

# Mexico and the Qhājār Empire: The Genesis of a Diplomatic Friendship

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the genesis of the diplomatic relations between Mexico and Qhājār Persia, from their conception in 1864, when Mexico was under French occupation, to 1925, the rise to power of the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran, paying special attention to the *Porfiriato* (1876-1911) and the Mexican Revolution. This is a period of Mexican history that illustrates the interest of this Latin American country in expanding its foreign relations to latitudes never reached before, as well as the role of its embassies in Europe as the main diplomatic liaison with the Middle East. It is thus at this time of history that Mexico City and Tehran, despite the distance between them and their seemingly discrepant nation-state building processes, decide to establish an official relation, thus planting a seed of friendship whose fruit still blossoms today.

**Keywords:** Mexico; Qhājār Iran; Maximilian I; *Porfiriato*; international relations

## Resumen

El presente trabajo analiza la génesis de las relaciones diplomáticas entre México y Persia, desde la concepción de éstas en 1864, época en la cual México se encontraba bajo ocupación francesa, hasta 1925, el ascenso al poder de la dinastía Pahlavi en Iran, prestando particular atención al *Porfiriato* (1876-1911) y a la Revolución Mexicana, cubriendo un periodo de la historia mexicana que ilustra el interés del país latinoamericano en expandir su política exterior a latitudes nunca antes alcanzadas y, al mismo

tiempo, el rol de sus embajadas en Europa como principal liaison diplomática con Oriente Medio. Es pues, en este periodo de la historia que Ciudad de México y Teherán, a pesar de la distancia geográfica entre ambos y de las aparentes discrepancias entre sus respectivos procesos de construcción de estado-nación, deciden establecer relaciones oficiales, plantando de este modo una semilla de amistad cuyo fruto continúa floreciendo hoy.

**Palabras clave:** México; Persia; Maximiliano I; Porfiriato; relaciones internacionales

## Introduction

The early history of Mexico's diplomatic relations with Iran has rarely been examined. Academic work on the subject is embryonic and the topic is scant and nascent in scholarly writings thus far. Sources on the early stages of Iran-Mexico relations are scarce as well. Along with these challenges, language barriers figure as an obstacle in the secondary literature, since *Fārsī*—an indispensable tool when researching Iran—is unfortunately often lacking in the repertoire of researchers in disciplinary fields such as Iberian and Latin American Studies or History of Mexico. These peculiarities pose a further challenge when appraising existing scholarship on the subject. In addition to this, I must say that, as an Israeli citizen, the impossibility of performing academic research physically in Iran is an additional major component of the challenges discussed here. Together, these factors account for my study's focus on a Mexican perspective on diplomatic relations between Mexico and Iran. Despite being acutely aware that the inaccessibility of Iranian archives might make my work one-sided, I had to ask whether this inaccessibility might vitiate the narrative and conclusions of my study. The responses to this could be both affirmative and negative. However, a relative scarcity of original documentation should not deter any historian from attempting to reconstruct and describe the past, or pieces of it, to the best of his ability and from the sources at his disposal, despite the limitations just evoked in my reconstruction of a fragment of this riveting historical subject.

Nevertheless, as I will further argue, the notable scarcity of primary sources may be a direct consequence of both the international and domestic geopolitical realities and events lived during the chronological scope covered in this work. Mexico has had a turbulent historical development, and “few portions of its history have been as unstable and volatile as the nineteenth century.”<sup>1</sup> During that century, Mexico suffered not only civil wars but also foreign invasions on three different occasions and the loss of large portions of its territory to the U.S. as a consequence of foreign penetration. In the domestic sphere, Mexico failed to reorganize itself as a functional State. The rule from 1864 to 1867 of

Maximilian of Habsburg (1832-1867) saw an effort to improve the country's internal situation, even though it fell short of the envisioned objectives. This difficult era for Mexico, was also a formative period in its evolution as a Nation-State, a process to which the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) contributed considerably. The emergence of the oil industry at the dawn of the twentieth century would not only expand Mexico's diplomatic efforts beyond the frame of its conventional diplomacy but would eventually position the country as a major player in this energetic sector, turning it into an attractive potential diplomatic and business partner, particularly for Britain and the U.S. It is from this chronological point onwards that sources begin to surface, but even there, these are mainly administrative in nature.

As for Iran, the diplomatic history of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Persia, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the First World War,<sup>2</sup> greatly influenced the manner in which the Qhājār Empire conducted itself both in the international and domestic arenas.<sup>3</sup> Russia wished to turn northern Iran into an area of overwhelming Russian influence, while Britain's efforts to extend its political and economic influence into southern Persia unsettled Russian competition. The pattern resulting from this imperial struggle shaped the economic, political, and even physical landscape of Iran through to the end of World War I.<sup>4</sup> According to George N. Curzon (1859-1925)—Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905 and foreign secretary from 1919 to 1924—the visit of the Shāh of Persia to England in 1889 and the public reception accorded to him across the country, which renewed its interest in Iran, causing the Persian question to resurface.<sup>5</sup> British imperialism could not ignore the geostrategic significance of Iran:

Even those who knew or cared little for Imperial politics were conscious that Persia is a country providing an extensive and profitable market for English and Anglo-Indian trade, and that on the most mercenary grounds if on no other, a good understanding with its ruler is in the highest degree desirable.<sup>6</sup>

However, Anglo-Russian rivalry owed much of its scope to the weakness of the Iranian government, leaving Persian foreign policy vulnerable to manipulation, particularly during the Qhājār era—a period in which Iran suffered from frail political, economic, and social structures. There was therefore a direct link between Iran's international and domestic situation and the Anglo-Russian rivalry.<sup>7</sup> Such a state of affairs would also be reflected in the character of the diplomatic relations the Qhājār Empire maintained in the Americas, and in our case study, with Mexico *per se*.

Concerning the internal structure and domestic situation of the Persian State during our chronological frame of the study, Nikki Keddie explains that nineteenth-century Iranian politics “were only a slight variation on the general pattern of Iranian politics since the eleventh century when large-scale invasions strengthened the regional power of tribal and other military leaders and weakened the strength of central governments.”<sup>8</sup> We are thus dealing with a tribal society in which every important ruling Iranian dynasty from the Seljuqs to the Qhājārs was either tribal or relied on tribal backing in taking power.<sup>9</sup> Hence, tribe and State interactions on the periphery of Qhājār Persia during the nineteenth century transformed the balance of power in Iran and had a direct influence on its process of Nation-State building.<sup>10</sup> Opposition to the throne existed, sometimes from the Shi’ite ‘Ulamā’, who often regarded the rulers of Iran as illegitimate. This caused domestic unrest with religious undertones that eventually manifested most tangibly during the Islamic Revolution (1978-1979).

It is against this general background that the diplomatic bond between Mexico and Iran is established and through which we can account for the present-day scarcity of sources. Notwithstanding, based on the available documentation, I am able to analyze key aspects of the genesis of this diplomatic relation, little-known until now. This, altogether, forms the nucleus and originality of the problem that this subject presents and which this article addresses based on a strictly archivist methodology. Thus, the narrative it presents is drawn from the scant unedited primary sources treasured in the documentary corpora of Mexican and British archives. While available documents found in Mexico for this study are mostly about the formalities and the manner of reception, I will argue that these are still very relevant, for they reflect a threefold reality shared by both actors: 1. The respect and admiration both States had towards each other; 2. The will and diplomatic ambition they both shared during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth; 3. The importance of the diplomatic bond for Mexico City and Tehran, as well as the role of the Mexican diplomatic missions in Europe as a bridge towards the Qhājār Empire—mainly the Mexican legation in France. Thus, from the available sources, it has been possible to observe the gestation of this diplomatic endeavor from the days of the Second Mexican Empire (1864-1867) to 1925, the rise to power of the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran, a period which includes the *Porfiriato* (1876-1911)—the thirty-five-year span from 1876 to 1911 during which Porfirio Díaz controlled the country—and the Mexican Revolution.

It is within this chronological frame that the starting point of the first Mexican mission to Persia takes place. The work implemented by the Mexican legation in Paris stands out in this regard and across this historical continuum, with the naming of Ambassador Sebastián B. de Mier (1848-1911) as the first official

representative of Mexico in Qhājār Persia. It is at this period of history that Mexico decided to reach out beyond its traditional diplomatic efforts and approached a new and remote diplomatic playmate: Iran. The plot of the historical narrative reconstructed here hopes to offer a new dimension to what is known today about Mexican diplomatic relations with Iran. The present study aspires to contribute towards a better understanding of the genesis of this diplomatic friendship, hoping that other scholars will be able to continue from where I have begun. Ultimately, my work strives to provide a historiographical and argumentative road that may lead to a clearer understanding of the early diplomatic endeavors of the Mexican State in Iran.

