Sacred Space and Holy War

The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam

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conventional terms, but they continue to be significant actors in state-making in the Middle East.

The government of Iran is a theocracy, and guaranteed to be so by the Iranian constitution. It gives enormous powers into the hands of the Supreme Jurisprudent, the cleric who stands at the head of the system of Islamic law and administration, as well as into the hands of the clerically dominated supreme court and Guardianship Council. In so identifying the Iranian state, it is not my intention to posit Islam or theocracy as essentialist and unchanging cultural formations. Rather, as I will attempt to show, the very process of institutionalizing a Shi’ite theocracy in a modern state has radically changed the Twelver Shi’ite tradition. As Talal Asad has argued convincingly, a religious tradition is in any case a set of arguments over time rather than a static object of transmission. Taking religion seriously does not ipso facto imply a commitment to an essentialist view of it or of social causation. I want here, however, to go rather beyond a consideration of a religious tradition as a bounded set of internal arguments to an assertion that "tradition" is always a social construct, and that what is "traditional" in a modern setting is in reality a core of earlier texts or doctrines wrapped in an unacknowledged set of innovations. Certainly, in important sectors of society, Islamic law has made a large impact on revolutionary Iran. Law has been "Islamized." In 1982 the Supreme Court abolished remaining legal institutions surviving from the Pahlevi period as well as laws still on the books that contravened its understanding of Islamic law. In 1983, it established "Islamic" punishments, decreeing 109 capital offenses, including adultery, drinking alcohol, and homosexuality. Hands were to be severed for theft, and fornication or violation of the dress code resulting in flogging. Most justice was administered summarily, and executions took place almost immediately after sentencing. The touchstone for many of these laws is medieval Muslim jurisprudence (which is not exactly the same thing as Islamic law, though often the two are confused).
As a result of this sort of legislation, the question of whether Iran’s theocratic republicanism represents a form of medieval romanticism or a form of modern populism has been a theme of the literature on Iran since 1979. The "medievalist" argument has often inflected the writing of journalists and of Iran’s theocratic republicanism’s opponents. Ervand Abrahamian has made the strongest case against medieval romanticism and for Iran’s theocratic republicanism as akin to Latin American populism, juxtaposing the ayatollah to Peron. I concur in the value of this comparison, but my concerns here are different from those of Abrahamian. It is the argument of this paper that Iran’s theocratic republicanism as a state project is a distinctive form of high modernism, which is influenced by the demands of Shrite nativism. That is, medievalism is a motif in Iran’s current version of modernism, but it is like the medievalism of Dali's surrealist paintings, like Walter Benjamin's use of the kabbalah, like neo-Thomism in twentieth century Catholic theology. The medieval is encapsulated by and employed for the construction of an anti-liberal modernism, thus becoming something quite un-medieval.

I would like to begin by examining the premises underling the medievalist thesis. Among its proponents was the shah himself. While in power (1941-1979) he frequently characterized the Shi'te clergy as "black reactionaries," and, perhaps under the influence of his Swiss education, saw many social institutions in Iran, including the bazaars, as medieval holdovers that were better swept away by modernity. Already in the summer of 1979, from his exile in Mexico, the shah described the revolutionary government as "under the influence of medieval leadership" and "crumbling of its own ineptitude." A year and a half later Steven V. Roberts of the New York Times wrote that "A year ago at this time, Americans were already in a funk. Iran, one of our strongest allies in the Middle East, had fallen to the forces of a medieval religious fanatic who was turning back the clock with both hands." In 1986 Gary Sick, formerly of the Carter National Security Council, wrote of Khomeini in France that "During his four-month sojourn at Neauphle-le-Chateau outside Paris, he gave hundreds of personal interviews to those who flocked to his door, curious to meet this medieval prophet turned revolutionary." Imam Khomeini’s 1989 jurisprudential ruling (fatwa) condemning Salman Rushdie’s book The Satanic Verses as a capital offense created a virtual flood of newsprint coupling the words "Iran" with "medieval." As late as 1995, Thomas Friedman could write, "In my next life I want to be a European statesman. I want to be able to turn up my nose at the United States when it puts principle before profit and naively imposes an embargo on Iran to prevent this medieval theocracy from acquiring nuclear arms." Iranian secularists tend not to use the diction "medieval," which has connotations in Persian of Western historical periodization, preferring to call the regime "reactionary" (irtija'i), though they also speak of it taking Iran "back to the stone ages." Moreover, of course, Khomeini and other Islamist activists often had a sharply critical view of the Muslim medieval period, which was dominated by Sunni caliphates and by monarchies, so that the terminology was not by any means indigenous.

Whether its adherents recognize it or not, the idea that a contemporary state can be a throwback to medieval times rests upon Auguste Comte’s "law of the three stages" of human intellectual development. Comte (1798-1857) believed that there had been a progression from a theological stage (that of belief in gods) to a metaphysical stage (that of medieval theology and sometimes theocracy with its belief in abstractions such as essences), and finally that of positive, empirical knowledge typical of scientific rationalism. From this point of view, what Iranians have done since 1979 appears to have been to displace the high modern technocracy of the shah in favor of an imposition on Iran of medieval-religious governmental and social forms of the "second stage." They have gone "backward" and so violated Comte’s law. The shah’s wholly unwarranted conviction that the 1979 Khomeinist government was "crumbling" was probably tied up with this idea of the unnatural nature of a regression to the metaphysical stage of medieval theocracy, which seemed unlikely to those in the Comtean tradition to persist.

The trope of medievalism is actually quite peculiar. It maps the globe in four dimensions rather than only three. That is, Khomeinist Iran is not only over 600,000 square miles in its dimensions, but it lies 800 years in the past. Perhaps, in good science-fictional fashion, journalists who speak in this manner see parts of the U.S., e.g. Silicon Valley or Cape Canaveral, as in the future. By slicing time up into static, linear blocs and then locating each geographical region on this temporal grid, a Comtean moral hierarchy is established, wherein a humane and advanced West is in the future compared to barbaric "medieval" countries. These considerations aside, it is not at all clear that the authors who appeal to the pervasive trope of the medieval understand what the medieval period was really like, so that what is being invoked is a modernist set of myths about the medieval in any case.

