

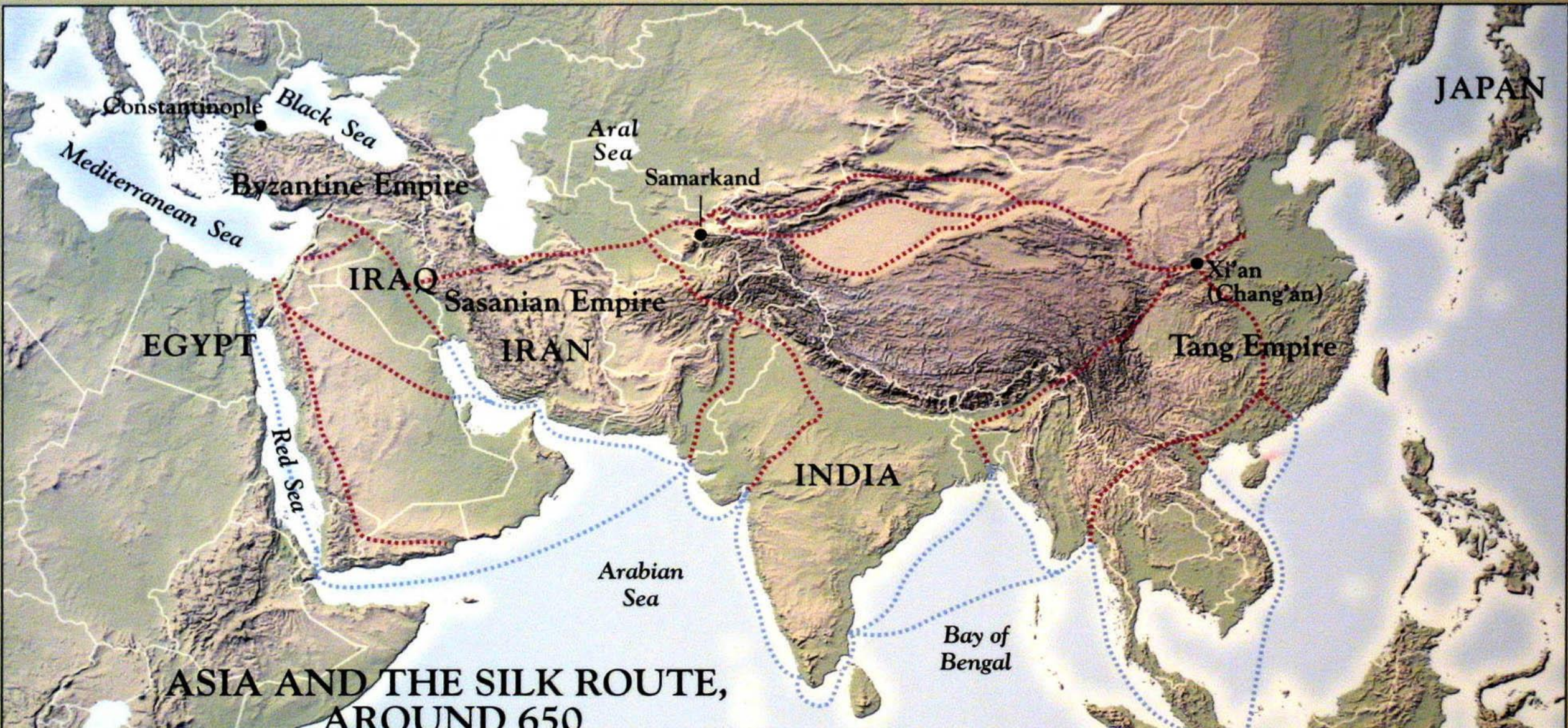
# Persianizing Islam and the Arabs

Week 4, OLLI Fall 2020

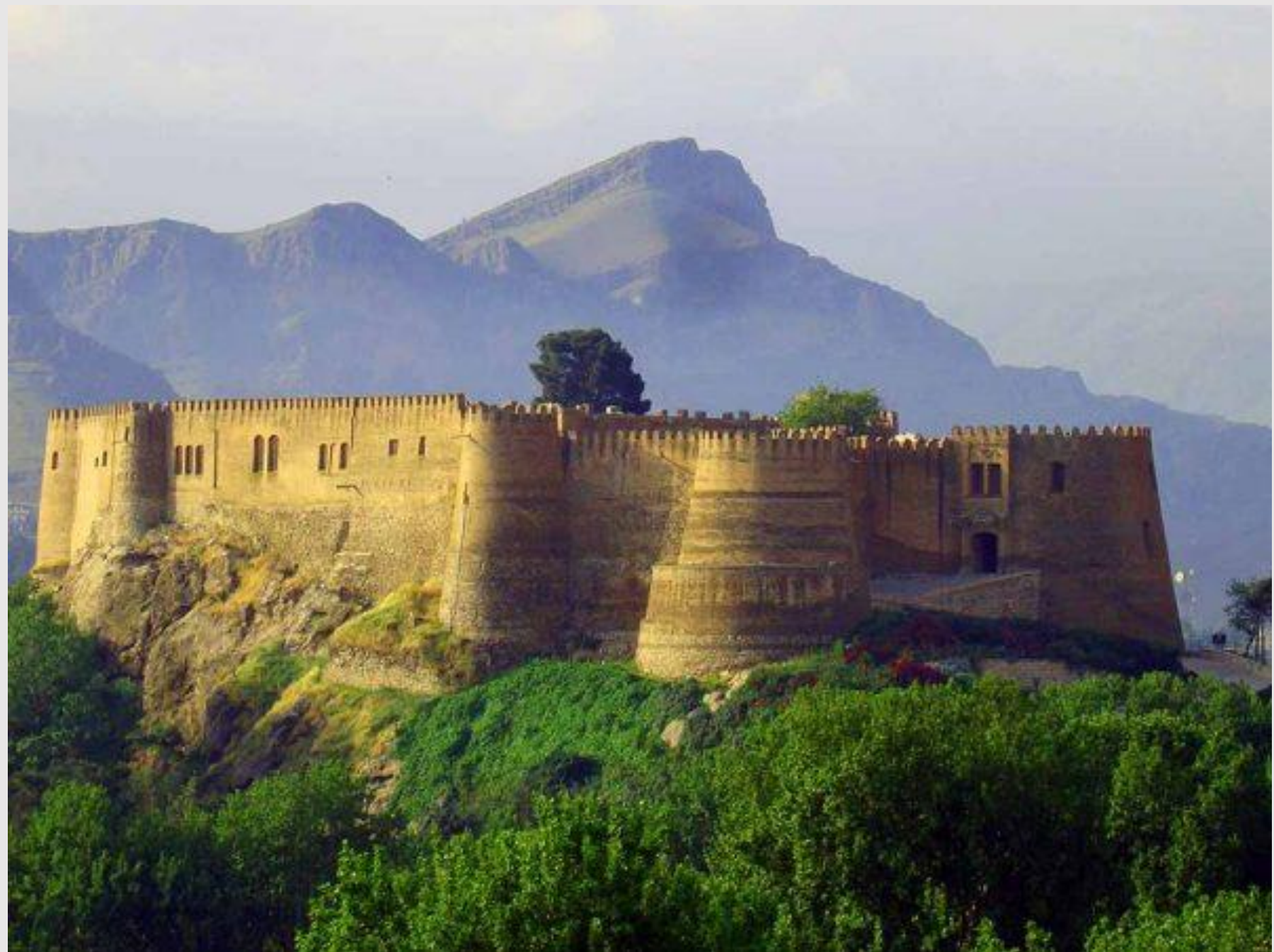


The expansion of Islam in the Middle Ages

# THE SILK ROUTE



Falak o  
Aflac,  
Sassanid Era  
Castle,  
(Western  
Iran)



