

Sacred Space and Holy War

The Politics, Culture and History of
Shi`ite Islam

Juan Cole

I.B.Tauris *Publishers*
LONDON • NEW YORK

Contents

1. Introduction	1
-----------------	---

Early Modern Arab Shi`ites and Iran

2. The Shi`ites as an Ottoman Minority	16
3. Rival Empires of Trade and Shi`ism in Eastern Arabia	31
4. Jurisprudence: The Akhbari-USuli Struggle	58
5. Indian Money and the Shi`ite Shrine Cities	78
6. Mafia, Mob and Shi`ism in Iraq (co-author: Moojan Momen)	99

India and the British Empire

7. The Shi`ite Discovery of the West	123
8. Women and the Making of Shi`ism	138
9. Sacred Space and Holy War: The Issue of Jihad	161

The Twentieth Century

10. Shi`ites as National Minorities	173
11. The Modernity of Theocracy	189

Notes	212
Suggestions for Further Reading	248
Index	251

Introduction

The rise of nation-states during the past two centuries has had a profound effect on the writing of history, which has increasingly been tied to artificial “national” frameworks. Stories that cannot be fit into the narrative of the rise of the nation have often been neglected by contemporary historians. Worse, some movements with an international aspect have been reconfigured as national or written about mainly as an element in the formation of particular nations. Thus, most writing about the Twelver branch of Shi`ite Islam after about 1500, when it became the official religion of Iran, has focused on Iranian Shi`ism. The history of Shi`ite minorities in Eastern Arabia, and in what is now Pakistan and Lebanon, was relatively neglected by historians until recently, and of all non-Iranian Twelver communities only those of India and Iraq have been treated at length in contemporary English-language scholarship (and this only during the past decade and a half). Yet, recovering the history of this important branch of Islam in these particular nations is only part of the task that historians must set themselves. Looking at Shi`ite Islam (and other major Islamic movements) outside the box of a national framework, at its international networks and the profound interactions they entail, is among the prime tasks of historians of religion. One historian has spoken of rescuing Chinese history from the nation.¹ I propose that we need to rescue Shi`ite Islam from the nation. Accordingly, this book has no national focus. It is concerned with intellectual and social developments among Arabic-speaking, Persian-speaking, and Urdu-speaking Shi`ites. It examines three arenas of Shi`ite activity, the Arab world, Iran and South Asia (India and later Pakistan) synoptically. That is, I try to keep the interactions between the three consistently in view. One of my readers once spoke of the “vertigo” induced by my alternation between Najaf in what is now Iraq and Lucknow in India, between Manama in Bahrain and Shiraz in Iran. I would argue in reply that this vertigo is a feeling induced by our habit of thinking within “national” categories, categories that are anachronistic if imported into the Middle East and South Asia before the

twentieth century, and which obscure important developments even later on.

The interaction of early modern and modern Iranian Shi`ism with its neighbors and even further afield has been much greater than is usually recognized. It was a commonplace of an earlier generation of historians that when Iran's rulers promulgated the Shi`ite branch of Islam in the sixteenth century, it threw up a barrier to communication and trade between the Sunni east and west of the Islamic world. This thesis has the disadvantage of being untrue. It has the additional disadvantage of obscuring the ways in which Iran - throughout the Safavid (1501-1722), Qajar (1785-1925), Pahlevi (1926-1979) and Khomeinist eras - has continued to export and influence religious movements far beyond its borders. Shi`ite Iran was not a bulkhead but a fluid field of interaction, subject to outside influences but also sending tributaries abroad. Iranian Shi`ism exercised a profound influence in these centuries on many regions of the Arab East, South Asia, and Central Asia. This book looks at developments from 1500 to the present, though most chapters deal with the less-studied period before the twentieth century, and with the relatively little-studied Indian and Arab communities and their interactions with Iranian currents. What were the dynamics that allowed newly Shi`ite Iran under the Safavids to exercise religious influence over Iran's neighbors? What were the international implications of the turmoil in Iran of the eighteenth century, and then the restoration of state support for Shi`ism under the Qajars? What was the impact on the religion of the age of colonialism from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries? How did the "high modernist" state-building project of the Pahlevis affect the "Shi`ite International?" Finally, how have political Shi`ism and the Khomeinist revolution affected other Shi`ite communities? How did the state structures, political economies and communications networks of each of these eras affect the influences Iranians could bring to bear?

