

Introduction

In 1722, the Safavid Empire collapsed. An empire that ruled for over two centuries, in its heyday spanned parts of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and present-day Iran, and which was responsible for converting the majority of Iranian society to Shi'ism, came to a swift end in the face of Afghan invaders.¹ Over the next several decades, pretenders to the throne and political upstarts, most importantly Nadir Shah (r. 1736–47) and Karim Khan Zand (r. 1750–79), attempted to establish new dynasties. None were successful. Much of the eighteenth century was a time of upheaval in Iran – an era characterized by historians as a

¹ The 'decline' and fall of the Safavid Empire is a subject of some historical debate. The classic account is Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958). For a critique, see Martin B. Dickson, 'The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82, no. 4 (1962): 503–17. A second generation of scholarship includes Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); John Foran, 'The Long Fall of the Safavid Dynasty: Moving beyond the Standard Views,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 281–304; and Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006). Most recently, the question of Safavid decline has been the subject of Rudi Matthee's *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012). Persian-language chronicles and histories, for their part, have highlighted the internal causes of the empire's collapse since at least the eighteenth century. For a discussion of how Persian-language sources have explained the Safavid collapse – in what also serves as a response to Matthee's study – see Kioumars Ghereghlou, review of *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan*, by Rudi Matthee, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015): 815–18. For a slightly different take, see Andrew J. Newman, "Great Men," "Decline" and Empire: Safavid Studies and a Way Forward?" *Medieval Worlds: Comparative & Interdisciplinary Studies* 2 (2015): 45–58. On the Afghan occupation of Iran, see Willem Floor, *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia, 1721–1729* (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 1998). For an account of the Afghan occupation through the eyes of a contemporary Jewish inhabitant of Kashan, see Bābā'ī Ibn Farhād, *Iranian Jewry during the Afghan Invasion: The Kitāb-i Sar Guzasht-i Kāshān of Bābā'ī b. Farhād*, ed. Vera Basch Moreen (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990).

time when ‘orderly administration ceased. Insecurity became the order of the day.’² It was only with the rise of Qajars in the 1780s that a level of stability was restored. By the time the second Qajar monarch, Fath-‘Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834), died in 1834, the Qajars had been ruling for almost fifty years. Cities that had been depopulated during the eighteenth century grew again, the economy showed signs of expansion, and the Qajar dynasty itself would remain in power until 1925. For bringing to a close a politically and economically turbulent period, the rise of the Qajars was a watershed moment in Iranian history.³

How did the Qajars, out of the cauldron of political fragmentation during the eighteenth century, rebuild political authority? How was political and economic stability re-established in Iran during the early Qajar period (1785–1834)?⁴ How did the Qajars remake an empire? Answering these questions is an opportunity to move beyond traditional explanations of state building, which emphasize capacity building and the centralization of power. The polity which the Qajars formed does not fit neatly into the category of a modern ‘state.’ Early Qajar Iran did not have a centralized bureaucracy, nor did it have a large, standing army capable of enforcing the Qajars’ will and coercing society across a vast territory – roughly 100,000 square miles larger than contemporary Iran, and two and a half times the size of modern-day France, the largest country in Western Europe (see Map I.1).⁵ In fact, it is debatable whether the word ‘state’ can even be applied to the Qajar polity in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶ The Qajars claimed to be legitimate

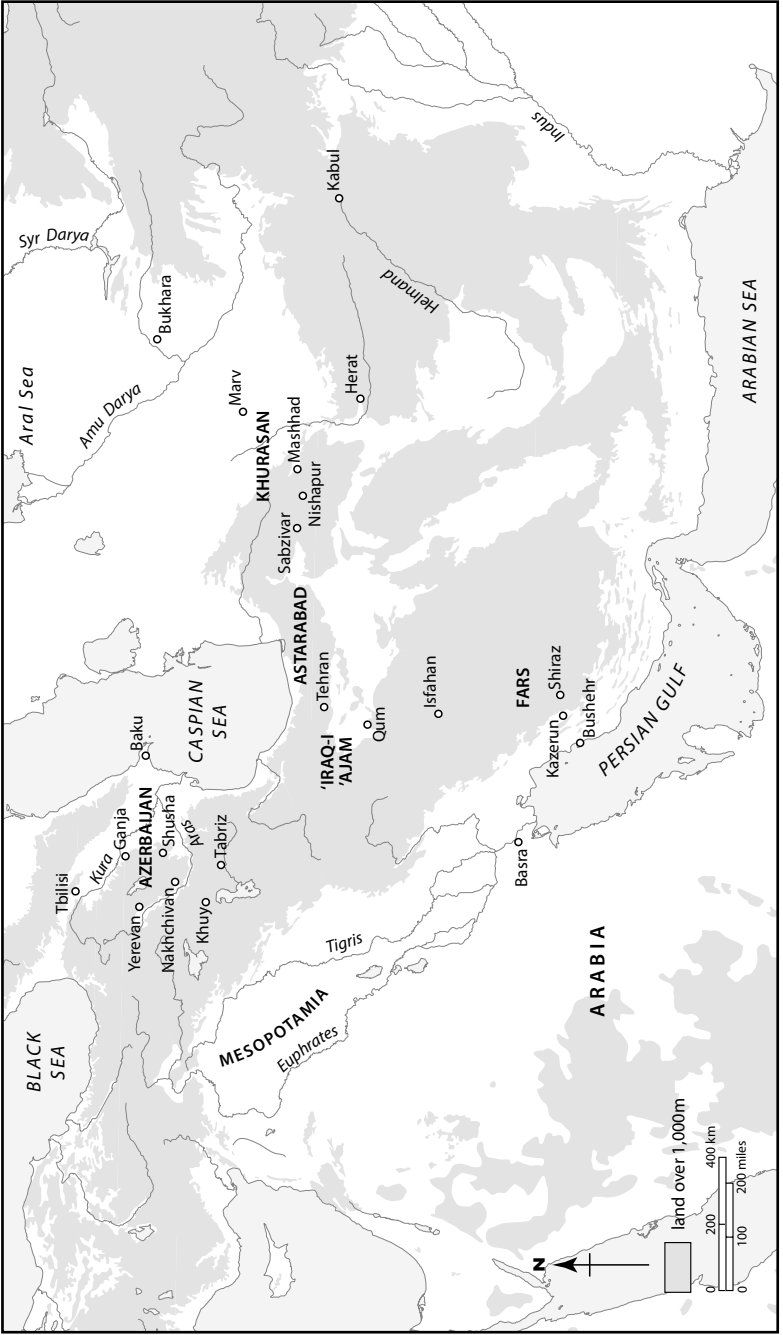
² Ann K. S. Lambton, ‘The Tribal Resurgence and the Decline of the Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century,’ in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, ed. Thomas Naff and Roger Owen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), 129.

³ On the rise of the Qajars being a ‘watershed’ moment, see Ann K. S. Lambton, ‘Persian Trade under the Early Qajars,’ in *Qājār Persia: Eleven Studies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 110.

⁴ The years 1785 to 1834 correspond to the reigns of the first two Qajar shahs – i.e. from when Agha Muhammad Khan consolidated power in the northern provinces of Azerbaijan, Gilan, and Mazandaran (in 1785) to the death of Fath-‘Ali Shah (in 1834).

⁵ The area of territory that was at least nominally under Qajar control prior to 1828 and the conclusion of the Russo-Persian Wars included, in their entirety or in part, the modern nation-states of Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan, totaling close to 700,000 square miles.

⁶ The term closest in meaning to the ‘state’ in Qajar-era Persian-language sources was *dawlat*, as in *dawlat-i ‘aliyyih* or *dawlat-i abad-muddat*. The word *dawlat* (Ar. *dawla*) had come to mean something like ‘state’ or ‘government’ by the



Map I.1 Iran as defined by early Qajar chroniclers.

rulers, but they could not enforce those claims through coercion, or violence, or propaganda. They simply did not have the means to do so.⁷

Rather than viewing these historical realities as evidence of the Qajars' 'weakness,' *Making and Remaking Empire* takes them as a clue to the nature of Qajar power and authority. The book adopts a socially oriented approach to political history – one that takes seriously the political, economic, and social ties that ran between Qajar rulers and broader society, closely examines the discourse and political practices of empire in Qajar Iran, and expands the focus to include both the centers and peripheries of empire.⁸

Three distinct but closely related themes emerge in this book. The first is the extent to which the Qajars were part of a long historical tradition of imperial rule in the Iranian world. Qajar rulers saw themselves as reigning over an empire modeled on earlier empires and drew from earlier institutions and practices – those practices were in fact how they formed an empire.⁹ Qajar-era texts like chronicles (*tārkh*) and political ethical treatises (*andarznāma*; *siyāsatnāma*) advanced a vision of kingship and imperial authority whose roots went back centuries. The prescriptions found in these treatises often could be traced back not only to the Qur'an and Islamic ideals, but also to Plato, Aristotle, and pre-Islamic Iran, producing a genre that can be

early nineteenth century, but historically the word had different (though related) meanings. The word is derived from the Arabic root meaning 'to turn,' but it seems to have acquired a political coloring, meaning something like 'turn to rule' or 'dynasty,' during the 'Abbasid era. See Franz Rosenthal, 'Dawla,' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1748.

⁷ As Roy Mottahedeh reminds us, '[n]o society can hope to coerce all the people all the time; before the industrial revolution no extensive society could hope to coerce most of the people most of the time.' *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 5.

⁸ I have borrowed the term 'socially oriented political history' from Leslie P. Peirce, 'Writing Histories of Sexuality in the Middle East,' *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009): 1325.

⁹ For a similar argument, but in the context of Russian history, see Jane Burbank, 'Rights of Difference: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire,' in *Imperial Formations*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 78. As Burbank has argued, 'Bourdieu's category [of "habitus"] works well to describe the unrecognized self-producing and -adjusting field of practiced empire.' For Bourdieu's 'habitus,' see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72–95.

described best as Perso-Islamic.¹⁰ There is overwhelming evidence that Agha Muhammad Khan (r. 1785–97) and especially Fath-‘Ali Shah saw themselves as ‘king of kings’ (*shāhanshāh*) ruling over the ‘guarded domains of Iran’ (*mamālik-i mahrasih-yi Īrān*). The political offices created under the early Qajars, like the *ṣadr-i ‘aẓam* (prime minister) or *munshī al-mamālik* (imperial secretary), had existed in previous empires. And the practices that are the focus of each chapter in this book were not new but inherited by the Qajars from earlier tributary, Perso-Islamic, Turco-Mongol dynasties – especially the Safavids.¹¹

On the other hand, the socially oriented approach used here also helps us see the particularities of early Qajar politics. Political practices like land administration, gift-giving, marriage, and political correspondence helped the Qajars assume a position of authority, by buttressing their claims of legitimacy, and by building ties with provincial elites, tribal khans, and urban notables. Given the eighteenth-century turmoil out of which the Qajars rose to power, the social and economic relations built through these practices were especially crucial. And yet, the expanding Russian and British empires in Iran at the turn of the nineteenth century, together with tribal khans who continued to resist the Qajars’ claim to rule, put pressure on Qajar governance practices. Correspondence, provincial diplomacy, and territorial conquest and tribal relations – as Chapters 5, 6, and 7, respectively, will show – were again practices with long histories, but the circumstances of the early nineteenth century challenged and exposed the limits to their effectiveness. Thus, a second theme running through this book is of early Qajar governance practices responding to, being shaped by, and adapting to the historical circumstances of the late eighteenth and

¹⁰ For a useful introduction to the vast ‘manuals of statecraft’ literature, see Muhammad Taqi Danishpazhuh, ‘An Annotated Bibliography on Government and Statecraft,’ in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand, trans. Andrew Newman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 213–39. See also the sources cited in Chapter 1.

¹¹ For a definition of ‘tributary empires’ – as opposed to commercial or colonial empires – see Peter Fibiger Bang and C. A. Bayly, ‘Tributary Empires – Towards a Global and Comparative History,’ in *Tributary Empires in Global History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and C. A. Bayly (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 6–7. Both the use of ‘tributary empire’ in relation to the Qajars and the meaning of Turco-Mongol are discussed at more length later in this introduction.

early nineteenth centuries – of being historically contingent, rather than simply the latest iteration of an age-old political culture.

