

## *The Story of the Foundation*

### **LOCATION**

To the first European traveler to have visited Shiraz and written down his impressions - in 1579 - the town must have seemed like a mighty remote place, to be reached only after weeks of caravan travel overland from the Mediterranean. Today it is almost next door - two nights by plane from New York to Tehran and then a pleasant three hours flight down south to Shiraz. Circling for the landing, the passengers see the compact older town pierced by newer avenues, and glimpses of sunlight on faience-coated domes. Within the town of some 130,000 people there is an air of bustle and activity: signs of progress abound. Here is no somnolent, ancient site with people living on dreams of past renown, but a place where its citizens are busily shaping its future.

Many hundreds of years ago this same town marked this same site. Long a market center for the agricultural villages and a source of supplies for the nomadic tribes of the area, Shiraz has been the seat of a number of local kingdoms. Indeed, the "Shiraz Story" composed in the fourteenth century describes the splendor of the town under an energetic local dynasty. However, throughout the past centuries its chief claim to fame came from its poets: from Saadi of the thirteenth century and Hafiz who was active in the fourteenth. Both loved their native town, but Hafiz in particular sang of spring, of the rose, of the nightingale and of wine, and crystallized that image of the Shiraz garden and its delights which has so enchanted all later generations - both Persian and Western.

Today a handful of these grand old gardens still remain - proud of such names as Paradise, Heart's Ease, the Throne, and Image of the World - although as the town continues to expand most will be divided up and then vanish forever. The constant care of the garden-tombs of Hafiz and Saadi is a beloved charge which the poetry loving Shirazis will never neglect. Indeed, the local addiction to the recitation and impromptu composition of poetry is something that must be heard to be believed.

At the present time the older sections of town bear the stamp of Karim Khan, the local ruler of the second half of the eighteenth century, who embellished the capital with palaces, garden pavilions, mosques and a splendid covered bazaar. However, within recent years the demands of modernization have burst through the confines of the ancient, narrow streets and the close-packed houses. While this opening up of the town did begin a number of years earlier, it is now displaying a more definite form, with the construction of many buildings devoted to public welfare and private business. The citizens show their pride in their town in a constructive fashion: one provides funds to replace an ancient gateway over the main road, another builds an elementary school, and still another gives money to repair a mosque which was first constructed a thousand years ago.

### **CONCEPT OF THE FOUNDATION**

This same private concern for public welfare is the motivating force behind the Iran Foundation, Incorporated, for Advancement of Health and Education in Iran, incorporated in

