

Iran from Sassanid through Abbasid Rule (200s bce-900s ce)

Conflicting Historiographies

Tribes and Cities

Persianizing the Conquerors

Actually, its tribes all the way down...

- 550s-330s bce Cyrus and the Achaemenid Empire
- 312-224 bce Greek Period” from Alexander through the Seleucids
- 200s ce-630s bce Tribal Confederations Parthians, then Sassanids
- 650s ce -900s The Arab/Islamic empires
- 1000s – 1500 ce Turkic tribal dynasties come and go...Seljuks, Mongols, Ghaznavids...
- 1500 – 1722 Safavid Persian Dynasty
- 1700s -1900 Qajars



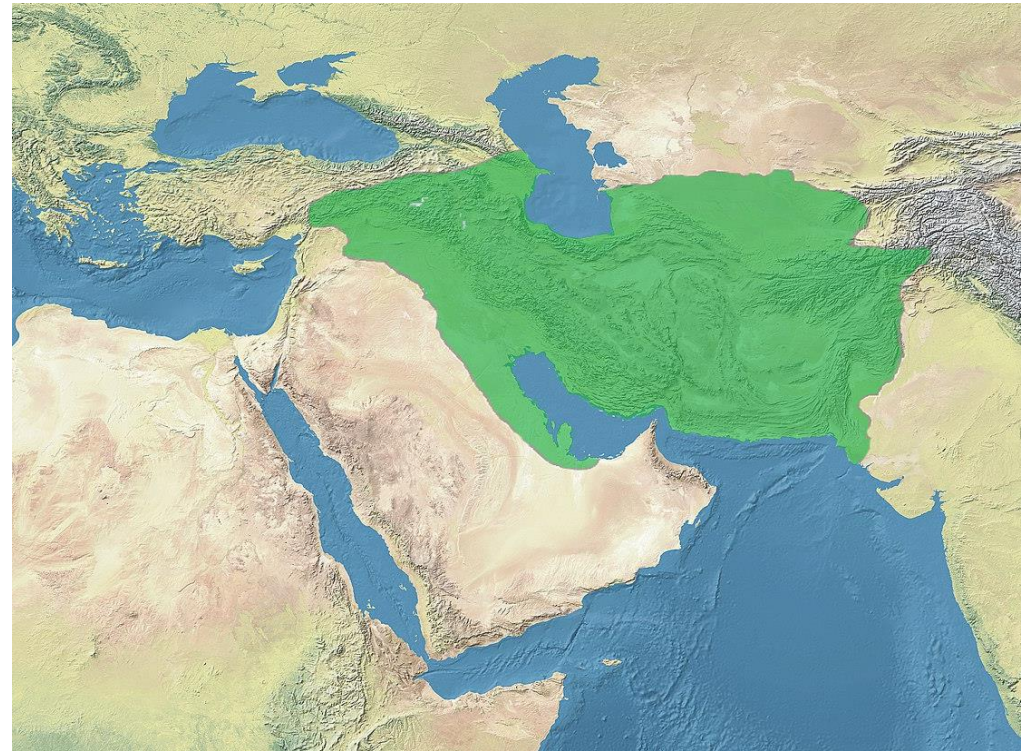
“Hellenistic” Empire?

In the 200s, revolts in Persis against the Seleucids commemorated in coins.



Parthians 240 bce-224 ce

- A refuge for Christians in the 100s
- Book of Revelations a Judeo- Greek text that emerged in the Parthian era, based on Oracle of Hystaspes, a Zoroastrian.
- Parthian literature in folktales casts a long shadow (Tristan and Iseult carried back in 11th c. to Europe- ends up as French romance?)



Sassanians- 220s-
650 ce

Wrestling with
their Roman
inner demon.

