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cioeconomic characteristics that contribute to cohesion and cleavage within the society. Particular attention is given to the origins and traditions of the people who make up the society, their dominant beliefs and values, their community of interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with the national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward the social system and political order

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William Evans-Smith

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Iran: A Country Study

Religious Life

living by publicly explaining points of ritual. Funeral rites are elements, it has become strongly Islamicized. The Quran is placed elaborate. Vows of charity and piety are frequently made for the table along with young plants and the haft sin (seven things fulfillment of a wish. A person who has asked for the granting of a begin with the letters). Blessings are recited for the Prophet wish often symbolizes this request by slaughtering a sheep or by his family, and prayers are offered. Joyous religious festivals attaching a padlock or a shred of cloth to the door or some other the feasts at the end of Ramazan; the feast of the sacrifice

part of a shrine, even to holy trees. during

the hajj month; the birthdays of Muhammad, Ali, and the

There is virtually a cult of Ali in Iran. Many homes have a Imams;

and the Idi Ghadir, which commemorates the day when Ali

painting of him set in an enshrined niche, and gold medals with his Ali

was chosen as successor to the Prophet.

portrait are worn by many in all classes. In times of trouble Ali, not

Tragic religious events are more numerous than the joyful: the most

Allah (God), is exclaimed; and whenever an example is called for, most

important is Ashura, the death of Husyan on the tenth of

whether in social discourse or business dealings, anecdotes about

Muharram. Mourning begins on the eve of his martyrdom, and the

Ali occur much more often than those of the Prophet. The hadith

procession of self-flagellation occurs on the day itself. There is

of Ali are collected in a volume that is regarded with almost the open

weeping and exclamations of sorrow on the streets as the

same reverence as the Quran and is probably read more often.

procession passes. Taaziehs, highly emotive passion plays, are

Two religious practices, unique to Shia Iran, combine those performed

depicting the events of his martyrdom.

elements of cathartic religious tragedy and beauty so beloved by The

deaths of the Prophet, Ali's other son, Imam Hassan, and of Imam

Iranians. The rawda (literally, garden) is a series of religious Imam

Reza, all occur in Safar. The attack and eventual death of Ali on the

sessions during which the rawda khwan, a person gifted in the

twenty-first of Ramazan is understandably a major event.

techniques of sermons and laments who is not necessarily a Other

mourning holidays are for the deaths of Ali's wife, Fatima,

mujtahid, delivers powerfully emotional sermons and recites and and of

the other Imams.

sings laments on the subject of the deaths of the Prophet o..r the

Deviant Religious Movements

Imams. The government sponsors rawdas in mosques during Mu-

After the acceptance of Shiite doctrine as the official religion in

harram and Safar. In addition they are given in private homes, the

sixteenth century, there were many schismatic movements,

throughout the year, usually as nadhr, the fulfillment of a vow for partly

encouraged by the Shiite principle of ijtihaad (personal rea-

some special favor asked of God. Anyone may go to a rawda. Black

soning, derived from the Arabic word meaning to struggle). The

flags on the door indicate that a rawda will be held. Weather

follower of ijtihaad is permitted to study rules and regulations and

permitting they are held in a garden. Some of the particularly their

sources, draw his own conclusions, and follow his conscience

pious attach loudspeakers outside of their houses so that those who on

procedural matters without reference to the authorities. This

cannot fit inside the house may still benefit from the rawda. code

of personal responsibility is open to anyone who can make an intelligent judgment. The two most important deviant movements to women. Sufiras are held to fulfill nadhr, and a woman will invite her friends to a lavish feast prepared with meticulous and highly ritualistic care. A female rawda khwan will recite and chant during at variance with the puritanism of the early period of Islam, the meal. After the performance, the remainder of food is distributed among the poor and the participants and is believed to possess baraka. The success of both the sufira and the rawda is judged by the number of people who are moved to weeping. Supporting and perpetuating political tyranny. They prescribed Despite the Islamic prohibition against magic, it is widely practiced in Iran where it is combined with Islamic motifs. The magical love of God is the only real condition; all else is illusion, and use of Quranic phrases is a traditional science, and certain phrases and reason are inadequate to explain these facts. Their names or formulas are well-known for their specific application. Dua, generally believed to come from the rough white wool (suj) that short prayers that include the names of Sufi saints or imams, may be carried on the person or inscribed on rings and amulets. The name came from the Greek word sophos (knowledge). By the tenth or eleventh century the Sufis had developed a rammal, the practitioner of geomancy, enjoy a brisk trade in semiliturgical poetic service with a significant musical content. urban and rural areas.

