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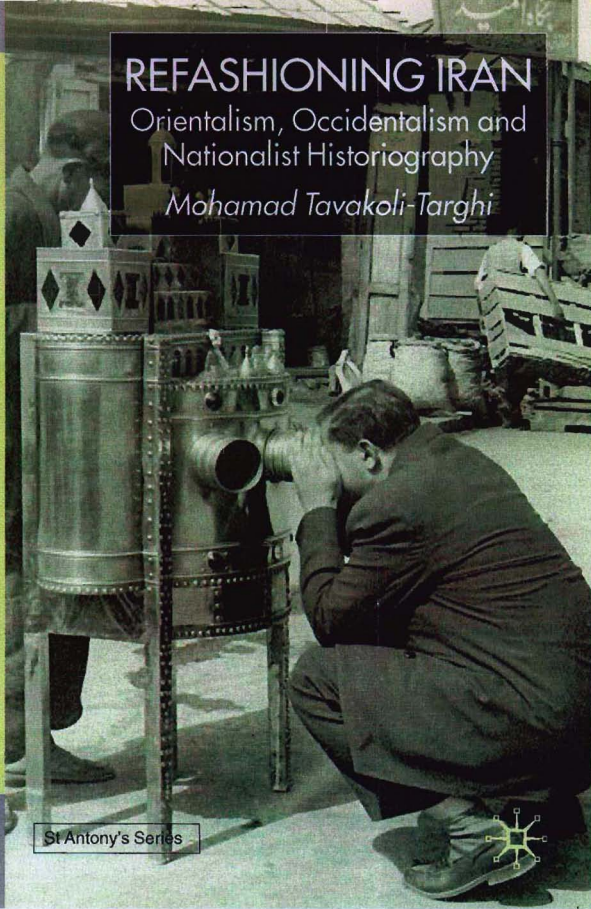
# REFASHIONING IRAN

Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi

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Orientalism, Occidentalism and  
Nationalist Historiography

*Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi*



St Antony's Series



# Refashioning Iran

## **Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography**

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# 6

## Crafting National Identity

### Envisaging history

The formation of a modern Iranian national identity was linked intimately to the configuration of its national history and restyling of the Persian language. Informed by *dasatiri* texts and inspired by the *Shahnamah* of Firdawsi, modern historical writings harnessed the Iranian homeland (*vatan*) to an immemorial past beginning with Mahabad and Kayumars and pointing toward a future unison with Europe. Iran's pre-Islamic past was celebrated as a glorious and industrious age, and its integration into the Arab-Islamic world was shunned as a cause of its "reverse progress" (*tarraqi-i ma'kus*). To catch up with the "civilized world," the architects of Iranian nationalism sought to "reawaken" the nation to self-consciousness by reactivating and inventing memories of the country's pre-Islamic past. The simplification and purification of Persian were corollaries of this project of national reawakening. Like the glorification of the pre-Islamic past, these language-based movements helped to dissociate Iran from Islam and to craft a distinct national identity and sodality.

In an increasing number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Persian historical texts, "Iran" was constituted as the shifter and organizer of chains of narration and emplotment. For instance, *Rustam al-Tawarikh*, completed in 1800, referred to Karim Khan Zand (d. 1779) as "the architect of the ruined Iran" (*mi'mar-i Iran-i viran*) and "the kind father of all residents of Iran" (*pidar-i mihraban-i hamah-i ahl-i Iran*). Among other compound constructions with Iran that were politically significant, Rustam al-Hukama, the author of this text, used *Iranmadar* (Iran-protector), *dawlat-i Iran* (government of Iran), *farmanrava'i-i Iran* (governing of Iran), *ahl-i Iran* (the people/residents of Iran), and territorial



couplets such as *kishvar-i Iran*, *mamalik-i Iran*, *qalamraw-i Iran*, and *bilad-i Iran*.<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Hasan Khan I'timad al-Saltanah, like many other nineteenth-century historians, set himself the task of writing a geographical and historical "biography of Iran" (*sharh hal-i Iran*).<sup>2</sup> The narratological centrality of the entity "Iran" signified the emergence of a new conception of historical time that differed from the prevalent cyclical arrangement found in chronicles. While Iran had been previously conceived of as the center of the universe in the premodern Persian geographic imagination,<sup>3</sup> pre-nineteenth-century chronicles rarely temporized Iran. Rather, they were primarily concerned with chronicling the cycles of the rise and fall of dynasties. Making Iran the "ultimate referent" for the sequence of historical events allowed for the emergence of new modes of historical emplotment. Ancient history, which was for so long equated with the sacred history and the cycles of messengers and prophets from the time of Adam to the rise of Muhammad, was reenvisioned. The cyclical time of messengers and prophets gave way to an *Iran-time* connecting the "glorious pre-Islamic past" to a reawakened present and a rejuvenating future. These newer histories challenged the universality of biblical/Qur'anic stories. The new historians granted that Adam might have been the father of the Arabs, but he was not the father of humanity.

In the emerging Iran-time, the mythical tempos of *Dasatir*, *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, *Sharistan*, and *Shahnamah* increasingly displaced the sacred time of Islam. Reading and (re)citing these Iran-glorifying texts in a period of societal dislocation, military defeats, and foreign infiltration during the nineteenth century allowed for the rearticulation of Iranian identity and the construction of alternative forms of historical narrations and periodizations. The authorization and popular (re)citation of these narratives resulted in a process of cultural *transference* that intensified the desire for a recovery of the "forgotten history" of ancient Iran. This awakening of interest in the country's pre-Islamic history provided a formative element in the discourse of constitutionalism. The Islamic master-narrative dividing history into civilized Islamic and uncivilized pre-Islamic periods was increasingly displaced with the meta-narratives and periodizations of *Dasatir* and *Shahnamah*. The eras of Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus were substituted with those of Kayumars, Hushang, Tahmuris, and Jamshid.