And finally, a third theme that emerges is of a dynamic and evolving empire being made and remade – a story not of imperial structures, but of a process of imperial formation.¹² This book ultimately presents a picture of Qajar Iran not often depicted in the scholarly literature: of an interconnected empire, with a web of bonds, relationships, ties, and networks linking people and regions, centers and peripheries, across a far-flung territory. Political, social, and economic conditions at the local and provincial levels shaped and informed Qajar political decisions. Correspondence, in the form of firmans and petitions (*'arīḡih*), crisscrossed Qajar Iran. Resources were shared and sent from one locale to another through a system of Qajar imperial management. And there was a multidirectional relationship between state and society, and between centers and peripheries. To put it simply, then, this book is about the remaking of an empire. The Qajars resuscitated a set of governance practices, based on a tributary imperial system that was heavily indebted to a Safavid past, but which was, at the same time, suited to the needs of their time.

The Rise of the Qajars: A Brief History

Before elaborating on the methods and interventions of this book, a brief history of the rise of the Qajars may help orient the reader. The period following the collapse of the Safavid empire in 1722 was, by general consensus, a turbulent time in Iranian history.¹³ In fact, the

¹² Here I have been influenced by Sanjay Subrahmanyam's distinction between structure and process in Mughal history – and more specifically, by his comparison between a perspective that emphasizes the structure of the Mughal state versus one that sees the Mughal state as evolving, even after the death of Akbar. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The Mughal State – Structure or Process? Reflections on Recent Western Historiography,' *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 29, no. 3 (1992): 291–321.

¹³ There is no book-length study of eighteenth-century Iran that provides a synthesis or holistic account of the period. The classic account is Lambton, 'The Tribal Resurgence.' See also the essays in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977). For a recent treatment of the century, see Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 126–75. A slightly different perspective – one which questions whether Iran's eighteenth century should be viewed as a discrete unit of

only real debate among historians seems to be over how devastating the eighteenth century actually was. Ann Lambton characterized the century as one of ‘political contraction,’ ‘economic decline,’ ‘tribal resurgence,’ and a ‘decline in the bureaucracy’ in Iran.¹⁴ Michael Axworthy described it as a ‘century of revolt, war, political disorder, anarchy and lawlessness, disruption of trade, economic collapse, famine, emigration, and general misery.’¹⁵ Willem Floor wrote that ‘the advent of the Afghans was a devastating interlude that led to the rape of Iran.’¹⁶ Perhaps the most vivid description was the one by Roger Stevens: ‘The eighteenth century is a horrible period in Iranian history – horrible to read about, horrible to disentangle, horrible to have tried to live in – I say tried because, at least if one was prominent, one probably stood a better chance than in any other period of being tortured, blinded, castrated, massacred or just simply put to death.’¹⁷

Amid the upheavals of the eighteenth century, the periods of rule under Nadir Shah and Karim Khan Zand stand out as islands of stability.¹⁸ Even here, though, there are a number of caveats. Nadir built his career as a military commander and he spent much of his reign focused on conquering territory. He is most remembered for his ambitious military campaigns in Iraq, Central Asia, and northern India, including his conquest of the Mughal capital Delhi, in 1739, and his invasion of Ottoman

time or rather as the final stage of longer-term historical patterns stretching back to the Mongol invasion – is offered by Gene R. Garthwaite, “What’s in a Name?” Periodization and “18th-Century Iran,” in *Crisis, Collapse, Militarism and Civil War: The History and Historiography of 18th Century Iran*, ed. Michael Axworthy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9–19. In the same volume, see Rudi Matthee, ‘Historiographical Reflections on the Eighteenth Century in Iranian History: Decline and Insularity, Imperial Dreams, or Regional Specificity?’ 21–41. For another critique of the prevailing periodization of the eighteenth century, see Thomas M. Ricks, ‘Towards a Social and Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Iran,’ *Iranian Studies* 6, no. 2/3 (1973): 115–18.

¹⁴ Lambton, ‘The Tribal Resurgence,’ 108, 129. For a counterargument, see Willem Floor, ‘Tribal Resurgence in the Eighteenth Century,’ in Axworthy, *Crisis*, 151–62.

¹⁵ Michael Axworthy, ‘Introduction,’ in Axworthy, *Crisis*, 1.

¹⁶ Willem Floor, *A Fiscal History of Iran in the Safavid and Qajar Periods, 1500–1925* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 1998), 215.

¹⁷ Roger Stevens, *The Land of the Great Sophy* (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), 30.

¹⁸ John R. Perry, ‘The Last Safavids, 1722–1773,’ *Iran* 9 (1971): 59.

territories during the 1740s.¹⁹ To the extent that he paid attention to political matters at all, it seems most of it was devoted to the size, discipline, and weaponry of his army.²⁰ Even his attempt to integrate Shi'ism into Sunni Islam as a fifth *madhhab* was part of his broader ambition of expanding control into Ottoman territory.²¹ Karim Khan, on the other hand, took more interest in matters of politics and governance, was a patron of art and architectural projects, and developed a reputation as a relatively gentle and restrained ruler.²² But his political authority was effectively limited to southern Iran and especially to Shiraz, which he made his capital, and there is no evidence that he formed a bureaucratic administration (*dīvān*) analogous to that found under the late Safavids.²³ Furthermore, upon Karim Khan's death in 1779, internal fighting plagued the Zand clan and contending members claimed to be Karim Khan's successor, leading to more political confusion.

Economic and social upheavals, meanwhile, followed on the heels of political instability. Although more scholarship is needed to fill in the picture, from what we know, war, famine, natural disasters, earthquakes, and outbreaks of disease devastated the population and the countryside during the century. Muhammad Hashim Asaf Rustam al-Hukama', who began writing his history in 1779 or 1780 and lived through some of the upheavals of the eighteenth century, claims that the price of bread rose to ten *tāmāns* during the nine-month siege of Isfahan in 1722, a price so high that some people resorted to murder and cannibalism to feed themselves.²⁴ Hasan Fasa'i, writing in the

¹⁹ Michael Axworthy, *Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Ernest Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

²⁰ On the military reforms of Nadir Shah, see Michael Axworthy, 'The Army of Nader Shah,' *Iranian Studies* 40, no. 5 (2007): 635–46; and Axworthy, 'The Awkwardness of Nader Shah: History, Military History, and Eighteenth-Century Iran,' in Axworthy, *Crisis*, 43–60.

²¹ Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest*, 1–2.

²² William Francklin, who traveled to Iran in 1786, and spent eight months at Shiraz, described Karim Khan as 'affable' and 'amiable.' See William Francklin, *Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia, in the Years 1786–7* (Calcutta: Stuart and Cooper, 1788), 122–25.

²³ John R. Perry, *Karīm Khān Zand: A History of Iran, 1747–1779* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 217–18.

²⁴ Muhammad Hashim Asaf 'Rustam al-Hukama', *Rustam al-Tavārtkh*, ed. Muhammad Mushiri (Tehran: Taban, 1348 Sh./1969), 159. For more on

early nineteenth century, estimated that close to two million people perished during the Afghan interregnum of 1722–29 alone.²⁵ The city of Shiraz may have lost 100,000 people to hunger during its siege in 1722.²⁶ Other anecdotal evidence suggests that even smaller cities and towns were not immune to the ruin caused by years of war during the 1720s and 1730s. Carmelite missionaries in Nakhjavan, Azerbaijan, reported that, of the inhabitants of the town who were not killed or did not die of starvation, most fled to Izmir in the Ottoman Empire, while others fled to Tabriz.²⁷ Tabriz itself would be victim to a disaster later in the century, in January 1780, when the city – which sits in a seismic region and was long familiar with earthquakes – was decimated by the strongest earthquake to have hit it in recorded history.²⁸ Meanwhile, the output of revenue-generating crops like silk dramatically dropped in Iran during the eighteenth century.²⁹

Nevertheless, the eighteenth century was not a period of unmitigated disaster. Cultural life flourished, and there were new developments in the realms of court culture, pictorial arts, and architecture. The Zand period in particular stands out as one of cultural efflorescence.³⁰ Meanwhile, there were also important changes underway

this source and the ambiguity of who its author was, see Muhammad ‘Ali Jamalzadih, ‘Rustam al-Tavārīkh va Mu‘alif-i Ān Rustam al-Hukamā’: Qismat-i Avval,’ *Vahīd*, no. 88 (Farvardin 1350 Sh./March–April 1971): 133–49; Jamalzadih, ‘Rustam al-Tavārīkh va Mu‘alif-i Ān Rustam al-Hukamā’: Qismat-i Duvvum,’ *Vahīd*, no. 90 (Khordad 1350 Sh./May–June 1971): 360–66; Rustam al-Hukama’, *Persische Geschichte; 1694–1835 erlebt, erinnert und erfunden: der Rustam at-tawārīḥ in deutscher Bearbeitung*, trans. Birgitt Hoffmann (Bamberg: Aku-Verl., 1986); and Birgitt Hoffmann, ‘The *Rustam al-Tawārīkh* Revisited: An Early Qajar “Chronicle” Read as an Ego-Document,’ in *At the Gate of Modernism: Qajar Iran in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Éva M. Jeremiás (Piliscsaba: Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2012), 65–84.

²⁵ Lambton, ‘The Tribal Resurgence,’ 110, 377n7.

²⁶ Mirza Muhammad ‘Kalantar-i Fars,’ *Rūznāmih-yi Mīrzā Muḥammad Kalantar-i Fars*, ed. ‘Abbas Iqbal (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahami, 1325 Sh./1946), 3.

²⁷ *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1939), 1:628.

²⁸ Charles P. Melville, ‘Historical Monuments and Earthquakes in Tabriz,’ *Iran* 19 (1981): 159–77.

²⁹ Charles P. Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 13.

³⁰ See, for example, Basil Robinson, ‘Persian Painting under the Zand and Qājār Dynasties,’ in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles P. Melville

in the sphere of Shī'i religious and political thought. An intellectual debate emerged between two schools of thinking among the 'ulama – one emphasized the traditions (*akhbār*) of the twelve Imams when deciding religious matters, while the other allowed for a measure of rationalist speculation based on the principles (*uṣūl*) of religious law. The debate was essentially over the appropriate sources of religious knowledge and authority, and the dominance of the Usuli school by the end of the eighteenth century would have far-reaching social and political consequences. The rise of the Usulis contributed to the widening purview of jurists (*fuqahā'*), and helped expand the role and functions of the 'ulama in not only the religious sphere, but in political and social life.³¹

The eighteenth century, of course, was not just a period of change for Iran. Developments in Europe, including the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of an imperial rivalry best represented by the Napoleonic Wars, would have profound repercussions around the globe, including in Iran.³² Although Iran was never formally colonized, it was not immune to European imperialism and became, like many other places in the world, a region over which Europeans competed for influence, resources, and domination. In

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 870–89; Jennifer M. Scarce, 'The Arts of the Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries,' in Avery et al., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7:890–958; and Christoph Werner, 'Taming the Tribal Native: Court Culture and Politics in 18th Century Shiraz,' in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (London: Routledge, 2011), 221–34.

³¹ On the Akhbari and Usuli schools, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shī'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 220–225. See also Zackery M. Heern, *The Emergence of Modern Shī'ism: Islamic Reform in Iraq and Iran* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2015). For more on the Akhbari-Usuli dispute and its repercussions, see Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 33–44; Hamid Algar, 'Shī'ism and Iran in the Eighteenth Century,' in Naff and Owen, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, 288–302; Said Amir Arjomand, 'The Shī'ite Hierocracy and the State in Pre-modern Iran: 1785–1890,' *European Journal of Sociology* 22, no. 1 (1981): 40–78; Juan Cole, 'Shī'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered,' *Iranian Studies* 18, no. 1 (1985): 3–34; and Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 33–69.

