all tax ledgers were translated from Pahlavi into Arabic (685 and 705), displacing hosts of Iranian workers in the many administrative bureaus of occupied Iran. Unfortunately for the Umayyids, those positions were given to Arabs who were not adequately trained for the jobs. The consequence of this decision came to roost at the door of the caliphs when, increasingly, they lost contact with the Iranians, especially those in the eastern provinces.

Like elsewhere, at the time, in Central Asia, the indigenous people were deemed devoid of dignity. The Zoroastrian religion, the glories of Persian Empires under the Achaemenians, Parthians, and Sassanians did not impress the nouveaux riches Arabs. They continued to refuse to walk with Persians in the same file, participate in funerals held to commemorate the deaths of Iranians and, they certainly did not participate in prayers led by an Iranian. Iranians could not pronounce the Arabic verses correctly, they would argue. In sum, according to the Umayyids, Arabs were born rulers while Iranians were born slaves.

The third phase coincides with the rise of the Abbasid Caliphs and their anti-Khurasanian and anti-Turkish policies. To begin with, after the execution of Abu Muslim, who had commanded the army of Khurasan that had brought the Abbasids to power, there were many insurrections. These included the revolts of Sunbadh, al-Muqanna', and Babak, among others. These insurrections indicated the existence of a very strong anti-Arab sentiment in Khurasan. To satisfy the Khurasanis, the caliphs assumed a pro-Iranian policy. Some even went as far as adopting a pro-Shi'ite policy. But those policies, as expected, added to the strength of the Iranians not only in Baghdad but in the provinces as well.

To stem the tide of Iranian nationalism, therefore, al-Mu'tasim (833), whose mother was a Turk, turned to the Turks of Central Asia for assistance. This policy created an even more dire situation. By the year 1000, the Turks had become strong enough, in Baghdad and Central Asia, to take on the caliph himself. The difficulty with the Turks was that they

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<sup>7</sup> Ibn-i Khaldun, 1981, pp. 97ff.

were everywhere. In Baghdad, they enthroned and dethroned caliphs. In Central Asia, they were invaders assaulting Islamic lands.

In order to keep the Central Asian Turks away from Baghdad, the caliphs trusted the rule of the eastern lands to Iranian governors, provided that the latter would pay an appropriate amount of tribute, would mention the name of the caliph in the khutba (Friday sermon), and would not mint new coins without caliphal approval. This strategy, too, was not fruitful. The Taherids, Saffarids, and Samanids, recruited to safeguard the eastern lands against infidel Turks, became engrossed in independence movements of their own and in self-preservation. In the long run, as we shall see, the situation was reversed. The caliphs assisted the Turks to displace the increasingly powerful Iranian element in the caliphate.

### **The Triumphant Trio**

The first Eastern state to break away from the Abbasid caliphate was the province of Khurasan which, under the brief rule of the Taherids (827-881), became the symbol of the hopes and aspirations of all Iranians of the former Persian Empire. A military general, Taher had assisted Ma'mun defeat his brother Amin. As caliph, therefore, Ma'mun appointed Taher the governor of the Eastern lands bordering on the territories of the Western Turks. Using Islam as his main support, from his capital of Nishapur, Taher dispatched many contingents against the Turks, the Ghuzz in particular, and gained a fair degree of security for the caliphs. Later on, however, against caliphal wishes, he minted coins and read the khutba, in his own name, i.e., for all intents and purposes declared himself independent from Baghdad. The caliph's mandate to defend the Empire against the infidel Turks was turned into a mandate by the Iranians who advocated breaking away from the Empire. Subsequent rulers fought the Turks only when Iranian interests were in jeopardy.

The field of numismatics reflects the progression of the Perso-Islamic culture quite accurately. According to numismatic finds, at the time of their victory at Nihavand, the Arabs did not have a coinage of their own.<sup>8</sup> Their takeover of the Sassanian mints, however, enabled them to modify the Sassanian dirhams and use them as instruments of their government. Soon after the takeover, the names of the Sassanian monarchs, mostly Khusrau II, were replaced with the names of caliphs or governors, as the situation required. The figures of the monarchs were changed to altars, and the Pahlavi writing was changed to Kufic script. Only in the far-off regions, such as in Tabaristan, Sassanian coins survived this type of modification. After the Taherids and the Saffarids (see below), the name of the caliph is either dropped or is deemphasized on the coins issued in Transoxiana and Khurasan.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Miles, 1975, p. 364.

<sup>9</sup> Cf., Miles, *op cit*, p. 372.

Although sympathetic to the caliph, the Taherids were resolved to overthrow the oppressive rule of the Arabs. As an indication of their devotion to gaining Iran's independence, the Taherids reintroduced the Persian language into Transoxiana and Khurasan and promoted Persian literature and culture. Adopting an expanded version of the Arabic script, scholars, students, and officials alike were encouraged to use the Farsi language in their translations, discussions, transactions, and in the administration of the realm. Advocating public access to knowledge, the Taherids promoted the lower classes, especially the peasantry. This was the first time, since the Arab invasion and the destruction that had accompanied it, that a native dynasty was openly promoting the language, literature, and culture of Iran. In this effort, the Taherids benefited greatly from the support of another ancient Iranian House, that of Saman. Installed as the governor of the village of Saman in the Balkh province by the Caliph al-Ma'mun, Saman Khudat, a former Zoroastrian,<sup>10</sup> was an increasingly growing force in the Balkh region. His great-grandson, Isma'il, as we shall see, established the mighty Samanid Dynasty.

