

## Was “Shaking of the Land in Esfand Month” True? Some Transitions of Tourism in Iran

Asuka Nakamura

### **Abstract:**

In the middle of February 2018, I visited Iran where people were preparing for Nowruz, the Persian New Year, on March 21. I also toured local cities such as Tehrān, Eşfahān, Yazd, Shīrāz and Tabriz. In Eşfahān, Shīrāz and Yazd, new tourist facilities have been developing. In the Azerbaijan region, new tourism resources like Armenian buildings were being developed. In this paper, I would like to report mainly what I observed about movements and transitions of tourism after having visited these places again for the first time in ten years.

### **Keywords:**

Iran, Tourism, Local City, Armenian Church, Transition

## 1. Preface

In the middle of February 2018, I visited Iran where people were preparing for Nowruz, the Persian New Year, on March 21. Iranians phrase this Esfand month as “shaking of the land” which means a season when plants are beginning to germinate under the ground for spring. I could not see it with my own eyes in Iran this season, but as I was observing from the sightseeing routes, I thought I could feel that something was beginning to move.

This time I followed two tourist routes. The first was the major tourist route from Tehrān to Eṣfahān, the city in the central plateau of Iran, to Yazd and then on to Shīrāz. The second was a relatively new route along which tourists can visit Tabriz in the East Azerbaijan province and Armenian churches and other sites in the West Azerbaijan province in the Northwest of Iran. So this report also consists of two parts.



Figure 1 Map of Iran with Road Routes

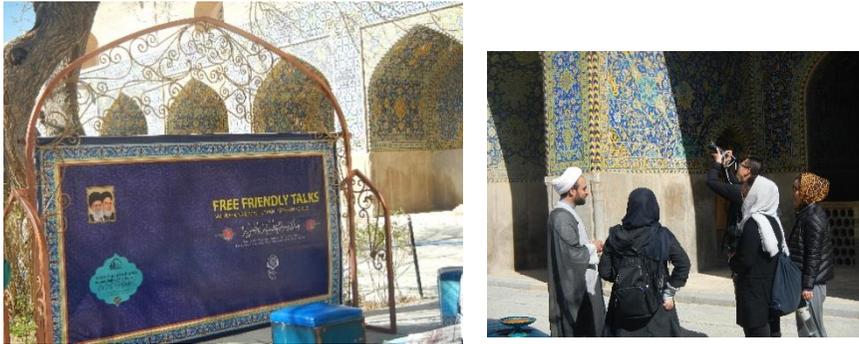
## 2. Part I: From Eşfahān to Yazd to Shīrāz

### 2-1. Eşfahān

I traveled about 450 kilometers by night bus from Tehrān to Eşfahān. In the Beyhaqī bus terminal in northern Tehrān, many people were waiting for buses to major cities of the country because different bus lines connect at this terminal. One of the major lines, Seir-o Safar co., has always been noted for a long-distance bus service. The company has also been running the airport taxi service of Tehrān Imām Khomeinī Airport for about ten years. A large tourist bus with a Seir-o Safar’s logo arrived ahead of time. You can check the destination and the departure time of the bus displayed in Persian and English on the electric bulletin board at the front of the bus. Inside the bus, spacious seats are installed in three independent rows and passengers can access Wi-Fi. In addition, what impressed me afresh was a passenger who spent about 5 hours on the road, talking on the phone and hitting keys on a computer keyboard.

Eşfahān used to be the capital of the Safaviyān Dynasty (1501-1736) for a certain period.<sup>1</sup> There are few large rivers in Iran, although the Zāyandeh Rūd River flows through the town of Eşfahān, and the beauty of the view with the Sī-ose Pol Bridge over the river is the pride of the people of Eşfahān. But when I visited there, the water flow had been stemmed by an upstream dam. In recent years, Iran has been suffering severe water shortages, which has made residents feel uneasy, although they were optimistically saying, “Authorities would allow the water flow for tourists when Eid (i.e. a national holiday, Nowruz) comes.”<sup>2</sup>

In Imām Square, one of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, foreign tourists were noticeable. And a brand-new area called “Free Friendly Talks” has been established in the yard of Imām Mosq in the corner of the square. Once there was a seminary of Nāserīyeh which seems to be used as a dormitory or classroom for theological students even now. In the area, Islāmīc jurists sit in a circle and talk with tourists. They can talk in English, French, Spanish and Arabic depending on the time of day. Throughout the history of Islām, jurists have had leading roles, and even now they remain part of the elite under the Islāmīc Republic of Iran. Those who want to graduate from an Islāmīc seminary to become a jurist have to study hard. It seems to me that Islāmīc jurists should be required to learn foreign languages in addition to professional expertise as part of the elite in this era of globalization.