Those who find the medievalist argument unconvincing frequently have a dialectical rather than a linear view of history. From a dialectical point of view, no medieval template could simply be lifted from past history and misplaced onto the present. Rather, any social movement or form of government now existing has come into being by dialectical interaction with modernity and so itself partakes of modernity. The oaths that Catholic clergy had to swear in the early twentieth century to oppose
modernism were modern oaths. The Bharatiya Janata Party in India, which some would see as devoted to restoring a medieval vision of Hindu rule in India, is a quite modern and sophisticated political party. The Hinduism of the BJP has evolved in dialectic with modernity and the heritage of both colonial utilitarianism and Nehruvian secularism. Likewise, the Christian Coalition of the late twentieth century U.S. is, despite the biblical literalism of many of its members, a most modern political movement.

Sociologist Anthony Giddens has been among the more thoughtful commentators on modernity as a dialectical rather than a static social form. It is fluid and changing and full of contradictory forces. The modernist impulse that overthrew royal absolutism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could also give rise to amoral republics and national security states, which in turn gave rise to "utopian realist" movements for greater civil liberties within the modernist republic. Modernism cannot be placed in a simplistic way under the sign of secularism and scientism. Rather it is itself a field of contention on which religious and secular ways of viewing the world battle with one another and influence one another. Twentieth century religion has been transformed by modernity, with regard to everything from bureaucratization to doctrine. Modernity in turn has been shaped in important respects by religious institutions and concerns, whether negatively or positively. I will argue that republican Iran has been such a field of contention, in which theocratic forces have battled secularizing ones, proponents of state socialism have struggled with capitalists, militarists have contended with forces favoring a small military, and those seeking greater religious censorship have grappled with those advocating greater intellectual freedom. The balance sheet of these various struggles about the shape of Iranian modernity has to be drawn differently in the 1980s (when the first term in each of these binary oppositions prevailed) than in the 1990s (when, despite the continued strength of the theocrats, the ground began to shift against them). An Iranian observer, Ali Asghar Kazimi, has characterized the entire past two decades as a "crisis of modernity."  

Medieval and Modern Shi’ism

One response to the argument for medievalism is that despite the rhetoric appealing to Shi‘ite tradition, the Islamic Republic of Iran does not resemble the functioning or even ideals of medieval Shi‘ism. As we have seen above in this book, Twelver Shi‘ism was initially premised on the notion that after the death of the Prophet Muhammad he should have been succeeded by his cousin and son-in-law, ‘Ali, and then by ‘Ali’s lineal descendants through Fatimah, his wife and the daughter of the Prophet. When the eleventh of the Shi‘ite Imams, Hasan al-‘Askari, died, some alleged that he had had an infant son in hiding, who had gone into Occultation in a supernatural, subterranean realm, from which he would return someday to restore justice to the world. The absence of an Imam in this world threw the Twelvers into severe crisis. Some took the Akhbari literalist line, holding to the sayings and doings of the Prophet and the Imams as guides to how life should be lived now that the Imam was not present. They came to hold that the sayings of the Imams had to be taken on faith, and they collected enormous volumes of putative sayings, which they sought to put off-limits for reasoned examination. They even came to argue that the Qur’an itself could not be understood in a common-sense manner without taking into account the sayings and interpretations of the Imams.

Note that even for the rationalist Usulis, the law was never standardized. Apparently contradictory sayings of various Imams all co-existed in enormous folio volumes that entirely lacked indexes. The consensus of past jurisprudents was an unscientific instrument, since scholars often picked and chose among the jurisprudents they considered "great." Usulis maintained that in the absence of the Imam, the Shi‘ite learned men were his general deputies. They could thus authorize religious taxes, Friday prayers, and at least defensive holy war (most medieval jurisprudents disallowed offensive holy war in the absence of the Imam, since only he would have the authority to launch one). This Usuli school of scholastic rationalists in jurisprudence tended to garner greater support from and to give greater support to the civil states erected by Shi‘ites. Some great Akhbaris did also come to support, e.g., the Safavid state, however, so the distinction is not an absolute one. Some Usuli jurisprudents were recognized as having only partial expertise, able to rule on some issues but not others. Only a handful were seen as absolute jurisprudents. Some Usuli writers asserted that ideally there should be a single, most learned jurisprudent, to whom all would turn. In practice, however, each city tended to have several senior jurisprudents, and at any one time there were usually five or six major contenders in Iran and (from the late eighteenth century) the Iraqi shrine cities for the position of supreme jurisprudent. That is, Usuli ideals sound like Roman Catholicism, whereas Usuli practice was much more like that of Greek Orthodoxy, with its polycephaly or several equal archbishops rather than a single pope.

Occasionally, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, a scholar would locate to the shrine cities in Iraq and attain such great prestige by virtue of having trained an entire generation of ulama that he would be given the right to disburse the donations and religious taxes coming into Iraq, a prerogative referred to as riyasa or leadership. Such a scholar
might be very widely emulated, as well. But it was seldom the case that other senior mujtahids in Iran's major cities saw themselves as subordinate to him or bound by his rulings (indeed, classical Usuli teachings held that no trained jurisprudent was allowed to simply emulate another jurisprudent, but rather always had to reach his conclusions about the law independently).

Usulis strongly held that it was illegitimate to continue to cling to the ruling of a jurisprudent once he had died. Jurisprudence was seen as a continual, dynamic activity of the jurisprudent's mind. Should he, by reasoning upon the relevant texts, ever reach a conclusion that reversed his previous ruling, he was bound to declare it, and the new ruling stood. Commercial litigants complained endlessly of the arbitrary and unstable character of Muslim law, where in a sense no case was ever finally closed until the presiding judge was dead. Since a dead mujtahid cannot engage in this dynamic process of continual reconsideration, and since we cannot know if his great legal mind would have continued to maintain his positions had he lived longer, his rulings cannot form the basis for lay emulation once he is dead. The laity must rather choose a new, living mujtahid to rule on difficult and abstruse matters for them. The previous jurisprudent's rulings might be influential, but they were hardly binding, and only constituted a consideration with regard to any sort of "precedent" insofar as that scholar might be entered among the ranks of the great legal thinkers and so become part of the tradition's consensus (ijma').

Both Akhbaris and Usulis tended to hold that in the absence of the Imam, civil governmental authority could only derive from common law (urf) rather than from Islamic law. In Shi'ite law, after all, the state should be a theocracy ruled by the Imam. In the Imam's absence, governmental authority was not illegitimate, but it was not divinely bestowed, either. It welled up out of customary practice and was therefore mundane or in some sense "secular." To the extent that the Qajar civil state, for instance, did incorporate the ulama into itself with regard to the judiciary, it could be recognized as having some religious charisma, but never very much. Since the state officials and notables were often rapacious and lived by imposing uncanonical taxes on the little people, some of the more radical ulama saw them as holding power illegitimately, though this was a minority view among them.

