

A SOCIO-POLITICAL GLIMPSE AT THE FIRST TWO “PERSIAN” IOC MEMBERS

by Esmail Kadkhodazadeh

In early April of this year I received a letter from Ian Buchanan in which he informed me that he and Wolf Lyberg were compiling a Biographical Dictionary or “Who’s Who” of all IOC Members, past and present. Ian asked in his letter if I could possibly be of assistance in providing information on the early Persian members of the IOC: Nizzam Eddin Khoi and Prince Samad Khan, which are two names that can rarely be found in historical and biographical works in Iranian libraries. My late father was a political genealogist who had trained me in that field from my early days. Thus, I felt that I could definitely help Ian in his researches.

It was, first of all, astonishing to me to find that Iran had two IOC members before the younger brother of the deposed Shah of Iran, Gholam Reza Pahlavi. I was upset and disappointed at my lack of knowledge, but I overcome this feeling of futility during the course of my research.

In the title of this article, I have used the name “Persia.” There is an interesting historical background in the use of this name which relates to the original two Iranian IOC Members.

In fact, the history of my country goes back to around 2,000 B.C., almost 4,000 years ago, when several groups of the Aryan¹ race invaded the area where Iran is currently located. The situation was, in all probability, similar when a second Aryan invasion occurred in the first millenium B.C. Following their successful invasions, the Aryans began to strengthen their position culturally; slowly, they replaced the original inhabitants as the dominant race. Two groups among them gained particular prominence and played important roles in the establishment of the first Persian empire.

These two groups were the Medes and the Persians. The Medes emerged as a leading power towards the end of the 7th Century B.C. Around 605 B.C. they attacked and conquered Assyria and subjected neighboring kings to their overlordship, thereby establishing the Kingdom of Medes. This Kingdom remained intact until the mid-6th century B.C., when Cyrus the Great, the local king of the Persians, revolted against the Medes and defeated them in battle, thus extending his influence over them. Having incorporated Media into his sphere of influence, Cyrus proceeded to conquer Babylon and Syria as well as Asia Minor. He gradually expanded the borders of his kingdom to include Eastern Persia as far as the Oxus River, transforming the Kingdom into the first Persian Empire, the Achaemenid Empire.

This was the foundation and dawning of Persia and the Persians. The outsiders had known and called my nation “Persia” until the coronation of Reza Shah in 1926, when he proclaimed the official name of the country to be Iran.

At the outset of World War I, Persia declared its neutrality, but despite that declaration, the country was frequently drawn into the conflict. Germany and Great Britain were arch-rivals in the political scene within Persia. It was not until 1918 that the situation in Persia had improved and the overt influence of competing international powers had been greatly reduced. The presence of large numbers of British and Indian forces on Persian soil on

¹The inhabitants of Persia prior to the arrival of the Aryans have not yet been fully indentified. They are often grouped under the general name of “Caspians,” from which, of course, the Caspian Sea takes its name.

one part and the pressure brought on the Shah to appoint an Anglophile as Prime Minister and as other leading Ministers, aroused strong anti-British and nationalistic feelings.

By 1919, Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Minister, was able to pursue his dream of protecting the approaches to India. He saw Persia as a vital link in the chain from the Mediterranean to the Pamiras. After protracted secret negotiations, an Anglo-Persian Agreement designated as “making provision for British Assistance in promoting the progress and prosperity of Persia” was signed by Mr. Hassan Vusuq (Vusuq-ed Dowleh), the Prime Minister of Persia, and the corresponding British officials in Teheran on 9 August 1919. This agreement soon came under fire not only in Persia, but also in America, Russia, and France where the secrecy of the negotiations and the dominant position it gave to the British were much criticized. In the Persians’ eyes, foreign tutelage and national independence were incompatible.

The appointment of the first two Persian IOC Members occurred during this very important socio-political period and notably the above Agreement enters prominently into the story. The first Persian IOC Member registered at Lausanne is Mr. Nezamoddin Emami Khoei with IOC Member number 106. The date of his appointment is 15 March 1921. Let’s look at his life and see how his appointment relates to the above Agreement.

