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Imam, Shah, and Ayatollah: Charismatic Leadership in the Shi'i Tradition, and its Role in Iran's Shi'ite Revolutions

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IMAM, SHAH, AND AYATOLLAH: CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP IN THE SHI'ITE
TRADITION, AND ITS ROLE IN IRAN'S SHI'ITE REVOLUTIONS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Humanities

By

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B.S.S., Ohio University, 2008

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Jonathon Case Henderson ENTITLED Imam, Shah, and Ayatollah: Charismatic Leadership in the Shi'i Tradition, and its Role in Iran's Shi'ite Revolutions BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Humanities.

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ABSTRACT

Henderson, Jonathon Case. M. Hum., Master of Humanities Program, Wright State University, 2010. *Imam, Shah, and Ayatollah: Charismatic Leadership in the Shi'i Tradition, and its Role in Iran's Shi'ite Revolutions.*

This thesis examines the role of charismatic religious leadership in Iran's two Shi'ite revolutions. Included within the larger arguments of this work, are sections addressing the scholastic categorizations of charisma, the development of the Shi'i Islamic tradition, and the way in which the charisma of the was appropriated by later Shi'i figures to bring about social, political, and religious revolutions in Iran. For this work, Shah Isma'il ibn Haydar and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini serve as examples of charismatic Shi'i figures that drew upon the suspended charisma of the Shi'i Imams. This work also briefly comments on events in contemporary Iran in order to provide insight into the future of revolutionary Iran.

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I. INTRODUCTION, CHARISMA, AND THE ISLAMIC HISTORICAL TRADITION

Revolutions make understandably popular research topics. Iran, for example, has received a great deal of scholastic attention thanks to the relatively recent Islamic Revolution, which resulted in the creation of a government headed by the religious establishment. While there are many different studies of Iran's Islamic Revolution, there are few that take into account the uniqueness of Iranian religious history. Moreover, studies of the Islamic Revolution tend to concentrate only on historical and religious developments during the twentieth century and providing only fleeting mention (if at all) of events that precede the contemporary. This work will seek to avoid such pitfalls by using charismatic leadership as a unifying factor to investigate Shi'i Iran. The purpose of this work will be to establish the charismatic nature of the Shi'i Imamate and to demonstrate how the Imam's charisma, due to the belief in the occultation of the Twelfth Shi'i Imam, was appropriated and transformed by Shah Isma'il ibn Haydar (1487-1524) and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) in order to facilitate Iran's Shi'ite Revolutions in 1501 and 1979 respectively.

An account of the 1979 Islamic Revolution from Iranian Sattareh Farman Farmaian helps to provide some context to the nature of this study. Farman Farmaian describes the message of Ayatollah Khomeini in the years leading up to Iran's Islamic revolution as simultaneously "powerful" and "impressive," but also "disturbing" (294). What Farman Farmaian found so alarming about Khomeini's revolutionary rhetoric was his willingness to condemn and destroy everything the Shah's regime had built, while

making only vague references to what sort of social reforms and institutions would arise once the Shah was gone (294). Even so, Farman Farmaian was not too alarmed as she, like most Iranians (and most of the world for that matter) felt that it was unlikely that the Shah with his large, well-equipped, and American-supported army would ever fall (290). Yet, by February of 1979 the Shah was gone and his army was in shambles with its members either defecting or swearing allegiance to the new revolutionary government and its revolutionary leader: Ayatollah Khomeini (Arjomand, The Turban 136).

Khomeini's return to Iran from exile marked the culmination of massive street demonstrations by people from all levels of Iran's society, who had thrown their support behind Khomeini's message and stood up against the Shah, even though in doing so they often put their lives and livelihoods at risk (Garthwaite 254-255).

Said Amir Arjomand views the "seeds" of the "revolutionary transformation" in Iran as being rooted in the Shi'ite Islamic tradition ("History, Structure" 112). In Arjomand's mind, Shi'ite or Shi'i Islam has "considerable transformative potential" upon which Khomeini drew during the Islamic Revolution ("History, Structure" 112). With Khomeini's authority the people of Iran, at great risk to themselves and families, forced the Shah to permanently abandon Iran. Even the Shah's army and his elite "Immortal" corps were ultimately no match for Khomeini armed only with a broadcast microphone (Farman Farmaian 299). Khomeini's revolution in Iran suggests what Thomas E. Dow, in commenting on the work of sociologist Max Weber, describes as "a specifically revolutionary force" in which people are freed from "custom, law and tradition" and "overturn all notions of sanctity" (83). The "force" behind the behavior that Dow describes, and the possible drive for the Islamic revolution, is charismatic authority.

Charisma and charismatic authority are, by their nature, somewhat nebulous terms-often escaping definition or simply applied as an adjective to a popular or successful individual. Some may even argue that any attempt to analyze charisma “run[s] the risk of stilling the drama into lifelessness” (Willis xi). In order to combat such ambiguity, this work will draw almost exclusively from the definitions of charisma presented in the scholarship of Max Weber. Sociologist and scholar Max Weber dedicated a fair amount of his writings to defining and demystifying charisma and charismatic authority (Lindholm, Charisma 23). In addition to the works of Weber, scholarship that builds on Weber’s theories of charisma, particularly in regard to charisma’s revolutionary potential, will be explored and briefly reviewed.

Weber states that charismatic leaders, or holders of charismatic authority are in possession “of specific gifts of the body and spirit” which are “believed to be supernatural, [and] not accessible to everybody” (19). Weber further defines charisma, albeit with a degree of Christian shading, as “the gift of grace” (47). Weber further associates the ability to reach various states of ecstasy, revelation, and berserker rage with charisma, and as part of a charismatic individual’s “gifts” (19). Dow observes that by linking charisma with certain states such as ecstasy “the elemental and daemonic character” of charisma is revealed, thus establishing a trend in which charisma is associated with states “beyond reason and self-control” (84). Following his assertions of charisma as an elemental, reasonless force Dow elaborates on his theories citing the “Dionysian” character of charisma (84). For Dow, Weber’s “gift of grace” is more correctly characterized as “grace of divinity divested of morality” (84). The point that Dow makes in his analysis of Weber’s characterizations is that charisma is a significant

and powerful force, but its character is distinctly “elemental not ethical” (Dow 85). For an example of his view of charisma, Dow presents lightning with all of its “caprice or carelessness” as an apt metaphor for “elemental” charisma (Dow 85). John Ralph Willis adds that, “a feeling for the irrational is an almost infallible touchstone of the charismatic sense” (xi).

Expanding on Weber’s definitions of charismatic authority are a number of scholars who help to clarify, and in some cases, critique the works of Weber, creating a greater understanding of charisma. Douglas F. Barnes makes the important distinction between a charismatic individual and an individual who possesses charismatic authority. For Barnes, individuals can be said to have charismatic authority only when they attract followers based on their charismatic gifts (2). In some ways, Barnes’ argument differs slightly from Weber’s own conception of a charismatic leader’s relationship to his/her followers, who he viewed as being more independent from the “attitudes of the masses” (Weber 49). Nonetheless, taking followers into account adds a social dynamic to charisma that separates it from the skills or talents that make an individual charismatic, or as Weber puts it, “it is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma” (49). In more practical terms, Weber views the merits of “personal charisma” as the “original basis of recruitment” in any group in which charisma is revealed through the relationship between the charismatic leader and their followers (58). In many ways, Weber’s explanation of charisma showcases the volatile and fickle nature of the “gift of grace” (47). Weber writes that charisma, “by its very nature” is “unstable” and can easily be lost if it is not properly sustained (22).

Charismatic authority in the Weberian sense is authority that is derived from an “individual person” that inspires loyalty through the exercise of their special gifts (46-47). Willis’ analysis of the effect of a charismatic Sufi Shaykh displays his Weberian point of view when he writes about the effect of the Shaykh on his followers (152). For Willis, the Shaykh’s followers “were drawn not by the average but by the extreme instance of every phase of life he touched” (152). Willis’ statement certainly indicates the importance of the follower who reciprocates the leader’s charismatic touch with loyalty, however, that relationship would not exist if not for the uncommon ability of the Shaykh. If, for whatever reason, the gifts that have bestowed charisma on a specific individual are lost, then the followers of said individual (Weber’s validating factor) will fade away.

Weber’s concept of charisma is also viewed as a result of the symbiotic relationship between an exceptional individual and those who support them. Jack T. Sanders, in his analysis of the charismatic nature of Jesus, attests to the importance of the relationship between a charismatic leader and his or her followers writing that it is “the phenomenon of following Jesus that we want to examine” in order to understand his charisma (11). From Sanders point of view, a leader is only charismatic from the point of view of his followers adding, “the high priest Caiaphas, for example, would hardly have described Jesus as a charismatic leader” (26). Presenting a similar opinion without referencing a specific tradition, Charles Lindholm characterizes Weber’s theories on charisma as an extension of his sociological outlook, since Weber discussed not just the outlook of one “genius as an outsider,” but the relationship between a charismatic leader and his or her followers (Charisma 25). In seeing the communal ties that charisma can

create, Weber distinguished himself from thinkers like Nietzsche and Mill who thought that the gifts of charisma often led to a charismatic individual's rejection from groups of individuals rather than their inclusion (Lindholm Charisma 25). Robert Tucker goes even further, suggesting that a charismatic leader and his or her followers are one entity or a charismatic "phenomenon" (qtd. in Sanders 26). Despite Tucker's argument, Sanders, like Weber, is quick to point out that while the followers of a charismatic leader provide them a source of social and political strength, those same followers "do not randomly simply put someone up as the embodiment of their hopes" (27).

While Weber did not necessarily see followers as vital to the maintenance and acquisition of charismatic authority, he does view the role of followers as an authenticating factor. According to Dow, Weber felt that followers were needed for the "application of personal values" to an otherwise unrestrained force (85). Likewise, it is possible that through the loss of followers, or the failure to "perform" or meet the expectations of charismatic authority, that power can be lost (Weber 23, 49). In Weber's own words, "if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear" (50).

Lindholm does contend, however, that while Weber's definition of charisma has a social character, charisma "in its primal form...does not have any fixed lines of authority" (Charisma 25). For Barnes, it is the relationship, or social character, that develops between a charismatic leader and their followers serve to contain or limit the primal charisma (2). Lindholm's analysis of the volatile nature of primal or "pure" charisma does hint at the activist potential of charisma, in a way that, at least to Lindholm, Weber's analysis does not (Charisma 24). Lindholm feels that Weber dwells

too much on charisma as legitimizing factor within a rational framework (Charisma 24). This is not to say that Lindholm feels that Weber ignores “primal” charisma, but merely that Weber does not devote enough space to the volatile nature of primal charisma (Lindholm, Charisma 25). In Weber’s defense, devoting too much time and analysis to understanding primal charisma, because of its revolutionary and irrational character, is hard to document. Furthermore, most charismatic events in history work within some sort of societal framework making “pure” or “primal” charisma in these events hard to quantify. Lindholm, however, proves to be quite capable of explaining the intricacies of primal charisma, noting “charisma of this type is revolutionary and creative, occurring in times of social crisis, opening the way to a new future” (Charisma 25). Barnes echoes Lindholm’s sentiment saying “a period of radical social change which causes distress and dissatisfaction among a segment of the population” often creates a fertile “environment” for the rise of charismatic leader (4).

Going further to emphasize the importance of a chaotic socio-political environment to the advent of a charismatic leader, Barnes states that “without proper social conditions the society would regard the potential leader as an eccentric getting excited over nothing” (4). Tucker, like Barnes and Lindholm, also links times of distress with the rise of charismatic leaders noting that charismatic authority is often recognized by followers who turn to a leader who is “peculiarly qualified to lead them out of their predicament” (qtd. in Sanders 27). Sanders, for example, presents dissatisfaction with leadership and high taxes contributing to social and political unease, as one possible explanation for the rise of Jesus (51-53). Barnes, Lindholm, and Tucker in adding a revolutionary subtext to Weber’s theories on charisma, are adding aspects that were not developed by Weber

himself, who did not see the rise of charismatic leaders as “revolutionary in the socio-political sense” (Sanders 25). Sanders does note, however, that despite Weber’s intentions, much of the commentary on his work has taken on a revolutionary overtone (25). It is also important to point out that Weber acknowledges the “unpredictable nature of charismatic leadership” and describes charismatic authority as “sharply opposed both to rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority” (53). Although Weber does not describe charismatic authority as being particularly reactive to the status quo he, nevertheless, admits that the “rational” and “bureaucratic” elements of society may be strained by a charismatic event (53).

Dow comes to conclusions similar to those of Barnes and Lindholm in that he sees charismatic authority as “a pattern of psychological, social, and economic release” (83). What Dow means by the “release” granted by charismatic authority refers once again to the relationship between a charismatic individual and those who follow them, in which the charismatic leader’s followers are freed from of “custom, law ordinary worldly attachments” (83). Dow further notes, however, that while Weber’s initial formulations on pure or primal charisma acknowledge the “irresponsible release” that is innately found in such charismatic activity, he later denounced such behavior (90). Instead, Weber began to see charisma in terms of a “charismatic ethic” seen in terms of an assessment for “personal and social development” (Dow 91). Dow views Weber’s early theories of the revolutionary charisma as being “at odds” with his later conception of charisma as a “model of personal and social development” (91). Neither Dow nor Weber provide sufficient definitions of “social development” so it is hard not to view certain revolutionary or reactive behavior as falling under the umbrella of “social development”

(Dow 91). In terms of a “charismatic ethic,” it is easier to quantify what Weber might mean by investigating his views and scholarship on the role of charisma in religion.

The historical role of certain religious figures is something that is often hard to establish. Arjomand, for example, in an article that discusses revolutions in Shi'i Iran, indicates the “inadequacy” of the more traditional explanations for certain political behavior that presents upheaval as a “mere” consequence of society (“History, Structure” 111). Arjomard feels that many revolutionary movements are often presented without a proper understanding of the history and culture of the region (“History, Structure” 111). Looking at all aspects of a society and culture including religion are significant, as religious history can transcend any one society. Using Weber’s conception of charismatic religious leadership as a linking factor allows for a more comprehensive analysis that avoids the pitfalls that Arjomard describes. Nevertheless, certain conventional components of a society or culture cannot be completely overlooked, and provide salient counterpoint to the wider arguments of this work.

S.N. Eisenstadt, an editor of Weber’s work, acknowledges that religion in particular “is prone to the manifestations of charismatic creativity and innovation” (qtd. in Weber 252). Weber’s sociological analysis of prophethood and charismatic religious leadership, much like his categorization of charisma itself, does not completely encapsulate all aspects of the charismatic and the religious; it nevertheless, serves as an appropriate starting point. Weber’s classic definition of a prophet links many of his more general theories on charisma, tying them together toward a more cohesive end. The prophet as revealed by Weber is an “individual bearer of charisma” who is able to successfully convey “a religious doctrine or divine commandment” thanks to the individual’s special

gifts (253). Once again, Weber places emphasis on the singular, individual nature of the charismatic prophet figure. Weber's definition of the prophet also contains specific references to the talents of a prophet, the first and foremost being some sort of divine connection (258). Prophets must also be able to successfully communicate the message of their revelations, implying the need for a certain degree of physical and mental ability, to aid in what Weber calls "vital emotional preaching" (260). For Weber, it is the prophet's charisma that differentiates them from religious functionaries or nobility (254). Prophets are also able to profess "definite revelations," and are on an inspired mission to deliver these revelations in the form of a message (Weber 254).

Weber states that there are two distinct incarnations of the prophet figure (263). One form is represented "with especial clarity by Zoroaster and Muhammad," who epitomize the role of the "ethical prophet" (Weber 263). Buddha represents the second form of the prophet, which Weber defines as a world-rejecting, personal salvation oriented prophet who serves as the consummate example for their followers (263). The ethical prophet, according to Weber, serves as an "instrument for the proclamation of a god and his will," and outlines a defined program of obligations in order for their followers to adhere to the message of the leader's revelations (263). The delineated nature of the ethical prophet's message lends itself to a more resolute application in society free from "concrete historical influences" (Weber 266).

While Weber's use of Zoroaster and Muhammad as examples of ethical prophets are fitting concerning the scope of this work, it is still helpful to look at the some scholarship on other prophetic figures in order to provide context to distinctly Iranian and Islamic elements. In Sander's analysis of the charismatic authority of Jesus a few salient

points to a general discussion of religious leadership are presented. One example concerns the “call” or message of Jesus, which, according to Sanders, is accepted by most researchers of the New Testament to have been “one consistent, coherent complex of ideas” (37). Sanders notes that while Jesus may have had such a defined message, “he failed to convey it to his followers” (37). What Sanders means by Jesus’ inability to communicate a message is that Jesus’ message was new enough, and different enough from existing traditions that his followers could not completely assemble his message without the aid of Jesus (37). Jesus’ ambiguity existed because he had no distinct “models” in the “Hebrew prophets” or the various “messianic revolutionaries” that were familiar to the people of his time (Sanders 71). Sanders does, however, concede some points after referencing some recent scholarship by Robert Stark (71). In the case of Muhammad and Jesus in particular, Stark identifies the relevance of a “supportive cultural tradition” in the influence and “receipt of [their] revelations” (qtd. in Sanders 71). The guesswork involved in the creation of a new religious movement (Christianity in this case) adds to an aura of randomness that surrounds charismatic leaders (Sanders 54). According to Sanders, “doing the unexpected is a key device of the charismatic leader of a new religious movement,” and can actually be used to amplify charisma (54). In the case of Jesus, Sanders references “a group of problem sayings” to illustrate his randomness (55).

Muhammad, as argued by Liyakat N. Takim, “bears the hallmarks of Weber’s characterization of charismatic authority,” as he challenged the existing social organizations based on a “belief in [a] divinely appointed mission” (3-4). Furthermore, Muhammad was the bearer of an ethical message building on the traditions “of the great

biblical prophets” (Takim 3-4). From Takim’s perspective, Muhammad, unlike Jesus, fully acknowledged and embraced the Abrahamic-Judaic prophetic lineage that existed in his day (4). Moreover, Muhammad, through his revelations from God, was able to provide the young Muslim community with the Qur’an, which “replaced traditional tribal authority with a new ethical-moral structure that negated the old normative order” (Takim 4). In building on the image of previous prophets and delivering the Qur’an, Muhammad is presented as anything but random. The way in which Muhammad established a community in Medina with precise “moral and his social reforms” provides additional support for the clarity of his prophetic purpose (Armstrong 105). Furthermore, Muhammad is perceived by Muslims to have been nearly infallible, his actions having attained a level of reverence that can hardly be categorized as arbitrary (Lapidus 30).

At the societal level, Muhammad’s charisma and its effect on his followers are even more apparent. In her biography of the prophet, Karen Armstrong describes the *hijrah*, or the migration of the early Muslim community from Mecca to nearby Yathrib (later renamed Medina), as a sacrilegious action to the tribally oriented Arabians (97). According to Armstrong, the early Muslims break from the tribal system “was far more shocking than the Qur’anic rejection of the goddesses” (97). Even the word *hijrah*, when broken down to its roots, implies a painful process involving the severing of ties to an adoring community (Armstrong 97). Moreover, when the Meccan Muslims arrived in Yathrib they would be considered “*zalim* (outsider) a word which carried” a number of implications in Arabic ranging from “base” to “evil” (Armstrong 97). The fact the Muhammad was able to uproot a portion of Mecca’s population and have them break the tribal ties that had in essence defined their entire lives lends some credence to Dow’s

tradition-breaking notions of charismatic authority (83). Muhammad's abilities express what Weber calls "charismatic dominance" in which "ties to any external order" are cut and ultimately replaced with the message and "mentality of the prophet" (Weber 24).

Zoroastrianism, the religion of most pre-Islamic Iranians, offers a few relevant charismatic developments that endured the Islamic conquest and subsequent conversion of Iran. The prophet Zoroaster is believed to have begun his religious mission around 1100 B.C., and is thought to have been an agent of significant religious change (Garthwaite 62). Zoroaster's doctrine professes faith in Ahura Mazda as the "paramount god of the cosmos," thus injecting hints of monotheism into a world that was generally polytheistic (Garthwaite 62). According to Zoroastrian tradition, Ahura Mazda is locked in a cosmic struggle with Ahriman the personification of darkness and the evil forces of the world (Garthwaite 62, 96). Moreover, the cosmic struggle that Zoroaster revealed contains many eschatological parables in which the forces of good ultimately triumph over the forces of evil in an apocalyptic scenario (Garthwaite 93).