A distinction must be made here between independence and autonomy. In the eyes of the people of Khurasan and Transoxiana, the Taherids were independent. In reality, however, they had gained a degree of autonomy within the caliphate. Consequently, the land that they had freed from the overlordship of the caliphate continued to be administered by governors sympathetic to the wishes of the caliphs and mindful of the cause of Islam. It was a divided land with no real sense of homogeneity and unity, an ideal situation in which skeletal administrations sent by far-off Baghdad could operate with a relatively high degree of success.

Rising to prominence from among the ranks of the Khawarij and the 'ayyars of Sistan, Khurasan, and Transoxiana two brothers, Ya'qub Laith and 'Amr Laith, sons of a tinsmith (saffar), rose against Arab sovereignty in the region. Helped by the lower classes, they took on the Taherids and overthrew them. Then, between 873 and 900, they toyed with the idea of independence. In this regard, Ya'qub ibn Laith chose the high road and mounted an invasion against Baghdad. His invasion remained inconclusive as he perished of natural causes on the way. 'Amr, on the other hand, chose a conciliatory stance vis-à-vis the caliph. The latter, however, fearful of a ruse, turned to Isma'il Samani instead (875). Lacking the support of the influential upper classes--the Saffarids relied on the support of the middle and lower classes--and, in spite of the considerable amount of wealth that they had amassed, the Saffarids were defeated by Isma'il, a member of the House that had supported the Taherids in their quest for the reestablishment of Iranian rule in the region.<sup>11</sup>

Although different in outlook, the Saffarids and the Taherids shared many of the same values. They both endeavored to elevate the status of the Persian language at the expense of Arabic and promoted Persian culture but, more importantly, instilled a sense of identity in people whose ancestors had accepted Arab overlordship. Ya'qub, in fact, is known to have ordered one of his poets to rewrite in Persian a poem that had been composed in his praise in Arabic. By writing your poem in Persian, you will make it accessible to all Iranian peoples, Ya'qub had advised.

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<sup>10</sup> For details, see Frye, 1975, p. 136.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

If there was a difference between the two dynasties, it rested in the level of society that they felt was in need of most assistance. The Taherids felt that an elevation of the intellectuals and nobles of society would automatically elevate the peasants and the artisans. The Saffarids felt that the downtrodden in society were the deserving element. As we shall see, the Samanids recognized merit in both strategies. Consequently, in the creation of their unique medieval civilization, they combined these factors.

One of the major strategies of the Arab rulers of Transoxiana and Khurasan was that of "divide and conquer." Each region was assigned to an Arab governor who developed it to meet his own needs and those of his Arab clientele. The prosperity of the land, and the people who lived and worked on it, was not a concern. As a result, the region, cut from the rest of the world, suffered. The region could still prosper, if the fruits of the labor of its people were returned to them. But, as is the rule in all such cases, most of the revenue of Transoxiana and Khurasan was sent to Baghdad as tribute.

In their intensive struggle for independence, neither the Taherids nor the Saffarids were able to neutralize the destructive influence of this anti-national system. What they achieved, however, was noteworthy in and of itself. They virtually dispossessed the caliph of his eastern lands, established the foundation of a strong revivalist movement, reestablished the use of the Dari/Farsi language, and accumulated wealth. This latter eventually formed the base for a strong economy.

Building on the accomplishments of their predecessors, the Samanids (875-999) unified the nation by undermining the power of the local rulers. The centralization was not complete, of course, as Khwarazm, Chaqanian, Khuttalan, and Isfijab did not fall in line as expected. Nevertheless, a major step in this direction was taken when such ancient urban centers as Bukhara, Samarqand, Merv, Nishapur, Hirat, Balkh, Khujand, Panjekent, and Holbuq were revived. Revival of these centers, even within a limited centralized government, elevated the socio-political, economic and, necessarily, cultural dynamics of the new and progressive state. Additionally, in order to boost revenues and further the reach of the State across the feudal boundaries, a major program of urbanization went into effect. New mints were installed to produce Samanid dinars and dirhams and new civic administrations were empowered to revitalize traditional local customs.

Urbanization, of course, was not new to the region. Major cities like Ray, Nishapur, Samarqand, and Bukhara testify to the late Sassanid times when urbanization was a major trend. To the majority of people who lived under Arab rule and whose lives were spent in the fields and on the slopes of mountains, it was a new feature, a feature that acquainted them with the larger world around them. The expanse of this new world can be measured by charting the routes of Bukharan merchants as they traveled to the markets of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Russia, and India. That route is easily reconstructable on the basis of the coins that they carried. According to numismatic data discovered in these regions, it is clear that the centralized Samanid administration drew on the resources of almost all of Transoxiana and Khurasan--the coin hordes, containing mostly silver dirhams, are

traceable to nearly forty-eight mints--for the promotion of a set of common values, including cultural, scientific, and ideological commonalities.<sup>12</sup>

A centralized state required the contributions of all the people to aspects of government, military, trade, and the arts. It also required a substantial infrastructure such as roads, irrigation canals, public buildings such as schools, caravansaries, and mosques. More importantly, there was need for cities, means for trade--money and wares--and for a mechanism for defense against internal troubles and foreign invaders. The Samanids responded positively to all those issues. They allocated resources, devoted a great deal more to educating the public than ever before, and encouraged innovation and enterprise. In the process, they created a civilization that, in many respects, was unique for its time.