The dissemination of *dasatiri* texts heightened the interest in the *Shahnamah*, which was published in more than 20 editions in Iran and India in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The *Shahnamah* provided valuable semantic and symbolic resources for dissociating Iran from Islam and

for fashioning an alternative basis of identity. Its accessibility contributed to its increased recitation in the coffeehouses, important sites for cultural and political production and dissemination. In fact, recitation of the *Shahnamah* in the coffeehouses increasingly displaced the narration of popular religious epics such as *Husayn-i Kurd-i Shabistari*, *Iskandar Namah*, *Rumuz-i Hamzah*, and *Khavar Namah*.<sup>5</sup> A number of nineteenth-century poets such as Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Harif Jandaqi (d. 1814), Hamdam Shirazi, and Mirza Ibrahim Manzur were, among others, well-known reciters of the *Shahnamah*.<sup>6</sup> The Qajar Aqa Muhammad Khan, Fath 'Ali Shah, Nasir al-Din Shah, and Muzaffar al-Din Shah were known to have had their own reciters or *Shahnamah'khwanan*.<sup>7</sup> Hearing that John Malcolm's *History of Persia* was read to Nasir-Din Shah at bedtime, Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir (d. 1852) is reported to have suggested that the Shah should have the *Shahnamah* recited instead to him: "Why don't you read the *Shahnamah*. . . You should know that for all Iranians, for the highest to the lowest, the *Shahnamah* is the best of all books."<sup>8</sup> The importance of the *Shahnamah*, and thus pre-Islamic Iran, in nineteenth-century Iran is also evident from the increased use of the names of its heroes and characters. For example, many Qajar princes were given names such as Kayumars, Jamshid, Farhad, Firaydun, Nushafarin, Isfand-yar, Ardashir, Bahman, Kaykavus, and Khusraw. This emerging popularity of ancient Iranian names signaled an important aesthetic shift in the constitution of both personal and national identities.

Mimicry of the *Shahnamah*, popular among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets, became an important means for literary and cultural creativity. Known as the Second Firdawsi (Firdawsi-i Sani), Muhammad 'Ali Tusi's *Shahanshah Namah-i Nadiri* began in 1721 with an account of the desolation of the provinces and the rise of revolts attributed to the "negligence of the King of Iran-land" (*ihmal-i sultan-i Iran zamin*). This, in his view, provided suitable conditions for the rise of Nadir Shah Afshar (r. 1736–47). The text ended by drawing a parallel between the fate of Jamshid and Zahhak in the *Shahnamah* and that of Nadir Shah who had become intoxicated with power. "Forgetting the truth like Jamshid" and "slaughtering the people like Zahhak," Nadir was beheaded by his own guards.<sup>9</sup> Likewise in "the Pahlavi author's style" (*bi'din-i guyandah-i Pahlavi*), Fath 'Ali Khan Saba (d. 1822) described the Irano-Russian war of the 1810s in his *Shahanshahnamah*.<sup>10</sup> Among other poets imitating Firdawsi were Visal Shirazi (d. 1845) and his son, Muhammad Davari (d. 1866). Davari was an able calligrapher, transcribing one of the most beautiful copies of the *Shahnamah*.<sup>11</sup> In a versified introduction to his transcribed edition, Davari praised Firdawsi for glorifying the name



of Iran and for revitalizing ancient history.<sup>12</sup> He wrote a versified history of Iran from the Mongol to the Safavid period, but owing to his early death it was never finished.<sup>13</sup> These imitations of Firdawsi reactivated and disseminated memories of pre-Islamic Iran and thus contributed to the recirculation of a large number of obsolete Persian concepts and allusions.<sup>14</sup>

Veneration of Firdawsi was not limited to "traditionalist" poets. Nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Fath 'Ali Akhundzadah (1812–78), Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani (1855–98), and Mirza Malkum Khan (d. 1908), who were critical of Iran's poetic tradition, respected Firdawsi's oeuvre. Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani viewed the *Shahnamah* as a foundation for preserving the "people/nation of Iran" (*millat-i Iran*):

If it were not for the *Shahnamah* of Firdawsi, the language and the race of the Iranian nation/people [*lughat va jinsiyat-i millat-i Iran*] would have been at once transformed into Arabic after the domination by the Arab tribes in Iran. Like the peoples of Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, the Persian speakers would have changed their race and nationality [*milliyat va jinsiyat*].<sup>15</sup>

Imitating Firdawsi, Kirmani wrote a versified history entitled *Namah-i Bastan* (The Book of Ancients).<sup>16</sup> In the introduction, he accused the classical poets of disseminating falsehoods, idleness, and moral corruption in the persons of kings and *vazirs*. Yet Kirmani praised Firdawsi for "inspiring in the hearts of Iranians patriotism, love of their race [*hubb-i milliyat va jinsiyat*], energy and courage; while here and there he also endeavored to reform their characters."<sup>17</sup> Akhundzadah, who was also critical of Persian poetic tradition, viewed Firdawsi as one of the best Muslim poets. Comparing Firdawsi to Homer and Shakespeare, he asserted, "It can be truthfully stated that amongst the Muslim people [*millat-i Islam*] only the work of Firdawsi can be considered poetry."<sup>18</sup> In his *Majma' al-Fusaha*, Riza Quli Khan Hidayat (1800–71) characterized *Shahnamah* as the "grand work" (*namah-i 'azim*) of Persian poetry, comparable only to *Masnavi* of Mawlavi.<sup>19</sup> The nineteenth-century authorization and popular (re)citation of the epic *Shahnamah* resulted in a process of cultural transference that intensified the desire for the recovery of the "forgotten history" of ancient Iran. By transference, I have in mind the dialogic relation of cultural interlocutors and historical texts, that is, the *Shahnamah*-narrators and the *Shahnamah*, whereby the language and the themes of the *Shahnamah* reappear in the works of the interlocutor.<sup>20</sup> Identification with the ancient world of *Shahnamah* became a formative element of modern national identity.