### **Early Steps of Mexican Diplomacy in the Middle East**

Since its independence in 1821, Mexico's foreign policy was predominantly defensive, reactive, and tutelary. Mexican diplomacy nevertheless exuded a positive attitude about its nation's position in the international arena. Although warfare, domestic unrest, and foreign penetration crippled the country throughout the nineteenth century, the Mexican Republic was confident that its strategic geographic position between Ibero-America and English-speaking North America could contribute towards the realization of the aforementioned national goal. Illustrious Mexican figures such as Lucas Alamán, Miguel Ramos Arizpe, Manuel Eduardo Gorostiza, Juan de Azcárate, and José Joaquín de Herrera, conducted foreign relations during the nineteenth century and tried to mold a stable Mexico against the doubts of international observers at the time. What is more, they envisioned their nation's hegemony over a confederation of Ibero-American States. Their hopes, however, went unfulfilled, to a certain extent due to domestic turmoil and largely because of international competition between Britain, France, and the US. Consequently, during most of the nineteenth century, the meaning of foreign affairs in Mexico was virtually lost.<sup>11</sup>

US diplomatic and military intrusiveness during the Mexican Revolution would eventually influence Mexico's conduct in foreign policy affairs in accordance with the tenets of national sovereignty, the juridical equality of nations, self-determination, and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states.<sup>12</sup> Two Mexican revolutionary figures contributed significantly in this regard, namely, Francisco I. Madero (1873-1913) and Venustiano Carranza (1859-1920). The former left an important legacy for foreign policy matters in Mexico and made all possible efforts to obtain a greater degree of national independence, whereas the latter intended to maintain national sovereignty at all costs and strongly opposed foreign military and diplomatic intervention in

Mexico, especially that of the United States. Moreover, Carranza's vision set the bases for the Carranza Doctrine, announced in 1918. From that moment on, the principle of nonintervention would be incorporated into the Mexican international doctrine as one of the fundamental pillars of its foreign policy.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, in the annual message of 1919, Carranza stated the following concerning the Monroe Doctrine:

El Gobierno mexicano se vio en el caso de declarar públicamente y de notificar oficialmente a los gobiernos amigos que México no reconocía la Doctrina Monroe [...] esa doctrina ataca la soberanía e independencia de México.<sup>14</sup>

This idea would subsequently crystallize in the Estrada Doctrine, which, in the same line of defense of Mexico's national sovereignty, was issued in 1930 by the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Genaro Estrada.<sup>15</sup> This doctrine would become a foreign policy vision of the Mexican State best coined by Rafael Velazquez-Flores as "principled pragmatism."<sup>16</sup> Velazquez-Flores argues that the Mexican State has resorted to such a stance in foreign policy matters mainly due to geographic, historical, economic, security, and political reasons. While Mexico has used this posture to deal with Washington's policies, it has also resorted to it to defend its national interests in the international arena and to promote economic growth. In this fashion, Mexico's "principled pragmatism" in foreign policy aims to project a double-edged diplomacy, namely, a posture tailored to cope with external and domestic challenges at the same time, while it helps the Mexican State to increase its international bargaining power.<sup>17</sup> The oil industry and Mexico's international place therein during the first decades of the twentieth century became a "value added" to that power. A similar state of affairs would be shared by the Persian Empire. Hence, the geopolitical realities of the epoch and the domestic situation lived in Mexico during our chronological frame of study operated as a determining element in the crafting and implementation of Mexican foreign policy. In this regard, Alejandra Galindo Marines states:

According to the content and scope of Mexican foreign policy, it is necessary to identify the variables that affect both its elaboration and its implementation. A state's foreign policy is the international expression of a society, but it also serves to integrate the world at large into that society. For this reason when dealing with foreign policy, one has to take into consideration not only the international structural variables, namely the configuration of power in the system, but also those in the domestic realm.<sup>18</sup>

Against the deliberateness suggested here, it is possible to observe that the early Mexican rapprochement with the Middle East in general, and with the Persian Empire in particular, is characterized by few and sporadic non-strategic encounters during the second half of the nineteenth century. By then, Mexico was still trying to consolidate itself as an independent Nation-State, and still needed to recover from the national trauma left by post-colonial retribution from Spain in 1829, as well as by US expansionism reflected in the US-Mexico War (1846-1848) and French neo-colonial ambitions (1838-1839; 1862-1867). Paul Garner explains that these historical instances threatened Mexico's survival as an independent nation and caused all nineteenth-century Mexican governments to be acutely aware of the external threats to national self-determination, and adds that these threats simultaneously played an important role in invigorating popular resistance in support of the *patria* and in developing a sense of national identity and consciousness.<sup>19</sup> These tensions eventually shaped Mexico's foreign policy. In this manner, the political anxiety with which Mexico walked out of the nineteenth century, as well as the sociopolitical realities that were formed during the beginning of the twentieth, forced Mexico to look abroad and explore new diplomatic horizons to build fresh political ties beyond its conventional diplomatic network—an effort that the Mexican State believed would allow for better integration into the new international theater forged in that epoch.

During the 1860s, Mexico was occupied by France and governed by a foreign authority who had been imposed by Napoleon III (1808-1873): Maximilian of Habsburg. It is during his rule that historian Hilda Varela locates the starting point of the Mexican interest in establishing diplomatic relations with the Ottoman and Persian Empires.<sup>20</sup> Documentation in the *Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada* of the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs confirms, that in effect, it is in 1864 that the government of Maximilian I established the first diplomatic contacts with the Ottoman Empire—referred to by Mexico then as “Turquía”—and appointed the Panamanian Doctor named José Pablo Martínez del Río (1809-1882) as Plenipotentiary Minister to Greece, Turkey, and the Persian Empire.<sup>21</sup> The objective of this mission was to keep Maximilian's government informed about the occurrences in those distant lands and about the influence of Europe on those territories. This mission however, as stated by Maximilian I on July 8, 1864, was temporary: “La misión que se le confía es temporal, y mientras la desempeña tendrá el carácter de Enviado Extraordinario y Ministro Plenipotenciario, el cual cesará a su regreso.”<sup>22</sup>

On September 4, 1865, an official protocol was signed in Constantinople by which commercial and amity relations were established between both parties. The official document was to function as a precedent until full relations were established by a treaty and by which Mexico was guaranteed the opening

of general consulates in all major cities of the Ottoman Empire. Among other guarantees provided by this protocol was the safeguarding of Mexican pilgrims visiting the holy places within the Ottoman Empire, including Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> On May 6, 1866, a final treaty between Mexico and the Ottoman Empire was reached. It stipulated the desire of both nations to establish commercial relations, navigation, and diplomatic friendship. Unfortunately, these early contacts did not have the desired diplomatic or economic impact, and despite the effort, they were interrupted after the death of Maximilian I in 1867.

Another relevant Mexican figure in these early diplomatic beginnings was General Leonardo Márquez (1820-1913), one of the main conservative Mexican Generals of the epoch, who was to figure as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary on behalf of Mexico. The diplomatic anecdotes of Leonardo Márquez recount the experience of the Mexican legation in Egypt and the Biblical Land of Israel, sent in 1864 by Maximilian I. General Márquez's diplomatic tour lasted two years and set the bases for consular establishments in the region. Concerning his diplomatic expedition and efforts, Márquez wrote to Ignacio Aguilar y Marocho (1813-1884), an active member of the Mexican Junta that invited Maximilian I to reign in Mexico, as follows: "Muy Señor mio y fino amigo: Como tengo à U. anunciado por mis anteriores, marchamos à Egipto y Palestina donde dejé establecidos los Consulares Generales de México en Alejandría y Jerusalem."<sup>24</sup> These early Mexican diplomatic steps in the Middle East might be regarded as some of the positive outcomes of the second French occupation of Mexico.

