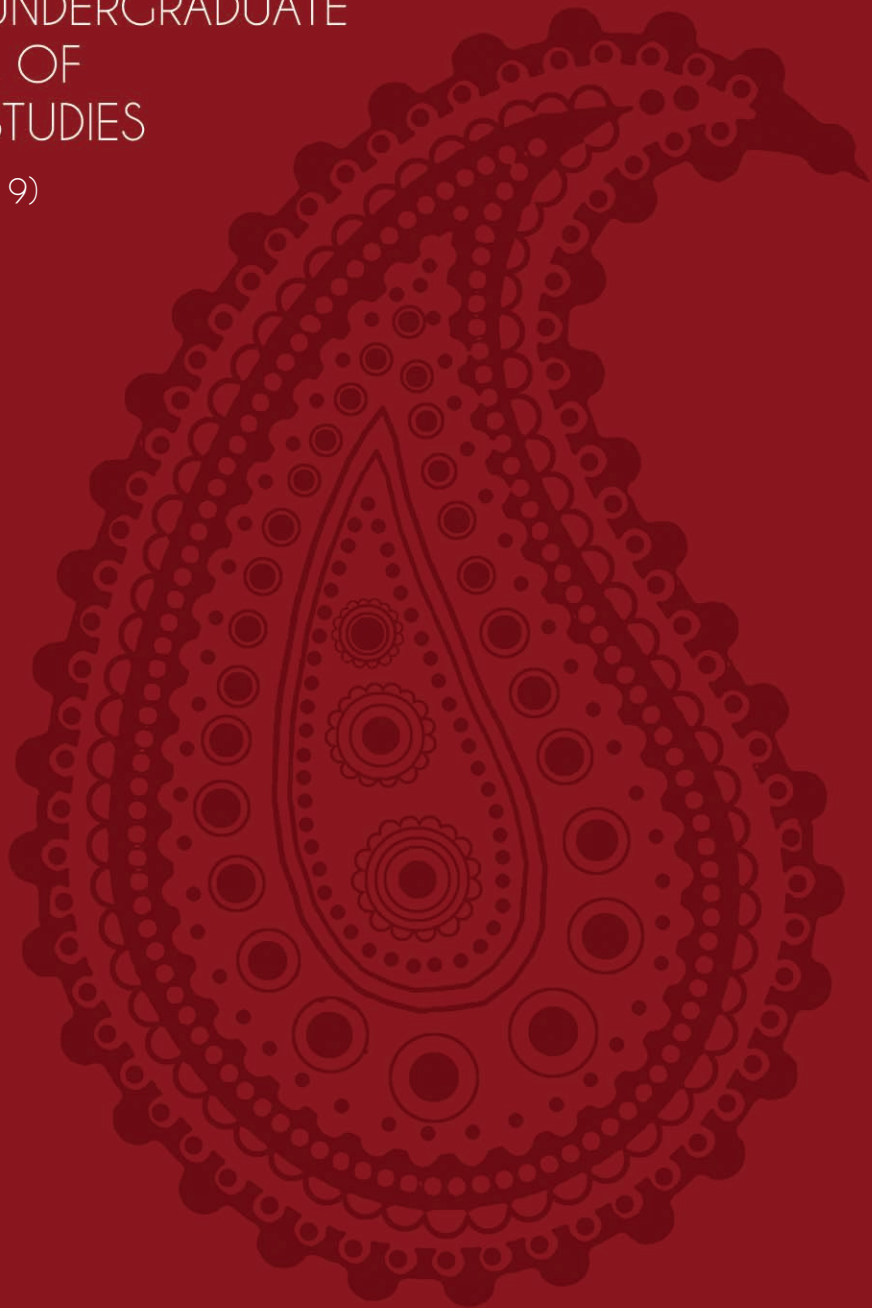


DĀNESH

THE OU UNDERGRADUATE
JOURNAL OF
IRANIAN STUDIES

Volume 4 (2019)



COLLEGE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA





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From the Faculty Advisors

Since its founding in 2016, *DĀNESH* has sought to provide a forum to showcase the original research produced by undergraduate students at the University of Oklahoma's Iranian Studies program. This fourth volume of the journal was produced through the able editorial leadership of **Corey Standley** (BA, 2019) and **Kayleigh Kuyon** (BA, 2019). As with their work on volume three, Corey and Kayleigh have ensured that *DĀNESH* has continued to thrive as a forum for the study of all aspects of the history, culture, society, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world.