Several historians contributed to the reactivation of Iran's ancient history and to the configuration of a glorious past. Mahmud Mirza Qajar's (b. 1799?) *Tazkirah at-Salatin* began with Kayumars and concluded with the reign of Fath'ali Shah.<sup>21</sup> *Khulasat al-Tawarikh*, another condensed general history of Iran from Kayumars to Fath'ali Shah, ended with the events of year 1798.<sup>22</sup> 'Itizad al-Saltanah's *Iksir al-Tawarikh* of 1842 likewise began with Kayumars and ended with the reign of Muhammad Shah (1834–48), the ruler who had commissioned the work.<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Shah's interest in pre-Islamic history is evident from his support of Henry Rawlinson's research on Bistun, which was translated for him into Persian, with an introduction by Mirza Muhammad Taqi Lisan al-Mulk (1801–79).<sup>24</sup> Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani's *Namah-i Bastan*, clearly indebted to *Dasatir* and *Dabistan Mazahib*, also began with Kayumars and ended with his contemporary Nasir al-Din Shah. In his *Ayinah-i Sikandari*, Kirmani synthesized Persian historical texts with Orientalist works on pre-Islamic Iran. *Ayinah-i Sikandari* was hailed as "the genealogy of this noble nation/people" (*shajarah namah-i in millat-i najib*).<sup>25</sup>

Authors of these general histories viewed their efforts as attempts to overcome a debilitating historical amnesia. According to 'Itimad al-Saltanah, "for a civilized people and a great nation ... no imaginable flaw is more severe than ignorance of the history of their country and a total forgetting of events of the former times."<sup>26</sup> In his tireless effort to recover the memory of Ashkanid history, 'Itimad al-Saltanah synthesized Orientalist works with classical Persian and Arabic mythhistories.<sup>27</sup> His "discovery" that the Qajars were descendants of the Ashkanids was highly praised by Nasir al-Din Shah.<sup>28</sup> Jalal al-Din Mirza's *Namah-i Khusravan*, a children's history book, was popular for its illustrations and for its use of "pure Persian" prose. Akhundzadah praised Jalal al-Din Mirza for his use of pure Persian language by saying, "Your excellency has freed our tongue from the domination of the Arabic language."<sup>29</sup> Jalal al-Din Mirza's illustrations invented a visual memory of the past and thus were further used for plaster-molding and interior decoration in Qajar houses and palaces.<sup>30</sup> Furughi, in his *Tarikh-i Salatin-i Sasani*, regretted that while "all over Europe, that is in London and Paris, people know the history of our land [*tarikh-i mamlikat-i ma*], but children of my own homeland are entirely ignorant of it." He celebrated the completion of his work by declaring, "I can now say that Iran has a Sasanid history."<sup>31</sup>

Historical research and the ensuing reconstruction of the pre-Islamic past helped to craft a distinctly nationalist memory and identity. With the rise of Iranian nationalism, pre-Islamic names lost their predominantly

Zoroastrian connotations and were adopted as proper names by Muslim Iranians. Likewise, Zoroastrian mythologies were cast as quintessentially Iranian. By anthropomorphizing the Iranian homeland (*vatan*), these mythologies were constituted as the nation's "spirit and character."

Emplotted in a tragic mode, these ancient histories of Iran signaled the will to recover lost national glories and to dissociate the Iranian Self from the "alien" Muslim-Arabs who had dominated Iran. Pre-Islamic myths and symbols were used by nationalists to fashion a new Iran and to reidentify the *millat*. The nationalist thinker Akhundzadah, for example, objected to using a picture of a mosque as the logo for the newspaper *Millat-i Saniyah-i Iran*.<sup>32</sup> In a letter to the editor he argued that, "if by *millat-i Iran* you mean the specific connotation prevalent today, the mosque, which is a general symbol for all Muslims, is not an appropriate logo."<sup>33</sup> He suggested that the newspaper should use a combination of a pre-Islamic symbol, like an icon of Persepolis, and a picture of a Safavid building, in order to capture the spirit of the *millat-i Iran* (the people/nation of Iran).<sup>34</sup> Kavah the Blacksmith (Kavah-i Ahangar), another character from the *Shahnamah* of Firdawsi, provided an inspiring icon. Furughi argued that Kavah's famous banner should be seen as the national flag of Iran.<sup>35</sup> Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani portrayed Kavah as a revolutionary vanguard:

Because of the courage and nationalist endeavors [*ghayrat va himmat-i milli*] of Kavah-i Ahangar, who uprooted from Iran the rule of the Chaldean Dynasty, which had lasted for 900 years, Iranians can truthfully be proud that they taught the nations of the world how to remove oppression and repel the repression of despotic Kings.