Further centralization of the government required a number of other bold steps. First and foremost, it required a commitment on the part of the ruler; this included a personal as well as a financial commitment. Then it required tolerance towards neighboring faiths, including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Manicheism. More than anything, it required wisdom in the face of intrigue emanating from Baghdad. Consequently, the early Samanid rulers persuaded prominent families in the State to accept to serve in major positions of responsibility. In the new administration, not only new ideas, but thus-far hated sects of Islam such as Isma'ilism, were accepted. In fact, the cooperation of great houses, like those of Bal'ami and Jaihani, with the Samanid Dynasty would not have been possible if such wise measures had not been implemented this early in the life of the dynasty.

## **Samanid Achievements**

The burning of Persepolis by Alexander the Great and the burning of libraries by the Muslim Arabs in the wake of their conquest of Central Asia have intrigued scholars, making them wonder about the motives behind such destructive acts. Alexander, it is deemed, had a grudge against the Persians for their having burned the sacred woods in Ionia, in present-day Turkey, and the temple of the goddess Athena. He is also reported to have been intoxicated when undertaking the action. Still others argue that he wanted to indicate to the Persian satraps, and others, that the Persian Empire was no longer a viable force in the world. These, and the argument that he sacrificed Persepolis to the gods, are only a few of the reasons presented. But what were the motives of the Arab conquerors who set fire to the many libraries, including those in Bukhara, Samarqand, and Khiva?

We are too distant from the actual reality in those scenes to judge with certainty; we can only surmise. Furthermore, unfortunately, it seems that the harder we try, the more elaborate our surmises become, often inviting us to reach unsubstantiated conclusions. One fact remains, however; there is not a great deal of commonalty between burning palaces and burning libraries. By burning a palace, we destroy material culture, i.e., the results of decades of hard work, expenditure of funds, and a symbol of glory. In fact, we destroy a rallying point around which a resurgence of the past can be staged.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf., Miles, op cit, p. 374.

By burning libraries, as was carried out by 'Amr ibn 'As, and by killing of scholars and students, as was carried out by Qutaiba ibn Muslim, in Khiva, we set out to destroy the intellectual base of the society, the base on which every culture draws for recruiting commanders, politicians, scholars, poets, artists, and a whole array of other officials, administrators, and benefactors. Besides, the burning of a palace, where a great deal of drinking and politicking takes place, can easily be accidental, while the burning of libraries is a calculated and measured act. It is a conscious effort made to undermine the very ability of a conquered people to stand on its own feet ever again.

Finally, while the burning of a palace stands out as a single act of atrocity against a conquered culture, the extinguishing of the intellectual abilities of a nation commands a host of collateral damages such as the closing and burning of places of worship, the temples of fire in the case of the people of Transoxiana and Khurasan, for instance. It also entails a reorganization of political, administrative, and economic affairs of the region, banning the use of native languages, and forcing the population to perform corvée work, irrespective of their merits and skills.

Thus, unlike the accidental burning of a palace, a footnote to world history, atrocities such as the slaughter of scholars, burning of libraries, closing of schools, and banning the use of local languages become fully documented. Besides, for the burning of Persepolis, only Alexander and a few of his associates, like Ptolemy, were blamed; but in the case of the dismantling of the intellectual fount of Persia, high-level authorities from diverse sectors of Arab bureaucracy were responsible.

The institution of a new culture, especially if the new culture is being installed by one less organized or less capable than the culture being displaced, is a struggle with an unpredictable outcome. Depending on the resilience of the conquered culture, it may take a few centuries. Often, however, it has been the case that the conquering culture is weakened to the point of being absorbed by the people it had conquered. The struggle of the Arab caliphs, the Umayyids and the Abbasids, against the mighty forces in Iran, Khurasan, and Transoxiana is a case in point. As we shall see, three centuries after their domination, in the ninth and tenth centuries, the Arabs were as unsure about their gains and losses in Khurasan and Transoxiana as they had been at the outset of their Asian venture.

In this respect, the Samanids were well versed. As mentioned, they had become involved in the administration of Balkh during the rule of the Taherids. They were fully familiar with the region, its ethnic composition, the peoples' zeal for rejuvenation of ancient values, as well as with the economic and administrative disarray that Arab rule had introduced and maintained as a measure of control over the various levels of society. Like the Taherids, sympathizing with the populace, many of whom were still adherents of the ancient Zoroastrian religion, the Samanids allowed the continuation of the coinage of the Sassanids. In fact, they minted coins with ancient Iranian (Zoroastrian) features. Additionally, they reintroduced such ancient works as the Khudainama and reformed their society on the model of their Sassanian predecessors. In fact, they were so successful in this regard that subsequent dynasties, like the Seljuqs, followed their example in creating their centralized

rule, institution of rule of justice, promotion of the arts and sciences, and facilitating commercial transactions.

In the same vein that the destruction of a society and a culture is reflected in the various acts of the destroyer, revival of ancient modes of life and trends also can be traced to the efforts of renovators and, at times, innovators. To a great degree, architecture, apparel, music, and the literature of the time of the Samanids, reflect the skill, knowledge, style, and finesse of their Sassanian predecessors. It is true that Islamic civilization had changed the appearance of these facets of Persian culture, but the genius of the Iranian artist continued to shine through the restrictions imposed. Indeed, the surface was hardly scratched before the ancient principles, hidden behind an Islamic mask, reappeared to command attention. What is fascinating about this aspect of Samanid culture is not so much the preservation of the old, but the innovations that were introduced to reintroduce the old and to make it acceptable to the new Islamic milieu.