I want to underline that I do not see adherence to Shi`ism as a primordial identity, but rather as a socially constructed one into which individuals are mobilized in every generation or which they adopt for their own reasons. Shi`ites born into the faith have converted out of it to Sunnism, Christianity, the Baha'i faith, secularism, and Marxism. Converts hailing from Sunnism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity have adopted it. Observers once tended to see Twelver Shi`ism as a stagnant tradition mired in rigidity, but the surprise of the new academic literature on it is that Shi`ism has arguably been growing significantly not only in the past five hundred years but in the past two hundred. The Shi`ite majority of Iraq (where they are estimated to be 55 percent of the population) results in large part from the conversion of Arab tribes in the south to this branch of Islam in the course of the nineteenth century. The

Punjabi Shi`ites of Pakistan probably also in the main derive from a conversion movement of the nineteenth century, from the Suhrawardi Sufi order to Twelver Shi`ism. Because of demographic movements rather than conversion, Twelver Shi`ites are now a plurality (probably 40 percent or so) of the population of Lebanon, whereas in the nineteenth century they may have accounted for as little as six percent of the population of Mount Lebanon. Nor does Shi`ite Islam have a single essential essence. It is a diverse tradition. As a religion, it has been very different when practiced in pre-modern, semi-feudal societies, in capitalist dictatorships or democracies, and in the current Iranian theocracy. In every generation, the choice has had to be made, of whether to be Shi`ite and of what that might mean. The interaction of the Iranian community with its neighbors has been an important dynamic in those choices.

Who have the Shi`ites been in history? The split in Islam between Shi`ites and others goes back to the crisis of succession that followed the Prophet Muhammad's death. The partisans (*shi`a*) of the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin, `Ali ibn Abi Talib, supported his accession to power. A permanent constituency grew up for `Ali and his descendants, the House of the Prophet, which sought to transform hereditary charisma into political power. The Twelver line ended in exoteric history with Hasan al-`Askari, alleged to have a young son (Muhammad al-Mahdi) who disappeared into a supernatural realm and would return eventually to fill the world with justice. The Twelver branch afterwards developed as a scripturalist religion with ulama that often studied with Sunni scholars and used similar techniques to elucidate texts. The rest of the Muslims, rejecting the hereditary claims of the `Alid lines, recognized the prior rights of four early elected caliphs (only the last being `Ali himself), and then acknowledged the subsequent sultan-caliphs. Twelvers remained a minority most places, though various sects of Shi`ism gathered great numerical strength in medieval Syria, southern Iraq, and eastern Arabia, as well as some towns in Iran. In the eleventh century Isma`ili Shi`ites ruled Fatimid Egypt and Twelver Buyids ruled Iran and Iraq. But this interlude of Shi`ite power ended with the Turkish Saljuq invasions and the victory of the Sunni Ayyubids over the Crusaders and Fatimids.

The establishment of the Safavid dynasty in Iran from 1501 and the conversion of a majority of those who lived on the Iranian plateau to Twelver Shi`ism over the succeeding two centuries constituted among the more important religious developments in early modern Islam. The world historian William McNeill compared this development to the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Safavid Iran was a large country, more than three times the size of modern France, but it had a tiny population, at probably 5 million or so, compared to most of its powerful neighbors. Iran was nevertheless a relatively wealthy and influential state, able to fend off the

Ottomans, the Uzbeks, and the Mughals and even sometimes to grow at their expense. Its tribal army, made up of Turkmen cavalrymen who worshipped the Shi`ite Imams and wore red headgear (thus acquiring the name Qizilbash or redheads) was later supplemented by Georgian slave soldiers. Its lucrative silk trade, along with a powerful military, lent it importance in world affairs. Along with tribal armies and silk, however, its other most important impact was religious. Iran, like most of the Muslim world, had been a majority Sunni society until the Safavids made Shi`ism the state religion and promoted it for most of the succeeding two centuries.

If we think of Shi`ite Iran as like the body of a bird and the Shi`ite communities of India as its right wing, those of the Arab East constitute its left. The Safavid revolution had an immediate impact on the older, Arabic-speaking Twelver communities. However, this impact was probably not as politically or intellectually deep as in India, because of the dominance in the Arabic-speaking regions of the Sunni Ottoman empire and because Persian learning was less central to Arab Shi`ite identity than to Indian.

