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**2010**

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**“Mirrors for Princes” and Kingship in Modern Iran**

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**“Mirrors for Princes” and Kingship in Modern Iran**

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**Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2010

## **Acknowledgements**

The completion of this project owes much to the work and support of others. I am indebted to countless professors, administrators, colleagues, and friends who have invested generously in me throughout my academic career.

I am thankful to my early academic mentors, Nancy Reynolds and Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, who nurtured my historical instincts and encouraged my interests, and who continue to show me undeserved kindness.

Many thanks are also owed to Anna, Christine, and Ellen who listened patiently as I verbally processed this project over the course of months, and who offered invaluable feedback, encouragement, and distraction when I needed it. I am also grateful to my Wednesday morning friends who cheered me on, inquired about my progress, reminded me of the most important things, and generally made Austin a home for me in a time of transition.

At the University of Texas, I thank Jim Sidbury, Marilyn Lehman and all the staff of the Department of History and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. I am especially grateful to Gail Minault for her relentless enthusiasm, her commitment to her students, and her humor. This project developed from a paper written in her seminar on Indo-Iranian intellectual history.

My deepest gratitude is owed to Kamran Aghaie, whose dedication to his students' success is unmatched. He has been unfailingly generous with his knowledge, time, and encouragement. I cannot begin to enumerate all that I have learned from him

about research, modern Iranian history, and the Persian language. I could not have asked for a better advisor.

All that is good and right with this work should probably be credited to the aforementioned individuals; the arguments, errors, and flaws are my responsibility alone.

# **“Mirrors for Princes” and Kingship in Modern Iran**

by

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This report examines the legacy of “mirrors for princes” literature, or advice literature for kings, in Iranian political thought, particularly in the modern period. While most scholars have studied ‘mirrors’ literature as a predominantly medieval phenomenon, this report argues that the genre and the ideals of kingship it articulates continued to flourish well into the modern period in Iran. Through an analysis of themes found both in the medieval Persian texts and the ‘mirrors’ composed in the Safavid and Qajar periods, this report demonstrates a remarkable continuity in the genre and in the ideology of kingship throughout centuries of dynastic and structural changes in Iran. Moreover, although the genre of ‘mirrors’ appears to have faded with the Qajar dynasty, this report shows how its ideology of kingship continued to influence the rhetoric of political legitimacy in the Pahlavi period. Muhammad Reza Shah in particular relied on the office of the king and his duties of executing justice and protecting Islam to justify both the necessity of the monarchy and his right to the throne.

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## **Introduction**

The genre of advice literature for kings and rulers, known as “mirrors for princes,” enjoys a long history in the Persianate tradition, as well as among other cultures. In the Iranian context, this form of literature first became prevalent during the early medieval period, as the Islamic empire of the ‘Abbasids weakened and rulers in all corners of the empire arose to expand their own independent kingdoms. The literature produced for these rulers by their courtiers relied in part on developing Islamic principles of governance, but also drew much of its inspiration from pre-Islamic Iranian theories of kingship and the examples of Iranian kings, particularly those of the Sasanian dynasty. In Iran these ‘mirrors’ continued to be written for rulers all the way into the early twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, for example, numerous “mirrors for princes” treatises and tracts were penned and dedicated to various members of the Qajar ruling family.

However, in spite of the long legacy of this genre in Iranian and other Persianate cultures, relatively little scholarship has been produced on these texts, especially those composed in the modern period. The purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study explores and illuminates some of the continuities between the medieval and modern ‘mirrors’ literature, particularly that from the Qajar period. Secondly, although the production of ‘mirrors’ ceased in Iran around the turn of the twentieth century, this study examines how conceptualizations of kingship articulated in the ‘mirrors’ continued to influence the rhetoric of political legitimacy and nationalist discourses in Iran under the Pahlavis. The analysis of several ‘mirrors’, as well as the speeches and writings of the



Pahlavi shahs demonstrates that the ideas of strong kingship, justice, and the examples of Iran's past rulers continued to be employed in twentieth-century Iran in an attempt to affix legitimacy to Pahlavi rule and to the monarchy more generally.

The majority of scholarship available on 'mirrors' literature in the Iranian tradition focuses exclusively on the medieval period, and even this corpus is limited in scope. Among those scholars who have written astutely on the medieval literature in the Iranian tradition, few even mention that this genre continued to flourish under the Safavid and Qajar dynasties. Much of this scholarship, exemplified by the works of Ann K.S. Lambton, Louise Marlow, and C.E. Bosworth, focuses on medieval Islamic theories of kingship, particularly the ways in which both the Islamic juristic tradition as well as pre-Islamic Iranian notions of kingship informed medieval Islamic forms of government.<sup>1</sup> Their work analyzes, among other texts, the eleventh-century 'mirrors' of Nizam al-Mulk, Kai Ka'us ibn Iskandar, and Ghazali. With the rise of the Safavids in the sixteenth century, however, and the conversion of Iran to Twelver Shi'ism, scholarly discussion of Iranian statecraft shifts from medieval 'mirrors' and kingship to questions of political legitimacy in the Shi'i tradition and the authority of the ulama and the king in the absence of the Imam. Representative of this scholarship are the works of Said Amir

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<sup>1</sup> A.K.S Lambton, "Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship," *Studia Islamica* 17 (1962): 91-119; "The Dilemma of Government in Islamic Persia: The 'Siyasat Namah' of Nizam al-Mulk," *Iran* 22 (1984): 55-66.; Louise Marlow, "Kings, Prophets and the 'Ulama' in Mediaeval Islamic Advice Literature," *Studia Islamica* 81 (1985): 101-120; C.E. Bosworth, "The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran and the Search for Dynastic connections with the Past," *Iran* 11 (1973): 51-62.

Arjomand and others, which treat ‘mirrors’ literature only peripherally in their discussions.<sup>2</sup>

The remaining scholarship on Iranian political thought in the modern period, specifically the Qajar and Pahlavi eras, tends to emphasize the rise of western political ideologies in Iran and increasing tensions between the traditional religious leadership and the ruling family. These works rightly focus on intellectual and political developments in light of western liberal thought, constitutionalism, leftist ideology, and questions of Islamic governance, all of which were fundamental in shaping the changing political climate in Iran throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In contrast, only a few scholars make more than passing reference to ‘mirrors’ in the Qajar period. Abbas Amanat discusses the role of ‘mirrors’ literature in the early education of Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896).<sup>3</sup> Fereydoun Adamiyat also explores the role of ‘mirrors’ in his work on social, economic and political thought in Qajar Iran.<sup>4</sup> These works, however, do not offer a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which the ideology of kingship articulated in ‘mirrors’ literature may have continued to shape political movements or rhetoric in modern Iran.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Also, Seyyed Hussein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, eds., *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy 1831-1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), especially p. 58-88.

<sup>4</sup> Fereydoun Adamiyat, *Afkar-i ijtimai' va siyasi va iqtisadi dar asar-i muntashir nashodeh-ye dowran-e Qajar* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Agah, 1977).

More recently Nader Sohrabi has endeavored to explore the modern legacy of ‘mirrors’ literature and the ideology of kingship it presents. He notes the significance of the conceptualization of political legitimacy as presented in the ‘mirrors’ literature in the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), particularly in the ambivalent attitude of constitutional advocates toward the Qajar government.<sup>5</sup> Sohrabi argues in particular that criticism was often directed at the Shah’s ministers, not the Shah himself, in part because in the local idiom the office of the king was essentially above reproach. Further, he indicates that the initial call for a House of Justice (*Adalat khaneh*), rather than a parliament, echoed the expectations of the king that Nizam al-Mulk had presented some eight centuries earlier in his *Siyasatnameh*.<sup>6</sup> The influence of these long-held ideas, regardless of their imperfect implementation and manipulation, contributed to tensions between modern notions of representative government and the established understanding of kingship. This was perhaps especially true among members of the traditional classes who would have been more familiar with the traditions of the court. These feelings of ambivalence likely continued through the 1920s since the Majles consisted primarily of large landowners, tribal leaders, ulama, and, in large urban centers, the bazaaris.<sup>7</sup>

Sohrabi’s research rightly concludes that “King” as a concept and office had more or less lost its legitimacy by the end of the constitutional period, but he also questions

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<sup>5</sup> Nader Sohrabi, “Revolution and State *Culture*: The Circle of Justice and Constitutionalism In 1906 Iran,” in *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, ed. George Steinmetz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 253-289.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 262-265.

