Earlier Developments

In a general sense, “politics” and literature had been close to each other ever since the rise of classical Persian literature in the ninth and tenth centuries, although the art of politics, as distinct from practical rules for successful state management, did not exist, precisely because the state was bound by no law or tradition of any kind, and its power was based on force rather than some kind of deep-seated legitimacy. It follows that usually the people’s submission was not based on consent but on fear. The state was inclined toward arbitrary rule and the people were commensurately inclined toward rebellion.  2

Homa Katouzian
St Antony’s College, Oxford
It was the window of Europe in the nineteenth century which showed the intellectual elite that there was an alternative to both arbitrary rule and chaos, and that was government based in law. Thus the constitutional movement began first and foremost for the abolition of arbitrary rule, and it came to fruition when, following the campaign for a constitution, the Qajar shah agreed to a constitutional government in 1906.3

Politics itself was new. By the turn of the twentieth century they did not yet have a Persian term for it so they habitually applied the term polteek, which was a corruption of the French word politique. They even called European politicians polteek-chi. It was later that they used the term siyasat, which did exist in Persian but had had other meanings. Politics was new, but so were the modern political press and the use of poetry, including scathing or obscene poetry, in public discourse. Advanced prose and poetry were no longer confined to the elite or the private sphere; on the contrary, they made up much of the emerging public sphere. This initiated a long tradition of the closeness of politics with literature, and especially poetry, in the twentieth century, which in effect ended by the revolution of February 1979.4

Qanun, or law, was the sacred objective, the password for which freedom was often used as the alternative term, because in an arbitrary regime it meant freedom from arbitrary rule; but in time it came to be identified with licence and chaos as well since the triumphant revolutionaries behaved as if they had been liberated not just from arbitrary rule but from the state itself, constitutional or otherwise. Hence the years after the final revolutionary triumph of 1909 witnessed increasing chaos rather than constitutional, let alone democratic, government. The paradox was that the typically weak governments which were but pawns in the hands of a very strong parliament were trying as hard as they could to modernize politics and society; nationalist sentiments which were latent during the revolution were emerging fast, and lofty ideals were being aspired to in the midst of poverty, anarchy, and virtual


disintegration, especially after World War I inevitably intruded in the country. Soon the nationalist poet Mirzadeh-ye Ṭeshqi (1894–1925) would write:

آزادی و انقلاب اول گم شد
بار دگر انقلاب می‌باید کرد؟

The first freedom and revolution were lost
We should start another revolution.

By the end of the world war Iran was on its knees, with chaos and rebellion both in the center and in the provinces adding to the Spanish flu epidemic, which wreaked havoc especially among the poor masses. The country was but a short distance from total disintegration. The financial situation was so dire that the British government was paying monthly subsidies to Iran in order to be able to keep the civil service and the Cossack Division barely afloat. At least with hindsight it is clear that to avoid total collapse two alternatives were open to the country: a relatively strong constitutional government or a military dictatorship with the risk of reverting to arbitrary rule.

1919–1921

It was in August 1918 that Vosuq al-Dowleh formed a cabinet with the support of the British embassy and a splinter group of the Iranian Democrat party; he also had the backing of Seyyed Hasan Modarres, the astute, popular, and very influential Mojtahed-politician who had just returned from Turkey and, as he was to say later, had witnessed the appalling state of the country and people on his way.

Lord Curzon, chairman of the eastern committee of the British war cabinet, soon to become foreign secretary, was keen to enter an agreement with Vosuq, universally regarded as being a very able politician, which would restore order to Iran and make it safe for India as well as Iraq, which was expected soon to become a British pro-


tectorate via the Paris conference and the Versailles Treaty. Vosuq and two of his colleagues, Nosrat al-Dowleh and Sarem al-Dowleh, responded positively, although negotiations took very long and it was only on August 9, 1919, that the agreement was signed in Iran with the support of the young Ahmad Shah. Vosuq, Nosrat, and Sarem subsequently became known as the triumvirate.

The agreement began by emphasising respect for the independence and integrity of Iran, and its main points were a British loan of £2 million to Iran at 7 percent interest – against the security of the Iranian customs revenues - to be repaid over the next twenty years; a financial adviser employed from the private market to help organize Iran’s chaotic and penniless financial administration; and a military adviser to help organize a uniform central army. The couple of remaining points referred to the reconstruction of the Iranian customs tariffs, British backing for Iran to become a member of the League of Nations, and so on.\(^7\)

It is not clear exactly when opposition began to spread to the agreement, but it is fairly certain that it began while the agreement was still being negotiated. The Iranian delegation on the fringes of the Paris Conference that was not privy to negotiations was one important source of spreading rumors against it. Having been cold-shouldered by the British, entertaining ideas of their own about being accepted as the Iranian delegation by the conference, and aspiring to obtaining aid from other countries as well, but especially the United States, they began to express doubt as to the bona fide nature of the negotiations and the subsequent agreement. They also expressed concern to French diplomats who were eager to listen and who were offended when the agreement was signed.