The isles of Bahrain escaped Ottoman domination, and their many Shi`ites were instead affected by the rise of Iranian Shi`ism. The Shi`ites of Bahrain were under Portuguese rule 1521-1602, and then fell to the Safavids until 1717. It is my thesis that Ismailis predominated there from Carmathian times (the ninth and tenth centuries of the Common Era), but that after the Safavid revolution they gradually became Twelvers, in part because their intellectuals tended to study in Iran or in Iran-influenced centers of learning in what is now Iraq. The more than a century of direct Safavid rule strongly molded local clerical institutions and thought. After 1717, however, Bahrainis were ruled first by Oman, and then by the Sunni local Al-Khalifa dynasty, suffering subordination and occasional persecution at the hands of a Sunni dynasty. Iranian influence on Bahrain was further limited because that island adhered from the eighteenth century to the conservative Akhbari School of jurisprudence, whereas in Iran the Usuli school largely won out by the early nineteenth century.

The Ottoman-ruled Arabophone Shi`ite communities included the Twelvers of Jabal `Amil near Tyre and Sidon, of Baghdad and Basra in what is now Iraq, and of al-Hasa further down the Persian Gulf littoral. The Ottomans made a major distinction among Twelvers, reserving harshest treatment for those who adhered to the esoteric sect of Safavid followers known as Qizilbash. Clearly, they feared the Qizilbash Twelvers more for their political support of the Safavid leaders than for their doctrines, and their jurists declared them apostates who should be killed and against whom holy war was necessary. The Ottoman-Safavid international political struggle often had unfortunate repercussions for

Arab Twelvers, whom the Ottomans feared as a pro-Safavid fifth column behind their own lines. The very aggressiveness of Safavid Shi`ism toward Sunnis caused a backlash against Arab minorities.

Twelvers suffered disadvantages in Iraq, which the Ottomans took from the Iranians in 1534 and held thereafter, with a hiatus of Safavid reconquest 1623-1638. This region constituted a frontline in the two powers' tug of war, and the loyalties of the Twelvers in Baghdad, the shrine cities, and Basra were always suspect. Once they had conquered territories beyond Basra on the coast of the Persian Gulf, the Ottomans treated the Shi`ites in the area known as al-Hasa (eastern Arabia) harshly. The Twelvers who lived in what is now Lebanon were not the objects of as much Ottoman suspicion, probably because they were far from the border with Shi`ite Iran, and some of their clans were incorporated into the Ottoman military and administrative apparatus.

The eighteenth century was a disastrous one for Twelver Shi`ism. Sunni Afghan tribal cavalries overthrew the Shi`ite Safavids in 1722, initiated a long period of political chaos in Iran and of Sunni rule or of the rule of chieftains not particularly sympathetic to the Shi`ite clergy. In the first six decades of the century the conservative, literalist Akhbari school of jurisprudence appears to have become dominant in many Shi`ite centers, especially outside Iran. But in the last quarter of the eighteenth century the more scholastic, clericalist Usuli school witnessed a resurgence in the shrine cities near Baghdad, allowing its partisans to train the next generation of Shi`ite clergymen in Iran and even places like India, and ensuring its eventual victory nearly everywhere save Bahrain.

This development was important because the Usuli school gives a special place to the clergy, valuing their scholastic reasoning in the law, and insisting that all lay believers follow and emulate their rulings and example. The Ottoman Shi`ites probably benefited from the political decentralization that the empire underwent in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, allowing local Shi`ite Arab notable families more space to maneuver. But the Tanzimat ("reorganization") reforms that began in 1826 led to a gradual tightening of the Ottoman grip. Thus, the province of Baghdad was restored to direct Ottoman rule in the early 1830s, and in the 1840s strong measures were taken to end the semi-autonomy of the Shi`ite shrine cities.

Let us now turn to developments in India. The rise of a Shi`ite dynasty in Iran coincided with the establishment of several new Muslim dynasties in India, the rulers of which looked to Iran as the model for imperial style in the sixteenth century. Iran's preeminence in this regard had several roots. First, Persian was widely viewed in the early modern Muslim world anywhere east of the Tigris as the ideal court language, and was preferred for this purpose even by Turkic-speaking monarchs in Central