³² David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

1798, Napoleon's forces invaded Egypt as part of a broader strategy to challenge British political and economic interests in India. Britain's concern over rising French expansionism was one reason for its interest in pursuing an alliance with the Qajars.³³ Meanwhile, the Russian Empire expanded southward during the eighteenth century, and by the early nineteenth century had encroached on the Caucasus. The stage was set for the main players in the so-called Great Game, a nineteenth-century contest between European powers over who would dominate Iran and Central Asia.³⁴

How does the rise of the Qajars fit into this eighteenth-century context? The story begins back in the Safavid period, when the Qajars served various Safavid shahs as military commanders and provincial

³³ On Napoleon in Egypt, see Juan R. Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *Napoleon in Egypt: Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the First Seven Months of the French Occupation, 1798*, trans. Shmuel Moreh (Princeton: Markus Winner Publishing, Inc., 2003); Irene Bierman, ed., *Napoleon in Egypt* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2003). On the British attempts to form alliances with the Qajars, see, for instance, the British government and English East India Company correspondence in J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record 1535–1956*, 2 vols. (Gerard Cross: Archive Editions, 1987); J. C. Hurewitz, ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

³⁴ H. W. C. Davis, *The Great Game in Asia (1800–1844)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927); Edward Ingram, *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828–1834* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Edward Ingram, *Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia, 1797–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Edward Ingram, *Britain's Persian Connection 1798–1828: Prelude to the Great Game in Asia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992); Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 2007); Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Small Players of the Great Game: The Settlement of Iran's Eastern Borderlands and the Creation of Afghanistan* (London: Routledge, 2007). For one of the few studies of Qajar political strategies in the Great Game, see James M. Gustafson, 'Qajar Ambitions in the Great Game: Notes on the Embassy of 'Abbas Qoli Khan to the Amir of Bokhara, 1844,' *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 4 (2013): 535–52. For a brief history of the term 'Great Game,' see Malcolm Yapp, 'The Legend of the Great Game,' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001): 179–98. For a study which challenges the Great Game as an explanation for what drove the Russian Empire to expand into Central Asia, see Alexander Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

governors. In fact, the Qajars were among the constituent tribes in the Qizilbash confederacy that had supported the Safavid dynasty from its very beginning in the sixteenth century. After the Safavid collapse and for most of the eighteenth century, the Qajars were caught up in the political rivalries of the time, alternating between serving and competing against the Afsharids and the Zands. During the 1720s, Fath-‘Ali Khan Qajar emerged as a rival to Nadir Afshar’s political ambitions, before being killed in 1726. One of Fath-‘Ali’s sons, Muhammad Hasan, took his father’s mantle and controlled parts of northern Iran, in the provinces of Mazandaran, Gilan, and Azerbaijan, along the littoral of the Caspian Sea. By 1759, he too was killed – this time by Karim Khan Zand’s forces – and a few years later his son, Agha Muhammad Khan, was taken as a hostage to Shiraz, along with a few relatives, to ensure the good behavior of the Qajars. When Karim Khan died in 1779, Agha Muhammad Khan escaped captivity, returned to Mazandaran, and launched his own political career. He conquered most of the former Safavid territories, defeated his last remaining Zand rivals, and crowned himself shah in 1796, before three of his own servants assassinated him in 1797. His nephew Baba Khan succeeded him to the throne, and took as his regnal name Fath-‘Ali Shah, in honor of his great-grandfather. Fath-‘Ali Shah would reign as Qajar monarch until 1834 (see Figure I.1).³⁵

But with the expansion of European empires at the turn of the nineteenth century, a flurry of diplomatic and military activity took place at the Qajar court, as the British, French, and Russians competed for influence with the Qajars.³⁶ The opening gambit came from the British

³⁵ The only monograph which tackles the subject of the formation of Qajar Iran, as far as I am aware, is Hormoz Ebrahimnejad, *Pouvoir et Succession en Iran: Les Premiers Qājār, 1726–1834* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000). Christoph Werner’s *An Iranian Town in Transition: A Social and Economic History of the Elites of Tabriz, 1747–1848* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000) may be regarded as another example, although it focuses exclusively on Tabriz, and the political, social, and economic conditions of the city and its hinterland over the course of a century, rather than providing an explanation for the rise of the Qajars. For more on the background to the Qajars, see Ann K. S. Lambton, ‘The Qājār Dynasty,’ in *Qajar Persia*, 1–32; and Gavin Hambly, ‘Āghā Muḥammad Khān and the Establishment of the Qājār Dynasty,’ in Avery et al., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7:104–43.

³⁶ On British relations with the early Qajar court, see Fereydoon Adamiyat, ‘The Diplomatic Relations of Persia with Britain, Turkey and Russia, 1815–1830’ (PhD diss., University of London, 1949); Colin Meredith, ‘The Qajar Response

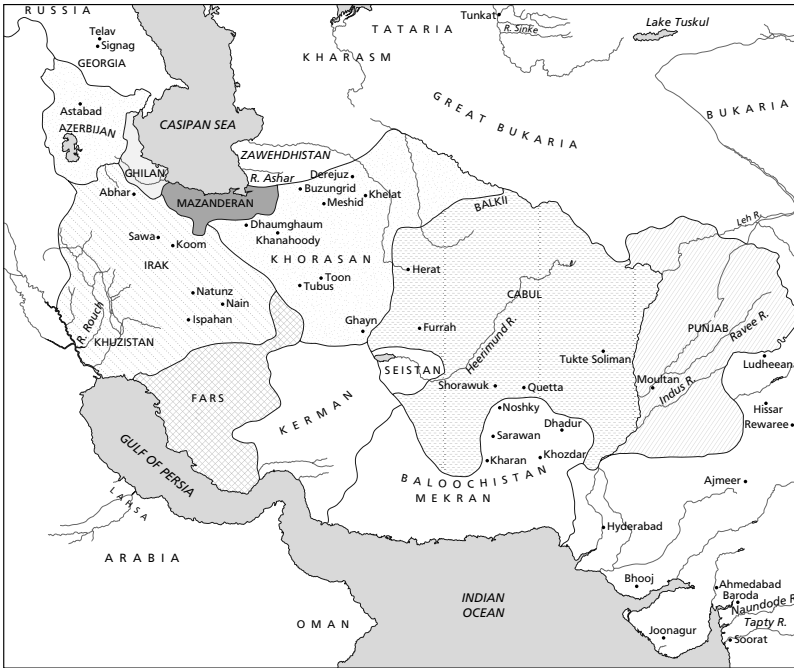


Figure I.1 Map of Persia under Qajar rule, drawn in 1814. Published in John Thomson, *A New General Atlas* (Edinburgh, 1817), 30.

to Russia's Military Challenge, 1804–28' (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1973); Sayyed Fakhr al-Din Shadman, 'The Relations of Britain and Persia, 1800–1815' (PhD diss., University of London, 1939); J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Malcolm Yapp, *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran, and Afghanistan, 1798–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); and 'Abd al-Amir Muhammad Amin, *British Interests in the Persian Gulf* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967). On relations between Napoleonic France and the Qajars, see Iradj Amini, *Napoléon et la Perse: Les relations franco-persanes sous le Premier Empire, dans le contexte des rivalités entre la France, l'Angleterre et la Russie* (Paris: Fondation Napoléon, 1995); translated into English as *Napoleon and Persia: Franco-Persian Relations under the First Empire: Within the Context of the Rivalries between France, Britain and Russia* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999); and Muhammad Hasan Kavusi 'Iraqi and Husayn Ahmadi, eds., *Asnādī az Ravābiṭ-i Irān va Farānsih dar Dawrih-yi Fath-'Alī Shāh* (Tehran: Vizarat-i Umur-i Kharajih, 1376 Sh./1997). Earlier scholarship in French includes Edouard Driault, 'La Mission Gardane en Perse (1807–1809),' *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 2, no. 2 (1900/1901): 121–55; Driault, *La politique orientale de Napoléon: Sébastiani et Gardane, 1806–1808* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1904); Henri Dehérain, 'La Mission de Félix Lajard En Perse (1807–1809) et Ses Conséquences Scientifiques,'

in India, who sent two missions to Iran at the end of the eighteenth century – driven in part by the arrival of Napoleon in Egypt, but also to incite Fath-'Ali Shah to attack Zaman Shah and thus protect British interests in India from the Afghan threat. Jonathan Duncan, the governor of Bombay, dispatched Mihdi-'Ali Khan to the Qajar court in 1798, and Lord Wellesley, the governor-general of India, sent John Malcolm in 1799 – the first European diplomatic missions to Iran since the seventeenth century.³⁷ They were quickly followed by several other emissaries, culminating in various treaties that the Qajars signed with the French and the British – most notably the Anglo-Persian Treaty of 1801, the Treaty of Finkenstein of 1807, the Treaty of Alliance of 1809, and the Definitive Treaty of Alliance of 1814.³⁸ Adding another layer of complexity to the geopolitical context was the Russian Empire's expansion and its own imperial objectives in the north. Russia had made claims to Darband, Baku, Gilan, Astarabad, and Mazandaran as early as 1723, in an agreement with the Safavid claimant Tahmasp.³⁹ Although the agreement was never ratified, it marked an early example of European demarcation of boundaries in Iran, and foreshadowed the two wars with the Russians during the

Journal Des Savants (1929), 359–72, 401–11; Henri Dehérain, *Lettres inédites de membres de la mission Gardane, en Perse (1807–1809)* (Abbeville: F. Paillart, 1923); and Alexandre-Henri-Raoul Quarré de Verneuil, *Napoléon 1er et la Perse* (Paris: Librairie Militaire R. Chapelot et Ce., 1904). On relations between Russia and Qajar Iran, see Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780–1828* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Peter Avery, 'An Enquiry into the Outbreak of the Second Russo-Persian War, 1826–28,' in *Iran and Islam: In Memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky*, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth (Edinburgh: University Press, 1971), 11–45; George A. Bournoutian, *From the Kur to the Aras: A Military History of Russia's Move into the South Caucasus and the First Russo-Iranian War, 1801–1813* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); George A. Bournoutian, *Eastern Armenia in the Last Decades of Persian Rule, 1807–1828* (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1982); and George A. Bournoutian, 'Prelude to War: The Russian Siege and Storming of the Fortress of Ganjeh, 1803–4,' *Iranian Studies* 50, no. 1 (2017): 107–24.

³⁷ Hurewitz, *Middle East*, 1:117.

³⁸ See, for instance, John William Kaye, *The Life and Correspondence of Major-General Sir John Malcolm, G. C. B., Late Envoy to Persia, and Governor of Bombay* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1856), 1:105–54; J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1915), 1/II:1879–1909; S. F. Shadman, 'A Review of Anglo-Persian Relations, 1798–1815,' *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 31, no. 1 (1944): 23–39.

³⁹ For the text of the agreement, see Hurewitz, *Middle East*, 1:66–69.

early nineteenth century, from 1804 to 1813 and from 1826 to 1828. Both wars ended in military defeat for Iran and, more damaging, resulted in the loss of territory, the imposition of huge financial indemnities, and Russian intrusion in Iran's political affairs. To this day, the Gulistan (1813) and Turkmanchay (1828) treaties that ended the wars are remembered among Iranians as symbols of defeat and capitulation to European imperialism, and are a source of controversy and debate in Iranians' collective national memory.⁴⁰

The Qajars rose to power, therefore, in the context of political fragmentation and upheaval in eighteenth-century Iran, and globally, of European imperial expansion. Explaining how they were able to form a new empire in these circumstances is among the most important questions in modern Iranian history. Under Qajar rule, and especially during the reign of Fath-ʿAli Shah, the political situation in Iran returned to a reasonably stable situation, the economy improved substantially, and European travelers to the shah's court remarked upon its splendor and opulence.⁴¹ Ascribing the Qajars' rise to their tribal

⁴⁰ To mark the bicentennial of the Treaty of Gulistan, in 2013, BBC Persian published a series of articles exploring the historical significance of the Treaty. See 'Divistum Salgard-i 'Ahdnāma-yi Gulistan,' BBC Persian, October 24, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/10/131023_142_pics_golestan_treaty.shtml; Maziar Behrooz, 'Ahdnāma-yi Gulistān: Payān-i Jang-i Avval, Āghāz-i Jang-i Duvvum,' BBC Persian, October 24, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/10/131024_144_golestan_treaty_behrooz.shtml; 'Divist Sāl Guzasht: 'Ahdnāma-yi Gulistān Chirā Imzā Shud?' BBC Persian, October 26, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/10/131026_golestan_treaty_radio.shtml; Farzin Vahdat, 'Jang'hā-yi Irān va Rūsiyyih: Āghāz-i Rūdarū'i-yi Sunnat va Mudirni'tih,' BBC Persian, October 28, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/10/131028_144_golestan_treaty_tradition_modernity.shtml; and 'Ali Farasati, 'Mu'ahadih-yi Gulistān: Āghāzī bar Gustarish-i Nufūz-i Rūs'hā dar Irān,' BBC Persian, October 30, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/10/131027_144_golestan_treaty_caucasus_conquest.shtml. For a different perspective, see Manoutchehr M. Eskandari-Qajar, 'Between Scylla and Charybdis: Policy-Making under Conditions of Constraint in Early Qajar Persia,' in *War and Peace in Qajar Persia: Implications Past and Present*, ed. Roxane Farmanfarman (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 21–46.

⁴¹ On the politics and economy, see Gavin Hambly, 'An Introduction to the Economic Organization of Early Qājār Iran,' *Iran* 2 (1964): 69–81; Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831–1896*, 2nd ed. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 3; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran*, 13; and Lambton, 'Persian Trade under the Early Qajars,' 108–39. On the splendor of Fath-ʿAli Shah's court, see John Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia* (London: John Murray, 1845), 209–10.

relations or to their coercion over society is not convincing, not least because like other rulers of preindustrial societies, the early Qajars simply did not have the bureaucratic capacity to rely on force to rule. A shift in approach is needed to explain the formation of Qajar Iran.