In contrast to this medieval hodgepodge of unrationaled authority claims and welter of conflicting texts, the Islamic Republic of Iran radically reconfigured Shi'ite institutions via its constitution and legal system. Instead of being an unattainable idea, the Supreme Jurisprudent becomes the holder of a political, institutionalized post, as Iran's head of state. Instead of being a personalized jurisprudent for particular clients and followers, whose rulings lose their force upon his death, he is an institution whose fatwas, as with Khomeini's death decree against Salman Rushdie, are felt by most Iranian Shi'ites to be irrevocable. Instead of being able to pick and choose among thousands of sayings attributed to the Imams (with all of their potential contradictions), law is now made by state jurists in accordance with a fixed constitution, a codified legal system, and parliamentary legislation.

The ability of rival jurists to strike a stance of independence from the supreme jurisprudent, guaranteed in premodern Iran by the informal, personalistic structure of authority in Shi'ism and by poor transportation and communications technologies, has been substantially eroded. Too severely questioning or critiquing Supreme Jurisprudent 'Ali Khamenei can impose threats of imprisonment or even actual jailings on the critics, even if they are themselves high-ranking clergymen. The shotgun marriage between the old Shi'ite ideal of a "source for emulation" (marja'-i taqlid) and the Khomeinist institution of the Supreme Jurisprudent (Faqih) has produced a far more modern, rationalized structure of authority in Iranian Shi'ism. Nothing like the office of the Faqih existed in medieval Shi'ite Islam, nothing even approaching it.

Medieval Shi'ite learned men were wary of the civil state and saw it as lacking direct divine sanction in the absence of the Imam. Khomeini promulgated the new and quite innovative idea that the clerically-ruled state is not just the general deputy of the Twelfth Imam, but something closer to his specific representative. Whereas medieval Shi'ites fought over whether Friday prayers could even be said, religious taxes paid, and defensive holy war fought, on behalf of a common-law civil state in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, Khomeinism asserted divine sanction for an entire state, with its various branches and extensive bureaucracy, despite the Occultation of the Imam. In his famous pronouncement toward the end of his life, Khomeini affirmed that the Islamic Republic, as the representative of the Hidden Iman, had the authority temporarily to suspend pilgrimage to Mecca and to make other, similar demands on believers. In Islamic law, a distinction was made between basic Islamic law (usul) and subsidiary legal issues (fara'). Most jurisprudence concentrated on the subsidiary issues, and the demand that the laity emulate the jurists related only to these. A layman was to say his five daily prayers or go on pilgrimage in a straightforward way with reference to the basic Qur'anic texts. Khomeini demolished this fine distinction, projecting the Islamic State's power even into the area of basic, common-sense Islamic obligations like pilgrimage. He further extended its powers by appealing the to Sunni jurisprudential principle of maslaha or state action on behalf of the public good, a principle not
recognized by medieval Shi’ite jurisprudents but which was taken up from Hanafi thought and foregrounded by Sunni modernists like Muhammad 'Abduh. In essence, the “public good” principle allowed the new state to do virtually anything and declare it in accordance with Islamic law, assuming it could be argued it was benefited Muslims. The Khomeinist state is not only not medieval, and it is full of features that would have been branded heretical and unthinkable by the major Shi’ite thinkers of that time. They are so because they are modern.

Let us turn, then, to the question of theocratic Iran as a project of high modernism. James Scott argues that the “most tragic episodes of state-initiated social engineering” occur when four conditions are present. The first is a commitment on the part of the ruling elite to an administrative ordering of nature and society. The second is a high modernist ideology that consists in an aggressive program of scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, and mastery of nature and of human life. The third is an authoritarian state that unreservedly backs and seeks to implement the high modernist project. Such a state often comes to power through war and revolution, headed by those who repudiate the past and wish radically to reshape society. Finally, Scott believes that such a thoroughgoing state intervention can only be accomplished where civil society is prostrate, such that the populace lacks the means to resist the enterprise.

Scott explicitly names Mohammad Reza Pahlevi as among the purveyors of a high modernist project in the twentieth century, and no one who knows modern Iran can read his description of the phenomenon without immediately thinking of this dynasty. Reza Shah (1925-1941) had initiated the high modernist period in Iran. He demanded that all Iranians take last names so as to establish social “legibility” of the society by the state. He standardized law and thrust aside premodern practices, reducing the power of the clergy, expanding the capital of Tehran, establishing a national school system and the first university. He renegotiated in a small way the royalties on Iranian petroleum, and built the first extensive railroad links throughout the country. The coercive character of this project is symbolized by the forced unveiling campaign of the 1930s, by the banning of trade unions, the jailing and assassination of some political opponents, the banning of socialist movements, and attacks on writers. His successor, Muhammad Reza Pahlevi (r. 1941-1979), established if anything a more complete dictatorship, pursuing industrialization, favoring large businesses, promoting literacy, and vastly expanding the school and university system. Iran was to become “modern” and “like France” by the year 2000, overcoming its “medieval” heritage and institutions, with the clergy and the covered bazaars serving as the Shah’s betes noires.

The high modernist projects of many states have foundered. Some were conquered by outside powers (the Axis). Some ran out of steam, and were supplanted by parliamentary processes, free markets, and civil society in the second or third generation (Kemalist Turkey, the Soviets). Some were overthrown by revolution at the hands of the enraged objects of their social engineering (British India, French Algeria, the Pahlevis in Iran). When high modernist regimes are overthrown, they are often supplanted by Liberal ones. For a society that felt hobbled and impoverished by a large public sector, it is tempting to deliver the economy into private hands and renounce micromanaging it, as the Poles did in the 1990s. For a society that resented the high-handed fiat of dictators, apparatchiks, or politburos, it is appealing to turn to multiparty elections instead. For a society that had experienced severe constraints on public organization, it is often felt desirable that a plethora of civil society organizations be allowed to form.