Thus, as illustrated thus far, studying the early diplomatic endeavors between Mexico and Iran poses several challenges, because as Varela rightly states, there is no solid documentation that permits us to establish the continuity of the early stages of the diplomatic relations between Mexico and Persia.<sup>25</sup> This condition is especially applicable to the period that oscillates between the death of Maximilian I to 1895. During those days, the situation in Iran was not so different from that of Mexico, namely, foreign interventions, a tangible social disparity, domestic polarization, an unconsolidated economy, and even civilian insurrections, such as the Tobacco Revolt of 1891. The Middle East altogether was living in an era distinguished by strong European penetration and occupation, due to which many peoples in that region of the world lacked the political experience to define and implement their own foreign policies, especially during the first half of the twentieth century. These elements were part of the status quo lived in the precarious Persian Empire led by the Qhājār Dynasty. As a result, early Iranian diplomatic efforts towards Mexico were hindered, and although reaching the Middle East was within the goals of Mexican diplomacy, particularly during the rule of President Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911), Persian and Mexican domestic



affairs would impede the progress of the diplomatic enterprise between both nations, without amounting to an obstacle to paving the road for an off-and-on diplomatic relation that was going to take years to deepen.

### **Qhājār Iran and the *Porfiriato***

With the death of Maximilian I in 1867, and the return to power of Benito Juárez (1806-1872), the connection between Mexico and Europe weakened and relations became somehow tense, ipso facto, causing a tangible deterioration in the relations Mexico was building with Persia. General Porfirio Díaz took power in 1876. From that moment on, a key foreign policy objective of his government was to obtain recognition from the U.S.<sup>26</sup> Díaz's regime had to adapt its foreign policy in response to changing internal and external circumstances. Hence, Garner expounds, Mexican foreign policy mainly focused on ensuring the survival of the Díaz regime, particularly in light of the U.S.' initial hostility. To counterbalance the weight of Washington on Mexico, General Díaz's administration sought to reinforce diplomatic relations with European powers and moved towards a closer rapprochement with Latin American countries. Following Díaz's first re-election in 1884, a diplomatic and commercial offensive towards the U.S. was maintained. European capital was sought out hoping it would act as a counterbalance to excessive dependence on US capital.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, one of the key elements of the Mexican foreign policy during the *Porfiriato* was economic development and diversification of commercial and diplomatic relations, which accounts for Mexican foreign policy's privileging of pragmatism.<sup>28</sup> As part of this pragmatism, Mexico reconciled with Europe and turned its gaze back towards the Old World, primarily France.<sup>29</sup> In an attempt to emulate *le pays des lumières* as a means to elevate Mexico's sociopolitical status, General Díaz was influenced by the foreign policy that Paris maintained towards the Middle East, which had a direct repercussion on Mexico's diplomacy. Commerce between the Middle East and Europe was an additional variable that caused Mexico City to go beyond the frame of its classic diplomatic paths and seek out non-Western partners in the Middle East region. From this background, a new diplomatic path for Mexico and Iran began to be paved.

By the end of the nineteenth-century, relations between Mexico and Qhājār Iran differed from those the Latin American country held with the then crumbling Ottoman Empire, in that they were slightly more direct than the latter. With the purpose of cultivating them, William J. de Gress—who was General Consul of Hawaii in Mexico City in 1895<sup>30</sup>—served as consular agent on behalf of Persia in Mexico.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, there are not many records of Mexican-Persian affairs

during those years that permit us to establish with clarity and resolution how de Gress fulfilled his duties. From the very few records in existence, however, it is possible to observe that as part of the diplomatic renewal with Europe during the *Porfiriato*, Sebastián Bernardo de Mier (1849-1911) was appointed by General Díaz as Plenipotentiary Minister of Mexico to France on June 21, 1901.<sup>32</sup> De Mier was to occupy that post until 1911 and would eventually play an important role in the continuation and development of Mexican-Persian relations during the first decade of the twentieth century.

An additional riveting point to underline is that Mexican policies under General Díaz and geopolitical developments in the Middle East paved the way for an Ottoman wave of immigrants into the Latin American country. According to Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, between 1878 and 1909, Mexico became the destination for 2,277 Middle Eastern immigrants of diverse religious backgrounds—all of whom registered with Mexican officials from 1926 through 1951.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that Mexico was a destination for these individuals mainly because of its geographical proximity to the US, and not due to Mexican foreign policy per se. In a similar spirit, and concerning the early Persian interest in Mexico, this was partly derived from latter country's geostrategic position vis-à-vis the U.S. The Latin American country was seen as a bridge between the U.S. and the rest of the Americas, hence, Tehran visualized Mexico as a potential diplomatic gateway toward the Western Hemisphere. It is from this perspective that on June 23, 1888, Edward Spencer Pratt (1856-1925), then head of the US legation in Tehran, informed Washington that Hosseïn-Qholi Khān Mo'tamed-ol-Vezarē (1849-1937) had just been chosen as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of Persia to the US and was expected to leave for America about a week after his official appointment.<sup>34</sup> Mo'tamed-ol-Vezarē became thus the first Persian Ambassador to the US, although he functioned in that capacity for just a year. Consequently, from 1889 to 1903, the main diplomatic channel between Mexico and the Qhājār Empire was through the Persian legation in Washington, whose new Ambassador, General Eshāqh Khān Mofaḥamāl-Dōvleh, would be in charge of developing the diplomatic plan for the region.<sup>35</sup>

Like Mexico, Qhājār Persia was eager to engage in diplomatic efforts with other countries beyond its geographical boundaries, and Latin America was within that range of interests. To this end, General Eshāqh Khān began consultations with the ambassadors of Mexico and other Latin American countries in Washington. Mexico figured among the first Latin American states with whom the Persian diplomat negotiated since it was considered a bridge towards the rest of the Americas. It is worth mentioning that, unlike today, during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Iranians perceived the U.S. as a rather sympathetic international actor.<sup>36</sup> This vision significantly

contributed towards the building of the propitious diplomatic atmosphere needed to set forth Persia's political goals in the American continent, regardless of the success Iran might have had thereafter. In this manner, once official relations were established between the Qhājār Empire and the U.S., the Iranian legation in Washington began to work towards the establishment of diplomatic, trade, and economic affairs with other players in Latin America, besides Mexico.

Mozaffarodīn Shāh Qhājār (1853-1907) shared with President Díaz the aspiration to establish and develop commercial relations officially. Persia had instructed her plenipotentiary ambassadors in the U.S. to work towards the achievement of that objective, which would occur through a diplomatic agreement and treaty of friendship. By then, the Mexican legation in Washington had already been elevated to the rank of an embassy in an event that was held on December 5, 1898, with Manuel Arpiroz (1836-1905) as head of the Mexican mission to the U.S.<sup>37</sup> From this background, and as a reflection of their diplomatic effort, the Persian ambassador in the US and his Mexican homologue signed on May 14, 1902, a treaty of amity and commerce.<sup>38</sup> The signing of such an agreement was the first official diplomatic accord between Mexico and Iran. Through it, the enforceable rights and obligations of both parties were stipulated, and it was affirmed that no import and export prohibitions would be imposed, except for sanitary and health-related reasons. The agreement also safeguarded mutual freedom in the commercial exercises between both nations, as well as guarantees of peace between the two countries.

When we speak of peace and the Middle East, it is imperative to remember that this region of the world has witnessed multiple and diverse conflicts throughout history, ranging from ethnic and geographical issues to religious and political matters, which have been local, regional, and international. Peace is thus a desire naturally pursued by the actors in our narrative, as reflected in the Mexican-Persian Agreement (1902, ratified in 1903) as follows: "Article I: Il y aura paix perpétuelle et amitié invariable entre Sa Majesté Impériale le Chahinchah de Perse, ses héritiers et successeurs et les Etats-Unis du Mexique et entre leurs sujets et citoyens respectifs."<sup>39</sup> Notwithstanding, it is important to note that despite the provisions of Article II of the previously mentioned agreement—which stipulates the right of those involved to appoint diplomatic agents in both their capitals and in main Iranian and Mexican cities—there was no exchange of Mexican and Iranian embassies while the Qhājār Dynasty ruled in Iran. For the crystallization of this fortuitous event, several decades had to pass and a regime change had to occur in both countries.

Although the 'Mexican-Persian Agreement' may be regarded as symbolic, it set a precedent in matters of international law, since its tenets and structure became a model for other nation-states. For instance, we learn from records

in the UK National Archives that in 1903, Japan and Persia were negotiating a confidential treaty in The Hague. While the initiative was taken by Persia in 1902—with the intention of pursuing Tokyo into signing an agreement on commerce and navigation—it was Japan who demanded special treatment and sought a treaty that specified within it what Tokyo considered to be: “The most-favored-nation clause by which European treatment and Consular jurisdiction are secured for Japan.”<sup>40</sup> Additional negotiations for further accords were discussed between Japan and the Ottoman Empire in Berlin at the time but with little progress, since consular jurisdiction was not accorded between the parts.<sup>41</sup> Even though the depth and range of such accords may be seen as symbolic, they are particularly significant, since Japan demanded from Qhājār Iran similar terms to those stipulated in the treaty Tehran had signed with Mexico City.<sup>42</sup> Eventually, treaties of friendship and commerce were concluded between Persia and other countries—among them, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay—which were similar in character to that concluded on May 14, 1902 with Mexico. Concerning the envisioned accords between Tokyo and Tehran, these were suspended due to the Russo-Japanese war.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, this account illustrates how the treaty between Mexico and the Qhājār Empire served as a prototype in the international arena.