A Socially Oriented Political History

This book, unlike much scholarship on Qajar Iran, introduces a sociological and anthropological bent into Qajar political history. In doing so, it elaborates on recent trends in the histories of state and imperial formation more broadly. Since at least the 1980s, historians have developed a body of literature that is simultaneously grounded in the historical sociology of state formation of earlier generations, and also profoundly shaped by the ‘cultural turn.’⁴² While it would be difficult to describe this varied literature as making up one discrete category, a general feature of much of this work has been to begin from the premise that in preindustrial societies, political and economic systems were ‘as a rule, embedded in social relations.’⁴³ No fixed and distinct line separating state from society existed – there was instead ‘an elusive boundary’ between the two, and state and society constituted one another.⁴⁴

⁴² See George Steinmetz, ed., ‘Introduction: Culture and the State,’ in *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1–49; and Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, ‘Introduction: Rethinking Theories of the State in an Age of Globalization,’ in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, ed. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 8–11.

⁴³ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 279. For a classic account of how family and personal ties, rivalries, friendships, and enmities were normal components of government, see Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983). Sociologists have reminded us, of course, that much of the same could be said of ‘modern’ states. See Philip Abrams, ‘Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State,’ *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988): 58–89.

⁴⁴ Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Adam White, ed., *The Everyday Life of the State: A State-in-Society Approach* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013). On the ‘elusive boundary’ and how modern states produce a distinction between state and society, see Timothy Mitchell, ‘Society, Economy, and the State Effect,’ in *State/Culture*, 76–97, especially 76–77. See also Abrams, ‘Notes’; Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Gilbert M. Joseph and

At the same time, waves of scholarship have emerged out of anthropological history and histories of imperial formation, which have pushed the conversation beyond institutions and structures of power.⁴⁵ Much of this scholarship has argued that there be less emphasis on defining what empires or states are, and instead more focus on what they do.⁴⁶ Far from being a return, however, to the functionalist approaches of the past, which described the functions of institutions and how they worked, the more recent scholarship has devoted attention to the practices of states and empires, and sought to inject people and social actors into the history. What these developments have yielded is a body of work that incorporates analyses of relationships, customs, beliefs, and culture in telling the story of how states and empires form. At its core, the aim has been to place structural constraints of culture, on the one hand, and the practices of social actors, on the other, into a dialectical relationship with one another – to place culture and discourses in creative tension with political and economic realities on the ground.⁴⁷ Some of this scholarship has persuasively pushed back against reified conceptions of the state.⁴⁸ At a minimum, the scholarship has reminded

Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Timothy Mitchell, 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,' *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 77–96; and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 'The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind,' in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 79–96.

⁴⁵ On 'anthropological history,' see Bernard S. Cohn, 'History and Anthropology: The State of Play,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (1980): 198–221; Bernard S. Cohn, 'History and Anthropology: Toward a Rapprochement,' *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12, no. 2 (1981): 227–52.

⁴⁶ Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan, 'Introduction: Refiguring Imperial Terrains,' in Stoler et al., *Imperial Formations*, 5.

⁴⁷ Many theorists have contributed to these developments, but a seminal work in the field is Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. For an introduction to 'practice theory' and its intellectual genealogy, see Sherry B. Ortner, 'Introduction: Updating Practice Theory,' in *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–18.

⁴⁸ For example, Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

us that empires and states are constantly changing – being made, unmade, and remade.⁴⁹

Needless to say, a perspective that considers the rise of the Qajars has been absent from these scholarly debates.⁵⁰ This is a shame, because early nineteenth-century Iran is an ideal historical laboratory for exploring the sorts of on-the-ground processes where the rubber of political culture meets the road of reality – and the changes that often ensued.⁵¹ Understanding the formation of Qajar Iran is impossible without an appreciation for the political culture of Persian kingship, and more specifically of the culture of imperial rule represented by the Safavid Empire. That political culture, and its associated practices, institutions, and vision of imperial rule, endured for long periods of time, and even survived the turmoil and upheaval of Iran's eighteenth century, when bureaucratic institutions and structures weakened. But the case of early Qajar Iran also illustrates how new historical circumstances – like, for example, the eighteenth-century regional autonomy and tribal resurgence that resulted from the Safavid collapse and the encroaching European empires that served as the backdrop to the Qajars' rise – constrained and shaped Qajar political authority and the formation of their empire. Political practices and institutions were adapted to and changed as a result of the context in which those practices were used. The case of Qajar Iran reminds us of just how crucial historical context is for making sense of processes of historical change and adds nuance and complexity to our understanding of how cultural systems change.

But the method adopted here offers a fresh perspective for Iranian history as well. It departs from studies that focus on particular political

⁴⁹ On the process of empires, see Stoler and McGranahan, 'Introduction,' 8–9; Subrahmanyam, 'The Mughal State'; David Ludden, 'The Process of Empire: Frontiers and Borderlands,' in Bang and Bayly, *Tributary Empires in Global History*, 132–50. On 'states in the making,' see Adams, *Familial State*, 13.

⁵⁰ For an example of a socially oriented political history of Pahlavi Iran, see Cyrus Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁵¹ For a discussion along similar lines about how the disjunction between 'models of' and 'models for' culture can open up space for cultural change, see William H. Sewell, Jr., 'History, Synchrony, and Culture: Reflections on the Work of Clifford Geertz,' in *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 190–96.

events, on political figures, or even traditional social histories, all of which have been the subject of some study. A number of historians, for instance, have written about political events, about the role key statesmen and ‘political men’ (*rijāl-i dawrih-yi Qājār*) played in Qajar politics, about the political and administrative offices that comprised the Qajar bureaucracy, and about the institution of kingship during the Qajar era and its long history in the Iranian world.⁵² We know a fair amount about nineteenth-century political and religious concepts, ideas, and thought, and their evolution over time, including concepts like law and constitutionalism.⁵³ There, likewise, are numerous studies

⁵² For some examples, see Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*; Abbas Amanat, ‘The Kayanid Crown and Qajar Reclaiming of Royal Authority,’ *Iranian Studies* 34, no. 1/4 (2001): 17–30; Assef Ashraf, ‘A Familial State: Elite Families, Ministerial Offices, and the Formation of Qajar Iran,’ *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 51, no. 1 (2019): 43–64; Shaul Bakhash, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy, and Reform under the Qajars: 1858–1896* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978); Mihdi Bamdad, *Sharḥ-i Ḥāl-i Irān dar Qarn-i 12, 13, 14 Hijrī*, 6th ed., 6 vols. (Tehran: Zuvvar, 1387 Sh./2008); Willem Floor, ‘The Office of Kalantar in Qajar Persia,’ *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 14, no. 3 (1971): 253–68; Shireen Mahdavi, *For God, Mammon, and Country: A Nineteenth-Century Persian Merchant, Haj Muhammad Hassan Amin al-Zarb (1834–1898)* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999); Colin Meredith, ‘Early Qajar Administration: An Analysis of Its Development and Functions,’ *Iranian Studies* 4, no. 2/3 (1971): 59–84; Dust-‘Ali Khan Mu‘ayyir al-Mamalik, *Rijāl-i ‘Aṣr-i Naṣīrī*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Tarikh-i Iran, 1390 Sh./2011); Husayn Sa‘adat Nuri, *Rijāl-i Dawrih-yi Qājār* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Vahid, 1364 Sh./1985); Khan Malik Sasani, *Siyasatgarān-i Dawrih-i Qājār*, 2 vols. (Tehran: Intisharat-i Hidayat, 1352 Sh./1973); ‘Ali Sha‘bani, *Hizār Fāmil* (Tehran: Bu ‘Ali, 1366 Sh./1987); A. Reza Sheikholeslami, *The Structure of Central Authority in Qajar Iran, 1871–1896* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); and Karim Sulaymani, *Alqab-i Rijāl-i Dawrih-yi Qājāriyyih* (Tehran: Kitabkhanīh-yi Milli-yi Iran, 1379 Sh./2000).

⁵³ Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), especially 111–75; Hossein Kamaly, *God and Man in Tehran: Contending Visions of the Divine from the Qajars to the Islamic Republic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Nikki R. Keddie, ed., *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Dīn ‘al-Afghani’* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn ‘al-Afghānī’: A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Mehrdad Kia, ‘Constitutionalism, Economic Modernization and Islam in the Writings of Mirza Yusef Khan Mostashar Od-Dowle,’ *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 4 (1994): 751–77; Ann K. S. Lambton, ‘Some New Trends in Islamic Political Thought in Late 18th and Early 19th Century Persia,’ *Studia Islamica*, no. 39 (1974): 95–128; Ann K. S. Lambton, ‘A Nineteenth Century View of Jihād,’ *Studia Islamica*, no. 32 (1970): 181–92; Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, ed., *One*

on nineteenth-century diplomacy, imperial politics, and political and economic relations with Europe and the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁴ As useful as these political histories are, the focus overwhelmingly has been on high politics, prominent intellectual figures, and major events. Historians have of course recovered stories from the sources about the other end of the social spectrum as well: on nineteenth-century religious upheavals, social and economic unrest, households, women, slaves, and subaltern groups.⁵⁵ But the few studies which have explored the relationship

Word – Yak Kaleme: 19th-Century Persian Treatise Introducing Western Codified Law (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010); Nader Sohrabi, 'Revolution and State Culture: The Circle of Justice and Constitutionalism in 1906 Iran,' in *State/Culture*, 253–88; Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

⁵⁴ Fereydoon Adamiyat, *Bahrein Islands: A Legal and Diplomatic Study of the British-Iranian Controversy* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1955); Amini, *Napoleon and Persia*; Sabri Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game*; Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (New York: Routledge, 2013); George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1892); Moritz Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism: The Ideal Anarchists, 1800–1914* (London: Routledge, 2016); Ingram, *Britain's Persian Connection*; Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914: A Study in Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*; David MacLean, *Britain and Her Buffer State: The Collapse of the Persian Empire, 1890–1914* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1979); Mahmud Mahmud, *Tārīkh-i Ravābiṭ-i Siyāsi-i Īrān va Inglīs dar Qarn-i Nūzdahum-i Milādī*, 8 vols. (Tehran: Iqbal, 1988); Vanessa Martin, ed., *Anglo-Iranian Relations since 1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Rudi Matthee and Elena Andreeva, eds., *Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and the Politics of Power in the Qajar Era* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018); H. Lyman Stebbins, *British Imperialism in Qajar Iran: Consuls, Agents and Influence in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

⁵⁵ For some examples, see Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*; Wendy DeSouza, 'Race, Slavery and Domesticity in Late Qajar Chronicles,' *Iranian Studies* 53, no. 5/6 (2020): 821–45; Willem Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2008); John D. Gurney, 'A Qajar Household and Its Estates,' *Iranian Studies* 16, no. 3/4 (1983): 137–76; Ranin Kazemi, 'The Tobacco Protest in Nineteenth-Century Iran: The View from a Provincial Town,' *Journal of Persianate Studies* 7, no. 2 (2014): 251–95; Ranin Kazemi, 'Of Diet and Profit: On the Question of Subsistence Crises in Nineteenth-Century Iran,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 2 (2016): 335–58; Ranin Kazemi, 'The Black Winter of 1860–61: War, Famine, and the Political Ecology of Disasters in Qajar Iran,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa*

between society and the state have stressed the breakdown in those relations, and especially the protests, rebellions, and general discontent that eventually led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11.⁵⁶

This book, by contrast, begins from the position that – as mentioned above – there was no fixed boundary between Qajar state and society. The task, then, is to identify, tease out, and explain the social relations that ran through Qajar political power.⁵⁷ That means highlighting the importance of conventions, mores, and codes of behavior that are often only alluded to in the textual and visual sources – that is to say, the ‘informal politics’ of Qajar government.⁵⁸ But it goes further, by questioning the very category of the ‘Qajar state,’ and instead preferring the more capacious term ‘Qajar governance,’ to mean the customs, practices, and relationships that, combined with the formal apparatus of the state, kept a political order in place.⁵⁹ A central contention of this book is that the customs, practices, and relationships at the heart of Qajar governance were critical to stitching an empire back together following the collapse and upheaval of the eighteenth century.