Dehqan Class

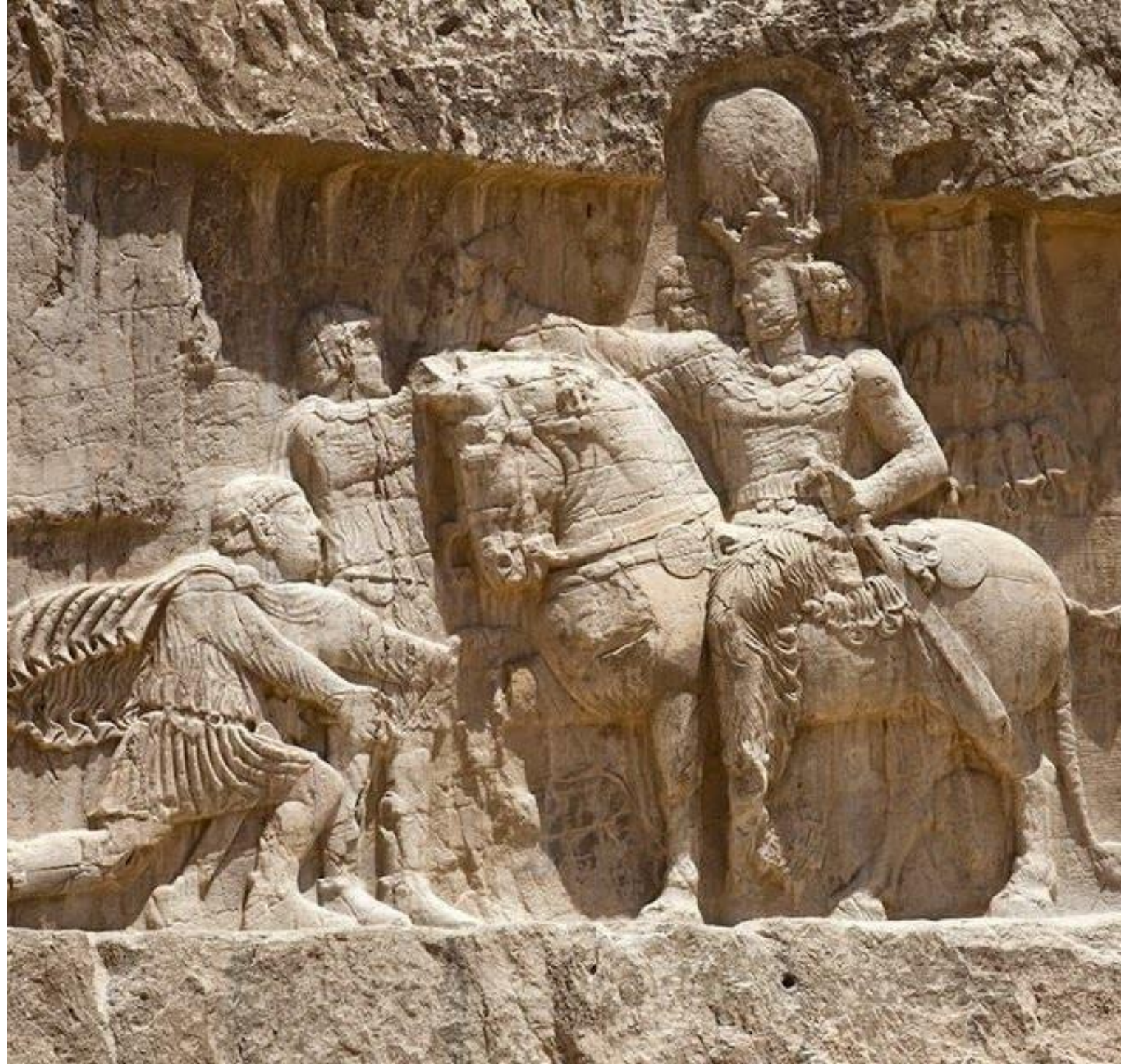
Zoroastrianism

Manicheans
Silk Road Trade



Tomb commemorating Emperor Shapur's capture of the Roman Emperor Valerian, 260

- (The Irony is that Shapur "married" to later Roman Emperor (270-75) Aurelius' daughter...)
- Shapur a patron of Hellenic scholars in philosophy, medicine, engineering, even Christian theology
- But he built his Tomb at the site of the necropolis of the Achemenids, Naqsh e Rostam – seeking to present himself as the heir of Cyrus.



Shapur's capital, Gondeshapur, became the intellectual center of the Empire.