Shortly after the signing of the Iran-Mexico 1902-1903 treaty, the direct function of General Eshāqh Khān in the Mexican-Persian equation concluded. The former Persian Ambassador to the U.S. informed Mexico on March 16, 1903, that due to his new diplomatic mission to South America he could no longer continue with his diplomatic role before the representatives of the Mexican State, and that in his place the German legation in Mexico City would serve as the liaison between Mexico and the Qhājār Empire.<sup>44</sup> A day after, Dr. Adolf von Flöckher, then secretary of the German Embassy in Mexico City, began performing as Chargé d’affaires ad interim on behalf of the Qhājār Empire, and informed the Mexican Government about his new mission in a detailed telegram:

Señor Ministro: Por la presente tengo el honor de comunicar a vuestra Excelencia que con fecha de hoy me he hecho cargo del puesto de Encargado de Negocios de Persia. El Señor General Isaac Chan Mofechemedovleh me ha suplicado antes de salir, de poner en conocimiento de vuestra Excelencia, que Su Majestad el Schahinscha mucho honor tendría, si Su Excelencia el Señor Presidente Don Porfirio Diaz le felicitaría por telégrafo el sábado proximo, 21 del actual, año nuevo de los Persas, y el día 7 de Septiembre, cumpleaños del Shahinschah.<sup>45</sup>

On April 14, 1903, Von Flöckher wrote again to the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ignacio Mariscal (1829-1910), in order to consult about the future representatives of Mexico in Iran, stating: “Mucho agradecería a Vuestra Excelencia si tuviera la bondad de indicarme, si el Gobierno de la República Mexicana ya se ha fijado en una persona que después será nombrada Representante de México en Teherán o cuándo se resolverá probablemente este asunto.”<sup>46</sup> However, the Mexican chancellor ignored this.<sup>47</sup>

### **A Mexican Diplomatic Journey in Persia**

On August 4, 1903, in Karlsbad, Germany, General Ishāq Khān met with the Mexican legation to Vienna to discuss the establishment of a potential Mexican mission in Iran.<sup>48</sup> As described in the Mexican diplomatic reports, the meeting between the Persian General and the Mexican diplomats in the Austrian capital was fruitful. As soon as a report of the meeting reached Mexico City, President Díaz responded personally through a letter he addressed to Moẓaffarodīn Shāh on August 26, 1903, stating:

Grande y buen amigo: Con el propósito de que haga presentes a Vuestra Majestad los sentimientos de alta consideración y amistad sincera que abrigó por la persona de Vuestra Majestad, y para que le exprese los votos que hago por su felicidad, he tenido a bien nombrar a D. Sebastián B. de Mier, Embajador Extraordinario en Misión especial cerca de Vuestra Majestad. Don Sebastián B. de Mier es el Representante diplomático de México en Francia; y siendo notorias su ilustración y demás dotes personales, no he vacilado en conferirle esta Misión, seguro de que sabrá desempeñarla cumplida y satisfactoriamente.<sup>49</sup>

If the written response from Mexico was prompt, so was the implementation of the measures stipulated in it. Thus, under the command of General Díaz, Sebastián B. de Mier left Paris for Persia on October 22, 1903 and on November 1, 1903, he reached the City of Baku. Once on the shores of the Caspian Sea, the Mexican envoy visited the main oil deposits of the region, particularly those of Bibi-Heybat, which captured his utmost attention. Consequently, he informed Mexico, quite enthusiastically, about the importance of the oil industry,<sup>50</sup> in which his country was very actively involved at the time—this would be a common denominator between both nations in the years to come. On November 9, 1903, De Mier was received at the Persian port of Enzeli by Mohteshamul-Molk—one

of the highest functionaries of the Qhājār Empire—, from where the Mexican ambassador advanced towards Tehran escorted by the Persian Cavalry.<sup>51</sup>

At his arrival to the Persian capital on November 9, 1903, the Shāh placed the Bahārestān Palace at the disposition of the Mexican mission. The following day, a solemn audience between the Mexican diplomatic corps to Persia and the Shāh took place, followed by an official visit of Prince Malek Manṣūr Mīrzā Shoa-o-Soltaneh (1880-1922), the Shāh's second son. On the night of November 10, the highest ministers and functionaries of the Qhājār Empire came together at a special dinner to honor the Mexican visit, an event that would be repeated during the following nights; and on November 13, a meeting between Sebastián B. de Mier and the *Sepahsālār-e Qhājār* (The Qhājār Minister of War) took place.<sup>52</sup> During the official visit of the Mexican diplomatic mission to Persia, the atmosphere of camaraderie was felt by both parties; and on the weekend of November 14, 1903, the Shāh Qhājār received the Mexican envoys for the second time. During that particular meeting, Sebastián B. de Mier offered the Persian King a rifle, which had been sent as a present of friendship by President Porfirio Díaz. Brigadier General Manuel Mondragón (1859-1922), whom Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs had appointed as the personal secretary of De Mier on his trip to Persia and who had performed as Mexico's military attaché in France since 1900,<sup>53</sup> did not hesitate to demonstrate his military prowess by taking the rifle in his hands to show the Persian Shāh and his ministers how to use it with the greatest skill, firing a few shots in the presence of all those present at the gathering.<sup>54</sup>

A fourth gala dinner was offered to the Mexican ministers. A particular host was present at that specific event, the leader of the Belgian delegation in Persia, who also functioned as Minister of Customs and Post of the Qhājār Empire, Mr. Joseph Naus. *Monsieur Naus*, as he was generally known, was a key element behind Iran's Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911). He was seen by the Iranian people as a symbol of foreign control in Persia.<sup>55</sup> On Sunday November 15, it was the turn of the Persian Minister of Interior to meet the Mexican legation; and on November 16 and 17, the Mexican Ambassador was granted a leave of absence as an "object of imperial benevolence."<sup>56</sup> De Mier resumed his activities on November 18, with a toast to the Shāh's health, an occasion he used to offer his gratitude and appreciation for the splendid reception accorded him since the beginning of his visit. That day, the Mexican diplomats left Iran and returned to Europe. Upon their departure from Iran, De Mier was given several official gifts, among them, Persian silk carpets and awards to all the members of the diplomatic mission. The documentation treasured at the Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada in Mexico City provides some rich and riveting historical details of this diplomatic visit. From them, we can learn that

General Mondragón was conferred a red-ribboned second-class military order and a rapé box; while the other two secretaries who accompanied De Mier were decorated with a second-class civil medal and two turquoise rings—decorations that the Persian Empire offered as a sign of appreciation. Yet, the most significant of all was the Imperial Order of the Lion and the Sun enriched with brilliants, which had been instituted by Fateh-‘Ali Shāh Qhājār (1772-1834) in 1808 to honor foreign officials. The Shāh, in his desire to reaffirm his friendship and respect for Mexico, requested De Mier to offer such insignia to President Díaz as a sign of amity, along with an autographed picture of himself. The Imperial Order of the Lion and the Sun was also conferred to José Yves Limantour (1854-1935), Mexico’s Secretary of Finance during 1893-1911, although not on that specific occasion.<sup>57</sup> Thus concluded the first official Mexican diplomatic tour in Persia. The report of this endeavor was sent to Von Flöckher on December 23, 1903, by General Eshāqh Khān.<sup>58</sup> On January 11, 1904, Mexico’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially thanked the Persian Empire through the German *chargé d’affaires* in Mexico City for the imperial reception given in Iran to the Mexican emissaries and expressed Mexico’s utmost satisfaction with the Qhājār Dynasty.<sup>59</sup> On his return to Europe, De Mier recounted his experience in Persia to José Y. Limantour, and expressed:

Nuestro viaje á Persia fue muy interesante y feliz; nos favoreció constantemente un tiempo espléndido y fuimos recibidos por aquella gente “royalement” en toda la extensión de la palabra. Nos colmaron de honores y de atenciones y tratamos de dejarles una buena impresión, lo que creo logramos. No obstante que en aquello de los regalos anduvimos mas que parcos. Salvo el fusil que gustó muchísimo al Shah, todo lo demás que llevábamos era mezquino en comparación de lo que nos dieron, y eso que á ultima hora eché mano de algunas de las joyas que llevaban mis compañeros, de su uso personal, para hacer obsequios indispensables. Si hubiera yo podido prever cómo nos iban á tratar, hubiese llevado más regalos pero teníamos una idea de los Persas muy triste y creíamos que con poca cosa quedaríamos bien. De seguro, gastaron ellos en recibir la Embajada Mexicana mucho más del doble de lo que esta desembolsó en su viaje y en los obsequios que llevaba. Eustaquio Escandón, que sale para México el 13 del presente, contará á Ud en detalle nuestro viaje.<sup>60</sup>

De Mier’s diplomatic tour in Iran, beyond providing a fascinating historical recounting of his ambassadorial endeavors in Persian lands, reveals, on one side,

Persia and Mexico's level of interest in establishing official channels, as well as the importance they attributed to the fostering of their diplomatic bonds. The fact that Mexican officials were treated with the utmost gallantry, as archival documents narrate, demonstrates this reality and illuminates the significance of Mexico for the foreign policy of Persia toward the Americas. This friendship, although seemingly protocolar at this stage in history, would ultimately serve their national interests a few decades later, particularly during the 1930s, when their respective oil industries became a cause of geopolitical turmoil and, consequently, of further closeness between both states.

De Mier's journey in Persia also allows us to observe the extent of the foreign penetration Iran was suffering at a time when European [post]-colonial opportunism was still vivid. This state of affairs is singularly tangible through the endeavors of Joseph Naus; and, although documentation in the Mexican archives does not attest to the level of rapprochement the Belgian diplomat might have had with the Mexican legation, we might deduct from the fact that he occupied an official post in Qhājār Iran that potential economic interest in Mexico may have also been on his mind. From records at the UK National Archives, we additionally learn that both English and Russian bankers were involved in the finances of the Qhājār Empire. Yet, these were viewed with utmost suspicion by common Iranians and as instruments of foreign penetration. At the top of this financial control apparatus that was involved in the affairs of Persia was Mr. Naus, who eventually became an object of animadversion among the people of Iran.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the Belgian Customs Director of the Qhājār Empire played a very important role in the economic affairs of Iran, but also in Persian politics; despite the corruption and extortion accusations against him, his power and influence were felt vividly throughout Iran during that epoch.<sup>62</sup>

From these diplomatic anecdotes, we may infer that the diplomatic tour in Persia led by Sebastián B. de Mier reflects Mexico's palpable lack of knowledge of Iran and Persians at that time. However, this "deficient and deceptive perception," as De Mier expressed it, has, unfortunately, not changed much in contemporary Mexico. It was hence against this background that the first official steps in the Iran-Mexico relations crystalized with De Mier's visit to the Qhājār Empire, although it would take more than half a century for a full ambassadorial exchange to take place between Mexico City and Tehran. Notwithstanding, his visit reveals that the initial diplomatic cultivation between Mexico and Persia was, albeit symbolic, important, and therefore worthy of observing; and while the description of those events only registers an ambassadorial tour, the narrative illustrates how the foundations of the Iran-Mexico diplomatic relations were built. After De Mier's diplomatic tour in Persia, both Iran and Mexico did not miss opportunities to reiterate the vote of friendship, respect, and diplomatic interest



they shared since the days of Maximilian I. President Díaz, at the opening of the twenty-first constitutional congress on April 1, 1904, stated in this regard:

Desde luego me complazco en manifestaros que nuestras relaciones exteriores siguen, sin alteración, presentando el carácter de amistosas y en ciertos casos de verdaderamente cordiales, extendiéndose cada día más, hasta comprender algunas naciones que nunca las habían cultivado con México. Para corresponder a la misión especial que el S. M. el Shah de Persia tuvo a bien enviar a México, fue despachado el Ministro mexicano en París con el carácter de Embajador Extraordinario y Plenipotenciario, en Misión también especial, a la capital de aquel Imperio. Allí y en el territorio persa que hubo que cruzar, nuestro enviado ha venido a cimentar las excelentes relaciones de amistad establecidas por la misión Persa en nuestro país.<sup>63</sup>

As documentation demonstrates, the diplomatic relation between the Qhājār Dynasty and the Presidency of General Díaz was marked by diplomatic amity. At his seventh reelection in December 1904, Porfirio Díaz informed the Qhājār Empire of his victory and reiterated his friendship—sharing this news with the Shāh in a letter dated December 10, 1904.<sup>64</sup> Mozaffarodīn Shāh Qhājār saw the reelection of the General from Oaxaca as favorable for Iran and, convinced that President Díaz shared a parallel spirit and desire, the Shāh responded to the Mexican legation in Washington, congratulating President Díaz for his electoral victory and expressing his intentions of enhancing the bond between their nations.<sup>65</sup> Despite the close communication maintained between Mexico City and Tehran during those days, political and social events at the time were about to go against their goodwill and intentions.

### **Diplomacy under Revolution**

The Mexican Revolution, the first social revolution of the twentieth century, had profound effects on the development of Mexico, and its outcome provided a political stability for the Latin American country which was unique in Latin America.<sup>66</sup> The 1917 Constitution is among the most relevant outcomes of the Mexican Revolution. Constitutional provisions give the president of the Mexican Republic primary responsibility for shaping and steering foreign affairs. Throughout the twentieth century, a cornerstone of Mexico's foreign policy has been a vigorous rejection of any form of foreign hegemony in Mexico and in the

internal affairs of any country, which Mexico considered intolerable. In other words, nonintervention and the self-determination of peoples were two new central tenets. These principles, as President Adolfo López Mateos stated in his first annual report to Congress in 1959, “emanate from Mexico’s own historical experience.”<sup>67</sup> Foreign intervention in Mexico during its Revolution, particularly from the US and Britain, was a substantial concern. In spite of this, Mexico enjoyed limited freedom of action during its revolution, although mainly due to the historical context of the epoch. Specifically, the First World War diverted the attention of foreign actors and enabled talented Mexican diplomats to take advantage of the global geopolitical theater to advance their diplomatic agendas as they sought to establish Mexico’s place within the international system.

The first decade of the twentieth century brought significant sociopolitical changes in the lives of Iranian and Mexicans, as both countries were crossing the threshold towards revolution. In those years a new figure appeared in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Qhājār Empire, Mīrzā Moḥammad-‘Alī Khān ‘Alā’-o-Salṭaneh (1829-1918)—the son of Mīrzā Ebrāhīm Khān, the Iranian Consul General in Baghdad at the time. ‘Alā’-o-Salṭaneh was serving as head of the Persian delegation in London when he was summoned to Tehran to be appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>68</sup> His arrival at that new official post was reported to Mexico City through the Iranian diplomatic representatives in Washington on October 3, 1906.<sup>69</sup> These developments, however, were only a prelude to what was about to occur in Persia during those years. As in Mexico, during the first years of the twentieth century, social unrest was increasing by the day in Iran. Corruption, disdain, foreign penetration, elite favoritism, and despotism were the hallmarks of a perceived reality in the lives of both the Iranian and Mexican peoples during those years. Ultimately, such a situation would mount, eventually causing both peoples to take up arms. The popular goal was to remove from power the autocratic figures that ruled their respective nations. An armed revolution was inevitable. In Iran, the uprising exploded in 1905—*Ēnqhelāb-e Mashrūteh* (The Constitutional Revolution)—and continued until 1911. In Mexico, the insurrection took place from 1910 to 1917. Both revolutions would bring about a homogeneous outcome in the political lives of both countries, namely, the drafting of a constitution that was to serve as the basis of the legal tenets on which their nation would sit. Yet this was only the case on paper, since the levels of corruption, of concentration of absolute power in a figure or party, social disparity, and other illegalities would continue to be the par excellence repertoire in the political *modus vivendi* of both countries. During these times, diplomatic relations between Mexico and Iran were limited to what was required by protocol. The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 added considerably to the discontinuity in diplomatic relations.