The name of the journal, *DĀNESH*, comes from the Persian word meaning *knowledge, learning, and wisdom*. We believe this is a fitting name for a journal that seeks to foster deep and compassionate understanding of one of the world's most culturally rich and historically complex civilizations. It is with this in mind that we present this volume of *DĀNESH*.

Afshin Marashi

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Farzaneh Family Professor in the Sociology of Contemporary Iran

From the Editors-in-Chief

We are proud to present to you the fourth volume of the University of Oklahoma's Undergraduate Journal of Iranian Studies, *DĀNESH*. Through the past three editions of the journal we have seen wonderful presentations on varying regional topics, spanning the breadths of history and social strata. In the tradition of the meaning of *DĀNESH*, or knowledge, we present these articles as an offering to expand the collective dialogue on the understanding of the Iranian and Persian state. We are pleased to have worked on this edition with a group of driven authors to present an edition comprising of submissions focusing on both historical issues and events as well as contemporary issues that Iranians are currently facing.

This work is a collective effort among our undergraduate authors and editors. We would like to extend a humble thanks to our Associate Editors, without whom we would not be able to produce such a successful and professional journal. It would also be remiss of us to not extend a heartfelt thank you to the Farzaneh Family, for without their continued support of the Iranian Studies program none of this would be possible. The University of Oklahoma's Libraries and Printing Services are the unsung heroes of this endeavor, as without their support we would not have the ability to make *DĀNESH* so accessible, both our print and digital versions. Thank you to the tireless, diligent work of our authors, who have crafted these amazing works that we are proudly sharing with you.

And finally, we are wholly indebted to the continued and unwavering support of Dr. Afshin Marashi, whose guidance and advice was invaluable in this journal's creation and continuance. This work, and so much of the growth of the Iranian Studies program as a whole, would not be possible without your faith in us, and our institution. Your academic guidance, advice, and friendship have been invaluable to us.

Corey Standley (BA, 2019), Editor-in-Chief

Kayleigh Kuyon (BA, 2019), Editor-in-Chief

The Alternating Allegiances of the *Ulama*: Clerical Participation in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11

Mathew Bray*

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In the summer of 1906, a group of theology students and other constitutionalists gathered in Tehran for what was expected to be a peaceful protest in favor of government reforms, a continuation of the nascent Constitutional Revolution. By the end of the first day's protests, a respected *sayyed* had been shot by police. In response, an even larger crowd of protesters gathered the next day, only for twenty-two of them to be killed in an attack by the Cossacks.¹ Following these gruesome events, almost all of the *ulama* turned immediately against the Qajar government. Even for those who had been uncertain about Constitutionalism, this direct and inhuman affront to the clerical estate was more than enough to make the current government an enemy.² Within days, many of the *ulama* and their followers had migrated to Qum, leaving the capital without religious leadership and clearly defining their stance on the revolution.³ In the years to follow members of the secular intelligentsia, merchants, and other reformers would continue to push for constitutional reforms with varying degrees of success; ultimately, though, support from the *ulama* began to waver as time went on.

The involvement of the *ulama* in the Constitutional Revolution can be viewed through a variety of lenses. Some scholars would argue their

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¹ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 3 (August 1979): 405.

² *Ibid.*, 406.

³ *Ibid.*

participation, or lack thereof, derived primarily from economic aspirations. Rather, the *ulama* supported whichever side seemed more inclined to protect their land holdings and their financial support from *waqfs*. Others would view the issue in a theological context, attributing the actions of the *ulama* to the way scripture was interpreted in relation to legislative issues. Still others would point to the social position of the *ulama* as the natural representatives of the people, particularly the *bazaaris*, and connect the *ulama*'s leadership during the revolution to their traditional role as an opponent of the government in favor of the people. One theme common to all of these perspectives, though, is the complexity of the *ulama* as an institution. The *ulama* held a unique position in Iranian society as an autonomous, revered, organized, and non-governmental entity. This influence over society gave them the power to pursue their various goals, everything from maintaining *Shi'ite* religious purity to amassing economic wealth.