Through a process of narrative recoding, Kavah, the restorer of monarchy to Faraydun, was refashioned as a revolutionary nationalist. Similarly, Faraydun, a pre-Islamic king, was depicted as a modernizing monarch who transformed the "indolent, fainéant, and world-resigning" Iranians into a people interested in "construction, cultivation, development, the pursuit of happiness and the reform of material life."<sup>36</sup> Anticipating the formation of a constitutional form of government in Iran, another pre-Islamic king, Anushirvan "Dadgar" (the Just), was depicted as a constitutional monarch.<sup>37</sup> In a critique of contemporary cultural practices, it was argued that veiling of women and polygamy were not aspects of the pre-Islamic past.<sup>38</sup> These "historical facts" were used rhetorically in a nationalist political discourse that projected Iran's "decadence" onto Arabs and Islam.



The protagonists of Iranian nationalism masterfully used history as a rhetorical resource. They inverted the Islamic system of historical narration, in which the rise of Muhammad constituted the beginning of a new civilization and which defined the pre-Islamic period as the age of infidelity and ignorance. Like Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, the forerunners of constitutionalism construed the pre-Islamic period as an "enlightened age" (*asr-i munavvar*). They explained that the desperate conditions of their time were the result of the Muslim conquest of Iran.<sup>39</sup> Mirza Fath 'Ali Akhundzadah boldly asserted that "the Arabs were the cause of the Iranian people's misfortune."<sup>40</sup> In opposition to the "weak" and "despotic" state, which claimed to be the protector of Islam and the *Shari'a*, the protagonists of the "new age" (*asr-i jadid*) looked back to the pre-Islamic era with great nostalgia. They borrowed pre-Islamic myths and images to articulate a new social imaginary and historical identity. In the emerging nationalist discourse Islam was defined as the religion of Arabs and as the cause of Iran's weakness and decadence.<sup>41</sup> Looking back to the idealized pre-Islamic Iran, Akhundzadah, addressing "Iran," stated:

What a shame for you, Iran: Where is your grandeur? Where is that power, that prosperity that you once enjoyed? It has been 1,280 years now that the naked and starving Arabs have descended upon you and made your life miserable. Your land is in ruins, your people ignorant and innocent of civilization, deprived of prosperity and freedom, and your King is a despot.<sup>42</sup>

The same Arabophobic ideas, in remarkably similar language, were echoed in Kirmani's rhetorical masterpiece, *Sah Maktub*.<sup>43</sup> In such "novelized" and "dramatized" accounts of historical processes, the pre-Islamic era was viewed as a lost Utopia that possessed just rulers. By contrast, the Islamic period was projected as a time of misery, ruin, ignorance, and despotism. Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani called the fall from this imaginary grace the "reverse progress of Iran" (*tarraqi-i ma'kus-i Iran*).<sup>44</sup> The rhetorical use of history, according to him, was "necessary for the uprooting of the malicious tree of oppression and for the revitalization of the power of *milliyat* [nationalism] in the character of the Iranian people."<sup>45</sup>

In a double process of projection and introjection Iranian nationalists attributed their undesirable customs and conditions to Arabs and Islam. Obversely, desirable European manners and cultures were appropriated and depicted as originally Iranian. In fact, contrary to the

"Westernization" thesis, identification with European culture provided an important component for the long process of historical dissociation from the Arab-Islamic culture that occurred in the nineteenth century. In these endeavors fake etymology and assumed resemblance facilitated cultural appropriation of modern European institutions. Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, viewing history as the "firm foundation of the *millat*," speculated that the French term "histoire" was actually derived from the Persian word "*ustuvar*," meaning firm and sturdy.<sup>46</sup> After enumerating a number of Persian words with similar roots in French (i.e., *pidar* = *père*, *dandan* = *dent*, *zanu* = *genou*), he argued that the French and Iranians were "two nations born from the same father and mother." The French who moved to the West progressed and prospered, Iranians, by contrast, were raided by the Arabs in the East and as a result lost their reason, knowledge, and ethics and forgot their etiquette, norms of life, and means of progress, prosperity, happiness, and comfort.<sup>47</sup> Likewise Muhammad Shah (r. 1834–48), in a public proclamation calling for the adaptation for European-style military uniforms, had argued that these uniforms were really copies of ancient Iranian uniforms. He supported these claims by pointing to the similarities between the new uniforms and the uniforms of the soldiers engraved on the walls of Persepolis.<sup>48</sup> In a similar manner, I'tizad al-Saltanah attributed the "new order" (*nizam-i jadid*) of military reorganization to the pre-Islamic Iranians. Forgetting their military organization, he argued, Iranians were weakened and defeated by the Arabs whereas Europeans who imitated Iranians were empowered.<sup>49</sup> In another example, Mirza 'Abd al-Latif Shushtari (d. 1805) claimed the discovery of a Persian origin for the European custom of dining at a table. He argued that the term *mizban* (host) was etymologically connected to the word *miz* (table). Accordingly, the compound *miz-ban* [understood as table + keeper] constituted a trace of a forgotten Persian custom adopted by Europeans.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Kirmani attributed the progress of Europe to the ideas of "liberty and equality" (*azadi va musavat*), which in his view had been introduced in Iran by the pre-Islamic reformer Mazdak.<sup>51</sup> In I'timad al-Saltanah's *Durrar al-Tijan*, modern political concepts such as *mashviratkhana* and *majlis-i shura* (parliament), *jumhuri* (republic), and *mashrutah* (constitutional) were used to describe the pre-Islamic Ashkanid dynasty. I'timad al-Saltanah asserted that this dynasty "like the contemporary British monarchy was constitutional and not despotic."<sup>52</sup> Jamal al-Din Afghani, at the end of his brief outline of Iranian history from the time of Kayumars to Nasir al-Din Shah, similarly believed that most European industrial innovations, such as the telescope, camera, and telephone, had actually been



invented by Iranians of earlier times.<sup>53</sup> Similar claims were promoted by Kirmani, who viewed Iranians as the inventors of devices as varied as the telegraph, postal service, and ships.<sup>54</sup> In this historical mode of self-refashioning, the architects of Iranian modernity crafted a past that mirrored, and even surpassed, that of nineteenth-century Europe.