- and the Middle East* 37, no. 1 (2017): 24–48; Anthony A. Lee, ‘Enslaved African Women in Nineteenth-Century Iran: The Life of Fezzeh Khanom of Shiraz,’ *Iranian Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012): 417–37; Anthony A. Lee, ‘Half the Household Was African: Recovering the Histories of Two African Slaves in Iran,’ *UCLA Historical Journal* 26, no. 1 (2015): 17–38; Behnaz A. Mirzai, *A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 1800–1929* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017); Moojan Momen, ‘The Family and Early Life of Tahirih Qurrat Al-‘Ayn,’ *Bahā’i Studies Review* 11 (2003): 35–52; Moojan Momen, ‘Usuli, Akhbari, Shaykhi, Babi: The Tribulations of a Qazvin Family,’ *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2003): 317–37; Moojan Momen, ‘The Role of Women in the Iranian Bahā’i Community during the Qajar Period,’ in *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, ed. Robert Gleave (London: Routledge, 2005), 346–69.
- ⁵⁶ Vanessa Martin, *The Qajar Pact: Bargaining, Protest and the State in Nineteenth-Century Persia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Mansoureh Ettehadiéh Nezam-Mafi, ‘The Council for the Investigation of Grievances: A Case Study of Nineteenth Century Iranian Social History,’ *Iranian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1989): 51–61; Sohrabi, ‘Revolution and State Culture’; Irene Schneider, *The Petitioning System in Iran: State, Society and Power Relations in the Late 19th Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).
- ⁵⁷ Sharma and Gupta, ‘Introduction,’ 9.
- ⁵⁸ On this point, see Haruhiro Fukui, ‘Introduction: On the Significance of Informal Politics,’ in *Informal Politics in East Asia*, ed. Lowell Dittmer, Haruhiro Fukui, and Peter N. S. Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–20.
- ⁵⁹ Here I am borrowing from Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), xxiii.

A Note on Structure and Sources

The methodological approach outlined above is only possible because, despite the numerous challenges associated with conducting historical and archival research in Iran, a rich array of manuscript, archival, and published primary sources exists from the early Qajar period.⁶⁰ To put it bluntly, there is an abundance of sources, presenting an abundance of evidence, for socially oriented political histories of Qajar Iran. Over the course of seven chapters, divided into three parts, *Making and Remaking Empire* demonstrates what such an approach might look like. Following this introduction, Chapter 1 will focus on representations of legitimacy and kingship, in both textual sources and material culture, during the reigns of Agha Muhammad Khan and Fath-‘Ali Shah. The chapter shows what the political culture of Qajar imperial authority looked like – a culture that envisioned and emphasized the Qajar rulers as having reestablished balance, order, and the ‘circle of justice’ over an empire, and highlighted Qajar links with a long history of kingship in the Iranian world, but especially with the Timurid and Safavid political past. The book then moves its attention to the political and administrative practices that served as the backbone of the Qajar Empire.

Part II, comprising Chapters 2–4, emphasizes governance practices from the perspective of imperial centers – mostly Tehran and the provincial capital of Tabriz, the seat of the Qajar crown prince and heir apparent ‘Abbas Mirza. Chapter 2 focuses on the main source of revenue and wealth for Qajar rulers: the land. It begins by explaining how the conquest of the Safavid Empire’s former territories was central to Agha Muhammad Khan’s career, before explaining the continuities in land administration between the Qajars and earlier polities, with particular attention to the Qajar system of assigning land (*tuyūl*) and collecting taxes (*maliyat*). Chapter 3, meanwhile, focuses on the second major source of revenue for the Qajars: gifts and tributes. It begins by highlighting the long history of political gift-giving in the Iranian world. It then demonstrates the central role of the *pīshkīsh*, a tributary gift-giving ceremony, in the political culture and economy of Qajar Iran, and its function in presenting Qajar rule as a continuation of previous Iranian royal dynasties. The chapter then discusses

⁶⁰ See, for example, Shivan Mahendrarajah, ‘Archival Research in Iran and Afghanistan,’ *MELA Notes*, no. 89 (2016): 22–28.

how gifts and honors given by Qajar rulers to society were part of an effort of presenting themselves as just and legitimate. Finally, Chapter 4 draws attention to the shah's marriages. While dynastic marriages had long mattered in the political history of Iran, it is difficult to find a parallel to how Fath-ʿAli Shah used the practice in the early Qajar period. The shah married over 160 women and fathered over 260 children, many of whom in turn entered into numerous marriages with notable figures. By the mid-nineteenth century, an important change with far-reaching consequences had occurred in Iran: the emergence of an entire class of Qajar 'aristocracy,' composed of thousands of princes and princesses, who were directly descended from or related to the shah. The chapter highlights the social and regional background of the wives and the political considerations behind the marriages, and argues that marriage and marital practices were central in producing and reproducing Qajar political power.

Part III shifts perspective. Here the book moves its attention to the peripheries of the Qajar Empire, and how the Qajars governed in the provinces. Each of the three chapters in this part zeroes in on one province: Azerbaijan (Chapter 5), Fars (Chapter 6), and Khurasan (Chapter 7). The choice of these provinces was strategic: Azerbaijan, Fars, and Khurasan were the three most economically productive regions in early Qajar Iran; they were home to some of the major urban and cultural centers outside of Tehran; and, because they were all situated on the frontiers of the Qajar Empire, they were all places of intense contestation, negotiation, and, in the case of Azerbaijan, war. By focusing on various governance practices in these provinces, the book aims to show how the peripheries of the Qajar Empire were central to the empire's formation, and more specifically, to illustrate the dual processes of expansion and constraint of Qajar political authority.⁶¹

In Chapter 5, we see how the Qajars relied heavily on correspondence – in the form of firmans and petitions – with local tribal leaders to govern the region during the Russo-Persian Wars. The correspondence shows both an evolving relationship between the Qajars and local leaders, and that Qajar rulers were well informed of events on the war's front. In fact, local circumstances and conditions in the Caucasus clearly

⁶¹ On peripheries being central to imperial formation, see Ludden, 'The Process of Empire,' 135.

influenced Qajar rulers' political decisions. Chapter 6 is on diplomacy at the provincial level, and on the local politics that shaped it. It focuses on a minor diplomatic crisis between the Qajars and the British, which followed a rebellion among Arabs in Bushehr in February 1827. The crisis is a good example of the productive tension between normative and pragmatic governance: it created space for Qajar rulers to turn normative claims of political authority into concrete declarations of sovereignty over Iranian territory. Finally, Chapter 7 focuses on Qajar relations with the tribal khans in Khurasan, and especially with the Afshars. In the early nineteenth century, the Afshars, under the leadership of Nadir Mirza, a scion of Nadir Shah, repeatedly rebelled against Qajar rule and refused to send taxes and tributes. The chapter demonstrates how the practices discussed in prior chapters had limited success in consolidating Qajar expansion and authority in Khurasan. Here we can see the limits of Qajar political authority and imperial rule.

Serving as the foundation to the book's chapters are an array of Persian-language sources – among the core of which are narrative sources, particularly chronicles (*tārīkh*) and local histories. While some of these sources are well known to historians, others have seldom been used by them. One of the strengths of these sources is their narrative quality – they often provide a good deal of information on the political history of the period, and even on the Qajar household and their relations.⁶² Like other chronicles in the Persian historiographical tradition, however, early Qajar chronicles also have their limitations. They tend to devote most of their attention, for instance, to narrating events deemed important to the author or patron, like military campaigns, diplomatic missions and negotiations, royal accessions, and court intrigues. They also tend to depict events in a particular way – generally in the manner that the patron would want them to be presented. Nevertheless, when read carefully, they can also shed light on the political practices

⁶² The early Qajar narrative sources are too numerous to list here, but for more information, see C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, vol. 1, part 1, *Qur'anic Literature: History* (London: Luzacs & Co., 1927), 332–48. See also the catalogues of the Persian manuscripts held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the British Library: E. Blochet, ed., *Catalogue des manuscrits persans*, 4 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1905); Charles Rieu, ed., *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols. (London: British Museum, 1876); Charles Rieu, ed., *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1895).

and social ties that shaped Qajar rule. Some of these chronicles were written by ministers and secretaries (*munshī*) serving the Qajar government, but others were written by Qajar princes themselves, providing clues to the cultural worlds and imaginative universes of the people who wrote them and for whom they were intended.⁶³

Another critical corpus of sources to this book, in addition to the narrative sources, are firmans, and, to a lesser extent, petitions.⁶⁴ In fact, firmans and petitions are central to the story, because they often are the clearest expression of the relationship between rulers and the ruled. Petitions can shed light on the concerns of subject populations, while firmans are an excellent window onto the intentions and political objectives of rulers. This becomes most evident in Chapters 5 and 6, which draw heavily on these sources. And yet, despite their usefulness for understanding a wide range of issues, including governance practices, public law, political ethics, and even socioeconomic conditions and concerns, this is among the first studies of Qajar history to draw on firmans and petitions in a sustained manner.⁶⁵

⁶³ The seminal study of a medieval Islamic society's cultural world that is largely based on narrative sources is Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*. On 'imaginative universe,' see Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,' in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 13. Examples of early Qajar chronicles written by ministers include the major chronicles like *Tārīkh-i Muḥammadi*, *Tārīkh-i Zā al-Qarnayn*, and *Tārīkh-i Jahān-Āra*, while narrative sources written by princes include *Tārīkh-i Ṣāhib-Qirānī*, *Tārīkh-i 'Azudī*, and *Tārīkh-i Naw*. For more on these sources, see Chapter 1.

⁶⁴ In Persian, the words *farman*, *raqam*, and *manshar* are among the terms used to refer to royal decrees, but following the conventions of *IJMES*, this book refers to them as firmans (and sometimes *raqam*). Jahangir Qa'im-Maqami suggests that the term *raqam* was used as a near synonym for *farman* since the Safavid period, except that *raqam* almost always referred to orders issued by princes rather than by shahs. For more on these types of sources, see Jahangir Qa'im-Maqami, *Muqaddamih'ī bar Shīmakht-i Asnad-i Tārīkhī* (Tehran: Anjuman-i Asar-i Milli, 1350 Sh./1971), 44–48, 74–79. For more on firmans of the early Qajar period, and especially on the formal stylistic features of the documents, see 'Alī Sam, *Bar'īst-yi Farman Nīst-yi Dawrīh-yi Avval-i Qajar* (Tehran: Kilk-i Zarrin, 1392 Sh./2013); and Huriyyih Sa'īdi, *Bāzshīnāshī-yi Ravand-i Taṭāvūr va Tahavvul-i Farman'hā dar Dīvānsālārī-yi Īrān-i Dawrīh-yi Qājār: Bar Asās-i Guz'idih'ī az Farman'hā-yi Mawjūd dar Ārshtv-i Millī-yi Īrān* (Tehran: Sazman-i Asnad va Kitabhānīh-yi Millī-yi Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī-yi Īrān, 1399 Sh./2020).

⁶⁵ On the importance of firmans for the study of 'public law,' see Said Amir Arjomand, 'Political Ethic and Public Law in the Early Qajar Period,' in Gleave, *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, 22. A notable exception to the lack of studies which draw on firmans is Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*.

One possible explanation for why many historians have neglected Qajar-era firmans and petitions may be the difficulties associated with collecting and reading them. At a basic level, the firmans are scattered across different libraries and archives in Iran and around the world, in edited volumes, and even buried in manuscripts. Only a fraction of early Qajar firmans have been used or studied, often in Persian-language scholarly journals like *Bar'ris̄'hā-yi Tārīkhī*, *Yaghma*, *Vahīd*, or *Ganjīnih-yi Asnād*. More recently, researchers at the University of Bamberg have drawn attention to Persian historical documents by creating a remarkable online database of sources, including firmans, from pre-twentieth-century Iran and Central Asia.⁶⁶ Moreover, the language typically employed in early Qajar firmans can be daunting. Firmans often begin by addressing the recipient with a series of titles and honorifics that can extend to several lines, and which to a modern reader can seem excessive, superfluous, even distracting. The message contained in the firman – the core of the text – likewise tends to be written in the ornate and formal style of Persian diplomacy that was typical in the premodern period. Yet another challenge is related to their historical veracity; it is difficult to determine whether firmans were actually executed. It is often impossible to know from reading a firman what actually happened after it was written. Was the firman delivered to the addressed person? Did the addressee follow the orders? How effectively or successfully were the orders executed? How was the firman received, and what effect did it have? Reading a firman in isolation, in other words, gives no indication of whether and how it was carried out.⁶⁷

Despite these challenges, however, firmans are useful for socially oriented political histories in several ways. First, their baroque language can furnish important historical clues in its own way. Firmans were not unchanging over time; their language and style reflect the political ideology of the particular ruler who issued them. Safavid decrees from the early sixteenth century, for instance, often referred to

⁶⁶ See 'Digital Persian Archive,' Universität Bamberg, www.uni-bamberg.de/iranistik/forschung/asnadorg-digital-persian-archive/.