The Free Friendly Talks Area (Photo: Noriko Morimoto)

## 2-2. Yazd

Yazd and Shīrāz, where I visited next, have been transforming into international tourist cities following Eṣfahān. The city of Yazd is located some 270 kilometers southeast of Eṣfahān. Since there are Zoroastrian temples and relics, the Yazd city has been registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Improved hotels to accommodate domestic and foreign tourists are concentrated in the Old Town after previous residents having left. These hotels are designed to imitate a traditional Iranian house, which is equipped with a well-kept courtyard, completely surrounded by one-story buildings. In the daytime, the courtyard is used as a restaurant or *chāy-khāne* (çayhane: tea house) with tables and chairs in place. These kinds of facilities seem to be for foreigners, but have decreased in urban areas and therefore might be a rather “fresh” traditional culture for young Iranians today. Such hotels were also being built in the Old Town of Shīrāz.

A staff member of a hotel in Yazd said that the number of this type of hotel had increased and that the owner there built the hotel with sponsorship. The staff member also asked me to post a review on TripAdvisor if I agreed. An important way to attract guests here is not via travel guidebooks but with reviews on tourism websites.

Historic sites around Yazd are also tourist attractions. When I visited a village in Kharānaq, a mosque dated from the Qājār Dynasty period (1796-1925) was under repair and the remaining parts of the mosque had been kept intact. But tourists still come to visit there and enjoy roaming around old abandoned residences with collapsed earthen walls. Also in the historical town of Meybod near Yazd where castle ruins of the Sāsāniyān Dynasty period have been discovered, the repair of historic buildings has almost finished, and the

town itself has entered the growing phase.

### **2-3. Shīrāz**

A 440-kilometer highway runs from Yazd to Shīrāz. It takes about twelve hours to go around the ancient ruins of the Achaemenid Empire and the Sāsāniyān Dynasty including Persepolis, Pāsārgād and Naqsh-e Rostam along the route. A driver from Tehrān, who lives in Yazd, drove me around on this tour without looking irritated. All the ruins were crowded with tourists, while only a small number of tourists were walking in the rain inside the extensive ruins of Pāsārgād, which is believed to be a tomb of Cyrus II of the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>3</sup>

Also in Shīrāz, large-scale construction work was taking place to improve roads, buildings and subways. And many schoolgirls passing by casually talked to me there. Iranian girls have always been curious, but now they asked questions with a smartphone in their hand, “Will you take photos with me?”. They seemed to post the photos on SNS. On Friday, a holiday in Iran, I was surrounded by active high school girl students. “Where are you from?” “Why did you come to Iran?”. They asked similar questions one after another in English. These schoolgirls told me that they were students at an English conversation school and went out into the street to learn practical English skills. “Go easy on her!” “Talk more slowly!” “Your voice is too loud!”. In this way they were advising each other. Typical of Iranians, they never forgot consideration for anyone, even foreigners like me. I felt as if I had seen the women of Shīrāz as described by Ibn Baṭūṭah as “pure people who do good deeds” and “their habits are peculiar.”<sup>4</sup> A globetrotter may consider it unusual that women (despite being women) gathered at a mosque listening to the preacher’s lecture, while it seemed to me that those girls’ curiosity was an indication of their desire for learning and hope for the future. Foreign language proficiency is going to be a key skill for those who live in Shīrāz since it is developing as a tourist site and great city. Although people there still have a traditional desire to learn Islāmic Studies, they might be looking for a more practical way of learning now.