We have already mentioned centralization as the cornerstone of the Samanids' attempt at ethnic unification and national revitalization of Khurasan and Transoxiana. Since administration reflects the hierarchical organization to which the individual contributes, would it not be the logical place to launch our discussion of the mechanics of the centralization of the Samanid State?

Resembling the administration of the caliphate at Baghdad, the centralized government of the Samanid State consisted of two main branches: the dargah (court) and the divan (chancellery). Standing at the head of the state, the Amir oversaw both. Through the former, also known as the office of the hajib (chamberlain), he appointed governors, assigned tasks to princes and nobles, and sorted out social and executive affairs. For the more weighty affairs of government, such as finances, military affairs, land management, legal affairs, and matters related to endowments, he drew on the divan, i.e., the office of the Wazir or Prime Minister. Second in command in the state, the Wazir, in turn, created a bureaucracy of his own. By creating a series of ministries, each undertaking an appropriate portion of his task, the Wazir communicated with all levels of society. A special correspondence and intelligence bureau carried out internal and external communication and correspondences.<sup>13</sup> Of the two, i.e., the court and the chancellery, the former played a more prominent role, especially during the latter decades of the dynasty. This was, after all, the office that trained, promoted, and appointed the Turkish slaves that served the Amir.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the appointment of a Turkish slave general like Alptekin that changed the whole direction of Samanid government, to the most important province of the country, Khurasan, was made by the hajib.

Before centralization, the officials in charge of villages, towns, and cities were loosely accountable to rungs above them in the hierarchy. Even that was true only in a theoretical sense. Under the centralized system, officials, from the village head to the provincial governor, became accountable for every single decision they made. Every cent of the revenue they collected and the expenses they incurred had to be reported to the center for

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<sup>13</sup> For a list of the ministers, see Frye, *op cit*, p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

scrutiny and reallocation. To oversee the correct implementation of laws, in each administrative bureau, diverse offices were established. For instance, at the village level, land holding, water distribution, cleaning of canals, digging of karizes, and the like became the responsibility of the village experts. They were instructed to work under the supervision of the village council and the village head. Similarly, in the urban centers, the standardization of the prices, weights, and measures were entrusted to a muhtasib, while spiritual and ethical issues were the concern of a local qazi. A ra'is controlled law and order; special cases were reported to the provincial governor. Drawing on the resources of a well-organized state, the Amir commanded a wealthy treasury; a well-organized body of educated individuals, some of them intellectuals; a mighty army; and an increasingly enlightened people.

While the administration was in charge of the well-being of the infrastructure, language, literature, and the sciences served as the moving force in the state. In this regard, the Iranians' most outstanding contribution in the post-Arab-invasion era was the reestablishment of their linguistic heritage, the Persian language. Much has been said about the subject and many names are associated with the revival. Among these, the names of the Taherid, Saffarid, Ghaznavid, and Samanid rulers, as well as of Abu Hafs Sughdi, Rudaki, and Firdowsi, are regularly and repeatedly cited. To this we should add the contributions of the ordinary people of Transoxiana and Khurasan who actually retained the language. Rather than specific poets or rulers--the intention is not to decrease the importance of their contributions--it was the ordinary individual who took delight in his language and who continued its use even after others, including many major scholars, had abandoned it. The shepherd's son sang the songs that his father had sung as he had tended their flock; the weaver's daughter sang the songs that her mother had sung when she had tried to recall the colors and the patterns to be incorporated in her handicraft.

What then was the contribution of the state? The state--Taherids and Saffarids in the early stages, Samanids thereafter--repaired the damage that the Arab invaders had inflicted on the finer aspects of language, i.e., language as a means of promotion of literature, arts, and the sciences. It funded revitalization projects so that a peasant's recollection of the exploits of Rostam, as he narrated them to his children, could be rendered in a more standard form for inclusion in a body of formal literature. It funded poetry contests whereby talented youth could refine their language and express their feelings towards life, love, and nature. It funded collaborative projects whereby literature could be enhanced by music. In a manner of speaking, the state elevated the shepherd boy and his flute to the level of the bard and his orchestra. At the end, the ruler found himself to be in possession of a shepherd's boy, a flute, and a song.

The process, however, did not end there. The kings being mortal, passed away. Their legacy, including their assumed contributions, reverted to the state and, from there, back to the people. In this way, a generation later, the people found themselves in possession of a shepherd's boy, a shepherd's flute, a bard, and an orchestra. In more universal terms, they found themselves in possession of a civilization. And that is, I believe, where the Samanid State made its contribution. While the Arabs regarded the shepherd expendable, the Samanids found him to be a most profound symbol, a most precious representative of their

Achaemenian, Parthian, and Sassanian ancestors. They cultivated the values that were inherent in the shepherd, i. e., his person, his song, and his flute.

As it will be shown, much of what is interesting and germane in Samanid culture has its roots in the culture of Sassanian Iran. For instance, the Sassanians reestablished Zoroastrianism, which had been declining since the invasion of Alexander the Great, as their state religion. They further strengthened Zoroastrianism by allowing it a place in the state government, providing it with a hierarchy of priests, and regarding it as a main pillar of their rule. Within a few generations, when all vestiges of Hellenism were erased, people enjoyed the fruits of their forefathers' foresight which had resulted in the reestablishment of the values of the good religion.