⁶⁷ Some of these issues are discussed in the following entries: Bert G. Fragner, 'Farmān,' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_9574; H. Busse, U. Heyd, and P. Hardy, 'Farmān,' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0213.

the shah as having received his mandate from the Prophet Muhammad and the twelve Imams, and as being dedicated to the propagation of Islam (*tarvīj-i dīn-i mubīn*).⁶⁸ Much of that ideological and ‘extreme’ (*ghuluww*) language which underpinned early Safavid rule had been stripped away or changed considerably by the time of Qajar rule in the early nineteenth century. Firmans, therefore, can tell us about the ideology, ambitions, and objectives of the ruler who issued them. Second, firmans usually name the addressee and therefore functioned as a form of political correspondence. Read in such a way, they can offer clues about the relationship between the two sides. Moreover, firmans were often issued in response to petitions and, even in cases where the original petition to which the firman was a response is unavailable or missing, were part of a larger corpus of political correspondence. Using firmans provides historians a more complete, if still imperfect, picture of the relationship between the two sides in the correspondence – the petitioner and the ruler – and sometimes, allows us to even chart the evolution of the relationship.

Two final bodies of sources used in this book are early Qajar literary and diplomatic sources. The literary sources include biographical dictionaries (*tazkīrīh*), poetry, and travelogues, while diplomatic sources include the correspondence written or copied by the British, French, and Russians, all of whom had a political and economic presence in Iran in the early nineteenth century. Any student of nineteenth-century Iranian history – or indeed Middle Eastern history more generally – will know that there is an ocean of relevant European political and diplomatic sources. In the case of early nineteenth-century Iran, these sources include the records of European trading companies like the English East India Company as well as various imperial governments, like the British, French, and Russians. While these sources are used in this book, they are largely used in an auxiliary fashion – to supplement Persian-language sources rather than be the focus. As will hopefully become clear, this book very much prioritizes the Persian-language sources, of which there is no shortage.

⁶⁸ For an example of this type of language, see the firman by Shah Tahmasb, dated September 26, 1534 (Rabīʿ 7, I), in ‘Abd al-Husayn Navaʿi, ed., *Shāh Tahmāsb-i Šāfāvī: Majmūʿih-yi Asnād va Mukātabāt-i Tārīkhī hamrāh bā Yaddashtʿha-yi Tafṣīlī* (Tehran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1350 Sh./1971), 513–14.

Finally, it will become clear that the socially oriented approach taken here is in fact grounded in the sources and not an attempt to impose a theoretical model upon reality. Social relations, familial ties, and indeed notions like trust, loyalty, and reciprocity can be detected in the sources for anyone willing to look for them. The sources repeatedly refer to, for example, the ‘sincere loyalty and devotion’ (*ikhhlāṣ va ‘ubūdiyyat-i arastih*), ‘petitions of loyalty’ (*‘artzihi-yi ‘ubūdiyyat*), and ‘fitting tributes’ (*pīshkishi-lā‘iq*) by subjects. Persian-language political ethical treatises or ‘mirrors for princes’ (*andarznāma*) from the Qajar period point to a mutually beneficial relationship between rulers and the ruled, and not distinct dichotomies between state and society. Chroniclers like Mirza Fazlullah ‘Khavari’ Shirazi, a court historian under Fath-‘Ali Shah who wrote *Tarikh-i Zā al-Qarnayn*, wrote glowingly about the shah entrusting to his most trusted advisers the questions and concerns petitioners sent him, of treating the lowliest servants – let alone the most notable governor – with utmost respect.⁶⁹ And the practices highlighted in this book – land assignment, gift-giving, marriage, correspondence, provincial diplomacy – appear over and over again across various kinds of sources: official Qajar histories, documents, and records, but also poetry, painting, rock reliefs, and diplomatic sources. To give but one example of how often these practices appear in the sources when one is looking for them: in an ode (*qasidih*) addressed to the Qajar minister Hajji Mirza Aqasi, the prominent early Qajar poet Mirza Habibullah ‘Qa’ani’ Shirazi praises Aqasi at length for his various qualities – his greatness (*‘ulaw*), his generosity (*jād*), his bounty (*navāl*). Then, toward the end of the poem, in just one single line, Qa’ani refers to three of the practices that appear in this book – land (*tuyūl*), gifts (*in ‘ām*), and robes of honor (*khil‘at*). The poem suggests that Qa’ani received all three from Aqasi and the shah.⁷⁰

Qajar Iran: An Empire Remade

Over the course of its seven chapters, this book will show that the Qajars remade a tributary empire, modeled on earlier empires but

⁶⁹ Mirza Fazlullah ‘Khavari’ Shirazi, *Tarikh-i Zā al-Qarnayn*, ed. Nasir Afsharfard, 2 vols. (Tehran: Kitabkhanih, Muzih va Markaz-i Asnad-i Majlis-i Shura-yi Islami, 1380 Sh./2001), 2:964–66.

⁷⁰ Mirza Habibullah ‘Qa’ani’ Shirazi, *Dirvan* (Tehran, AH 1277/1860–61), 223–24.

adapted to its own particular historical circumstances. The book's argument reframes three debates in the scholarship on Qajar Iran: the debate on the rise of the Qajars; on the transition to 'modern' Iran; and on how Qajar Iran compares with other empires. As will become clearer, the rise of the Qajars should be placed, first and foremost, in the context of a long-standing tradition of Perso-Islamic and Turco-Mongolian empires. In fact, a central thread in this book is of the *longue durée* continuities between Qajar institutions and practices, and those of earlier polities. There were, of course, notable differences between Qajar political culture and that of earlier dynasties: the Qajars were not, for example, nomadic rulers. Dream narratives were not central to their claims to legitimacy.⁷¹ Any notions of sacred kingship – that the king himself was of semidivine status – had greatly diminished by the early nineteenth century.⁷² And unlike the Safavids, the Qajars' claims to legitimacy did not depend on even the pretense of being descended from the Shi'i Imams.⁷³ But these differences are outweighed by other similarities.

Nowhere are the continuities between the Qajars and the past clearer than in Persian historiography itself, and in the concepts and terms those sources deployed. Genres that had existed for centuries, like biographical dictionaries (*tazkīrih*), travelogues (*safarnāma*), and political ethical treatises (*andarznāma*), continued to be written into the Qajar period. And early Qajar chronicles continued a tradition of Persian historical writing that stretched back to at least the tenth century. That textual tradition grew and evolved over time but really flourished in the post-Mongol period, with further developments under the Timurids and Safavids.⁷⁴ The result was that, by the early Qajar period, chronicles couched the language of imperial rule in a Perso-Islamic idiom of kingship colored with Turco-Mongolian

⁷¹ On this point, see Nobuaki Kondo, 'How to Found a New Dynasty: The Early Qajars' Quest for Legitimacy,' *Journal of Persianate Studies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 261–87.

⁷² On sacred kingship in the post-Timur eastern Islamic lands, see A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁷³ Even during the Safavid period, there were 'ulama who did not accept the Safavids' claims. See Lambton, 'A Nineteenth Century View of Jihād,' 184–85.

⁷⁴ Elton L. Daniel, 'The Rise and Development of Persian Historiography,' in *A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 10, *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles P. Melville (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 101–54.

terms.⁷⁵ Concepts like justice, which long undergirded political legitimacy, continued to be central in Qajar political culture. Political offices that were at the heart of Qajar administration, like the *ṣadr-i a'zam* (premier or grand vizier), *mustawfī al-mamālik* (imperial treasurer), *munshī al-mamālik* (imperial secretary), or the *ṣāhib-i dīvān* (head of the *dīvān*), can be found in earlier polities of the Iranian and broader Islamic world. The words associated with Qajar political practices – like *tuyūl* (a form of land assignment), *pīshkīsh* (a gift or tribute), or *farmān* (a royal decree) – had long histories, referring to practices used for centuries before the Qajars came to power. And terms used to refer to Qajar rulers, like *shāh* and *shāhanshāh*, had ancient Persian roots, while others had Islamic roots, like *nā'ib-i mahdī* (deputy of the Mahdi) and *nā'ib-i ṣāhib-i 'aṣr va zaman* (deputy of the Lord of the Age), or Turco-Mongolian ones, like *khāqān* (khan of khans). Another term, *ṣāhib-qirān* (Lord of Conjunction), may have had Middle Persian origins, but first came to be used in New Persian historiography in the thirteenth century, before becoming closely associated with Timur in the fourteenth century.⁷⁶ One of the main chronicles of the early Qajar period, written by Mahmud Mirza, Fath-ʿAli Shah's fifteenth son, was called *Tārīkh-i ṣāhib-Qirānī*.⁷⁷ And Khavari's chronicle, arguably the most comprehensive and important of Fath-ʿAli Shah's reign, and one used extensively in this book, is called *Tārīkh-i Zū al-Qarnayn*, a title that derives from

⁷⁵ For more on kingship in the post-Mongol world, see Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially 6–26. See also Charles P. Melville, 'Concepts of Government and State Formation in Mongol Iran,' in *Iran after the Mongols*, ed. Sussan Babaie, *The Idea of Iran* 8 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 33–54. See also Thomas T. Allsen, 'Technologies of Governance in the Mongolian Empire: A Geographic Overview,' in *Imperial Statecraft: Political Forms and Techniques of Governance in Inner Asia, Sixth–Twentieth Centuries*, ed. David Sneath (Bellingham: Western Washington University Press, 2006), 117–40.

⁷⁶ Naindeep Singh Chann, 'Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction: Origins of the *Ṣāhib-Qirān*,' *Iran & the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (2009): 93–110. See also Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*.

⁷⁷ The chronicle was completed in 1832 and published in a critical edition for the first time in 2011. Mahmud Mirza Qajar, *Tārīkh-i Ṣāhib-Qirānī: Havadis-i Tārīkh-i Silsilih-yi Qājār (1190–1248 A.H.)*, ed. Nadirih Jalali (Tehran: Kitabkhanih, Muzih va Markaz-i Asnad-i Majlis-i Shura-yi Islami, 1389 Sh./2011).

the Qur'anic term (*dhā al-qarnayn*, 'the two-horned') that later commentators interpreted as being an allusion to Alexander the Great.⁷⁸

It should be said that modern historians have long been aware of these deep connections between the Qajar idiom of kingship and rule to those of previous eras and dynasties. As early as 1933, in a monumental work of history that was never fully completed, the Iranian literary scholar and historian 'Abbas Iqbal drew attention to these continuities by placing the Qajars at the end of a long period of history in Iran that began with the Mongol invasion and ended with the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11.⁷⁹ Iqbal's framing was emblematic, and to some extent a harbinger, of many fine studies that traced the political concepts and institutions that defined the Qajar era back to the Mongol, Seljuq, or even early Islamic periods – works like those by Ann Lambton, and more recently, Gene Garthwaite, who argued in favor of viewing the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries as one coherent period in Iranian history.⁸⁰

But few historians have emphasized how the Qajars went about resuscitating an imperial past.⁸¹ Instead, the emphasis has been on other aspects of the Qajars' rise. Much of the earliest scholarship narrated their rise as a 'tribal' story. Derived from the narratives found in Persian-language sources, and the Qajar chronicles themselves, these

⁷⁸ W. Montgomery Watt, 'al-Iskandar,' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3630.

⁷⁹ 'Abbas Iqbal, *Tārīkh-i Mufaṣṣal-i Īrān* (Tehran, 1312 Sh./1933). Although only the first volume of this work was published during Iqbal's own lifetime, the intended four volumes were to cover the history of Iran from the Mongol to the Qajar period. Iqbal referred to himself as among Iran's first historians to follow a 'modern' concept of history. See *Tārīkh-i Mufaṣṣal-i Īrān*, ii.

⁸⁰ Ann K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953); Ann K. S. Lambton, *Theory and Practice in Medieval Persian Government* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980); Gene R. Garthwaite, 'Transition: The End of the Old Order – Iran in the Eighteenth Century,' in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 3, *The Eastern Islamic World, Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 504–26; Garthwaite, "'What's in a Name?'" Garthwaite argues that at least four themes in Islamic history – pastoral nomad confederations, the rise of the 'ulama, a division between temporal and religious kingship, and the rise of Persian as an administrative language – define this six-century period of time beginning with the Mongols and stretching into the nineteenth century.