Although Zoroastrianism may not appear to be directly related to aspects of charisma beyond the mention of Zoroaster in Weber's work, it does however have a strong connection to a distinctly Iranian conception of charisma that continued into Islamic times. In the ancient Iranian tradition, it is believed that the right rule was directly bestowed by Ahura Mazda, creating a "golden radiance which can be perceived in a victor or a powerful, successful king" (Von Stietencron 19-20). In Old Persian the term for the charismatic aura of the ancient Iranian kings and champions is known as *khavarnah*, or in modern Persian, as *farr* (Garthwaite 56). *Farr*, like Weber's definition of charisma, is something that sets the individual apart, a "nimbus symbolizing Divine

favor” (Ferdowsi 7). *Farr* is also an aura that is apparent to any subject or follower in sight of one who possess *farr*, as Persianist Rueben Levy notes in his commentary of the *Shahnama* (The Persian Epic of Kings), *farr* “was recognized by beholders and implied infallible greatness and good fortune as its possessor held the favour of the Divine powers” (qtd. in Ferdowsi 7).

Farr, because of its divine origins, serves as a nearly literal Iranian equivalent to Weber’s conception of charisma as a “gift of grace” (47). Heinrich Von Stietencron observes in the Indo-Iranian “literary tradition” that *farr* is often intimately linked to kingship (18). Weber also saw the link between charisma and the development kingship writing, “kingship evolves from charismatic heroism” (25). In citing an ancient Indo-Iranian myth, Von Stietencron describes a cycle that illustrates the nature of *farr*, in addition to linking *farr* to Weber’s ideas of charismatic action and kingship (19). In Von Stietencron’s example Yima, the first man, loses the divine *farr* due to his “misconduct” (19). As a result, the world’s “moral order is corrupted” and the forces of the dark “gain the upper hand” (Von Stietencron 19). During this time of “darkness” an evil dictator assumed power and claimed the entire world’s “riches for himself” (Von Stietencron 19). Order in the world was only able to be restored when a young hero is granted with the victorious aura of the *farr* and kills the usurper (Von Stietencron 19). In the process of defeating the forces of darkness the young hero receives the *farr* and is granted the right to rule the world at the behest of Ahura Mazda. In Weberian terms, the hero’s skill in battle set him apart from other warriors and his defeat and subsequent ascension to the throne of ancient Iran further distinguished him from the population.

Regardless of how charisma is categorized or named, there is an important concept

of Weber's that is central to the understanding charismatic authority. Weber writes that charismatic authority, because it is so "specifically foreign to every-day routine structures," is unstable (54). Charisma's inherent instability lends itself to or requires transformation, or in Weberian terms "routinization," in order to be secured along rational or tradition lines (Weber 54). In a general sense, the routinization of charisma is an attempt to sustain the "pure" charisma of the charismatic leader in way that it can either be passed on or institutionalized in some fashion (Weber 54-55). Weber is nonetheless clear that in searching for a new charismatic leader, followers must be "bound to certain distinguishing characteristics; thus, to rules with respect to which a tradition arises" (55). In this statement, Weber elucidates that whoever accepts the mantle of charisma, must themselves be privy to the charismatic ideals established by the previous leader. In some cases the followers can become the gatekeepers of the leader's charisma choosing those leaders who best fit their conception of the charismatic prototype (58). Weber goes on to list a number of ways in which routinization can occur. One case in point that warrants mention is the case of hereditary charisma. Weber writes that "charisma is a quality transmitted by heredity," although in many cases "it is still also sometimes necessary to select the proper heir" (56). Perhaps even more interesting is Weber's assertion that in the case of hereditary charisma "[p]ersonal charisma may be totally absent" among the successors (57).

Monika Horstmann comments on the work of Weber and his concept of routinization, identifying two ways in which routinization often occurs. In the first scenario, charisma is transferred to a successor of the current "office-holder" (171). In the second instance, charisma is "vested in the office itself and not in the office-holder"

(171). The goals of both routinization methods that Horstmann describes are designed to facilitate what Weber termed “*Gentilcharisma*” a “smooth” transition of charisma brought about “by the timely designation of a successor” (173). Weber himself notes the commonality of the practice of a charismatic leader designating his or her successor adding that, “in this case legitimacy is [also] acquired” (55).

In order to support his theories regarding charisma, Weber draws from a number of historical and religious sources. As noted previously, Weber was aware of various aspects of Islam and was even familiar with Zoroastrianism. Regardless, Weber’s inclusions of various Islamic and Iranian aspects in his scholarship of charisma is often presented in a cursory fashion and, in some cases, present a decidedly Orientalist point of view (Weber 19, 258). Furthermore, there is no mention of Shi’i Islam and what Lindholm describes as a “distinctive Shi’ite premise of a charismatic lineage of redemptive figures” in Weber’s scholarship (The Islamic 168). It is to the “charismatic lineage” of the Shi’i, and the scholarship of those who have taken Weber’s studies of charisma and applied them to the Shi’i that this work will now turn.

Shi’i Islam itself arose in the turbulent period after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 C.E., and is rooted in the debate over who should lead the Muslim community or *ummah* (Momen 11). Most Muslims accepted the transition of power to a succession of deputies known as Caliphs¹ who served as the new leaders of Islam

¹ On the reigns of the first four “Rashidun” Caliphs see “The Caliphate” in Ira M. Lapidus A History of Islamic Societies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pg. 45.

(Momen 10). A minority of the early Muslims, however, believed that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali was the rightful successor to the Prophet both "as temporal head (Caliph)" and also "as spiritual head (Imam)" (Momen 11).

While 'Ali was eventually elected Caliph, his right to lead was never fully acknowledged by the Muslim community as a whole, and he faced great strife within the community during his Caliphate (Nasr 36). Conversely, the fact that 'Ali was not chosen as the first Caliph was seen as a usurpation of his rightful authority by "his partisans (literally, *Shi'ah Ali*)" (Nasr 38). One threat to 'Ali's Caliphate was the rise of a relative of the third Caliphate 'Uthman (d. 644 C.E.) named Muawiya (d. 680) who went on to found the Umayyad dynasty (661-950 C.E.) (Nasr 36). Umayyad rule was eventually accepted by most of the non-Alid Muslims and quickly developed into a powerful ruling institution (Nasr 35-36). 'Ali was killed shortly after the ascent of the Umayyads, leaving a leadership vacuum for his partisans that was consequently filled by his progeny (Nasr 40). For the Shi'ah, 'Ali's sons, as products of the union between 'Ali and the Prophet's daughter Fatima (d. 632) were the only "rightful leaders of Islam" (Nasr 40). The Shi'ahs' acknowledgement first of 'Ali and then his descendants as the just leaders of the Islamic community illustrates a key facet of Shi'i beliefs, principally the emphasis that is placed on proper leadership.

The descendants of 'Ali through Fatima came to be recognized as spiritual leaders or Imams² by the Shi'i community, serving as saintly guides "and preserving and

²For an expanded reading of the history of Shi'ism and the development of the Imam see Momen, An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism. New York: Yale University Press, 1985. Pgs 61-83.

explaining the Divine Law” (Momen 147). One of the early Shi’i Imams, Husayn ibn ‘Ali (the third Shi’i Imam), in addition to his role as a spiritual leader also adopted an activist position and sought to rebel against the Umayyads (Momen 28-29). Husayn’s bid for political authority was ultimately doomed as his small force faced a much larger Umayyad force on the plains surrounding Karbala, Iraq, leading to a struggle that ended with Husayn losing his life in 680 C.E. (Momen 30-31). According to Moojan Momen, “it would be difficult to exaggerate the impact and importance of the martyrdom of Husayn for the Shi’is” as it gave the Shi’i movement an “impetus” and tragic counterpoint to “intellectual justification” that the usurpation of ‘Ali and development of the Shi’i movement had developed (33). Husayn’s martyrdom also engendered a change in philosophy among the latter Shi’i Imams, especially after the time of the 6th Imam Ja’far (d.765 C.E.), because they adopted a quietist position, turning largely to scholarly pursuits (Jafri 289). L. Carl Brown refers to the process by which the Shi’i sought to avoid political action as the “spiritualization” of the Imamate because the Imams after Husayn effectively ceased to be political leaders and were, instead, relegated to the role of supreme religious leaders within the Shi’i community (38).

While there are a great number of groups that fall under the umbrella of Shi’ism, it is Twelver or *Ithna ‘Ashara* Shi’ism that is the most relevant to the history of modern Iran, and therefore, will prove to be the most often discussed within the context of this work. Twelver Shi’is look to twelve successors or Imams of the Prophet Muhammad as special spiritual leaders. The first Imam recognized by Twelver Shi’is is ‘Ali, with the Imamate being passed to his sons Hassan and Husayn (the second and third Imams

respectively) then progressing through Husayn's line to the Twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (Quinn, Historical Writing 4). The Twelfth Imam is believed to have entered a period of occultation or hiding (*ghayba*) shortly after his father the Eleventh Imam died in 874 C.E. (Momen 161). The Twelfth Imam is believed to have entered his period of hiding by disappearing down a well, and it is believed that he will one day return from this same well to bring justice to the world (Momen 162).

The Twelver Shi'i "doctrine of occultation" effectively states that God placed the Twelfth Imam into hiding in order to protect him and extend his life "until the day when he will manifest himself again by God's permission" (Momen 165). The need for the Twelfth Imam's occultation is linked to the Shi'i belief that the Twelfth Imam's life was in jeopardy from the enemies of the Shi'i (Momen 165). Despite being in hiding, the Twelfth Imam is still believed to be part of the physical world, but out of direct contact with it (Momen 165). The occultation of the Twelfth Imam also contains a strong eschatological component, as the Twelfth Imam is also regarded as al-Mahdi or "the rightly guided one," a messianic figure who will return at the end of days and lead a great battle against the enemies of Islam (Momen 165-166). The occultation of the Twelfth Imam is a significant event in its own right; it is also significant because it paved the way for the rise of the Shi'i clergy or *'ulama*, who took over the administration and spiritual leadership of the Shi'i community after the Twelfth Imam went into hiding (Armstrong, The Battle 52). The effect of the occultation of the Twelfth Shi'i Imam on the Shi'ah and the development of charismatic Shi'i figures will be elaborated upon in future chapters.

Iran's relationship with Islam, like the Shi'i movement, began shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Under the reign of the second Caliph 'Umar (d. 644

C.E.) the Arab Muslim armies swept into the realm of the Persian-Iranian Sassanid Empire, defeating the once great Empire's armies with relative ease (Garthwaite 120). Iran's conversion to Islam was a gradual process since most of Iran's population, at the time of the Arab conquest, were Zoroastrians who were accorded protected status by the Arab Muslims because of their monotheistic leanings (Garthwaite 120). Nevertheless, within a couple of hundred years the vast majority of Iranians had converted to Islam (Garthwaite 120). The Iranian population embrace of Islam is one thing; they did not, however, completely reject their pre-Islamic Iranian history and culture in favor of an Arab-Islamic identity.

A good example of the amalgamation of pre-Islamic Iranian identity and Islamic Arab culture is the Persian language. Gene R. Garthwaite notes that while "Arabic as a language was in a sense rejected" by the Iranians, the Persian language nevertheless adopted the Arabic script and many Arabic loan words (120). The creation of the *Shahnamah* or Persian Book of Kings, an epic poem about the glory of Iran's pre-Islamic kings, further illustrates the symbiotic relation of Iranian culture and Islamic values. The *Shahnamah* was one of the first major works written in "new" Persian or Persian written using the Arabic script by 'Abul Qasim Ferdowsi (940-1020 C.E.), a Muslim who presented "some of the heroes of his poem with Muslim values" (Mottahedeh, The Mantle 157).

As Islam developed as a ruling institution it too would come to adapt certain facets of the cultures and people it had conquered. The successors to the Umayyads, the Abbasids (750-1258 C.E.) were based in Baghdad not far from the former home of the Sassanid Empire. They "revived" Persian concepts of "universal rulership" and

legitimacy to suit their needs (Garthwaite 118). The Abbasids, and the numerous dynasties that arose in Iran and Central Asia after the Abbasid's decline, invested heavily in Persian culture as is evident in the literature, art, and bureaucratic tradition of much of the 11th century C.E. (Lapidus 129-131). Persian language and culture also survived a succession of invasions by Turkish peoples who came to dominate much of the Iranian culture sphere in the ninth and tenth centuries C.E. (Garthwaite 128). Iranian culture was also able to weather the cataclysmic effects of the Mongol invasions in the mid thirteenth century (Garthwaite 140). The Mongols' holdings in the Middle East were ruled from the heart of Iran, where they picked up the trappings of Persian culture and even converted to Islam (Garthwaite 141-143). The Mongols, like many of the ruling dynasties that had come before them, eventually "dissolved into competing provincial states" laying the foundation for the steppe conqueror Timur, or Tamerlane, to establish a new Empire (Lapidus 229). After Timur's death in 1405 C.E., Iran and central Asia were once again divided into a number of mini-Empires controlled by the sons of Timur (Lapidus 229-230).

In 1501 a young military leader named Isma'il swept through Iran with his zealous followers conquering Iran and establishing the Safavid Empire (1501-1722 C.E.). The Safavids brought the whole of Iran under the rule of a single dynasty for the first time since the fall of the Sassanid Empire to the Arab conquest (Newman, Safavid Iran 2). It is under the Safavids that the population of Iran was converted to Twelver Shi'ism despite the Sunni leanings of much of the country (Quinn, Historical Writing 4). In order to aid in the conversion process, the Safavids brought Shi'i clerics to Iran from throughout the Arab world (Quinn, Historical Writing 5). Many of the Shi'i clerics

brought to Iran laid the foundation for a powerful cleric establishment that eventually produced Khomeini (Quinn, Historical Writing 5). Arjomand, for example, views Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 "as the last stage of the evolution of clerical authority in Shi'ite Islam" begun in Safavid times ("History, Structure" 112). The links between revolutionary charisma and Shi'i Islam and the development of the Shi'i Imam are where this work will now turn.

II. THE CHARISMATIC IMAM

The belief that ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib (d. 661 C.E.) was designated by the Prophet Muhammad to be his successor as leader of the Muslim community (*ummah*) after the Prophet’s death is the belief that defines the Shi’i experience. While there are many events that the Shi’i reference in order to justify ‘Ali’s claim to leadership, the importance of the events at Ghadir Khumm often take precedence (Dakake 33-34). The Prophet Muhammad, who was returning to Medina from his final pilgrimage to Mecca in 632 C.E., is said to have stopped his caravan at a place called Ghadir Khumm (Momen 15). It is recorded that the Prophet led the Muslims in prayer and declared, “For whomever I am their lord (*mawla*) ‘Ali is their lord (*mawla*)” (qtd. in Dakake 35). According to Maria Massi Dakake, the Prophet’s selection of ‘Ali followed a lengthy “fatherly” themed sermon based around the Qur’anic verse, “The Prophet is closer to the believers than their selves, *and he is a father for them*, and his wives are their mother” (qtd. in Dakake 35). Essentially, the Prophet, in his sermon at Ghadir Khumm, engendered his followers with a sense of “filial piety,” which he first directed at himself and then at ‘Ali (Dakake 53).

Descriptions of the events that took place at Ghadir Khumm survive primarily in Shi’i sources. It is important to note, however, that accounts of Ghadir Khumm are also preserved in some Sunni traditions (Dakake 43). Many of the differences between the Sunni and Shi’i accounts of Ghadir Khumm revolve around the lack of mention of ‘Ali’s “familial connections” in the Sunni sources (Dakake 35). Conversely, the Shi’i sources

stress ‘Ali’s “unrivaled closeness to the Prophet” (Dakake 35). The word choice of the Prophet is also significant as he calls ‘Ali *mawla* or *wali* instead of the “more doctrinally precise term” of *imam*, which the Shi’i eventually adopted (Dakake 35). Despite the many different readings of the Ghadir Khumm traditions, “it is hard to deny that it confers on ‘Ali a kind of spiritual distinction that sets him apart from the other close companions of the Prophet” (Dakake 35).

For the Shi’i, Ghadir Khumm represents but one of the many instances in which ‘Ali, and other family members of the Prophet Muhammad, were singled out by the Prophet as his successors (Momen 11-15). Some of the more salient examples of the Shi’ah’s arguments besides Ghadir Khumm come from ‘Ali’s place as the first male besides the Prophet to embrace Islam, and ‘Ali’s role as the Prophet’s “chief assistant” in life” (Momen 11-13). The Shi’i also reference other traditions to support their claim that, like Ghadir Khumm, have found homes in Sunni traditions (Momen 15). For example, both Sunni and Shi’i sources recount that:

The Prophet took the hand of Hasan and Husayn [‘Ali’s sons and the Prophet’s grandsons] and said: “Whoever loves me loves these two and loves their mother and father, will be with me in my station on the Day of Resurrection.” [and] “Hasan and Husayn are the chiefs of the youths of paradise” (qtd. in Momen 15).

Once again, both Sunni and Shi’i sources emphasize the importance that the Prophet placed on his family or the *ahl al-bayt*³. Similar to the traditions of Ghadir Khumm,

³ For more on the evolution of the use of *ahl al-bayt* see Jonathan P. Berkey *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pg 88.

these mutually accepted traditions take on a Sunni or Shi'i bent depending on the leanings of those who reference them. For example, the Shi'i view the tradition cited above as an extension of the Prophet's designation of 'Ali to his sons Hassan and Husayn (Momen 15). For the Sunnis, the tradition cited above certainly presents Hassan and Husayn as significant individuals in Islam, however, it does not firmly place them in a position of leadership.

Questions of historical and religious shading and interpretation are found not only in those traditions that relate to 'Ali's designation, but to the question of succession after the Prophet's death. Moojan Momen writes "the succession to Muhammad is clearly the key question in Shi'i Islam and the principal factor separating Shi'is from the Sunni majority" (11). Perhaps even more central to those Muslims who professed Shi'i leanings is a question of not just who would succeed the Prophet Muhammad, but ultimately what "the nature of the role of this successor" should be (Momen 11). Those Muslims who would eventually become the Shi'i, unlike the Sunni, were not simply concerned with a succession of worldly authority, but an extension of the Prophet's spiritual charisma (Momen 11).

The question of succession after the Prophet Muhammad's death, while an important and defining question to the partisans of 'Ali and scholars of Shi'ism alike, is not a question that will form a central theme of this work. More important will be the question of why the issue of succession arose in the first place. In an introduction to a work containing a collection of essays addressing Shi'i leadership, Linda S. Walbridge makes some inquiries that are worthy of note. One of Walbridge's questions concerns whether or not "politics" or "heredity" ought to "be the overriding consideration in

determining leadership” (3). Another question posed by Walbridge concerns what skills and “attributes” are required of a leader (3). Finally, Walbridge asks, “should charisma override learning, or is it the other way around?” (3). The answers to the first two of Walbridge’s questions when considered from the Shi’i perspective are not difficult to answer. When they are, however, considered with a slight re-working of Walbridge’s third question to “should charisma override everything,” the answers to her first two questions become more complex and subsequently more difficult to answer. In this reworking of Walbridge’s question, charisma is placed at the forefront, with heredity and learning moving to background. The purpose of this section will be to argue that the office of the Shi’i Imam is a charismatic office established by a collection of figures whose charisma defined the Shi’i experience, in addition to being organized and ultimately routinized along Weberian lines. Once the role of charisma is established this section will turn to the “mystery” of the Twelfth Imam’s occultation and the perpetuation of the Imam’s charismatic image inherent in the Twelfth Imam’s return (Walbridge 3).

Most scholarship of Shi’ism places a great deal of significance on the lives and actions of the first three Shi’i Imams: ‘Ali ibn Talib (d. 661 C.E.), Hassan ibn ‘Ali (d. 669 C.E.), and Husayn ibn ‘Ali (d. 680 C.E.). The emphasis on the first three Imams is understandable as they characterized the Shi’i movement in its infancy, ultimately shaping the Shi’i struggle against what has come to be known as the Sunni majority. The approach of basing much of the development of the Shi’i on the actions of the first three Imams can be said to compose the “traditional” or conventional argument for the nature of the charismatic Imam. The “traditional” argument in conjunction with studies that present different, and more recent, arguments for the charismatic nature of the Shi’i

Imam based on the teachings of ideas of Max Weber serve as the basis for much of this section's argument.