### Restyling Persian

The invention of a glorious past was contemporaneous with a thorough restylization of the Persian language. Restyling the Persian language, a process which continues today, was achieved in a dialogic relationship with Iran's Arab- and European-Other, but also with its often-ignored Indian-Other. The relationship with the Persian-speaking Indian-Other facilitated the renaissance and canonization of classical Persian literature. Fear of European colonization, experienced particularly in India where Persian served as an official language until the 1830s, led to a desire for neologism, lexicography, and the writing of grammar texts. The Arab-Other, on the other hand, provided Iranian nationalists with a scapegoat for the purging of the "sweet Persian language" (*zaban-i shirin-i Parsi*) from the influence of "the difficult language of the Arabs" (*zaban-i dushvar-i 'Arab*). Through these types of responses, the Persian language was instituted as essential to the formation of Iranian national identity. Kirmani's observation that "language is history," and that "the strength of each nation and people depends on the strength of their language," became accepted nationalist wisdom.<sup>55</sup> This development in Iran paralleled other nationalist movements worldwide.<sup>56</sup>

The rise of a Persian print culture in the late eighteenth century strengthened a literary style which resulted from a dispute among Persian poets of Iran and India. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, India had been an important center for the development of Persian art, culture, and literature and was the site of the emergence of the "New Style" (*Tarz-i Naw*) poetry, known as the "Indian School" (*Sabk-i Hindi*).<sup>57</sup> The poets of the Indian School broke away from the conventional paradigms of the classical Persian poets in order to fashion a distinct style and language.<sup>58</sup> They created new conventions and systems of signification by altering poetic tropes and by coining new compound words. The liberty taken by Indian poets in constructing and shifting the meaning of terms and concepts came to be viewed by the Iranian literati as a sign of their basic unfamiliarity and incompetence in the Persian language.<sup>59</sup> This issue of linguistic competence served as the foundation for intense debates and disputes between

Iranian and Indian poets. Siraj 'Ali Khan Arzu (1689–1756), a leading Indian lexicographer and linguist, outlined in his famous essay *Dad-i Sukhan* one of these controversies that related to the problems of rhetoric, poetic creativity, and language identity. Reflecting on whether an Indian poet's resignification of idioms should be regarded as an error, Arzu took a pragmatic stance. He declared: "the Persian poets belonging to countries other than Iran, who are experts in language and rhetoric and have a long experience in poetic exercises, are qualified to amend or modify the meaning of words and idioms and use indigenous idioms in cases of poetic contingency." Such sentiments had been previously expressed by the poet Munir Lahuri (d. 1644) in his *Kamamah-i munir*. Munir criticized contemporary poets who claimed mastery of the Persian language because of their birth in Iran. Likewise the seventeenth-century poet Shayda Fatihpuri (d. 1632) criticized Iranians who dismissed him because of his Indian lineage.<sup>60</sup>

In an objection to *Tarz-i Naw* poets, Mir Sayyid 'Ali Mushtaq (1689–1757) and his disciples<sup>61</sup> – Lutf 'Ali Bayg Azar Baygdili (1721–80), Hatif Isfahani (d. 1784), Sabahi Bigdili (d. 1792) – negated the innovations of the Indian School, formulating a program explicitly aimed at returning to the images and language of classical poets.<sup>62</sup> Mushtaq believed that "poets must follow Sa'di in *qazal*, Anvari in *qasidah*, Firdawsi and Nizami in *bazm*, Ibn Yamin in *qit'ah*, and Khayyam in *rubai*; otherwise they drive on the path to falsity."<sup>63</sup> This authorization of classical poets, later labeled as *Bazgasht-i Adabi* (literary return), was an early expression of literary nationalism in Iran and has had a continuous influence on the modernist historiography of Persian literature. Even though in some instances it led to "mindless imitation" and to the rise of "Don Quixotes of Iran's poetic history"<sup>64</sup> or what Mahdi Akhavan Salis called "false Sa'dis, false Sana'is, [and] false Manuchihris," this literary return was a creative reauthorization of classical texts.<sup>65</sup> By authorizing classical poets and by recirculating their word choices, the literary return contributed to canon formation and a nineteenth-century literary renaissance.<sup>66</sup>

Notwithstanding the animosity of Iranian poets toward the Persianate poets of India, the development of Persian print culture in India did provide textual resources for a later poetic renaissance in Iran. As with the rise of Persian printing in India, a large number of classical texts became easily accessible for the first time. Printing made possible the formation of authoritative canons and facilitated the dissemination of seminal texts at an affordable price. Cultural and religious movements peripheral to the Shi'i networks of knowledge and power gained new means of propagation and dissemination. Printed copies of *Dasatir*