⁸¹ An exception is the brief discussion in Amanat, *Iran*, 181–86.

works situate Agha Muhammad Khan's career in the tribal politics, rivalries, allegiances, and battles of late eighteenth-century Iran.⁸² Scholars tended to highlight continuities in the specifically 'tribal' modes of rule between the Qajars and earlier dynasties. Then, in the late 1950s and even more so during the 1960s, a new wave of historians began to place the rise of the Qajars in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century developments in Shi'ism. Influenced by a turn at the time toward intellectual and social history, historians of Iran became interested in the question of what the Shi'i 'ulama's attitudes toward political power were.⁸³ For these historians, then, the key to

⁸² In European-language scholarship, this argument can be traced to at least 1815, when John Malcolm published his two-volume *The History of Persia from the Most Early Period to the Present Time* (London: John Murray, 1815). See especially *The History of Persia*, 2:203–61. Malcolm's *History*, in turn, relied on several Persian chronicles that he had collected during his missions to Iran in 1801, 1806, and 1810. For a discussion of these sources, see A. K. S. Lambton, 'Major-General Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833) and "The History of Persia,"' *Iran* 33 (1995): 104–6. See also, Ebrahimnejad, *Pouvoir et Succession en Iran*, 110–48; Gavin Hambly, 'Āgha Muḥammad Khān and the Establishment of the Qājār Dynasty,' in Avery et al., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7:104–43; Leonard Helfgott, 'The Rise of the Qajar Dynasty: The Political Economy of Tribalism in Eighteenth Century Persia' (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1978); Lambton, 'The Qājār Dynasty'; Ali Mossadegh, 'Une introduction à la stabilisation des Qājārs au début de 19e siècle,' in *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies*, vol. 2, *Medieval and Modern Persian Studies*, ed. Charles P. Melville (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), 327–36; Roger Savory, 'The Qajars: "The Last of the Qezelbaş,"' in *Society and Culture in Qajar Iran: Studies in Honor of Hafez Farmayan*, ed. Elton L. Daniel (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 3–32; and Sha'bani, *Hizār Fāmīl*.

⁸³ For a discussion of how these trends shaped Iranian studies, see the 'Autobiographical Interview' and especially pages 336–37 in Nikki R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). The scholarship can be further broken down into two groups: the first was primarily interested in Shi'i intellectual history and how Shi'i thought influenced the political sphere, while the second still paid attention to the ideas and intellectual contributions of religious thinkers, but tended to treat the 'ulama as a social class and to explain their influence in politics through their social and economic interests. For examples of the first group: Ann K. S. Lambton, 'Quis Custodiet Custodes? Some Reflections on the Persian Theory of Government (Conclusion),' *Studia Islamica*, no. 6 (1956): 125–46; Lambton, 'Some New Trends in Islamic Political Thought'; Nikki R. Keddie, 'Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, no. 3 (1962): 265–95; Nikki R. Keddie, 'The Origins of the Religious-Radical Alliance in Iran,' *Past & Present*, no. 34 (1966): 70–80; Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The*

understanding the rise of the Qajars was to understand how and why the Qajars not only drew on but relied on the ideological and political support of an ascendant Shi'i clerical class at the turn of the nineteenth century.⁸⁴ A parallel trend emerged during the 1960s, this time under the influence of developments in the social sciences and Weberian theories of state formation. Historians began to pay greater attention to Qajar administrative history and to the Qajar state's bureaucratic capacity.⁸⁵ As a result of this school, the early Qajar period came to be seen as a precursor to later nineteenth-century attempts, under the rule of Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96), to create a more centralized, bureaucratic, and by extension 'modern' state.⁸⁶ This book, in

Tobacco Protest of 1891–1892 (London: Cass, 1966); Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*; Nikki R. Keddie, 'Pan-Islam as Proto-nationalism,' *The Journal of Modern History* 41, no. 1 (1969): 17–28; Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Dīn 'al-Afghānī*. For examples of the second group: Ann K. S. Lambton, 'A Reconsideration of the Position of the Marja' al-Taqlīd and the Religious Institution,' *Studia Islamica*, no. 20 (1964): 115–35; Nikki R. Keddie, 'The Roots of the Ulama's Power in Modern Iran,' *Studia Islamica*, no. 29 (1969): 31–53; Algar, *Religion and State in Iran*; Said Amir Arjomand, 'The Shi'ite Hierocracy and the State in Pre-modern Iran: 1785–1890,' *European Journal of Sociology* 22 (1981): 40–78; Said Amir Arjomand, 'The Office of Mulla-Bashi in Shi'ite Iran,' *Studia Islamica*, no. 57 (1983): 135–46; Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 215–59; Cole, 'Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran'; Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, especially 33–69; Abbas Amanat, 'In between the Madrasa and the Marketplace: The Designation of Clerical Leadership in Modern Shi'ism,' in Arjomand, *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, 98–132.

⁸⁴ Ann K. S. Lambton, 'The Impact of the West on Persia,' *International Affairs* 33, no. 1 (1957): 12–25; 'Abd al-Hadi Ha'iri, *Nakhushtīn Rūyārūt'hā-yi Andīshihgarān-i Īrān bā du Rūya-i Tamaddun-i Būzhuwāzī-i Gharb* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1367 Sh./1988); Abdul-Hadi Hairi, 'The Legitimacy of the Early Qajar Rule as Viewed by the Shi'i Religious Leaders,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 3 (1988): 271–86; Ahmad Kazemi Musavi, *Khaqān-i Ṣāhib-Qīran va 'Ulamā-yi Zamān: Naqsh-i Fath-'Alī Shāh Qājār dar Shikl-Gīrī-yi Ravand'hā va Nahād'hā-yi Mazhabī-yi Naw* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Agah, 1397 Sh./2018).

⁸⁵ Ann K. S. Lambton, 'Persian Society under the Qajars,' *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 48, no. 2 (1961): 123–39; 'Abdullah Mustawfi, *Sharḥ-i Zindigānī-yi Man: Tārīkh-i Ijtīmā'ī va Idārī-i Dawrih-yi Qājāriyyih* (Tehran: Zuvvar, 1343 Sh./1964); Vanessa Martin, 'An Evaluation of Reform and Development of the State in the Early Qajar Period,' *Die Welt Des Islams* 36 (1996): 1–24; Colin Meredith, 'Early Qajar Administration: An Analysis of Its Development and Functions,' *Iranian Studies* 4 (1971): 59–84.

⁸⁶ For studies on Qajar efforts to create a centralized bureaucracy, see Shaul Bakhash, 'The Evolution of Qajar Bureaucracy: 1779–1879,' *Middle Eastern*

contrast to these three prevailing frameworks, insists that the rise of the Qajars should be situated in the long tradition of empire-making in the Iranian world, stretching from the Achaemenids and Sasanians to the Timurids and Safavids.

Chapter 1 elaborates these points in greater detail and shows how historical, literary, and politico-religious texts of the early Qajar period, along with material objects like paintings and portraiture, articulated a discourse of Qajar power and authority grounded in the concepts mentioned briefly here. The chapter shows that the concept of a 'circle of justice' ran through Qajar claims of having resurrected an empire and of being legitimate rulers. Imperial pretensions can also be seen in the paintings and portraiture of Qajar shahs, especially of Fath-ʿAli Shah, in the rock reliefs constructed by the Qajars during the early nineteenth century that emulated those of pre-Islamic Iranian dynasties like the Sasanians and Achaemenids, and even in the political and bureaucratic offices of the early Qajar administration, all of which were modeled on the administrative apparatus of other empires. The Qajars clearly saw themselves as rulers of an empire.

Making Empire in Qajar Iran

This brings us to the second intervention of this book. While it is true that the terms *shāhanshāh* and *khāqān* had long histories, as did practices like land assignment or gift-giving in the Iranian world, these terms and practices were used in a new, early nineteenth-century context – a context first and foremost born out of Iran's eighteenth-century turmoil, but also of expanding European empires. After Agha Muhammad Khan conquered the lands formerly under Safavid rule, he and especially his successor, Fath-ʿAli Shah, began building relationships and ties with the tribal khans, urban notables, and provincial elites they would need to sustain their rule. And in both the Caucasus (where the Russian Empire was expanding south) and in the Persian Gulf (where the British Empire was ascendant) the Qajars encountered empires with new technologies and capabilities.

Studies 7 (1971): 139–68; Bakhash, *Iran*; A. Reza Sheikholeslami, 'The Patrimonial Structure of Iranian Bureaucracy in the Late Nineteenth Century,' *Iranian Studies* 11 (1978): 199–258; and Sheikholeslami, *The Structure of Central Authority*.

Situating Qajar governance in this early nineteenth-century context clarifies a process of change. This may seem counterintuitive, since ‘thick descriptions’ of culture tend to tell us more about what went on, rather than how things changed.⁸⁷ But as it will become abundantly clear in this book, paying close attention to *how* the Qajars administered land, received gifts and tributes, entered into marriage alliances, used political correspondence, engaged in diplomacy following local uprisings, and pursued relations with tribal khans – each of the practices that is the subject of chapters in this book – shows that these practices were shaped by specificities of time and place. The Qajars may have seen themselves as latter-day Timurid or Safavid rulers, but their political authority was grounded in the realities of early nineteenth-century Iran.⁸⁸

Qajar kingship drew on a range of symbols and imagery from pre-Islamic to Safavid Iran, buttressing their claims of having resuscitated an older imperial system. But, as even Chapter 1 will show, it also was in clear conversation with newer modes of sovereignty, including European kingship, and helped the Qajars present themselves to their own subjects and foreign powers as sovereigns.⁸⁹ In

⁸⁷ For a discussion of how anthropological theories of culture can be modified to take into account the possibility of cultural change, see Sewell, Jr., ‘History, Synchrony, and Culture,’ 175–96. For a similar discussion in the context of Ottoman history, see Alan Mikhail and Christine M. Philliou, ‘The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn,’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 725–30. To give an idea of the breadth and variety of work that combines historical and anthropological methods, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdaglis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*; Munis D. Faruqi, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Abhishek Kaicker, *The King and the People: Sovereignty and Popular Politics in Mughal Delhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁸⁸ For a few examples of Safavid-era studies that combine an analysis of discourse and practice, see Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Colin Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion and Rhetoric* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

⁸⁹ On Qajar kingship, see, for instance, Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*; Amanat, ‘The Kayanid Crown’; Sussan Babaie, ‘In the Eye of the Storm: Visualizing the Qajar Axis of Kingship,’ *Artibus Asiae* 66, no. 2 (2006): 35–54.

many instances, Qajar governance practices facilitated the building of relationships with tribal khans, urban notable, and provincial elites. As we will see in Part II, the assignment of land, the giving of gifts, and the shah's marriages all facilitated this process of building ties with notables. Even the correspondence that forms the bedrock of Chapter 5 shows a growing and evolving relationship between the Qajars and the Kangarlu tribal khans in Azerbaijan. Chapters 5 and 6 also demonstrate that the Qajars were able to meet some of the challenges posed by European empires – by mobilizing resources against the Russians, and by asserting their sovereignty over the Persian Gulf coast – but they simultaneously fell short. The Qajars did ultimately lose two wars against the Russians, and ceded control of the Gulf to the British.

In other situations, governance practices were tools for circulating information, news, local concerns, and for managing resources across a multidirectional empire. Chapter 5, but also Chapter 6 on the Bushehr revolt, is a good example of how political correspondence, in the form of firmans and petitions, served as a conduit through which information circulated. Provincial circumstances and local concerns reached Qajar rulers in Tabriz and Tehran, and those concerns and circumstances in turn shaped Qajar political decision-making and management of resources. Again and again, this book will demonstrate that Qajar rule was profoundly grounded in social and economic realities. In many other examples throughout this book, correspondence crisscrossed Qajar territories tying various regions and provinces to political centers as well as peripheries to one another. To imagine Qajar Iran as having one center (Tehran) connected to various provinces and peripheries – akin to a wheel with spokes radiating from a center – would be to miss a vastly more complex web of relationships and ties.⁹⁰ There were in fact multiple centers and multiple peripheries in Qajar Iran.

Meanwhile, the case of Khurasan illustrates the aftershocks of the collapse and fragmentation of the Safavid Empire in eighteenth-century Iran. The Afsharids, a local dynasty descended from Nadir Shah,

⁹⁰ On the 'hub-and-spoke' metaphor for understanding the Ottoman Empire's system of center-periphery relations, see Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9; and Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23–25.

continued to claim political authority in the province well after the death of Nadir. Chapter 7 brings this theme to the foreground. Qajar efforts to use land assignment, marriage alliances, and correspondence to build relationships with the Afsharids – practices discussed in the previous chapters – repeatedly fell short, and Afsharid leaders resisted and refused to submit to Qajar rule. The same system of governance that had helped build Qajar political authority was met with resistance in Khurasan.