Yet an authoritarian high modernist regime is not always replaced by a Liberal state. The paradoxes of Iran derive from dialectic. The Islamic revolution represented a severe critique and rejection of prominent features of Pahlevi high modernism. The rhetoric of inclusion, of populism, and of religious authenticity with all its “medieval” referents, was intended to offer an alternative to the Shah’s vision, which was coded as elitist, exclusionary, foreign, secular and inauthentic. The Khomeinist project is not high modernism (characterized by a scientific ideology) but nativist modernism, in which the tropes of Western scientism have been subordinated in public to those of indigenous authenticity, here Shi’ite Islam. That the project is now carried out in the name of Islam rather than of science and progress should not deceive us, however. For one thing, the constitution of the Islamic Republic mandates “the utilization of science and technology.” There is a real sense in which theocratic Iran continues the Pahlevi project and even exceeds the former in its “high modernism.” This is easy to see if we examine the basic initiatives of social engineering since 1979. Khomeinist Islam is not anti-modern, but rather anti-liberal. But as the twentieth century relentlessly showed us, there have been many forms of anti-liberal modernism.

Nativist Modernism in the Economy

Let us consider the economy. One of Scott’s indices of high modernism is extensive state intervention in the economy. Fred Halliday famously argued that the regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlevi was properly seen not as a fascist one but as a capitalist dictatorship. Although plagued by cronyism, maldistribution of wealth, and a severe bias toward big business and modern urban enterprises in its loan policies,
the Pahlevi state was in fact capitalist. True, the state-owned petroleum industry played a central role in the economy, and the Soviet-built steel mill at Isfahan was a state enterprise. Nevertheless, Iran in the 1960s and 1970s also had a significant private sector. Akhavi has characterized this system not as private enterprise but as exclusionary corporatism, wherein the state intervenes both to bargain with social groups about the scope of their action and to curtail moves toward independence from the state. That is, both "capitalism" and "private sector" meant something different in the shah's Iran than they do in the global north. Nevertheless, unlike many of Scott's examples, the Iranian state was hardly socialist.

In contrast, the Khomeinist state carried out massive nationalization of banks and industries. As economist Jahangir Amuzegar has pointed out, the radical faction around Khomeini chose the Soviet-inspired "Indian model" for the Iranian economy. At the height of Nehruvian economic policies, the Indian public sector constituted about 25 percent of the economy. It is difficult to compare this situation with Khomeinist Iran because the state-owned oil sector distorts the statistics (thus, in almost all oil states large proportions of the economy are in state hands, even rightwing Saudi Arabia). Still, in the Islamic Republic something close to 70 percent of the gross domestic product came to be controlled by the state or state foundations, and even if one subtracted the oil sector some 30 to 50 percent would remain in the public sector, depending on the price of petroleum and currency exchange rates at any one time. This outcome puts Iran somewhere between India and the old Soviet bloc countries such as Hungary (50 percent) or Nasserist Egypt (also 50 percent). Rashidi notes, Today [1993], the public sector, including the government, public organisations (nahad, boniyad) and institutions considered to be part of the government, directly or indirectly control some 70 percent of the GDP, and spend 75-80% of foreign exchange earned by the country. Even though the ratio of the general budget to GDP in 1991 (1370) was 17.3%, the "government" employed about half of the labour force in cities, and 31.8% of the total manpower of the country (4.166 million out of 13.00 million).

The nationalized industries were either placed under direct governmental control or under that of government philanthropies. Between the Revolution and March, 1993 some 580 industrial units were nationalized by the state. Even after the beginnings of privatization in the late 1980s, in 1990 state industries still produced all washing machines and spools, most light bulbs, and about half of the auto tires, refrigerators and freezers, paper, vegetable oil and Pharmaceuticals manufactured in

the country. By March, 1982, 637 businesses had been placed under the jurisdiction of the Foundation for the Oppressed (Bunyad-i Mustaz'afin). Among the holdings of such state institutions are Alborz Silica, Avand Plastic, Ham Cement, Indamin Shock Absorber, Iran Tire, Radio Electric Iran, Quds Cellulose Manufacturing, and other industries notably lacking in any medieval overtones. Banks and credit institutions were also nationalized, as were the some 600 engineering consultant and construction companies. Very large numbers of businesses and pieces of real estate belonging to pro-Shah political refugees who fled the country were absorbed into the public sector. And, of course, the petroleum industries, which had already been in the public sector under the shah, continued to be a prime source of income to the state. Media such as television and radio are also state-owned and controlled.

Although factory workers participated in the Revolution and then organized themselves into independent Consultative Unions (shuras) in the first year after the revolution, attempting to assert workers' control over the shop floor, they were gradually subordinated to the state, as Assef Bayat has shown. In 1979-1981, first Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and then President Abolhassan Bani Sadr, promoted a liberal, technocratic management strategy that accommodated some greater worker input but insisted on a technically qualified management making the key decisions in the factory. This strategy was opposed not only by the Consultative Unions themselves, who struck and agitated for worker control, but by the proponents (known as maktabi) of Islamic Ideology. Bayat explains that Islamic Ideology as a managerial strategy: is management by those whose position derives not from certain relevant skills (education or experience) but is based mainly on character and personal, or more importantly, ideological connections with the ruling clergy, especially the IRP (This does not imply that all managers lacked managerial skills.) They were in authority to preserve the presence of the ruling party in the factories, these being the most vulnerable parts of Iranian society . . . In essence, their major policy was repressive one-man management . . . The implication of this approach is that, in practice, there is a tendency to create and support ideological gangs—informal workers' organizations which are extensions rather than independent of different external organizations of factional powers, such as [the] Islamic Association of the IRP, Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) and Basij (mobilization organization), etc.

Bayat concurs with Akhavi that the labor policy of the Islamic Republic has been corporatist, in which an attempt has been made organically to unite labor, capital and state interest. Although in the first
two years after the Revolution Khomeini made numerous statements in favor of the "barefoot" or "oppressed," by which he meant Iran's masses of slum dwellers, he gradually backed off supporting them, throwing his authority behind capital and property instead. By 1992 the Rafsanjani government was engaging in "urban renewal," as Abrahamian has pointed out, which involved the bulldozing of shantytowns, provoking major riots in five cities.22

The state has a large role in economic planning and the building of infrastructure. Much more infrastructure, from schools to roads, has been built in the rural areas than was the case under the shah (many of the more powerful members of parliament are from the countryside). But, as Patrick Clawson has noted, the appeal of big industry has not entirely faded:

Iran is also pouring billions of dollars into creating heavy industries that do not seem particularly appropriate from an economic standpoint. Iran's experience with heavy industries, such as the Sar Cheshmeh copper refinery or the Mubarakeh steel mill, should show that such projects can consume billions of dollars for dubious results . . . Perhaps the decision to put so much emphasis on heavy industry in the National Priority Projects reflects the same attitude that led to the investment of billions in the Mubarakeh steel mill. But outside observers can only note that the emphasis on heavy industry gives Iran the capacity to produce a wide range of military goods.25

In 1976-1986 the average number of workers employed by each large firm owned by the state or para-state organizations increased from 294 to 407, at a time when employment and output in privately-owned medium firms was plummeting.24 If state intervention in the economy on a large scale is a sign of high modernism, then Iran's theocratic republicanism has been far more interventionist than the Pahlevis.