Another source of opposition to the agreement from beginning to end was the government of Imperial British India. They even suggested that, instead of the agreement, Britain apologize to Iran for their intrusion in the country during the war and offer generous assistance for reconstruction and development. There is little doubt that their views leaked to the Iranian elite and intellectuals.

Bolshevik Russia, which was deeply engaged in civil war, also wanted a neutral and possibly benevolent Iran on its southern borders—a buffer at least between them and British India—and burst out against the agreement as soon it was formally declared. The United States was at first silent but when a pro-Vosuq newspaper in Tehran claimed that they had declined to help Iran, it reacted angrily and all but in name denounced the agreement.8

Thus barely a couple of months after the agreement came into existence, it had been one way or another denounced by France (mainly through Bonin, their minister in Tehran), Russia, the United States, and British India. Iranians, however, began to get suspicious much earlier and soon became convinced that it was “the agreement for Iran to become a British protectorate.” This was far from the truth since there was nothing in the text of the agreement or its secret protocols to that effect; the idea of the creation of a protectorate via an agreement between two independent states was preposterous, and both the British and Iranian governments published several public statements emphatically denying it. Indeed, Curzon had informed the British cabinet that the agreement did not in any way undermine the sovereignty and independence of Iran.9

But the idea had the force of a religious conviction and no amount of argument, evidence, or reassurance was to change the minds of Iran’s political public; if anything, the idea spread further and wider as time went by. It was here that romantic nationalist poets ʿEshqi (1893–1924), ʿAref (1882–1934), and Farrokhi Yazdi (1889–1939), all of whom spent a term in jail, first showed their feverish reaction.

ʿEshqi wrote a poem entitled “Love of the Motherland,” in which he said, among many other things, that a feast of blood had been launched for “the Anglo-Saxon wolves” by their Iranian hosts. He then directly attacked Vosuq, the prime minister:

ای وثوق الدوله ایران ملک بابایت نبود
اجرت المثل زمان بچگی هایت نبود
مزرد کار دختر هر روز یک چاپت نبود
تا که بفروشی به هر کو زرفشانی می کند


10ʿEshqi, Kolliyat-e Mosavvar, 290–91.
O’ Vosuq al-Dowleh Iran was not your daddy’s estate
Or the rent payments for when you were a youth
Or the wages of your loose-legged daughter
So you could sell it to whoever spreads gold

He wrote in another poem:

داستان موش و گربه ست عهد ما و انگلیس
موش را گر گربه بر کیرد رها چون می کند؟
شیر هم باشیم گر ما روبه دهر است این
شیررا روباه معروف است مغبون می کند۱۱

It is a cat and mouth game, our pact with England
Once it catches the mouse how could the cat let it go?
Even if we be lion, she is the fox of our time
The fox famously defeats the lion

And in another poem:

خاکم به سر ز غصه به سر خاک اگر کنم
خاک وطن که رفت چه خاکی به سر کنم۱۲

Wretched me, if I go under dust from grief
What dust should I go under when the motherland’s is lost?

ʿAref-e Qavini also exploded like thunder. Vosuq, who was something of a poet, had recently published a ghazal which many poets, including poet-laureate Bahar, had “welcomed” (esteqbal) with poems of their own in the same meter and rhyme. ʿAref published a seemingly respectable one as well,۱۳ but he also published a sequel to it which was virtually unprintable:

۱۱Ibid., 305–6.
۱۲Ibid., 355.
۱۳Divan-e ʿAref-e Qazvini, ed., ʿAbd-al-Rahman Seyf-e Azad (Tehran, 1948), 235, in which he nevertheless compared her beloved’s popularity with the Bolsheviks, who were opposed to the agreement. For ʿAref’s life and works, see the entry on him in Encyclopaedia Iranica, http://www.iranica.com/articles/aref-qazvini-poet. For a few previously unpublished works by ʿAref in addition to critical comments on his life and works by a number of leading twentieth-century literary critics, see Athar-e Montasher Nashodeh-ye ʿAref-e Qazvini, ed. Seyyed Hadi Ha’eri (Tehran, 1993).
ای خانه تو در به رخ جنده باز گن
وز در برون زنت همه را جنده باز گن . . .
ای برده هر چه بود به دزدی و خلق را
محتاج قوت قالب و نان و پیاز گن
هنگام احتیاج صدارت چهار وقت
پشت سرجناب مدرس نماز گن
این نیز بر قرار نماند غمن مباش
ای در قرارداد حقیقت مجاز کن ۱۴