Zoroastrianism, however, is a logic-based religion emanating from the mind of Ahura Mazda. As such, it distinguishes good and evil in a mechanical, binary fashion. Certain acts are assigned good values; certain others are to be avoided. Strict adherence to either side, it appears, would seem to be a boring proposition. Nevertheless, adhering to the letter of the Vendidad, their law book, the early Sassanians created a prosperous kingdom. But, this state of affairs obtained only as long as Zoroastrian orthodoxy and the divine right of the monarch were not questioned.

During the Sassanian Era, two movements, Manicheism and Mazdakism, emerged as powerful counterpoints to the strictly binary system of orthodox Zoroastrianism. The former attempted to dilute the original message by injecting elements of Gnosticism, Christianity, and Buddhism into its tenets. The latter attempted to destroy the very social fabric on which the religion drew for strength. Although neither succeeded, both brought the message of the people to the rulers and to their oppressive subordinates. The message was loud and clear: fewer restrictions, more justice.

The proverbial just rule of Khusrau I Anushiravan came in the wake of these revolts. Helped by his capable minister, Buzurgmihir, Khusrau reformed Sassanian society, imposing the rule of justice. The difference between his rule and that of his predecessors was the humanism that he injected into the old system. He involved himself personally in the lives of his subjects. His model of care and tolerance was then translated throughout the Sassanian social, religious, and military hierarchies. Everyone was obliged to sympathize with the downtrodden and assist the needy.

Although lost on the Arab invaders, the lessons of Mani and Mazdak were not lost on generations of Iranians who had suffered the atrocities of the Arab invasion, the humility of living at the behest of the Umayyids, and coping with the deceitful manipulations of the Abbasid Caliphs. As early as the Taherid Era, the banner of resistance is high; with the advent of the Samanids, it is installed at the pavilion of the Amir. Naturally, the request from the Amir would be to reestablish the rule of justice in the manner of Khusrau I. And, quite naturally that was what Isma'il Samani, a most remarkable example of his age, did. By centralizing the government, instituting divan s, building roads, promoting the sciences and the arts and, most importantly, by involving the people in the daily affairs of the state, he established a direct link between the ruler and the ruled. In fact, he is known to have

stood at cross-roads near his palace, waiting for subjects who might need his assistance in finding shelter on the coldest days of the year.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned, a major contributor to the early development of the state was the rulers' recognition of the role of the Persian language, its use as a unique means for compilation of a record of historical events, and for facilitating communication across governmental, religious, and military lines. The Persian language and the Persian culture also provided the best means for the promotion of an anti-Arab, pro-Iranian ethnic identity. By underscoring the mistakes of the Arabs--in fact, by embarrassing them in public (cf., "Az khatlan amadai")--the Samanids gained the upper hand.

Yet another contributor was empowering the indigenous people to become acquainted with their true identity, as seen and described by their own people rather than by Arab or Arabized scholars (cf., at-Tabari's *Tarikh*). Glorification of the deeds of the kings, heroes, and heroines of the past, in the manner of Firdowsi's *Shahname*, served this purpose admirably.

But, perhaps the most instrumental, strategy was the creation of a spiritual, cultural, and scientific weapon against the discriminatory ideological and scholastic world view of Sunni Islam. There was need for a two-pronged weapon: the rise of Isma'ilism and of the Shu'ubiyyah is related to this strategy. The contributions of the Shu'ubiyyah elevated Iran and Islam in ways that were incredible even to the Iranian Muslims themselves. In essence, the mission of the Shu'ubiyyah was to beat the Arabs at their own game, i.e., to downgrade Arab culture by providing incontrovertible evidence of the inability of the Bedouin to create a burgeoning Islamic culture within a few generations. Rather than Persian, which most of them had forgotten, the Shu'ubis asked questions in the Arabic language: How could the Arabs, who sold useless yellow gold for dazzling white silver, who bartered dear camphor for a piece of cloth, and who claimed triple taxes from a person whose name happened to include three words," they asked, " be superior to the Iranians?"

Early on, in the development of the dynasty, the Samanids recognized the role of the sciences and the arts in their quest for unity and advancement. Samanid rulers not only respected scholars and poets, but invited them to their court, held group discussions, and participated in the sessions as major contributors. Similarly, Prime Ministers, like Abu Ali Bal'ami, a well-known historian, and Abu Abdullah Jaihani, a competent geographer, were patrons of the arts and sciences. In fact, the encounter between the young poet, Farrukhi, and Amir As'ad, the vassal of the Samanids at Chaghanian, forms one of the memorable chapters of the history of Persian literature.<sup>16</sup> About the richness of the court of the Samanids, al-Tha'alibi says:

Bukhara was, under the Samanid rule, the Focus of Splendour, the Shrine of Empire, the Meetingplace of the most unique intellects of the Age, the Horizon of the literary stars of the world, and the Fair of the greatest scholars of the Period. Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Musa al-Musawi related to me as follows: "My father Abu'l-Hasan received an invitation to Bukhara in the days of the Amir-i-Sa'id [Nasr II b. Ahmad, reigned A. D. 913-942], and

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>16</sup> Clinton, 1972, pp. 7-8; Frye, *op cit*, p. 141.

there were gathered together the most remarkable of its men of letters...And when these were settled in familiar conversation one would engage with another in plucking the fringes of some discussion, each offering to the other fragrant flowers of dialectic, and pursuing the perfumes of Culture, and letting fall in succession necklaces of pearls, and blowing on magical knots. And my father said to me, 'O my son, this is a notable and red-letter day: make it an epoch as regards the assembling of the standards of talent and the most incomparable scholars of the age, and remember it, when I am gone, amongst the great occasions of the period and the notable moments of thy life. For I scarcely think that in the lapse of the years thou wilt see the like of these met together,' And so it was, for never again was my eye brightened with the sight of such a gathering.<sup>17</sup>

During the first century of Islamic rule in Transoxiana and Khurasan, virtually to the end of the Umayyid period, there was very little activity in the promotion of the sciences. There was, however, considerable activity in preparing translations from Syriac, Greek, and Pahlavi into Arabic, and adopting ideas from India.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, even though there was no real advancement in the sciences as such, the road was paved for future generations to involve themselves in the higher levels of learning.