The Military

Because of the large number of irregular "revolutionary guards" thrown up by the 1978-79 Revolution, and because of the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, Iranian society became significantly militarized in the 1980s. The number of soldiers in the shah's army, air force and navy in 1977 was 342,000, with military expenditures (in 1992 dollars) of $15 billion. By some estimates, the Islamic Republic in 1986 had 705,000 men under arms, including the revolutionary guards. Military expenditures were $29 billion in 1984 and $20 billion in 1985, falling precipitously thereafter to $7-$10 billion until 1991, when the total was halved.25

Given the drastic fall in petroleum prices, and the decline in GDP in the course of the 1980s, the increase in military spending was even steeper in proportional terms than it appears. The revolutionary guards were often poorly integrated into the military, sometimes actually competing with regular army troops in the fighting in southwestern Iran against Iraqi invaders. In addition to their battlefield role, they often acted as vigilantes in urban areas, policing morality and the appearance of women, and attacking those they viewed as enemies of the state, not only Mujahidin and Baha'is, but also supporters of elected officials such as President Abolhassan Bani Sadr.

The militarization of Iranian society and a preference for violent means of settling disputes led to tragedies such as the attacks on Kurds seeking greater autonomy in Sanandaj in the early 1980s.26 It also resulted in the decision to prolong the Iran-Iraq war even after Saddam Hussein began suing for peace in 1984. Just as Nixon and Kissinger had needlessly prolonged the Vietnam War out of domestic political considerations, so Khomeini prosecuted the war with Iraq for four years longer than he had needed to. Iraq, admittedly the naked aggressor in 1980, was already in 1984 offering substantial concessions and even reparations. Khomeini sought to take Baghdad and to add to Iran's territory a country that was majority-Shi'ite, wherein lay the holiest Shi'ite shrines (Najaf and Karbala), and which was among the richest oil states in the world. His greed and stubbornness cost the country tens of thousands of additional lives and hundreds of thousands of casualties. It is probably not the case that the failing economy was significantly affected by the war, but continuing it incurred many opportunity costs.

The most grotesque manifestation of the high-modern militarism of the 1980s was the tactic of human wave attacks. Foolhardy frontal assaults on heavily fortified Iraqi positions had succeeded in pushing them out of Iranian territory earlier in the war. But after 1982, the Iraqis were dug in, defending their own country rather than attempting to occupy someone else's and their morale appears to have improved. They were, moreover, far better armed than the Iranians and had control of the air. Controversy swirled around the human wave tactic inside Iran, with Khomeini beginning to back away from it in 1985 and Rafsanjani, then speaker of the parliament, openly condemning it in 1988. Still, as late as January 16, 1987, the Washington Post quoted U.S. Defense Department reports that 40,000 Iranian troops, many as young as 14, had been killed since the previous December 24 in human wave attacks on Iraqi positions around Basra.27
The vigilante cadres of the revolutionary guards, the cultural revolution of 1980 (which was coopted by the Khomeinist state), and the human wave attacks were all consistent with the monumentality and single-mindedness of a high modernist approach to reordering society. No premodern state in the Middle East maintained the demographic equivalent of a 700,000-man standing army. Professional soldiers' lives were valued in the early modern period. It was a Napoleonic innovation to draft hundreds of thousands of peasants and throw them at well-trained, well-armed opponents, using them up at dreadful rates in order to batter down the enemy. Khomeini was not a Richard the Lion-Hearted in his military tactics, but rather a Napoleon Bonaparte, a modern military leader of grandiose ambition and complete lack of respect for individual human lives (though to be fair, Khomeini only came to want Iraq, not the whole of his continent).

The Nuclear Program

Another area where the Iranian state has pursued a program reminiscent of the worst features of high modernism is its nuclear reactor program. Such an energy source makes a certain amount of sense for countries such as France, which can afford big science and which lack petroleum reserves of their own. Even there, the problems of the storage of nuclear waste have never been satisfactorily resolved, creating a very long-term and dangerous potential pollution problem (and a security issue with regard to the potential for terrorists to use nuclear waste to create "dirty" conventional bombs). Iran is virtually floating on petroleum and natural gas, and does not need to risk Chernobyl-style disasters nor face the problems of nuclear waste disposal. It is, moreover, prone to earthquakes. Finally, the unfinished Bushehr nuclear facility was in fact attacked by the Iraqis during the Iran-Iraq war, and should another war break out in the Persian Gulf, an active reactor would pose a tempting target, with terrible consequences should it be hit.

The shah had developed extensive nuclear ambitions in the 1960s, and had acquired from the U.S. a small nuclear research reactor of the Triga type, installed at Amirabad, which became the center for subsequent Iranian nuclear research. The shah hoped to build twelve nuclear power plants and almost certainly had ambitions of developing nuclear weaponry. He actually contracted for and began building two nuclear reactors in the Persian Gulf port of Bushehr, with French, German, Belgian, Italian and Japanese partners, investing $3 billion in the project.

Khomeini cancelled work on these reactors projects on coming to power, seeing nuclear energy as satanic. In 1982, Reza Amrollahi, a relative of then speaker of parliament Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was appointed to the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization and became an advocate for reviving it. He mapped out in public a plan for a civilian power program that would provide about 20 percent of Iran's energy needs. There have been allegations, however, that he also spent a great deal of time lobbying Khomeini and Rafsanjani during the 1980s for the nuclear program, attempting to convince them that Iran could hope to build an atomic bomb. In the end, he was appointed one of four vice presidents and given a budget to restart the nuclear program. In 1985 Iran began seeking agreements with foreign countries, and made plans to site nuclear-related facilities throughout the country in order to make them less vulnerable to attack (taking a lesson, no doubt, from the successful Israeli preemptive strike on Iraq's nuclear facility in Baghdad in 1981).