Before the death of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Ali was known as a very active participant in the Muslim community and "a great warrior in the forefront of all the battles fought under Muhammad" (Jafri 59). 'Ali for example, was the Prophet's "standard-bearer" in a number of early battles between the Muslims of Medina and the armies of Mecca (Momen 13). Beyond being a "standard bearer" 'Ali is renowned for his own skill in combat, "symbolized by his legendary fork-tongued sword *zulfiqar*" (Nasr 37). Because of 'Ali's heroism he has been accorded many titles that are referenced by both Sunnis and Shi'is alike (Nasr 37). 'Ali is also popularly believed to have risked his life for the Prophet by sleeping in the Prophet's bed in order to thwart an assassination attempt and facilitate an escape to Medina (Nasr 37).

After the Prophet's death, 'Ali's demeanor changed, becoming more reserved. He was often reported to have, "confined [himself] to the four walls of his house," presenting an image in stark contrast to the fearless warrior of his younger years (Jafri 59). The change in 'Ali's behavior is equated with the rise of the office of the Caliph as the leaders of the Muslim community (*ummah*) after the Prophet's death (Jafri 60). Even though others were appointed to the position of Caliph before 'Ali, he maintained "that he was better qualified for the caliphate and that he had been unjustly deprived of leadership of the community" (Jafri 61). In a collection of 'Ali's sermons known as the *Nahj al-Balagha*, his position that the first three Caliphs were usurpers is clarified, in addition to expanding 'Ali's plan for the future (Jafri 62). The *Nahj al-Balagha* also explains the quietist position that 'Ali adopted saying, "So I adopted patience, although there was a

mote rankling in my eye and a bone sticking in my throat on seeing my heritage being plundered” (qtd. in Jafri 62).

It is to patience, and the composition of his sermons that ‘Ali turned after being passed over to lead the Muslim community, first by Abdullah ibn Abi Qahafa Abu Bakr (573-634 C.E.) and then by ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (590-644 C.E.) and finally by ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan (579-656 C.E.). What is perhaps most interesting about ‘Ali’s statement is that he viewed the leadership of the community as his “heritage” (qtd. in Jafri 62). ‘Ali’s mention of the leadership as his heritage harkens back to the initial question and the formation of the Shi’ah, as well as calling Weberian notions of charismatic succession into play. Invoking a certain charismatic, religious heritage also illustrates the Shi’i belief that Muhammad and then ‘Ali were “the restorer[s] of the true religion of Abraham and Ishmael, and so in him the hereditary sanctity of his clan reached its highest level” (Jafri 14).

Hereditary notions of charismatic authority or “hereditary sanctity” are very important to the Shi’ah (Jafri 14). Weber acknowledged the clout that heredity could play in a succession, but also stated that inherited structures were not necessary if a successor was selected (56). To the Shi’ah, ‘Ali represents a union of both designated and hereditary succession because he was selected by the Prophet, and was familiarly tied to the Prophet through his marriage to the Prophet’s daughter Fatima (Momen 13). Shi’i supporter Habib ibn Muzahir (d. 680) presents the Shi’i conception of the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet), and their importance to the Shi’i when he wrote, “The people of this sacred family [‘Ali, Fatima, and Hassan and Husayn] are those who are the best worshippers of God and who spend their mornings striving in the devotion of God” (qtd.

in Jafri 206). Since Muhammad did not have any sons that survived into adulthood, ‘Ali became, for all intensive purposes, his heir (Momen 14). Moreover, it is from ‘Ali and his supporters that the Shi’ah developed a routine of employing ‘Ali’s name and his closeness to God during prayer (Takim, “From Bid’a” 166). Fatima’s part in the development of the Shi’i cannot be underestimated as she “is considered the most holy of Muslim women” and “is called al-Zahra [the radiant]” (Chittick 137). Furthermore, Hassan and Husayn as the sons of ‘Ali and Fatima are literally the descendants of the Prophet. The emphasis on proper succession by the Shi’ah can be quantified in terms of charismatic succession and routinization, like those professed by Weber providing support for the argument that the Shi’i Imamate operated as an effective charismatic office in Weberian terms.

The first section of this work already established that Muhammad was a charismatic figure, and that the charisma of a religious leader can go through a process of routinization in order to be prolonged (Weber 54). Viewing Shi’i history and applying the concepts of Weber to the Shi’i perspective reveals a number of instances during the Prophet’s life in which he designated ‘Ali as his successor. The events that took place at Ghadir Khumm serve as one example of what the Shi’i believe to be a very public confirmation of ‘Ali’s place once the Prophet was gone (Momen 15). There is also the Shi’i claim that in the Prophet’s last minutes of life he called for writing supplies in order to put ‘Ali’s succession in writing, but was put off by ‘Umar (who became the second Caliph) (Momen 16). To the proto-Shi’i, it appears that the Prophet was striving to achieve the *Gentilcharisma* or the smooth transition of charismatic authority that Weber describes (Horstmann 173).

Further proof for the Shi'ah's embrace of Weberian notions of charismatic routinization are seen after the death of 'Ali. In 661 C.E. 'Ali was killed, leaving the Shi'i Imamate in the hands of his oldest son Hassan (Momen 26). The Imamate of Hassan is marked not by the battles and political struggles that characterized the Imamate of his father 'Ali (Momen 27). Instead, Hassan removed himself from the political scene in favor of the patient, contemplative life (Momen 27). Some scholars of Shi'ism have painted Hassan as a weak figure who abandoned the Shi'i, and all but handed over the Caliphate to the Umayyad Caliph Mu'awiya (Momen 27). According to Momen, the harsh treatment of Hassan by some scholars is not in concurrence with the view of the Shi'i historians, who view Hassan's "abdication not [as] an act of feeble cowardice but a realistic and compassionate act" (27). The Shi'i historians believe that in stepping aside Hassan actually prevented "pointless bloodshed" (Momen 27). There also seems to have been some distinction between Mu'awiya's political and military strength and Hassan's "religious precedence" (Momen 27). Regardless of certain distinctions, Hassan and his followers (the Shi'ah 'Ali) were left to their own devices and granted "general amnesty" after Hassan's deal with Mu'awiya (Momen 27). Hassan may have not been the most dynamic of the Shi'i Imams; nevertheless, he maintained the Alid community in the face of a hazardous political climate. Moreover, the proto-Shi'i looked to him for leadership because of his religious credentials and relationship to the Prophet. Hassan is even popularly "reported to have resembled the Prophet in appearance" (Jafri 131). Even Weber notes that a deficiency in individual charisma does not necessarily result in the end of charismatic transmission (57).

It is the life and subsequent death of the third Shi'i Imam, Husayn, that forms the basis of what can be called a "traditional" argument for the charismatic nature of the Shi'i Imamate. Husayn became the third Shi'i Imam, and head of the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) after the death of Hassan in 669 C.E. (Jafri 177). Like Hassan, Husayn "combined in his person the right of descent both from the Prophet and 'Ali," but unlike Hassan he was far more politically active (Jafri 177). It is recorded that the people of Mecca flocked to Husayn upon his arrival, praying and circumambulating the Ka'ba with him (Jafri 177). By the time of Husayn's ascension, the Umayyad Caliph Mu'awiya had died, freeing Husayn and his Shi'i supporters from the treaty of inaction that Hassan had forged (Jafri 177).

Apparently the threat that Husayn posed to the Umayyads did not go unnoticed by Mu'awiya, who warned his son and successor Yazid (d. 683) to be wary of the Grandson of the Prophet (Jafri 175). Mu'awiya, in his warning to Yazid, described a few individuals who could be problematic for their regime, but singled out Husayn saying, "Among them Husayn b. 'Ali commands great love and respect because of his superior rights and close relationship to the Prophet" (Jafri 175). Syed Husyan Muhammad Jafri writes that Mu'awiya's deathbed speech, "confirms the reports that Mu'awiya's efforts to secure the approval of these grandees of Islam for Yazid's succession had not been successful" (175). It seems that Mu'awiya was especially concerned about the people of Iraq because they had supported 'Ali and had strong sympathies for the *ahl al-bayt* (Jafri 175). It is also significant that Mu'awiya concedes that Husayn was in possession of certain gifts or "rights" that made him an especially potent foe. There is also a reference to Husayn's connection to the Prophet and the political and religious significance that

such an association can draw. Yazid's questionable succession combined with Husayn's popularity and the instability in Iraq contributed to an unstable political situation in the Islamic world. Some sources also paint Yazid as a person who rejected certain Islamic values, and was widely believed to have been an alcoholic (Momen 28). Yazid's blasphemous proclivities did not endear him to many Muslims who looked to Husayn to return the leadership of Islam to its unsullied roots.

Yazid, in an attempt to quickly consolidate his power, sought an oath from Husayn similar to that of the agreement between Mu'awiya and Hassan (Jafri 175-176). Husayn, in move that resembled the Prophet's escape from Mecca, was able to elude Yazid's forces and make his way to Mecca from Syria (Jafri 176). In Mecca, Husayn began to receive letters and envoys from Iraq (especially Kufa), seeking his guidance and leadership and claiming "they had no *Imam* other than him" (qtd. in Jafri 177). The Kufans were particularly upset by Yazid's perceived un-Islamic behavior often rioting in the streets in response (Armstrong, Battle 46). To use the charismatic-social context exposed by Lindholm and Barnes, the tense social situation created by Yazid's rule and behavior created an environment that attracted the Kufans to Husayn's charismatic lineage in the hopes of a religious revitalization.

Husayn's response to the Kufans, and his actions while in Mecca are interesting as Jafri notes they "show that from the beginning to end his [Husayn's] strategy was aimed at a much higher goal than simply accession to the caliphate" (178). Husayn's response to the Kufans is important as it contained details that related not just to a promise of political upheaval, but also contained a strong religious message. The

religious message of Husayn's letter is significant enough that sections of it are worth reprinting here:

God has chosen Muhammad from among his people, graced him with His Prophethood and selected him for His message. After he admonished the people and conveyed His message to them God took him back unto Himself. We being his family (*ahl*), his close associates endowed with the with the quality of guardianship (*awliya*)...his heir and legatee (*warith*), are the most deserving among all the people to take his place...the Book of God, and the *Sunna* of his Prophet, the *Sunna* which has become obliterated and innovations have become active and energetic. If you listen to me and obey my orders I will guide you to the right path (qtd. in Jafri 179-180).

According to Jafri, Husayn's letters act as a summarization of Shi'i theology in its infancy, presenting the Imam as a religious guide and restorer (180). Husayn's letter is perhaps even more revealing in establishing the charismatic nature of the Shi'i. Husayn, like 'Ali and Hassan, continued to stress the point that he was the legitimate heir to the Prophet. Furthermore, Husayn and his family have received special gifts that allow them to lead the Muslim community because of their hereditary proximity to the Prophet. While 'Ali expressed in his writings that he had special talents that qualified him for leadership, he did not specifically identify what these qualities were (Jafri 61). Husayn clearly denotes the qualities that 'Ali only hinted at, namely, protecting and leading the Muslim community aided by the gifts from their association of the Prophet. Husayn, in this statement, appears to support 'Ali's claims as he attacks the rulings and actions of the

first three Caliphs, whom he viewed as unjustly altering the sayings and actions of the Prophet (Jafri 181).

Perhaps even more significant is Husayn's mention of his ability to return the Muslim community to the right religious path. In stating that he will serve as their "guide," Husayn takes on the prophetic-charismatic aura of his grandfather, making his bid for political action more legitimate. Husayn's charismatic authority was almost certainly recognized by the Shi'ah 'Ali who, as in the case of Qays ibn Mushir, refused to follow the Umayyad practice of cursing Husayn, yelling instead that "Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, is the best man of his time among the men of God" (qtd in Jafri 205). Further proof for Husayn's abilities are seen in the statements he made as he set out for Kufa, which seem to suggest that he was aware of his fate, and ultimately that he was accepting of the situation (Jafri 185).

Husayn's martyrdom at the hands of the armies of Yazid created what Jafri terms "a deep heart-searching after-effect upon the Shi'is, giving a new turn to the mode and nature of the Shi'i movement" (222). The image of Husayn (who like Hassan was blessed with a strong resemblance to the Prophet) covered in over thirty wounds, yet still standing against the armies of the usurper Yazid's armies, is a powerful testament to the abilities of Husayn. Nevertheless, the question that must be asked for the purposes of this work is what are the charismatic implications of the martyrdom of Husayn. From some of the analysis presented in previous paragraphs it can be said that Husayn was charismatic, both because of his lineage and closeness to the Prophet, and his personal charisma as a religious restorer.

Shi'i scholar Muhammad 'Ali Amir-Moezzi writes that "none of his [Husayn's] successors interpreted his presence in Karbala as being a 'political' act" (66). Instead, it appears that Husayn was basing his resistance to the Umayyads on purely grounds of religious reform, fulfilling his role as "a friend of God (*wali*)" (Amir Moezzi 66). Jafri, like Amir-Moezzi, reads the Shi'i conception of Husayn's martyrdom "as a strictly religious issue" (233). The eighth Shi'i Imam, 'Ali al-Rida (d. 818) even likened Husayn's martyrdom to the actions of Abraham who was willing to sacrifice his son "in order to fulfill divine will" (Amir-Moezzi 67). Nevertheless, the religious connotations of Husayn's stand were based on loyalty to the leadership of his father and Prophet-grandfather, and have subsequently been transformed by later Shi'is into a "political ideology" (Amir Moezzi 67). It can be said, however, that even if Husayn did not seek any political post in his stand, it certainly drove many of his supporters to seek larger roles in their social and religious order (Jafri 232-233). While Husayn and his brother and father had loyal followers, the number of those who could be counted upon as faithful partisans was constantly in flux (Jafri 222-223). For example, many of the Kufans who had sent their pleas to Husayn for leadership and religious guidance in the end failed to aid Husayn in his time of greatest need (Jafri 223). The Kufan's failure to act engendered a "deep sense of repentance," that subsequently led to the creation of the *Tawwabun* or penitent movement (Jafri 222). The *Tawwabun* felt that they could atone for their inability to act in Husayn's defense "by exposing themselves to death while seeking vengeance for the blood of Husayn" (Jafri 222). Husayn is therefore a charismatic leader in both the Weber and Barnes sense of a charismatic entity who was

able to attract followers because of his religious mission, and in terms of Tucker's idea of a charismatic phenomenon, which attracted followers after his death.

Husayn in death not only secured the loyalty of more followers for his descendents, he also inspired a frenzied sense of loyalty and justice among the Shi'ah based on a charismatic obligation for his martyrdom. Jafri notes that even while the *Tawwabun* eventually lost the zealousness that characterized their actions following Husayn's death they were, nevertheless, imbued with "a strong feeling of duty and a deep sense of religious obligation" (233). The "obligation" that Jafri describes is one to the *ahl al-bayt* and the partisans of 'Ali moving "Shi'ism another step forward towards an independent and self-sustaining existence" (233). The fact that many of the Shi'i turned to Husayn's son, 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin as their new Imam shows just how powerful notions of charismatic succession and proper leadership had taken hold in the Shi'i community (Jafri 229). Tales of the courageous death of the Prophet's grandson spread throughout the Islamic world bringing in converts to the Shi'i cause from the Arab territories, as well as significant sympathy from many Persian converts to whom the populist nature of the Shi'ah 'Ali held a "wider appeal" (Jafri 232).

Perhaps nowhere is the self-sustaining nature of Shi'ism more apparent than in the commemoration ceremonies of Husayn's martyrdom "during the first ten days of Muharram (the month in the Islamic Calendar in which Husayn was martyred)" (Momen 33). The reenactments of Husayn's death during Muharram serve not only to foster "an ethos of sanctification through martyrdom," but also to keep the charismatic nature and obligation of Husayn and those of his household fresh in the mind of the Shi'i (Momen 33). Husayn's death also further entrenched the Shi'i view that "every single one of the

Imams suffered martyrdom” (Momen 33). The culture of persecution and martyrdom within the Shi’i community help account for the need for the constant presence of a charismatic leader (the Imam). As Barnes has noted, a time of great social and religious upheaval “which causes distress and dissatisfaction among a segment of the population” is often a key element in the promoting of charismatic individuals (4).

The actions and abilities of ‘Ali, Hassan, and Husayn also played an important role in shaping the Shi’i conception of the Imam. Momen notes that in following the trend of the first three Imams, the Shi’ah came to view designation (*nass*) as increasingly important as the Imams themselves were seen as increasingly significant figures (145). By the time of the sixth (Ja’far al-Sadiq d. 765) and seventh Imams (Musa al-Kazim d. 799), the office of the Imamate had come to be equated with certain special attributes (Momen 154). The Imams, for example, were believed to be free from sin and error (*i’sma*), as well as having access to special religious knowledge (*‘ilm*) (Momen 155). Among the Shi’i it is believed that, “the imams are the Gate [*bab*] or the Threshold that allows the passage into Divine Knowledge” that was closed to all but them (Amir-Moezzi 70). The writings of a contemporary of the eighth and ninth Imams, al-Fadl ibn Shadhan al-Nisaburi (d. 874) show that the idea of the Imams having sole access to special religious knowledge was not universally accepted (Bayhom-Daou 193). Al-Fadl believed that all humans could access the knowledge of the Imams through learning; however, he kept his view confined to his private writings as it went against the belief of most of the Shi’i community (Bayhom-Daou 193). Since the majority of the Shi’ah understood that the Shi’i Imam was privy to religious knowledge that was outside of that of the standard Muslim and also free from error, the Imam was the ideal judge and was worthy of the

spiritual leadership (*walaya*) of the community (Momen 156-157). It is because of the unique abilities of the Imam that proper designation continued to be important as the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq wrote, "Do you imagine that we place this Cause of ours [the Imamate] with whomsoever we wish? No! Not at all!...None of us (the Imams) die until God has informed us of the one who is to succeed us (qtd. in Momen 154).

At an even more esoteric level, the Shi'i Imamate is conceived in terms of divine light (*nûr*), whose existence pre-dated the creation of the world (Amir-Moezzi 40). It is then believed that God placed this "Light of prophecy (the Imamate)" into Adam starting its passage "through the generations of humanity, covering the spaces and times of the sacred history of humanity" (Amir-Moezzi 40). The transfer of the light of the Shi'i Imamate from Adam to the Imams themselves creates a sanctified genealogy that certainly imbues proper succession (and therefore, proper designation) with a great deal of meaning. The idea of the Shi'i Imams emerging from a source of ancient luminosity has little charismatic merit on its own, yet the fact that the Shi'i view the ascendance of each Imam, as a completion of God's prophetic will suggest that each Imam is a holder of the charisma of the past Prophets. Tamima Bayhom-Daou disagrees with much of Amir-Moezzi's arguments for the "esoteric doctrine" of "pre-*ghayba* [occultation] Imamism," on the basis that Amir-Moezzi was founding his arguments on "late sources" (189). Even though Amir Moezzi's scholarship may make use of later sources, it is still relevant to the scope of this work as it shows that the Shi'ah living after the Twelfth Imam's occultation certainly viewed the Imams in a charismatic light.

Maria Massi Dakake in her book, [The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam](#) presents a different argument for the charismatic nature of the Shi'i Imam

from the “traditional” argument put forth by Jafri and Momen. Dakake bases her argument on the assertion that the Shi’i Imam did not exclusively depend “on the genealogically transmitted charisma of the Prophet...in order to be ‘religious’” (6). Instead, Dakake suggests that it was the charismatic presence of ‘Ali that served as the basis for the charismatic nature of the Shi’i Imamate (6). In order to substantiate her claim, Dakake relies on a number of sources (both Sunni and Shi’i) that relate the “unshakeable bond” between ‘Ali and his supporters expressed in terms of *walayah* (6). *Walayah* is most commonly understood as a bond that enables an individual to “exercise authority” (Izzi-Dien 6: 208). Dakake argues, however, that *walayah* means something more for the Shi’ah saying, “it [*walayah*] is a concept that has been part of the Shi’ite believers over centuries of substantial doctrinal and political change” (7). Furthermore, the Shi’i view *walayah* in terms of “spiritual charisma” that represents the “Shi’ite religious ethos” (Dakake 7). The “religious ethos” that Dakake views *walayah* representing in the Shi’i community refers to a multi-faceted connection containing “God, the Prophet, the Imam and the community of Shi’ite believers” (7). P.E. Walker goes even further suggesting that *walayah*, along with prayer (*salat*) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), represents another “pillar” of Islam of for the Shi’ah (6: 209).

