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The French Revolution inspired many generations of Persian commentators who described it directly or obliquely in terms of what they regarded as its salient characteristics such as sedition (*fetna*), corruption (*fesād*), a general disturbance by the populace (*balwā-ye ʿāmm*), insurrection (*šūreš*), the great revolution (*enqelāb-e ʿaẓīm*), and the great revolution (*enqelāb-e kabīr*; Rouhbakhshan, p. 24, p. 29; Tawakkolī-Ṭarqī, pp. 411-12). In later decades, some reformist writers cited the French Revolution as an illustration of a historical precedent in their endeavors to reform the state (*dawlat*), to empower the people (*mellat*), and to imagine a constitutionally-based Persia.

One of the earliest accounts of the French revolution is given in Mīr ʿAbd-al-Laṭīf Khan Šūštarī's *Toḥfat al-ʿālam* (1799), which expressed alarm at Napoleon 's invasion of Egypt (1798) and the prospect of a French expansion into India. This contemporary concern motivated Šūštarī's synoptic account of modern European history, which included an account of the Reformation in England and what he regarded as the English success in demoting the status of the clergy and promoting those of philosophers and scientists. Šūštarī went on to observe that "the God-forsaken nation of France has gone beyond this stage ."

Recounting the situation that led to the French Revolution, he remarked, “Ten years ago the people became fed up with the oppression of the king and requested a parliament and an English way of governance. The king refused, and ordered the execution of many people, guilty and innocent alike. The masses revolted and killed the king and his wife and children. The tradition of local warlords (*molūk al-ṭawāʾefī*) became widespread and sedition and corruption ensued. This resulted in war and dispute between the French people and the British and other kingdoms, and immeasurable blood was shed amongst them.” Šūstarī’s account, like many later reports by the architects of the New Order (Neẓām-e Jadīd), terminated with a discussion of the rise and military achievements of Napoleon Bonaparte, “who is the exemplar of the epocy (*yegana-ye rūzgār*) in bravery and courage” (Šūštarī, p. 255-56).

Another important early Persian reflection on the French Revolution was the *Masīr-e ṭalebī* (1219/1804) of Mīrzā Abū Ṭaleb Khan Laknawī Eṣfahānī, who visited France in 1802. Reflecting on the military conflicts between France and England that took place during his travel to Europe, Mīrzā Abū Ṭāleb wrote, “When the monarch is sovereign but is not wise, the people suffer □. Thirteen years ago □ the people of France became fed up with the king’s agents and began to protest. Their goal was to steer the kingdom’s form of governance (*naqša-ye rīāsat*) towards a British model. The King and the nobility procrastinated and ignored these pleadings. After two years of passive complaints, the French subjects assembled everywhere and prevented some governors from meddling in the affairs of the kingdom. At this juncture, the inattentive king and the nobility woke up from the slumber of ignorance and sought to appease the people by inviting them to the capital for consultation on the pattern of government. Strengthened by their solidarity, the rebellious mob (*ahl-e balwā*), went beyond their original demands and called for the establishment of a republic” (Abū Ṭāleb Khan, pp. 287-88). After enumerating the privileges that were to be taken away from the king, the nobility, and the military, Mīrzā Abū Ṭāleb reported, “The king refused to accept these demands and ordered the arrest and imprisonment of the mob. They resisted and many were killed. Then, the remaining subjects of the kingdom of France became united and declared an uprising. The courtiers, because of their extreme caution and love of ease, extricated themselves, their wives, children, and belongings from imminent danger and escaped to different places, particularly to England. The king was arrested. Most of the troops joined the rebels. Consequently, they grew in strength and in the year 1793 the king and his wife were executed and his son was imprisoned □. Thus, a great revolution

(*enqelāb-e ʿaẓīm-ī*) occurred in France; the strong became weak, and the weak became strong. In accordance with the laws of the republic, the people elected representatives (*ahl-e šūrā*) from amongst themselves and appointed military chiefs to protect the borders." As a model, according to Mīrzā Abū Ṭāleb, the French Revolution also made "the English, Spanish and German subjects eager to rebel and prone to revolt" (Abū Ṭāleb Khan, pp. 288-89). Unlike Mīr ʿAbd-al-Lāṭīf Šūštarī, Mīrzā Abū Ṭāleb presented a more positive image of the French Revolution and the French people, whom he found less sensitive to adverse criticism than the British.