These observations and theories regarding the *ulama* explain their actions during the Constitutional Revolution. In the early stages of the Revolution, the *ulama* were compelled to support the Constitutionalist cause due to their roles as the leaders of the people and foil to the government, even though they had almost no political experience in a multi-party system. As time went on, however, the *ulama* split into two distinct groups based on their view of constitutionalism: those who believed representation was the best route to serve the *ulama*'s goals, and those who believed the new form of government was at odds with religious precepts. In the end, the *ulama* lost out during the revolution as much of their influence was transferred to the new government. Nevertheless, two important developments occurred within the clerical establishment. The *ulama* became far more politically savvy, which they would use to their advantage later on. Additionally, most clerics realized that in the grand scheme of politics, the *ulama* were more powerful united than divided and that it would be prudent for them to advocate for common religious causes.

Initial Revolutionary Involvement of the Unified *Ulama*

While the constitutionalist movement was in its early stages, it was widely supported by the *ulama* – though not necessarily because they believed in western government. In many ways, the *ulama* were swept into the revolution, compelled to join by both their historical role in society and the current state of Iran. At this point, the *ulama* were fully unaccustomed to participating in the public sphere of political discussion; their authority had never been questioned, but the rise of new political factions forced the *ulama* to compete for influence. Since the interregnum period of the eighteenth century, the *ulama* had served as community leaders and formed particularly close bonds with the *bazaari* class. For decades, animosity had festered between the *ulama* and the Qajar state,

centered on the lessening influence the *ulama* held within the government. As a result, the *ulama* had come to serve as a general opponent to the Qajars; whenever the people disagreed with the government, they looked to the *ulama* for support. A prime example, of course, is the Tobacco Protests of late nineteenth century. Considering their responsibility to the people, it was only natural for the *ulama* to participate in the Revolution.

Acts of direct violence against the *ulama* began around the same time as the first constitutionalist demonstrations and continued until the *ulama*'s migration to Qum in 1906. The first major incident was the application of the bastinado against Mirza Mohammad Reza, a mujtahid, in response to his preaching against government corruption.⁴ Within the next year several more violent offenses against the *ulama* were initiated by the Qajar government, mostly led by Ayn ud-Daula.⁵ Having become accustomed to a great deal of independence, and understandably angered by violence against their peers, the *ulama* became increasingly allied with the constitutionalist protesters.

Among the other constitutionalist protestors was the *bazaari* class, who were not well adapted to modernization and held close ties to the *ulama*. This *ulama-bazaari* alliance formed in the eighteenth century due both to *waqfs* given by the *bazaaris* to the *ulama* and similar social outlooks.⁶ The first action by the *bazaaris* against the government came after the tobacco concession of 1890, when Qajar leaders attempted to give a monopoly over the production and sale of tobacco to a European corporation.⁷ Not only did many believe that this would cause a 'peasantization' of the population, but the *bazaaris* were particularly concerned that increased foreign interference would interfere with their business.⁸ In response to this and other concessions, the *bazaaris* began to push for greater protections against foreign corporations and increased development of Iranian businesses to protect from outside monopolies.⁹ The Qajars did not honor these requests, most likely due to corruption or fear of European powers. They of course drew increasing ire from the *bazaaris*. Since the *ulama* held close

⁴ Said Amir Arjomand, "The Ulama's Traditionalist Opposition to Parliamentarianism: 1907-1909," *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 1981): 176.

⁵ Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 176.

⁶ Ali Gheissari, "Iran's Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Constitutional Experience, Transregional Connections, and Conflicting Narratives of Modernity," in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and Narratives of the Enlightenment*, ed. Ali Ansari (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

ties with the *bazaaris*, many would argue that “their [the ulama] major support for the economic interests of the *bazaaris*, as the main financial contributors to the religious establishment, should not be taken for granted” when considering the factors that brought the *ulama* into the revolution.¹⁰ Therefore, the Qajars’ apparent lack of care for the merchant’s interests turned the *bazaaris* against them, and the *bazaaris*, in turn, used their traditional relationships with the *ulama* to galvanize the clerics into leaders of the revolution.

The *ulama* were a natural choice to lead the revolution, not just because of their connection to the *bazaaris* but for their role as leaders of Iranian society. For centuries, they had served as community heads and sources of emulation, and within the previous decades had become a counterpoint to the corrupt government. The Qajars, however, tried to take power away from some religious institutions and often embraced Western powers and ideas over Iranian interests (as seen in the tobacco protests).¹¹ Additionally, the *ulama* depended on the Iranian people for support as all of their power derived from the respect and reverence lent to them by believers. Thus, if the people were at odds with the actions of the state, it was only logical for the *ulama* to side with the people to preserve their own power.¹² So strong was this bond, in fact, that scholars have even argued that “the occasion for the disturbances was less important than the outcome—a clash between ulama and state” on behalf of the disgruntled citizens.¹³ In fact, this connection between the *ulama* and their followers seems almost certain when one realizes that “there was no significant faction among the ulama whose position over the contesting issues differed from the warring classes,” implying that the *ulama* simply followed along with the desires of the majority.¹⁴ At this point in the revolution, the *ulama* were not basing their support on the ideals of constitutionalism but rather on protecting their own supporters against the government.