Dakake draws extensively on the Ghadir Khumm tradition for insight into the charisma of ‘Ali. The revelation of a particular Qur’anic verse after the Prophet’s speech at Ghadir Khumm which states, “This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed my favor unto you,” is often understood by the Shi’i to be “confirmation that the *walayah* of ‘Ali was the final ‘piece’ that perfected the religion of Islam” (Dakake 46). It appears, after the Prophet’s death and the subsequent usurpation of ‘Ali for the

Caliphate, that ‘Ali’s charismatic aura grew (Dakake 58). Dakake’s view of ‘Ali contends with Jafri’s “traditional” argument to some degree as he writes that the “hereditary sanctity” that Hassan, and to an even greater extent Husayn, capitalize on were perceived as coming from the Prophet through their mother Fatima (Jafri 229). Jafri observes that in many cases Hassan and Husayn were referred to not “as the sons of ‘Ali,” but as “the son[s] of the daughter of our Prophet” (229).

Despite Jafri’s argument, Dakake maintains that ‘Ali can easily be considered a charismatic figure based both on Weber’s categorizations and his perceived gifts and talents by the Shi’ah (Dakake 8). Moreover, evidence from the early Safavid period reveal a form of Shi’ism that “engendered a devotion to ‘Ali, in particular” (Takim, “From Bid’a” 169). Dakake further contends that the bonds of *walayah* (charisma) that ‘Ali initially received as a result of military exploits and the Ghadir Khumm were further increased thanks in large part to the belief that ‘Ali had access to the Prophet’s will and testament (Dakake 58). From the Shi’i perspective, the Prophet’s will delivered into Fatima’s possession after his death, and had, conversely, been dictated by ‘Ali in the first place making it a natural assumption that ‘Ali would have had access to such a religious treasure (Dakake 58). Being the recipient of the Prophet’s final words gave ‘Ali tremendous prestige and implied that ‘Ali had “exclusive knowledge of the Prophet’s will for his community,” further confirming the Shi’i ideal of ‘Ali’s place as the rightful successor to the Prophet (Dakake 58).

Dakake notes that while the spiritual charisma inherent in the Shi’i conception of *walayah* was first “associated primarily with ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib,” it eventually evolved into “a state of absolute allegiance and devotion” to the Imams (104). The loyalty and

affection that the Shi'ah show to the Imams is, in turn, reflected on them making them part (however small) of the "charisma and spiritual status of the Imams" (Dakake 168). By this statement Dakake means that the Shi'ah, in showing proper respect and reverence for the Imams, essentially become part of the charisma of the Imams. In presenting a cyclical interchange of charisma between the Shi'i Imams and their partisans, Dakake not only supports her argument for the conception of the Shi'i as a "charismatic community," but also reflects on a number of points that are relevant to the line of reasoning for the charismatic station of the Imam (10). Regardless of how Hassan and Husayn were referenced, in Dakake's view 'Ali was a charismatic figure who caused a somewhat arbitrary Arabic term (*walayah*) to become a central spiritual pillar of the Shi'i community. Moreover, the effect of laying a charismatic foundation based on the distinctly Shi'i concept of *walayah* enable the Shi'is, through their devotion to the spiritual guidance of the Imams, to themselves be part of the essential charisma of the Imamate. In doing so, Dakake presents a degree of charismatic interplay between a charismatic leader and their followers that Weber in his analysis of personal charisma and its "recruitment" potential did not even begin to categorize (Weber 58).

Liyakat N. Takim presents yet another explanation and argument for the charismatic nature for the Shi'i that is based on his own research, in addition to being strongly grounded in Weber's theories on charisma. It is Weber's conception of the routinization of charisma that provides a strong basis for Takim's arguments. Takim notes that in looking to a succession of Imams, the Shi'i attempted to extend the original of charisma of the Prophet, whereas the Sunnis sought to immediately routinize it (The Heirs 24). The problem with routinization, Takim notes, "is the paucity of charismatic

figures” to succeed the original charismatic figure after the death (The Heirs 5). For those Muslims that came to form the Shi’i the death of the Prophet did not present the problem of succession that Weber describes, as there were charismatic individuals to take the Prophet’s place in the form of ‘Ali and his children (Takim, The Heirs 26).

Conversely, the rise of the Sunni Caliphate is presented by Takim as an example of the quickness with which the proto-Sunnis routinized the charisma of the Prophet in the perceived absence of charismatic figures that characterized the beliefs of their Shi’i brethren (The Heirs 24-25). Takim, like Momen, Jafri, and, to a degree, Dakake recognizes and elaborates on the importance of proper leadership and hereditary succession (The Heirs 24-25). It is not, however, to notions of “hereditary sanctity” that Takim turns to as the crux of his argument. Instead, it is the Shi’i desire “to perpetuate Muhammad’s charismatic legacy” that Takim points to as the central theme in the argument for the charismatic nature of Shi’ism (The Heirs 25).

Of course, explaining that the Shi’i look to the Prophet’s “charismatic legacy” as the reason for the creation of their religious movement begs the question of just what is the nature of the Prophet’s charisma. For Takim, Muhammad’s charisma stems from his ability to tap into and elaborate upon the divine ethical message “of the great biblical prophets” (The Heirs 3-4). The ethical message of Muhammad naturally included the Qur’an, which provided “a new ethical-moral structure” that eventually replaced many aspects of Arabian society (Takim, The Heirs 4). In order to explain how the Shi’i Imam came to inherit the Prophet’s charismatic-ethical mantle, Takim presents two terms of his own adaptation. The first term that Takim employs is the “Shari’man.” Generally, the Shari’man refers to those individuals who fill in the “lacuna in the [Islamic] legal

field” who are often outside the realm of political power (Takim, The Heirs 30). In the case of the Shi’i, the Shari’man refers to the Imams themselves and their more scholastic disciples (Takim, The Heirs 30). The second term that Takim uses to define the charisma of the Shi’i Imam is that of the “Holy Man.” The holy man, according to Takim, is someone who is concerned with the more esoteric aspects of Islam (The Heirs 42-43). The Sufi shaykh epitomizes the role of Takim’s holy man, as the shaykh encapsulates the “spiritual authority” of the Prophet because of an ability to connect to the divine or the *numinous* (The Heirs 42-43).

Understanding both of Takim’s terms is important because the Shi’i Imams are able to carry on and ultimately complete the charismatic-ethical message of the Prophet due to their role as shari’men and holy men par excellence. Because of the Imam’s special religious knowledge (*ilm*) they were not only able to interpret the legal authority of the Prophet, but their own legal opinions and rulings came to form a distinct legal framework all its own (Takim, The Heirs 31-32). Perhaps even more important is the Shi’i Imam’s role as a holy man, where they served as “the nexus between the divine and human...[by] duplicating the Prophet’s spiritual journeys and devotional exercises” (Takim, The Heirs 57). Thus, through legal exegesis, and defined spiritual position the Shi’i Imam effectively extends that charismatic message of the Prophet by “230 years” until the occultation of the Twelfth Imam in 864 C.E. (Takim, The Heirs 25).

With the occultation of the Twelfth Imam comes a host of questions. Once such question pertains to who should lead the Shi’ah in the Imam’s absence. Another question that is perhaps more important to the scope of this work is what happened to the charisma of the Twelfth Imam once he went into hiding. The bulk of this chapter has been devoted

to establishing that the Shi'i Imamate is a charismatic office, regardless of whether or not one particular argument for the charisma of the Shi'i Imams presented above is accepted, or some combination of the three. As such, the loss of such a figure could be viewed as quite a blow to the Shi'i community. According to most sources, the Twelfth Imam was taken into hiding by God as a child and, therefore, did not have any children to mark as a successor (Momen 162). The result of the end to the chain of designation and succession was the removal of the charismatic presence of the Imam, which had defined the Ithna 'Ashura or "Twelver" Shi'i since their inception.

For Twelver Shi'is, the idea that they were without an Imam was incomprehensible due to the belief that the world couldn't exist without the presence of an Imam. 'Ali, for example, is said to have famously declared that, "The earth will engulf its inhabitants. If one of us [an Imam] is not upon it" (qtd. in Amir-Moezzi 61). It is from the lack of a physical Imam coupled with the belief that Imam was necessary to maintain the order of the world that the Shi'i doctrine of occultation (*ghayba*) was born (Momen 165). The doctrine of occultation (*ghayba*) states that God took the Twelfth Imam into hiding in order to protect him from the many enemies of the Shi'i (Momen 165). Furthermore, the Twelfth Imam is still part of the world and "in control of the affairs of men" (Momen 165). Because of the Twelfth Imam's presence in the physical world, he is still able to regulate the actions of the world, acting as the "axis mundi around which the spheres of existence rotate" ("Ithna 'Ashariyya" 4: 275).

The occultation of the Twelfth Imam is often divided into two different phases: the lesser occultation (874-941 C.E.) and the greater occultation (941-Present C.E.) (Momen 162-164). The lesser occultation is characterized by the lives of a series of

mediators, who were able to communicate with and pass on the will of the Twelfth Imam to the Shi'ah (Momen 162). The first of these “intermediaries” was ‘Uthman al-‘Amri, a close confidant and secretary of the tenth and eleventh Imams (Momen 162). While many scholars of Shi'ism view the occultation of the Twelfth Imam as a “crisis” that “overtook the Shi'ah,” some recent scholarship presents another point of view (Akhavi, “Contending” 230). Momen, for example, suggests that Al-‘Amri’s new position and the occultation of the Twelfth Imam in general, were not overly revolutionary or shocking to the Shi'i community due to a state of “effective occultation” of house arrest placed on the tenth (Abu'l Hassan ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hadi 829-868 C.E.) and eleventh Imams (Abu Muhammad Hassan ibn ‘Ali al-‘Askari 845-874 C.E.) by the Abbasids (Momen 162). Takim observes that many of the disciples of the Imams took on a larger role in the Shi'i community during the lifetimes of the late Shi'i Imams because the Imams were often inaccessible to the Shi'ah (Heirs 80).

In order to prepare their devotees for life among their followers, the Imams provided them with special instruction and debating techniques, effectively passing on their charismatic message to a group of devout Shi'i adherents (Takim, Heirs 80-81). Takim views the increasing power and influence of the disciples of the Imams in terms of Weber's notion of routinization (Heirs 81). In passing on their knowledge (*'ilm*), the Imams created a charismatic office of scholars who were charged with protecting and transmitting “the traditions of the Imams...and their divinely bestowed knowledge” (Takim, Heirs 81). If the charismatic foundations of Takim's theories are accepted, then it is no great surprise that one of the eleventh Imam's closest confidants assumed the position of the hidden-Twelfth Imam's agent in the world after his occultation. Providing

even more support for Takim's argument is the Weberian style of succession that the mediators of the Twelfth Imam practiced, designating successors until the death of the last arbitrator in 941 C.E. (Momen 164). With the death of Abu'l-Husayn 'Ali ibn Muhammad as-Samarri the last gate (*bâb*) of the Twelfth Imam the lesser occultation is said to have ended in favor of the greater occultation, in which "there is no agent of the Hidden Imam on earth" (Momen 164). The greater occultation led the disciples of the Imams, the proto-Shi'i *'ulama*, to develop a number of doctrines regarding the actions of the Shi'i in the absence of the physical Imam (Akhavi, "Contending" 230). The cornerstone of this "new" Shi'i doctrine was abhorrence of political action, and a stigma towards any leader other than the Twelfth Imam (Akhavi, "Contending" 230). If anything, the Shi'i model for government in the years immediately following the occultation of the Twelfth Imam can be characterized by tolerance for "rule by secular," or Sunni rulers provided they were "just" in most religious matters (Akhavi, "The Clergy's" 100). In many ways, the anti-political discourse of the post-occultation Shi'i jurist reflects many sayings attributed to the fifth and sixth Imams, who discouraged their followers from seeking an activist stance (Takim, Heirs 80).

With the doctrine of occultation (*ghayba*) also came a doctrine that addresses the return of the Twelfth Imam known as the *raj'a*. The doctrine of the *raj'a* adds an eschatological dimension to the Twelfth Imam who will return to the physical world and his religious and political duties as the Mahdi or rightly guided one (Momen 166). The Mahdi will then engage the forces of evil in a battle and bring about the end of days (Momen 166). Because of the importance of the Mahdi and his mission he is accorded "an extremely high status among human beings in general" (Bashir, Messianic Hopes

27). In other words, the Twelfth Imam or Mahdi is not merely a continuation of the charismatic Shi'i Imam, he is the sum total of the Shi'i charismatic experience; "a venue" that allows the Shi'i to "tap into the messianic hope" that had come to comprise their belief structure by the tenth century (Bashir, Messianic Hopes 23-24).

Momen notes some signs that are believed to indicate the return of the Mahdi, the most common of which is a world that has "been filled with injustice and tyranny" (166). It is also believed that the Mahdi's arrival will coincide with the erosion of Islam in its proper form, Twelver Shi'ism in this instance (Momen 167). In other words, the Mahdi will arrive when the world is full of social and religious strife, harnessing what Shahzad Bashir calls "the charisma inscribed in [the] traditions regarding the Twelfth Imam" (Messianic Hopes 28). Moreover, those that make the claim of being the Mahdi will, necessarily, break some aspects of the religious establishment in the process of becoming "Shi'ism's greatest hope" (Bashir, Messianic Hopes 28). It is in the charismatic tradition of the Shi'i Imams, and under the guise of the Mahdi, that a young Sufi Shaykh named Isma'il conquered Iran and brought revolution that resulted in the rise of a Shi'i empire.

III. THE FIRST SHI'ITE REVOLUTION: SHAH ISMA'IL'S CONQUEST OF IRAN

In 1501 a young Sufi Shaykh named Isma'il was crowned the king or Shah of Iran and pronounced *Ithna 'Ashari* or Twelver Shi'ism "to be the official religion of the newly established...Safavid state" (Savory, Iran Under 27). Isma'il's declaration of Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion in mostly Sunni Iran is not important because he brought Shi'ism to a region that had never known the Shi'i faith. The Buyids (10th century C.E.), for example, ruled most of Iran at the behest of the Abbasid Caliph, and identified themselves as partisans of 'Ali (Mottahedeh, Loyalty 187). The Buyids were not, however, adherents to the Twelver or *Ithna 'Ashuri* sect of Shi'ism, instead they were Fiver or Zaidi Shi'is (Mottahedeh, Loyalty 13). The Zaidis maintain "that any 'Alid (descendent of 'Ali)" had the potential to become the Imam provided they made an effort to lead the Zaidi community politically (Mottahedeh, Loyalty 13). Even the Abbasid Caliphate (950-1258 C.E.) who controlled much of Iran had Shi'i leanings in its infancy (Garthwaite 122).

The Mongol Ilkhans (13th-14th centuries C.E.), who ruled Iran after their conquest of the Abbasids, originally professed shamanistic beliefs, but were very tolerant of Islam in all of its incarnations (Garthwaite 143). When the Mongols did eventually convert to Islam they tended to favor both Sufism⁴ (Islamic Mysticism) and Shi'ism (Garthwaite

⁴ For a general overview of the development of Sufism see Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.pgs 169-182. For more specific reading on Sufi's in the Islamic Middle Period see Karamustafa,

143). The Mongols embrace of Sufism was not necessarily celebrated by all Muslims because Sufism, in the eyes of many Sunnis, was characterized by many practices such as “mendicancy, itinerancy, celibacy, and self-mortification” that were distinctly outside the realm of proper or orthodox belief structure (Karamustafa 2). For one Sunni theologian, Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taimiya (1263–1328 C.E.), the formerly pagan Mongols embrace of Sufism and Shi’ism confirmed his theories that most Sufi practices were un-Islamic (Homerin 223).

The fall of the Mongols influence coincides with the rise of another nomadic conqueror named Timur (1336-1405). It appears that Timur, like his Mongol predecessors, favored Sufis in at least some capacity as he was reported to have sought the guidance of a Shaykh in Northern Iran while on campaign (Quinn, Historical Writing 86-87). Although Timur may have had some mystical leanings, his descendants, according to Maria Eva Subtelny and Anas B. Khalidov, “professed adherence to Sunnism” despite the conception of Timurid of Iran as religiously “confused, complex, ambiguous, and ambivalent” (210). Moreover, it appears that under the reign of Timur’s son, Shah Rukh (1377-1447) that Sunnism underwent a “revival” in order to combat “the threat presented by the growth of extremist Shi’ite socio-religious movements (Khalidov and Subtelny 211). Iran still possessed some pockets of Shi’ism in cities like “Ray, Qum and Kashan,” but they could hardly be construed as an influential group within Iran

God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1200-1550.
Oxford: Oneworld Press, 1994. Pgs 1-11.

(Khalidov and Subtelny 210). While there was a certain amount of religious “ambivalence” among Iran’s population during the Timurid period exposing a form of Sunnism with some “pro-‘Alid influences,” it was more a result of the Mongol’s religious tolerance than a form of Shi’ism (Khalidov and Subtelny 211). Timur’s reign brought some stability to Iran, but his death created a power struggle that plunged Iran back into fragmentation and social unease opening the door for “Shi’ite and Sufi ideas...[and] a messianism that was linked to the promise of the establishment of social justice” (Khalidov and Subtelny 211).

During the reigns of the Mongols and Timurids, a Sufi order in Northwestern Iran was founded. The Safaviyya Sufi order was founded by Shaykh Safi al-Din in the early fourteenth century in the Iranian town of Ardabil and, like the Mongols and Timurids, professed a mystical approach to Islam (Quinn, Historical Writing 4). In fact, many of the later Mongol Ilkhans sought the guidance of the “Shaykhs of Ardabil” (Savory, Iran Under 10). Under the reign of Shaykh Safi the Safaviyya engaged in a “period of active proselytism” expanding the influence of the order “throughout Iran, Syria and Asia Minor” (Savory, Iran Under 8). The proselytism of the Safaviyya under Shaykh Safi and his immediate predecessors should not be confused with the order taking a political stance. If anything, the “mainstream or ‘high’ Sufism” exposed by the early Safavis was able to adapt and accommodate Iran’s irregular political scene (Turner 59). Shaykh Safi also made the leadership of the Safaviyya a hereditary right, passing the leadership of the order to his son upon his death (Savory, Iran Under 8-9). In 1494 C.E., upon the death of his father, the leadership of the Safaviyya was passed to Isma’il the great-great grandson of Shaykh Safi.

Isma'il's conquest and subsequent embrace and propagation of Twelver Shi'ism is ultimately significant because of its historical impact on the Iranian religious landscape. The way in which Isma'il was able to accomplish his conversion does not come without raising some important questions. First is the question of how Isma'il, a twelve-year-old Sufi Shaykh, was able to conquer Iran. Second, and perhaps equally if not more important, is the question of why did Isma'il embrace Shi'ism and lead what Arjomand calls, "the first successful Shi'ite revolution in Iran" in the first place especially in light of both the Safaviyya's and Iran's Sunni past (Arjomand, "History" 113). Finally, what role did Shi'ism play in Isma'il's military beginnings and in his ensuing rule as Shah? The point of this section will be to argue that Shah Isma'il ibn Haydar was able to instigate Shi'ite revolution in Iran because of his ability to draw on the charisma of the Imams and messianism inherent in the doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism.

Both Barnes and Lindholm discuss the effect that a chaotic socio-political environment can have on charismatic individuals. Barnes for example, states that in times of stability a charismatic individual may be regarded with disdain or ambivalence and perceived as "getting excited over nothing" (Barnes 4). Stability was certainly not a word that could be said to characterize most of the Safaviyya's existence in Ardabil as Roger M. Savory notes that "the town of Ardabil itself changed hands many times on several occasions" creating an "adverse position" for the Safaviyya (Iran Under 11). In the years preceding the rise of Isma'il, two Turko-Mongol clans dominated the Safaviyya's area of influence: the Aq-Qoyunlu (White Sheep) and the Qara-Qoyunlu (Black Sheep) who fought one another, and the Safaviyya for control of Northern Iran

(Quinn, Historical Writing 3). Eastern Iran was in a similar state of distress and decentralized rule due to infighting among the Timurids (Quinn, Historical Writing. 3).

The relationship between the Safaviyya and their neighbors was not always violent, as in the case of marriages between the Aq-Qoyunlu and Isma'il's father and grandfather (Morgan 109-110). Nevertheless, it was not long after his marriage that Isma'il's father, Shaykh Haydar, was killed in battle by a rival power that was aided by the Aq-Qoyunlu (Morgan 110). Even Isma'il's older brother, Shaykh 'Ali, who took over the leadership of the Safaviyya after Haydar's death, was killed shortly after his father (Savory, Iran Under 20). It is even reported that Shaykh 'Ali, sensing his impending demise, "designated his brother Isma'il as his successor as head of the Safavid Order," and told Isma'il to use his sword to "sweep unbelief from the face of the earth" (Savory, Iran Under 21). It is into the socio-political quagmire that was late fifteenth century Iran that Isma'il became the head of the Safaviyya order and all of those who looked to the Safavid Shaykh as a leader.