You the door of whose home is open to whores
While out of doors your wife makes everyone a whore-monger
You who have stolen the whole of the public money
Making the people hungry, in need of bread and onions
And when you aspire to premiership
You say your daily prayers behind the revered Modarres
This too shall pass don’t be concerned
You who in the agreement have sacrificed the truth for appearance

Like most others, ʿAref too believed that Vosuq and his associates had sold the country to Britain:

الهی آنکه به ننگ ابد دچار شود
هر آن کسی که خیانت به ملک ساسان کرد
به اردشیر غیور درآردست بگو
که خصم ملك ترا جزو انگلستان کرد ۱۵

God damn to everlasting shame
He who betrayed the land of Sasan
Tell the zealous Long-armed Ardashir
That the enemy annexed your land to England

As noted, the issue had come to boil and people of various political persuasions had no doubt that the triumvirate had committed high treason. Mohammad Farrokhi

۱۴Divan-e ʿAref, 325.
۱۵Divan-e ʿAref, 247.
Yazdi (1889–1939), poet as well as journalist, had been a highly emotional revolutionary ever since his youth when the governor of Yazd had had his lips sewn together as punishment for outspokenness. Now he wrote a scathing piece against Nosrat al-Dowleh, one of the triumvirate and foreign minister, accusing him of being busy selling the country in Europe:

Nosrat al-Dowleh is busy in Europe
Annihilating the motherland-look and see . . .
Like a dealer for the sale of the motherland
Constantly finding customers-look and see . . .
To deliver the motherland to Britain
He is even keener than her-look and see

And when, as a result of his campaigns against the agreement he was arrested, he wrote in jail:

Take this message to Vosuq al-Dowleh, O’zephyr,
It’s not nice to mistreat Iranian patriots
He whose only offence is love of the motherland
No creed would condemn to a dark cell . . .
The one who affirmed our independence in the agreement

Means none but to appropriate [Iran] by the ominous points of the agreement

http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/farrokhi-yazdi

\[17\] Divan-e Farrokhi, 197–98.
The odd poet out was the leading poet-laureate Bahar (1887–1951) himself.\(^\text{18}\) He was (and remained) close to Vosuq and his brother Qavam al-Saltaneh and was editor of the semi-official *Iran*. He certainly did not oppose the agreement, but there is no evidence of his having written a poem in favor of it. However, when on one occasion Vosuq’s forces defeated Kuchik Khan and his Jangal (forest) guerrillas in Mazanderan,\(^\text{19}\) Bahar wrote a long and lofty qasideh celebrating the event and praising Vosuq:

\[
\text{شَدّ به اقبال شهنشه ختم کار جنگلی}
\]
\[
\text{جنگل از خلخال و طارم امان شد تا انزیلی}
\]
\[
\text{دولت دزدان جنگل ساخت مستعجل فتاد}
\]
\[
\text{دولت دزدی بلی باشد دین مستعجلی . . .}
\]
\[
\text{صاحب اعظم و ثوق دولت عالی، حسن}
\]
\[
\text{مُتَبَهیر در مقبَلی ضرب المثل در عاقلی . . .}
\]

By the Shahanshah’s good fortune, the Jangal insurgency was ended

The Jangal was made secure from Khalkhal and Tarom to Anzali

The Luck of the Jangal robbers quickly turned

Indeed the luck of robbers always turns quickly . . .

The great leader, Support of the Sate, Vosuq

Well known for his good luck and his wisdom . . .

After the fall of Vosuq in July 1920 in the wake of the Bolshevik invasion of Gilan and the virtual, though not yet formal, abandonment of the 1919 agreement, Bahar found a new cause to refresh his revolutionary reputation. Vosuq had tolerated the revolt in April 1920 of the popular and charismatic Sheykh Mohammad Khiyabani in Tabriz, but his successor, the equally popular Moshir al-Dowleh, was determined to stamp out the revolts in the provinces of Gilan, Mazanderan, and Azerbaijan. In the case of the first two provinces, he managed to persuade Khuchik Khan to break up his coalition with the Gilan Bolsheviks, but the new Tabriz governor Mokhber

al-Saltaneh (Hedayat) put down Khiyabani’s revolt in that city, which led to the unplanned death of Khiyabani himself. He was mourned in Tehran in meetings held by radical Democrats, and Bahar wrote a tarji’ band with the refrain: 21

گر خون خیابانی مظلوم بجوشد
سرتاسر ایران کفن سرخ بپوشد. 22

If the blood of the innocent Khiyabani comes to boil
From end to end Iran will wear a red shroud

Bahar had been a V osuq supporter and did not mind attacking his replacement, Moshir, and in the deal, Mokhber as well. But we may surmise that the reason for ʿAref’s, ʿEshqi’s, and Farrokhi’s silence in this case was that they regarded Moshir as a popular politician.