- Home to Nestorian and Hellenistic philosophers expelled by Byzantines
- Translations from Greek, Latin, Sanskrit into Pahlavi, Invited scholars from India and China, to join them
- Model for the House of Wisdom in 9th c. Baghdad
- Christian monastery, school of medicine, astronomy, philosophy

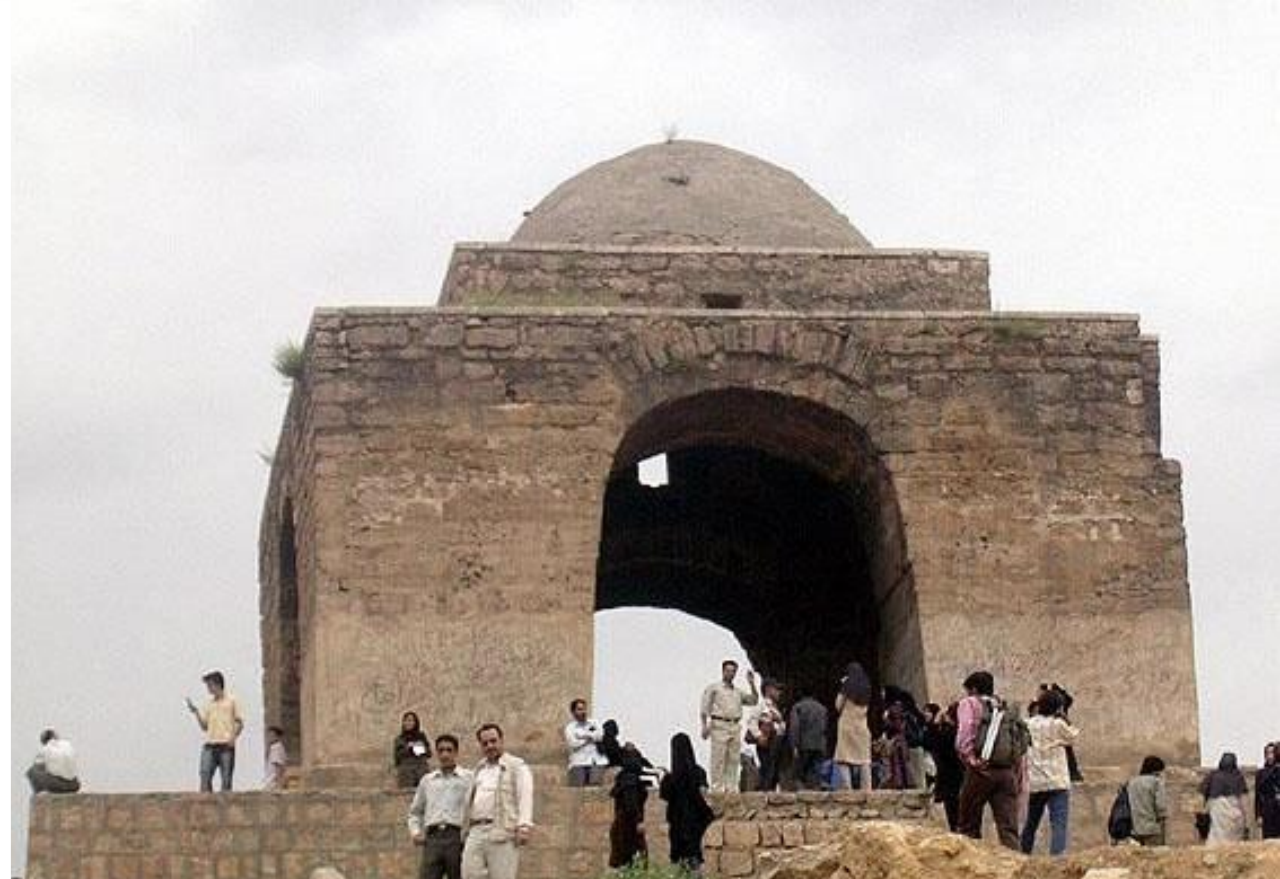




Bishapur – Summer palace of Shapur

- Mosaics from Shapur I Palace at Bishapur. The building and layout of the town created by roman engineers