At the height of the Iran-Iraq war and only a few years after the winding down of the cultural revolution and the Great Terror, Iran then lacked the highly-trained scientists and engineers to pursue the program effectively, and needed to rebuild its scientific infrastructure. Amrollahi sought and received permission from the International Atomic Energy Agency, given that Iran had signed the non-proliferation pact, to buy 20 percent enriched uranium for their old American research reactor, and the IAEA authorized Argentina to supply it. Iran further sought another research reactor from the Argentinians, which had the potential to produce weapons-grade plutonium, but this purchase was blocked by the U.S.

President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani revived Iran's nuclear ambitions upon becoming president in 1989, however. Initially, he sought to convince Iran's earlier partners to resume work, but these had been alienated by the Iranian role in the terrorist tactic of taking Western hostages in Lebanon, and refused. Rafsanjani then sought a contract for the reactors with China or India. He signed a contract with the Chinese to import a small nuclear research reactor in 1991, which nuclear engineers saw as ominous, since this technology could eventually be used, as it had been by Iraq, to produce atomic bombs. Iran's vice president, Ayatollah Ata'u'llah Muhajirani, did nothing to allay such fears when he said in 1991 in an interview in Abrar that all Muslim countries should attempt to acquire nuclear weaponry.

Further momentum toward the Bushehr plan was blocked by the first Bush administration, which also convinced the Kraftwerk Union division of the German Siemens Corporation not to go forward, on the grounds that the project might have military applications. Rafsanjani insisted that Iran only wanted to develop its nuclear research facilities for peaceful purposes. Finally, after four years of seeking another partner, President Rafsanjani prevailed upon a cash-strapped Russia to do the work. In 1995, Iran granted Russia an $800 million contract to build its first nuclear power plant, a VVER-1000 water-cooled, water-moderated
reaction, at the Persian Gulf port of Bushehr. Despite enormous pressure applied by Washington to prevent the deal from going forward, the project appears to be quite alive. In April, 1999, a St. Petersburg-based company began producing equipment for the planned nuclear power plant, with delivery set for 2001. The Iranians subsequently sought from the Russians a deal to install three more reactors at Bushehr, even though some high Russian officials have spoken against the wisdom of building further such plants. In spring of 2001, Russian President Vladimir Putin reaffirmed a Russian commitment to helping Iran build nuclear reactors for energy production, despite the sanctions the United States had placed on the Russian firms contracting for this project. Despite Iran's having signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and despite the lack of firm evidence that it seeks to acquire nuclear weaponry, Washington continues to be convinced that Iran aims at doing so. The reactor at Bushehr would probably not in fact be much help in any weapons program, and it is open to international inspections. It has, however, been alleged by some American journalists and officials that the real nuclear weapons program is far more clandestine, scattered around at secret facilities in Iran not open to inspection. Given that such neighbors as Russia, Pakistan, India and Israel all now have nuclear weapons, and Iraq has in the past been close to developing them, it would not be far-fetched that the Iranian state is seeking this capacity itself. Even a purely civilian nuclear program, however, seems foolish in its risks and monumentality for an oil-rich, income-poor nation. A high modernist project has been refurbished as a nativist-modernist one. Note, too, the obvious contradiction between all the talk of Iran as a "medieval" society in Washington and among the Western journalists, and their simultaneous anxiety about Iran's high-technology capabilities (this startling oxymoron is visible in the quote from Friedman cited earlier).

Political Repression

Although the grounds for censorship and the jailing of dissidents for thought crimes have shifted enormously, the specific state technologies of social control show continuities, as well. While Mohammad Reza Pahlevi led a repressive police state with extensive censorship and jailing of dissidents, the average number of prisoners in the shah's jails held for thought crimes in any one year in the 1970s was about 1,000. This number compares to about 300 in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev. Relatively few dissidents were actually executed, though that any at all were is, of course, monstrous.

Under Khomeini literally tens of thousands of Iranians were serially jailed. Some 10,000 members of or sympathizers with the "Islamic Marxist" Mujahidin party were killed, most through execution after arrest. Political parties other than the loose Islamic Republican grouping were gradually banned and destroyed, including the revived National Front that had opposed the shah in the early 1950s and which had a significant religious wing. In 1986 there were 600 members of the Baha'i religion in jail simply for adhering to the wrong religion, almost as many as the total number of the Shah's prisoners of conscience in any one year, and in the 1980s nearly 200 Baha'is were executed for their faith. Although the numbers of killings declined dramatically after Khomeini's death in 1989, as did the number of prisoners of conscience, theocratic Iran has for most of its history been far more repressive than the shah's regime.

Religious persecution and struggles over the Mujahidin version of liberation theology have tended to be depicted as a form of "medievalism." But in fact, the various technologies of social control implied by the huge numbers of jailed and killed indicate clearly that we are in the presence of a bureaucractized process, of Hannah Arendt's banality of evil. The gendarmeries, revolutionary guards, holding cells, prisons, execution squads, burial grounds, dunning of families of the executed to pay the costs—all of these institutions and repertoires are those of the high modernist state, not the ramshackle and inefficient methods of medieval baronies. In the mid-1990s, the prison system of Iran according to official government sources held 160,000 prisoners, or 266 per 100,000 population. For comparison, in Europe Romania at 200, Poland at 170, and Portugal at 140 per 100,000 population are considered among those with "relatively high" numbers of inmates. These numbers are, of course, much smaller than those of the former Cold War superpowers, the U.S. and Russia. But they are sufficiently large for a country of Iran's size to indicate a substantial penal bureaucracy that compares ably with the high end of European states. As for the theological dimension, the large-scale jailing and even execution of persons for holding the wrong views has been a persistent feature of high modernism. In a state like Iran characterized by nativist modernism, with a theocratic politics, religious views are at once a form of theology and a form of political ideology.

Theocratic republicanism in Iran has entailed extensive pre-publication censorship by the state. Articles have been vetted. Liberal Islamist writers like 'Abd al-Karim Soroush have been denied visas to speak abroad on occasion. Periodicals and newspapers have frequently been closed. In 1998 a number of writers were assassinated by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence, later branded "rogues" by the supporters of President Khatami, who condemned the killings. Still, nothing has been done to the so-called rogues. Informal mechanisms of censorship also
operate, often with tacit state support. Sorosh, for instance, has sometimes been prevented from speaking on campuses by hordes of radical Islamists opposed to his brand of Islamic liberalism. In 2001 the campaign against the press and suppression of other human rights by hardline clerics intensified.