1921–1923

It was barely six months between the fall of Khiyabani and the Reza Khan-Seyyed Ziaʾ’s coup of February 1921, during which chaos as well as feverish opposition to the agreement merely intensified. The coup was assisted by a few British military and diplomatic officers on the ground, but Curzon and the British government were totally oblivious to it. The officers in question had come to believe that Curzon’s insistence on the implementation of the agreement was prejudicial to both British and Iranian interests and thus acted on their own. 23 For at least a year the coup was quite popular, since Reza Khan, the war minister began to organize the new army and managed to supress both the Bolshevik and Jangal movements in the Caspian provinces. It is highly instructive that not even the romantic nationalist poets such as ʿEshqi and ʿAref wrote a line in defense of Kuchik Khan, who had been popular even in Tehran. Indeed, they had welcomed with open arms Seyyed Ziaʾ, the civilian leader of the coup and its first prime minister, who had imprisoned many landlords and members of the political elite.

23For details, see Katouzian, State and Society in Iran, chap. 9.
Ten days after the coup, Bahar found himself in jail, not to be released until Ziaʾ’s dismissal and departure from Iran more than three months later. While in Ziaʾ’s jail, he wrote a scathing piece, in the form of a long qasideh, on Ahmad Shah, apparently because the shah had recognized the Seyyed Ziaʾ-Reza Khan coup and in that sense acquiesced in the arrest of politicians and notables, although Bahar was to learn later that the shah had had very little choice in the matter.24 He wrote about the end of the poem that when the people move to avenge themselves on the shah:

نه زور رضات می کند یاری
نه نور ضیات می شود رهبر

Neither Reza’s force would be of much help to you
Nor would Ziaʾ’s light, of any use
Ziaʾ, of course, literally means light

But he also wrote a humorous qat’eh (fragment), poking fun at his young friend and jailer, it being more like a joke than a lampoon:

من و تو هر دو ای ضیاالدین
دو جوانیم شوخ و مندلی
تو کنون از وجوه هندستان
زر ستاندی و می کنی بیلی . . .

You and I, O’ Ziaʾ al-Din, are both
Two young men with little turban cloth
This minute you’ve got some money
from India’s budget, and look mighty . . .

ʿEshqiʾs sentiments toward the Seyyed were quite the opposite. He wrote in a long qasideh:

پی تجدید فیروزی نسل پاک ساسانی
مهین سید ضیاءالدین خجسته صدر اعظم شد

24See, for example, Katouzian, State and Society, chaps. 8 and 9.
25This qasideh has been published in the third edition of Divan-e Bahar (Tehran: Tus, 1989), vol.1: 347–52.
27Kolliyat-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi, 302–05.
The great Seyyed Zia’ al-Din became the auspicious prime minister
To revive the victories of the pure descendants of Sasan

And when within a hundred days the shah and Reza Khan brought down Zia’ and sent him into exile, ‘Aref wrote his famous song lamenting his departure. Zia’’s cabinet had been known as the black cabinet mainly because he wore a black hat, beard, and coat. So ‘Aref wrote:

ای دست حق به پناهت بازاً
چشم آرزومند نگاهت بازاً
وی توده ملت سپاهت بازاً
قربان کابینه سیاهت بازاً...

May you enjoy God’s support, come back
Eyes long for seeing your eyes, come back
People at large are your soldiers, come back
We love your black cabinet, come back...

Despite the expulsion of Seyyed Zia’ (in which they saw the British rather than Reza Khan’s hand!), there was no serious opposition to Reza Khan among modern and romantic nationalist poets and intellectuals. On the contrary, when on the first anniversary of the coup in February 1922 largely positive articles were published by the press speculating who were “the real persons behind the coup,” Reza Khan proudly responded in a long statement issued by the war ministry (and written by his chef de cabinet) that he was the real person behind the coup.29

There had however been one major incident for political poetry writing in that period. It was the death in battle of Colonel Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan (1892–1921), the young, able, and romantic nationalist Gendarmerie chief of Khorasan. There had been a long and bitter feud between the colonel and Qavam (Vosuq’s brother), the former governor-general of Khorasan, whom the colonel had arrested on Zia’’s order and sent to Tehran after the coup. Qavam having become prime minister after Zia’ in June 1921, the colonel felt highly insecure and, although he reaffirmed his loyalty to the shah, in effect he revolted against the government. He had six thousand well-trained

28 Divan-e ’Aref, 41113.
29 Hoseyn Makki, Tarikh-e Bist Saleh-ye Iran
gendarmes under his command, which made him militarily stronger than Rea Khan, and there was even fear of his joining hands with the Gilan insurgents with whom Reza was currently engaged. In the end, Qavam persuaded the tribes of northern Khur-.