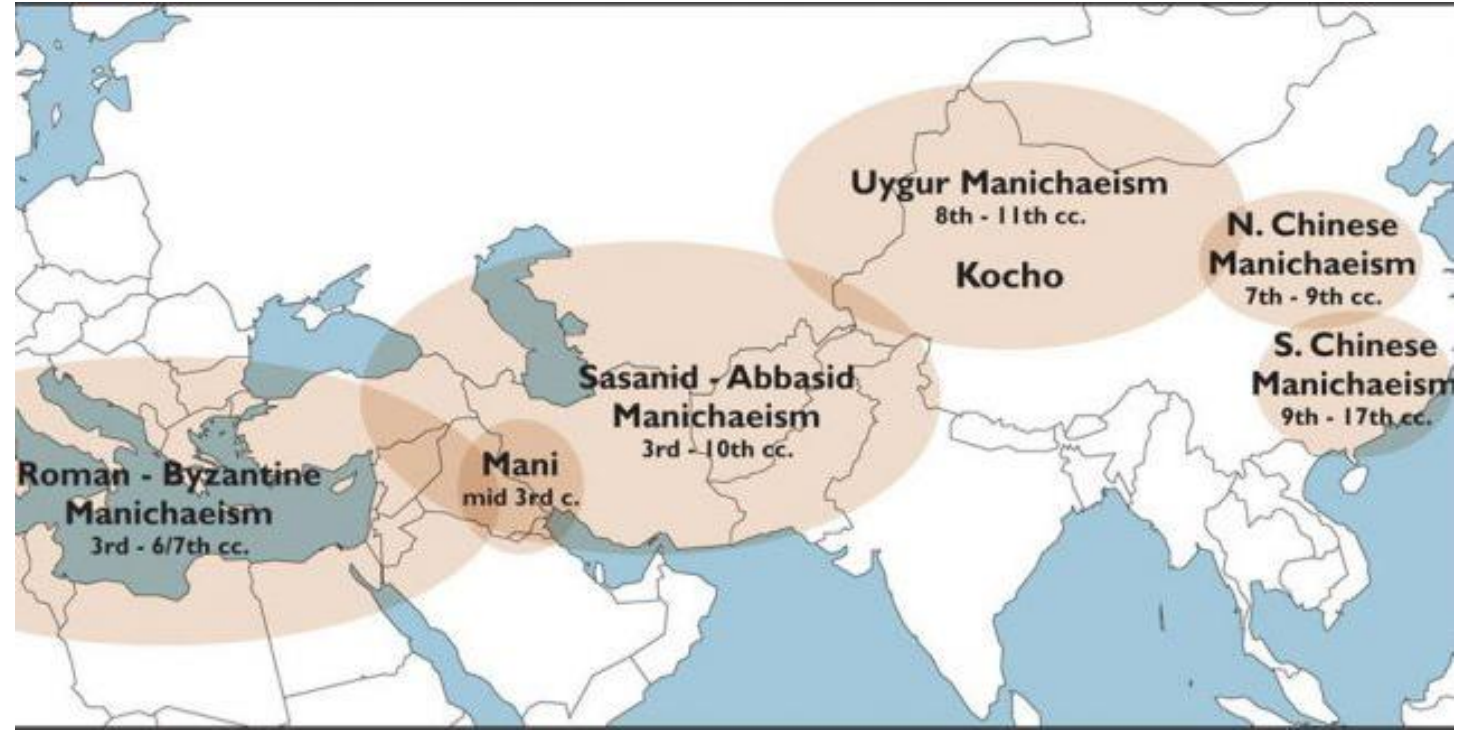
Zoroastrianism elevated to the official religion - part of the institutionalization of the state. Partnership with the Magi, fire temples, border markers...

(pictured here - Firuzabad and Niasar Fire Temples, Sassanian Era)



Formal Adoption of Zoroastrianism
by the State, but tolerance for others
– including Mani

- 16th c. Tashkent painting of Mani in the court of Shapur.
- Born near Ctesiphon of Jewish/Christian family, traveled to India and studied Buddhism
- Gnostic, anti materialist view
- Used by Shapur to balance out the power of the Magi?
- Manichean refugees head off into Rome (St. Augustine a Manichean) and the Silk Road – Xuighurs in China manicheans for awhile



Portrait of Mani in Duhuang, China

- Spread of Manicheanism along the Silk Road and across the East-West divide.



**1864 photo of the ruins of Ctesiphon, capital of Sassanids, c. 540s ce.
The arch a legacy of roman architecture incorporated in the Sassanid world.**