Literacy and Schooling the Nation

Among the big social engineering projects adopted by the shah was vastly increasing literacy. The Middle East had relatively low rates of literacy in world terms for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Around 1900 only 7 percent of Egyptians were literate according to British colonial statistics, and the percentage was likely to have been rather smaller in Iran, with its rugged landscape, low population density, and extremely low levels of governmental investment in areas such as national education. Despite the shah's Literacy Corps program that began in 1963 as part of the White Revolution, which involved the drafting of urban youth to teach reading and writing in villages, by the late 1970s the national literacy rate was still less than 50 percent. Women were only 35 percent literate. In Khomeinist Iran, 1980 witnessed the cultural revolution, which was coopted by the state with its Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution. This body groups the heads of the judiciary, legislature and executive with the "ministers of education, culture and higher education and health and medical education, as well as several cultural experts." The ministry of education under the Islamic Republic receives about a fifth of all governmental expenditures, and employs 41 percent of the country's civil servants, more than any other ministry. Thus, a modernist commitment to universal literacy, along with a concomitant desire to socialize all students to state values, characterizes the Khomeinist state just as much as it had the Pahlevi, if not more. By 1994 over 17 million students were enrolled in about 96,000 schools. There are now over one million students enrolled in 44 universities in Iran, compared to 16 in the late 1970s. In the 1990s, the number of women entering the universities tripled.37

The highly ideological and theocratic nature of Iran's nativist modernism, indeed, encourages a special concentration on education and indoctrination. Ironically, even though an Islamic revolution brought Arabic words flooding back into newspaper Persian, the populist character of the revolution, with its emphasis on reaching out to the poor, led to a Persianization of grade school textbooks so as to enhance the facility with which children could become literate (Arabic words pose special orthographic and lexical problems).38 The daughter of the former president, Fatemeh Hashimi Rafsanjani, alleged that by 1996 the literacy rate had climbed 72 percent over-all, with women at about 68 percent, representing nearly a doubling of literacy rates among women since the Revolution. Other sources were more conservative, estimating over-all literacy at 68 percent in 1995. By 2000, the deputy head of Iran's Literacy Movement estimated that only 10 million out of 65 million Iranians were illiterate, or 15 percent. Of these, 6 million were women (and most were rural), suggesting that women's literacy had nearly pulled equal to that of men at over 80 percent.39 Whatever the exact statistics, it certainly is the case the both literacy and female literacy has improved enormously under the Islamic republic. Ironically, given the highly patriarchal rhetoric of the theocracy, the education of women has been among its greatest successes the education. Many of these newly literate women, moreover, have become active in politics, and they were among the major constituents who helped elect Mohammad Khatami president in 1997.

Society Responds to Nativist Modernism

The dialectical, fluid and changing character of republican Iran has allowed for the emergence of forces that moderated the excesses of the Khomeini years during the subsequent decade. Nativist modernism has been a battleground over which various social and cultural forces have fought, from Khomeini's theocratic radicalism to Sorosh's Islamic liberalism and even to a defiant Iranian secularism, though proponents of the latter have been so far out of the mainstream of political discourse that their battles tend to end in martyrdom.

The prolongation of the Iran-Iraq war from the early 1980s, when the Iraqis first signaled an eagerness to settle, until 1988, produced extensive disaffection with the Khomeini regime in Iran. The evidence is that Iranians simply did not put their hearts and souls into the war effort, especially in the second act of the drama when it was clear that the Iraqis wanted peace and that the reason for the continuation of the war was Khomeini's ambition to take Baghdad. Less than two percent of the population was enlisted in the military, and only about 3 percent of gross domestic product was spent on the war effort in the mid-to-late 1980s. The expenditures on the military declined dramatically from $20 billion (in 1994 prices) in 1984 to $13 billion in 1985 and only about $6 billion in 1986, even though the war itself continued to rage throughout this period.40 After the end of the war, and with the death of Khomeini, military expenditures declined further, to only a little over 2 percent of GDP. Iran has continued to maintain a relatively large military force, especially if one counts the paramilitary revolutionary guards, but as Clawson notes, it is used for road-building, revolutionary indoctrination,
and other non-military purposes. Iran's military spending in the late 1990s has been much lower per capita than neighbors such as Turkey or Saudi Arabia.

The massive state control of the economy has been, of course, a huge economic disaster for the country and poses a long-term threat to Iran's future, to the extent that many observers have spoken of the "de-industrialization" of the economy. The state has faced a number of economic constraints, including low oil price troughs in the mid to late 1980s and again in the mid to late 1990s. The initial disruptive effects of the revolution were dramatic. In 1979-1982, Iran lost fully a third of its gross domestic product. Given the near doubling of the population since the revolution, the lackluster performance of the public-sector industries, and that petroleum and gas income is the major source of foreign exchange, the sometimes low oil prices have largely kept Iranians from attaining again, much less surpassing, the per capita income levels they saw under the shah in the 1970s. Per capita income in Iran, despite the significant petroleum wealth, is far less than that of a non-oil neighbor like Turkey, with its more vibrant private sector.

The government control of so much of the economy resulted in lack of significant investment in key areas like machinery or construction and the retardation of the process of capital accumulation, as Sohrab Behdad has shown. He argues for economic involution, such that institutions of the market have been disrupted and the workforce has been deprolletarianized, forced into petty bourgeois status in small self-owned workshops. He has demonstrated that in 1977-1990, investment in machinery and construction declined an average of 6 percent per year, so that by 1990 investments by the government and the private sector in machinery were a third what they had been under the shah in 1977. The private sector, mainly smaller workshops, has occasionally attempted to take up the slack, though he notes that medium-sized firms were much weakened at the expense of small workshops employing one or two persons, and large state-owned factories with hundreds of employees. The sector of medium firms, he believes, is key to capitalist development, and it was failing. In contrast, in 1987 the small workshops produced 30 percent of manufacturing output (up from 16 percent in 1976) and employed fully 50 percent of manufacturing workers (up from 29 percent in 1976). Self-employed workers, who predominated in the small workshops, increased from 2.8 million in 1976 to 4.4 million, or by a factor of 57 percent. Medium-sized firms correspondingly declined. Wage workers in the private sector declined from about 3 million in 1976 to 1.9 million in 1986, a reduction of 39 percent. Along with the expansion in the number of smaller workshops, there was a proliferation of service activities, most of them of a make-work nature, and government workers increased in the same period by 1.9 million (though about half of this number is accounted for by larger military and paramilitary forces).