rasan to rise against him, and that was how he was slain in battle in October. With Qavam taking the entire blame, the biggest winner of the event was Reza Khan, who had painlessly lost a dangerous rival without being tainted.\footnote{See, for example, Ali Azari, \textit{Qiyam-e Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan dar Khurasan} (Tehran: Safiʿali Shah, 1965). Gholamhoseyn Mirza Saleh, \textit{Jonbesh-e Kolonel Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan bana bar Gozaresh-ha-ye Konsulgari-ye Ingilis dar Mashhad} (Tehran: Nashr-e Tarih-e Iran, 1987).}


\begin{quote}
که گمان داشت که این شور به یا خواهد شد؟
هر چه دزد است نظمیه رها خواهد شد
دور ظلمت بدل از دور ضیا خواهد شد
dzd گفتسته رئيس وزارا خواهد شد...
\end{quote}

\...Who’d believe there’d be such an upheaval?
Every thief would be released from police custody
The period of darkness would follow the period of light (=Ziaʾ)
A thief in chains would become prime minister . . .

And in a long qatʿeh:

\begin{quote}
ولکه جون تو شیر نری را در این کنام کنند
به چشم مردم این مملکت نباشد آب
وگرنه گریه برایت علی الدوام کنند . . .
\end{quote}

\footnote{Divan-e Kamel-e Iraj Mirza, ed., Mohammad Jaʿfar Mahjub (United States: Sherkat-e Katab, 1989), 213–16.}

\footnote{Divan-e Kamel-e Iraj Mirza, 182–83.
I grieved for you o’ lover of Iran
That they’d put a lion like you in that den
No more water is left in the peoples’ eyes
Or they would cry for you always

And in another piece referring to Pesyan’s severed head:

به احترام به این سر نظر کنید ای خلق
که بی حيات وی با حيات جاود است

People! Regard this head with respect
Since it’s lifeless but enjoys eternal life

Farrokhi Yazdi wrote in a lead article in his newspaper Tufan:

روزی که شهید عشق قربانی شد
اغشته به خون مফخر ایرانی شد

The day they sacrificed the martyr to love
Rolling in blood, he became the pride of Iran

‘Aref knew Pesyan well, loved him, and was his guest for a time in Mashhad. He mourned Pesyan’s death bitterly in a few poems and songs, in one of them even displaying a death wish. He wrote in one poem:

زنده به خون خواهی ات هزار سیاوش
گردد از آن قطره خون که از تو زند جوش
عشق به ایران به خون کشیدت و این خون
کی کند ایرانی ار کس است فراموش

Alive to avenge your blood, a thousand Siyavosh
Will rise from a drop of blood which is lost by you
Love of Iran soaked you in blood and this blood
Iranians will never forget if they are humans at all . . .

\[^{34}\text{Makki, Tarikh-e Bist Saleh, vol. 1: 462.}\]
\[^{35}\text{Makki, Tarikh-e Bist Saleh.}\]
\[^{36}\text{Divan-e ‘Aref, 251.}\]
And the death wish:

مگر چسان نکنم گریه گریه کار من است
کسی که باعث این کار گشته بار من است...
تدارک سفر مرگ دید عارف و گفت
در این سفر کنل چشم انظار من است

How can I not cry, it is my habit
My beloved is the cause of it . . .
ʿAref prepared himself for the journey of death and said
In this journey the colonel is waiting for me

For some time nothing very exciting happened within the realm of current politics that would attract the direct engagement of the political poets. Some of them were busy elevating their ideals of pre-Islamic Persia, while others had given up all hope and had death wish for themselves as well as their country. ʿAref wrote in a longish ghazal:

مشکل کار من آسان نکند کس جز مرگ
چه کنم آنکه کند مشکلمن آسان نرسید
من در این غم که سکندر ز چه ایران آمد
تو به فکری ز چه بر جشمه حیوان نرسید ...
من به فکرم شه خانن به سر دار رسد
تو در این غم ز چه عرض توه ایران نرسید
تا که شد پای عرب باز به ایران زان روز
خبر خرمی از دولت ساسان نرسید ...
عارف از په همین آمده پرشد از چیست
خبر کنیکون کردن تهران نرسید

Naught but death would relieve my pain
That which would relieve my pain did not arrive
I am mourning Alexander’s adventure in Iran
You wonder why at the Spring of Life he did not arrive . . .

37 Divan-e ʿAref, 253–54.
38 Divan-e ʿAref, 262–63.
I think of the traitorous shah being hanged
You are sad that to the sultan your petition did not arrive
When the Arabs found their way into Iran and since
A word of happiness from the land of Sasan did not arrive . . .
That is why ‘Aref has arrived wondering
Why the news of the total destruction of Tehran did not arrive

‘Aref then completely gave up on Iranians and, in a long mathnavi called “The Book of Asses,” described them all as asses:

... اهل این ملک بی لجام خرند
به خدا جمله خاص و عام خرند
شاه و کابینه و وزیر خرند
از امیرانش تا فقیر خرند . . .
آنکه دارد ریاست وزرا
به خداوند خالق دو سرا
زن خیان جملگی بزرگترست
می‌توان گفت یک طوله خر است . . .
شجنه و شیخ تا عسس همه خر
زن و فرزند و هم نفس همه خر . . .