Isma'il was charged with avenging his brother and father, and much of his early conquests reflect his vengeance on the Aq-Qoyunlu (Morgan 112). Conversely, as the head of the Safaviyya, Isma'il automatically received the loyalty of its Sufi disciplines, and the leading families of Ardabil who provided him with ample military support. The scope of Isma'il's military campaigns and the extent to which his followers would go to ensure military success far outstripped the conquest and raids of his father and grandfather. Isma'il's father and grandfather, Shaykh Junayd and Shaykh Haydar respectively, engaged in raids and border conflict (*ghazi*) with neighboring Christian communities, so the military wing of the Safaviyya was not unaccustomed to warfare

(Morgan 109-110). The core of the Safaviyya's military was comprised of a group of Turkoman tribes collectively known as the Qizilbash (redheads) (Babayan, "The Safavid" 138). The Qizilbash had been important members of the Safaviyya since the time of Shaykh Junayd, but it was under his grandson, Isma'il, that the relationship between the Safavid Shaykh and the Qizilbash reached its zenith. The logs of an Italian merchant who was traveling in Iran during Isma'il's conquest record some of the practices of Isma'il's soldiers as they expanded the Safavid's influence. The traveler notes that Isma'il's followers often, "enter[ed] into battle without armor, expecting their master Ismael to watch over them in the fight" ("A Narrative" 16). The Italian traveler continues writing, "the name of God is forgotten throughout Persia and that of Ismael [Isma'il] remembered" he also noted that Isma'il's name often replaced that of the Prophet Muhammad in the traditional Muslim declaration of faith (*shahadah*) ("A Narrative" 16-17).

The statements put forth by the Italian traveler reveal a couple of things that differentiate Isma'il and his followers from the Safaviyya's previous military endeavors. The practice of some of the Safaviyya's followers engaging in armed conflict without the protection of armor based on a belief that Isma'il will protect them, certainly suggests a degree of faith and reverence in their leader that was outside the realm of the traditional Sufi Shaykh-discipline relationship. Beyond Isma'il's role as a Sufi guide, is his own personal charisma that was established in military campaigns where he was referred to as "a lion wielding a dagger" (Sarwar 99). Isma'il was also a hunter of some renown killing a bear unaided at the age of thirteen (Sarwar 100). It was also at a young age (between

12 and 14 depending on the source) that Isma'il began his conquest of Iran, leading an army of "7,000 men" against the Shirwan Shah (Sarwar 100).

Perhaps even more striking than Isma'il's youth and ambition is the substitution of Isma'il for God and the Prophet Muhammad in many popular religious declarations of his followers. Kathryn Babayan suggests "Isma'il's descent from the mystic Shaykh Safi al-Din had infused him with an aura of saintliness that...was intimately associated with Sufi culture" ("The Safavid" 135). Going beyond Isma'il's authority as a Sufi Shaykh, is the nature of the Safaviyya itself at the time of Isma'il's ascension, which had been transformed by *ghulat* or *ghuluww* belief structures (Babayan, "The Safavid" 136). It was under Isma'il's grandfather, Shaykh Junayd, that the Safaviyya began to exhibit *ghulat* attributes after his wanderings among various heterodox groups in Anatolia (Morgan 108-109). *Ghulat* or *ghuluww* beliefs have been translated in a number of ways, the most common of which being "Shi'i extremism" (Dakake 204). Babayan views the use of the *ghulat* or *ghuluww* not in terms of extremist belief, but rather in terms of "exaggerated" belief or an "approach to the apocalyptic horizon of [the] truth" (*Mystics* xv). For those who express *ghulat* tendencies "revelation never ceased" and "Muhammad was not the seal of the prophets" (Babayan, "The Safavid" 136). Colin Turner provides yet another insight in the definition of the *ghulat*, seeing it as a "partnership" between "Ali and the Imams" and God based on a "preoccupation...with the created rather than the Creator" (58).

Isma'il's poetry (*divan*) presents not only an example of the nature of *ghulat* belief structures, but also a look into how Isma'il was able to grasp the charisma of the

Shi'i Imams. In his poetry (*divan*), Isma'il presents himself as the incarnation of many different figures and divine attributes. One example Isma'il writes:

My name is Shah Isma'il. I am God's mystery. I am the leader of all these ghazis. My mother is Fatima, my father is 'Ali; and... I am the Pir [guide/father] of the twelve Imams... In me is Prophethood (and) the mystery of Holiness. I follow the path of Muhammad Mustafa [The Twelfth Imam] (Minorsky and Isma'il 1042).

In these passages Isma'il establishes himself as a prophetic figure in the vein of the Shi'i Imams. Furthermore, Isma'il claims that he is not only a Shi'i figure of some importance, but he is in fact one of the Imams himself. In another poem, Isma'il claims that he, like the Shi'i Imams, existed from "Pre-Eternity" (Minorsky and Isma'il 1044). In yet another example from Isma'il's poetry (*divan*), Isma'il expands the context of his religious claims by presenting himself as the prophesized Mahid, returning to lead the righteous:

By the Lord! Come and behold: God's light has reappeared; Muhammad Mustafa [the Twelfth Imam], the Seal of the Prophets has come!
The Perfect guide has arrived. Faith has been (brought) to all.
A man (has become) a manifestation of Truth. Prostrate thyself!
Pander not to Satan! Adam has put on new clothes, God has come.
The Guiding Imam has come! Seize his hand, show him the way.
(Minorsky and Isma'il 1049).

In some respects, Isma'il goes even further than claiming that he is the Mahdi, identifying himself as both Adam and God. Such exaggerated claims of divinity help to

explain the religious message of Isma'il and his Qizilbash followers is often interpreted as being so far outside the realm of Twelver Shi'i Islamic belief that it cannot be categorized as such. David Morgan for example, correctly notes that "reverence for 'Ali and the Shi'i imams was not seen, in the fifteenth century, as being incompatible with something approximating to orthodox Sunni belief" (109). Babayan, in a paper analyzing the evolution of the Safavids from Sufi order to imperial dynasty, terms the religious movement of the early Safavids as "Qizilbash Islam" differentiating it from the orthodox Twelver Shi'ism that defined the Safavids after Isma'il ("The Safavid" 135-136). Qizilbash Islam refers to a version of Islam which incorporated elements from "Sufi, 'Alid [reverence for 'Ali and his progeny], *ghulat* and Turco-Mongol cultures" (Babayan, "The Safavid" 136). Turner also suggests that the Safavid movement is an amalgamation of "Sufism and *ghulat* extremism" (58). Babayan and Turner's summaries of the Safavids religious policies are at least, in the case of Isma'il, more appropriate than Morgan's, because the message of Isma'il's poetry is not one of reverence for the Imams, but one of personification and embodiment of the Imams. The adoption of a red twelve-gored Turkish hat by the Safaviyya serves as a fine example of the synthesis that Babayan and Turner suggest, as each fold in the hat was said to represent each of the Twelve Shi'i Imams ("A Narrative" 17). It is from this hat the Isma'il's followers received that title "Qizilbash" or redheads in Turkish (Quinn, Historical Writing 4-5).

The arguments of Babayan, Turner, and even Morgan are all valid to a point, as they provide a solid historical basis for explaining and analyzing the religiosity of the early Safavids. Shahzad Bashir provides an explanation for the beliefs of the Safavids, and Isma'il in particular, that is based on an understanding of the religious connotations

of taking on the mantle of the Mahdi. Bashir writes that “being a Mahdi in a Shi’i context necessarily requires going beyond traditional belief” (“The Imams Return” 21). Bashir’s analysis of Shi’ite messianism throws new light on Isma’il’s claims and his mission. If Bashir’s notion of the Mahdi superseding more conventional belief structures is accepted, then the religiosity of Isma’il and his Qizilbash followers is easier to quantify. Furthermore, the cultural and religious synthesis that Babayan and Turner present as an explanation for the religiosity of the early Safavids can be viewed in terms of the innovation and expansion of belief that an individual claiming to be the Mahdi demanded. Viewing Isma’il as a claimant to the Mahdi, as his poetry certainly suggests, finds further fault with Morgan’s view of the early Safavids religiosity stemming from the popular worship of ‘Ali during the fifteenth century. If anything, Isma’il’s declaration of himself as the Mahdi shows an early indication of a distinctly Shi’i mindset that Isma’il built upon after conquering Iran. In claiming to be the Shi’i Mahdi, Isma’il was able to “access the charisma inscribed in traditions regarding the Twelfth Imam in order to acquire spiritual and political power through the claim” (Bashir, “The Imams Return” 21). The ability to draw on the charisma of the Mahdi creates a tremendous pull towards the “salvation” inherent in “the acclaimed leader thus invested with mahdistic authority” (Arjomand, The Shadow 82). In claiming to be the Mahdi, Isma’il was able to charismatically outshine the political and religious forces of the day by creating a personal relationship between himself (the sacred) and his followers (the profane) (Arjomand, The Shadow 83).

The question now becomes to what end did Isma’il direct his followers after establishing himself as the Mahdi. Arjomand acknowledges that Shah Isma’il’s poetry

was almost certainly targeted at his Turkoman disciplines because they were composed in the “Turkish of the Turkmans” as opposed to Persian the traditional “literary” language of the period (The Shadow 81). The report from the Italian merchant quoted above provides some insight into the dealings of the Safavids, acknowledging their penchant for conflict and expansion. The Italian merchant’s reports of the use of Isma’il’s name in place of that of the Prophet Muhammad and even God now make more sense if it is accepted that Isma’il was viewed as the Mahdi.

The reports of the Qizilbash entering battle without armor, in addition to the bloodthirsty behavior of the Qizilbash as they conquered Iran, imply an application of charisma in a distinctly Weberian model. As the revealed Imam, Isma’il drew upon the unique gifts and heritage inherent associated with the Shi’i Imam’s separating himself from his followers due to what Weber defines as specified access to the “supernatural” (Weber 19). In examining Isma’il’s effect on his Qizilbash followers, a number of Dow’s comments on Weber’s theories appear especially relevant. Dow, in recognizing the “Dionysian” quality of charisma, writes that charismatic authority can more correctly be stated not in terms of Weber’s gift of grace but as “grace of divinity divested of morality” because of the unrestricted nature of the power derived from charismatic authority (84). The effect of Isma’il’s charismatic authority on the Qizilbash, as reported by the Italian traveler, indicates Dow’s conception of grace freed of morality. When Isma’il sacked Tabriz and secured his hold over most of Northwestern Iran it is reported that the Qizilbash “massacred many of the inhabitants,” including the pregnant women “with their unborn offspring” (“A Narrative” 14). Isma’il himself is said to have ordered the beheading of his mother (in his presence) when he learned that she had married one of his

enemies in Tabriz (“A Narrative” 15). Other tales of the Safavid’s conquest under Isma’il contain references to pyramids being erected out of human skulls and Isma’il fashioning a drinking cup out of “the skull of Shaybani Khan” (Sarwar 100). Perhaps even more revealing of Isma’il’s charismatic effect on his followers is reports of the Qizilbash engaging in cannibalistic activity at Isma’il’s behest. Safavid chronicler, Sayyid Yahya Qazvini, reports that the Qizilbash reportedly roasted Aq Quyunlu chief Murad Beg over a fire and “devoured his flesh” (qtd. in Bashir, “Shah Isma’il” 236). Bashir views the acts of anthropophagy by the Qizilbash as representative of the “Qizilbash’s religious relationship with Shah Isma’il” (“Shah Isma’il” 240). Within Bashir’s religious context, the act of cannibalism by the Qizilbash reinforces the “sincerity of their belief” in Isma’il, who demanded such action in order to view the devotion of his followers (“Shah Isma’il” 240).

The cannibalism of the Qizilbash can also be explained in terms of its charismatic religious context, which reflects much of what Dow describes as charisma’s ability to abolish “all notions of sanctity” (83). The Qizilbash’s literal consumption of Shah Isma’il’s foes powerfully illustrates the outlets for the amoral tendencies of charisma that Dow describes. Moreover, Isma’il’s relationship with the Qizilbash appears to have been constantly redefined and refreshed in a manner that confirms Barnes’ argument for religious charisma being defined by the relationship between a charismatic religious figure and their followers (2). Isma’il’s military success as an “activist” Mahdi was, therefore, made possible by the “allegiance of the Qizilbash tribesman to the Safavid order” (Bashir, Messianic Hopes 73-74). Conversely, the degree of bloodshed that Isma’il and the Qizilbash engaged in, and the scope of their conquest, which went beyond

that of any previous Safavid Shaykhs implies that Isma'il was acting on some higher instinct, a drive to create "a just utopia" for his brand of exaggerated Shi'ism in Iran (Babayan, "The Safavid" 140). Isma'il's role as a "holy warrior" cannot also be underestimated because of his claimant to the office of the Mahdi (Babayan, Mystics 299). As the Mahdi, Isma'il's conquests took on a religious connotation, in which he brought the true version of Islam to the "Eastern lands of Islam" which had suffered under political "oppression and [improper religious] innovation" (Babayan, Mystic 299). According to Arjomand, the "political decentralization" of the period directly preceding the advent of the Safavids as an imperial dynasty paved the way for Mahdist-messianic movements such as Isma'il's (The Shadow 82).

Isma'il crowned himself "Shah" or King of Iran in 1501 in Tabriz, the former capital of his Aq Quyunlu enemies (Arjomand, The Shadow 109). At the time of his coronation, Isma'il had not conquered Iran in its entirety, having only assumed control over most of Northwestern Iran (Rumlu 24-25). Nevertheless, within just a few short years of Isma'il's adoption of the traditional Persian title of Shah, he had regained much of the territory of the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire (Newman, Safavid Iran 1-2). Moreover, most historians acknowledge 1501 as the beginning of the Safavid Empire, marking the transformation of the Safaviyya from a Sufi order to imperial dynasty (Newman, Safavid Iran 2). An account of Isma'il's coronation reveals a number of interesting points that are relevant to Isma'il's Mahdist claims and the Shi'ite revolution that he fostered after becoming Shah and, as such, warrants reprinting here:

On Friday, the exalted king [Isma'il] went to the congregational mosque of Tabriz and ordered its preacher, who was one of the Shi'ite dignitaries,

to mount the pulpit. The king himself proceeded to the front of the pulpit, unsheathed the sword of the Lord of Time [The Mahdi], may peace be upon him, and stood there like the shining sun (qtd. in Arjomand, The Shadow 109).

This account contains a few references to Isma'il being the prophesied Mahdi, namely, his possession of the sword of the Mahdi and his illuminated presence. The likening of Isma'il to the sun could also contain a subtle Persian subtext possibly hinting at the ancient Persian notion *farr*.

In Quinn's analysis of the dream narratives of Shaykh Safi al-Din there are a number of references to the divine-charismatic-Persian aura of *farr*. Shaykh Safi is said to have had a powerful, prophetic dream about the rise of a world-conquering king from his line and light is said to have surrounded the head of the King indicating the "pre-Islamic Zoroastrian/Sasnian" notions of *farr* (Quinn, Historical Writing 69). It was only natural for the chroniclers of Shah Isma'il to adapt the tales of Shaykh Safi's dreams to Isma'il's rise to power (Quinn, "The Dreams of" 138). Isma'il himself appears to have been familiar with Persian concepts and figures despite his Turkoman leanings, as he claimed to be a number of Persian historical figures in his poetry (*divan*) (Minorsky and Isma'il 1047). The idea of Isma'il being surrounded by *farr* is further referenced in the work of later Safavid chroniclers such as Iskander Bek Munshi, who was active during the reign of Isma'il's great-grandson ('Abbas I) indicate that Isma'il was perceived to have been in possession of the Persian concept of charismatic kingship appropriated by later Safavid rulers (41). When writing of the young Isma'il, Munshi notes that, "the divine glory [*farr*] shone forth from his [Isma'il's] face" (41). Much like his appeal to

Shi'i notions of pre-existence and the establishment of a world in accord with the Imam's justice, Isma'il incorporating distinctly Persian pillars of legitimacy such as the adoption of Shah, and an emphasis on Persian heroic figures and his association *farr* was an effort to secure his imperial rule.

The presence of "Shi'ite dignitaries" at Isma'il's coronation is even more interesting, and holds a great deal of significance for the future of Iran. That fact that Shi'i clerics participated in any event with Isma'il is perplexing as there was often "tension" between those who claimed to be Mahdis and the Mujtahids or scholars who lead the orthodox Shi'i community (Bashir, "The Imams Return" 21). The conflict that arises between a Mahdi and the Mujtahids stems from the Mahdi being perceived as "the gravest transgressor against accepted [Shi'i] dogma" by the Mujtahids while those who claim to be the Mahdi view themselves as "Shi'ism's greatest hope" (Bashir, Messianic Hopes 28). Another Mahdi of the fiftieth century, Muhammad Nurbakhsh writes "Mujtahids are leaders of the people concerned only with the exterior (*ahl-i zahir*). They are people of doubt" who often mislead the people (qtd. in Bashir, "The Imams Return" 21). Nurbakhsh's argues that the great religious revelations and innovations of the world were not the products of religious scholars but those of "saints" and "master of unveiling (*kashf*)" who intrinsically "know the truth (*haqiqat*) of things" (qtd. in Bashir, "The Imams Return" 21). Bashir observes that the Mujtahids, as "the guardians of traditional religion" were, therefore, very likely to be vilified by claimants to the Mahdi, and, conversely, to malign these "Mahdis" themselves ("The Imams Return" 21). Yet, in the instance of Isma'il's coronation, it seems that Mahdi and Mujtahid were working together. The cooperation of the Shi'i Mujtahids with Isma'il can be explained by

Isma'il's proclamation to "convert Iran to Twelver Shi'ism," and to make Twelver Shi'ism "the state religion of his empire" after his coronation (Arjomand, The Shadow 109). Despite Isma'il's pronouncements, he did not directly renounce his Mahdist claims, nor did the Qizilbash cease to revere him as such. Nevertheless, Isma'il, in adopting Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion of his empire and making a commitment to convert the population of Iran to this particular brand of Shi'ism, instigated a revolution both for Shi'ism and for Iran.

For Shi'ism, Isma'il's proclamation was revolutionary because for the first time since the Imamates of 'Ali, Hassan, and Husayn, Shi'ism became associated with a defined political presence. In order to accommodate such a shift, some of the doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism were adapted to fill its new role as a source of legitimacy and imperial prestige (Momen 107). One such change to the traditional canon of the Twelver Shi'is concerned who had to right to lead the community in the absence of the rightful Imam. Traditionally, the Mujtahids or legal scholars had led the Twelver Shi'i community since the occultation of the Twelfth Imam (Momen 99). While the Qizilbash viewed Isma'il as the Mahdi and, therefore, the rightful ruler and just Imam, the Shi'i Mujtahids viewed Isma'il's Mahdist claims with suspicion that characterized their reaction to most claimants to the office of the Mahdi (Momen 108). Isma'il was, however, allowed to continue his conquest as the Mahdi because Iran lacked any prominent Shi'i clerics or *'ulama* to effectively mount religious opposition to Isma'il (Momen 108). The lack of Shi'i clerics in Iran at the time of Isma'il's conquest was further indicative of the religiosity of Iran's population who were predominantly Sunni at the time of Isma'il's conquest. Isma'il used the appropriated charisma of the Twelfth

Imam to lead his devoted Qizilbash followers to victory in the chaotic socio-political scene that comprised Iran in the early sixteenth century. Once he began to secure the Iranian plateau, Isma'il began what this work will categorize as a process of revolutionary routinization, in which he transformed Iran from a group of warring Sunni states into a unified Shi'i Empire.