<sup>7</sup> Gavin R. G. Hambly, “The Pahlavi Autocracy: Riza Shah, 1921-1941,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran Vol. 7 From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 213.

how some of these traditional ideas of kingship continued to influence the politics, structure, and rhetoric of the Pahlavi era and the populace's response to Pahlavi claims to legitimacy. However weakened the idea of kingship may have been, the institution of the monarchy persisted, at least for a few decades longer. In light of this continuity it bears exploring how ideas of kingship began to shift and be reformulated in the twentieth century, and to understand how they were incorporated into a state that maintained both a strong monarchy and the celebration of Iran's past, as well as modernizing and westernizing programs.

The following study seeks to shed light on both the themes and role of the 'mirrors' literature in the Iranian tradition, and to raise questions about the influence of this tradition on the persistence and reassertion of the conceptualizations of kingship throughout the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah. This paper argues that in spite of the challenges to the ideas of traditional kingship, the Pahlavis, in particular Muhammad Reza, clung to the ideology of kingship articulated in 'mirrors' literature in an attempt to reinforce their legitimacy in the eyes of Iranians, as well as on the international scene. Moreover this study seeks to show that the use of this discourse was not simply a return to ancient Iran as part of a nationalist vision, but also the continuation of a view of kingship held by much more recent dynasties.

The study progresses in three parts. Chapter one examines some of the best-known 'mirrors' literature of the medieval period and analyzes the most salient characteristics of kingship presented therein. Chapter two explores the genre's development in the Safavid and Qajar periods and takes a more detailed look at one

mirror in particular, Seyyid Ja'fari Darabi Kashfi's, *Tuhfat al-muluk*, to examine continuities and changes in 'mirrors' literature. Finally, chapter 3 analyzes the ways in which the Pahlavis, particularly Muhammad Reza, employed the ideology of kingship articulated in 'mirrors' literature as a means of legitimating and justifying their rule and the powers of the monarchy.

## Chapter 1: Medieval Persian “Mirrors for Princes”

The genre of advice literature for kings has flourished not only in Indo-Iranian culture, but throughout other Asian and European cultures as well.<sup>8</sup> ‘Mirrors’ literature is so named for the titles *Speculum regis*, *Speculum principis*, and *Speculum regale* given to various European works from the late twelfth century onwards. However, among the books of the European tradition which include *speculum* (mirror) in their titles, relatively few actually functioned as ‘mirrors for princes.’<sup>9</sup> The works came under several other kinds of names and in several forms ranging from treatises of political theory to dictums of kingship. While the diversity of sources lends itself to a broad scope of applications and study, it also points to one of the difficulties in researching and writing about ‘mirrors’ literature - the boundaries of the genre are rather ambiguous.

This complexity holds true for the literature of the Persianate tradition as well. A number of the medieval and early modern ‘mirrors’ share identifying titles such as *Tuhfat al-muluk*, *Tuhfat al-vuzura* or *Nasihah al-muluk* which generally indicate their purpose as advice literature for rulers. However, other well-known works such as Nizam al-Mulk’s *Siyasatnameh* and Kai Ka’us Iskandar’s *Qabusnameh* do not follow these conventions. Moreover, a number of other didactic or ethical (*akhlaqi*) texts which are not directed specifically at political leaders also contain practical wisdom and advice for kings, princes, and other courtiers. Generally speaking, all of these works, including ‘mirrors’

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of this literature include Thomas Aquinas’, *The Rule of Princes*, Erasmus’, *Education of a Christian Prince*, and Machiavelli’s, *The Prince*.

<sup>9</sup> Louise Marlow, “Surveying Recent Literature on the Arabic and Persian Mirrors for Princes Genre,” *History Compass* 7, no. 2 (2009): 524.

literature, may be categorized broadly as belonging to the genre of Persian advice (*andarz*) literature.<sup>10</sup>

In order to understand the implications of the ‘mirrors for princes’ tradition in Iran’s modern political climate, the genre and its themes must first be discussed. This chapter will address the development of Persian ‘mirrors’ in the medieval period and explore some of their prominent commonalities, their portrayal of the kingly office, and the duties of rulers. Only a few of the medieval Persianate texts will be discussed, but it should be noted that other Indo-Iranian and Arabic texts of the ‘mirrors’ genre are remarkably similar in content.<sup>11</sup> While these ‘mirrors’ were composed in distinct socio-political contexts and vary greatly in style and content, three common themes will be explored: kingship and the role of the king, justice, and the role of religion in governance.

The best-known ‘mirrors’ of the early medieval period are the *Qabusnameh* of Kai Ka’us ibn Iskandar ibn Qabus ibn Vashmgir, the *Siyar al-muluk* (*Siyasatnameh*) of Nizam al-Mulk, and Ghazali’s *Nasihah al-muluk*. The *Qabusnameh*, completed in the year 1082, was the earliest of the three mirrors. The author, a prince of the Ziyarid dynasty in the South Caspian provinces composed the book for his son as a guide and counsel. The work begins with several chapters dedicated to the knowledge of God and piety. Topics then turn to more practical matters of sleeping, bathing, buying horses, marriage, chess, dining etiquette, and advice for various professions. Only a few sections are explicitly devoted to issues of kingship or advice for governance.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 525-526.

<sup>11</sup> The selection of ‘mirrors’ literature surveyed here is not exhaustive and is based in large part on availability. However, I have assumed that these works are sufficiently representational of the medieval genre to be useful for analysis.

The *Siyasatnameh* on the other hand focuses significantly more attention on governance and the conduct of kings. Great care is given to the details of ruling and of commanding the various members of the court, from slaves, to couriers, to viziers and tax collectors. Nizam al-Mulk, who served as the chief minister of the Seljuk empire under Sultan Alp Arslan and his successor Malikshah, composed the work only a few years after the *Qabusnameh* (between 1086-1091), including advice, quotations and sayings, long stories, historical narrative, anecdotes, and contemporary events. Several of the chapters near the end of the work detail the history of several ‘heretical’ sects, including a long chapter on the origins of the Isma’ilis and the Qarmati revolts, which Nizam al-Mulk perceived as a danger to both the state and to true religion.

Ghazali’s *Nasihāt al-muluk* was likely composed sometime between 1105 and Ghazali’s death in 1111, although scholars disagree as to an exact date.<sup>12</sup> Like the *Siyasatnameh*, Ghazali’s *Nasihāt al-muluk* offers a great deal of practical advice for managing the affairs of the court as well as providing a more general theory of rulership and governance and the ethical principles that underlie the kingly office.

As is clear from the aforementioned examples, the ‘mirrors’ literature of the medieval period did not rely upon a specific formula or format, but contained part political theory, part political expediency, and part practical wisdom for life. In the case of the mirrors of the late eleventh century, the position and motivation of the author, as well as the political climate in which they were writing shaped the format of their

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<sup>12</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Kitāb Nasihāt al-muluk* (Counsel for Kings), trans. F.R.C. Bagley (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), xvii-xviii. The translator also notes that there is also some scholarly disagreement as to the authorship of the text.



treatises. Writing to his son, Kai Ka'us clearly takes a more paternalistic tone and offers advice on love, marriage, and raising children that would have perhaps been inappropriate for Nizam al-Mulk to offer his patron. Nizam al-Mulk opts for style and content that will find him favor with his patron and give him outlet to express the pressing political concerns of the day, namely the threat of 'deviant' religious sects. Ghazali, as a leading religious scholar of his day, positions his own advice on ruling in a broader conceptualization of political theory drawn from elements of his other works. In spite of their differences in tone, content, and motive, these mirrors share many similarities, not the least of which is the ease with which they combine pre-Islamic Iranian, particularly Sasanian, concepts of kingship with Islamic tradition. Examples, anecdotes and sayings of pre-Islamic Iranian rulers abound alongside those of Muhammad and his companions. Through these stories and examples, the authors communicate an ideology of kingship that continued to hold significance for Iranian political authority all the way into the twentieth century, as will be discussed below.

### **The Kingly Office**

In the Sasanian theory of kingship, the ruler was 'the Shadow of God' on earth. The leader was selected by God to exercise his rule and will over his dominion, and his subjects were meant to obey him. In the 'Abbasid period, the traditions of the caliph's authority did not remain unchallenged by these pre-Islamic Iranian understandings especially as the empire fractured and localized sultans and kings held real power and the caliph receded to a more symbolic figure. The significance of pre-Islamic concepts of

kingship is immediately clear in the ‘mirrors’ literature where the king continues to hold divine favor and authority. Nizam al-Mulk opens his *Siyasatnameh* with the following:

In every age and time God (be He exalted) chooses one member of the human race and, having endowed him with goodly and kingly virtues, entrusts him with the interests of the world and the well-being of His servants; he charges that person to close the doors of corruption, confusion and discord, and He imparts to him such dignity and majesty in the eyes and hearts of men, that under his just rule they may live their lives in constant security and ever wish for his reign to continue.<sup>13</sup>

His use of these statements at the very beginning of his treatise indicates how foundational this understanding of kingship is to his work. The king is the chosen instrument of God and is specially graced with the qualities of a king so that under his idealized rule his subjects are content and safe.