Mīrzā Ṣāleḥ, who was sent to study in England in 1815, provides yet another early perspective on the French Revolution. He viewed the French Revolution as a prelude to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. "In the year 1789," he noted, "a general uprising occurred in France and (the people) became dissatisfied with their king, Louis XVI. First the members of the Estates General (*mašwarat-ḵāna*) reduced the power and influence of the king so that he was unable to make war or peace with other countries. They came to view him as obsolete, and the individuals who had been appointed and promoted by him to high positions were removed." Their guiding principle, according to Mīrzā Ṣāleḥ, was the belief that "status and honor should be bestowed on capable and talented individuals and not upon any prattler who happens to be promoted by the king" (Mīrzā Ṣāleh Šīrāzī, p. 266-67).

In this and other early accounts, the interest in the French Revolution often converged with an interest in Napoleon, who was viewed as a natural ally against the Russians who were encroaching into the northern territories of Persia. Several accounts and biographies of Napoleon were translated or adapted into Persian and are preserved in manuscript form in the National Library (Ketāb-ḵāna-ye mellī Īrān). Other translated works focused on governmental structures, political conceptions, and the history of France. These reports and translations were important for the dissemination of knowledge about the French Revolution and popular and parliamentary forms of government. With the development of Persian journalism and a new genre of political pamphleteering in the 1860s and 1870s, the ideals of the Revolution were probed closely. Mīrzā Yūsof Khan Tabrīzī Mostašār-al-Dawla, Persia's chargé d'affaires in Paris from 1866 to 1870, was notable amongst essayists who popularized the ideals of liberty and equality by regrounding them in Islamic textual traditions. In *Yak kalama*, written in Paris in 1287/1871, he viewed the Civil Code as the key to the progress and the order of Europe. Like

the formulators of the French Civil Code who tried to reconcile Roman law, French common law, and the rights of man, Mostašār-al-Dawla grafted the Declaration of Rights on Islamic legal traditions. He argued that these rights are called "the rights of the people of France, but in reality they are the rights of Muslim people and all civilized societies" (Tabrīzī, pp. 64, 62-63).

In fashioning the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1909), Persian revolutionaries actively recalled the memories of the French Revolution. The principles which appeared in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen were among the intensely debated issues in the National Consultative Assembly (Majles-e šūrā-ye mellī) established in 1906. Many of these principles were included in the Constitution of 1907 under the "Rights of the People of Persia" (*ḥoqūq-e mellat-e Īrān*). When Moḥammed-ʿAlī Shah refused to cooperate with the constitutionalists, he was reminded of the fate of Louis XVI. The revolutionary tribunal that ordered the hanging of anti-constitutionalists like Shaikh Fażl-Allāh Nūrī (d. 1909) was enthused by its French counterpart; so were the revolutionary institutions such as the Directory (Hayʾat-e modīra) and National Guard (Qošūn-e mellī). Ascertaining the similarities of the two revolutions, Zayn al-ʿĀbedīn Marāḡaʾī noted that "it seems that they were made from the same cast" (Marāḡaʾī, p. 561). Writing in 1906, Moḥammad-Amīn Rasūlzāda likewise observed that the patterns of the French Revolution were repeated in its Russian and Persian counterparts (Rasūlzāda, p. 35).

With the emergence of the Tudeh party and the development of a socialist political discourse, the enthusiasm for the French Revolution was condensed into and displaced by the memory of the Russian Revolution and its promise of social equality. The French Revolution was increasingly characterized as a capitalist revolution that brought to power the exploitative bourgeoisie (Malek, p. 72). Such a reading of the French Revolution became popular with Persian intellectuals of differing political persuasions, including Islamists such as ʿAlī Šarīʿatī (1973, p. 70; 1978, p. 260). For example, Moḥammad Ḵātamī, who became the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1997, wrote of the French Revolution, "The point of departure for modern thought and praxis, which celebrated its final victory during the French Revolution was freedom (*āzādī*); but this freedom was not for all. It implied the freedom of a class that based its power not on land-ownership but on mobile wealth and free exchange and commerce" (*dād o setad-e āzād*; Ḵātamī, p. 252).

In recent years, a new interpretation of the French Revolution has appeared in political debates in Persia. To counter the ulema's claim of being the guardians

of the people, some Persian Shiʿite intellectuals, such as ʿAbd-al-Karīm Sorūš, have been echoing Kantian phraseology to propound ideas expressed in the literature of the Enlightenment. In “Jorʿat-e dānestan dašta bāš” (Be bold enough to learn), Sorūš argued that the notion of liberty during the French Revolution was not confined to legal and political freedom. “It meant much more than that; it meant liberty from sanctities” (*wa ān āzādī az moqaddasāt būd*; Sorūš, p. 36).

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