# A Sassanid state under an Arab veneer?

- The first Islamic converts in Persia came from the **Bazaar merchants**. (Zoroastrianism saw trade as a less honorable profession than agriculture, the reverse of the Arabs). beneficial to both.
- The **House of Wisdom** in Baghdad, 800s modeled on Sassanid library and scholastic centers, preservation Hellenistic texts, study of medicine
- Sassanid administrators left in charge of govt ministries, tax collection, **court etiquette**, patronage of the arts...
- And then of course mathematics, irrigation, philosophy, engineering...



## Reshaping Islam?

Shariah Law codified by Persian scholars

Hadiths collected by Persian Scholars

The Night Journey resembles a story in the Zoroastrian Avesta of ascending to heaven and hell.

Zoroastrians also fed the sacred fire five times a day.

**The Sasanian ruler Khusrow I Anushirvan**



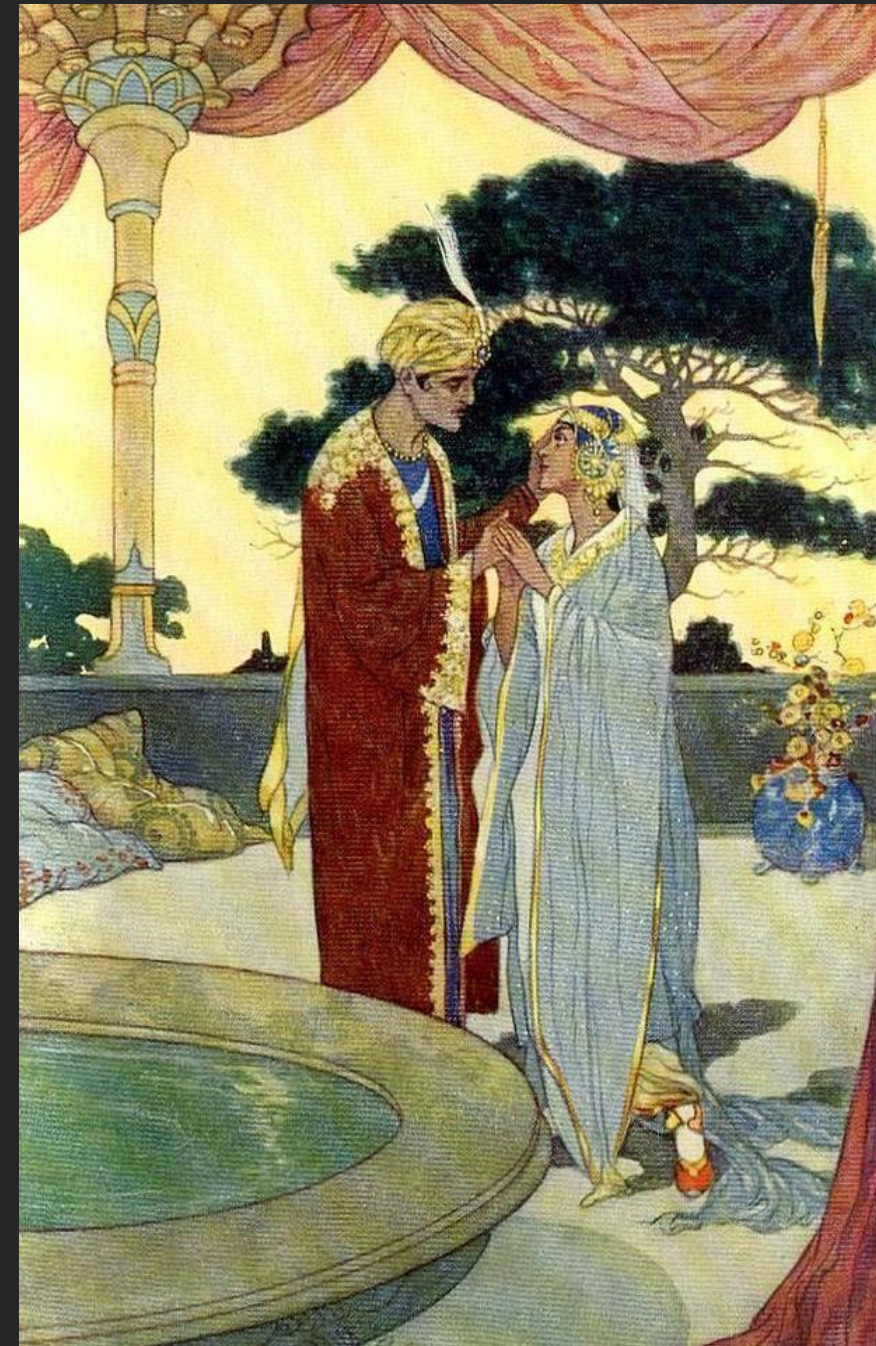
Persian literature  
genre of Court  
Education (“Mirrors  
for Princes”) recast  
in Arabic