The absolute and divine authority of the kings is also central to Ghazali’s understanding of the art of governance.

You should understand that God on High selected two classes of the Sons of Adam and endowed these two classes with superiority over the rest: the one being prophets, blessings and peace be upon them, and the other kings...He sent kings, to whom He bound the welfare of men’s lives in His wisdom and on whom He conferred high rank. As you will hear in the Traditions, ‘the Sultan is God’s shadow on earth’, which means that he is high-ranking and the Lord’s delegate over His creatures. It must therefore be recognized that this kingship and the divine effulgence have been granted to them by God, and that they must accordingly be obeyed, loved and followed. To dispute with kings is improper, and to hate them is wrong.<sup>14</sup>

He explicitly recalls the Iranian traditions of kingship to legitimate the kings’ rule as a superior class of people, and to justify unquestioned obedience and loyalty to them.

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<sup>13</sup> Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyar al-muluk or Siyasat-nama of Nizam al-Mulk*, trans. Hubert Darke (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ghazali, 45.

Additionally, as will be discussed in more detail below, the close relationship between kings and religious leaders, or prophets, is established by virtue of God's electing to endow these classes of men with gifts far greater than those given to the rest of humanity.

Not only do these 'mirrors' borrow and reinforce the concepts of kingship from the pre-Islamic period, they enjoin the kings to actively seek the example of his pre-Islamic predecessors. Anecdotes of the Sasanian kings abound in these treatises, with Anushirvan (Nushirvan) typically revered as the exemplar to be emulated. Ghazali urges that, "The King must follow the precepts and methods of these kings who preceded him, and govern righteously like them. He must also read the Books of Good Counsel [*Pandnameh-ha*]."<sup>15</sup> However endowed with the special characteristics of a ruler the king may be, it was still his responsibility to seek the wisdom and example of his predecessors.

The adoption of this view of the kingly office in the medieval period and the emphasis on Sasanian ideals of kingship did not exclude Islam from the picture. Rather, the theology of Islam was woven into the expectations of the king's conduct and of the reward awaiting him on the Day of Resurrection, and many stories and traditions of Islamic leaders and the early Caliphs are included in the 'mirrors.' Alongside anecdotes from Anushirvan and Bahram, and Yazdgard, the authors frequently recount stories and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphs. Qur'anic references are also used to validate the position of the king. Ghazali writes,

It must therefore be recognized that this kingship and the divine effulgence have been granted [rulers] by God, and that they must be obeyed, loved and followed.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 63.

To dispute with kings is improper, and to hate them is wrong; for God on High has commanded (Q. iv. 62) “Obey God and obey the Prophet and those among you who hold authority”...<sup>16</sup>

The authority granted to rulers comes with responsibilities, and chief among those is the maintenance and execution of justice. Having already been a celebrated value in the kings of pre-Islamic Iran, this virtue found even greater support in the teachings of Islam.

### **Justice: The Duty of the King**

Of all the kingly duties outlined and commended by the writers of the ‘mirrors’ literature, maintaining justice was the preeminent calling of any ruler. The keeping of justice as proposed in the ‘mirrors’ implies many other ways of tending to the needs of subjects and of the kingdom as a whole, deliberately exercising power to the benefit of social order. In fact, the welfare of his subjects and the world is dependent on the king’s commitment to justice. Ghazali describes the centrality of justice this way:

You must understand that the development or desolation of this universe depends upon kings; for if the king is just, the universe is prosperous and the subjects are secure, as was the case in the times of Ardashir, Faridun, Bahram Gur, Kisra, and other kings like them; whereas when the king is tyrannical, the universe becomes desolate, as it was in the times of Dahhak, Afrasiyab, and others like them.<sup>17</sup>

The king’s failure to be just results in ruin for his kingdom, so it is in his best interest to avoid becoming a tyrant. Rulers are also warned against injustice because a record of injustice leads not only the demise of their kingdom, but also the demise of their position.

Ghazali contends,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

The Sultan in reality is he who awards justice, and does not perpetrate injustice and wickedness, among God's slaves; for the unjust Sultan is ill-starred and will have no endurance, because the Prophet stated that "sovereignty endures even when there is unbelief, but will not endure when there is injustice".<sup>18</sup>

Not only is justice the defining feature of the king, it also supercedes religious devotion as a requirement for kings.

While no definition of justice is plainly delineated in these 'mirrors', the discussion of justice is not abstract and theoretical. Directives and even suggestions for institutionalized measures are given in order to help the rulers more easily fulfill their obligation to guarding justice. For example, Nizam al-Mulk counsels,

It is absolutely necessary that on two days in the week the king should sit for the redress of wrongs, to extract recompense from the oppressor, to give justice and to listen to the words of his subjects with his own ears, without any intermediary.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Ghazali offers an anecdote from the lives of the Persian kings that,

A few days before the date of Nawruz, the king's herald would proclaim: "Get ready for such-and-such a date. Let every man prepare his case, put his plea in writing, and assemble his evidence. Let him who has an adversary know that he may complain of him to the king."<sup>20</sup>

Such occasions for audience with the king would give subjects from all levels of society access to the ruler and the opportunity to make appeals to the highest authority. These ceremonies, regardless of whether they were actually implemented with any regularity, again serve to underscore the close identification of the king with justice. Based on this

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>19</sup> Nizam al-Mulk, 13. He further employs the following example from pre-Islamic Iran: "I have read in the books of the ancients that most of the Persian [Sasanian] kings used to put up a high platform and sit up there on horseback so that they could see all the complainants gathered round about, and they would redress the grievances of every one," 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ghazali, 102.

advice, the ideal king would ensure that his subjects see justice meted out directly from him, not from his ministers or officials.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, in the ‘mirrors’ literature authors describe justice as more than simply the rule of law or making decisions in cases of complaints or disputes. Justice also entails caring for the material needs of the kingdom. As Ghazali explains,

When the Sultan’s subjects fall into penury or suffer distress, it is his duty to come to their aid, especially in times of drought or when they are incapable of earning their livelihood... The king must (then) provide them with food and grant them financial help from the treasury, and take good care to stop his officials from oppressing the subjects.<sup>22</sup>

This responsibility for the material needs of the population and for protecting the weak from corrupt officials demonstrates an expanded view of justice and of the king’s duties. In this way justice became intimately connected with all of the king’s activities.

## **Religion and Governance**

The final salient characteristic of kingship in the medieval ‘mirrors’ is the inextricable link between religion and government. This concept, too, was borrowed from pre-Islamic Zoroastrian political theory and adapted to its medieval Islamic contexts. Not only is the ruler God’s representative, chosen by him and endowed with the special characteristics for ruling, but the ruler is also charged with protecting and promoting religion, specifically Islam. The ‘mirrors’ authors are careful to both describe

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<sup>21</sup> Ghazali also holds the king responsible for any injustices enacted by those under him. “The king should understand that he must not be content with personally refraining from injustice, but must discipline his slave-troops, servants, and officers, and never tolerate unjust conduct by them...” Ghazali, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 101.

and illustrate the relationship between religion and kingship and to exhort kings to uphold the spiritual foundations of their societies over which they rule. As Nizam al-Mulk summarizes,

The most important thing which a king needs is sound faith, because kingship and religion are like two brothers; whenever disturbance breaks out in the country religion suffers too...evil-doers gain power and render the king impotent and despondent; heresy grows rife and rebels make themselves felt.<sup>23</sup>

This point may have seemed especially critical for Nizam al-Mulk considering his opposition to the Ismai'li movement at the time of his writing.

The brotherhood of religion and government also necessitates the king's knowledge and observance of religious custom and law. Kai Ka'us highlights the importance of religious devotion in the introduction to the *Qabusnameh*. He advises his son,

Know then that this world is ploughland; as you sow, be it good or ill, you reap. Yet no man enjoys on his own ground what he has reaped there. It is in the place of Delight that he enjoys it, and this is the everlasting Everlasting Abode...The one way to achieve it is by submission to God Almighty.<sup>24</sup>

This injunction serves as the background for all further counsel included in the work.

Similarly, Nizam al-Mulk and Ghazali open their treatises with lengthy exhortations to offer gratitude and obedience to God.

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<sup>23</sup> Nizam al-Mulk, 60. See also Ghazali, p. 59. "The quality which kings most need is correct religion, because monarchy and religion are like brothers...He must be diligent in matters of religion, performing the duties at the proper times, avoiding eccentricity and (heretical) innovation..."