and South Asia. Iran was often called “*vilayat*,” literally “authority,” but here apparently in the sense of “the metropole,” among South Asian Muslims. The Safavids thus assumed not only the throne of Iran but also the position of role models for other dynasties. Of course, the Uzbeks, the Mughals, and the Ottomans committed themselves to Sunni Islam, but most were generally rooted in claims legitimacy having to do with Turco-Mongol descent and they based their power on a Sunni Turkic tribal cavalry. Other rulers, lacking this strong source of legitimacy, were more open to establishing it by modeling themselves loosely on the Safavid court, even to the extent of adopting Shi`ism. Further, Shi`ite Iranian émigrés at regional courts often played a key role, both in founding new dynasties in South Asia and in encouraging the conversion of newly-established regional rulers. In this regard, the trade routes between Iran and India became an important conduit of religious ideas, bringing the latter along with silk, grain, horses, raisins and wine from Shiraz and Bandar Abbas to Indian cities such as Surat, Bijapur, Golconda and Hooghli. The early modern states in South Asia that emulated Iran’s Safavid court tended to be in the non-Mughal South, and included Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golconda. These were gradually incorporated into the Sunni Mughal empire in the course of the seventeenth century, however.

During the eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire radically decentralized, relinquishing power from the capital of Delhi to its major provinces, which emerged as royal courts in their own right. The western Deccan and central India fell to the Hindu Marathas, the eastern Deccan was devolved on the Sunni Nizam of Hyderabad, Punjab fell to the Sikhs, Kabul and Peshawar to the Sunni Durrani dynasty. Bengal, Sindh and Awadh each developed local Shi`ite dynasties that began as regional Mughal governorships. Especially after about 1725, these regional courts increasingly became post-Mughal successor states. Shi`ism in Bengal flourished in the eighteenth century, with the state providing ample government patronage for Shi`ite practices and institutions such as seminaries. Many Iranians immigrated to the nawabate, as merchants and Muslim learned men. Shi`ism lost this privileged position, however, when the British conquered the province in 1757.

The most important and long-lived Shi`ite successor state to the Mughals was Awadh (which the British called Oudh), ruled by the Nishapuri dynasty 1722-1856. It is the scene for a number of the chapters in this book. Situated between Bengal and Delhi at the foot of the Nepalese Himalayas, it was founded by Mir Muhammad Amin Nishapuri (d. 1739), known as Burhan al-Mulk, the first nawab of Awadh. He came to the Mughal Empire from eastern Iran in 1708 and rose rapidly in government service. He became governor of Awadh in 1722, and quickly

formed an alliance with local Sunni townsmen and rural Hindu rajas, the local intermediate elites. He resisted the Mughal emperor's one attempt to transfer him to another province, which was a sign of the increasing autonomy of the province, and he later collaborated with the Iranian invader Nadir Shah, who rewarded him by conferring Awadh on him and his descendants as a hereditary nawabate. He also left behind a substantial contingent of Shi'ite Qizilbash cavalymen, who joined the Awadh military. The nawabs gradually consolidated their hold on Awadh, and began in a minor way to build up local Shi'ite constituencies and institutions. Shi'ites never became more than a very small minority in the province. Some ninety percent of the population was Hindu, and only three percent of the Muslims were Shi'ites. Shi'ism as the royal religion, however, had a vastly disproportionate impact on politics and culture throughout the nineteenth century. Since Awadh at its height comprised a population of 10 million, moreover, the Shi'ites could have been as many as 300,000, a significant community in pre-modern times. In contrast, Iran's population in 1800 has been estimated at only 5 million, though some 80 to 90 percent of these were Shi'ites. What is now Iraq in 1800 probably only had a population of one million, and since this was before the large-scale conversions of the tribes, its Shi'ite community at that point may have been no bigger than that of Awadh.

Awadh was gradually surrounded by the British, being among the forces defeated at Baksar in Bihar by British forces in 1764. The indemnities and other payments levied by the British on Awadh forced it into debt to them. The British demanded the concession of some Awadh territory in the north later in the century, and then annexed over half the province in 1801 to pay for the claimed arrears in Awadh tribute. The rulers of the province were thus deprived of the opportunity for expansion, and instead lost substantial territory, after which they were surrounded by the British on three sides. It is not surprising that they should have invested their wealth in culture rather than in the military, and, of course, that culture had a strong Shi'ite coloration.

Thousands of immigrants came into Awadh from Iran over the decades, serving as physicians, bureaucrats, military men, poets, chroniclers, and clerics or ulama. They remained a small minority overall, but they were a noticeable component of the urban population. Persian could be heard spoken by some common people in the streets of the capital, Lucknow, in the late eighteenth century, as well as at court and among literary figures. Enormous numbers of Persian words entered local speech, contributing to the further development of Urdu, which began enjoying an important place in Awadh culture. Urdu was a mixture of what we would now call Hindi grammar with Arabic, Persian and Turkish vocabulary and idioms, spoken by both the Muslim and some

elements of the Hindu elite in much of the subcontinent. Ironically, the nawabs of Awadh, despite their Persian ancestry, became the foremost patrons of Urdu poets in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, leading to a flourishing of the language there. The Awadh court contributed significantly to the development of Urdu, which had begun supplanting Persian even in late Mughal Delhi. The foundational texts of Urdu literature often have a strongly Shi`ite tinge because they were written in Lucknow, and *marthiyya* or traditional elegies in commemoration of the martyred Shi`ite Imams constituted a major genre.