Thus, the early Abbasids, building on the knowledge gained from a study of Indian and Iranian (Sassanian) scientific books, especially in astronomy, contributed greatly to the creation of a sound foundation for scientific inquiry. Samanid scholars like al-Razi, Ibn-i Sina, and al-Biruni, following the Ptolemaic model, as opposed to the Indian and Iranian models, enhanced this knowledge and passed it on to subsequent generations to which figures like Hakim Umar Khayyam Nishapuri belong.<sup>19</sup>

Samanid revival benefited the sciences, especially mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. Geography, historiography, and philosophy, alongside literature, cultivated the social aspects while mining, zoology, and agriculture contributed to the economy and the well-being of the State. There is hardly anyone in the history of medieval mathematics and the theory of numbers who could rival the fame of al-Khwarazmi, the author of *Kitab al-Mukhtasar fi Hisab al-Jabr wa al-Muqabilah*. Just a mention of the word "algebra" is sufficient to conjure up the milieu to which al-Biruni, Ibn-i Sina, Sijzi, and Buzjani contributed. Both al-Biruni and Ibn-i Sina were involved in the field of physics as well. The former excelled in the practical aspects of physics while the latter contributed to the theoretical dimensions of the same. The physicist par excellence of the era, however, was Muhammad Zakariyyah al-Razi, the founder of practical physics and the inventor of the special or net weight of matter. Other contributors to physics were Ibn-i Sina (acoustics), Ibn-i Haitham (optics), and al-Biruni (the completion of the efforts of al-Razi in determining special weights).

Directly related to ascertaining the time of prayers and to the agricultural calendar, astronomy received special attention by the scholars and by the State. Astronomers in five major observatories, including one in Khwarazm and one in Isfahan, carried out research and enhanced the already rich culture of Transoxiana and Khurasan. In their calculations,

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<sup>17</sup> Clinton, *op cit*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> See, Safa, 1988, pp. 108ff.

<sup>19</sup> Cf., Kennedy, 1975, pp. 378ff.

that were in need of most computation during the Middle Ages, the astronomers employed the letters of the Arabic alphabet as numeral symbols (cf., the abjad system). In this respect, the works of al-Biruni and Ibn-i Sina command attention. The former's calibration of the circumference of the earth is a single, most germane, contribution to the field, while the latter's exploration of movement, time, and space are uniquely innovative.

Ibn-i Sina understood movement as a change of place, a change in quantity, or in the quality of a thing. Dividing movements according to the nature of their source, he distinguished three types: *tabi'i*, *qasri*, and *arazi*. He sought the source of the *qasri* and *arazi* movements outside themselves, while he attributed the source of the *tabi'i* movement to the thing itself, indicating that the cause of natural phenomena is internal to nature. This view, which prevents the inclusion of the supernatural in the explanations for eclipses and earthquakes, also places God outside the scheme of the natural progression of things.

Ibn-i Sina conceived of time as countable segments of movement. Like matter and movement, he considered time to have an objective reality, thus rejecting the prevalent view that because it could not be observed, time was more imaginary than real. Furthermore, because he could not logically assign a beginning and an end to time--because every beginning necessarily has a preceding end in the past, and every end a beginning in the future--he considered time to be eternal. The attribution of eternal existence to time placed Ibn-i Sina in the category of the *Dahris* (materialists) who, like the *Zurvanites*, believed in Absolute Time.

Medicine was the first of the Greek sciences to attract the attention of Muslim scientists. The history of medicine in the region, however, dates back to pre-Islamic times when, in AD 529, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian closed the Plato Academy that had been working under the direction of Precleus. Seven Roman scientists, who did not have an academy in which to work, were invited by Khusrau I Anushiravan to Iran to carry out their research in the newly founded University of Gundishapur.<sup>20</sup> The forte of the researchers of the University of Gundishapur, which continued into Islamic times--until the middle of the ninth century--was medicine.

A major research center, the University of Gundishapur acquired knowledge from the Hellenistic world, India, and China. After this knowledge was examined and expanded, it was transmitted to Baghdad. From Baghdad, by way of Cordoba and Toledo, this knowledge was sent to what is present-day Western Europe, where it was further enhanced and expanded.

The Samanids were heir to the repository of knowledge controlled by the University of Gundishapur. In fact, many of the Samanid physicians and researchers were descendants of those who had recognized the merit of Greek medicine, especially the necessity of maintaining a balance among the four elements--earth, air, water, and fire--and who had ascribed fundamental value to them as criteria for preservation of, and restoration to, health.

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<sup>20</sup> For the names of these scholars, and more information on their work in Iran, see Safa, *op cit*, p. 103.