Author with girl students of an English Conversation School at Shīrāz (Photo: Noriko Morimoto)

#### **2-4. Tehrān**

In Tehrān, I visited two brand-new tourist sites. The first one was the Tabī‘at Bridge which is a pedestrian bridge designed by an female Iranian architect.<sup>5</sup> The bridge itself is a tourist site and is crowded with people enjoying walking every evening. The second one was the Bām Land which is a large commercial facility with brand stores popular in the Middle East and many restaurants and cafes, and people can enjoy listening to a band playing on the extensive premises. Located near the Chītgar artificial lake, the Bām Land is worth visiting if only to see a beautiful view and is indeed a picnic spot for many families. This 22<sup>nd</sup> district of Tehrān is far from the center of the city, but several high-rise apartments have already been built around the lake. A large new shopping mall is going to be built and it is said the district is a popular residential area as the real estate prices are rising.

Tehrān Metro has been sequentially extended and has become an important means of transportation for Tehrān citizens. Taxi services are used less often than before and, even when taking a taxi is necessary, the use of taxi dispatch apps known as Snapp has become common. Snapp is Uber-like service in Iran. The service is provided not only in Persian but also in English, which enables even foreigners living in Tehrān to use it. Previously in some cases, they were charged a higher fare with a telephone taxi called āzhāns. Why has the Snapp service become rooted in Iranian society? Probably, for one thing, it might be due to the spread of smartphones. For another thing, it might be because not only foreigners but also Iranians have felt the use of āzhāns to be inconvenient. However, the popularity of Snapp is also the flip side of the harsh situation of āzhāns' drivers. Previously,

jobless and underpaid workers had been able to earn their living by engaging in the āzhāns service. Most Snapp drivers are youths who possess IT skills including smartphone apps and SNS. How then will the surplus workforce pushed out of the taxi driver labor market be absorbed?

## **2-5. Consideration**

In the Iranian presidential election of May 2017, Rowḥānī was re-elected for a second term as president by a majority of votes. However, in March 2018 when I visited the country, the president was plagued with domestic and external problems. Rowḥānī's great achievement in the first term was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) known as the Iran nuclear deal signed in 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany). After that, however, the US Congress voted for a ten-year extension of the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) in December 2016, which in turn discouraged the Iranian people who had hoped for the lifting of sanctions on their country and the ensuing economic reconstruction. Also conservative hardliners, the majority in the Iranian Parliament, severely criticized the government of Rowḥānī, a moderate conservative. In addition, Rowḥānī failed to fulfill his 2017 campaign promise to create four million jobs as an unemployment measure.<sup>6</sup> Further, in June 2017, there were terrorist attacks, purported to be linked to IS, against the Iranian Parliament and the mausoleum of Imām Khomeinī. From the beginning of 2018, a protest demonstrations by people who were angered by the price hikes of essential commodities in Iran's northeastern religious city of Mashhad developed into anti-government rallies throughout the country.<sup>7</sup>

Initially, when the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011, Iran did not announce its military involvement, but now photos of the Iranian war dead who were involved in this neighbor's civil war are listed as "martyrs" across the country. The situation of Iran's involvement in the Yemen Civil War since 2015 is unpredictable unless the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia improve. Some of the people I met on this tour clearly said, "The government should stop the deterioration of domestic economic conditions, and our country can no longer afford to spend money to support Syria and Palestine."

Since the birth of the Trump administration, US withdrawal from the JCPOA and Israel's increasing pressure on Iran have followed, and Iran's relationship with the West, which seemed to be able to find a clue for improvement, has also become unpredictable.

Iran has enthusiastically pursued “the export of the Islāmic revolution,” but surprisingly it has not been very aggressive as a missionary because Iran believes that it should not force non-Muslims to convert and that any non-Muslim is bound to believe in Islām in due course if it is that person’s destiny. That is why, at the moment, the Free Friendly Talks area also seems to be a grassroots attempt to make foreigners familiar, if only a little, with the faith of the Twelve Imāms to make “friends” with Iran if it attracts more foreign tourists in seeking a Tourism-Oriented Country.

Iran aims to become a Tourism-Oriented Country even in the situation of international isolation (when I visited this time, there were crowds of Chinese tourists). It also seeks to revitalize the lives of the people by making commercial facilities that are as good as overseas facilities even under severe economic conditions. Such trial and error efforts will lead to some changes in the field of tourism, arts and relevant business activities.

Iran has abundant historical sites and architecture as well as being a land with diverse natural landscapes. Iranians are tremendously hospitable with a great spirit of service. Iran has attractive tourism resources including magnificent traditional crafts such as carpets. Thirty years have passed since the Iran-Iraq war, which exhausted the country, and Iran may finally be able to afford to push for efforts other than "the export of the Islāmic revolution."