Influenced by Christianity and pre-Islamic mystery religions, Iran has major religious holidays throughout the year. New Year, No Ruz, is the continuation of the Zoroastrian New Year became so preoccupied with the contemplation of divine perfection, although the celebration naturally contains many pre-Islamic that they sought ecstatic trances, eventually by prescribed

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selfless state. As a result, Sufi poets were among the greatest contributors to Iranian art.

A number of Sufi brotherhoods were established during the early centuries of Islam, many of which continue to exist. In the late 1960s one Kurdish sect had members in nine Middle Eastern countries. One of the brotherhoods, which came into being in the thirteenth century, was that of the whirling dervishes (from the Iranian word meaning poor), mendicant ecstasies known for their gyrating dances performed while in a trance, a condition heightened by the gyrations. Dervishes and other Sufi orders maintain loose organizations and hold private meetings at which the traditional ritual chanting of Sufi poetry and invocations are carried on. A khaniqah, the tomb of a dead Sufi master or the teaching center of a living one, continues to be a vital religious institution in contemporary Iran and is actually a complex of centers. It houses rooms for spiritual training as well as accommodations for fuqara (disciples) and for visiting Sufis. The ceremonies of the khaniqah are opened to the public on such special occasions as birthdays of the Prophet Muhammed and the Imams and on the mourning holidays. In addition to the fuqara who reside there and the public who occasionally visit, there are others from all socio-economic classes who may go once a week to the khaniqah for instructions in Sufi spiritual techniques. The meeting of these people on a frequent basis is socially significant because it is one of the few Iranian institutions that cuts across all classes and where there are exchanges among the members of all groups.

The major Sufi orders, most of which have branches in other countries, wield considerable influence in shaping contemporary cultural life, particularly in the fields of philosophy, music, literature, and painting. Because of the Sufi orientation to the esoteric or mystical truths of Islam, Sufism is attractive to those Iranians who, while living in the real world, nevertheless seek spiritual realization. Because the emphasis is on the development of the inner self and because Sufism may be approached and appreciated on any intellectual level, it draws, though not necessarily or exclusively, from groups that are not otherwise religious in the traditional sense of outward practice. In order of their size and influence, the following Sufi orders are most prominent in Iran today; the Nematollahi, which has centers throughout the country; the Gunabadi, chiefly in Khorasan; the Dhahabi in Shiraz; the Qadiri in the Persian Gulf area and in Kordestan; and the Naqshbandi, also in Kordestan.

The Bahai movement had its origin in the eighteenth-century heretical beliefs of the followers of Shaykh Ahmed Ahsai, who taught that the hidden Imam was a creative force with which contact could be made through a human intermediary, the Bab Dervish carrying flag ornamented with symbol of Shiite resistance

(door). In 1840 Mirza Ali Muhammad of Shiraz proclaimed himself
U.S. Army photograph