The *ulama*’s role as the representatives of the people went beyond direct opposition to the Qajar government, extending into social and religious spheres as well. As a result of this religious leadership, the *ulama* became inextricably attached to the Iranian people, especially through the course of the Constitutional Revolution. In a sense, the *ulama* played the role of the guardians of religion in society; the *Shi’ite* religion was seen as equivalent with the Iranian nation, and the *ulama* protected it from any impurities or attacks, even from the government

¹⁰ Hani Mansourian, “Iran: Religious Leaders and Opposition Movements,” *Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 1, (2007): 222.

¹¹ Gheissari, “Iran’s Dialectic,” 34.

¹² Algar, *Religion and State*, 241.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 244, 252.

¹⁴ Mansoor Moaddel, “The Shi’i Ulama and the State in Iran,” *Theory and Society*, 15, no. 4, (July 1986): 523.

itself.¹⁵ This theme is particularly evident in the use of religious symbolism during the Revolution, particularly with respect to ideas like martyrdom.¹⁶ Although they had long been the religious leaders of Iran, the *ulama* had only begun to greatly exercise their power in the decades leading up to the Revolution.¹⁷ Much like their other roles as allies of the *bazaaris* and antagonist of the state, the *ulama* developed this power over time in events like the tobacco concession before exercising it to its full extent during the Constitutional Revolution.

The *ulama*'s participation in the early part of the Constitutional Revolution was almost inevitable. The Qajars attacked clerics violently and engaged in trade deals which significantly impacted *bazaaris* trade. At this point, the *ulama* felt they had developed a responsibility to protect the interests of the Iranian people and the purity of Islam. When Qajar leaders started to threaten these ideals, anger the people, and take steps that violated Islam, the *ulama* felt obligated to join in revolution against them. Thus, the *ulama*'s united leadership at the onset of the Constitutional Revolution can be viewed as an instinctive reaction to fulfill their traditional roles, maintain the relationships that granted them power and money, and protect their colleagues without much regard for the actual demands of the Revolution.

As different clerics began to consider the issues at hand in depth, they split into two major categories. The pro-constitutional group often was not as religiously conservative and focused more on maintaining worldly power than the more traditional monarchists.¹⁸ At the same time, many of the anti-constitutional *ulama* had ties to the Qajar government and stood to gain from brokering political deals.¹⁹ Even during the schism of the later part of the Revolution, though, the *ulama* shared the same major goals: protecting and expanding Islam, increasing the role of Islam in the government, and maintaining their own social and political power.²⁰ They did, however, disagree on which form of government best achieved these goals, shifting the role of the *ulama* in the Constitutional Revolution dramatically. During the period to follow, the *ulama* also began to discover how to operate in political discourse and attempt to exert their will over opposing factions.

¹⁵ Arjomand, "The Ulama's Traditionalist," 175.

¹⁶ Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Democracy in Iran*, 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁸ Arjomand, "The Ulama's Traditionalist," 175.

¹⁹ 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), 247.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The Pro-Constitutionalist *Ulama* of the Later Revolution

As the Constitutional Revolution continued to grow and become successful, the majority of *ulama* opted to stick with the movement and continue leading demonstrators. Although their support initially hinged on the instant fulfillment of leadership roles and protection of interests, clerics in the later stages of the Revolution issued endorsements for more concrete rationales, developed after more thorough consideration of constitutionalism. At the core these *ulama* were looking for the best way to reach the goals of preserving Islam, increasing Islamic oversight in government, and protecting their own power, and they eventually arrived at constitutionalism as the best way to do so. In contrast to the current Qajar state, these *ulama* believed that a representative form of government would be better able to protect Islamic values and that religious leaders could better control legal proceedings. That being said, most *ulama* supported the continuation of the monarchy in a limited capacity due to its historical importance. Moreover, constitutionalism was viewed as an excellent way to protect the rights of Iranian citizens and promote their interests adequately, which benefits the *ulama* by keeping their religious and pecuniary supporters pleased.