(1818 and 1888), *Dabistan-i Mazahib* (1809, 1818, 1860), *Farhang-i Jahangiri*, and *Burhan-i Qati'* (1818, 1858),<sup>67</sup> for example, were widely disseminated in Iran and contributed to the vernacularization of the Persian language. These texts popularized a large number of supposedly obsolete Persian words reactivated by Azar Kayvan and his disciples. *Farhang-i Jahangiri* of Inju Shirzai (d. c.1626) included a chapter devoted to ancient Persian terms known as *zand va pazand* or *huzvarish*.<sup>68</sup> *Burhan Qati'* of Khalaf Tabriz embraced neologisms of Azar Kayvan and his disciples. These words quickly found their way into the works of Iranian poets such as Fath'ali Khan Saba (d. 1238/1822), Yaghma Jandagi (d. 1271/1859), Qa'ani (d. 1271/1854), Furughi Bistami (d. 1274/1857), Surush Isfahani (d. 1285/1868), Fursat Shirazi (1854–1920), and Fath Allah Shaybani (d. 1308/1890). Both Saba and Yaghma Jandaqi owned personal copies of *Burhan Qati'*.<sup>69</sup> Yaghma in many of his correspondences used unfamiliar and newly constructed Persian concepts instead of the popularly used Arabic equivalents.<sup>70</sup> He called this “recently appeared new style” (*tazah ravish-i naw didar*) pure Persian (*farsi-yi basit* or *parsinigari*)<sup>71</sup> and encouraged his disciples to practice *parsinigari*. In a letter Yaghma Jandaqi remarked that *parsinigari* was prevalent among many writers in Iran who were “highly determined in their endeavor and have written valuable materials.”<sup>72</sup> The practitioners of *parsinigari* used terms such *amigh*, *akhshayj*, *farsandaj*, and *timsar*, which were recirculated by the followers of Azar Kayvan in *dasatiri* texts. Persian scholars and lexicographers Purdavud and 'Ali Akbar Dihkhuda have drawn attention to the inauthenticity of *dasatiri* terms. But the proliferation of these words, despite their “suspected” origin, signified a passion for semantic diversification and neologism in the nineteenth-century “invention of tradition.”

An important context for the proliferation of neologism during the nineteenth century was the British policy of replacing Persian as the official language in India. Among the charges leveled against the Eastern languages, including Persian, was that they “greatly darken the mind and vitiate the heart” and are not an “adequate medium for communicating a knowledge of the higher departments of literature, science, and theology.”<sup>73</sup> Such anti-Persian views justified the British government’s abolition of Persian as the official language of India in 1834. At the same time this intensified the need for lexicography and neologism as anti-colonial defense mechanisms.<sup>74</sup> Abolition of Persian as the official language in India was noted in Iran. Persian dictionaries published in India provided the basic model and lexical resources for compilation of dictionaries such as *Farhang-i Anjuman Ara-yi Nasiri* (1871), *Farhang-i*



*Nazim al-Atibba'* (1900), and *Lughatnamah-i Dihkhuda* (1958–66). Iranian neologists such as Isma'il Tuysirkani, Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, and Ahmad Kasravi used many of the terms and concepts objected to in the lexicographical controversies in India surrounding *Burhan Qati'*.<sup>75</sup>

With the nineteenth-century governmentalization of everyday life and the formation of the public sphere, Iranian bureaucrats recognized that a style of writing full of allusions and ambiguities was inappropriate for communication and popular politics. Bureaucrats and court historians, continuing a trend set by Indian Persophones, began to take pride in simple and comprehensible writing. Simple language meant de-Arabization and vernacularization of the Persian language. Among the leading practitioners of "simple prose" (*nasr-i sadah* or *sadah nivisi*) were 'Abd al-Razzaq Dunbuli (1753–1826), Qa'im Maqam Farahani (1779–1835 or 1836), Muhammad Ibrahim Madayih-nigar (d. 1325/1907), Muhammad Khan Sinki Majd al-Mulk (1809–79), Hasan 'Ali Khan Amir Nizam Garusi (1820–99), Nadir Mirza Qajar (1826–85), and Amin al-Dawlah (1844–1904 or 5). With the expansion of the public sphere, these writers sought to close the gap between the written language of the elite and the spoken language of the masses by moving away from "sheer display of rhetorical cleverness and skill"<sup>76</sup> and adopting a style directed toward communication with the people (*mardum*).<sup>77</sup> This was the stated goal of official journals and news papers, *Kaqaz-i Akhbar*, *Vaqay'-i Ittifaqiyah*, *Iran*, *Ruznamah-i Dawlat-i 'Illyah-i Iran*, and *Ruznamah-i Millati*.

The need to communicate with the public was evident from two significant publicity pronouncements issued by Muhammad Shah in 1839. The first, as explained earlier, pertained to the adaptation of modern military uniforms. This announcement called for the standardization of uniforms with the intended function of promoting the "homogenization of all people" (*hamah mardum bih surat-i tawhid shavand*). The royal publicity explained that the new uniform, modeled after pre-Islamic attire, was lighter, easier to remove, and cheaper to produce. Signifying the formation of a national economy, it remarked that the fabric for these uniforms should no longer be imported from India but made of indigenous materials in Kirman and Shiraz. This printed publicity was disseminated in all the provinces and barracks (*buldan va amsar-i Iran*).<sup>78</sup> In the second public statement, the Shah explained why he had to retreat from his military campaign in Herat. Pressured by the British to withdraw from Herat, Muhammad Shah reassured "the people of Iran" (*mardum-i Iran*) that his retreat was not due to war fatigue or change of mind. He assured the soldiers, cavaliers,

and tankers that he preferred an "honorable and virtuous/manly death" (*murdan-i ba ghayrat va mardanigi*) to a luxurious palace life. Here the Shah hailed the soldiers as his "brave religious brothers" (*hamana shuma baradaran-i dini va ghayur-i man hastid*).<sup>79</sup> The need to shape and to contain public opinion meant that these pronouncements had to be written in a simple and easily communicable language.