# The 1001 Arabian Nights



Sir Richard Burton

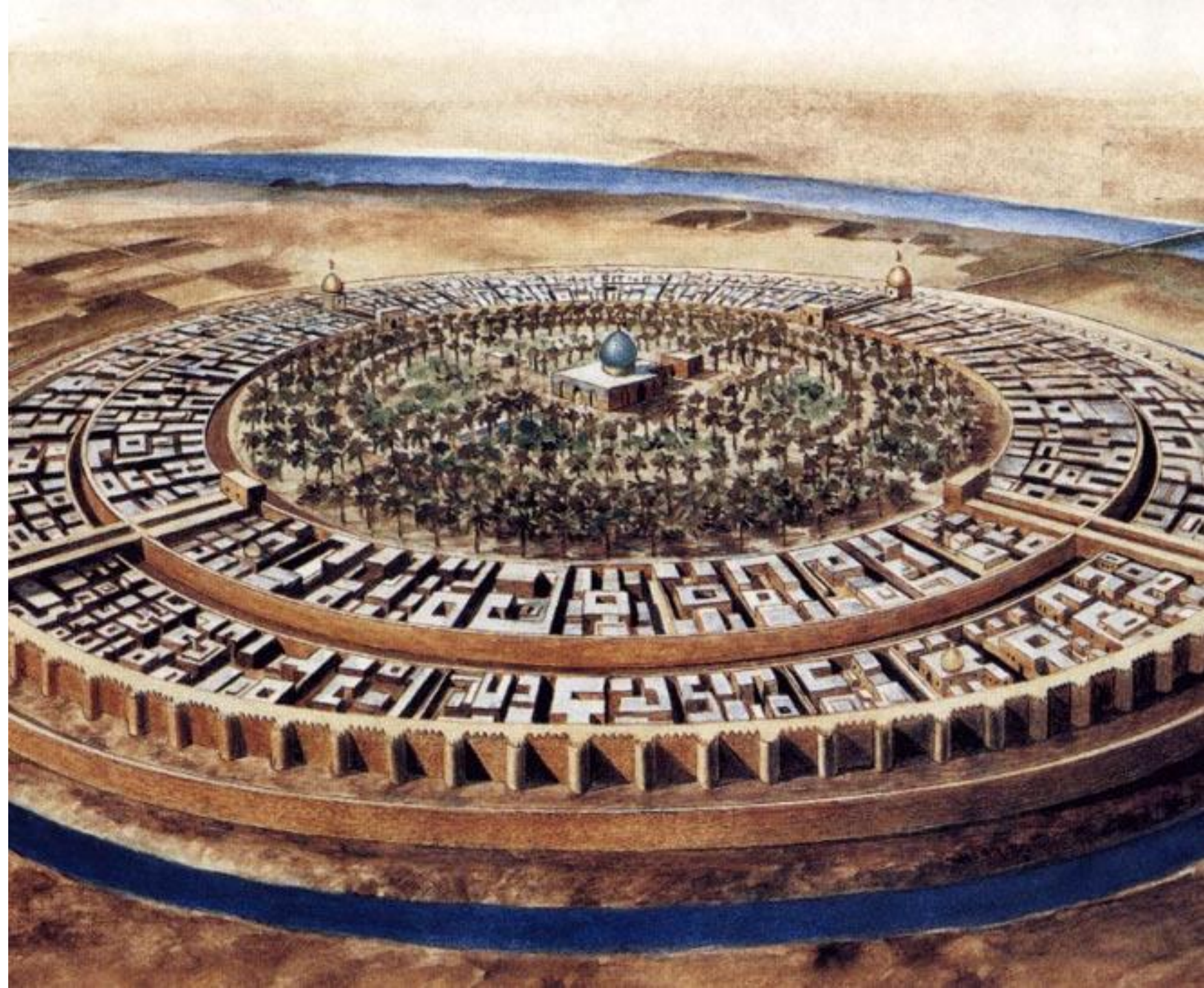
Folktales from pre-Islamic Persian, Arabic, Indian, and Chinese sources all made their way into the collection, but the “frame story” of Sheherezade was Persian.