<sup>24</sup> Kai Ka'us ibn Iskandar, *A Mirror for Princes: The Qabus Nama*, trans. Rueben Levy (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1951), 3.

The relationship between religion and kingship is not only to be manifested in the king's upright character, but also in the relationships between political leaders and religious leaders. Nizam al-Mulk maintains,

It is incumbent upon the king to enquire into religious matters, to be acquainted with the divine precepts and prohibitions and put them into practice, and to obey the commands of God (be He exalted); it his duty to respect doctors of religion and pay their salaries out of the treasury, and he should honour pious and abstemious men. Furthermore it is fitting that once or twice a week he should invite religious elders to his presence and hear from them the commands of The Truth.<sup>25</sup>

In this view, religious scholars hold a privileged place in the social hierarchy because of their unique ability to assist the king in matters of religion and piety. The king's faithfulness is therefore expressed both in his personal piety and in his support of the religious institutions that structure religious life in his kingdom. In spite of this counsel, the texts are still somewhat ambiguous at points as to whether the king must be a devout Muslim, but the Islamic idiom is the default language for the medieval period. Although expressions of Islam would change significantly by the modern period, 'mirrors' literature continued to maintain notable thematic continuity while adapting to these changes.

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<sup>25</sup> Nizam al-Mulk, 59-60.



## **Chapter 2: 'Mirrors' in the Safavid and Qajar Eras**

Although scholarship on Iranian 'mirrors' generally omits the discussion of the genre after the medieval period, in reality the genre remained a significant element of court culture, political thought, and intellectual history. Having evolved in its earliest stages as a rather flexible and malleable genre of maxims, anecdotes, exhortation, ethics, practical wisdom and political theory, 'mirrors' were easily adaptable to the changing political and cultural milieus of the Safavid and Qajar periods in Iran. Just as the earlier medieval literature demonstrated a hybrid of Zoroastrian, Sasanian, and Islamic political thought and examples, so the later literature incorporated developments in Shi'i thought as necessitated by the political and cultural developments in Iran, showing remarkable continuity in the genre.

Prior to the sixteenth century, the region of Iran was predominantly Sunni. Only with the rise of the Safavids, the state's embrace of Twelver Shi'i doctrine, and its subsequent program of conversion did the population over time become primarily Shi'i. In terms of political thought, the significance of this transformation is that in the Shi'i tradition, only descendents of the prophet Muhammad through the line of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib were qualified to govern the Islamic community as both temporal and spiritual leaders. Following the occultation of the Twelfth Imam in 872 C.E. and the end of the line of succession, temporal authorities were generally viewed as illegitimate, but necessary rulers.

## Safavid Political Thought

Shi'i political theory aside, the office of the shah in the Safavid period remained relatively unchanged from the ideas of kingship that preceded it in the medieval period. By the eleventh century the tradition of viewing the king as the 'Shadow of God on Earth' had been firmly established in Islamic Persianate culture. In the Safavid period the attribution of a divine charisma to the shah persisted and created a continuity of the conceptualization of kingship in spite of the significant political and cultural changes in the period.<sup>26</sup>

The Safavid shahs in further support of their divine right to rule also claimed to be the representatives of the Hidden Imam through the Safavid family's descent from the seventh imam, Musa al-Kazim. Additionally, their position as the *murshid-i kamil* of the Safavid order of Sufis further entitled them to demand obedience from their Sufi followers.<sup>27</sup> However dubious their claim to descent from the Imam, the Safavids used it along with their supposed divine appointment to rule, as the foundation for their legitimacy. Where this legitimacy was challenged violence and force served as reminders of Safavid sovereignty.

Among the various works on government and kingship from the Safavid period are the *Qava'id al-Salatin (The Rules of the Rulers)* composed by Muhammad 'Abd al-Hasib 'Amili Isfahani, a Shi'i scholar who dedicated his treatise to Shah Sulayman (r. 1666-1694). Like earlier 'mirrors' this work combines Shi'i political thought with Greek

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<sup>26</sup> Said Amir Arjomand in Nasr, 113.

<sup>27</sup> Roger Savory in Nasr, 168-169.

and Sasanian philosophy, recounting stories of Iranian kings and past caliphs.<sup>28</sup> Other works from this period include *Qava'id-i Sultani (Royal Rules)* by Sultan Mahmud Kashani, *Dastur al-Muluk (the Constitution of the Kings)*, and *Siyar al-Salatin (The Conduct of the Rulers)* by Hashim ibn Muhammad Husayni.<sup>29</sup>

Like the 'mirrors' and advice literature that preceded them, these works demonstrate variety in their approaches, content, and sources. With many of the treatises composed by religious scholars, a number of them rely primarily on the Qur'an, hadith and sayings of the Imams in support of their ideas. However, they demonstrate remarkable similarity in certain understandings of kingship. For example, Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani's "Kingly Mirror," which was written at the request of Shah 'Abbas II in 1650, takes a markedly philosophic tone and treats kingship "as one of a number of interrelated phenomena...which center on the human self."<sup>30</sup> Fayd's purpose is to instruct the shah in the various forces that govern human wisdom and action. For Fayd the highest external source is the revealed law given by God to humankind.

In relation to the revealed law sovereignty is like the body in relation to the spirit, or like the slave in relation to the master. Sometimes the sovereign listens to the revealed law and obeys it, sometimes not...Day by day God guides the servants, aids them, and gives them success, especially the king who urges his subjects to follow the revealed law, and follows it himself.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Mohammad-Taqi Danishpazhouh, "An Annotated Bibliography on Government and Statecraft," translated and adapted by Andrew Newman in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 224.

<sup>29</sup> For a more comprehensive listing of Safavid and Qajar sources, see Danishpazhouh in Arjomand, 222-227.

<sup>30</sup> William C. Chittick, "Two Seventeenth-Century Persian Tracts on Kingship and Rulers" in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 269.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Chittick, 275.

As in earlier ‘mirrors’ the king is portrayed as a servant of God and the prosperity of his rule and kingdom depend on his piety and obedience to revealed law. Similarly, an excerpt another Safavid mirror instructs the king in justice and in preserving religion.<sup>32</sup> Instead of using stories from Iran’s ancient kings however, this author relies on hadith and quotations from the Imams, demonstrating how adaptable this genre was to changes in religious and political culture.

### **The Qajar Period and *Tuhfat al-Muluk***

Following an interregnum of some seventy years after the fall of the Safavids, Agha Muhammad Khan was finally able to consolidate political power and secure rule over Iran for the Qajar line. Throughout the nineteenth century, new ‘mirrors’ continued to be composed that carried on many of the same themes and ideas as the earlier mirrors. Fereydoun Adamiyat has examined some of the nineteenth century ‘mirrors’ manuscripts in the first chapter of his work on social, economic, and political thought in the Qajar period. He notes that these sources generally share in the tradition of their medieval and early modern predecessors, with the exception that from a literary perspective they lack the “graceful speech of their predecessors, and from the perspective of thought and content, they do not approach the strength and validity of the works of their forbearers.”<sup>33</sup> Beyond this criticism though, these works still shaped political thought in the nineteenth century and their influence and content are worth examining. In a century that witnessed

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<sup>32</sup> Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi’s *The Fountainhead of Life*, excerpts in Chittick, 284-299.

<sup>33</sup> Adamiyat, 1-2.

the introduction of modern European ideals of government in Iran, these mirrors were significant in perpetuating Iranian ideals of kingship.

It is difficult to discern the degree to which these ‘mirrors’ impacted political realities or to what extent the pragmatic counsel offered in them was implemented. However, it is known that the genre constituted part of the education of many Qajar princes, including the young Nasir al-Din Shah. Additionally, new ‘mirrors’ continued to be produced and dedicated to the Qajar ruling elite. One such mirror is Seyyid Ja’fari Darabi Kashfi’s *Tuhfat al-muluk*. This ‘mirror’ was presented in 1819 to Muhammad Taqi Mirza, son of Fath Ali Shah (r. 1797-1834) and governor of Boroujerd. This two-volume work offers suggestions for governance and advice for rulers covering a variety of topics from the theoretical and Islamic foundations of the primacy of ‘*aql* (wisdom or reason) to details of household management, marriage, and warfare.