The Awadh nawabs supported the creation and growth of a Shi`ite clerical corps, made up both of local Shi`ite ulama and of immigrant Iranians. Indeed, a rather lively set of debates were conducted about whether the local clerics or the Iranians were better Shi`ites. Because of their knowledge of local court protocol and customs, the Indian Shi`ite ulama tended to become ensconced in positions of influence such as Friday prayer leader and seminary teacher, and to receive the patronage of the Shi`ite nawabs (later kings) of Awadh. Iranian clerics sometimes preferred to settle among Shi`ite communities ruled by the British, where they were free from the demands made on them by the Awadh state. The Awadh nawabs did respect the great Shi`ite jurists of the Iraqi shrine cities, and bestowed on them enormous amounts in patronage and put them in charge of large-scale philanthropic works such as canal building. The Shi`ites in Awadh remained a tiny minority of the population, and the religion functioned more as a symbol of royal distinctiveness and prerogatives than as a missionary faith aimed at converting the masses. The chroniclers do maintain, however, that in the 1840s hundreds of Hindus and thousands of Sunnis became Shi`ites. I show below that a distinctive set of South Asian Shi`ite practices grew up in Awadh that was significantly shaped by Muslim noblewomen, demonstrating the centrality of gender to the tradition, though this point is seldom recognized in the existing literature.

Increasing conflicts in the 1850s between Sunni revivalists and Hindus drew the Shi`ite state of Awadh into the fray, so that it put down the Sunni militants, partially at British insistence, in 1855. The conflict that developed in Ayodhya near Faizabad, over a Hindu temple to the monkey-god Hanuman that Sunnis maintained had once been a mosque that was usurped, bears an uncanny resemblance to that in precisely the same town in the early 1990s. In the contemporary struggle, Hindu revivalists insisted that the Baburi mosque had been built above the temple marking the birthplace of the god Rama, and in 1992 they tore down the mosque, initiating a wave of violence against Muslims. The trope of illicit squatting on sacred space appears to have long-term appeal

in North India, and to be an element in the imaginary of communal violence.

The Shi`ite establishment in Awadh was much reduced in power and influence in 1856 when the British annexed the province, after which the decline of Shi`ite patronage led to a great slackening if not a total halting of Iranian immigration into the area (unlike the situation in Bombay). Shi`ites in British India often went to Iran for seminary study or to master Persian poetry, and a small number of them could afford the pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams in Iraq, so that contacts between Iran and South Asian Shi`ites continued. They were not as extensive as before, however, and the gradual decline in knowledge of Persian among most Muslims in the century after the annexation further limited Iran's influence. The rise, first of Urdu, and then of Hindi-English medium schools after independence, along with the new projects of Indian and Pakistani nationalism, helped foster among South Asian Shi`ites a certain amount of independence and a turn inward to local traditions that was not interrupted in a major sort of way until the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79.

In chapter 10, I come back to consider the impact of twentieth-century developments on what Lebanese scholar Chibli Mallat called the "Shi`ite international," the international networks of Shi`ite activists coming out of local communities from Tyre in Lebanon to Lucknow in India.² The Pahlevi period in Iran, 1925-1979, is usually seen as a time of secularization in that country, and it is almost certainly true that the sort of patronage given by the Qajar court and courtiers to Shi`ite institutions abroad was much curtailed during these decades. Reza Shah, who crowned himself in 1926, gradually adopted Western commercial codes and established national educational institutions, pushing the Shi`ite clergy out of realms on which they had earlier exercised great influence. During the early 1950s, when clerics formed part of an alliance of nationalists, leftists and religious groups to support Prime Minister Mohammad Musaddiq, they regained some influence. When Musaddiq was overthrown by a CIA-backed coup in 1953 and the young Muhammad Reza Shah (r. 1941-1979) was put back on the throne, the Shi`ite activists fell into disfavor with the state. The shah castigated the Shi`ite clergy as "black reactionaries," and further weakened their power base with a number of measures, including land reform. The drying up of Iranian and Indian patronage and the turn to nationalism in Iraq led to a drastic decline in the wealth, power and numbers of the Shi`ite clergy teaching at Najaf and Karbala, and to a substantial reduction in the student body. Still, even during this unusual period of secular emphases, contacts among Shi`ite thinkers continued to be extensive. Even the Pahlevi did bestow some patronage on religious edifices, such as the shrine to Zaynab near Damascus or the Shi`ite mosque at Tyre. Some Iranian money