Isma'il's revolutionary routinization is based in part on his rejection of his Mahdist claim in order to adopt the tenets of the Twelver Shi'ism and found an imperial dynasty. The change in Isma'il's claim is subtle, with it being argued that, "Isma'il [was] guided by the Imams rather than embodying the awaited twelfth Imam himself" (Babayán, Mystics 301). Isma'il adapted his ruling title to fit his new image as one who ruled on behalf of the Imams. Instead of Mahdi, Isma'il took the Persian title of Shah and drew on a Sasanian notion of the Shah as the "Shadow of God on Earth" (Arjomand, The Shadow 95). It also appears that Isma'il recognized that the zealous loyalty that his divine status and charisma granted him ultimately proved to be a "liability" after he had succeeded in conquering Iran (Arjomand, The Shadow 110). Isma'il even sentenced some "fanatical devotees" to death, and became displeased when he was called "God or a Prophet" (Arjomand, The Shadow 110). The unreliability of the Qizilbash was especially evident after the Ottoman defeat of Isma'il's army at the battle of Chaldiran. Savory notes that Isma'il's defeat at Chaldiran "destroyed the legend of his invincibility," and caused the Qizilbash to lose "their faith in Isma'il's supernatural powers" ("The Principal Offices" 91). The fallout from Chaldiran not only confirms Weber's theories regarding the "instability" inherent in charismatic leadership, but also illustrates the importance, and ultimately the success, of Isma'il's process of

routinization because the Safavid dynasty endured and even prospered after his defeat (Weber 22).

Equally, Isma'il's mystical Sufi upbringing did not prepare him for a role as a leader in the orthodox Shi'i community. This is not to say that Isma'il was completely ignorant of concrete aspects of Islam, as he had studied the Qur'an with a teacher as a child (Rumlu 4). Moreover, Isma'il's religiosity certainly had defined Shi'i elements, as evident in the reverence for the Shi'i Imams in his poetry. Moreover, later versions of Isma'il's poetry "omit verses" in which Isma'il labels himself the Mahdi in an effort to display his dedication to a less exaggerated interpretation of Shi'ism. There is also the fact that Isma'il chose to adopt orthodox Twelver Shi'ism, and even "concocted" a genealogy that traced his ancestry to that of the Twelver Imams (Babayan, "The Safavid" 136).

Nevertheless, it appears that Isma'il's personal religiosity and the religiosity of the Qizilbash were characterized more by anti-Sunni actions that doctrinally precise Shi'ism (Momen 109). As such, excessive veneration of 'Ali, and the cursing of 'Ali's enemies, were reportedly very common amongst the Qizilbash (Momen 109). Turner categorizes the Shi'ism of Isma'il and the Qizilbash as "Shi'ism with a predominantly externalist flavour [*sic*]," (58). By this statement, Turner means that Isma'il's version of Shi'ism was comprised of specific actions and exaggeration of certain Shi'i tenets, as opposed to scholarly-legal based form of Shi'ism (58). After Isma'il's coronation in 1501, he begins to adopt a more orthodox position in order to distance himself from the religiosity of the Qizilbash. The point of establishing the religiosity of Isma'il and his Safavid cohorts is to show that in order to realize a process of revolutionary

routinization, in which Isma'il accomplished his Shi'ite revolution by channeling his Mahdist charisma into a process of religious conversion and empire building in Iran.

In order to accomplish his revolution, Shah Isma'il turned to a number of prominent Arab-Shi'i clerics (*'ulama*) for guidance. As noted in the previous paragraphs, the number of Shi'i Mujtahids, or experts in Twelver Shi'i law and doctrine, in Iran were not conducive to mounting an effective resistance to Isma'il's Mahdist claim, let alone serving as successful agents of religious conversion (Momen 108). In order to bolster the ranks of Shi'i 'ulama in Iran, Isma'il "invited renowned Twelver Shi'ite *'ulama*...from Arabic-speaking countries," with "Iraq, Bahrain and [the] Jabal 'Amil in Syria" providing most of the émigrés (Abisaab 8). According to Rula Jurdi Abisaab, it was from the Jabal 'Amil area of Syria/Lebanon that the "foremost" Shi'i scholars arrived (8). The number of Shi'i 'ulama that immigrated to Iran in response to Isma'il's invitation is the subject of great debate in the area of Safavid studies (Babayan, "The Safavid" 140). Andrew Newman for example, rejects the analysis of many Safavid scholars, which claims that after Isma'il's institution of Twelver Shi'ism a "large" number of Arab Shi'i clerics promptly moved to Safavid Iran ("The Myth" 66). Newman argues that while a few Twelver clerics did in fact throw in their lot with the Safavids, the bulk of the clerics viewed Safavid Iran as an "unorthodox amalgamation of non-Shi'i and Shi'i religious expression" ("The Myth" 67). Moreover, many of the Arab Twelver Shi'i clerics were concerned with Isma'il's sudden "interest in and conversion to the faith," especially considering the religiosity that characterized Isma'il's early years (Newman, "The Myth" 68).

Newman's points are valid; however, there is some recent scholarship, most notably that of Abisaab, that confirms the more established claims favoring more interchange between Arab Shi'i clerics and the Safavids under Isma'il (Abisaab 16). It should be noted that the number of immigrant Shi'i clerics that Abisaab suggests do seem to be lower than those suggested by Arjomand and his early works (Arjomand, The Shadow 130-131). Abisaab also points out that it was becoming increasingly difficult for the Shi'i 'ulama of the Jabil 'Amil region to find work and support their families under the auspices of the increasingly Sunni Ottomans (22). Moreover, those Shi'i scholars who did move to Iran often received salaries and lucrative land grants (Abisaab 22). What both Newman and other Safavid scholars can and do agree on is the significance attached to Shaykh 'Ali al-Karaki, a Twelver Shi'i mujtahid who immigrated to Iran from the Jabal 'Amil at Shah Isma'il's behest (Newman, "The Myth" 67, Abisaab 9, Babayan, Mystics 306).

Al-Karaki is important because he provided a degree of legalistic Shi'i legitimacy to Isma'il's Shi'i revolution. Al-Karaki, as a mujtahid, was able to provide Isma'il with the religious expertise necessary to further his plans for Iran's conversion to Shi'ism (Abisaab 16). Naturally, one of the first steps taken by the Isma'il and al-Karaki in the conversion was a campaign to discredit many Sunni scholars combined with a general denouncement of Sunnism in general (Abisaab 16). Al-Karaki was particularly fond of bringing converts to Shi'ism by publicly denouncing aspects of Sunni theology "among both Sunnites and Shi'ites so as to bring converts to Twelver Shi'ism based on their freely chosen, unequivocal adherence to the rightful cause of the Imams" (Abisaab 16-17). Al-Karaki's methods appear to have been more effective in bringing willing

converts to Shi'ism than the attempts of Isma'il, who favored a more forceful approach to conversion (Abisaab 21). At the same time that they were attacking the bases of Sunnism in Iran, Isma'il and al-Karaki also went after *ghulat* and Sufi groups who were perceived as impeding the spread of Shi'ism in Iran (Arjomand, The Shadow 110-112). Shah Isma'il saw the usefulness of the Friday prayers to promote his rule, and insisted that al-Karaki use the Friday prayer as an outlet to spread Shi'i theology and the unique brand of state Shi'ism that al-Karaki and Isma'il had created (Abisaab 21). The title and role of the Safavid Shahs was profoundly shaped by al-Karaki who gave Shah Isma'il the title of *imam al-adil* or "just Imam," thus "playing on the double entendre embedded in this designation that denoted both the hidden Imam [the Mahdi] as well as the just temporal ruler" (Babayan, Mystics 306). Al-Karaki also developed and extended the role of the Shi'i 'ulama in Safavid Iran making them the "general representatives" of the Imams; paving the way for close relationship between the Shi'i 'ulama and the temporal rulers of Iran from the Safavids onward (Babayan, Mystics 307). Babayan views the reforms of al-Karaki as a "theoretical revolution in Imami [Twelver Shi'i] doctrine," in which the Shi'i 'ulama as "arbiter[s] of Shi'i doctrines and practices" began to embody the will of the Imams (Mystics 307). Al-Karaki was able to accomplish all of these reforms because of the support of Shah Isma'il and his desire to rule a Shi'i Iran.

Isma'il may have renounced his role as the Mahdi after he had succeeded in conquering Iran, but his Mahdist image allowed him to gather a large group of zealous followers and, subsequently, to channel their devotion into his drive to create a ideal social and religious society. The appropriated charisma of the Shi'i Imams allowed Isma'il to place Iran under centralized rule for the first time since the Islamic conquests

of the seventh century. Conversely, Isma'il's position as Shah of Iran allowed him to proclaim Twelver Shi'ism as the religion of his new state whose population was predominantly Sunni. The Shi'i 'ulama, both imported and native, were ultimately the recipients of Isma'il's charisma. The elaboration of Shi'i doctrines by al-Karaki and his ilk, and the successful conversion of most of Iran's population to Twelver Shi'ism, exemplifies the success of the routinization of Isma'il's Mahdist charisma and the triumph of the first Shi'ite revolution.

IV. THE SECOND SHI'ITE REVOLUTION: KHOMEINI AND 20th CENTURY IRAN

Events in sixteenth century Iran changed many aspects of long-held Shi'i doctrines as the Safavids ushered in a revolution of Shi'i conversion, creating, for the first time, an imperial state in which most of its subjects were Shi'i (Arjomand, "History" 113). Under the Safavids, Shi'ism became an imperial religion, limiting the charismatic guise of "Imami [Twelver] legitimacy" to the Shah and the "religious scholars [ulama]" (Babayan, Mystics 374). In other words, the Shi'i jurist of the Safavid era exercised considerably more influence in the political realm than their predecessors. The coronation of each Safavid Shah serves as a salient example of the relationship between the Safavid Shah and the Shi'i 'ulama, as each successive Shah was crowned by a prominent member of the Shi'i religious institution (Turner 164). There was also a great deal of intermarriage between the Safavid elite and important Shi'i clerics "linking the fate of the crown (*taj*) with that of the turban (*'amamah*)" (Babayan, Mystics 382). Despite the close relationship between the Safavid Shah and the extensive network of Shi'i clerics that had developed in Iran with the aid of Safavid patronage, the Shi'i 'ulama of Iran still maintained a quietist position (Arjomand, "History" 113). After the fall of the Safavids, Iran's Shi'i 'ulama adopted more a quietist path, concerning themselves with purely religious matters such as Islamic law and were, with a few exceptions, generally accepting of the Shah's rule provided he sought their guidance on all matters sacred (Babayan, Mystics 404-405). There are, however, a few events in Iranian history

under the reign of the Qajar dynasty (1795-1925) that display some significant developments in the Shi'i 'ulama that warrant mention.

The first event in Iran's history to really display the power of the Shi'i 'ulama after the Safavid period is the Tobacco protest or revolt of 1891. The Tobacco protest was instigated at the behest of a group of Shi'i clerics, the most notable of which being Ayatollah Hajj Mirza Hassan Shirazi, over the sale of tobacco concessions to a number of British companies (Keddie 61). Tobacco was a profitable crop for many Iranian farmers and landowners who, in turn, financially supported much of the religious establishment (Moaddel, "Shi'i Political" 459). It was then only natural that the clerical front became upset when the Qajar Shah made a deal with England to export all of Iran's tobacco to a British company (Moaddel, "Shi'i Political" 459). In response Ayatollah Shirazi issued a *fatwa* or legal opinion "prohibiting smoking," which resulted in a boycott of tobacco products by Iranian Shi'i Muslims (Moaddel, "The Shi'i" 529-530). Ayatollah Shirazi, who was exiled to Iraq for his actions, wrote to the Shah that the European manner of banking and the Shah's concessions to such a system was anathema to Islamic principles and should therefore be revoked (Moaddel, "Shi'i Political" 460). Whether or not Ayatollah Shirazi's legal reasoning had any effect on the Shah's decision is unclear, what is clear, however, is the effect of Shirazi's *fatwa*, which resulted in a "successful nationwide boycott on the sale and use of tobacco" in Iran (Keddie 61). It is reported that even the Qajar Shah's wives abstained from tobacco use while Shirazi's *fatwa* was in effect (Keddie 61). A boycott of such a scale made the concession unpalatable and unprofitable for all parties involved, and led to a cancellation of the tobacco concession by the Shah in 1892 (Keddie 62). The power which Ayatollah Shirazi wielded through his

fatwa shows that while the Shi'i 'ulama of Iran were not directly involved in politics they still commanded authority through religious declarations. The rulings of Ayatollah Shirazi are also significant because they represent the successful application of the opinion of one cleric in the face of dissenting opinions by other Shi'i clerics, thus demonstrating how the power and influence of a cleric can draw through their religious knowledge and message (Moaddel, "The Shi'i" 530).

The Iranian constitutional revolution of 1905-1906 represents another instance of the involvement of Iran's Shi'i 'ulama and, much like the tobacco rebellion before it, is defined by an alliance between 'ulama and merchants against the Shah (Keddie 67). In the case of the constitutional revolution, the Mullahs (a popular Iranian term for Shi'i clerics) and the merchants demanded the Shah form a "representative assembly or *majles*" (Keddie 67). The point of the *Majles* was to develop a constitutional monarchy in Iran, in addition to providing protection of certain rights and personal freedoms (Keddie 68). Like the tobacco rebellion the constitutional revolution was led by a prominent Shi'i mujtahid: Ayatollah Mohammad Tabataba'i (Keddie 67). Ayatollah Tabataba'i was profoundly interested in allowing Iranian society to run as smoothly as possible while eliminating "foreign penetration" (Moaddel, "The Shi'i" 531). The constitutional revolution was successful to a point, as it did result in the creation of the *Majles* and a constitution. Yet, the *Majles* itself was prone to corruption and the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution were often ignored by the Shah (Keddie 68-69). Moreover, while there was significant support among the 'ulama for the constitutional revolution (some even served in the *Majles*), there were still many who viewed the 'ulama's involvement as going against their traditional role (Moaddel, "The Shi'i" 531).

Both the tobacco rebellion and the constitutional revolution share a number of similarities. One of the more salient similarities is the alliance between the Shi'i 'ulama and a group of merchants against the Shah in the hopes of correcting some aspect of society. The Islamic Revolution, as will be shown, represents a revolution that changed, not one aspect of society, but the political and religious landscape of Iran.

Judging by events in the latter half of the twentieth century, it appears that some fundamental changes had occurred both in Iran, and in terms of what role of the Shi'i jurist should play in the political sphere. In November of 1979 C.E. a prominent Shi'i cleric named Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini (1902-1989) became the "*de jure*" leader of Iran "on behalf of the Hidden Imam" (Arjomand, The Turban 139). Arjomand characterizes Khomeini's takeover of the Iranian political sphere in terms of a "clerical coup d'état," in which the democratic elements of Iran's government were exercised in favor of Islamic law (*shari'ah*) and theocratic-clerical rule (The Turban 137-139). The events in Iran that lead up to the clerical takeover are now known as the Islamic Revolution, facilitated by a number of groups including, but not limited to, the Shi'i 'ulama (Keddie 222). Nevertheless, it is the visage of Ayatollah Khomeini that permeates most discussions of the Islamic Revolution and the subsequent founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The intention of this section is to argue that Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 represents a second Shi'ite revolution facilitated by a charismatic-Shi'i figure that drew upon the suspended charisma of the Shi'i Imams. The life of Ayatollah Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini and his doctrinal elaboration will serve as the primary focus of this section's analysis.

As noted in the previous chapters, the position and circumstances of the Shi'i 'ulama changed dramatically after both the occultation of the Twelfth Imam and after the rise of the Safavid dynasty in Iran. Iran's Islamic Revolution marks yet another such shift, however; the Islamic Revolution is different in that it is not simply a revolution that forced the Shi'i 'ulama of Iran to react to set of circumstances, but a revolution that was brought to a head by the Shi'i 'ulama themselves. Events in late ninetieth and early twentieth century Iran establish some precedent for the involvement of Iran's Shi'i clerics in politics; however, they do not compare to the 1979 revolution in terms of the scope of the revolution and the involvement of the religious establishment.

Ayatollah Khomeini was born into relatively humble beginnings in the Iranian village of Khomein (Moin 1). According to Baqer Moin, Khomeini was "a particularly striking boy of above average build" who favored games where he could play the role of the ruler, and dole out punishment to bandits (2). As a young boy Khomeini developed a passion for learning, and is reported to have memorized a great number of religious and classical Persian texts very quickly (Moin 18). In his teenage years Khomeini entered the seminary or *madrashah* studying with Ayatollah Ha'eri, a prominent Shi'i cleric who was against Mullahs getting involved in politics (Moin 22). Khomeini followed Ha'eri to a *madrashah* in the Iranian city of Qum, home to a popular Shi'i shrine, and bastion of Iranian-Shi'i learning (Moin 25). With the arrival Ayatollah Ha'eri, Qum underwent a renaissance in terms of its importance as a center religious learning (Moin 25). The growth of Qum in the 1920s was also fueled by a steady flow of Shi'i clerics from Najaf, Iraq, who had been expelled by the British (Moin 25). With resources and talented students and teachers at his disposal Ayatollah Ha'eri "set about laying the foundations of

a major religious institution” drawing even more talent to the new center of Iranian Shi’ism (Moin 25).

Qum’s renaissance was to be relatively short lived due to a coup lead by a military leader named Reza Khan. Reza Khan seized Tehran in 1921 with the aid of his “Russian-officered Cossack brigade” and eventually crowned himself Shah, ruling as a dictator until he was forced by Russia and Britain to abdicate in 1941 (Zirinsky 639). Many within the ranks of the Shi’i ‘ulama feared that Reza Khan sought to form a republic like Turkey, and would have secularized Iran’s population (Ghods, “Iranian” 41). In order to counter the perceived threat of republicanism to Islam many Shi’i clerics supported Reza Khan’s bid for Shah (Ghods, “Iranian” 43). Despite the Shi’i ‘ulama’s attempts to distill threats of secularism, Reza Shah’s reign was, nevertheless, marked by a number of “government initiatives” that sought to “direct Iran’s emergence into the twentieth century” (Ghods, “Government” 219). Reza Shah’s vision of a “modern” Iran did not include the Shi’i ‘ulama, who he felt “symbolized backwardness” (Chehabi 225). Because of their perceived “backwardness,” Reza Shah cut the Shi’i ‘ulama off from the educational and legal systems that had been under control for centuries (Ghods, “Government” 224-225). Instead, Reza Shah placed a great deal of importance on the military and the modernizing potential that a military education provided (Ghods, “Government” 223). Reza Shah also adopted the “surname of Pahlavi” in order to reflect his desire to return Iran to the perceived “glory” of its pre-Islamic past (Arjomand, The Turban 62).

The effectiveness of Reza Shah’s reforms are subject to some debate because of their varied results. His military and educational reforms for example increased the size

and competence of the military while increasing literacy rates, but the literacy rates were not tremendously higher than the rates before Reza Shah's reforms (Ghods, "Government 223-224). There was also a great deal of disillusionment with Iranian society in general because of a lack of social mobility, even with military experience and an educational background (Ghods, "Government" 223-224). Reza Shah also angered the masses of Iran by passing "legislation to benefit landlords at the expense of peasants" (Ghods, "Government" 226). M. Reza Ghods observes that while the reforms of Reza Shah did have some positive results, "in general, the gap between rich and poor widened" ("Government" 226). The actions of Muhammad Reza Shah, Reza Shah's son and successor, continued his father's trend of trusting and promoting certain "notables" at the expense of the general population (Martin 17). As his reign progressed, Muhammad Reza Shah became increasingly autocratic and ruled primarily "by decree" (Martin 21). Much of Muhammad Reza Shah's (henceforth the Shah) decrees and reforms unsurprisingly resembled those of his father with emphasis placed on the military and land reform (Martin 20-21). The Shah's land reforms ultimately backfired, creating a class of landless peasants that settled in Iran's cities to find work (Martin 21). The Shah's unpopularity was particularly evident in 1953 when he was effectively forced to flee Iran by a populist movement led by Muhammad Mossadegh (1882-1967) (Mottahedeh, The Mantle 128). Mossadegh's faction sought to liberate Iran from foreign influence by nationalizing Iran's oil industry, a move that was very unpopular with the British who owned or controlled nearly every aspect of Iranian oil production (Mottahedeh 129). In response, the British persuaded the United States (who feared a communist takeover in Iran) to aid them in a coup to take down Mossadegh (Mottahedeh, The Mantle 129-130).

With financial support from Britain and the U.S. Mossadegh was overthrown, and the Shah was returned to Iran.