Kashfi is notable as a theologian with mystical inclinations, and as one of the few members of the ulama class who sought to provide practical guidance for the Iranian rulers.<sup>34</sup> The evidence that Kashfi uses to support his claims in this work consists primarily of Islamic sources including the Qur’an, various hadith collections of the Shi’i tradition, including the *Majma’ al-zawa’id* of ‘Ali ibn Abu Bakr al-Haythami, the *Bahar al-nawar* (*Ocean of Lights*) of Mulla Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, and the collected sermons of ‘Ali (*Nahj al-balagha*). However, Kashfi’s work is not a juristic treatise, nor does he rely solely on Islamic sources for confirmation of his ideas. Occasionally, non-Islamic figures, namely Ardashir Babak, founder of the Sasanian Empire (224-651 C.E.),

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<sup>34</sup> Amanat, 70.

appear in the text. Kashfi also ends a significant number of the ‘gifts’ with extensive quotations from the *Divan-e Hafez*.

Like the previous authors of other ‘mirrors’, Kashfi’s discussion of kingship centers on the divine ordination of kings, and their responsibilities to preserve right religion and justice. In Kashfi’s view the king is the “Shadow of God on Earth” in whom all the oppressed seek refuge.<sup>35</sup> According to Kashfi, an Imam with just leadership is the best and most beneficial, but even an oppressive king is better than the strife that would result from having no king at all.<sup>36</sup> Again, Kashfi’s work demonstrates continuity with previous Islamic thought about the nature of kingship and the necessity of government, even an unjust one. Unjust rule is not without consequences, though. Kashfi argues that “The relationship of the king to his subjects is like the spirit’s relationship to the body; as long as the spirit remains pure and temperate, the body also will be temperate and steadfast and healthy.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the king bears great responsibility in the health and prosperity, both physical and spiritual, of his subjects. If he is corrupt, impious, or unjust, his subjects too will suffer the same fate. These ideas are remarkable identical to those presented in previous ‘mirrors’. Like previous ‘mirrors’ authors, Kashfi also maintains that religion and rule cannot be disassociated. He asserts that, “Religion and

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<sup>35</sup> Seyyid Ja’far Darabi Kashfi, *Tuhfat al-Muluk: Goftarha-yi Darbarah-i Hikmat-i Siyasi* (Qom: Bustan-i Kitab-i Qom, 2002), 893.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Kashfi later suggests, however, that there may be circumstances in which rebellion is called for. For example, while he asserts that obedience to an oppressive ruler is better than the alternative, he concedes that if the subjects have access to another rule who is just, then it is necessary to disobey and oust the first ruler and name the just king ruler in his place. Kashfi, 895.

<sup>37</sup> Kashfi, 894.

kingship are linked and dependent on each other, and neither is complete without the other.”<sup>38</sup>

Kashfi wrote from a Twelver Shi'i perspective, which in the period of the occultation of the twelfth Imam generally viewed all earthly rulers as illegitimate, although necessary. However, the views that Kashfi professes, especially those encouraging the tolerance of unjust rule, are not unique to Shi'i thought and find resonance in the broader Islamic political tradition. And while Kashfi's friendly relationship with Fath 'Ali Shah and the Qajar family precludes the possibility that he would challenge their legitimacy to the throne, his work is clearly concerned with more than legitimating of Qajar rule against their potential opposition.

Still, the example of the Imam as the model ruler shapes much of Kashfi's approach to kingship. In his view, the role of the Imam and his position as executor are for the rule and improvement of the condition of his subjects, and in this way he protects and establishes that which the Prophet commanded, which is the establishment and spread of the rule of God.<sup>39</sup> The examples of the Imam and Prophet demonstrate the closest marriage of religious and political authority in the office of the king. Kashfi, however, realizes that such an ideal is not the reality of his own political situation. He concedes that in the period of the *ghaybat*, the king serves as the vicegerent of the Imam and should thus imitate the just Imam in his rule, though he only holds political authority.

This 'division of labor' between the ulama and the king in no way diminishes the king's authority in Kashfi's view. Rather, Kashfi warns, "If a king is just and establishes

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 896.

<sup>39</sup> Kashfi, 897.

the order of religion and the *shari'a*, then obedience to him is like obedience to the Imam and opposition to him is opposition to the Imam and the Prophet of God and is counted as apostasy, idolatry, and unbelief.”<sup>40</sup> Kingship, in Kashfi’s view then, is an honored position and submission to his rule is in effect likened to submission to the rule of God.

In her description medieval Islamic theories of kingship Lambton writes,

From Sasanian sources came the theory of the ruler as the Shadow of God upon earth; to this was assimilated the Hellenistic idea of the philosopher-king... These borrowings, however, are permeated by Islam. Obedience to the just ruler, the Shadow of God upon earth, is equated with obedience to God and His prophet... Justice, rather than right religion, became in the medieval theory the foundation of righteous government, but the purpose of government remained the establishment of conditions in which, under the just ruler, the right religion could be lived and Islamic virtues practiced.<sup>41</sup>

This description could just as easily be applied to Kashfi’s work or any number of other ‘mirrors’ from the Safavid and Qajar periods. However, it is clear that by the end of the nineteenth century significant changes were occurring in Iranian political thought. The idea of the king as ‘the Shadow of God on earth’ had been losing credibility under Qajar rule. Yet, even so, the notion that the Iranian government should be the defender of Islam never faded among important groups in the population. Conceptualizations of “just” and “unjust” rule were intimately linked with the protection of Islam. These notions were at the center of much of the oppositional discourse toward the Qajars throughout the nineteenth century. The growing influence of European political and economic power, and the spread of western ideals and values in Iran provided grounds to criticize the Qajar state for, among other things, failing to protect the lands of Islam and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 899-900.

<sup>41</sup> Lambton, “Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship,” 119.



even actively encouraging its oppression through state policies.<sup>42</sup> Combined with ulama-state tensions, the desire for representational government, and the influence of leftist ideology, these factors left the Qajars and the idea of monarchy severely weakened by the early twentieth century. However, this fact did not prevent the subsequent dynasty, the Pahlavis, from employing the ideology of kingship as justification for their rule. In spite of challenges to the political theory, the legacy of ‘mirrors’ and the ideology of kingship endured well into the twentieth century.

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<sup>42</sup> The Tobacco Revolt of 1891 is a prime example. The power of this idea of the state protecting Islam and virtuous living may also be seen in the criticism of the westernizing and secular intelligentsia who mocked the Qajars’ stated mission to protect Islam in place of any effective state policy.

### Chapter 3: ‘Mirrors’ and the Pahlavi Period

In 1926 an illuminated manuscript by the title *Tuhfat al-muluk* was completed for presentation to the Iranian heir apparent, Prince Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, by Sayyid Yusuf Majd al-Udaba and his son.<sup>43</sup> This tract contains 160 maxims in forty sections (*bab*) ‘selected by sages from the books of the ancients’.<sup>44</sup> By the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, the ‘mirrors’ genre had become a relic of the past, but the ideology of kingship, expectations of the court, and the office of the king which it promoted persisted and found renewed expression in the official rhetoric of the Pahlavi state. The presentation of an illuminated manuscript to the six-year-old Crown Prince demonstrates that at least some of the trappings of kingship and advice for rulers maintained their relevance to the court culture, even as the Pahlavi rulers sought to adapt to the expectations of modern forms of government.

This act, however, does not contradict the reality that by the end of the Qajar era political theory and practice in Iran had undergone significant transformations that represented a break with traditional views of the monarchy. The Constitutional

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<sup>43</sup> Muhammad Isa Waley, “The Shah of Iran’s Copy of ‘A Gift to Kings,’” in *A Cabinet of Oriental Curiosities: An Album for Graham Shaw from his Colleagues*, ed. Annabel Teh Gallop (London: The British Library, 2006), Ch. 35.

<sup>44</sup> The manuscript held by the British Library is written in *nasta’liq* calligraphy and features a penciled portrait of the young Prince Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. Among the maxims presented in the text are ‘Chapter Twenty-Eight: That four things are injurious to a sovereign: tyranny in a prince, negligence in a vizier, treachery in a secretary, humiliation of a prisoner, and oppression of the lowly.’ Also, ‘Chapter Twenty-Nine: That four things do not last: an unjust ruler; an old man without sense; unlawful property; and the passing days.’ Quoted in Waley, Ch. 35.

Revolution dealt a substantial blow to the Qajar ruling elite and, more importantly, to the institution of the monarchy. Some intellectuals of the day had begun to embrace liberal political values, and among others leftist tendencies were beginning to take root. At the state level the monarchy remained intact, but was increasingly influenced by European autocratic models and the pressures of modernization processes directed at political and military centralization. The tension between established and new forms of government brought the ideology of kingship to the forefront. Although this trend was much less pronounced during Reza Shah's reign, it became foundational to Muhammad Reza's quest for legitimacy as a monarch who protected the traditions of Iran's past and ensured Iran's progress as a modern nation.