Nezam Khan was the oldest son of the Ayatollah Yahya Emam Joma of Khoei, a town in East Azerbaijan, northeast of present-day Iran. In the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, Ayatollah along with other notable Ayatollahs in Persia took over the leadership of the revolt. He soon became one of the most prominent figures of the revolution and was elected to the first session of Parliament from Tabriz.

At this time, Nezam was 15-years-old, giving his birthdate as 1891. Nezam was educated in Switzerland and married at an early age to the daughter of Mr. Hassan Vuzuq, who signed the Agreement with the British. When Vusuq’s brother Mr. Ahmad Qavam (Qavamusaltaneh) became Prime Minister of Iran in June 1921, he sent Nezam and his wife (Qavam’s niece) to England for further study and education. He also appointed Nezam as Persian Commissar for Oil in London, a dearly sought position among many elderly pro-British diplomats and politicians.

Nezam Khan was well-educated and naturally talented, but the influence of his father, father-in-law and his wife’s uncle, and finally his education and residence in Switzerland, led to his being co-opted into the IOC, although he remained a member for less than two years. His position in the IOC ended on 7 April 1923.

Nezam Khan was for many years the Government Legal Inspector to the Central Bank of Iran and his signature was printed on Persian, and later, Iranian currency. He held this position until his retirement. Nezam Khan had two daughters who later married two successive Prime Ministers of Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution of Iran. His first daughter married Hassan Ali Mansour,² Prime Minister of Iran beginning in March 1964 and ending with his assassination in January 1965. His second daughter married Amir Abbas Hoveyda, the Minister of Finance, who immediately succeeded Hassan Ali Mansour, and remained in that position for more than 13 years, the longest term of any Iranian Prime Minister. Hoveyda was condemned to the death penalty in 1978 after the Islamic Revolution took place.

The second Persian IOC Member was H.E. Samad Khan Momtaz Momtazosaltaneh, with IOC Member number 123. His date of appointment was November 1923, and he remained a member until 22 April 1927, after the coronation of Reza Shah Pahlavi. Samad Khan, replacing Nezam Khan, was born in Teheran in 1875. His father, Ali Akbar Khan Mokaramosaltaneh, was a famous aristocrat and diplomat. Samad Khan began his own

²Ali Mansour was himself the son of Ali Mansour, the Prime Minister of Iran in 1941.

diplomatic career first as the Persian Chargé d’Affaire at the Persian Embassy in the Soviet Union. He then was appointed Ambassador to the Netherlands, and later the Ambassador to France, a position which he held for 28 years.

Samad Khan personally owned the Embassy in Paris which was also his home, and during the period of the 1919 Agreement he supported the Shah of Persia, Ahmad Shah, the last king of the Qajar Dynasty. Therefore when Nosrat-ed Dowleh Firouz, the Justice Minister in Vusuq’s cabinet went to Europe to negotiate the procedure of the Agreement, Samad Khan refused to admit him to the Embassy, in fact his own home, because he was totally opposed to the Agreement.

Apart from his own influence, Samad Khan’s brother, Esmail Khan Momtaz-ed Dowleh was one of the Speakers of the Persian Parliament in its 1st and 2nd Sessions. Certainly, Samad Khan had many influential friends in France, including Baron de Coubertin, and his appointment to the IOC position was not at all surprising. Samad Khan died in 1956 in Europe.

It is interesting to note that nobody in sport and Olympic circles in Iran knew the fact that Persia/Iran had had two IOC members prior to Gholam Reza Pahlavi’s appointment in 1955. Morteza Momtaz, the nephew of Samad Khan, and Yahya Emami, the son of Nezam Khan, were quite surprised to learn that their uncle and father were IOC Members. They, like other veterans of sport in Iran, knew nothing of their appointment.³

³In my quest for information about these two Iranian IOC Members, I have been greatly helped by several of their descendants, Mrs. Melika Vusuq, the widow of Nezam Khan, his son, Mr. Yahya Emami, and Mr. Morteza Momtaz.