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Religious Life

to be the Bab and gained the following of many tribal leaders. The In
mid-1977 there were an estimated 80,000 Jews in Iran, living
Babi movement grew rapidly and assumed the character of a mili- mainly
in Tehran, Isfahan, Kashan, Hamadan, and Shiraz. Since
tant new faith at considerable variance with Shiism. The Babis 1948
some 45,000 Jews have migrated to Israel. Iranian Jews form
interpreted the Quran as largely allegorical and represented the one of
the oldest Jewish communities in the world, and through
resurrection as a manifestation of divine spirit. Claiming to be more
than 1,000 years of living among the Iranians, have become
Muslim nevertheless, they taught that all religions have elements
physically and spiritually very close to the majority population.
of truth, peace, brotherhood, and tolerance. The heretics were They
have preserved, however, a rather conservative, closed re-
severely persecuted by the Shiite leaders, and many were put to
life. They are fully protected by the Constitution. religious
death, including Ali Muhammad. In
the twentieth century the Jewish community achieved im-
A number of the Babis escaped, however, and followed Hussein portance
in the commercial life of the major cities, particularly
Ali Baha Ollah, a disciple of Ali Muhammad, who declared himself Tehran,
and Jews have entered the professions, most notably
the expected manifestation of the divine spirit, the messiah of all
pharmacy, medicine, and dentistry. They have their own hospitals
religions, and the promulgator of a new era. The followers of Baha and
academic and technical schools and are the only ethnic group
Ollah, known as the Bahais, were pacifists (unlike the Babis) and that is
considered 100 percent literate. The Jewish shrine to
preached respect for the law. They advocated universal brother- Esther
and Mordecai is at Hamadan; the tomb of Daniel is sup-
hood of man and legal equality between men and women. The posed
to be located near Ahvaz.

Bahai movement was spread throughout the world; it has small
Native Christians are limited almost entirely to the Semitic
groups active in Western Europe and the United States and claims
Assyrians, numbering about 30,000, who live around Lake
a world membership of 500,000. The Bahais have been severely
Rezaiyeh and in Tehran, and to the Armenians, totaling approxi-
condemned by the Shiite clergy; the Bahai religion, while not mately
250,000, living mainly in Tehran and Isfahan. Most
under active suppression, is not legally recognized in Iran,
Assyrians belong to the Assyrian Church of the East, formerly and

In addition to the Sufis, who may be appreciated as representing mistakenly called the Nestorian Church. As a result of Western the mystical aspect of Islam, and the Bahais, who are now totally missionary work in the twentieth century, four distinct denominations outside the theology of Islam, there are several sects active in Iran also exist, including Roman Catholic and Protestant groups. today that fall somewhere in the middle of these two interpretations. Adherents to these four Christian groups were estimated at approximately 30,000 in the mid-1970s. Most Armenians belong to very numerous in Iran during the medieval period. They were the Gregorian Church under the Catholicos of Cilicia at Beirut. originally part of the larger Shiite movement but split from the This has led to a political split in the Armenian community as many main body of Shiites during the ninth century over the question of Armenians continue to recognize the leadership of the Catholicos the rightful successor to the Imamate. They claim only seven of Echmiadzin at Yerevan in Soviet Armenia, who claims to represent the entire community. sent descendant of their last imam. The largest number of Ismailis are Armenians have long been free to enter the economic and social life of in other countries, but in 1977 several thousand resided in Iran, Iran. They have achieved a relatively high standard of living, chiefly in the Elburz Mountains. have maintained a large number of religious schools, and are Two smaller groups-the Ali Allahi and Ahl i Haqq-are concentrated in Lorestan but have also spread to Mazandaran, worship is a pilgrimage to the ruins of the Church of Saint Kordestan, and some of the southern provinces. Although still a West Thaddeus, founded over 1,500 years ago, in the area that became part of the Islamic tradition, these two sects emerged from political Azarbaijan. The strong National Armenian Committee re- presents the interests of the religious community. The ignore the shariah and many Muslim devotional practices. The foreign community of business and diplomatic people make up the Minority Religions up the bulk of the remainder of the Christians. They have churches The official recognized minority religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Each of these groups is permitted to pean languages. sustain an organization, to elect a representative to the Majlis (the lower house of Parliament), to maintain religious schools, and to

publish periodicals. They are, however, restricted in their political activities since non-Muslims cannot occupy command positions of the best treatments of Shiism in Iran is Sayyid Hossein in the armed forces and cannot achieve policymaking positions in article, "Ithna Ashari Shiism and Iranian Islam." Roger the government.