The Qhājār Dynasty remained in power until the 1920s, but Porfirio Díaz, by 1911, was already on his way to exile in France, where he lived until his death on July 2, 1915. In the years that unfolded from the end of the Qhājār Empire until the start of the Islamic Revolution (1978-79), Iran's decision-making in matters of foreign policy was to rest largely on the will of the Shāh.<sup>70</sup> It is possible to underline certain positive changes as an outcome of these armed insurrections. In the Iranian case, among the reorganization that Persia underwent as a product of the *Ēnqhelāb-e Mashrūteh* was the establishment of a new parliamentary body (*Majles*) to which the Shāh referred; this endeavor was undertaken to improve the wellbeing of his people and strengthen the Empire's institutions. This apparatus was needed—the Shāh informed Mexico through its diplomatic mission in Washington—to perform sensitive, truthful, and durable reforms in the administration of his kingdom, and for that purpose, a national assembly had to be constituted. Such an institution was to operate as an Islamic consultative assembly and was tasked with guarding egalitarian justice and religious civic law in Iran. Moreover, it was to be in charge of executing the imperial will upon the Iranian nation. This would be accomplished by transmitting the points of view and ideas of the assembly upon the necessary reforms in the Qhājār Empire.<sup>71</sup>

In the Mexican arena, a regime change was established as well. General Díaz would die in the country against which he valiantly fought during 1861-1867, the nation he came to admire thereafter, and, as if by a twist of fate, he would spend his last years among the people whose *modus vivendi* he so much intended to adopt for his brethren: France. In 1911, while Díaz was on his way to Paris, a notice arrived in Mexico reporting that Ambassador Sebastián Bernardo de Mier had passed away on European soil. Unlike President Díaz, who to this day rests at the Montparnasse cemetery in the fourteenth arrondissement of the French capital, the mortal remains of De Mier were repatriated to Mexico and left Europe aboard the *Flandre* in November 1919.<sup>72</sup> However, De Mier would not be the only figure in this narrative who by the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century had already died. Moẓaffarodīn Shāh passed away on January 3, 1907. At his death, his son Moḥammad 'Ali Shāh (1872-1925) took the reins of Iran, yet held them briefly, for his reign lasted from January 8, 1907, to July 16, 1909. Yet, neither the death of Sebastián B. de Mier, nor the passing of Moẓaffarodīn Shāh himself, nor the exile of Díaz would cause a waning of the diplomatic interest between Mexico and Iran.

The first years of the Mexican Revolution witnessed a regime change brought about by the electoral triumph of Francisco Ignacio Madero (1873-1913), the leader of the Anti-Reelection Party, which he had founded in 1909. At the cry of "*Sufragio efectivo, no reelección*" (Effective suffrage, no reelection), Madero rose victorious in the extraordinary elections held in October 1911 and governed

the Mexican Republic as its president from November 6, 1911, to February 19, 1913, the day he was assassinated. His administration promptly delivered the news of its victory to the new and last Shāh of Qhājār Persia, Āḥmad Shāh (1898-1930). The Iranian King responded with a letter addressed to Mexico's President, which he transmitted via the Persian legation in Washington on March 25, 1912.<sup>73</sup> Through his correspondence, besides congratulating Madero for his victory, the Shāh assured him that the diplomatic relations and the bond of amity between their nations would continue:

Grand et Cher Ami. J'ai reçu avec une grande satisfaction votre lettre en date du 6 novembre 1911, par laquelle vous m'avez fait part de votre nomination à la Présidence de la République des Etats-Unis Mexicains conformément à la Constitution de votre pays. En vous remerciant de vos bonnes intentions concernant nos relations, je tiens, également à vous assurer, de ma part, que tous mes efforts tendront à resserrer les liens d'amitié et de bonne intelligence qui existent si heureusement entre la Perse et les Etats-Unis Mexicains.<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, the goodwill expressed by both figures did not suffice to deepen the diplomatic relations as they wished for their countries. In addition to the precariousness of the epoch and the geopolitical and domestic instability suffered by both nation-states, dependence on foreign powers was part of the complicated equation.

Documents from The British Foreign Office and Board of Trade report that in 1911, general trade between Persia and other foreign countries had increased by 5.64 percent. By then, Iran was a country still dependent on others for oil and many other supplies, with Russia being its main provider.<sup>75</sup> As was the case in Mexico, British interests caused London to penetrate Iran and its oil industry. In Mexico, the British S. Pearson Sons & Co. vied with the US for access to Mexican oil. With the war spreading across Europe and an increasing need for oil, the UK War Cabinet requested to examine a proposal made by the S. Pearson Sons & Co. The proposal suggests that the government should advance large sums of money to ensure the safety of their Mexican oil properties as an alternative to their transfer to the U.S.-based The Standard Oil Trust.<sup>76</sup> In Iran, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, established in 1908 to work a concession obtained from the Persian government in 1901 by W. K. D'Arcy and set to expire in 1961—as agreed upon by all parties involved—, had the exclusive right to drill for, produce, pipe, and carry away oil and petroleum products throughout the Persian Empire, except in five Northern provinces. The Iran

of that epoch, socially tribal in its civilian structure, had the Bakhtiari Khans policing the oil fields in a direct agreement between the Persian government and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. A royalty of 16% of the net annual profits was payable to the Persian government, while the Bakhtiari Khans were to obtain 3% for their security services.<sup>77</sup> Hence, external dependence and domestic social unrest caused Iran to become less autonomous in its foreign affairs. Whereas in Mexico, the triumph of President Madero did not end socioeconomic and political chaos during this period.

The decade of the 1920s brought to Mexico additional social disruption, and with it, a new armed insurrection. This time, religion became an integral part of the equation in a civil war known as The Cristero Revolt (1926-1929). At that time, a new dynasty rose to power in Iran, the Pahlavi (1925-1979). The Qhājār Empire thus ended, giving place to the *Keshvar-e Shāhanshāhi-ye Īrān* (The Imperial State of Iran). With the ascent of the Pahlavi Dynasty to power in Iran, the 1902 Treaty of Amity between Mexico and the Qhājār Empire was nullified, but not due to enmity. On July 11, 1927, Iran informed the Mexican Embassy in Washington about the decision to cancel the 1902-1903 treaties, and at the same time, invited Mexico City to join Tehran in a fresh diplomatic endeavor by signing a new accord of friendship and cooperation, which would come into force shortly after the invalidation of the old agreement, whose cancelation was to come into effect on May 10, 1928.<sup>78</sup> A new era had begun in Persia, and the signing of a new treaty between Mexico and Pahlavi Iran inaugurated a new phase in the history of the Iranian-Mexican diplomatic relations.

## Conclusion

The friendship that the Mexico of Maximilian of Habsburg had developed with the Qhājār Empire would be the genesis of a diplomatic bond between the two peoples, which, due to shifts at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, did not have a chance to deepen. The foreign policy vision of Mexico during the *Porfiriato*, which some consider a dark epoch in the history of Mexico and others, a phase of development in the country's infrastructure and system, intended to expand Mexico's diplomatic horizons by including the Middle East, among others. Nevertheless, during the 1920s onward, reconstructing a shattered Mexico and the concern about further foreign intervention in the affairs of the country, caused the Latin American country to establish priorities for its foreign policy objectives, channeling them primarily towards the U.S. and Western Europe. It is therefore not surprising that diplomatic relations between Iran and Mexico were not as deep or as extensive as

they potentially could have been. Still, after the fall of the Qhājār Empire and the rise of the Pahlavi Dynasty to the throne of Iran, a new course was charted in a positive manner for the relations between these two countries. It is precisely at that stage in the history of Iranian–Mexican relations that Mexico celebrated the opening of an embassy on Persian soil, which still serves in Tehran today.

As observed, documentation and diverse primary sources from 1864, the year of Mexico’s first mission in the Middle East, to 1925, the rise to power of the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran, account for only a few events, posing a challenge in the reconstruction of this riveting diplomatic history. Finding secondary sources on Iran and Mexico detailing this chronological span and thematic is an even more complicated task. I have nonetheless intended to illustrate the genesis of this diplomatic friendship with the sources at my disposal and will argue that, had I had the opportunity to research physically in Iran, the outcome of this work would not have been too different because the diplomatic bond between these two countries was virtually dictated by domestic and international affairs often beyond the control of their governments. With this said, I agree with those who might say that having the Persian counterpart of this story would enhance the scope of the work here presented and would enrich it by adding the stance, vision, and hopes of the Qhājār side to the equation, which unfortunately I was not able to do. If this is the main weakness of my study, it also presents an opportunity for other researchers who, unlike me, may be able to conduct academic research in the magnificent land of *Ērān*. I invite them to continue with the academic effort of this humble scholarly contribution.