The Abbasid  
Revolt (750 ce) in  
part a Persian  
Revolt against  
Arab rule.

The new capital of  
Baghdad planned  
in the Persian  
urban tradition,  
760s ce



# Ruins of Merv, Turkmenistan



# 900s a Dark Age, or “Late Antiquity?”

By the 800s the Abbasid Empire fragmenting into competing local dynasties, often led by Turkic elite. Portrayed as a catastrophe in Arabic histories, but not entirely empty of value.

Part of a broader trend of political decline, emergence of new agricultural patterns, holy men challenging elitism of the clerics, religious coexistence (or confusion), a lively time for art and science

Persianization: Persian, now the language of administration, to spread and replace older regional languages.

- <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/arab-conquests-and-sasanian-iran>



Sufism, 8-9<sup>th</sup> c  
reaction to  
materialism of  
court Life

“The Whirling Dervish” not the most helpful image of Sufism





Naqshabandi Mausoleum, Bukhara

# Rumi and the Whirling dervishes

Shown here with meeting with Shams, the dervish, who would become his teacher.





Iranian Sufi Dervishes, early  
20<sup>th</sup> c.

<https://www.nimatullahi.org/>  
Contemporary Sufi order –  
many members emigrated  
after the 1979 Revolution.

## Jewish Sufi Dervishes 1922

Posted on August 24, 2013 by Alan Brill | 15 Comments



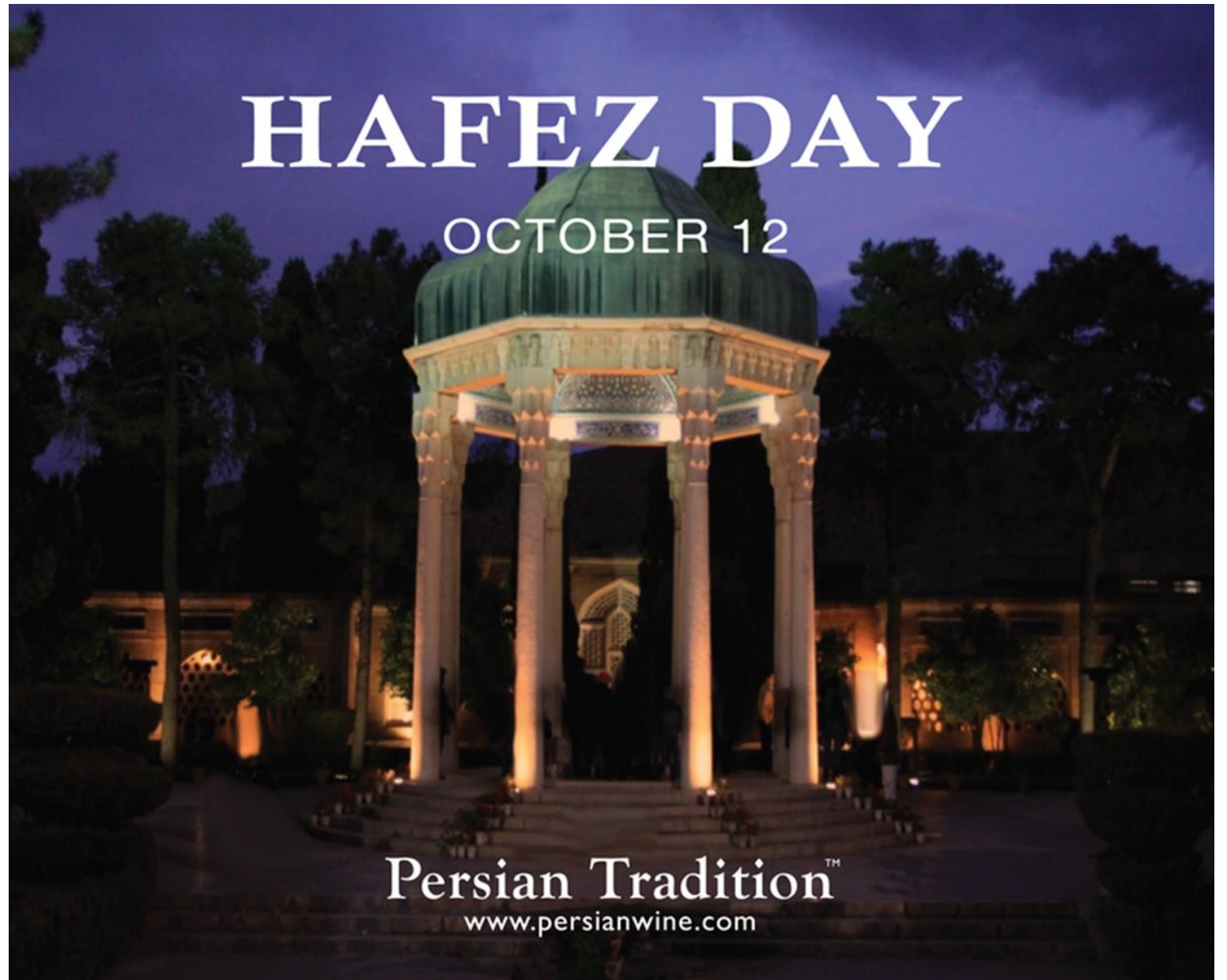
Jewish dervishes Agha-Jaan Darvish and his brother, patriarchs of the Darvish family. Tehran, Iran, c.1922.



Hafez, (1300s from Shiraz) also converted by roaming dervish. At left an illustrated page from his collection, the Diwan, below, his mausoleum in Shiraz.



Hafez  
day is  
really  
every  
day.