One

Nasr's

Savory's article, "Land of the Lion and the Sun," is useful as an

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Social Systems

the economic, military, and political sectors, the elite has been Qajar dynasty but powerful enough to hold on to some of their expanded to include high-level government administrators from former glory, those who through choice or fate have not acquired a families with a tradition of service to the throne, general officers of foreign education or some other essential of upper-class status, the military and security forces, highly respected professional men of unusual ability who could never hope to attain uppermen, and the wealthiest industrialists and representatives of class status for reasons having to do with their ethnic origins or commercial interests. Although no longer the ruling dynasty and religious adherence. The Bahais are the most conspicuous example precluded by the Constitution from holding the highest political in this category.

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positions, members of the Qajar family retain important political, Because political connections are the key to social status, the economic, and social status. In 1977 the upper class was estimated upper middle stratum continually hopes that some political change to comprise less than 1 percent of the total population.

will

bring them as individuals into the upper class. The lower

Members of the elite tend to be involved in numerous complex class is made up of small retailers, craftsmen, low-level

middle

interrelationships. Some members of the Senate, which included government employees, mullahs, and related occupations. Generally they are less well educated and less well paid than members industrial and commercial enterprises and were owners of a large

of

the upper middle class. Like the upper middle class they have a number of villages. Since an important prerequisite for entry into strong dislike for manual work, preferring desk jobs, especially

the elite has usually been belonging to a "good family," blood and the government. The members of this stratum do not how-

with

marital relationships tend to bring together important segments of have the hope of the upper middle stratum that fate will

ever,

the elite. Until the land reform measures most political leaders

propel them into the upper class. They are too far away from the were also large landowners, and many of the Islamic leaders held a dividing line, and they do not have the economic resources, family number of lucrative trusteeships over property endowed for religious background, or political connections to take advantage of a shift in religious purposes, waqf land.

the political scene. Their main concern appears to be that they do not lose In spite of all the prestige and power the ruling elite did. ~ot not lose their social niche and fall into the lower class.

There is no The middle class is also divided into modern and traditional

strong group or class cohesion even at the top. The members react groups. The modern middle class consists of those persons with individually or by family to the favor or displeasure of the single

Western education employed in government services, the professions, individual at the apex of the entire social hierarchy, the shah. One and the universities, whereas the traditional middle class

of the conclusions of Zonis' study was that because of such factors, includes bazaar merchants, mullahs, and wealthy guild members.

The behavior of the political elite emerged from and was based on The two groups differ greatly in their origins and outlook. The

four attitudinal characteristics: political cynicism, personal mis- modern middle class stems from the development of a modern

trust manifest insecurity, and interpersonal exploitation. Studies bureaucracy originating in the late nineteenth century. This group

by other observers identified the same or similar characteristics in was significantly expanded in the 1960s and 1970s, largely as a the society as a whole.

function of the greater access to education and wealth. James A.

The middle class underwent considerable changes during the Bill notes that, "One of the most profound unintended conse-

quences 1960s and 1970s, the most important of which was its rapid expansion of the White Revolution is the accelerating growth of the

of the class may be divided vertically into upper and lower professional middle class." Bill pays special attention to the

middle-class strata and horizontally into modern and traditional modern middle class that he calls "The Professional-Bureaucratic

Intelligentsia." He views them as an alienated class for the most groups.

The members of the upper middle stratum are drawn from the part and the class that is most vociferous about the need for system

same occupational sources as the upper class. They are ~ond ~n transformation. This group, whose power position comes primarily

lesser positions in the civil service in Tehran or in top positions from talents or skills acquired from a modern formal education,

provincial cities, in positions just below command level in the increasingly refuses to participate in or is at least intensely frus-

military, in important but not outstanding positions 1~ commerce trated
by the personal maneuvering and manipulation that are
and industry, among professionals who have not ac~l~ved reco~-
necessary for advancement in society.

nition as being at the top of their profession, in positions of reli- The
civil service reforms of 1966 strengthened the position of
gious respect, and finally as landowners of local influence but not this
group. The reforms introduced competitive examinations and
important enough to be consulted when new policies are being provided
that advancement would be based on education and skill
considered for the rural areas. They include latecomers to the rather
than on traditional criteria. Once in a position in the civil
cause of the Pahlavi dynasty, younger offshoots of old upper-class service,
however, individuals have found that traditional methods
families, members of families too actively associated with the for
retaining a position or securing another position have con-

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