## Notes

1. James Biedzynski, “Review Essay: Mexico’s Wars,” *Journal of Third World Studies*, 26: 2 (Fall 2009), pp. 317-319.
2. For a detailed account of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Iran, see: Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013).
3. The *Selseleh-ye Qhājār* (Qhājār Dynasty. Persian: قاجار سلسله) was an Iranian royal dynasty of Turkic descent that ruled Persia from 1785 to 1925. For further details see: Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 7, *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 104-143, 174-212.
4. See: H. Lyman Stebbins, *British Imperialism in Qajar Iran: Consuls, Agents and Influence in the Middle East* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016).
5. George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, Vol. 1 (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), pp. 1-2.
6. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, p. 2.

7. Amin Saikal, "Iranian Foreign Policy, 1921-1979," p. 428, in: Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, Charles Melville (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 7, From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 426-456.
8. Nikki Keddie, "Iran Under the Later Qājārs, 1948-1922," p. 174, in: Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, Charles Melville (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 7, From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 174-212.
9. Keddie, "Iran Under the Later Qājārs," p. 175.
10. For an insightful study about tribe and state interactions in Qhājār Iran see: Arash Khaenzi, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).
11. George W. Grayson, *Oil and Mexican Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), pp. 10-12.
12. Grayson, *Oil and Mexican Foreign Policy*, p. 14.
13. Bernardo Sepúlveda Amor, *Política Exterior de México: 175 años de Historia*, Vol. I (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1985), pp. 248-249.
14. (The Mexican Government found itself in the position of publicly declaring and officially notifying friendly governments that Mexico did not recognize the Monroe Doctrine [...] that doctrine attacks the sovereignty and independence of Mexico), "Carranza y la Liga de las Naciones," *Diario Oficial*, September 2 1919, in: Ernesto de la Torre Villar, *Historia documental de México* (México: UNAM, 1964), p. 521.
15. "La Doctrina Estrada," *El Universal*, September 27, 1930.
16. Rafael Velazquez-Flores, *Principled Pragmatism in Mexico's Foreign Policy: Variables and Assumptions* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), p. 9.
17. Velazquez-Flores, *Principled Pragmatism*, pp. 9-32.
18. Alejandra Galindo Marines, "Mexico's Elusive Foreign Policy towards the Middle East," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 4:3 (2011), pp. 341-359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17550912.2011.593959>
19. Paul Garner, *Porfirio Díaz: Profiles in Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 139.
20. Hilda Varela and Indira Isael Sánchez, *Historia de las Relaciones Internacionales de México, 1821-2010, África y Medio Oriente* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2011), pp. 165-68.
21. Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México (Henceforth: AHGE-SRE), File L-E-1172 (4), "Pablo Martínez del Río es enviado como ministro a Grecia, Turquía y Persia," 28 de agosto de 1864, f. 247.
22. (The mission entrusted to him is temporary, and while he performs it he will have the character of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, which will cease upon his return), "Imperio Otomano y Grecia: Se nombra a D. Pablo Martínez del Río enviado Extraordinario y Ministro Plenipotenciario. Número 42," México, 8 de julio de 1864, in: José Sebastian Segura (ed.), *Boletín de las leyes del Imperio Mexicano o sea Código de la Restauración. Colección completa de las leyes y demás disposiciones dictadas por la intervención francesa, por el supremo poder ejecutivo provisional, y por el Imperio Mexicano, con un apéndice de los documentos oficiales más notables y curiosos de la época*, Tomo III (México: Imprenta literaria, 1865), p. 56.
23. "Protocole pour l'établissement de consulats, entre l'Empire du Mexique et l'Empire Ottoman, signé à Constantinople le 4 septembre 1865. Protocole signé et échangé entre

- l'Envoyé Extraordinaire de Sa Majesté l'Empereur du Mexique et le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères de Sa Majesté Impériale le Sultan," in: *Derecho Internacional Mexicano, Segunda Parte. Tratados y convenciones celebrados y no ratificados por la República Mexicana con un apéndice que contiene varios documentos importantes. Edición oficial* (México: Imprenta de Gonzalo A. Esteva, 1878), pp. 362-63.
24. (My dear Sir and fine friend: As I have announced to you by my previous [correspondence], we marched to Egypt and Palestine where I established the Consular Generals of Mexico in Alexandria and Jerusalem), Centro de Estudios de Historia de México Carso, Fundación Carlos Slim (Henceforth: CEHM-CARSO), IX-1.5-8.665.1, *Segundo Imperio. Manuscritos de Ignacio Aguilar y Marocho*, Legajo 665, Año 1866, Carpeta 5-8, "Leonardo Márquez a E. S. Ministro Dr. Dn. Ygnacio Aguilar," Constantinopla, 21 de febrero de 1866.
  25. Varela and Sánchez, *Historia de las Relaciones Internacionales*, pp. 173, 175.
  26. Velazquez-Flores, *Principled Pragmatism*, p. 59.
  27. See: Garner, *Porfirio Díaz*, pp. 142-153.
  28. Velazquez-Flores, *Principled Pragmatism*, p. 71.
  29. Varela and Sánchez, *Historia de las Relaciones Internacionales*, p. 170.
  30. Dirección General de Estadística, *Anuario Estadístico de la República Mexicana 1895* (Mexico: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1895), p. 845.
  31. AHGE-SRE, File 42-17-73, "Nombramiento de William J. de Gress como representante del Shah de Persia en la Ciudad de México," México, 8 de junio de 1895.
  32. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, "Sebastián B. Mier.- Su expediente personal," México, 21 de junio de 1901, f. 2.
  33. Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), p. 46.
  34. US Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of The United States, Transmitted to Congress, With the Annual Message of the President, December 3, 1888, Part II* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), pp. 1361-1362.
  35. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, f. 38.
  36. Kamyar Ghaneabassiri, "U.S. Foreign Policy and Persia, 1856-1921," *Iranian Studies* 35:1/3, (2002), pp. 145-175
  37. "Embajadores de México: Estados Unidos," *Acervo Histórico Diplomático de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, last accessed February 13, 2021, available at: <https://acervo.sre.gob.mx/index.php/acervo/35-acervo-historico-diplomatico/152-estados-unidos-embajadas>.
  38. "'Ahdnōmeh-ye Mavadat va Tejārat mābein Īrān va Dolat-e Mekzīk/Traité d'Amitié et de Commerce entre la Perse et les États-Unis du Mexique, Signé le 14 mai 1902 (Treaty of friendship and commerce between Persia and the United States of Mexico, signed on May 14, 1902)," *Ensani*, last accessed February 12, 2021, available at: [http://ensani.ir/file/download/article/20110205184010-\(1212\).pdf](http://ensani.ir/file/download/article/20110205184010-(1212).pdf).
  39. (Art. 1: There will be perpetual peace and invariable amity between his Imperial Majesty the Shāhanshāh of Persia, his heirs and successors, and the United States of Mexico, and between his subjects and their respective citizens), "'Ahdnōmeh-ye Mavadat va Tejārat, Article I," f. 72.
  40. UK National Archives (Henceforth: UKNA), FO-416/15, *Affairs of Persia and Arabia. Further Correspondence Part XV, 1903 Oct.-Dec.*, "No. 181.- Sir H. Howard to the Marquess of Lansdowne.- (Received November 28), No. 152, Very Confidential," The Hague, November 26, 1903, f. 165.