What the Shah did succeed in doing was increasing the size and power of the military, and creating an expertly trained secret service known as SAVAK, which enabled him to crush most resistance to his rule (Martin 20). The agents of SAVAK were trained by the United State's CIA and Israel's Mossad and represented the Shah's close relationship with both countries (Keddie 134). The Shah developed particularly close ties with the United States, whose desire for Iranian oil was matched by the Shah's need for loans and modern weaponry (Keddie 136). The result of the rules of both Reza Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah was an Iran that catered to a few wealthy individuals and a large military while overlooking the rights and welfare of the middle and lower classes (Keddie 135). Under Muhammad Reza Shah the influence and actions of his secret police (SAVAK) became so prevalent that a culture of repression and fear was so engendered in the Iranian subconscious that any "mysterious" violent acts were automatically attributed to SAVAK and, consequently, the Shah (Keddie 217). In the previous sections of this work much has been made about the link between chaotic social situations and the rise of charismatic figures. The previous paragraphs illustrate that Reza Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah perpetuated a militaristic-secularizing and, in the case of Muhammad Reza Shah, increasingly paranoid form of rule that literally left many Iranians in the dust. Although a few Iranians benefited from programs and reforms put in place by the Pahlavi Monarchs; most Iranians either noticed no difference in terms of their socio-economic position, or found themselves with a education (often from a American or European University) with limited employment opportunities and little or no way to express their

anger at the lack of social mobility (Keddie 149, 157). Eventually one member of the Shi'i 'ulama in particular came to embody Iranian resentment towards the Shah, serving as the voice of the people and the will of God.

While perusing his education in Qum, Khomeini bore witness to the reforms and policies of Reza Shah, and began writing as a member of Iran's Shi'i 'ulama under the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah (Martin 17). Although Khomeini developed into a revolutionary figure, he did not start off that way (Nasr 121). It was the "modernizing trends" ushered into Iran by foreigners and the Pahlavi Monarchs that ultimately changed Khomeini's perspective, and set him on a course that changed the sociological, political, and religious structure of Iran (Nasr 121). In one of his early writings (circa 1940), Khomeini expands his view of what the nature and role of government should be. One section begins with the statement, "[w]hen a government does not perform its duty, it becomes oppressive" (Khomeini, Islam 169). Going further, Khomeini argues that, "[t]he only government that reason accepts as legitimate and welcomes freely and happily is the government of God" (Khomeini, Islam 170). In this early writing Khomeini doesn't suggest that "government must be in the hands of the *faqih* [Islamic jurist]," but that Islamic law (*shari'ah*) should be implemented to create a more ideal form of government (Khomeini, Islam 170). As Brown notes, the primary theme in Khomeini's writings is to establish that "Islam provides a comprehensive sociopolitical system valid for all time and place" (172). Khomeini even presents the court system set up by Reza Shah as an example of how a secular system is prone to corruption "and thousands of associated vices" (Islam 171). Shah Isma'il's Shi'ite revolution made a Shi'i empire in a Shi'i majority state a reality in the face of a Sunni majority. The root of Khomeini's

revolution is making a Shi'i government possible, where the power of the state is vested in the laws and will of God not the corrupt "monarchies and governments" of the world (Khomeini, Islam 169).

Arjomand observes that the "climate of educated opinion" inherent in the political conditions of twentieth century Iran made Mahdist or "millenarian" claims difficult ("History" 113). 'Ali Shari'ati, a "lay Islamic ideologue," viewed the return (*ra'ja*) of the Twelfth Imam in terms of a social revolution for the "oppressed masses of the Third World" (Arjomand, "History" 113). Another opinion of the *ra'ja*, this time from a member of the Shi'i 'ulama, Ayatollah Motahhari, presents the Mahdi's return within its eschatological framework, but in within a more positive context as restoration of justice "and the true religion...of the perfect society... realized only at the end of the process of human evolution" (Arjomand, "History" 113). It will be shown that Khomeini's revolution not only reflects the "educated" character of the twentieth century and his *Madrasedh* education, but also a very subtle interpretation and embodiment of the doctrine regarding Twelfth Imam's return (*ra'ja*).

Khomeini did not himself make any specific Mahdist claims; however, he did not stop his supporters from referring to him as the prophesized Mahdi, becoming the first person that Iranians had referred to as the just Imam since the "sixteenth century" (Arjomand, "History" 113). Due either to Khomeini's inability to stop his supporter's claims or his acceptance of the Mahdist mantle, Khomeini began to exemplify the role of the Mahdi "in the popular imagination" of the Iranian people (Babayan, Mystics 491). Moreover, Khomeini made active use of what Arjomand calls a "Shi'ite Messianic yearning" in order to facilitate his revolution, drawing on the charisma inherent in the

Twelfth Imam's return (*ra'ja*) ("History" 113). In Bashir's analysis of the life and works of the fifteenth century claimant to the Mahdi, Muhammad Nurbakhsh, he notes the distinction between those who espoused Mahdist ideals and the scholarly activity of the 'ulama ("The Imams" 21). As noted above, Khomeini did not make the specific claim to being the Mahdi that Nurbakhsh and Shah Isma'il did; nevertheless, he projected a knowledge of the "truth" and a "saintly" aura that were historical attributes of the Mahdi (Bashir, "The Imams" 21). Presented in the terminology of Weber, Khomeini's implied status as the Mahdi entitled him to access the charisma or "gift of grace" and the "specific gifts of the body and spirit" that were inherent in the Imami lineage (Weber 19, 47). According to Vali Nasr, Khomeini represented "a drastically new kind of Shia leader, with a movement behind him that represented a major break in Shia history" (121). Khomeini had what Nasr describes as "a clear sense of destiny, his own, Shi'ism's, and Iran's" that suggest both the mission of the Mahdi and Weber's "gifts" (Nasr 121).

Khomeini's flirtations with Mahdihood and the basis of his political philosophy are closely tied to his interest and study in *'irfan* or "mystical philosophy" (Martin 31). *'Irfan*, according to Vanessa Martins, contains "the perception that all creation derives from the One, the eternal truth" or, in other words, God (31). Where *'irfan* differs from the "purely spiritual manifestation" found in Sufism is in the educated character of its authors and adherents (Martin 32-33). Thus, Khomeini was ascribed the title of a "sober mystic" due to his "withdrawn demeanor [and] inward-looking gaze," as opposed to varied and extroverted practices often associated with Sufis or "drunken mystics" (Armstrong, Battle 249). *'Irfan* is rooted in the educational tradition of the Shi'i 'ulama where philosophical and logical analysis are emphasized over the individual mystical

teachings and practices of a Sufi Shaykh (Martin 32). The works of certain philosophers such as the mystic Ibn al-Arabi and the Safavid era cleric-philosopher Mulla Sadra were especially popular among students of *'irfan* (Martin 32). Arjomand notes, however, that Khomeini's interest in *'irfan* did not represent the majority interest of Iran's Shi'i 'ulama, many of whom viewed the study of *'irfan* as a gateway to "extremist" views (The Turban 100). *'Irfan's* "marginality" is due to "the possibility of millenarian interpretation of Shi'ism from its perspective, a possibility that had been realized by some claimants to Mahdihood" (Arjomand, The Turban 100). Because of the low view of *'irfan* held by most of the 'ulama, Khomeini had to study it in secret and only really began to teach the subject once his position as a cleric of note was firmly established (Martin 32-33).

In Khomeini's case, it appears that Sadra's work was of particular relevance, and helped foster an interest in "political questions" that had little to do with his "clerical career" (Armstrong, The Battle 228). In particular, Khomeini's reading of Sadra and his general interest in *'irfan* influenced his revolutionary character and his subsequent "extension of Shi'ite tradition to the sphere of political culture and political organization" (Arjomand, The Turban 100). Armstrong writes that "[f]or Khomeini, as for Sadra, mysticism and politics were inseparable," meaning there could be no great societal change without an attending "spiritual reformation" (Battle 248-249). Mullah Sadra in his work *al-Asfar al-Arbach* (The Four Journeys of the Soul) explains the "spiritual" process that prepares a leader to "begin [their] political mission" (Armstrong, Battle 56, 249). There is evidence to suggest that by 1963, when Khomeini began to actively speak out against the Shah, that he completed the initial stages of Sadra's process (Armstrong, Battle 249). Nasr provides a record of a meeting between the Medhi Haeri Yazdi (the

son of Khomeini's teacher Ayatollah Ha'eri), after the Islamic Revolution that shows that Khomeini continued on his Sadra inspired journey to God late into his life (119). In an exchange that centered on the Muslim bloodshed in the Iran/Iraq war, the younger Haeri exclaimed that "[i]t is not right for Muslims to kill Muslims" and that many are "dying in a war that has no end and no good purpose" (qtd. in Nasr 120). Khomeini replied with the question, "Do you also criticize God when he sends an earthquake?" this question jarred Haeri with his "implicit comparison of himself to the Almighty" (qtd. in Nasr 120). For the younger Haeri, Khomeini's admission to divine resemblance suggested that Khomeini had "embarked on the last leg of Sadra's journey...[were he] could function as a virtually divine lawgiver" (Nasr 120). As a being in command of the "direct knowledge of the Truth," Khomeini assumed the role of the Imam on Earth enabling him to revolutionize the application of certain Shi'i doctrines in way that had no real precedent in Shi'i history (Nasr 121).

Some Iranians were frightened by Khomeini's declarations because they called for the destruction of everything the Shah had built with no "constructive program" for a new government (Farman-Farmaian 294). Khomeini, however, appears to have had a well-conceived notion of how to rebuild Iranian society after the Shah was expelled, based on his mystical mission (Akhavi, "Contending" 229). Writing from Najaf, Iraq in 1971 Khomeini stated "[i]t is our duty to work toward the establishment of an Islamic government" (Khomeini, Islam 126). Khomeini goes on to suggest how such a government could and should be constructed, placing a great deal of emphasis on the role of the Islamic jurist in educating the public about the all-inclusive nature of Islamic law (*shari'ah*) especially its extension to the "political, economic, and legal" aspects of life

(Khomeini, Islam 126-128). J.S. Ismael and T.Y. Ismael write that Khomeini's political philosophy "reflects" the sum total of Islamic "inquiry into the nature and role of government" (601). Writing of the political function of the Friday prayer and practices such as *jihad*, Khomeini certainly references practices that harken back at least to the Safavid period (Khomeini, Islam 130). Khomeini's writings further abound with references to the political role of the Shi'i Imams and the Prophet and the failures of various Monarchs throughout Islam's history (Khomeini, Islam 133-134).

Even Khomeini's advocacy for the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* (*vilayat-i faqih* in Persian) or rule/guardianship of the jurisconsult is not without historical precedent (Akhavi, "Contending" 213). *Vilayat-i faqih* developed as a response to the occultation of the Twelfth Imam when the leadership of Shi'i community was left in the hands of the scholars and disciples of the Imams (Akhavi, "Contending" 231-232). It is in the scope of the implantation of *vilayat-i faqih* that Khomeini breaks with the traditional give and take found in societies relationship with Islam. Horstmann writes that certain aspects of "a routinized cannon can be revitalized [due to] the presence of the charismatic redeemer" (180). Horstmann asserts that the actions and proclamations of a charismatic figure can update or adapt a doctrine to fit their time period or situation (180).

Khomeini's doctrinal revitalization picked up steam in the 1960s and 1970s when he began to argue for the implementation of specific doctrine. (Khomeini 177-178). For Khomeini, *vilayat-i faqih* did not simply imply that an Islamic jurist was capable of being a judge or executor of Islamic law (*shari'ah*) but had the authority to effectively act as rulers because of their religious knowledge accumulated over years of study (Akhavi, "Contending" 238-239). Khomeini's argument for such an application of *vilayat-i faqih* is

rooted in the logic that the laws and beliefs of Islam were not abrogated after the Twelfth Imam's occultation because the proto-'ulama were there to protect and preserve the traditions of the Prophets and Holy Imams (Khomeini, Islam 42). Although Khomeini's logic was as sound as ever, Shahrough Akhavi writes that Khomeini had trouble quantifying his interpretation of *vilayat-i faqih* because of a lack of supporting Qur'anic verses and *sunna* accounts ("The Clergy's" 100).

Khomeini eventually found and modified a tradition attributed to the sixth Shi'i Imam that allowed Shi'i judges "to rule the Shiite community should the Imam not be available" in order to substantiate his concept of the rule of the jurist (Akhavi, "The Clergy's" 100). Most commentary on the tradition from Imam Ja'far that Khomeini cited as justification for his expansion of *vilayat-i faqih*, argue that Imam Ja'far allows clerics to make rulings in the Imam's absence only in "technical disputes over inheritance and debt" (Akhavi, "The Clergy's" 100). It is a testament to Khomeini's ingenuity and charisma that he was able to activate such a doctrine in the absence of extensive source material. For Khomeini, the Shi'i 'ulama could command what P.E. Walker defines as the holding of "powers similar in many respects but not exactly equivalent to those of the Imams" (6:209). Brown suggests that Khomeini's charisma and mystical character are central to the founding of the Islamic Republic and the implementation of *vilayat-i faqih*, arguing that they are based on "Khomeini's assumptions about God's plan for mankind and the ability of the just and learned faqih [Islamic jurist] to administer that plan" (172). The crux of Khomeini's argument for the implementation of *vilayat-i faqih* is that "Islam provides a comprehensive sociopolitical system valid for all time and place," and that

religious scholars are the most qualified to “implement God’s plan in this world” (Brown 172).

In 1963 Khomeini was arrested by SAVAK for speaking out against the Shah’s relationship with the United States and Israel, his undemocratic policies, and the increasingly depressed state of Iran’s poor (Armstrong, Battle 248). In the process of arresting Khomeini, SAVAK killed a number of students in Qum’s Fayziyah Madrasah where Khomeini was teaching (Armstrong, Battle 248). In this first instance, Khomeini was only jailed for a few days and then released only to be arrested again a few days later for denouncing the Shah in another speech (Armstrong, Battle 249-250). Khomeini’s second arrest led to massive protest in many of Iran’s cities, which were violently suppressed by SAVAK, illustrating the effect that Khomeini was beginning to have on the Iranian population (Armstrong, Battle 250). His second arrest also led to Khomeini being promoted to the rank of “Grand Ayatollah” in order to emphasize his position in Iran’s Shi’i ‘ulama, in addition to making it “too risky for the [Shah’s] regime to kill him” (Armstrong, Battle 250). The title of Ayatollah (Sign of God) is rank often ascribed to a prominent mujtahid (an expert on Shi’i law and doctrine) and

Increasingly in the twentieth century prominent Ayatollahs were also referred to as a *marja-i taqlid* or model of emulation (Momen 204-205). A *marja-i taqlid* is someone who can be considered one of the “most learned” of the Shi’i, someone that lesser Shi’i clerics (Mullahs in the case of Iran) looked to both for leadership and as a reference point for dealing with legal and theological questions beyond their abilities (Momen 205). Ahmed Kazemi Moussavi further describes the requirements for being a *marja-i taqlid* writing that a *marja*, “has to be learned in Arabic, logic, theology...and

jurisprudence,” in addition to being held in high esteem by “reputable” members of the Shi’i ‘ulama (44).

There have only been a few *marjas* during the entire history of the Shi’i, roughly one per century since the occultation of the Twelfth Imam (Momen 206). Naturally, the Prophet and the Twelve Shi’i Imams served as the *marja-i taqlids* during their lifetimes (Momen 206). The death of a *marja* often resulted in a number of spirited exchanges between various mujtahids vying for the position (Walbridge 5). Such a case arose in Iran after the death of Ayatollah Burujirdi in 1961 left a leadership vacuum at an important junction in Iran’s history (Walbridge 5). After Burujirdi death, many of the Shi’i in Iran turned to Khomeini as their new *marja-i taqlid* even though “he was not the most learned of the *mujtahids* of his time” (Walbridge 5). Walbridge writes that it is unlikely that Khomeini would have been considered for the rank of *marja* “had it not been for his stance against the shah and his leadership in the revolution” (5). Moreover, if not for the chaotic circumstances in Iran it is likely that Khomeini would have been “outshone” by the “scholarly achievement” of his peers (Walbridge 5). Although Khomeini did not become the sole *marja* for the whole of the Shi’i community after the death of Ayatollah Burujirdi, as evident in Iraq where the Shi’i turned to the leadership of Ayatollah Khu’i (Walbridge 5). For Iran, however, Khomeini was regarded as the *Marja’iyat al-taqlid al-tamm*, or the sole source of emulation for one community (Walbridge 4-5).

Khomeini’s ability to rise to rank of *marja* over other mujtahids who were perhaps more qualified in the traditional sense suggests that his charismatic appeal to the masses overrode the tenets of tradition. Walbridge notes that, “a strong *marja* can be a

powerful unifying force,” as his words and actions (for the Shi’i) serve as the “final word on a issue” (4). The mystical Mahdi-like appeal of Khomeini coupled with his ascension to the role of the sole point of emulation for the bulk of Iran’s Shi’i made Khomeini a *marja-i taqlid* par excellence. The esoteric charm of Khomeini for Iranians was rooted in his exile. Like the Hidden Imam, Khomeini was elsewhere; cut off from direct contact with his disciples yet still able to supply them with hope and guidance from afar. Khomeini’s Mahdist aura enabled him to speak on affairs as both an expert on Shi’i doctrine, but also as a creator or source of doctrine the most revolutionary being his recasting of *vilayat-i faqih*. In Khomeini the Shi’i of Iran saw someone who could liberate them from the tyranny and disenfranchisement imposed by the Pahlavi monarchy, and usher in a sort of religious utopia where the masses would no longer be deprived of life’s necessities.

It was in Khomeini’s rhetoric, and the Iranian people’s reaction to Khomeini’s rhetoric in the 1960s and 1970s, that the charismatic power of the Mahdi-*marja* is evident. By drawing on the significance associated with the Mahdi’s return Khomeini could command more influence on Iran’s Shi’i than other clerics. The power of Khomeini’s visage and message is further emphasized by the fact that he spent the majority of the 1960s and 1970s in exile (Moin 127-129). The invention and wide use of cassette tape players in Iran made Khomeini’s exile (first to Turkey and Iraq and finally to Paris) almost a non-issue as his speeches against the Shah’s regime were easily smuggled into Iran where they were copied and passed around (Farman-Farmaian 293-294). If anything, Khomeini’s speeches became more inflammatory in exile and were rife with Shi’i imagery. In one speech given in Najaf in the early 1970s Khomeini wrote that

“[t]he greatest disaster that befell Islam was the usurpation of rule by Mu’awiya [the first Umayyad Caliph] from ‘Ali...which caused the system of rule to lose its Islamic character entirely and to be replaced by a monarchical regime” (Khomeini, Islam 200). In the previous statement Khomeini eloquently equates monarchical rule with the despotism that unseated ‘Ali from his rightful place as the leader of the Muslim community (*ummah*) after the Prophet’s death, thus insinuating that the Shi’ah and monarchical rule have been antithetical since their inception in the Islamic context. Khomeini also allegorically referenced the tragedy of the martyrdom of Husayn (the third Shi’i Imam) in many of his speeches. In a speech given on ‘Ashura (the date commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn) Khomeini compared the Umayyad Caliph Yazid’s hatred of Husayn and the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) with the Shah’s loathing not just of the ‘ulama but of Islam and all of its practitioners (Khomeini, Islam 177). Kamran Scot Aghaie observes that the Karbala tragedy lent itself quite naturally to use as a model for speaking out against the Shah, particularly if there had been deaths at the hands of the Shah’s forces (78-79). Khomeini’s rhetoric regarding Karbala evolved into an apocalyptically themed struggle; a grand *ta’ziyeh* (passion play depicting the martyrdom of Husayn) with the Shah playing the part of the vile Yazid and Khomeini and the Iranian people being presented as Husayn and his heroic companions (Aghaie 79-80). The outcome of such a production was an outpouring of protest against the Shah that negated even the strength of the American armed Iranian army and the violence of SAVAK (Farman-Farmaian 289-290).

Tucker’s notion of a “charismatic phenomenon” in which charismatic leaders and “charismatic movements” become “inseparable” help to quantify the nature and outcome

of the Iran's Islamic Revolution (qtd. in Sanders 26). In his speeches, Khomeini often called on the people of Iran to protest the Shah's regime and policies. In one speech in particular, Khomeini called on the 'ulama to "remove the endorsements of their silence" and speak out against the Shah knowing that the Shah couldn't imprison them all (Khomeini, Islam 205). As the 1970s wore on, Iran was host to a great number of demonstrations, especially in urban centers (Keddie 232-233).