That is why, the contributions to the field of medicine, although usually not as comprehensively covered as those to the other fields, are deservedly noteworthy. Divided between medical care and pharmacology, a host of scholars, physicians, and caretakers participated in creating a thriving community within the Samanid realm. This community with substantial ties to India, Egypt, and Europe, played an international role in bringing health care to the world at large. An examination of the hospitals and pharmacies, as well as of the education of the physicians and pharmacologists, underscores the significance that the Samanids attached to this aspect of their society. Also noteworthy are the types of medical care provided including, among others, preventive medicine and psychiatry.

In spite of the difficulties and the disarray that accompanies war, especially the negative attitude of the Umayyids toward Iranian culture, the tradition of maintaining a high degree of medical knowledge continued into early Islamic times. In the ninth and tenth centuries, this tradition gave rise to a number of prominent physicians, from among whom al-Razi and Ibn-i Sina are widely recognized.

Born in the ancient city of Ray, around AD 841, al-Razi (westernized as Razes) was an encyclopedic scholar interested in philosophy, alchemy, mathematics, and medicine to which he turned at the age of forty. With over two hundred books to his credit, he is recognized as the physician par excellence, a foremost clinician and an original thinker. His emphasis on the well-being of children, especially his recognition of smallpox and measles as two distinct diseases that plagued children, and his discovery of remedies for them, underscore his humanism, as does his belief that there should exist a bond of trust between the patient and the doctor.

In twenty-five books, al-Razi's *al-Havi* deals with both the theoretical and practical aspects of medicine. Similarly, in ten books, his *Tibb-i Mansuri* deals with anatomy, diagnosis, urology, and various types of fevers and crises. His discovery of the causes of diseases (polluted water, contaminated air, and rotten food, to name a few) was a major contribution to the world of medicine of the time. Al-Razi, director of hospitals in both Ray and Baghdad, died in 926.

The other giant in the field of medicine at the time was Ibn-i Sina (westernized as Avicenna). He was born in AD 980 in the village of Afshana, near the city of Bukhara. Like al-Razi and other scholars of his time, Ibn-i Sina was an encyclopedist interested in philosophy, alchemy, music, poetry, and government. Other aspects of his interests included astronomy, mineralogy, and linguistics. By the age of ten, he is reported to have memorized the entire text of the Qur'an; by age sixteen, he turned to what he called "the easy science of medicine;" by age eighteen, he distinguished himself by curing the Samanid Amir, Nuh ibn Mansur; and by age twenty, he was appointed court physician which, as is well known, provided him access to such libraries as the Sivan al-Hikmat in Bukhara.

Dividing medicine into two branches, theoretical and practical, Ibn-i Sina defined *tibb*, medicine, as the science that deals with the human body in sickness and in health. The theoretical aspect, he said, dealt with the principles on which medicine is established; the

practical brought normalcy to life. His diagnostic methods, based on the science of signs, symptoms, and psychology; his advocacy of appropriate diet, and exercise are still accepted practices among those devising balanced health programs. Additionally, he discovered the properties of 760 medicinal plants. Ibn-i Sina's major contribution to medicine is his Qanun. Comprised of five books, among other things, al-Qanun, which deals with anatomy, physiology, neurology, and toxicology, was a required textbook at the University of Vienna until 1537.

Ibn-i Sina is also the great representative of the school of masha' philosophy. As a theologian, he explored such issues as the relationship between God, nature, and man; various forms of existence; matter and form; self and personality; causality; and man's understanding of the material world. He argued that God related to man, not so much as a Creator in control of a creature, but as a cause versus an effect. He further argued that since cause and effect were necessary relationships, God could not have created the world out of His own will, but as a consequence of a necessity.

As can be seen, even within the idealism of his time, Ibn-i Sina limited God's Will by subordinating it to necessity. He also limited God as the creator by stating that God's abilities were limited to that of the Prime Mover. Once He set the creation in motion, says Ibn-i Sina, God no longer interfered with its internal workings. Larger, metaphysical--as opposed to physical--issues, he says, commanded God's attention.

Interestingly enough, in dealing with the ulema of his time, he continued to profess Islam, even though his theories and pronouncements differed. Ibn-i Sina's investigations in geology, for instance, support the theory that his words and thoughts on the question of religion were at odds. For instance, he theorized that the mountainous regions of the globe had once been seabeds and that minerals, like gold, had been formed as part of the sedimentation process. Similarly, he posited that the earth surface is composed of various layers--as seen at the sides of certain mountains--and that the movements of those layers create earthquakes. These original theories have now been scientifically proven. Ibn-i Sina died in Hamadan, Iran, in 1037, of exhaustion.

Concrete views such as those could not pass undetected by the ulema. Ibn-i Sina's views were later challenged by al-Ghazali and Fakhr al-Din Razi who upheld the prevalent theological views of their time.

Both al-Razi and Ibn-i Sina were interested in psychology. Al-Razi's *Tibb-i Ruhani* relates many of the ailments that afflict individuals to such inner aspects as pride, greed, and anger. Ibn-i Sina adds love to the list. According to Rumi, Ibn-i Sina cured a young woman by identifying the young man she loved and by uniting the two.