### **3. Part II: From Tabriz to Mākū to Jolfā to Tehrān**

#### **3-1. Minorities in Iran**

Christians are a minority in Iran which advocates the Islāmic Republic. According to the statistics of 2016, Iran’s total population is 79.92 million, with 0.3% of the total population (about 0.13 million) identifying as Christians.<sup>8</sup> Although the official number of Armenians has not been announced,<sup>9</sup> it is generally said the Armenian Church, officially called the Armenian Apostolic Church, is the mainstream of Christianity in Iran. The word "Apostolic" is inserted in the name of the Church from the legend that the apostles Taddeus and Bartholomew directly evangelised this land.<sup>10</sup> In 301, Gregory the Illuminator baptized Tiridates III, the king of Armenia, who in turn proclaimed Christianity as the state religion of Armenia, and appointed Gregory as the patron saint of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Armenians lived in areas (the historical territory of Armenia) that were

under the influence of the Kingdom of Armenia before Islāmization. Today the area is around Khōy, Jolfā and Orūmīyeh in the Northwest of Iran.

The classification of minorities in Iran is not based only on religion, but also on language and ethnicity. Āzarī Turkish is the largest linguistic minority in Iran.<sup>11</sup> Āzarī is used as an antonym of Fārsī, which is said to account for more than half of Iran's total population. The word “Fārsī” refers to Fārsī language or Fārsī people. Regionally, in the East and West Azerbaijan provinces near the border with the Republic of Azerbaijan, the majority of people speak Āzarī language, while in major cities including Tehrān, Fārsī speakers and Āzarī speakers coexist. Kurdish, Luriish, Arabic and Balochi follow Āzarī.

### **3-2. Tabriz**

My first destination on the second route was Tabriz, about 600 kilometers away from Tehrān. Today it is the capital of the East Azerbaijan province and the center of Āzarī.<sup>12</sup> The Organization of Islāmīc Conference (OIC) selected Tabriz as the Capital of Islāmīc Countries Tourism for 2018.<sup>13</sup> In commemoration of this, Tabriz has posted advertisements, issued new brochures of the city and its tourist attractions, and offered airport taxi services with brand new Toyota vehicles.

With Nowruz approaching, the Bazaar of Tabriz, one of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, was vibrant. In this town where the Āzarī speakers make up an absolute majority, even when talking in Fārsī, I did not feel as uncomfortable as when I came here before.

### **3-3. Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran**

As I got on a long distance bus from Tabriz towards the northwest, I looked out of the window and saw a green land spreading out, very different from the dry land of the Iranian Plateau. The bus I rode entered the West Azerbaijan province and arrived in a small town named Mākū, which is close to the border with Turkey. The local inhabitants are part of the Āzarī community, but are very kind to foreigners who sometimes visit there. While stopping over at the Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran, I was able to find a driver who agreed to drive me along the 200-kilometer road to Jolfā on the banks of the Aras River.

The banks of the Aras River are now a peaceful border. On the side of the Republic of Azerbaijan across the river, a flock of sheep grazing in a meadow came into view. It was a peaceful landscape.

The Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran, registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, consist of St. Thaddeus Monastery,<sup>14</sup> the Chapel of Dzordzor and St. Stepanos Monastery. These three churches are under the control of the Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) and some of the staff, hired by ICHTO, guided me. The Muslim staff seemed suspicious of how much these pagan monuments, still sparsely visited by tourists, were worth visiting. I remembered the same situation twenty five years ago when I first visited Persepolis. So it can be expected that this place will be crowded with tourists in a few years time as well.



Left: The Aras River (some houses can be seen in the Azerbaijan Republic across the river)

Right: The Chapel of Dzordzor built on the bank of the dam lake.

### **3-4. Jolfā**

Armenians came to live in Eşfahān as they were forced to emigrate from Jolfā under the order of Shāh Abbās I (1571-1629) of Safaviyān Dynasty (1501-1736) in 1605.<sup>15</sup> Jolfā was an Armenian craftsmen's town and a merchants' trading hub at that time.