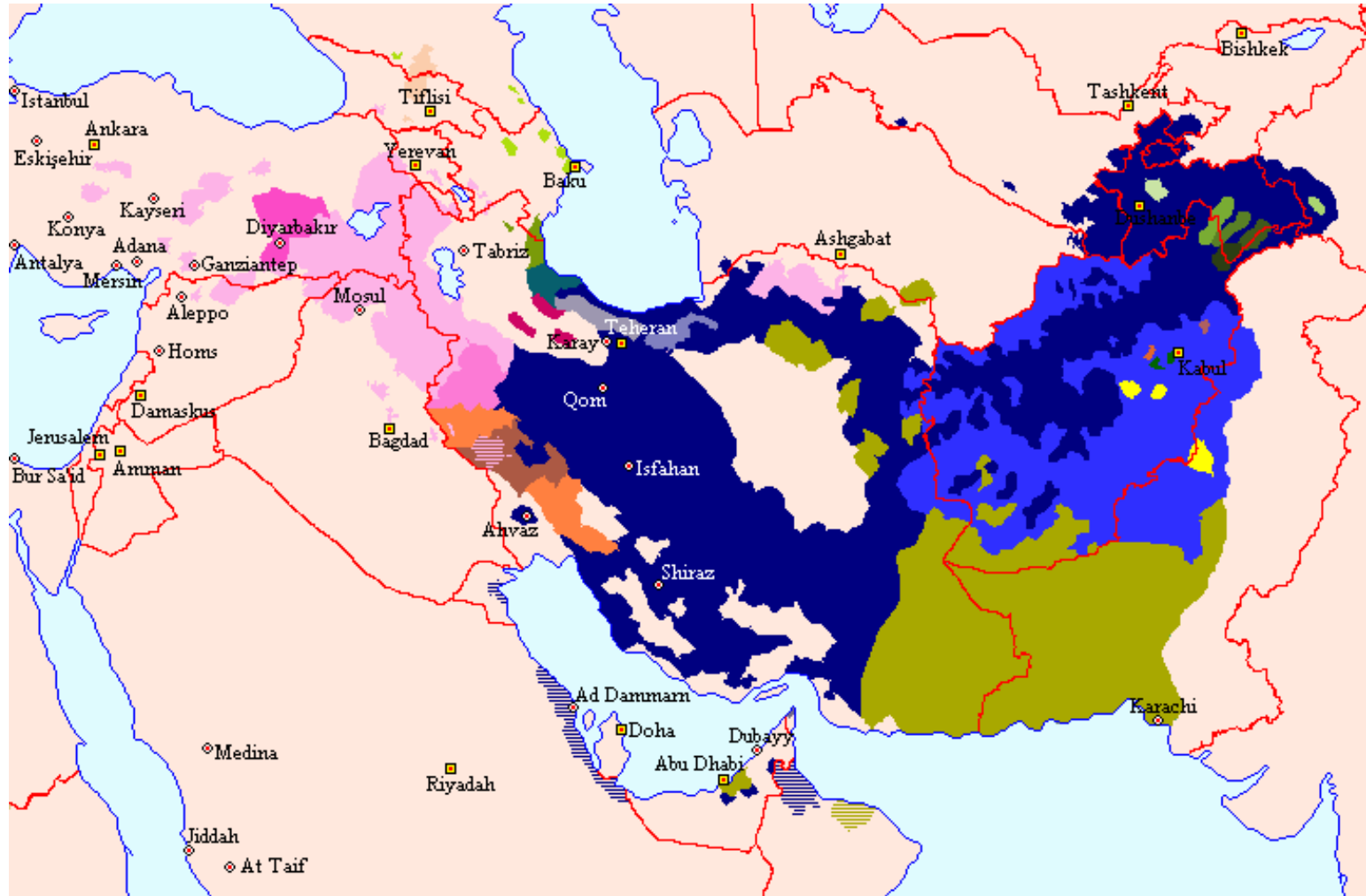
Computer simulation of the royal road to Arch





About 20
miles
outside
present day
Baghdad

Map still shows policy of population redistributions under the Sassanids – relocating Greeks, Romans, Arabs, etc., for the convenience of the Empire