. . . People of this lawless land are asses
By God both commoners and elite are asses. . .
He who is the head of ministers
I swear by the God of both worlds
Is a bigger ass than them all
In fact he is a stable-full of assess
Sheykh, police chief and his men are all asses
Wife, children and companion, all asses . . .

And he ended this long narrative poem with verses which could well be the subject of a separate study as it comes from a person who knew nothing about Lenin except that he was a successful revolutionary, who praises him as well as Bolshevism in

39Divan-e ‘Aref, 298–300.
Muslim religious terms, and who is unlikely to have been a believer:

بلشویک است خضر راه نجات
ـبر محمد و آله صلواتـ
ای لنین ای فرشته رحمت گن
کن قدم رنج زود و بی زحمت
هین بفرما که خانه خانه توست
تخم چشم من آشیانه توست
یا خرابش بکن و یا آباد
رحمت حق به امتحان تو باد۴٠

The Bolshevik is the divine guide to salvation
– Blessed be Mohammad and his people –
O’ Lenin, O’ angle of mercy
Take the trouble if you please
You may nest in the apple of my eyes
Please step in, the home is yours
Either devastate or develop it
May God bless your efforts

Several years earlier, ʿEshqi had been particularly active in writing poems and operettas bitterly lamenting the real and imagined glories of ancient Persia, which he now published. In his operetta “Resurrection of Iranian Kings,” set in the ruins of Ctesiphon, he introduces several ancient Persian kings and queens (Achaemenid as well as Sasanian), appearing one by one and singing songs of lament about the contemporary state of Iran. The following is a verse which is repeated several times:

این خرابه قبرستان نه ایران ماست
این خرابه ایران نیست، ایران کجاست۴١

This ruined graveyard is not our Iran
This ruin is not Iran, where is Iran

\[^{40}\text{Divan-e ʿAref.}\]
\[^{41}\text{Kolliyat-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi, 262–72.}\]
The last ghost to speak is none other than Zoroaster himself, after which the kings and nobles begin to disappear one after the other. The piece reflects the familiar intensity of the poet’s romantic nationalism which is further enhanced by his passionately charged personality. Much the same sentiments are shown in his long tarkib-band “The Black Shroud” (kafan-e siyah), except that here he combines his allusions to the ancient glories with a discourse on hijab. The ancient past and inglorious present are in the background, but the focal point is the veil, veiled women, and “brides in shrouds.” It ends with the verse: As long as Iranian women live in shrouds / Half of the Iranian people are not alive.\(^{42}\)

Being also a journalist, this talented and highly excitable ultra-revolutionary poet in his mid- to late twenties went as far as writing two articles where he advocated the holding of annual “blood festivals” (ʿeid-e khun). Through the year, he argued, a large number of the people at the top of the society inevitably become corrupt and turn traitors. There then should follow five days of a blood festival, the first four days of which would pass in public enjoyment and celebrations, and then on the fifth day all the traitors would be slain. This would return the society back to a happy and cleansed state until next year where inevitable accumulation of corruption and treason should be remedied in the same way. However, he cannot quite make up his mind about the number of days of bloodshed since somewhere else in his articles he talks about five days, not one day, of bloodshed during the blood festival.\(^{43}\)

1923-1925

It is not as if between 1921 and 1923 things had been quiet on the political front. On the contrary, there had been a growing power struggle between Reza Khan and his (largely nationalist modernist) supporters and the old constitutionalists, led by Seyyed Hasan Modarres. Modarres had been the most powerful figure in the fourth Majlis (1921–23), normally leading the majority, but with the growth of Reza Khan’s military power and his successes in putting down provincial rebellions and bringing security to towns, Modarres’s luck was in decline. He saw Qavam as a civilian match for Reza Khan and managed to put him in the prime-minister’s office for a period, but it was clearly not a line which could end in dislodging Reza Khan’s dictatorship. There were also the popular Independents, respectable constitutionalists

\(^{42}\)Kolliyat-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi, 183–203.
\(^{43}\)Kolliyat-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi, 90–105.
such as Mostowfi al-Mamalek, Moshir al-Dowleh, his brother Mo’tamen al-Molk, and Hajj Mirza Yahya Dowlat-Abadi, among others, who supported Reza Khan’s efforts in stamping out chaos but were committed to genuine constitutionalism. The spring and summer of 1923 saw the end of the fourth Majlis and the elections for the fifth. The revolutionary poets were still silent about Reza Khan in their works, but they hated the old elite, including Modarres, if only because of his support for the unpopular Qavam.\textsuperscript{44}

As soon as the fourth Majlis was dissolved ʿEhsqi took to the field and did not spare any libel and invective on nearly any of its members, except for Soleyma Mirza and Mostowfi al-Mamalek, the former because he was anti-Qavam and the latter because Modrres had tried to replace Mostowfi with Qavam as prime minister. This he did in a long qasideh-ye mostazad which began:

این مجلس چارم بخدا ننگ بشر بودیدی چه خبر بود؟
هرکار که کردنده ضرروی ضرر بودیدی چه خبر بود؟ . . .