While it is true that the rhetoric of the Iranian monarchy and the narrative of continuous Persian rule and civilization were focused largely on the construction of the Pahlavi nationalist vision, these symbols also functioned as a foundation for establishing the legitimacy of the monarchy. Some scholars have viewed the emphasis on the monarchy and the 'revival of sacral kingship' as evidence of an essential continuity in the ideology of kingship intrinsic to Iranian culture.<sup>45</sup> However, such essentializing perspectives fail to acknowledge not only the evolution of the ideas of kingship over time, but also the various ways in which rulers attempted to use these ideas to their advantage. Similarly, to speak of the 'revival' of the monarchy or the ideology of kingship as some scholars do, suggests that there was a dramatic break in the model of

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<sup>45</sup> See Pio Filippani-Ronconi, "The Tradition of Sacred Kingship in Iran," in *Iran Under the Pahlavis*, ed. George Lenczowski (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 51-84.

kingship in the Pahlavi period from previous dynasties. This view exaggerates the discontinuity between pre-modern and modern expressions of the monarchy and overlooks the persistent themes of kingship that had been passed down in ‘mirrors’ literature over the course of centuries.

Jamsheed Chosky has noted the degree to which the ‘revival’ of the monarchy significantly influenced Muhammad Reza Shah’s portrayal of his position as king and of the monarchy more generally. Highlighting the continuity of the ideology of kingship, he argues that it

Contrasts with the fact that there had been very little real dynastic continuity... As a result, to a limited extent Riza Shah and to a much greater extent his son Muhammad Riza sought to revive, modify, and reinforce the notion and praxis of sacral kinship in order to provide first legitimacy and later justification of their rule.<sup>46</sup>

Chosky’s work rightfully acknowledges the legitimizing role that notions of kingship played throughout Muhammad Reza’s reign, but he does not always demonstrate that these ideas had precedent in dynasties much later than Iran’s ancient civilizations.<sup>47</sup>

Bringing attention to this continuity, particularly in the modern period, is an important

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<sup>46</sup> Jamsheed K. Chosky, “Ancient Iranian Ideas in a Modern Context: Aspects of Royal legitimacy Under Muhammad Riza Shah Pahlavi” in *Views from the Edge: Essays in Honor of Richard W. Bulliet*, eds. Neguin Yavari, Lawrence g. Potter, and Jean-Marc Ran Oppenheim (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 48.

<sup>47</sup> For example, he writes, “The title *shahan-shah* had been assimilated by the earliest Iranians from their Near Eastern neighbors – the Assyrians and Urartians – during the first millennium B.C. ...Its adoption by the Pahlavis was thus not surprising, especially as it served to equate Riza Shah and Muhammad Riza Shah Pahlavi to the royal heroes of Iranian history and epic.” Chosky, 49-50. Yet Chosky does not mention that while this title indeed served to connect the Pahlavis with Iran’s ancient history, it necessarily connected them just as intimately with Iran’s other ruling dynasties, including the Qajars.

reminder that the Pahlavis were not reinventing the lost monarchy, but rather using the ideals and conceptualizations of kingship even as their immediate predecessors had.

Sohrabi's contention that critiques of the Qajar government throughout the Constitutional Revolution primarily took place within the local idiom – namely, the ideology of kingship developed in the mirrors literature – thus holds validity for the Pahlavi period as well. In spite of key differences in these periods, particularly the scope of public participation in opposition to the state and the diversity of political ideologies which dominated the late Pahlavi period, the ideas of kingship articulated for centuries in 'mirrors' literature continued to shape the Pahlavi discourse of legitimacy and the state's vision for the Iranian nation.

### **Legitimacy in the Reza Shah Period: 1925-1941**

The coronation of Reza Shah Pahlavi on April 25, 1926 marked the start of a new era and the end of the long demise of the Qajar dynasty. In contrast to the image of the weak and complacent Qajars, Reza Shah presented himself as a decisive and engaged leader eager to institute military reform and to modernize Iran. His programs of reform included expanding the army, limiting the judicial power of the ulama, education reform, building projects, and the imposition of "western" styles of dress. He aspired to show Iran to be a progressive and civilized nation, that it might gain the respect of the industrialized world and thus maintain its independence.

A military man in the prestigious Cossack brigade, Reza Khan was not educated in the court in the manners of a prince. His military background, in fact, probably

accounts for some of the reason that as king he was less concerned than his son with the ideology of the monarchy. Still, even before his coronation Reza Khan used the lessons of the ‘mirrors’ to secure his authority. When the ulama opposed his plan to establish a republic, Reza Khan responded:

It has become clear from experience that the leaders of the government must never oppose or contradict the ideas of the public, and it is in keeping with this very principle that the present government has avoided impeding the sentiments of the people, no matter whence they may derive. On the other hand, since my one personal aim and method from the beginning has been and is to preserve and guard the majesty of Islam and the independence of Iran... to preserve order and security and to stabilize the foundations of the state; and insofar as I and all the people in the army have, from the very beginning, regarded the preservation and protection of the dignity of Islam to be one of the greatest duties and kept before us the idea that Islam is always progress and be exalted and that respect for the standing of the religious institutions be fully observed and preserved.<sup>48</sup>

This statement reflects the tensions of the Iranian state in transition. The traditional structure of the monarchy had been challenged during the Constitutional Revolution, and new ideas of the will of the people and the responsibility of the government to that will had clearly found support among certain segments of the educated classes. At least superficially, Reza Khan acknowledged these new ideas and suggested that the government’s duty was to support public opinion – a reversal of the traditional understanding of kingship in which the people were to respect the opinion of the king.

However, Reza Khan’s appeal to tradition is also clearly observed in this statement. The sentiments that he refers to were not the will of the Iranian masses, but of the ulama who feared the loss of their position and privileges in society should a republic

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<sup>48</sup> Reza Khan, quoted in Sharough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 219-220.

be formed. Whatever its political exigency, Reza Khan's response to them invokes the long-held belief articulated throughout the 'mirrors for princes' genre that the government must first and foremost protect religion and religious institutions to secure the prosperity (in this case synonymous with progress) of the country. This response must be read as more than a convenient means to appease disgruntled ulama. The reliance on the tradition of kingship as propagated through the mirrors literature served to further legitimate the establishment of the Pahlavi monarchy as a continuation of the revered and just rulers throughout Iran's history who protected religious purity as part of the kingly office.

As forward looking as Reza Shah's nationalist project was, modernizing, creating and supporting industry, and promoting a level of westernization that would convince the European powers of Iran's place among the great nations of the world, there was also an aspect of the nationalist project that looked back to Iran's past as both a center of identity and of legitimacy. Several scholars have noted the trend in the late Qajar and Pahlavi periods toward highlighting Iran's ancient pre-Islamic past in place of its Shi'i religious identity. Reza Shah encouraged this celebration of Iranian identity as well. In his speech at the dedication of Ferdowsi's tomb at Tus in 1935, he praised Ferdowsi for his revival of the language and history of Iran through his epic poem, the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings).<sup>49</sup> Even the adoption of the surname 'Pahlavi' was in part a conscious move to

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<sup>49</sup> Reza Shah, speech on 21 Mehr, 1313. *Yadgar-i guzashtah; majmu'ah-i sukhanrahniha-yi A'lahazrat Faqid Riza Shah Kabir*, ed. 'Abd al-Riza Sadiqipur (Tehran, Sazman-i Chap va Intisharat-i Javidan, 1968), 121-122.

link Reza Shah to the heroes and pre-Islamic kings of Iran in an attempt to construct a new national identity.

But the invocation of the monarchy and long-held ideals of kingship were not merely instruments of the new state's nationalist vision. Perhaps more importantly, these ideals continued to be employed by the state to foster the legitimacy of a new monarchical line. At Reza Shah's coronation for example, the ceremony proceeded in the tradition of European as well as Qajar and Safavid coronations. And while the prime minister's closing speech quoted at length from the *Shahnameh*, the ceremony opened with a prayer by the Imam Jum'eh.<sup>50</sup> Each of these elements connected Reza Shah with the kings of the past, as well as with the office and responsibilities of kingship so clearly put forward in 'mirrors' literature. In spite of the fact that Reza Shah's reforms for modernizing the nation would distance him from much that was 'traditional' in Iran, particularly at the cultural level, the traditions of the monarchy served only to strengthen his power. As Abrahamian describes it, "[Reza Shah] conflated his own persona with the monarchy; the monarchy with the state; and the state with the nation."<sup>51</sup> Invoking the traditions of the monarchy provided the foundation on which Reza Shah claimed his authority and implemented his vision for a modern nation.

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<sup>50</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.