Area of distribution of the Iranian languages

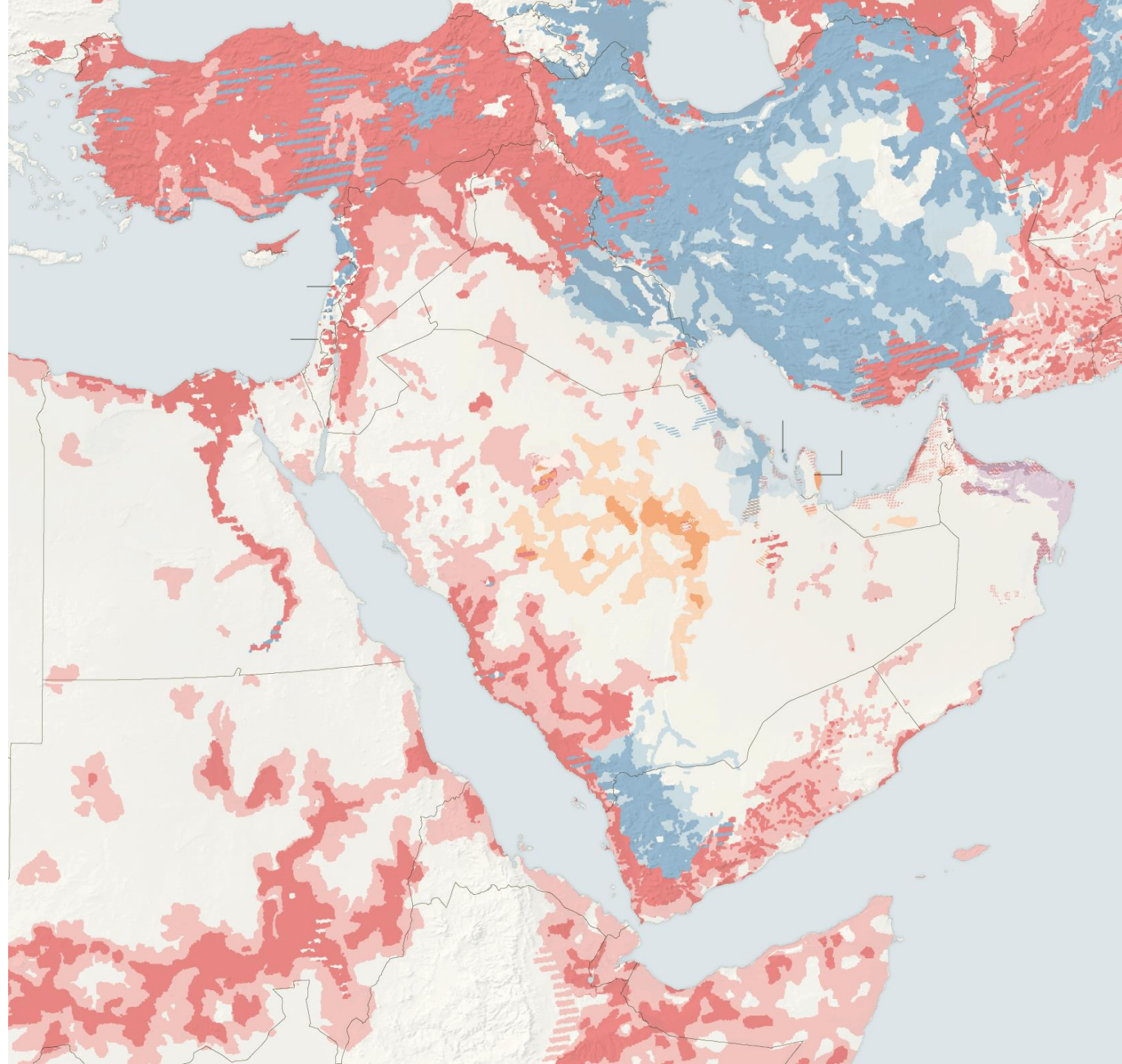
- | | |
|--------------|---------------------|
| ■ Dari | ■ Zāzā |
| ■ Paštō | ■ Kumanji (Kurdish) |
| ■ Bachtiyārī | ■ Sorānī (Kurdish) |
| ■ Tālyši | ■ Lūri |
| ■ Tāti | ■ Gilāni |
| ■ Iron | ■ Mukri |
| ■ Qumzārī | ■ Semnāni |
| ■ Bālōči | ■ Māzandarāni |
| ■ Omuri | ■ Munji |
| ■ Parāči | ■ Yidga |
| ■ Suḡni | ■ Iškāsmi |
| ■ Yazḡuāmi | ■ Waxi |
| ■ Sarykōli | |
| ■ Yāgnōbi | |