This depiction of the early Qajars as ruling over a dynamic empire, and as attempting to meet the demands of the time, is vastly different than the prevailing image in the scholarly literature. Much of the literature has framed the early Qajar period as a prelude to the main story – most especially as ‘setting the stage’ for later nineteenth-century transformations: the attempts at political, economic, and legal modernization during reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96).⁹¹ These are basically teleological narratives that understand the early Qajar period through the lens of explaining modernity in Iran. Some of this literature has been devoted exclusively to the early nineteenth-century wars with Russia and the extent to which those wars did or did not trigger modernization efforts.⁹² Characterizations of the Qajar state and of Qajar rulers, in this body of literature, range from ‘weak,’ ‘arbitrary,’ ‘despotic,’ to ‘a failed attempt at ... absolutism’ and uninterested or unable to govern.⁹³ The Qajar shah’s ‘real power,’ we are

⁹¹ On ‘setting the stage,’ see, Amanat, *Iran*, 177. Amanat’s excellent discussion of early Qajar kingship in the context of historical Persian, Turco-Mongolian, and Islamic institutions nevertheless serves as an introduction to the main story: Nasir al-Din Shah’s life and reign. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 7–13. For studies on Qajar efforts to create a centralized bureaucracy, see Shaul Bakhash, ‘The Evolution of Qajar Bureaucracy: 1779–1879,’ *Middle Eastern Studies* 7 (1971): 139–68; Bakhash, *Iran*; Sheikholeslami, ‘Patrimonial Structure’; and Sheikholeslami, *The Structure of Central Authority*.

⁹² See, for instance, Maziar Behrooz, *Iran at War: Interactions with the Modern World and the Struggle with Imperial Russia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2023). George Bournoutian, on the other hand, has produced a finely researched but rather old-fashioned military history of the first Russo-Persian War and its effects: Bournoutian, *From the Kur to the Aras*.

⁹³ For these descriptions of the Qajars, see, respectively, Ann K. S. Lambton, ‘The Case of Ḥājī Nūr al-Dīn, 1823–47: A Study in Land Tenure,’ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 30, no. 1 (1967): 71–72; Ervand Abrahamian, ‘Oriental Despotism: The Case of Qajar Iran,’ *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5, no. 1 (1974): 3–31; and Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 47. Left unspoken in much of this scholarship is

told, 'ran no further than his capital.'⁹⁴ A second school of thought has focused on the European-influenced Iranian elite who pushed for European political ideas, institutions, and technologies, or social and cultural values, in Iran, some of whom were active in the early nineteenth century.⁹⁵ Later historians took a different approach, and pointed out that nineteenth-century Iran was part of a global story of European imperialism – of Europeans seeking access to raw materials, cheap labor, and new markets abroad.⁹⁶ European imperialism, according to this school, led to Iran's integration into a global

the fact that the terms and concepts used are derived from a Eurocentric perspective. For revisionist assessments of the Qajar period, see Alessandro Bausani, 'The Qajar Period: An Epoch of Decadence?' in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social, and Cultural Change, 1800–1925*, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Carole Hillenbrand, and L. P. Elwell-Sutton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 255–60; and Ehsan Yarshater, 'The Qajar Era in the Mirror of Time,' *Iranian Studies* 34, no. 1/4 (2001): 187–94. Provincial histories, meanwhile, emphasize processes of political decentralization or to situate specific provinces in isolation from other provinces or even from the political center. See James D. Clark, *Provincial Concerns: A Political History of the Iranian Province of Azerbaijan, 1848–1906* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2006); Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf: Bushehr: City, Society, and Trade, 1797–1947* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2016); Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf: Links with the Hinterland: Bushehr, Borazjan, Kazerun, Banu Ka'b, & Bandar Abbas* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2011); James M. Gustafson, *Kirman and the Qajar Empire: Local Dimensions of Modernity in Iran, 1794–1914* (London: Routledge, 2015); Mohammad 'Ali Kazembeyki, *Society, Politics and Economics in Mazandaran, Iran, 1848–1914* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Heidi Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King: Zill al-Sultan and Isfahan under the Qajars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008); and Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*. For a survey on the scholarship on 'notables' in Iranian history, see Masashi Haneda, 'Iran,' in *Islamic Urban Studies: Historical Review and Perspective*, ed. Masashi Haneda and Tōru Miura (London: Kegan Paul International, 1994), 235–80, especially 252–57.

⁹⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8–9.

⁹⁵ Stephanie Cronin, 'Importing Modernity: European Military Missions to Qajar Iran,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 1 (2008): 197–226; Martin, 'An Evaluation of Reform'; Daniel T. Potts, *A Nook in the Temple of Fame: French Military Officers in Persian Service, 1807–1826* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2022).

⁹⁶ For a good introduction to these 'contending visions' of Middle Eastern history, see Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 38–99, 149–215.

capitalist economy, disruptions to local economies, sharpening of class divides, concessions, and massive debt.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, resistance to these various forms of Western hegemony – by some ‘ulama, thinkers, and politicians – has often been used to explain how and why the Islamic revolution of 1979 took place in Iran.⁹⁸

The underlying logic to all of this work is the same: at the turn of the nineteenth century, Iranians encountered the West, were shaken out of

⁹⁷ This literature is vast and diverse, but for some examples, see Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*; A. Reza Arasteh, *Education and Social Awakening in Iran, 1850–1968* (Leiden: E. Brill, 1969); Mangol Bayat, *Iran’s First Revolution: Shi’ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Juan Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha’i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Shireen Mahdavi, *For God, Mammon, and Country*; Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989); David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Monica M. Ringer, *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2001); Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1902–1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran, 1921–1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961); Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964); Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870–1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Mikiya Koyagi, *Iran in Motion: Mobility, Space, and the Trans-Iranian Railway* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021); Michael Rubin, ‘The Formation of Modern Iran, 1858–1909: Communications, Telegraph and Society’ (PhD diss., Yale University, 1999); and Cyrus Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁹⁸ Hamid Algar was among the first – even before the 1979 revolution – to argue that the Shi’i ‘ulama historically played an oppositional role in Iranian politics. See Hamid Algar, ‘The Oppositional Role of the Ulama in Twentieth-Century Iran,’ in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 231–55. For a couple of other examples, see, Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The*

their slumber, and responded by either copying Europeans or resisting them.⁹⁹ Some of these historians even went so far as to pinpoint the moment when Iranians ‘woke up’ to the West: the two rounds of wars against the Russians.¹⁰⁰ This book, by honing in on how the Qajars governed, reveals a much more complex history.

Old practices persisted, but they also changed in response to the conditions of the times – both domestic and global. Earlier forms of power and authority survived the collapse of the Safavid Empire, to be picked up again by the Qajars. The Qajars used those forms of power and authority in new historical circumstances. The view from the center looked different than from the peripheries. Qajar political authority was, in short, constructed. It was a process. It was uneven. There were no clean breaks between the modern and the ‘premodern’ periods. Instead, Qajar Iran was a dynamic and evolving empire with overlapping processes of continuity and change.¹⁰¹

Qajar Imperial Formation: Toward a Global Perspective

This way of conceptualizing the early Qajar period – as a time of an emerging and evolving empire – leads to this book’s final intervention: of placing the history of the Qajar period in greater and closer conversation with the arguments and debates animating other scholarly fields. With a few, albeit notable, exceptions – for instance, in the scholarship on nineteenth-century political and administrative reforms, or in the literature on the Constitutional Revolution – Qajar

Islamic Revolution in Iran (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3–90; and Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

⁹⁹ For example, see Hooshang Amirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran under the Qajars: Society, Politics, Economics and Foreign Relations, 1796–1926* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

¹⁰⁰ This argument is made in both Firaydun Adamiyat and Homa Nategh, *Afkar-i Ijtimā’i va Siyāsī va Iqtisādī dar Āsār-i Muntashir Nashudih-yi Dawran-i Qajār*, 4th ed. (Tehran: Intisharat-i Agah, 1399 Sh./2020), 27; and Arjomand, ‘Political Ethic and Public Law in the Early Qajar Period,’ 33.

¹⁰¹ For a critique along these lines, of the use of ‘modernity’ as a category of historical analysis, see Daniel Lord Smail and Andrew Shryock, ‘History and the “Pre,”’ *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 3 (2013): 709–37.

Iran is not situated in meaningful comparative historical frameworks. Take the scholarship on empires and imperial formation. Although the Safavids, at least, are included amongst the ‘gunpowder empires,’ and compared to the Ottoman and Mughal empires, the Qajars are, for the most part, excluded from this literature.¹⁰² Historians can barely even agree on whether the Qajar polity was, in fact, an empire. They instead refer to it inconsistently as the ‘Qajar state,’ or the ‘Qajar government,’ or simply ‘Qajar Iran.’¹⁰³ Further complicating matters is the fact that Iran was never formally colonized by European powers, as Mughal India and parts of the Ottoman Empire were, and is therefore occasionally left out of comparative scholarship on colonialism. Qajar Iran certainly seems somehow different. However, one of the goals of this book is to argue that the Qajars can and indeed deserve to be compared to, and integrated into, the histories of other empires.

This comparison can be made across both space and time. Qajar Iran was not a colonial or capitalist empire, but there is a strong case for it being a tributary one. A recent definition, offered by Peter Bang and Christopher Bayly, defines tributary empires along three criteria: as those that were ‘based on the conquest of wide agrarian domains and the taxation of peasant surplus production,’ who ‘dominated their wider worlds and were able to absorb most of their competitors and reduce them either to taxpaying provinces or tributary client kingdoms,’ and whose ‘rulers saw themselves as universal emperors, claiming supremacy over all other monarchs.’¹⁰⁴ All three can be applied to the Qajars, at least in the period up to 1828, when they finally and irrevocably lost the Caucasus to the Russians. Evidence of the Qajars’ perception of themselves can be seen in the

¹⁰² For a consideration of whether the Safavid Empire was in fact an empire, see Rudi Matthee, ‘Was Safavid Iran an Empire?’ *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1/2 (2010): 233–65. For examples of literature on empires which largely overlooks the Qajars, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Dominic Lieven, *In the Shadow of the Gods: The Emperor in World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2022).

¹⁰³ Among the few studies to explicitly present Qajar Iran as an ‘empire’ is Gustafson, *Kirman and the Qajar Empire*, although there is little discussion in the book on what made the Qajars an ‘empire.’

¹⁰⁴ Bang and Bayly, ‘Tributary Empires,’ 6–7.

numerous kingly and imperial titles that Fath-‘Ali Shah adopted for himself. It can be seen in the ways that Qajar sources refer to the government as ‘the glorious and eternal government’ (*dawlat-i bahiyyih-yi abad-iqrān*). And it is also evident in the use of the plural noun in the appellation of their territories as the ‘Guarded Domains of Iran’ (*mamālik-i mahrūsīh-yi Īrān*) – as mentioned above and elaborated in Chapter 1. These claims, these terms and concepts, were not exceptional to the Qajar kings or to Qajar Iran – indeed, many of these same terms and concepts were used in other earlier empires, from the Sasanian Empire, to the Timurid and Safavid ones.

There are even more grounds for comparison, however, if we focus on what the Qajars did – on how the Qajars governed. Land tenure under the Qajars looked remarkably similar to land tenure in other premodern empires.¹⁰⁵ Gift-giving and tributary ceremonies were a widely shared practice across Eurasia.¹⁰⁶ Marriage alliances were used by dynasties in vastly diverse cultural contexts – and indeed continue to be used in various ways in modern states.¹⁰⁷ Petitioning and correspondence have long served as a backbone of governance.¹⁰⁸ All of these practices were obviously rooted in the local and the specific, but again, they were not exceptional to the Qajar Empire. They were used in many other places and in many other times, and can serve as useful launching pads from which to make comparisons and connections across time and space.

Ultimately, thinking about the Qajar Empire in a global comparative framework helps us take it seriously, as a subject of study worthy of attention. By focusing on governance and administrative practices, and taking seriously the call by historians of other empires to attend to what empires *did* – rather than just to what they *are* – we can more clearly identify the *formation* part of

¹⁰⁵ Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*.

¹⁰⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); Anthony Cutler, ‘Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies,’ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 247–78.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345–1547* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Mughal State, 1526–1750* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1–71.

early Qajar history. Even if one rejects Qajar Iran as *actually* being an empire, then certainly early Qajar history can still be seen – and indeed this book will aim to illustrate it – as a process of imperial expansion, contraction, and change.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ On ‘empire’ and ‘imperialism’ being seen as analytic categories, rather than as terms representing reality, see Ludden, ‘The Process of Empire,’ 135.