flowed to the Lebanese Shi`ite community through the good offices of Musa Sadr, an Iranian of Arab extraction who became the leader of the Lebanese community in the 1960s and 1970s. Talks continued between Iranian representatives and the Sunni clergy of al-Azhar on Muslim ecumenism and the possibilities for lessening or healing the Sunni-Shi`ite rift. The most important links among Shi`ites of various nationalities in the twentieth century, however, were not established on the governmental level. The intellectual impact of the Iraqi scholastic Baqir al-Sadr was enormous, and that of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became so after his exile from Iran to Turkey in 1964 and his subsequent resettlement in Iraq. Even if in reduced numbers, Shi`ites from all over the world still did come to the Iraqi shrine cities for a seminary education in the 1960s and 1970s, where they often fell under the spell of clerical revivalists like al-Sadr and Khomeini.

Khomeini began putting forth a vision of Shi`ite theocracy in the late 1960s, which immediately became influential among Shi`ite Islamists opposed to Pahlavi secularism. The central problem for classical Shi`ism had been that of legitimate authority. Shi`ites had placed all authority in the hands of the immaculate Imam. So when the Imamate ended as an institution with the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam as a child in 280 A.H., Shi`ites experienced a crisis of authority. It was the Imam who authorized Friday prayers and appointed the Friday prayer-leaders? Now that he was gone, could such congregational prayers even be held? It was the Imam who authorized the collection of religious taxes, whether alms, the "fifth," or the agricultural tithes. Without an Imam, could such taxes even be paid? To whom would they go? Shi`ite thinkers put forward two major responses to this crisis. The literalist Akhbaris had often been willing to see some central Muslim practices lapse in the absence of the Imam. Some advised that one should just tax oneself the amount that should have gone to alms, and bury it in the ground so that it could be spewed forth from the earth at the Resurrection. They held that Friday congregational prayers should be cancelled during the Occultation of the Imam. The rationalist Usulis on the contrary believed that the collectivity of the Shi`ite learned men could stand general proxy for the Imam in his absence, and could authorize the common-law Muslim states that grew up during the Occultation to appoint prayer leaders, collect taxes, and lead defensive holy war or jihad to protect the community.

Khomeini took the Usuli logic one step further. If the Usuli jurists could authorize a civil monarchy or state to undertake these religious obligations in the absence of the Imam, then was it not more fitting that they should in fact erect a state themselves and rule on behalf of the Imam in accordance with Shi`ite law? Khomeini pointed to the appointment by early Imams of mediators among the learned men to

resolve the community's disputes, as proof of the standing of the clerics to establish a state. He cleverly played on the resemblance of the early Arabic word for mediator with that of "ruler" in later Arabic.

The "modernization" policies of Muhammad Reza Shah have often been blamed for the revolution in Iran. Yet many scholars, especially Nikki Keddie, have argued that it was not modernization per se that provoked the discontents but rather the skewed, uneven, emphases of the shah's government. The rural areas were disadvantaged by the loan policies of government agencies, which favored urban enterprises. Big business was treated more favorably than small businesses. Some think that the emphasis on urban industry over agriculture in government policy accelerated the emigration to the cities of large numbers of peasants seeking jobs as day laborers, who erected for housing tin shanties without sewerage and other amenities.