Along with the bureaucratic "simple prose" movement that addressed an enlarged critical reading public, there was a nascent nationalist attempt to purify the Persian language of Arabic words and concepts. The purist movement in language, contrary to the prevalent historical perception, predated the Riza Shah period (1925–41).<sup>80</sup> Amongst the nineteenth-century practitioners of "pure Persian" were: Mirza Razi Tabrizi, Farhad Mirza, Ahmad Divan Baygi Shirazi, Jalal al-Din Mirza, Isma'il Khan Tusirkani, Gawhar Yazdi, Riza Bagishlu Ghazvini, Manakji Limji Hataria, Aqa Khan Kirmani, Abu al-Fazl Gulpaygani,<sup>81</sup> Baha'u'llah,<sup>82</sup> and Kaykhusraw Shahrukh Kirmani.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the Qajar statesman Mirza 'Ali Amin al-Dawlah demonstrated an ability to write in "pure Persian" prose in the introduction to his memoirs, but refrained from doing so in the body of the text, arguing that "children of Iranian descent" (*kudakan-i Irani nizhad*) would understand him better in the contemporary language that is mixed with Arabic (*zaban-i imruzi-i Iran kah amikhtah bah navadir-i Tazi ast*).<sup>84</sup> Directly or indirectly these authors were informed by *Dasatir's* exemplary prose. While Persian purism found a nationalist expression in Iran, as a literary movement it was not limited to Iranian writers. Indeed the Indian poet Asadallah Ghalib (1797–1896) was an unquestionable nineteenth-century master of Persian purism.<sup>85</sup>

The movement for the simplification and purification of the Persian language coincided with the movement for the simplification of Ottoman Turkish. Both were intimately tied to the struggle for constitutionalism. The language reform was not an after-effect of the constitutional revolutions in Iran and the Ottoman Empire but a prelude to them. Purists viewed language as essential to national identity. As Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani argued, "*Millat* means a people [*ummat*] speaking in one language. The Arab *millat* means Arabophones, Turkish *millat* means Turkophones, and Persian *millat* means Persophones."<sup>86</sup> The purist movement in Iran, by recirculating and resignifying archaic concept, provided the semantic field for the dissociation of Iran from Islam and formation of a nationalist system of signification and political imagination.

Consciousness of language did not stop with the attempt to purify the Persian language and substitute Arabic terms with their Persian



equivalents. There were also attempts to study and to reform the structure of the Persian language. In 1286/1869 Riza Quli Khan Hidayat, lamenting the state of the language, wrote:

In the 1286 years since the *hijra* of Muhammad, the Arabic language has continuously developed and evolved; but because of religious enmity and opposing natures, the Persian language has become obsolete, disordered, and obliterated, and nothing remains of the Ancient Persian texts.<sup>87</sup>

Such observations were important components of the rhetoric of language reform and purification. Compiling dictionaries and writing grammar texts were responses to a regressive comprehension of the history of the Persian language. During this period there were many important books written on Persian grammar: 'Abd al-Karim Iravani's *Qavā'id-i Sarf va Nahv-i Farsi* (1262/1848), Hajj Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani's *Sarf va Nahv-i Farsi* (1275/1858), Muhammad Husayn Ansari's *Tanbiyah al-Sibyan* (1296/1878), Mirza Habib Isfahani's *Dastur-i Sukhan* (1289/1872) and *Dabistan-i Parsi* (1308/1890), Mirza Hasan Taliqani's *Kitab-i Lisan al-'Ajam* (1305/1887), Ghulam Husayn Kashif's *Dastur-i Kashif* (1316/1898), and Mirza 'Ali Akbar Khan Nafisi's *Zaban Amuz-i Farsi* (1316/1898). These grammar texts, although modeled on studies of Arabic grammar, and while they often had Arabic titles, nevertheless provided the ground for developing and identifying the rules of the Persian language.

Protagonists of the constitutional order in Iran were conscious of the importance of language in the struggle for a new identity. The reconstruction of history would not have been possible without the transformation of the language, the locus of culture and memory. Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani argued that language is in reality "a history which signifies the general and specific characteristics, behaviors, manners, and forms of belief of a people." He held the view that "the strength of the *millat* depends on the strength of the language."<sup>88</sup> Kirmani thought of writing as a creative act. He argued that the Persian word *nivishtan* (writing) was derived from *naw* (new) and "it means creating something original."<sup>89</sup> His *Ayinah-i Sikandari*, a creative act of historical writing, subverted not only the dominant system of historical narration but also the system of signification, by creating an Iran-centered political discourse and identity.