## **The Monarchy and Muhammad Reza Shah**

Establishing the continuity between Iran's past and the current dynasty may have found limited expression under Reza Shah, but it was under his son, Muhammad Reza, that the legitimizing rhetoric became much more pronounced. The ideological foundations and duties of kingship originating in ancient Iran and finding articulation in 'mirrors' literature of a largely Islamic idiom were central to Muhammad Reza's justification of his power as king and of the legitimacy of the Pahlavi dynasty. He wrote himself (and his father) into the role of legitimate king just as Iranian rulers had done for centuries before him. Much of Muhammad Reza Shah's efforts were directed at legitimizing the ideology of kingship, the office of the king, and his rightful occupation of that position.

### *The Need for Legitimacy and the Monarchy*

One of the primary reasons that Muhammad Reza expended such great energy on celebrating and defending the monarchy was the weak position of the monarchy by the mid-1950s. When Reza Shah abdicated his throne in 1941 he left the state and the monarchy weakened. His policies had aroused opposition from several segments of society. As one scholar describes it, "Beneath the surface...the existing political arrangements had begun to prove incongruous with the steady process of social change..."<sup>52</sup> In achieving his reforms, Reza Shah had laid the foundations of a modern state "at the cost of suppressing political development and all manifestations of

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<sup>52</sup> Fakhreddin Azimi, *Iran: The Crisis of Democracy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 1.

democratic aspirations. Modernization was perceived to be attainable only through autocratic measures and the suppression of representative institutions.”<sup>53</sup> Not only had he upset members of the ulama class with some of his more ‘secularizing’ measures, his totalitarian approach to ruling was invariably at odds with the development of representative government. With Reza Shah gone, and Muhammad Reza’s power weak, not only did Iran experience a social opening, but also a political opening as new political movements had freedom to organize.

Much has been written about the various opposition movements that rose up against the Pahlavi government in the decades preceding the 1979 revolution. For many of these groups, newer theories of government had completely supplanted the traditional ideology of kingship. Moreover, groups like The National Front, the Tudeh party, and supporters of Mossadeq’s nationalist government posed a tangible threat to Pahlavi rule. Members of the ruling elite also vied for power with the Shah. Especially in the power vacuum following Reza Shah’s abdication, “the dominant mode of political activity remained largely confined to the contest for power, with the monarchy as the main contender.”<sup>54</sup> The challenge to the monarchy from the ruling elite likely created even greater cause for Muhammad Reza to assert his legitimacy, thus his greater dependence on the discourse of kingship.

The Pahlavi shahs faced the dual task of demonstrating their legitimacy in the eyes of the outside world and to the populace of Iran. On one hand this entailed portraying themselves as modernizing reformers who were capable of bringing Iran into

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 18.

comparable standing with the nations of the West. On the other hand, they also needed to justify their rule and the office of the monarchy in an increasingly diverse political climate. This is not to say that this discourse actually afforded them legitimacy in the eyes of other elites or their opponents. Muhammad Reza's access to power, the institutional strength of the monarchy, and its connection to the armed forces were the foundations of his structural authority.<sup>55</sup> Especially as the Shah increasingly used force and oppressive measures to silence his opposition, the veneer of legitimacy achieved by invoking his right to kingship gained further importance.

#### *Illegitimate Rulers and the Need for Reform*

Both Pahlavi rulers, but Mohammad Reza in particular, employed “positive” strategies of legitimacy to connect their own rule to the line of just kings in the Iranian tradition. In their official discourse they fashioned themselves into ideal rulers in the same three categories of the nature of kingship, just rule, and the defense of religion as set forth in the ‘mirrors’ literature. In addition to this, at least under Muhammad Reza Shah, there existed a “negative” campaign of legitimization decrying the failures of previous rulers to embody the ideals of kingship that had been treasured since Iran's ancient past.

One form of this “negative” search for legitimacy adopted by Muhammad Reza Shah was the general dismissal of past rulers who had failed to secure Iran's prosperity

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<sup>55</sup> I disagree however with Azimi's contention that the Iranian monarchy had no religious legitimation or any historically rooted cultural and symbolic power that added to its institutional legitimacy. See Azimi, 18-19.

and progress and whose neglect was responsible for the pattern of decline that brought Iran to the low state that he and his father had worked so hard to reform. This strategy was ambiguous in that Muhammad Reza's comments often referred back to some indeterminate time in Iran's past when the king and his government simply failed to uphold their obligation to the people. As a result of this neglect the glory of Iran had deteriorated and "conditions in [the] country had come to resemble those of the Dark Ages in Europe...[Iranians] had disintegrated into lethargy and political and social anarchy."<sup>56</sup> In contrast, Muhammad Reza presented himself and his father as kings of action who had and were making great strides to restore the glory and prosperity of their country, as was their kingly duty and desire.

A second, more pointed strategy was Muhammad Reza's criticism of the Qajar rulers whose decadence, sloth, and weakness had left Iran vulnerable to penetration from Britain and Russia, leading to the legalized exploitation of Iran's resources, and the failure to defend the prosperity and interests of the Iranian nation. The reason for such criticism of the previous dynasty is not entirely clear. Having been already out of power for a few decades by the height of Muhammad Reza's reign, and banned by the Iranian constitution from holding government positions, the Qajar family presented no threat to the Pahlavi regime. Perhaps the living memory of the Qajar period and the Constitutional Revolution and the failures of that dynasty were to serve as a contrast to the rapid modernization, industrialization and material progress of the Pahlavi era. In other words,

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<sup>56</sup> Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Mission for my Country* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1961), 12.

whatever complaints were leveled against Pahlavi rule, the comparison to the Qajars was intended to imply that this regime showed marked improvement over the last.

Whatever the reason for this particular strategy, the influence of the ideals of kingship and the echoes of these ideas from the ‘mirrors’ literature remained as important in criticizing the Qajars as the details of their policies. Acknowledging that the Constitutional Revolution probably had little to do with a widespread desire for representative government, Muhammad Reza suggested instead that Iranians

Were desirous of a change from the tired Qajar dynasty...the common people realized that the Qajars of that period were largely devoid of any feeling of moral responsibility for the Persian people or for the welfare of the country...many ordinary people had become the victims of arbitrariness and excess.<sup>57</sup>

Even as he set forth his own understanding of democracy for twentieth-century Iran, Muhammad Reza used the traditional standards of kingship and governance, here the “moral responsibility” and “welfare of the country,” to undermine the Qajar record and to bolster the legitimacy of the dynasty that replaced them.

Ironically, the charges of “aimlessness and personal excesses, including lavish trips abroad”<sup>58</sup> that Muhammad Reza leveled against the Qajar kings, as well as the criticism that they “no longer cared much if the lower suffered injustice because of the higher”<sup>59</sup> were the same types of complaints that many of his own detractors would come

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<sup>57</sup> Mohammad Reza Shah, *Mission for My Country*, 165.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

to hold against him.<sup>60</sup> The content of these critiques also echoes the warnings and “negative” examples of kingship from ‘mirrors’ literature.

### *Muhammad Reza: The Ideal King*

From the “positive” angle, Muhammad Reza sought to legitimate his rule and the office of the monarch more generally by emphasizing the same qualities of the ideal ruler expressed in the ‘mirrors’ literature – divine ordination, the administration of justice, and the protection of Islam. A brief look at some of his speeches and publications shows the extent to which he employed these ideas in support of his position.

On the issue of the office of king, Muhammad Reza clearly articulated his sense that God had specifically chosen him for the position. In discussing the White Revolution, a series of reforms implemented in 1963, he writes, “I felt my mission was to enrich and pass on to the next generation the precious and ancient heritage of Iran, its sovereignty, independence, and national honour, all of which had been vested in me as a sacred trust.”<sup>61</sup> This ‘sacred trust’ was a reaffirmation of the sacral view of kingship that had remained part of the Iranian monarchical tradition through the Qajar era. Moreover, Muhammad Reza asserts,

I frankly confess that I was convinced that God had ordained me to do certain things in the service of my nation, things that perhaps could not be done by

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<sup>60</sup> One of the most striking examples of the “excesses” of the Pahlavi era of course being the grand celebration of 2500 years of Persian rule.

<sup>61</sup> Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, “The White Revolution: Principles and Accomplishments” reprinted in *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution: A Selection of Writing and Speeches of the Shahanshah* (London: Orient Commerce Establishment, 1971), 52.

anyone else...I consider myself merely as an agent of the will of God, and I pray that He may guide me in the fulfillment of his will, and keep me from error.<sup>62</sup>

This statement is essentially a claim to be ‘the Shadow of God’ on earth and is intended to give legitimacy to Muhammad Reza and his system of monarchy, as well as incontrovertible justification for his policies.