For some, however, arguments based on Khomeini's charismatic subtext (or any number of other arguments for that matter) as the cause of the Iran's Islamic revolution are not convincing (Parsa xi-xii). Misagh Parsa, for example, argues that the Iranian Revolution was not the result of Shi'ite messianic leanings or Husaynid cycles of mourning and martyrdom led by a charismatic Imam, but conflict between "state economic policies" and certain social groups following a trend seen "in revolutionary movements in the Third World" (8-10). Economic and social concerns certainly played a role in the revolution as many Iranians went on strike during the revolution effectively shutting down oil production and large segments of the economy (Keddie 233). Furthermore, there were many fringe groups made up of intellectuals, out-of-work students, and angry bazaaris (traditional shopkeepers and crafts-guild leaders) who, in their collective anger, joined up with the 'ulama against the Shah (Arjomand, The Turban 106-107).

The appeal of Khomeini cannot be underestimated as Arjomand notes that the throngs of migrants into Iran's cities had no real social ties, but were especially susceptible to "Islamic revolutionary ideology" (The Turban 107). The widespread nature of the protest and Khomeini's ability to appeal to groups as disparate as

leftist/communist student groups and seminary students in Qum suggests that there was a charismatic overtone to the revolution. There was arguably something inherent in Khomeini's tenacity and his ability to belittle the Shah and his military that captivated many in Iran regardless of their station and political belief (Arjomand, The Turban 101-102). The singularity of Khomeini's purpose (establishing an Islamic government) and his rejection of "experts" in dealing with hostages in the U.S. Embassy at least presents Khomeini as a man who is privy to special knowledge (*'ilm*) that parallels Weber's conception of a charismatic-prophetic figure (Arjomand, The Turban 102). It should be noted that in the aftermath of the revolution that many people in the leftist-militant camps who had supported Khomeini as the leader of the revolution did not support his idea for a new government (Arjomand, The Turban 138). After the Shah was deposed, Khomeini denounced many of his former supporters as "lackeys of the West," setting the stage for a clerical crackdown on "counterrevolutionary activities" (Arjomand, The Turban 138).

Nevertheless, 1978 in particular saw the rise in "grassroots organization of Khomeini supporters" and a public that was "increasingly fearless, enthusiastic, and aroused, even in the face of deaths in demonstrations" (Keddie 233). In 1978 Khomeini called on the people of Iran to "break open the chains of slavery! One after another, remove the treacherous pawns of the Shah from the scene [and] Make firm your ranks, strengthen your resolve, preserve your unity of purpose, and join together with all Muslim elements" (Khomeini, Islam 239). The previously mentioned statement, along with many others by Khomeini, drove many Iranians to extremes at the behest of a religious leader suggests something more than a revolt against the Shah's economic policies. Moreover, on 11 December 1978 during a massive 'Ashura celebration/protest

the effect of the Khomeini's charismatic phenomenon was realized when "a resolution was passed asking Khomeini to lead Iran and calling on Iranians to struggle until the shah was overthrown" (Keddie 234). By the end of 1978 the Shah had fled Iran and Khomeini made his triumphant return to Iran in February 1979 (Keddie 234-235). Even the Shah's powerful allies like the United States eventually realized that there "was no feasible way to stop the Khomeini movement" (Keddie 235-236).

Although there were many popular sayings that came to characterize the revolution in Iran, none captured both the significance of Khomeini's role in the revolution and the tone of things to come than *Shah raft, Imam amad* (The Shah has gone, the Imam has come) (Arjomand, The Turban 104). As the "Imam" of the revolution, Khomeini was able to command far more charismatic authority than his predecessors, and as the mystical *marja* was able to inject his version of *vilayat-i faqih* onto the Iranian political sphere. For Iran, Imam Khomeini (as he was popularly called after the revolution) was the just Imam returned with all the significance that this title implied. After the departure of the Shah and the success of the revolution many of the revolutionary elements came together in an attempt to form a new government. When the dust finally settled, it was Khomeini and a "clerically dominated Revolutionary Council" that had gained control of the political establishment (Arjomand, The Turban 139). The principal thrust of Iran's new clerical government was, unsurprisingly, putting on paper the "extensive governmental power" of the jurist (Arjomand, The Turban 139). Khomeini's founding of a government in which the Shi'i jurist was given precedence marks the culmination of his Shi'ite revolution. The second article of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution contains two points that illustrate Khomeini's success.

First, is the notion that the Islamic Republic's government was vitally based on the "belief in the One God...[and] divine revelation and its fundamental role in the expounding of laws" (Constitution 26). Second, is the basis and need for the "continuous *ijtihad* (legal reasoning) of the *fuqaha* (Islamic jurist)" in order to lead Iran's new government (Constitution 27). Shah Isma'il had made a Shi'i Iran possible, but it was not until Imam Khomeini returned to Iran from his occultation in Paris, and realized his vision of a "Government of God" that a Shi'i government led by the deputies "of the Holy Imams" was enacted (Arjomand, The Turban 139).

V. CONCLUSIONS AND COMMENTARY ON EVENTS IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN

In July of 2009, Iranian cleric and politician, ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (b.1934), read a speech that called for the release of a number of political prisoners, and even “challenged the authority of the country’s supreme leader, Ayatollah ‘Ali Khamenei (b. 1939)” (Sciolino 1). Rafsanjani’s speech was a response to the Iranian government’s crackdown after the massive protests that erupted after a disputed Presidential election in June of 2009 (Sciolino 1). The protests began after the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (b. 1956) was declared the winner of the Presidential election over the reform candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi (b. 1942) amid cries of election fraud (The New York Times 1). Moussavi’s supporters contended that the government headed by Ayatollah Khamenei “stole” the election in order to keep Ahmadinejad in office (The New York Times 1). Moussavi’s supporters and members of the opposition parties felt that Ahmadinejad and his regime were against democratic reform and the development of policies that would make Iran less antagonistic to the West (The New York Times 1). In response to the protest, Khamenei’s government sent out security forces and activated the “pro-government” Basij militia to violently disperse and arrest members of the opposition, consequentially creating a very tense political situation in Iran (The New York Times 1).

In an attempt to smooth over relations with the public, and still appeal to the clerical powers, Rafsanjani referenced his relationship with his political “mentor,” and

the Islamic Republic's founder Ayatollah Khomeini who, according to Rafsanjani, always believed in the primacy of the will of the people (Sciolino 1). Elaine Sciolino writes that "[b]ehind the words" of Rafsanjani's speech was an attempt to state that "for the Islamic Republic to survive, it must restore its legitimacy, reaffirm its republican institutions and find a formula for governing" (1). Khamenei's actions, or blunders depending on the interpretation, do not appear to have sustained the Islamic Republic in the same revolutionary spirit that characterized the rule of his predecessor (Cohen 10). Op-Ed Columnist Roger Cohen writes that Khamenei's violent suppression of the election protestors ultimately weakened Khamenei's (and therefore the Iranian government's) authority and deprived him of his "aura" (10).

In the thirty years since Khomeini returned to Iran as the Imam of the Revolution and established the Islamic Republic, Iran has never encountered such dissent (The New York Times 1). A significant portion of this work has concerned itself with the application and effect of charismatic Shi'i leadership on the Iranian religious and political sphere. Previous chapters have established the Shi'i Imams as charismatic figures who were part of a charismatic office that extended until the Twelfth Imam entered a period of esoteric hiding in the 9th century C.E.. This work then turned to two figures, Shah Isma'il ibn Haydar and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in order to argue that the suspended charisma of the Shi'i Imams could be tapped by certain individuals in order to bring about Shi'ite revolutions. The purpose of the final section of this work is twofold: first, to demonstrate that events in Iran after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini illustrate Weberian models of charismatic routinization, and second to argue that the protests stemming from the June 2009 Presidential election, while significant in their own right,

do not herald a third Iranian Shi'ite revolution. The process for arguing both points will also serve as a vehicle for general conclusions to this work as a whole.

Khomeini, while not actively involved in the creation of the Islamic Republic's government, was nevertheless very import in shaping the political aspects of the Iran's new regime (Arjomand, After Khomeini 30-31). The creation of the office of the supreme leader or "Supreme jurist" serves as a good example of Khomeini's influence. Members of the Shi'i 'ulama permeated almost every aspect of the Iran's new government, serving both in the Islamic Consultative Assembly and the Guardian Council (Arjomand, After Khomeini 30-31). Reaching a consensus in the political world, much like reaching a concrete opinion in religious matters, proved difficult. In order to overturn rulings or force some aspects of law through, many of Iran's politicians went to Khomeini (the Imam of the Revolution) in the hope that he would side with them and allot some of his authority to their project (Arjomand, After Khomeini 31). From his position, Khomeini was disconnected enough from the government to maintain his pious image, but was still able influence the direction and tone of the Islamic Republic's political rulings. Khomeini's creation of various committees and sub-committees to implement his will near the end of life illustrates his indirect involvement in the sundry business of politics (Arjomand, After Khomeini 34-35). The point of investigating Khomeini's political endeavors after the establishment of the Islamic Republic is to show that he was still functioning as a charismatic-Shi'i figure, serving as the model of emulation (*marja-i taqlid*) for the Iranian government.

Also during this time, Khomeini began to tone down whatever messianic or divine claims that he may have embraced in the years leading up to the revolution as

evident in his poetry (Khomeini and Hanaway 274). Although Khomeini wrote poetry throughout his life, joining “Shah Isma’il, Naser al-Din Shah and numerous other rulers of Persia who have written poetry,” the poetry composed in his final years suggests a deep longing for the divine presence that he once embraced (Khomeini and Hanaway 274). One poem in particular illustrates Khomeini’s desire for the divine beginning:

My life has reached its end and still my beloved has not come, my tale has ended but an end to this heartache has not come. Have in hand death's cup but have never seen a cup of wine, years have passed but a favor from my darling has not come. The bird that is my soul no longer flutters in this cage, and the one who would break its bars has not come (Khomeini and Hanaway 274).

Khomeini died on June 3, 1989, leaving Iran with “a relatively strong government” constructed on his revolutionary Shi’i principals and elaborated Shi’i doctrines (Keddie 262). According to Rafsanjani (who was serving as President at the time) he had designated ‘Ali Khamenei to serve as the Supreme Leader after his death (Arjomand, After Khomeini 36).

In designating a successor, Khomeini effectively routinized his charisma into the office of the Supreme Leader, creating what Arjomand calls, “post-charismatic, collective clerical rule” (After Khomeini 37). Further evidence for the routinization of Khomeini’s charisma is seen in Khamenei’s inheritance of all of Khomeini’s “political titles...except for ‘Imam’” (Arjomand, After Khomeini 36). The power of Khomeini’s designation is also evident in his choice of Khamenei, because Khamenei was not a *marja-i taqlid* and therefore not technically allowed to assume the position of Supreme Leader according to

the Islamic Republic's Constitution (Arjomand, After Khomeini 36-37). Khamenei's assent also marked a partnership with President Hashemi Rafsanjani, in which the focus of the Islamic Republic's government turned away from strictly religious matters and began to focus on "economic reconstruction" and "foreign relations" (Keddie 263). Although the efforts of Khamenei and Rafsanjani did improve Iran's economy and its station in the world to some degree, many Iranians were dissatisfied with the domestic situation and its lack of certain freedoms (Keddie 263). Khamenei lacked the religious qualifications and revolutionary spirit that had been crucial aspects of Khomeini's rule, and thus sought to cultivate support within the "revolutionary institutions (especially the Islamic Revolutionary Guards)" that had supported Khomeini (Keddie 263-264). Moreover, Khamenei funded public works that made Iran's revolutionary-Shi'i identity part of the Iranian landscape (Keddie 264).

The charismatic-Shi'i aura of Khomeini is also contained and routinized in the monumental tomb constructed after his death. Khomeini's tomb, according to Kishwar Rizvi, serves as a "commemorative monument built to honor both the man buried in it and the revolution he inspired" (209). Incorporating aspects of "Shi'i iconography" within a structure based both on modern Iranian structures and the tombs of Shi'i holy figures, Khomeini's tomb stands as a reminder of Khomeini's ability to merge the modern with the traditional (Rizvi 209). With minarets and gilded dome and surrounded by a cemetery for victims of the Iran-Iraq war the tomb of Khomeini is an impressive landmark on the road that fittingly links Tehran to the seminary city of Qum where Khomeini began his religious education in earnest (Rizvi 210-214). Rizvi sums up the importance of Khomeini's tomb nicely, writing "It [Khomeini's tomb] is both a civic

monument and a popular pilgrimage site, both a symbol of the state and a religious edifice imbued with a highly charged mystical ethos emanating from the Shi'i belief in the Imamate" (210). Essentially, Khomeini's tomb serves as a physical representation of Khomeini's revolutionary spirit and charisma. A visitor to the tomb is not simply reminded of the life of great and holy man, but is confronted with imagery that speaks both to the power and message of Shi'ism and its relationship with the Iranian revolution (Rizvi 212). Von Stietencron describes a phenomenon in which an object can take on a charismatic purpose even though doing so admittedly "extend[s] the concept of charisma into a domain that Weber did not envision" (25). Nevertheless, Von Stietencron's categorization is applicable to Khomeini's tomb because of the nature of its construction and imagery. For Iran's Shi'i, Khomeini's tomb both literally and figuratively stand as a glowing beacon on the horizon reminding them of the power and significance attached to Khomeini and the revolution that he fostered.

Iran's Presidential election of 1997 in which Muhammad Khatami, a reform-minded cleric, was elected even though the Supreme Leader (Khamenei) endorsed his rival, is often used to delineate a new phase in the Islamic Republic's post-Khomeini political development (Keddie 269). Khatami was a supporter of Khomeini, but spent most of the 1980s and 1990s working in Islamic Centers in Europe and in Iran, in addition to writing extensively on how to "reconcile Islam and liberal democracy" (Keddie 269). Khatami's struggle to find balance between Islamic government and democracy in his Presidency brought many of Iran's political divisions to the forefront (Gheissari and Nasr 147-148). The Presidential elections of 2005 continued the trend set by the elections of 1997, proving to be a very provocative expression of the Iranian

peoples will (Gheissari and Nasr 148). While the 2005 election ushered in the Presidency of conservative and former revolutionary guard Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the election process itself was full of “intense debates over various conceptions of government and social organization, economic development, and foreign policy” (Gheissari and Nasr 148).

The political development of the Islamic Republic is not directly relevant to this work, but the fact that the Islamic Republic endured and continued to develop after the death of the charismatic Khomeini is. There has only been one other Supreme Leader since Khomeini (Khamenei) at the time of this writing, but there have been numerous Presidential elections that have showcased (to a degree) the democratic elements in the Islamic Republic. Even within the Presidential election, however, the clerical establishment has a great deal of say in choosing the leadership of the Islamic Republic. The Council of Guardians, for example, in the 2005 election narrowed down a “list of 1,014” individuals to six “acceptable” candidates (Gheissari and Nasr 150). For the Islamic Republic, charisma was no longer really a factor in determining leadership ability. If anyone wanted to run for President they had to first pass a clerical inspection before they could even present themselves to the public. It should also be pointed out that most of the candidates who were running for President were either mainstays of the Islamic Republic since its inception or the protégés of such individuals (Gheissari and Nasr 150). What the effect of this system means is that each election, regardless of swings towards liberalism/reform or conservatism/crackdown, worked within the framework and constitution established at Khomeini’s behest.

The harsh screening processes and nepotism involved in the selection of Iran’s

Presidential candidates contribute to either Nasr's notion that the "Islamic revolution is... a spent force in Iran, and the Islamic Republic is a tired dictatorship facing pressures to change" (212). Conversely, there are notions that the Islamic Republic a vibrant political arena where liberal and conservative forces engage in partisan give and take with each election within the scope of clerical review (Gheissari and Sanandaji 277). Nasr, who views the Islamic Republic as being depleted legitimacy nevertheless acknowledges, "a sizeable share of the [Iranian] populace... still puts its trust in Khomeini and his legacy" even while it "continues to languish under the Islamic Republic" (212). If Nasr's analysis is considered, then it appears that the Islamic Republic is maintained by the memory of Khomeini and his charismatic visage. Iran it seems has not completely devolved into what Lisa Wedeen in her analysis of Syria under Hafez al-Assad, calls a "noncharismatic authoritarian regime" (6). Wedeen's noncharismatic regimes are characterized by an emphasis on "rhetoric and symbols" over (unsurprisingly) charismatic authority (6). In the case of Syria, symbols often took to the form of large organized spectacles that reinforced the regime's perception of itself, while integrating the public in a way that "substantiated" power of the regime (Wedeen 21). The rhetoric of Assad's Syria often contained "familiar metaphors" in which Assad was painted as a father figure for all of Syria, and a creation and implementation of a sort of national discourse that constantly glorified the regime and its goals regardless of actual public opinion (Wedeen 58-60, 70-71).

The Islamic Republic of Iran certainly developed and maintains a penchant for spectacle, especially spectacles that reinforce the Islamic purity of the regime while denouncing the actions of the West and the former allies of the Shah. The rhetoric of

Iran, however, was focused on perpetuating the revolutionary spirit making it, in Khamenei's words, a "struggle of the generations" (Arjomand, After Khomeini 177). The extension of Khomeini's revolution to a point outside of time effectively extended Khomeini's brand of charismatic Shi'ism to the perceived final Shi'ite revolution marked by the return of the Twelfth Imam. The extension of the charisma of the revolution to days unknown secures the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic through a sort of continual routinization or "worldly-messianism" that allows Iran to function as a player and advocate for Muslims on the international stage in the absence of the Mahdi (Maghen 255).

Article five of the Islamic Republic's constitution begins by stating that during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam or the "Lord of the Age," then the power of "governance and leadership" should lie in the hands of the Shi'i 'ulama (Constitution 29). Included in the article's introduction is common Shi'i statement that often follows the mention of the Twelfth Imam, "may God hasten his renewed manifestation" (Constitution 29). In essence, the Shi'i jurist will have political power over anyone in Iran save the Twelfth Imam upon his return (*ra'ja*), and thus, there can be no further Shi'ite revolutions, in the Iranian context, until his return. For some, this assertion may seem outrageous, as there is no guarantee that the Twelfth Imam will return in the near or even distant future. Conversely, however, this study has shown that figure can directly, in the case of Shah Isma'il, or indirectly, in the instance of Ayatollah Khomeini, come to embody the spirit of the Twelfth Imam, and take advantage of the charisma inherent in the line of Shi'i Imams to bring about significant social and religious transformations.

Although the protest that arose after the June 2009 Presidential election could be

interpreted as the chaos that will herald the Mahdi's return (*ra'ja*), there have not been any individuals who have made any direct or indirect Mahdist claims (Momen 168-169). This is not to say that member of the "Green" or "Reform" movement has evoked no Shi'i symbols in their protest. Mir Hussein Moussavi's willingness to be martyred in the name of the reform movement serves as a good example because of the significance associated martyrdom in Shi'ism in addition to playing on his namesakes famous last stand and his Moussavi (Husyanid) lineage (The New York Times 1). Even with such a powerful statement it still must be noted that Moussavi was part of the governmental establishment under Khomeini where he served as Prime Minister (Arjomand, After Khomeini 92). Moreover, Moussavi as a valid Presidential candidate in 2009 must have passed the clerical review needed by all candidates in order to run. Moussavi's reform movement is essentially just that-a movement that does not seek to overthrow or revolutionize the Islamic-clerical regime, but to reform the current system and make it more democratic. Furthermore, the reform movement has yet to make any appeal to the "messianic yearning" present in Twelver Shi'ism (Arjomand, "History" 113).

Paradoxically, it is the current Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has shown a great deal of interest in the Twelfth Imam. Ahmadinejad has not only set aside money for projects to build up the structures around the well of Jamkaran from which it is believed the Twelfth Imam will return, but also claims to feel "the presence of the Hidden Imam" at certain times (Arjomand, After Khomeini 156). Ze'ev Maghen notes that while Ahmadinejad's references and interest in the Twelfth Imam have "*not* gone too far," or to the point where he claims the Imam's presence within himself, nevertheless, his popular religious interests are still not as in line with his clerical supporters as previous believed

(254). The question for the future of Iran, and Iranian Shi'ism is whether or not the charisma of the Imam is even accessible anymore. Moreover, is there even room in the Islamic Republic for the Mahdi, or has the "rationalist project," or the orthodox aspects of Twelver Shi'ism "succeeded in severing the holy from the human" (Babayani, Mystics 496). If anything, this work represents the power that an individual can gain not from breaking with the divine, but by fully embracing it. The heart of the Shi'i movement is a belief in the genealogical right, and extraordinary skills of a group of individuals who represented a continuation of the revelations that had changed their lives. And as long as the Twelfth Imam remains unseen, then the grace of the Imams is open to those who seek to change that which seems impossible.

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