Today Jolfā, bordering with the Republic of Azerbaijan, forms the Aras Free Zone with its neighboring town Kalībar. Jolfā is an intermediate trading hub where many stores buy and sell European and Russian products shipped via the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey. I was told that many Turkish merchants come here to purchase inexpensive Iranian fruits and rice.

### **3-5. Tehrān Again**

Actually, the second part of my tour also started from Tehrān. Around St. Sarkīs Cathedral,

located in central Tehrān, there are many stores managed by Armenians and several areas called “Armenian districts” where Armenians manage stores dealing in stationary, sundry goods, clothes and so on, as well as café shops serving coffee that Armenians usually drink (on the other hand, Iranian Muslims usually drink tea) and selling coffee beans. These Armenian stores are also popular among younger Muslims because such stores deal in a variety of foreign-made products that are not found in Grand Bazaar in Tehrān, which functions as a wholesaler for mercantile stores in Tehrān and neighboring towns.

The day after I entered Iran, I visited St. Joseph Assyrian Chaldean Catholic Church in the vicinity. The bishop who had previously greeted visitors from Doshisha University willingly agreed to my request to attend the Sunday worship service. Since Friday is the weekly holiday in Iran, there are only a few church members who can participate in the service held on Sunday morning. Instead, foreign students and tourists took part in it. On that day, the bishop translated some of the sermons into English for us. He issued a strong message as follows: In these painful days, you should still practice self-sacrifice; and then you must pursue peace and the will of God. After the service, I was invited to tea in the basement salon, which can accommodate at least 100 people and even a wedding ceremony can be held there. At the tea gathering, I was informed that there is a church that holds a service once a month in the Grand Bazaar.

Having finished my whole tour, I visited Tehrān again and managed to arrive at the Armenian Church (St. Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew Cathedral) “inside the Bazaar” on the day of worship which is the first Friday of the month. A fluent English-speaking Armenian woman greeted me. This small church was built by the Armenian Merchants community in 1808. It is generally said that their ancestors were artisanal glassworkers in the Jolfā district of Eṣfahān but during the Fath-Ali Shah Qajar period (1797-1834) they were brought to the capital Tehrān to make the stained glass decorating the Golestān Royal Palace. This church was at the same time a burial place for Christians who died and were buried in Tehrān in the days when almost no Christians were there. Russian and British names are etched on gravestones. After showing me the tombstones, she pointed to a thick rope in the garden and told me that the rope was left by a thief (or thieves) who sneaked into this church the other day. I suppose the thief (or thieves) must have thought that they could easily steal from a church that is used only once a month. Although there is a Grand Bazaar in the vicinity of the church, it is a popular district with shops selling items such as clothes and food for residents and their dwelling houses are mixed, so it is hard to say

that security is good.

It might be a fact that Christians as a minority are in restricted positions in this country. However, at the same time, they are certainly living steadfastly even under such circumstances. If it is Christianity that maintains their way of life, this also may be a form of Christianity.

A bishop comes to St. Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew Cathedral to pray with everyone. This service has been maintained to remind people of the Armenian foundation in Tehrān and of Christians who passed away as Gentiles. Therefore, it seems to me that this service will continue even if access to this little church becomes more difficult.