Muhammad Reza also uses his autobiography as further evidence that his kingship is uniquely ordained and sacred. He writes of the beginnings of his religious life during a childhood illness in which he had a vision of ‘Ali instructing him to drink a certain liquid. The following day, he reports, he was cured.<sup>63</sup> Muhammad Reza also gives two other accounts of visions of ‘Abbas and the twelfth Imam.<sup>64</sup> These, along with other ‘miraculous’ instances, including his survival of an assassination attempt, are all for Muhammad Reza proof of God’s protection of him, and were for him an early sign that he had God’s support. He offers “no apology for his religious faith” and claims that he knew “since early childhood that it was [his] destiny to become a king” though he considers it “arrogant to believe that [he] could accomplish [his] life-work without God’s help.”<sup>65</sup>

Having justified his right to kingship by the divine will of God, Muhammad Reza also goes to great lengths to assure his audiences of his religious credentials and Muslim piety. In some cases his statements and stories also serve to reinforce the sense of his divine mission as king. Against any accusations that he was a secularist or impious,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>63</sup> Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for my Country*, 54.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 58.

Muhammad Reza presented himself as a devout believer. He attributes the success of his government's reforms to his piety, contending that, "the real reason we were able to accomplish this transformation was because it was in keeping with the teachings of Islam and the highest principles of justice and altruism."<sup>66</sup> This adherence to Islamic principles in part came from his own personal piety. For example, he claims, "Only the Almighty knows of the sleepless nights I spent in contemplation and humble prayer for guidance."<sup>67</sup> While it may appear that this rhetoric was simply intended to assuage opposition from more 'traditional' segments of Iranian society or from the ulama who resented the Pahlavi government's policies, beneath the surface this pious discourse was part of a larger ideology of kingship to which Muhammad Reza claimed adherence.

Muhammad Reza not only offers this legitimation for himself, but defends his father's record as well. He endorses Reza Shah's religiosity and notes that he often visited the shrine of Imam Reza, in addition to naming all of his sons after him.<sup>68</sup> Through this and other examples, Muhammad Reza tries to answer accusations that Reza Shah was not only irreligious, but also actively opposed Iran's Shi'i faith. Moreover, he highlights the way in which his father finally brought Iran into the modern age. He claims that Reza Shah, "transformed the responsibilities of Persia's millennia-old monarchy,"<sup>69</sup> but in doing so he revived the glorious past and modernized the country in a manner worthy of its history.

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<sup>66</sup> Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, 48.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>68</sup> Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for my Country*, 47.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



Muhammad Reza's emphasis on justice and the king's responsibility to execute it constitutes the final way in which he employed the discourse of kingship to legitimize his rule and policies. The issue of justice is also the most demonstrative of the adaptability of the themes of 'mirrors' literature to new contexts. The Shah not only used the theme to substantiate his fulfillment of his kingly duties, but he adapted the definition of justice to his context to show his commitment to modern humanitarian values.

In describing the measure to establish 'Houses of Equity' as part of the White Revolution, Muhammad Reza takes the opportunity to explain how the execution of justice has changed over time. He maintains, "Justice in Iranian society was probably never administered in the way it is now, that is, by concentrating on the most deprived classes and the most distant villages."<sup>70</sup> With this statement, he portrays himself as one of the greatest administrators of justice in Iranian history, but he also incorporates new ideas of social justice that had been gaining currency, particularly in leftist ideology. His view of justice also appeals to growing humanitarian sentiments. In a speech to the International Conference on Human Rights, hosted in Tehran in May 1968, Muhammad Reza affirms:

There was a time when human rights meant only the equality of individuals in politics and before the law, and the democratic laws of the most advanced Western countries were based on this idea. But in our time political rights without social ones, legal justice without social justice, and political democracy without economic democracy no longer have any real meaning.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, *Iran, Philosophy Behind the Revolution*, 147. He reinforces the need for 'social justice' in a 1966 speech at the University of Sofia, Bulgaria in which he argues, "Legal justice is inevitably incomplete unless accompanied by social justice." *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

Still the monarch who defends the cause of justice, Muhammad Reza expanded the meaning of justice to maintain relevancy to the problems facing his country and to the contemporary conceptualizations of justice in the international arena.

By stressing the value of justice and his record of defending it, Muhammad Reza completed his defense of legitimacy by means of the most salient features of 'mirrors' literature which had provided a customary ideology of kingship only decades before he came to power. With his right to rule and the institution of the monarchy itself undermined by competing political theories, both Pahlavi shahs exploited elements of the ideology of kingship developed in 'mirrors for princes' in attempts to secure authority and justify controversial policies. Ultimately though, appealing to the discourse of sacral kingship and the defense of Islam and justice were not enough to convince the Iranian populace of Pahlavi legitimacy.

## Conclusion

The tradition of “mirrors for princes” literature in Iran was a primary means of developing and articulating the conceptualization of kingship all the way into the modern period. These ideas remained relatively unchanged across time and diverse socio-political contexts. Seyyid Ja’fari Darabi Kashfi’s *Tuhfat al-muluk* demonstrates the extent of these continuities from the medieval period to the nineteenth century. Additionally, although the ‘mirrors’ genre itself ceased in the twentieth century, the ideas of kingship that it had long promoted continued to influence the course of Iranian political thought. As this study has shown, the Pahlavis, especially Muhammad Reza Shah, employed the characteristics of kingship upheld in ‘mirrors’ literature as a means of establishing legitimacy and justifying their rule. While their attempts at defending the legitimacy of the Pahlavi dynasty and model of rule were ultimately unsuccessful, they nevertheless maintained the discourse of kingship and adapted it to the political demands of the day.

Although the Pahlavi rulers sought to modernize the state and form Iran into a modern nation, they did so without entirely relinquishing the idiom of the traditional monarchy. Secularizing measures, centralization, military reforms, that nationalization of education, and the development of modern bureaucracy all happened under an official state discourse of traditional sacred kingship, the preservation of Islam, and the guarantee of justice as the king’s chief responsibility. This apparent contradiction highlights some of the tensions of the modernist project, particularly in how the European model was

imported into other cultural contexts. Iran is example of the adaptation of a model to a local context for the creation of an authentic modernity. In this case, the local context was the Pahlavi monarchy, which simultaneously pursued modernist reforms in the tradition of Iranian kingship. The necessity of a strong state to implement many sweeping social and institutional reforms only served to make the ideology of kingship that much more desirable, particularly to Muhammad Reza. In many ways, Ali Mirsepassi's analysis of the 1979 revolution could be applied to Pahlavi rule as well. "The ideology...emerges less as a monolithic clash between 'modernity' and 'tradition,' than as an attempt to actualize a modernity accommodated to national, cultural and historical experiences."<sup>72</sup> The outcomes of such adaptations though, as in the Pahlavi case, are not without their problems.

Even as traditional ideas of sacred kingship persisted in the Pahlavi era, in spite of the weakening of the institution of the monarchy, it may be worth exploring to what degree these ideas influenced oppositional discourses in the Pahlavi period as well as the ideology of the Islamic Republic. Among the chief complaints of the opposition were the state's failures to defend Islam and govern justly. These criticisms were especially true of religious opponents. For example, although he adopted primarily populist language, Ayatollah Khomeini's platform was largely based on defending the cause of the dispossessed and securing justice for the oppressed. The familiarity of the tradition of

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<sup>72</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13. Alternatively, in Mirsepassi's language, the Shah's implementation of modernity can be seen as "a revelation of the interlocked 'other' face of modernity, the unspoken one whose brutal intrusions have decimated all corners of the world." *Ibid.*, 10.

sacral kingship and its influence in both the Qajar and Pahlavi periods may also provide an additional framework for understanding the evolution of Khomeini's political theory of *vilayat-e faqih* and continuities in the discourse and structure of the Pahlavi government and the Islamic Republic.

Beyond the legacy of 'mirrors' literature and kingship in the years leading up to the Iranian Revolution, further examination of this genre, particularly comparative work that engages the early modern and modern literature, would undoubtedly lead to fruitful scholarship. Possibilities remain not only for tracing out intellectual genealogies, but also for placing 'mirrors' in their sociopolitical contexts, and for more in-depth comparison of the genre across cultures. In the study of modern Iran such analysis may lend itself to correcting the narrow focus on ulama-state tensions and on the influx of European political ideas in the modern period to illuminate a diversity of perspectives that have previously been largely ignored. Furthermore, as 'mirrors' literature continued to develop in both Mughal and Ottoman lands into the early modern and modern periods, comparative study may provide new insights into encounters with modernity, European political ideas and imperialism. Although 'mirrors for princes' literature has its roots in the ancient civilizations of the Near East, its more recent manifestations may yet prove to be rich sources of intellectual, cultural, and socio-political history.

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