Since the *ulama* derived both their importance and financial support from the people of Iran, keeping the general population happy was of central interest. A more representative form of government would accomplish this goal by protecting the people's rights and giving them the representation that they demanded. Mirza Malkum Khan, a prominent constitutionalist, summarized this argument nicely, describing an unlawful government like the Qajars as one which "plunders its subjects at will [...] wastes the kingdom's treasures [...] and brazenly denies its obligations and pacts."²¹ This perspective on the Qajar government was not unique, with many *ulama* adapting these ideas into a religious context. Some even argued that Islam calls for a government which helps the people and promotes social justice during the occultation of the twelfth Imam.²² In short, the *ulama* advocated for constitutionalism as a way to protect the rights of Iranians and provide support for the poor. This message resonated with the demands of the constitutionalist demonstrators; the activists were able to claim the support of the *ulama*, while the *ulama* maintained the admiration of

²¹ Malkum Khan, "The Law," *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*.

²² 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 Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 232.

the people.²³ This is similar to the role the *ulama* fulfilled at the beginning of the revolution but is based more in political theory than social forces.

Members of the *ulama* also examined constitutionalism in an even more esoteric light, arguing that absolutism destroyed individual rights, and, in a philosophical sense, representation is the better option. Certainly, these clerics did not argue for western-style democracy; on the contrary, they supported a continuation of the monarchy in some sense along with a *majles* that served to carry out Islam-based law.²⁴ Still, clerics incorporated the Enlightenment concepts of natural human rights and separation of powers into their arguments, using these as justification for the new form of government.²⁵ One member of the *ulama* described this realization as Iranians becoming “aware of the true requirements of their religion and its God-given freedoms,” drawing parallels to Islamic theology and modern political ideals.²⁶ These politically inclined *ulama* made it their mission to educate the people on the benefits of constitutional government, explaining its perks in numerous writings and speeches.²⁷ Clerics utilized this politics-based argument to supply a quasi-secular rationale to their position, which would appeal to all Iranians as well as other *ulama*. In their view not only would this new government provide tangible, real-world benefits to the people, but it would also serve as a pillar upon which Islamic law could be protected and spread.

In this same vein, many *ulama* believed that a constitutional government would be best suited to maintaining the purity of Islam. Keeping Islam safe from outside forces and changes was among the chief goals of all *ulama*, as Islamic purity was needed to maintain their legitimacy. The first argument of this sort used by pro-constitutionalist *ulama* was that the Qajars had become an anti-Islamic force which needed to be brought under control by an overseeing body.²⁸ Many clerics saw the Qajars as un-Islamic, due to the fact that the monarchy had gradually separated itself from the influence of the clerical establishment.²⁹

²³ Algar, *Religion and State*, 252.

²⁴ Asghar Fathi, “Ahmad Kasravi and Seyyed Jamal Waez on Constitutionalism in Iran,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 4 (1993): 708.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 709.

²⁶ Muhammad Husayn Na’ini, “Government in the Islamic Perspective,” *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*.

²⁷ Sayyid Abd al-Azim Khalkhali, “A Treatise on the Meaning of Constitutional Government,” trans. Hamid Dabashi, in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 343.

²⁸ Abdul-Hadi Hairi, “Why Did the Ulama Participate in the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909?” *Die Welt des Islams* 17, no. 1 (1976): 133.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Further, a common sentiment among members of the *ulama*, *bazaaris*, and average citizens alike was that Qajars had become far too friendly with foreign powers who did not share Islamic values and wished to dominate the Iranian state.³⁰ This betrayal by the Qajars was evidenced by the numerous concessions it attempted to make and led many Iranians to doubt the government. The solution to this corrupted government, as presented by the *ulama*, was a representative system which would be able to guard against the infractions of the monarchy.³¹ Additionally, these religious leaders argued that the Western constitutionalist system was actually *more* compatible with Islam, as it mirrored the principles of rational thought and *ijtihad*.³² Thus, the *ulama* effectively portrayed the Qajars as anti-Islamic and presented constitutionalism as a valid, Islamic alternative. Therefore, representative government was seen, by this facet of the *ulama* at least, as the only way to truly protect Islam in Iran.