The burgeoning of population growth, along with the substantial expansion of the university system and of opportunities to study abroad, produced a large class of first-generation intellectuals. More were produced than could get good jobs, and in any case often feared that their Western-style education would rob them of their authenticity and leave them adrift in an alienating modernity. In addition, the shah's autocracy had produced a police state in which much of the populace was spying on their compatriots for the state, and in which discourse critical of the regime could result in imprisonment and torture. At a time, in the early 1970s, when the Soviet government probably only had about 1,000 prisoners of conscience, the shah's government had an estimated 10,000. Many students and intellectuals turned to a radical vision of Shi'ite Islam or to Marxism. The oil shock of the 1970s, when after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War the price of petroleum quadrupled in four years, brought a windfall to Iran that was difficult to digest. It produced enormous spending on imports, creating frustrating bottlenecks. It also produced high inflation, which the shah unwisely attempted to blame on shopkeepers, thus alienating an important component of the bazaar. The vast oil wealth presented the shah's technocrats with very difficult choices, since if they suddenly invested too much of it in the country's economy they risked producing hyper-inflation, but if they did not, the masses would complain about not sharing in the windfall. Unable to find a happy medium, they produced both results. These problems were exacerbated by an economic downturn and lower petroleum prices 1977-78, putting sudden strains on a system that had been retooled to expect continued high rents on oil. Most other Middle Eastern countries that produced significant amounts of petroleum had small populations and a lack of what economists call "absorptive capacity" (the ability of the economy to put to work large inputs of capital). Iran was unique among

major oil states in having, in the late 1970s, a population of about 37 million. This absorptive capacity, ironically enough, made it much more vulnerable to massive dislocation from the oil boom than were much smaller countries in the Gulf. The populations of the sheikhdoms could easily be bought off with health and education benefits and good incomes, and the bulk of their oil income willy-nilly had to be plowed back into investments, often in the West. Because the Iranian government could plausibly invest in Iran, it was faced with discontents that its peers were spared. Because of the shah's rigid dictatorship, censorship of the press, curbing of political expression (he moved to a one-party state in 1976), imprisonment of intellectuals and others for expression of conscience, political discontent in Iran had no legitimate outlet. Because there were few civil intermediate institutions between the state and the people, the public began turning to the mosques as the only safe place to express any sort of dissidence.

Khomeini's strong rhetorical skills and his bright vision of a righteous, clerically-ruled state that would supplant the den of corruption that was Pahlavi government captured the imagination of millions of Shi'ites around the world, especially in Iran. The revolution against the Shah in 1978-1979 was exceedingly complex, and a majority of revolutionaries were not Khomeinists. They consisted of clerics, bazaar artisans and shopkeepers, and recent immigrants to the cities from villages, but also of middle class intellectuals and teachers and left-leaning workers. The clerical networks and their lower middle class supporters did, however, play an important role in the revolution, and they were the ones with the organizational skills and ideological vision to capture it after the beginning of February, 1979, when Khomeini returned to Tehran from Paris. The Khomeinist state is treated in chapter 11, below.

In the first eight months after the revolution, the clerics made an alliance with lay religious nationalists and retained many technocrats in the cabinet. Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, an engineer and the owner of a small factory, had supported Musaddiq in the 1950s oil nationalization crisis. In this period a new constitution was enacted that made the head of state the "supreme jurisprudent" and subordinated the army and the elected government to him in many ways. The first incumbent of the new office, of course, was Khomeini. A twelve-member Guardianship Council was also established, with wide powers of legislative review. Early in the revolution, Khomeini confronted the Bazargan government over its tendency to favor the interests of the nationalist middle class, insisting that free electricity and housing be given to the very poor or "barefoot." A parallel government grew up, of vigilante revolutionary guards and other zealous supporters of Khomeini and of hard-line Shi'ite radicalism, often shunting aside the government

police and municipal officials. When in October of 1979 the deposed shah went to the U.S. for cancer treatment, radicals in Iran feared this move was a cover for a planned coup aimed at restoring the monarchy. They invaded the U.S. embassy in Tehran and took its staff hostages for the succeeding 444 days. Khomeini tested the wind, and when he saw how popular the hostage-taking was, he supported it. Prime Minister Bazargan, who did not, resigned.

French-trained, left-leaning economist Abolhassan Bani Sadr, who was favored by Khomeini, then won the presidential elections early in 1980. For the next year and a half, Muslim leftist intellectuals like Bani Sadr struggled with conservative clerics for the fate of the nation. Bani Sadr, however, lacked grass roots support and declined to organize a political party. He did attract the allegiance of many in the Mujahidin-i Khalq, a leftist Muslim organization with a well-organized guerilla wing. Leftist and rightist activists began actively clashing with one another at rallies, forcing Khomeini to make a choice. Despite his earlier rhetoric in favor of the barefoot, he increasingly moved to the right. Bani Sadr was impeached in June, 1981, and had to flee the country for Paris. In 1981-1983, Iran was plunged deeply into social conflict. Mujahidin-i Khalq terrorist bombings and shootings were met with mass arrests and summary executions not only of its members but of sympathizers and other dissidents. Often, fifty prisoners were executed each day. Despite their apolitical character, nearly two hundred members of the Baha'i religious minority, considered heretical by the Shi'ite clergy were killed, and several thousand jailed. This bloody period has been called by some historians "the Great Terror." Even after the terror subsided, repression continued. The universities were purged of thousands of professors who did not toe the "line of the Imam" (i.e. Khomeinism), and Khomeini called upon children to inform on their parents to the state.

