

Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom

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03.05.2024, 19:07

TEHERAN

TEHERAN, VALIASR ST,
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Exposures

Tehran is the capital and largest city of Iran. It is also the capital city of the Ayatollah's state. This is where Poles found shelter when they left "the inhuman land".

Moreover, Tehran was the venue for the first conference of the leaders of the anti-Hitler coalition powers during World War II in 1943 - W. Churchill (Great Britain), F.D. Roosevelt (USA) and J. Stalin (USSR). It was here that the first decisions were made concerning the post-war order in Europe and in the world, and where the initial agreement on the borders of Poland was reached (it was decided that the so-called Curzon Line would be the basis of its eastern border, and the course of the Oder River its western border).

The ties between Poland and Iran date back to the late 15th century. One trace left of these contacts is the tomb of an envoy of the Polish king to the Persian Shah, located in Isfahan. Persia was one of the two countries that refused to agree to the partition of the Polish state (the other was the Ottoman Empire). After Poland regained its independence in 1918, Persia recognised its rebirth and the two countries slowly began to rebuild their mutual ties. They established diplomatic relations and then signed a treaty of friendship and a trade agreement. After the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union in 1941, Polish diplomatic missions in Iran were not closed, but were allowed to operate, despite the fact that Poland was under occupation. Moreover, in 1941, German troops reached the North Caucasus, which could have led to the seizure of control over Iranian oil resources. This forced both Great Britain and the Soviet Union to carry out a military intervention in Iran. After that, the anti-German alliance decided that it was necessary to create a new front in Asia. The Polish Army created in the USSR was to form the core of this front.

From 24 March to 4 April 1942, about 43,850 people, including more than 33,000 soldiers from three infantry divisions, were evacuated to Iran through the port of Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea. The troops were accompanied by thousands of civilians, including children, who were physically and mentally exhausted after being deported to "the inhuman land". For many of them, this was the only chance of survival. The second wave of evacuations took place in August of the same year. The port of Pahlavi in Iran became the destination of about 70 thousand soldiers and civilians who in 1944 were to form the core of the 2nd Polish Corps commanded by General Anders. In total, almost 120 thousand Polish citizens arrived in Iran. Some of them stayed there until the end of the war.

Polish was frequently heard on the streets of Tehran. Polish refugees opened shops, cafés and restaurants and worked at American and British bases. Polish scholars, especially professors from the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius, constituted a significant group among the survivors. It was they who, while staying

in refugee camps, took up the idea of creating a scientific institution in Tehran that would enable them to resume their scientific research. The Society for Iranian Studies (Polish: *Towarzystwo Studiów Irańskich*, TSIR), which was established in the Persian capital thanks to the support of the Diplomatic Mission of the Polish Republic and the Delegation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, commenced its formal activities in November 1942. The chair of the Society's Scientific Council, as well as its Board, was Prof. Stanisław Kościałkowski (1881-1960), a historian and professor of the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius. After the annexation of Lithuania by the USSR (on 3 August 1940), he was arrested by the NKVD and deported to a forced-labour camp in the northern Urals. The outbreak of the German-Soviet War and the Sikorski-Mayski agreement enabled him to evacuate with the Anders Army to Iran, where he engaged in cultural and educational work among the Polish exiles and the Persian population together with other scholars.

In Tehran, there is also a Polish cemetery which serves as the resting place of Polish exiles from the USSR, General Władysław Anders' soldiers, and civilians, including children. About 2,000 people, including 409 military men, are buried there. They mainly died of general exhaustion and diseases they contracted as a result of living in catastrophic conditions in the Soviet Union. In total, more than 3,500 Poles, including 611 military men, died during the war in the territory of Iran. The largest Polish cemeteries (apart from Tehran) are located in Pahlavi, Isfahan and Qazvin.

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Stanisław Maczek (1892-1994)

Commander of the 1st Armored Division.

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