A large part of the argument above that constitutionalism is more Islamic than absolutism rests on the assertion that in a representative system, the *ulama* would have oversight power in government affairs. In the past, religious oversight derived from the informal bond between the *ulama* and state; however, as the Qajars did away with this connection, a representative government became an appealing alternative. This additional oversight would, at least in theory, come through a board of *mujtahids* who would analyze all legislation and either accept or reject it based on religious validity.³³ This committee was promised to the *ulama* early in the revolution, and it was enough to garner their continued support as it gave them the power to effectively control all actions taken by the government. From this, another important point can be deduced: the *ulama* fully expected the *majles* to operate within the confines of Islamic law.³⁴ In contrast to the Qajar government, which did whatever it wished, the *ulama* expected that a representative government would only enact laws that supported their interests. In the early years of the revolution this appeared to be especially true, and many *ulama* were pleased with the actions taken by the parliament.³⁵ As a result, these *ulama* advocated strongly for the new representative government, seeing it as the best way to give themselves a position of influence over the legislative process. This legal power, in turn, granted them the opportunity to maintain Islam's high place in society and secure their own status as leaders of the people.

³⁰ Algar, "The Oppositional Role," 235.

³¹ Na'ini, "Government in the Islamic Perspective."

³² Gheissari, "Iran's Dialectic," 37.

³³ Abrahamian, "The Causes," 411.

³⁴ Fathi, "Constitutionalism in Iran," 708.

³⁵ Khalkhali, "A Treatise on the Meaning," 341.

Certainly, then, the *ulama* also had a more personal stake in the government than just the expansion of Islamic law. If they were able to secure a high place in government, they could guarantee their own financial and social standing and ensure that the government would not interfere with their operations. For many centuries, the *ulama* had enjoyed a prominent post in Iranian society, serving as the role models of the people and receiving gifts through the *waqf*.³⁶ A government which gave the *ulama* power, like the early constitutionalist form, would allow them to preserve the secular status quo and ensure that their authority as community leaders went unchallenged. Moreover, the *ulama* had become used to a less involved state; in contrast to the mutualistic relationship between *ulama* and state that characterized the Safavid period, the two had become far more discrete in recent decades. Instead of legitimizing the government and receiving money in return, the *ulama* had become accustomed to support from the people and ignoring the government as much as possible.³⁷ So, in a sense, “the *ulama* were acting constantly ... for the preservation of their own power” and lent their support to constitutionalism under the assumption that it would benefit them in the long run.³⁸ Of course, this is not meant to imply that the *ulama* were secretly conniving to snag as much power as possible. On the contrary, they were working in their own best interest, which, at least in their minds, benefited Iran as a whole; if the *ulama* were able to keep themselves in a position of influence then they could ensure that Iran progressed in a religiously-just fashion in the future.

The pro-constitutionalist *ulama*, were, in general, only supporters of the movement insofar as it aligned with their own goals. Most still wished to retain some form of monarchy and were wary of overtly secular currents within the revolutionary coalition. The *ulama*’s support hinged on achieving several major goals, like expanding the presence of Islam in government, serving the people, and sustaining the status of the *ulama*, which this group of clerics believed were best reached through representative government. Nevertheless, some *ulama* noted flaws in the constitutional system and as time went on, these flaws pushed more and more *ulama* to turn against the newly established government. Most clerics still valued the preservation of their own role above all else, and it became clear that this would not happen under the new regime. The *ulama* were being outmaneuvered by liberal factions and losing their high posts in society; this growing rift between the goals of religious leaders and the constitutionalists led to a migration of clerics to the anti-constitutional camp.

³⁶ Jahenbegloo, *Democracy in Iran*, 38.

³⁷ Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 249.

³⁸ Hairī, “Why Did the Ulama,” 152.

The Anti-Constitutionalist Clerics and Their Proliferation

Although the initial stages of the revolution included almost all *ulama* on the side of the new government, a select few were against the new system from the start and as time wore on membership in this camp only grew. The initial *ulama* against the constitution tended to be those with close ties to the Qajar government, who would personally benefit from a continuation of the traditional monarchy. Soon after, this group was joined by the religious traditionalists—those who, unlike the more liberal *ulama* discussed above, believed a western, representative-style government was anti-Islamic and thus not suitable for Iran. Compared to the larger group of *ulama* who supported the people against the government at first, this opposition group was relatively small. Nevertheless, in the later years of the revolution many *ulama* determined that the parliament was not properly serving their interests or giving the clerics enough power, and so turned against the movement as well. Although most *ulama* supported the constitutionalists at the beginning of the revolution, they gradually returned to their position of traditionalism as time went on. By the end of the Revolution, neither the constitutionalists nor the monarchy had truly won as the government remained in a sort of limbo. Either way, though, the *ulama* had not been able to preserve their influence as well as they had hoped, instead ceding powers to the government. Despite this, though, the *ulama* emerged from the ordeal more united and more politically prepared than ever before.