41. Ibid., f. 166.
42. UKNA, FO-416/15, *Affairs of Persia and Arabia. Further Correspondence Part XV, 1903 Oct.-Dec.*, “No. 144.- Mr. Grant Duff to Marquess of Lansdowne.-(Received November 14), No. 147, Telegraphic,” Tehran, November 14, 1903, f. 138.
43. UKNA, FO-416/17, *Affairs of Persia and Arabia. Further Correspondence Part XVII, 1904 Mar.-Apr.*, “Inclosure 5 in No. 57, Narrative of Events in Persia in 1903,” n/d, f. 70.
44. AHGE-SRE, File 42-19-23, “Isaac Khan à Ignacio Mariscal,” México, 16 de marzo de 1903, f. 2.
45. (Mister Minister, I hereby have the honor to inform your Excellency that as of today I have assumed the post of Chargé d’ Affaires of Persia. Mr. General Isaac Chan Mofechemedovleh has asked me before leaving, to inform your Excellency that His Majesty the Schahinscha would have much honor, if His Excellency Mr. President Don Porfirio Díaz would congratulate him by telegraph next Saturday, 21 of the present, New Year of the Persians, and on September 7, Shahinschah’s birthday), AHGE-SRE, File 42-19-23, “Legación de Persia,” México, 17 de marzo de 1903, f. 3.
46. (I would be very grateful to Your Excellency if you would kindly indicate me, if the Government of the Mexican Republic has already decided on a person who will later be appointed as representative of Mexico in Tehran or when this matter will probably be resolved), AHGE-SRE, File 15-10-5, “El Encargado de Negocios de Persia pregunta quién será la persona que representará a México ante el Gobierno de Persia,” México, 14 de abril de 1903, f. 1.
47. AHGE-SRE, File 15-10-5, f. 141.
48. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, f. 36.
49. (Great and good friend: With the purpose of making present onto Your Majesty the sentiments of high consideration and sincere friendship that I have for the person of Your Majesty, and so that he may express to you the vows that I make for your happiness, I have seen fit to name to Mr. Sebastián B. de Mier as Extraordinary Ambassador on a special mission near Your Majesty. Mr. Sebastián B. de Mier is the diplomatic representative of Mexico in France; and as his enlightenment and other personal gifts are notorious, I have not hesitated to confer this mission upon him, which I am certain he will know how to carry out successfully and satisfactorily), AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, “Porfirio Díaz, Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, a Su Majestad Mozaffar-Eddine Schah-in-Schah de Persia, México, 26 de agosto de 1903, f. 44.
50. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, “Informe del Embajador Extraordinario de México en Persia,” París, 25 de enero de 1904, f. 64.
51. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, “Légation de Perse.- No. 115,” Washington, December 23, 1903, f. 57.
52. Ibid.
53. “Diario de los debates de la Cámara de Senadores del Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Año I, Periodo II, XXVI Legislatura, Tomo III, Núm. 39, México, 23 de mayo de 1913,” *Infosen*, last accessed February 12, 2021, available at: [http://infosen.senado.gob.mx/documentos/DIARIOS/1913\\_03\\_27-1913\\_05\\_31/1913\\_05\\_23\\_O.pdf](http://infosen.senado.gob.mx/documentos/DIARIOS/1913_03_27-1913_05_31/1913_05_23_O.pdf).
54. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, “Légation de Perse.- No. 115,” Washington, December 23, 1903, f. 57.
55. For a review on the subject see: Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism* (New York: State University Press, 1988).

56. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, “Légation de Perse.- No. 115,” Washington, December 23, 1903, f. 58.
57. CEHM-CARSO, *Colección José Y. Limantour*, Segunda Serie, Legajo 6, Año 1904, Carpeta 6, 6 Enero - 20 mayo de 1904, CDLIV.2a.1904.6.6, “Cuerpo Diplomático Extranjero. Adolfo von Floeckher (Alemania), 1904. Légation de Perse.- No. 9,” México, 8 de enero de 1904.
58. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, “Légation de Perse.- No. 115,” Washington, December 23, 1903, ff. 57-58.
59. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, “Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores. Ignacio Mariscal al Señor Encargado de Negocios, el Doctor Adolf von Flöckher,” México, 11 de enero de 1904, f. 60.
60. (Our trip to Persia was very interesting and happy; splendid weather constantly favored us and we were received by those people “royalement,” in every sense of the word. They showered us with honors and attentions and we tried to leave a good impression on them, which I think we achieved. However, concerning the gifts, we were more than frugal. Except for the rifle that the Shāh liked very much, everything else that we had brought was paltry compared to what they gave us, even though at the last minute I made use of the jewels that my companions were wearing, for their personal use, to make indispensable gifts. Had I been able to foresee how they were going to treat us, I would have brought more gifts, but we had a very sad idea of the Persians and we believed that with little we would look good. For sure, they spent much more than double the amount paid by the Mexican Embassy on the trip and on the gifts it brought. Eustaquio Escandon, who is leaving for Mexico on the thirteenth of the current month, will tell you about our trip in detail), CEHM-CARSO, *Colección José Y. Limantour*, Segunda Serie, Legajo 29, Año 1904, Carpeta 6, 8 de enero - 2 de diciembre 1904, CDLIV.2a.1904.6.29, “Cuerpo Diplomático Mexicano. Sebastián B. de Mier (Francia), 1904. Correspondencia Particular del Ministro de México. Sebastián B. de Mier al Señor Lic. Don José Y. Limantour, Ministro de Hacienda de México,” París, 8 de enero de 1904.
61. UKNA, FO-416/31, *Affairs of Persia. Further Correspondence Part IX, 1907 Jan.-Mar.*, “No. 38.– Sir C. Spring- Rice to Sir Edward Grey.– (Received January 21),” Tehran, January 3, 1907, f. 34.
62. UKNA, FO-416/31, *Affairs of Persia. Further Correspondence Part IX, 1907 Jan.-Mar.*, “Inclosure in No. 109, Summary of Events in Persia for the year 1906. Mr. Naus,” January 1907, f. 96.
63. (Of course I am pleased to manifest to you that our foreign relations continue, without alteration, presenting the character of amity and in certain cases of true cordialness, extending each day more, to include some nations that had never cultivated them with Mexico [...] To correspond to the special mission that His Majesty the Shāh of Persia was pleased to send to Mexico, the Mexican Minister in Paris was dispatched with the character of Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador, also on a special mission, to the capital of that Empire. There, and in the Persian territory that had to be crossed, our envoy has come to cement the excellent relations of friendship established by the Persian mission in our country), “El General Díaz, al abrir el 21 Congreso Constitucional el segundo periodo del segundo año de sus sesiones, en 1 de abril de 1904,” in Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, *Un Siglo de Relaciones Internacionales de México a través de los Mensajes Presidenciales* (México: Publicaciones de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1935), pp. 219-20.

64. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1303, "Légation de Perse. Traduction de la lettre autographée de Sa Majesté Impériale le Schahenschah à Son Excellence Monsieur le Président de la République des Etats Unis du Mexique," Washington, May 1905, ff. 145-146.
65. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1303, "Légation de Perse. No. 89," Washington, May 2, 1905, f. 144.
66. James F. Engel, "The Revolution and Mexican Foreign Policy," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, 11:4 (Oct. 1969), pp. 518-532.
67. *El Universal*, September 2, 1959, p. 1.
68. On the figure of 'Alā'-al-Saltana see: Bāqer 'Āqeli, "'Alā'-al-Saltana," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2012, last accessed February 13, 2021, available at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ala-al-saltana-mohammad-ali-1>.
69. AHGE-SRE, File 15-15-43, *Asia. Asuntos Varios. El Shah de Persia y su Gabinete, año de 1906*, "Légation de Perse, No. 9/197," Washington, October 3, 1906.
70. Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran, a Developing State in a Zone of Great-Power Conflict* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 18.
71. AHGE-SRE, File 15-15-42, *Asia. Asuntos Varios. Asamblea Nacional de Persia, año de 1906*, "Légation de Perse. No., 6/152," Washington, August 11, 1906.
72. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1031, "Asunto: Recibo de su mensaje sobre salida en barco Flandre de restos del Sr. Sebastián de Mier," México, 27 de noviembre de 1919.
73. AHGE-SRE, File L-E-1439 (II), *Presidente Francisco I. Madero y Vicepresidente José María Pino Suárez. Toma de Posesión, 1911-1913*, "Embajada de México en los Estados Unidos de América. Número 688. Carta Autógrafa de S.M.I. el Shah de Persia al Señor Presidente de la República," Washington, 25 de marzo de 1912, f. 193.
74. (Great and Dear Friend. I received with great satisfaction your letter dated November 6, 1911, by which you informed me of your appointment to the Presidency of the Republic of the United Mexican States in accordance with the Constitution of your country. In thanking you for your good intentions concerning our relations, I would also like to assure you, on my part, that all my efforts will tend to strengthen the bonds of friendship and good understanding which so fortunately exist between Persia and the United Mexican States), AHGE-SRE, File L- E-1439 (II), "Ahmed Chah Kadjar à Son Excellence Monsieur Francisco I. Madero Président de la République des Etats-Unis Mexicains," Tehran, n/d.
75. British Foreign Office and Board of Trade, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports: Persia, Report for the year 1910-1911, Annual Series No. 4955* (London: His Majesty Stationary Office, 1912), pp. 3, 5.
76. UKNA, CAB.24/20/50, "Secret. G.T. 1448. War Cabinet: Proposal for Purchase of Messrs. Pearson & Sons' Mexican Oil Properties," July 18, 1917.
77. UKNA, FO-800-204-2, "Anglo-Persian Oil Company," n/d, ff. 145-147.
78. AHGE-SRE, File III-185-1, *Tratado Amistad Comercio y Navegación entre México y Persia. Gestiones, proyectos, estudios y todo lo relacionado con el mismo (1927-28)*, "Asunto: Denuncia Tratado entre México y Persia," Washington, 20 de julio de 1927, ff. 1-9.