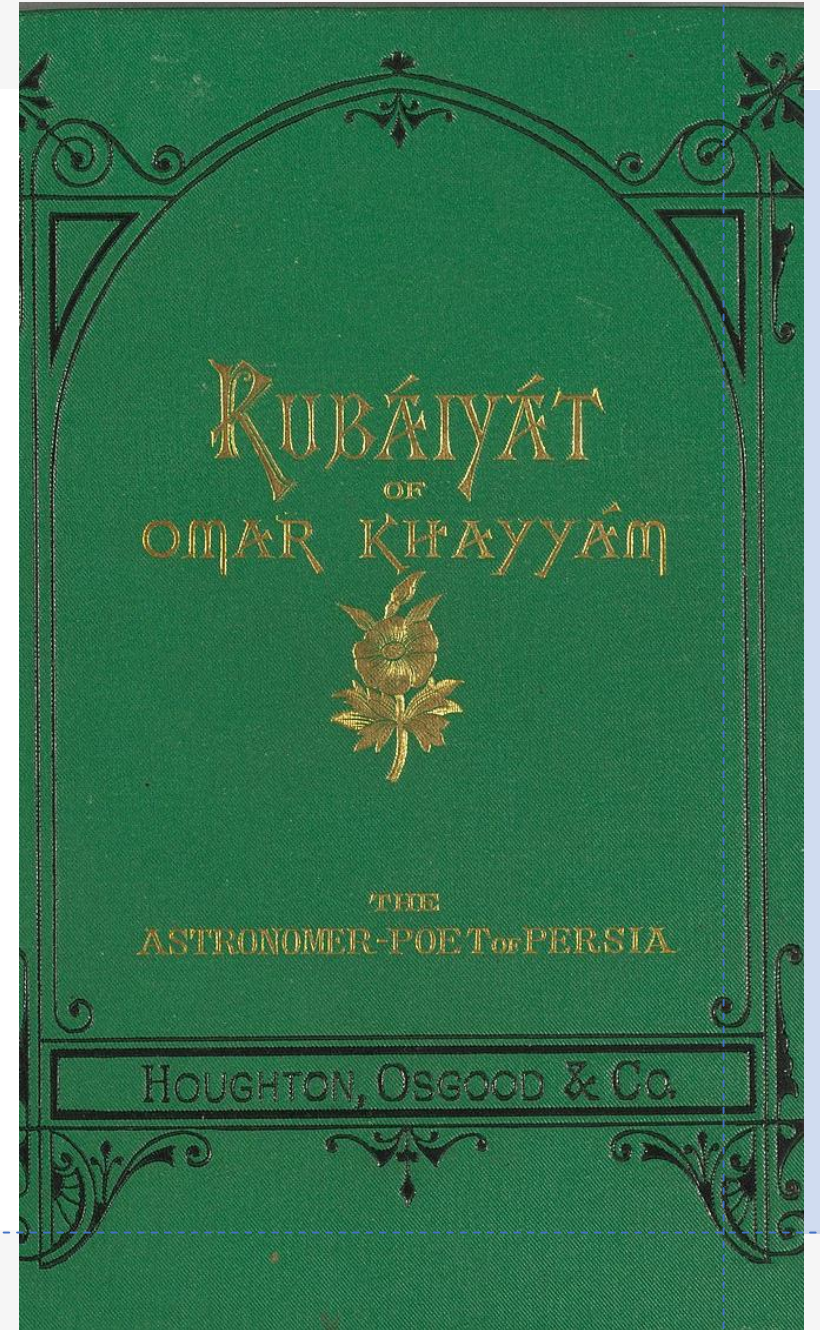


President Mohammad Khatami with actress Fatemeh Motamed-Aria in 2007 Yalda night (winter solstice) use Divan of Hafez for fortune telling.



Omar Khayyam,  
The Astronomer  
Poet of Persia  
(Nishapur 1048-  
1131)

1859 published in  
translation in  
England, a big hit  
with the pre-  
Raphaelites, who  
didn't seem to worry  
if the allusions to  
wine were  
metaphorical or not.



# The Barmacids of Balkh (900s-1100) a good example of fluidity

- The Barmacids seen as the power behind the throne during the Buyid dynasty, one of the successors to the Arab dynasty of the Abbasids.





Buddhist  
monastery  
and  
Caravanserai,  
Balkh

© Tommi Lehtonen

# The Barmacid family had been Buddhist priests



- In conclusion, the 900s witnessed the breakup of the Abbasid dynasty and the end of the Arab era, but what followed was hardly a dark age. Persian language and culture were adopted by the following empires and it was a rich era of poetry and science as the new dynasties adopted the Persian tradition of patronage over scholars.
- Poetry, science and Sufism, the incorporation of Buddhist and Zoroastrian traditions, the silk road, all created a rich, if no longer Arab-led civilization.