That Khomeini's policies had made Iran a pariah made it unable to receive international credit in the 1980s, and divorced it from the Bretton Woods institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In the 1990s Rafsanjani and Khamenei attempted to repair Iran's reputation internationally sufficiently to again receive a World Bank loan. Opening Iran to such global influences inevitably brought scoldings from economists about Iran's bloated and stagnant public sector. Rafsanjani was convinced by the dismal economic statistics that the massive nationalizations of the 1980s has been a tragic error, and decided in 1991-92 to pursue privatization. In the subsequent five years, the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO), which holds the majority of the country's heavy industries, raised $467 million from the sale of public companies to the private market. This process accelerated in the late 1990s, though only a small proportion of the heavy industries have actually been sold off. "Government policy calls for IDRO to sell up to 57 per cent of its holdings in firms, with the rest being distributed among the employees of privatized companies." Sales in the late 1990s included one-quarter of the main automobile manufacturer. Plans have been put forward to privatize the tourism industry, as well. Steps are now also being taken to allow private non-bank credit organizations in Iran, giving the state banking sector some private competition, with hopes of increasing the amount of credit available to the economy. After 1997, the dialectic between the communitarian and egalitarian impulses of the nationalizes and the desires for economic progress and efficiency of the privatizers began to swing toward the latter. The conservative clerics, however, continued to throw up roadblocks to legislativerforms.

Political repression and censorship, and even occasionally assassination, continue to be features of the Iranian political scene, though there are periods, as with the late 1990s, when a wider range of political speech and opinion was permissible—a window the hardliners tried hard to close in 2000-2001. The more liberal provisions of the Iranian constitution, which although it allows the vetting of candidates does insist on elected, representative officials, have been employed by forces in Iranian society to mitigate the most authoritarian aspects of nativist modernism. More recently, the authoritarians have struck back by more extensively vetting candidates to exclude liberals. In the five elections for parliament, there has been a decided retreat in the hegemony of radical or hardline clerics, and an increasing number of non-clerical representatives elected. The emergence of seminary-trained, unabashed Muslim theologians advocating a sort of Lockian liberalism, such as 'Abd al-
Karim Soroush, was an unexpected development of the 1990s. The way in which Rafsanjani and Khamenei backed off the large-scale killing of those they saw as enemies of the regime, whether Mujahedin sympathizers or the apolitical Baha’is, demonstrated that state actors’ determination to employ the authoritarian state as a blunt instrument for the forcible reordering of society was waning. In the 2001 elections liberals associated with President Muhammad Khatami, first elected in 1997, swept the parliamentary elections as Khatami received a second term.44

Conclusion

Theocratic republican Iran meets many of the criteria for James C. Scott’s vision of High Modernism gone bad. The ruling elite certainly had a commitment to an administrative ordering of nature and society. They asserted that they were conducting this reordering in the name of Islam. But the “Islam” of the Islamist technocrats around Khomeini, including Mehdi Bazargan (an engineer and factory owner), Abolhassan Bani Sadr (a French-trained economist), and many members of subsequent cabinets, was seen as entirely compatible both with science and with high modernist forms of social engineering. The human wave attacks on entrenched Iraqi army positions, the nationalization of much of the economy and the imposition of ideological control on workers, the instances of urban renewal requiring the expulsion of slum dwellers, the pursuit of nuclear and other high-technology weaponry, are all consistent with high modernism, despite being pursued under the rubric of the theocratic republicanism. Nativist modernism allows the ideological assertion of localist authenticity as an over-all framework for the working out of a High Modernist project.

The authoritarian Khomeinist state came to power through revolution and immediately was plunged into war by Saddam Hussein, responding by amassing an enormous 700,000-man military. It arose in a society where civil society or intermediary institutions between the state and the people had been largely suppressed by the Pahlevi state or incorporated into state organs. The top quintile of the country in terms of wealth was chased into exile, killed, or expropriated, such that the old power elite was decapitated. There were very few checks on the new state’s power, despite the flailing guerrilla actions of the Mujahedin or the futile minor revolts of the Kurds and Turkmen.

Still, the marriage of high modernism to Islamist anti-liberalism produced severe contradictions that ultimately posed challenges to Khomeinism of the 1980s variety. The alignment of discontents among large social groups has shifted over time. A new bourgeoisie emerged from the bazaar and government contracting in the course of the 1980s, replacing the old Pahlevi elite and restoring the wealth stratification to a shape very similar to that of 1977.45 This new bourgeoisie found a political ally in Rafsanjani. Some clerics are rumored to have desired to abolish women’s suffrage on coming to power, but had not done so, perhaps because women had been among the groups that mobilized for the revolution and they felt they needed their support. Despite restrictions on women, the labor needs created by the expansion of the army led to greater women’s participation in the work force, and the massive schooling and literacy campaigns created millions of newly educated women. The voting age in Iran was also set relatively low, allowing youth to have an impact on elections.

When the Guardianship Council allowed a former minister of culture named Mohammad Khatami, who had been sacked for being too liberal, to run for president in 1997 against the right wing clerical favorite, Ali Akbar Natiq Nuri, they unwittingly admitted into the race a Trojan horse for disgruntled women and youth, who voted for Khatami decisively and helped ensure that he received 70 percent of the vote. Khatami has been constrained by the relative lack of power the president enjoys under the Iranian constitution, and by his de facto lack of control over the army, the police, and a number of important ministries, including Intelligence. He has moved behind the scenes, however, in an attempt to put his men into power in the bureaucracy, and his hand was strengthened by subsequent municipal elections, in which candidates identified with his political party or with his program did exceedingly well. During most of his first term, many members of parliament remained to his right, however, which allowed the representatives to block some of his appointments. The judiciary and Guardianship Council are solidly under the control of clerical hard liners, so that even his more recent supportive parliament can make little headway on reform. Nevertheless, these developments of the late 1990s and early 2000s demonstrate that Iran’s long-supine civil society is reviving. The resulting polarization has created greater political tension, and raised question marks about the future. Whatever Iran has looked like in the past two decades and will look like in the succeeding two, it has not looked anything like a medieval state or society. Indeed, if anything the more admirable virtues of medieval Iran, its love of poetry and life, its reasoning approach to religion, its relative tolerance of other creeds (certainly compared to much of Europe at the time)—have all been damaged by the excesses of nativist modernism.