Although clerics served a vital role in the government during the Safavid and early Qajar periods, their connection to the government had begun to deteriorate through the nineteenth century. Most of the clerics who chose to stand with the government from the beginning stood to gain financially from their actions, as they were either high level employees of the bureaucracy or worked as mediators in government dealings.³⁹ Others were more personally connected to the Qajar family, either through familial relation or personal friendships.⁴⁰ No matter how these *ulama* truly felt about Qajar policy or the merits of constitutionalism, turning against the government would have been needlessly detrimental to their own lives. As a result, these *ulama* tended to either outwardly support the Qajar state and legitimize its actions or attempt to negotiate with the protestors on behalf of the government.⁴¹ Even though these Qajar supporters were less in number than those who advocated for the people, they gave the government a sliver of legitimacy and formed the core of the future anti-constitutionalist *ulama* coalition, which eventually toppled the Revolutionary movement.

³⁹ Arjomand, “The Ulama’s Traditionalist,” 177.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 249.

Perhaps the most vigorous clerical criticism of constitutionalism was that it was not only against Islamic values, but specifically prohibited by Islamic laws. By far, the most adamant supporter of this school of thought was Sheikh Nouri, a cleric who, after supporting the revolution in its infancy, turned staunchly against the *majles* and became the leading *ulama* opposed to constitutionalism. Nouri argued that the secular-leaning policies of the new government were threatening to Islam and that the constitutionalists wished to remove Islamic influence from Iran, gaining him immediate support from conservative *ulama* and regular Muslims.⁴² Nouri argued that since constitutionalism was built on “equality and freedom,” which were “pernicious principles” aimed at destroying Divine Law, it must be inherently anti-Islam.⁴³ He further claimed that any form of representative government is not allowed as only Imams are granted the rights to convene and review laws under Islamic doctrine.⁴⁴ In short, Nouri held the view that “for the disposition of [Iran] Constitutionalism is a fatal disease, a terminal injury,” a stark contrast to those *ulama* who believed it was exactly what Iran needed to protect Islam and progress into the future.⁴⁵ Certainly, these theological arguments illustrate a growing conservative Islamic and anti-western undercurrent which would become especially important in the late stages of the Constitutional Revolution all the way up until the Revolution of 1979. Moreover, the goal of *ulama* like Nouri and his followers is clearly the preservation of Islam in its purest form; this goal is almost identical to the *ulama* who supported the Revolution. Thus, the *ulama* all attempted to act in the best interest of Islam but had vastly different opinions on how this ought to be done.

Similarly, while some *ulama* believed that the representative system would give them the opportunity to review legislation, the anti-constitutionalist *ulama* concluded that the new government would generate less favorable policies. In the eyes of many conservative *ulama*, Islam forbade any intrusion of man-made law into issues that were already discussed in a religious context – and so the *ulama* wished to eliminate any laws that could be considered overreaching in this way.⁴⁶ From the beginning, members of the *ulama* who supported the Revolution expected that they, as the people’s esteemed leaders, would have the final say in any new policies so that they could veto anything deemed un-Islamic

⁴² Mansourian, “Iran: Religious Leaders,” 223.

⁴³ Shaykh Fadl Allah Nouri, “Book of Admonition to the Heedless and Guidance for the Ignorant,” trans. Hamid Dabashi, in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 356.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 354.

or against their interests.⁴⁷ Indeed, as the constitutional form of government progressed and the *majles* came together, clerics demanded more and more oversight power.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it became quickly apparent that the *ulama* would be left out of the new constitutionalist system; they would, at best, be given nominal position while the *majles* would be free to pass reforms.⁴⁹ As a result, many clerics switched to the anti-constitutionalist camp. They believed that maintaining the status quo would at least serve their interests more than a liberal-leaning government. Indeed, the *ulama* were, as a whole, increasingly fearful of the western form of government, believing it would take away their local power in communities and destroy traditional institutions.⁵⁰ Without the promise of veto power, the *ulama* had no reason to advocate for such a government. Legislative review was one of the primary goals of both pro- and anti-constitutionalist *ulama*, and the growing realization that this would not become a reality led many clerics to turn against the revolutionaries, even if they initially believed in their cause.

