

National Tree Planting Day, an opportunity to respect environment



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EXCLUSIVE

A few days ago, early in the morning, as I was passing through a busy street, my eyes fell upon the trees that were beautifully arranged in the park located along the street. I was wondering, who had planted these trees and when?

In the Iranian calendar, the 15th day of the month of Esfand, which corresponds with March 6th, is marked as Tree Planting Day. On this day, 15 days before the Iranian New Year, many people plant tree saplings in parks, forests and other areas of their cities and villages. The day also marks the beginning of the National Week of Natural Resources.

Also known as Arbor Day, it is observed by many countries throughout the world, but its date varies, depending on their climate and planting season. Each and every person should breathe and enjoy clean, fresh

air, created by the trees, to live a healthy life. This is just one of the many benefits of trees, producing most of the oxygen that humans and wildlife breathe.

Moreover, trees act as a natural flood defense, holding back water and slowing the flow.

Trees also play a very important role in strengthening of the soil and providing the nutritional needs of human beings and many other creatures.

However, the establishment of numerous industrial factories and manufacturing various types of vehicles, along with the development of science and technology have led to increased pollutants in the atmosphere, threatening the health of people living in cities, especially metropolises.

It is said that in the past 100 years, 1.5 trillion trees have been cut worldwide.

Experts believe that planting trees is considered to be a solution to the air pollution problem.

On the other hand, Islam has encouraged people to plant trees and some outstanding religious

figures have been involved in the action.

Cutting down trees is strictly prohibited in Islam. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ordered his soldiers to avoid cutting down trees after defeating the enemy. He said, "For me, breaking a tree branch is like breaking the wings of angels".

Meanwhile, historical documents show that ancient Persians used to hold special festivals in which they planted trees and respected the earth that fed them. Persians were among the first who started to preserve forests. Tree planting has been of interest in Iran since ancient times.

Stone relief with the images of cypress trees can be seen in Persepolis in Fars Province, which was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BCE). Cypress, as an

evergreen tree, has always been of special importance in Iran.

Besides, every Zoroastrian used to plant a tree sapling after the birth of his child. History shows that Iran has had numerous green gardens and green lands since ancient time.

Pasargadae in Fars Province, a historical site dating back to Achaemenid Period, is the oldest Persian Garden in which there is an irrigation system using streams and ponds.

Ferdowsi, a great 11th-century Persian poet, mentioned the gardens and meadows built around the Firouzabad Fire Temple.

According to Greek historians, about 3,000 years ago, most Persian houses were surrounded by gardens, referred to as *paradis*, from which the English word 'paradise' has been derived.

Besides, we know that in many countries the life of a tree is as



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valuable as the life of a human being. If a tree is in the path of a road, it will be moved to another place to continue its life.

Consequently, we should use Tree Planting Day as an opportunity to respect and revive our environment, or at least try to protect it more carefully.



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Cultural significance of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom

Bactria was an ancient Iranian civilization in Central Asia centered on modern day northern Afghanistan and including parts of southwestern Tajikistan and southeastern Uzbekistan.

For an evaluation of the cultural significance of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom in the ancient times, more basic archaeological and linguistic research is still necessary; linguistic research should make it possible to determine which cultural terms in oriental languages were borrowed from Greek, and would thus indicate Greek influence.

The influence of Greek art must have been especially strong, and indeed, little Greek heads adorn

the small earthen coffins in which the Zoroastrians kept the bones of the dead after their separation from the flesh; the numerous terra-cotta statuettes, found mostly in the environs of Samarkand, point equally clearly to the influence of Greek art.

Its traces are also noted by historians of Indian art, especially of sculpture. The well-known sinologist F. Hirth sees signs of the influence of Bactrian art even in ancient specimens of Chinese art that go back to the second century BCE; this connection, however, is rejected by another sinologist, E. Chavannes.

On the other hand, the Greeks too must have been influenced by oriental cul-

tural elements, especially by oriental religions, and in particular Buddhism, the propaganda of which began in the third century BCE, at the time of King Asoka. Already in the first half of the second century we find the picture of a Buddhist stupa on the coin of Agathocles, the Greek ruler of Arachosia; at the end of the second century, Menander, ruling over a substantial part of India, was a Buddhist, and after his death he was recognized as one of the Buddhist saints.

The Graeco-Bactrian state collapsed after 175 BCE as a result of internal disorders. The event was to provoke an onslaught of Central Asian nomads, who were most probably related

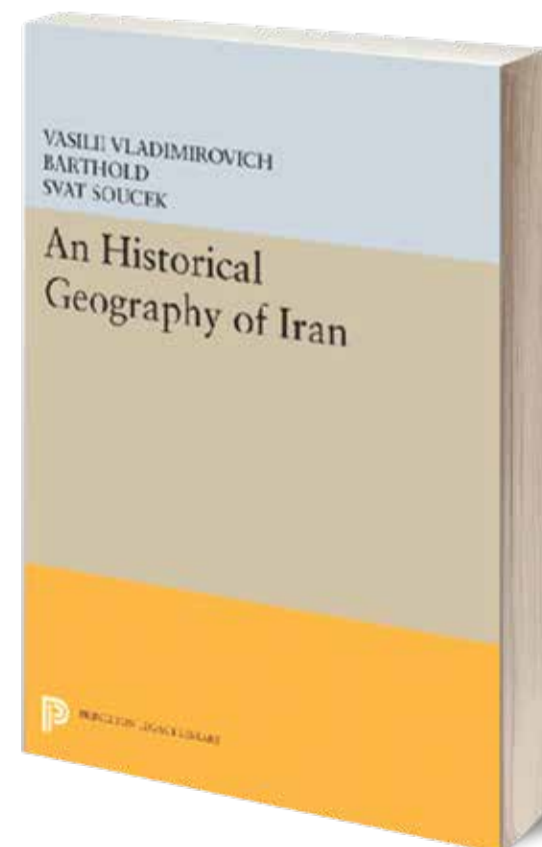
to the sedentary Iranians in origin.

As early as 206 BCE, Euthidemos, a Greco-Bactrian king and founder of the Euthydemid Dynasty, in his struggle with Antiochos the Great of Syria threatened to incite the nomads to invade the country, and Antiochos, impressed by this threat, agreed to conclude peace.

The son of Euthidemos, Dimitrios, was driven out of Bactria by Eukratidos, one of the most important Greco-Bactrian kings, and ruled only in India, that is, the country beyond the Hindu Kush. Eukratidos had to wage war against Euthidemos's descendants in India, against the Greek rulers of the Hindmand basin, and in addition, against the

peoples of Aria and Soghdiana; as a result of this, the Parthians, gaining strength at that time under the rule of Mithridates I, were able to take the provinces of Aspionia and Turibia from the Bactrians. These regions were a part of Aria. There is a report that Mithridates spread his rule to India, but the invasion of the latter country, was carried out not by the Parthians but by the Sakas, a people of the Chinese chronicles, who at that time were driven out of Semirechie, region which now is located on the territory of modern day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

This movement is known to have been connected with one of the great migrations of Central Asian history.



The above is a lightly edited version of chapter entitled 'Bactria, Balkh, and Tukharistan', from a book entitled, 'An Historical Geography of Iran', written by W. Barthold and published by Princeton University Press, Princeton.