---

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The population of Eşfahān is approximately 1.54 million, third only to Tehrān and Mashhad.
- <sup>2</sup> Every year during the holiday period of Nowruz, Eşfahān is inundated with tourists from all over Iran. According to Mehr Press dated April 1, 2018, in spite of Eşfahān citizens' wishful thinking, water was not released even during the Nowruz period (usually two weeks from March 21).  
(<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4261347/%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%DB%B1%DB%B0-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%81%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AE%D8%B4%DA%A9%DB%8C-%D8%B2%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF>)
- <sup>3</sup> It is said that October 29 is the day that Cyrus the Great, the first king of the Achaemenid Empire, entered Babylon in 539 BC. Recently, that day has become informally known in Iran as “Cyrus’s Day” (rūz-e kūrūsh). On Cyrus’s day on October 29, 2016, many Iranians rallied in Pāsārgād through SNS. They chanted “Cyrus is our father, Iran is our country.” That’s not very Islāmic. The BBC covered the video postings taken by participants in this rally (<http://www.bbc.com/persian/interactivity-37805667>). In Iran, where large gatherings are restricted, the local authorities warned people not to gather at Pāsārgād on October 29, 2017. According to news reports, Pāsārgād was closed by public security vehicles on that day. (<http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-41782490>).
- <sup>4</sup> Ibn Baṭūṭah, edited by Ibn Juzayy, Japanese translated by Hikoichi Yajima, *Dairyokoki 2*; Heibonsha, 1997, p. 319. Ibn Baṭūṭah was a 14<sup>th</sup> century historian and traveler. After Ḥajj, or an Islāmic pilgrimage to Macca, he visited Fārs via Iraq and described the dynamic state of Eşfahān and Shīrāz in those days. Having observed that one or two thousand women met in the mosque three days a week to listen to the preacher in Shīrāz, he wrote that the women “have a strange custom.” And he continued, “I have never seen in any land so great an assembly of women.”
- <sup>5</sup> Designed by Leilā Araghīān. This stylish pedestrian bridge has a complex curving form of the three-dimensional truss with multiple overlapped metal pipes, and is popular for lighting up at night.
- <sup>6</sup> Iran’s unemployment rate in autumn 2017 stood at 11.9% and rose to 12.1% in winter 2017. A Selection of Labor Force Survey Results- Winter, the Year 1396 (22 December 2017-20 March 2018), 2018, Tehrān, Statistical Centre of Iran, p.5.  
([https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/1/releases/LFS\\_Winter\\_1396.pdf](https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/1/releases/LFS_Winter_1396.pdf))

- 
- <sup>7</sup> *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2018  
([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/03/tens-of-thousands-of-people-protested-in-iran-this-week-heres-why/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.a440f3010d0a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/03/tens-of-thousands-of-people-protested-in-iran-this-week-heres-why/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a440f3010d0a)).  
It was reported, however, these rallies calmed down at the beginning of the year.  
(<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/03/asia/iran-protests-government-intl/index.html>)
- <sup>8</sup> *Selected Findings of the 2016 National Population and Housing, Census*, Statistical Center of Iran, 2018, Tehrān, pp. 20-21.  
([https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/1/census/2016/Census\\_2016\\_Selected\\_Findings.pdf](https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/1/census/2016/Census_2016_Selected_Findings.pdf))
- <sup>9</sup> <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/iran-population/>.
- <sup>10</sup> According to the Armenian Apostolic Church, both Apostles converted many people and then were martyred in this place. (<https://www.armenianchurch.org/index.jsp?&lng=en>)
- <sup>11</sup> It is also said that Āzarī accounts for 16 percent of Iran's total population.  
(<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-groups-in-iran.html>)
- <sup>12</sup> The Archaeological finds confirmed that Tabriz had residents from B.C. and had been the capital of the Ilkhanate Dynasty (1256-1336) for a certain period since 1265. After that, Tabriz was the capital of the Qarā Quyūnlū Federation or the Black Sheep Turkomans (1375-1468) and the Āq Quyūnlū Dynasty or the White Sheep Turkomans (1468-1501), and also the capital of the Safaviyān Dynasty from 1501 to 1555.
- <sup>13</sup> “Resolution on Tourism Development Among the OIC Member States adopted by The 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islāmīc Conference of Tourist Ministers (ICTM)”, Republic of Niger, 2015.  
([https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p\\_id=71&p\\_ref=40&lan=en](https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=71&p_ref=40&lan=en))  
The Capital of Islāmīc Countries Tourism is a city where the environment has been improved in consideration of ḥalāl meals, places of worship and time, and so on, so that Muslim tourists can be accommodated comfortably at their travel destinations.
- <sup>14</sup> St. Thaddeus Monastery is revitalized once a year as an Armenians’ pilgrimage site but only for several days in summer.
- <sup>15</sup> At this point, the district where Armenians had emigrated became the Jolfā district in Eşfahān. The advanced technique of Jolfā at that time is illustrated in an exhibition at the Vānk Church of Eşfahān. The Vānk Church is still maintained by Armenians, and one of the few Christian buildings in Iran where religious evangelism to Muslim is strictly forbidden; it is where citizens can easily feel free to visit and learn about the history and culture of the heathen. Jolfā, which means a weaving man, is located approximately 135 kilometers northwest of Tabriz. The Aras River flows in the north of the town, which is the border with Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and Republic of Armenia.