This fourth Majils was a blot on humanity
Didn’t you see it all?
Whatever they did was loss upon loss
Didn’t you see it all? . . .
No more will Modarres below and jump
In the Majlis hall
The jamboree of donkeys is now up
Didn’t you see it all? . . .
Shahzadeh-ye Firuz, that traitorous whore
With that jinn-like bearing of his
Was Curzon’s concubine and looked for lovers too
Didn’t you see it all?
Mohammad Vali Mirza who is Curzon’s sister-in-law
The whole point is this:


\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 396–402.
Like a mouth he was constantly trying to steal gold  
Didn’t you see it all? . . .  
The fount of baseness and god of turning coat  
Mister Tadayyon  
This wife-prostitute was worse than wife-whore Davar  
Didn’t you see it all? . . .

The reason, despite some law and order measures taken by Reza Khan, that such a piece could still be published with impunity must be that despite its onslaught on traditional politicians, especially on Modarres and Qavam, there is total silence about Reza Khan. ‘Eshqi had also written a piece chastizing the Majlis, the shah, some notables, among others, but he had left Reza Khan out of it.46 Indeed between 1921 and 1923 this silence had been deafening. Minor and unknown versifiers may indeed have written praises of Reza Khan, but perhaps the only fairly respectable poet who wrote a panegyric for him was Vahid-e Dastgerdi, whom ‘Eshqi took to task in a qasideh only because incidentally he had disparaged ‘Aref and ‘Eshqi in his poem, while incidentally commending his praise of Reza Khan.47

This however would change soon. At the opening of the fifth Majils Modarres tried but did not succeed in installing Qavam in the prime-minister’s office, the popular Moshir al-Dowleh, who was no match for Reza Khan, being elected. But soon Reza Khan manoeuvred Moshir out of office when at a stroke he also exiled Qavam, sent the shah to Europe, and became prime minister. This was October 1923, and he was now officially “the government.” He was soon to become the army commander-in-chief as well, a move which Mosaddeq and other Independents supported and Modarres did not resist. There was one step left for Reza Khan to formally becoming the dictator of Iran, and both he and his military and civilian well-wishers believed that this could only be achieved by a change of regime and the declaration of a republic. The field of political conflict now became wide open, although the Independents still stayed largely in the margins until when one of them, Mo’tamen al-Molk, Majlis, speaker and head of the legislature, lost his cool and rebuked Reza Khan for having ordered the parliamentary guards to attack the anti-republic demonstrators outside the Majlis.

46From now on the entire motherland must be shat on / Such a Majlis and its high and low must be shat on. And more of the same. Kolliyat-e Mosavvar-e ‘Eshqi, 403.

A stream of petitions to the Majlis in favor of the declaration of a republic were sent daily, especially from the provinces which army commanders in effect ruled. Reza Khan had the majority of the Majlis as a result of many defections to his side, and the further support of Democrats and Social Democrats who believed that a republican regime was progressive. There was going to be a bloody fight and the lines were clearly drawn. By all accounts the call for a republic should have been successful, as Reza Khan had funds, the army, as well as and the Majlis majority. But it failed for two principal reasons. First, they were over-confident and in a hurry to declare a republic and elect Reza Khan president by March 1924, in time for Reza Khan to take the traditional Noruz salute as president. Second, Modarres played his hands astutely both by his incredibly effective power of the word and by mobilizing the common people and bazaaris to resist. It worked so well that Reza Khan resigned, though he was soon returned from his estate to Tehran with some pomp. There was no more mention of a republic, however.48

ʿAref, ʿEshqi, and Bahar took to the field. ʿAref was delighted while ʿEshqi defected to the opposition led by Modarres, of which Bahar was a leading member. ʿAref saw all Iran’s ills as the doing of the shah and the traditional politicians, so he organized concerts and wrote poems in which he sang the praise both of republic and Reza Khan, although he was to change his view about Reza Khan sometime after he occupied the throne.49

باد سردار سپه زنده به ایران عارف
دولت رو به فنا را به بقا خواهد برد.