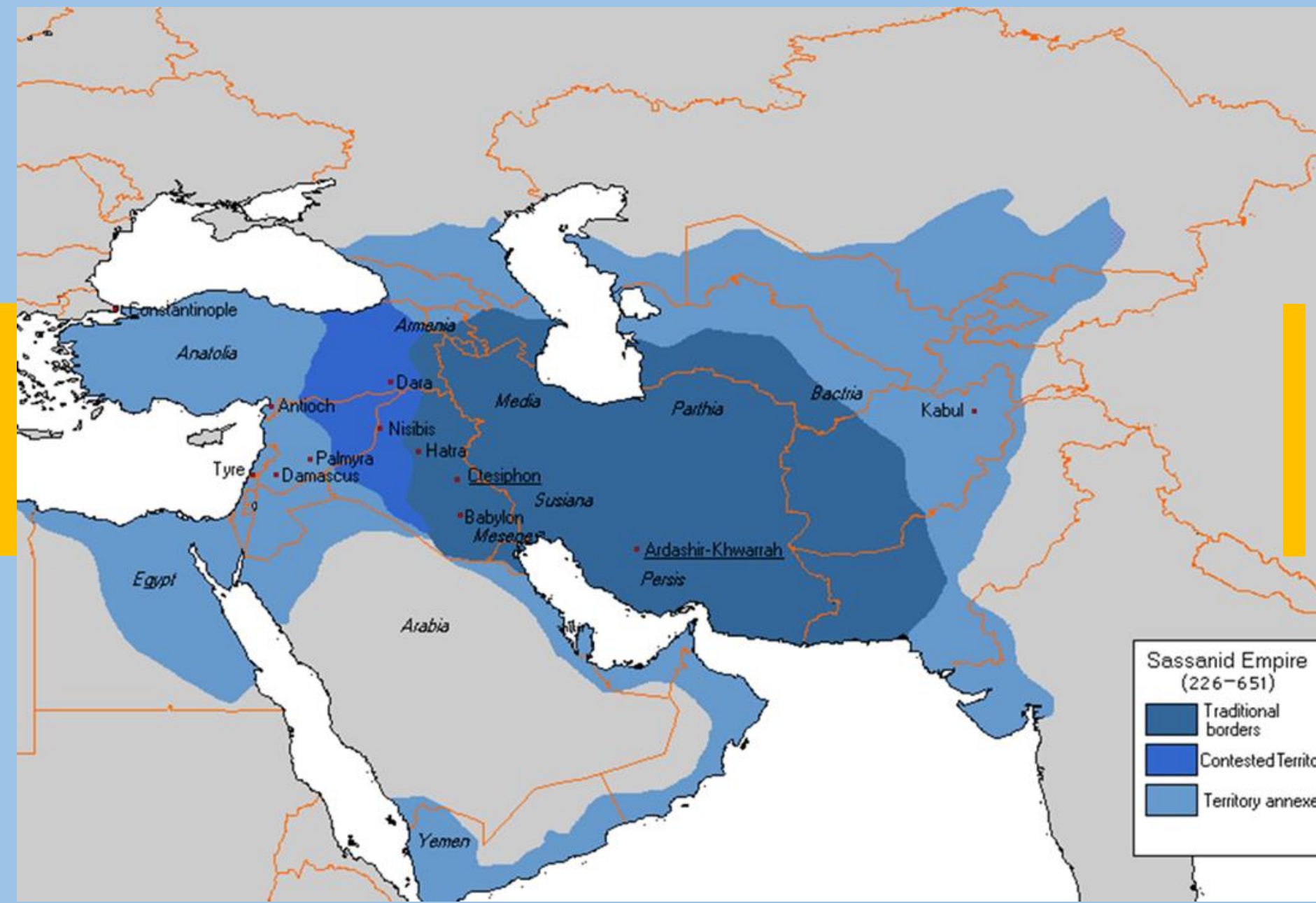
The legacy still apparent in Arabic speaking populations in Iran's south, Persian speaking populations on the Arabian peninsula.

Shiism not adopted as official religion in Iran until the 1500, but it spread among Persian speaking communities.

Gulf states today have significant Shia populations, ruled over by Sunni Royal families-not a very comfortable situation for them...

Map shows areas predominantly Shia (blue) and Sunni (red) today. Wahhabis shown in orange, Ismailis in lavender





Looks like success in the 600s, but a fragile empire – despite carrying home the “True Cross” from conquest of Jerusalem in 614 ce.

(Khosrow II had even sought support in Byzantium before later invading)



The expansion of Islam in the Middle Ages

But for the Persians I will weep, and for
the House of Sassan ruined by this war:
Alas for their great crown and throne, for all
The royal splendor destined now to fall,
To be fragmented by the Arabs might;
The stars decree for us to defeat and flight.

Shahnameh on the Arab conquests, Ferdowsi, 10th c.

THE SILK ROUTE