From 1983 through 1989, clerical rule was established on a regular footing. In October, 1981, cleric `Ali Khamenei was elected president. `Ali Akbar Hashimi Rafsanjani emerged as a popular speaker of the parliament, most of whose members belonged to the Islamic Republican Party (not so much a party as a loose grouping of the politically like-minded). Law was Islamized. A bloody and fruitless war with Iraq was pursued long after Saddam Hussein (who began it with his invasion of Iran in 1980) began suing for peace.

Khomeini died in 1989. Khamenei was chosen as his successor as supreme jurisprudent, and Rafsanjani was elected president. Although Iran's state remained a politically repressive, these two leaders moved away from some of the worst excesses of the Khomeini years. The number of political prisoners executed, or at least those that could be known about, fell dramatically. Rafsanjani chose to sit out the Gulf War.

The attention of the revolutionary state to education and rural development began bearing fruit, as rates of literacy rose substantially, even among women. Rafsanjani by the mid-1990s was even seeking reintegration with some Bretton Woods international institutions, since he wanted a World Bank development loan. Successive parliamentary elections produced sessions with increasing numbers of lay members, and fewer and fewer clerics.

The 1997 elections produced a surprise, when a dark horse named Muhammad Khatami garnered some 70 percent of the vote. Khatami, a cleric, had lived in Germany and written on civil society in the tradition of the left-liberal sociologist, Jürgen Habermas. He had been minister of culture briefly in the early 1990s, but was dismissed because hardliners thought him too liberal. He appears to have been elected primarily by the votes of youth and women, who chafed under the strictures of the hard-line Khomeinists. Khatami gained further support in the parliamentary elections of 1999, and was elected to a second term in 2001. His attempt to liberalize Khomeinism has largely failed, meeting concerted opposition from Supreme Jurisprudent `Ali Khamenei and from the Guardianship Council, which struck down many liberalizing measures enacted by parliament and forestalled others. After a brief flowering of a freer press after 1997, dozens of newspapers have been closed by the clerics. The Guardianship Council also vets those who can run for office, and has attempted to exclude known liberals from running. The mild-mannered and cautious Khatami has seemed unwilling or unable to use his substantial public mandate effectively to challenge the hardliners. Among the more controversial initiatives launched by Khatami was a dialogue between the American and Iranian peoples rather than at the level of the government.

Iranian and American relations improved in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by al-Qaida, a secret terrorist organization made up of an estimated 5,000 cultists. Al-Qaida's membership is fanatically hyper-Sunni, and its allies among the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Lashkar-i Tayyiba and Sipah-i Sahaba had been responsible for the massacres of thousands of Shi'ites in Afghanistan and hundreds in Pakistan. Iran backed the Afghan Northern Alliance, which included the Shi'ite Hizb-i Vahdat representing the Hazaras, and so became willy-nilly allied with the U.S., which supported the same group against the Taliban. Despite continued hard-line rhetoric from Khamenei and some other clerics, the Khatami government agreed to help find and return to the U.S. any servicemen who strayed into Iranian territory in the course of the bombing raids and special operations maneuvers in Afghanistan. From a government that had held U.S. embassy staffers hostage only two decades before, this

commitment was nothing short of astonishing. When he came to the U.S. for a meeting of the United Nations in fall, 2001, President Khatami gave an interview with Cable News Network reporter Christiane Amanpour. He expressed heartfelt sympathy for the trauma inflicted on the American people by the terrorists of 9/11 that was unmistakably sincere, and struck some observers as going further than some putative allies of the U.S. such as Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince `Abdu'llah. Even as Iran appeared to be warming to the U.S., at least for the moment, the clerical regime faced new challenges. In soccer riots that same fall of 2001, angry young men for the first time openly chanted the name of Reza Shah II, the secularist pretender to the Iranian throne resident in the United States, as a sign of their deep dissatisfaction with Iran's Shi'ite government. They also chanted pro-U.S. slogans. With the fall of the Taliban, the only other modern Muslim experiment in theocracy had ended ignominiously. The future of Iran's clerically-ruled government almost certainly depends on whether it can find a way to satisfy the increasingly democratic aspirations of Iran's new generation.