Most nationalists viewed writing as a crucial but problematic element for the progress and development of Iran. Some, like Akhundzadah, Mirza Riza Khan Bigishlu, and Mirza Malkum Khan, argued that the

proliferation of scientific thinking was not possible as long as the Arabic script was used. Akhundzadah argued that the reforms in Iran and the Ottoman Empire could not bring about the desired changes without the dissemination of modern sciences, which was only possible with a change in the alphabet. Such a change was necessary because scientific terms had to be borrowed from European languages: "How can we translate European books into Arabic, Persian, or Turkish when our three languages lack scientific terminologies? We have no choice but to adopt those terms into our language".<sup>90</sup> Akhundzadah devised a new alphabet based on Latin and Cyrillic, arguing, "The old alphabet should be used for the affairs of the hereafter, and the new alphabet for the affairs of this world."<sup>91</sup> Viewing the Arabic script as a cause of Iran's destruction, he revealed, "My outmost effort and hope today is to free my people [*millat-i khudam*] from this outdated and polluted script which was imposed on us by that nation [*an qawm*] and to guide my people [*millatam*] from the darkness of ignorance to the enlightenment of knowledge."<sup>92</sup> Likewise Malkum argued, "The ignorance of the people of Islam and their separation from present-day progress are caused by the defectiveness of the alphabet."<sup>93</sup> As Bernard Lewis observed, "In the inadequacy of the Arabic alphabet, Malkum Khan saw the root cause of all the weakness, the poverty, insecurity, despotism, and inequity of the lands of Islam."<sup>94</sup> Despite Akhundzadah and Malkum's nationalist enthusiasm, their argument against the Arabic script was similar to that of the British promoters of Romanization, who considered Devi Nagari and Arabic scripts as "barbarous characters." For instance, C. E. Trevelyan, arguing for Romanization, stated that the words of "the English language are so generally indeclinable that their introduction into the Indian dialects may be accomplished with peculiar ease." Looking forward to a heavy borrowing from "the more scientific and cultivated language," he exclaimed: "How desirable would be to engraft upon the popular languages of the East such words as *virtue, honour, gratitude, patriotism, public spirit*, and some others for which it is at present difficult to find any synonym in them!"<sup>95</sup> The hidden logic of such arguments was clearer to those who were familiar with the British colonial projects. In a sophisticated rebutting of Malkum Khan's argument, Dardi Isfahani, who had lived in India for many years, argued that the Roman script, as used in English and French, was more irregular and more difficult to master than Arabic.<sup>96</sup>

Instead of importing European terms via the adaptation of the Roman script, I'timad al-Saltanah and Jalal al-Din Mirza called for the establishment of a language academy for the coining of new Persian

scientific concepts.<sup>97</sup> This approach involved researching and rethinking history and language within the same scriptural culture. This was the stated goal of a Calcutta-based Persian journal, *Miftah al-Zafar*, which called for an active translation of European scientific texts. The journal's views on language were developed in a series of articles on "Falsafah-i Qawmiyat va Lughat" (Philosophy of Nationalism and Language), arguing that "sciences could become popular only if they were made available in the national language." To support this claim it argued that if Iranian philosophers had written in Persian, instead of Arabic, "philosophical spirit would not have been lost amongst Iranians."<sup>98</sup> In an editorial, Mohammad Mahdi b. Musa Khan contended that the translation and publication of scientific texts was the secret of European progress. In order to advance, he suggested that Iranians must also translate European scientific texts and, when necessary, they should not hesitate to invent and to coin new concepts" (*alfaz-i naw barayi anha vaz' va ja'l kunad*).<sup>99</sup> In another article he noted that sending students to Europe did not promote the general interest of the nation: "The general benefit of the nation can only be promoted if all fields of knowledge are taught in public schools in the mother language [*zaban-i madari*]."<sup>100</sup>

To strengthen the Persian language, in a letter to the Prime Minister Mirza Ali Asghar Amin al-Sultan, *Miftah al-Zafar* called for the establishment of a scientific society in Calcutta for the sole purpose of translating European scientific texts into Persian. The response from Tehran was very positive. The editor of the journal, Mirza Sayyid Hasan al-Husayni Kashani, was granted the title "Mu'ayyad al-Islam" (Strengthened of Islam) and an annual salary of two thousand francs.<sup>101</sup> The journal followed its design with the establishment of *Anjuman-i Ma'arif*, which consisted of 73 scholars who were capable of translating from various languages.<sup>102</sup> A few years later a similar society, *Majlis-i Akadimi* (1903), was established by Nadim al-Sultan, the Minister of Publications.<sup>103</sup> These two societies were the forerunners of *Farhangistan-i Iran* (The Language Academy of Iran), which was established on the occasion of the Firdawsi Millennium (*Hizarah-i Firdawsi*) in 1935 to advance Persian as the national language of Iran. Following the *Shahnamah* of Firdawsi, which was hailed as "the certification and documentation of the nobility of Iranian people" (*qabalah va sanad-i nijabat-i millat-i Iran*),<sup>104</sup> the members of Farhangistan sought to Persianize foreign terms and concepts. The purist movement, which was begun in the late sixteenth century by Azar Kayvan and his cohorts, was institutionalized in the form of Farhangistan in 1935.

The concern with language affected the development of the Constitutionalist discourse, a discourse best represented in the simple style of newspapers such as *Qanun*, *Sur-i Israfīl*, *Musavat*, *Iran-i Naw*, and by writers such as Zayn al-'Abidin Maraghah'i, Mahdi Quli Hidayat, Hajj Muhammad 'Ali Sayyah Mahallati, Hasan Taqizadah, 'Ali Akbar Dihkhuda, and Mirza Jahangir Shirazi.<sup>105</sup> The nineteenth-century literary mimicry and canonization, restyling of language, and the reconfiguration of history provided the necessary components for the articulation of the constitutionalist discourse and institution of a new national popular imaginary. The constitutionalist discourse represented Iran as the motherland (*madar-i vatan*) and Persian as the mothertongue (*zaban-i madari*). By anthropomorphizing Iran, the protagonists of the constitutional order also instituted history and culture as expressions of its soul, a national soul that was inherited by all Iranians.