More so than gaining legislative power, the *ulama* were interested in maintaining their religious and social rank. Once this was threatened by the constitutional government, though, the *ulama* overwhelmingly chose to defend their own interests over the demands of the revolutionaries. The main tipping point for the *ulama* was a push in the *majles* for financial and judiciary reforms, both of which would have threatened the *ulama*'s sources of income and influence.⁵¹ The *ulama* were ultimately supporters of their own goals; support for the constitution served as a potential surrogate of achieving their desired ends. Immediately after the new government began to attack their interests, such as traditional religious courts, the *ulama* either cut off their words of support or began to actively preach against representative government.⁵² From this, it is clear that promoting their own interests was at the core of the *ulama*'s involvement in the Constitutional Revolution. To be sure, other issues like protection of Islam and the well-being of the people were considered, but at the end of the day only self-preservation truly motivated the clerics' decisions. Further, it is evident that the pro- and anti-constitutionalist had more in common than it appears at first glance. As one scholar noted, "the pro- and anti-constitutionalist *ulama* had far more in common as members of the clerical estate than either group had with the secular constitutionalists or the absolutists,"

⁴⁷ Arjomand, "The Ulama's Traditionalist," 180.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁹ Algar, "The Oppositional Role," 255.

⁵⁰ Jahenbegloo, *Democracy in Iran*, 39.

⁵¹ Arjomand, "The Ulama's Traditionalist," 180.

⁵² Mansourian, "Iran: Religious Leaders," 224.

perfectly summarizing the character of the *ulama* during the revolution.⁵³ Although the *ulama* did temporarily debate each other, they remained, overall, united and continued to fight towards the same objective.

Clerics fought against the constitutionalist movement for reasons ranging from theology to politics to personal protection. Almost immediately, some members of the *ulama* were against the demonstrators either because they saw representative government as too Western or because they had a close connection to the Qajar state. As the revolution gained traction, however, it became increasingly clear to the *ulama* that they would not receive the benefits that their support had been contingent on. Moreover, they realized that the new government intended to undermine their position of authority and power within Iran. These factors eventually swayed almost all of the *ulama* to turn against the revolutionaries; the clerics' desire for influence outweighed their desire to remove Qajars and support their followers. Although the Revolution was eventually stalled by the Qajars, the *ulama* were still not able to maintain all of their power and became less important in society than they had been to start with. However, they had also developed political skills, which would allow them to influence politics and exert their will later on.

Conclusion

When the Constitutional Revolution broke out, the *ulama* had effectively no choice except to participate, due to their lofty post in society, which left them intertwined with almost every facet of Iran. Initially, most *ulama* naturally sided with the constitutionalist revolutionaries despite their lack of political expertise, as representing the interests of their supporters against the government had become an integral part of their function. Moreover, endorsing the will of the people secured the clerics' position of influence and prosperity, which primarily derived from popular support. As the initial wave of Revolution died down, however, the *ulama* split into two subgroups. The first of these continued to promote the constitution, believing it to be the best chance to protect Islam, ensure religious prominence in government, and serve the interests of the Iranian people. The second faction turned against the tide of Revolution, believing it to be anti-Islamic or too Western. Over time, more and more clerics joined this second group as it became clear that the new parliament would be detrimental to the religious establishment and its interests.

In the end, most *ulama* were united against the representative government, choosing to preserve their own place in society above all else. Certainly, the *ulama* shared the majority of their goals and were stronger together; although they split temporarily, they continued to pursue the same *ulama*-specific goals

⁵³ Arjomand, "The Ulama's Traditionalist," 184.

of promoting Islam and expanding their own power. Nevertheless, they were unable to stop the new government from curtailing their power significantly. The clerics did, though, learn how to operate in a contentious, public political sphere, a skill which would prove crucial in years to come.

Following the events of the Constitutional Revolution, the Pahlavi Dynasty established in the 1920's brought new pushes towards modernization and even further away from religious influence. Nevertheless, the *ulama* remained unanimous on their objectives through the reign of the Pahlavis and Mossadegh, and successfully attained their desires in the 1979 Islamic Revolution when Islam became the core of the government and the *ulama* obtained the leadership they had strived for. Although they were not fully successful in the Constitutional Revolution, the *ulama* gained the cohesiveness and political prowess necessary to enable their gradual rise to prominence throughout the twentieth century.