A measure of the importance of the works of the medieval Islamic scientists was in whether their works were translated into Latin and when. Ibn-i Sina's *al-Qanun* was translated into Latin in the twelfth century. Al-Razi's *al-Havi* was translated into Latin in the thirteenth. Both books were used as textbooks in Eastern and Western institutions of learning until the advent of modern medicine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Physicians like al-Razi were not only involved in the theoretical and practical aspects of medicine, but in the preparation and administration of drugs as well. In fact, al-Razi was one of the first to warn about the potential of damage resulting from misuse of drugs or from the use of the wrong drug. Al-Biruni went one step farther and, in his *al-Saidana*, classified the names of all the drugs known at his time. Using *al-Saidana*, physicians could administer drugs with a very high level of certainty. *Al-Saidana* was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century.

Al-Razi's *al-Havi*, Ibn-i Sina's *al-Qanun*, and al-Biruni's *al-Saidana*, of course, are among the most important contributions of the ninth and tenth centuries to medicine and medical care. Other contributors to the fields of medicine, pharmacology, and psychology included al-Ahwazi, Ibn-i Sahl, Yahya Masihi, al-Bukhari, and al-Hiravi.<sup>21</sup>

Under the Samanids, Iranian society underwent a drastic change. This was a change from the worldly life depicted in the court poetry, written in praise of the early Samanid Amirs, to the description of Sufic life in the works of Kalabadi and Mustamalli. The early court poets, actually court employees, praised the ruler in simple terms for worldly gain. The Sufic poets praised Allah; they sought Sufic truths without expecting a reward. The themes that occupied each group, even the language they used, was similarly different. While the court poet sought worldly pleasure in his discussion of wine, beauty, and love, the Sufic poet, albeit in symbolic terms, used the same concepts to mean knowledge of the Beloved, attainment of perfection, and annihilation. This change indicates that the audience for which the Sufic poets wrote had enjoyed enough prosperity, and experienced enough ease of mind to take the providers of those amenities for granted.

In the field of music, the great musician of the court of Khusrau II, Borbad, served as the model. By incorporating the experiences of Greek, Indian, and Arab musicians, great scholars like Abunahr Farabi and Abu al-Abbas Bakhtiyar renovated the entire field of music. The former devoted his efforts to the theoretical aspects of music while the latter concentrated on the application of theories and on the institution of schools for the education of future musicians.

Unlike the milieu in which Borbad freely followed the dictates of his own musical genius, musicians of the Samanid Era had to abide by certain restrictions. As is well known, Islam frowns on music unless it is in the form of religious chants or of recitation of the Holy Qur'an. To a degree, therefore, the practical aspect of instrumentation and voice were outshone by the theoretical. A great deal of attention was paid to method, rhythm, and style--aspects the development of which elevated the musical culture of Khurasan and Transoxiana to international heights.

Promotion of the arts and sciences led to the institution of new centers of learning such as madrasahs built on the model of the University of Gundishapur. It also led to the creation of centers for storing and retrieving information such as the Sivan al-Hikmat in Bukhara. These were libraries full of manuscripts spanning translations from Greek and Syriac

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<sup>21</sup> For further information on these scholars, see Nuraliev's article in Part Two of this volume.

languages on aspects of philosophy to innovative theories of contemporary scholars such as Ibn-i Sina and al-Biruni.

The contributions to the various fields of science and arts are many; fortunately, they are dealt with in great detail in specific articles in this volume. We shall, therefore, close this part with a brief discussion of the causes of the decline of the Samanid State.

## **Conclusion**

The rise and fall of empires involve complex and weighty issues, not all of which can be examined here. For instance, in order to understand the reasons and explain the causes for the fall of the Samanid Dynasty, the following factors must be taken into consideration: the strengths and weaknesses of the caliphate in Baghdad, the mind-set of the major leaders of the Empire, and the source on which the caliphate drew for security, stability, and expansion. Similarly, familiarity with the aspirations of the Iranian peoples, the measures they took to restore their ancestors' way of life, and the degree of hostility that existed among the Samanid rulers of Transoxiana and Khurasan is essential. Furthermore, special attention must be given to the roles that the caliphate assigned to the ethnic, ideological, and political forces for furthering its own programs. This includes the role of the Turks vis-à-vis the Iranians; the role of the Iranians at the court of Baghdad and in provincial centers in Transoxiana and Khurasan, and the role of the Turks in the administration of the caliphate and its satellite states, such as the Samanid State. Finally, the role of rival states, such as the Buyids, with designs on Baghdad and its satellites--Bukhara, for instance--must be taken into consideration.

But what if we simplified matters and divided Arab rule in Baghdad into pre-Turkish and post-Turkish phases? In that case, the first phase would coincide with the flowering of the efforts of the Iranians, resulting in, on the one hand, the decline and fall of the Umayyid Dynasty and, on the other hand, the establishment of Abbasid rule. The second phase would include the establishment of an Iranian-friendly caliphate beset by anti-Arab (Iranian and Turkish) rivals.

The caliphate used a very simple strategy. It pitted the Iranians against the Turks. Rather than combating the Turks, however, the Taherids and the Samanids became enmeshed in establishing independent kingdoms of their own. Seeing the negative results of this sterile strategy, the caliphate reversed the roles. It galvanized the Turks against the Iranians. Unfortunately, this strategy, too, proved to be counter productive. The well-groomed and well-educated Turks not only defeated the Samanids but went on to claim the caliphate as well.

Fortunately, the interactions among the Arab, Iranian, and Turkish groups were more than a mere exercise. They not only revived the traditions and values of the ancient world, but accommodated them in a larger and more cosmopolitan milieu, a milieu that brought Western Europe, Cordoba, Baghdad, and Bukhara closer to each other than they had been ever before.