Long live Sardar-e Sepah (Reza Khan) in Iran, ʿAref
He will save the country from annihilation

48Contrary to general belief, however, it was not the maraje’ in Qom who defeated the campaign for a republic. Reza Khan went to see them after the event in order to enlist their support, and they told him that they would not oppose his potential bid to become a constitutional monarch. See Khaterat-e Mehdi Haʾeri Yazdi, Tarh-e Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Iran, ed. Habib Ladjevardi, Markaz-e Motale’at-e Khavar-e Miyaneh-ye Daneshgah-e Harvard, December 9, 2001, 12–16. Katouzian, State and Society in Iran, chap. 10; Iran: Politics, History and Literature, chap. 11. Vanessa Martin, “‘Mudarris, Republicanism and the Rise to Power of Riza Khan, Sadar-i Sipah” in The Making of Modern Iran, State and Society under Reza Shah, ed., Stephanie Cronin (New York: Routledge, 2003).
49Athar-e Montasher Nashodeh-ye ʿAref-e Qazvini.
50Divan-e ʿAref, 418.
And in praise of republic:

... پس از مصیبت قاجار عید جمهوری
یقین بدان بود امروز بهترین اعیاد
خوشم که دست طبیعت گذاشت در دربار
چراغ سلطنت شاه در دریچه باد...

... After the catastrophe of the Qajars
The feast of republic is the finest festival
I am happy that the hand of nature put
The lamp of the monarchy, in the royal court,
In the window of the wind . . .

The response of Bahar and 'Eshqi was quite the contrary. 'Eshqi virtually exploded. Bahar first wrote a mosammat-e movashah and published it in a pro–Reza Khan newspaper apparently in favor of republic, but read as a movashah poem, it is quite the opposite:

در پرده جمهوری کوبد در شاهی
ما بی خبر و دشمن طماع زرنگ است...

In the guise of republicanism
He [Reza Khan] is knocking at the door of Shahi
We are naïve and the greedy enemy is canny.

However, he also wrote a long, sardonic, satirical, and humorous poem entitled “The Republic “Saga” (“Jomhurinameh”). Written in the wake of the campaign’s collapse, the poem describes its various stages and those involved in it in detail. This was believed to have been the work of 'Eshqi, who was publishing signed and very much more scathing poems and articles against the proposed republic, the continuation of which long after the event led to his assassination by two police agents (see below). However, “Jomhurinameh” was a product of collaboration between him and poet-laureate Bahar, though out of the forty stanzas only four were written by 'Eshqi. It describes, more or less faithfully, the republican campaign and its failure from

51 Divan-e 'Aref, 282–83.
the viewpoint of its opponents. With its semi-colloquial language and crypto-journalistic narrative style of reporting as well as its commenting on a contemporary event, it is almost unique among Persian political poems of the twentieth century.

Bahar wrote in “The Republic Saga” that, as soon as a strong man appears, he is surrounded by a few “tramps,” “Who would tell him to take off the shah’s crown / And put it upon his own head”: 

اگر پیدا شود در ملک یک فرد
بمانند رضا خان جوانمرد
کنندش دوره فورا چند ولگرد
به فکر این که بايد ضایعش کرد
بگويند از سر شه تاج بردار
به فرق خویشتند آن تاج بگذار . . .

And referring to a leading republic enthusiast and campaigner:

. . . چه جمهوري عجب دارم من از او
مگر او غافل است از قصد یارو
که ميخواهد نشيند جای قاجار
همان طوري که کرد آن مرد افشار . . .

. . . What republic[?], I am surprised at him
Who seems to be unaware of the bloke’s motive
That he wishes to succeed the Qajars
Just like that man of the Afshars [Nader Shah] . . .

And further:

نخستين بار سازيم آفتاني
علامت هاي سرخ انقلابي
كه جمهوري بود حرفی حسابي
چو گشتی تو رهيس انتخابی
بپایيدگفت كين مرد فداکار
بود خود پادشاهي را سزاوار . . .
At first we shall put out
Red revolutionary signs
That republic is a good idea
And after you become an elected president
We would say that this self-less man
Surely deserves to be shah . . .

Bahar goes on:

When there appears a republican in Mr Dashti
His standard bearer being that devil of a Rashti
Tadayyon, that insane old Mashti
Sits every night in his home’s hashti
Summons the riffraff from hither and thither
From cotton-whippers to pawn-brokers . . .

Listen to a tale about ‘Adl al-Molk
That that tall and useless bloke
Between shit and piss he tries to mediate
Sometimes to Tadayyon he lends support
Other times he becomes Soleyman’s assistant
So he can bring these two together . . .

‘Aref is putting on a show this week
With the support of the ministry of culture
It’ll be clear with a little expenditure
That republicanism has no opponent
It’ll be proven with the drum and the tar
That constitutional monarchy has no-one on its side . . .

The idea has been approved by London
That quickly summoned Sir Percy Loraine
If Shumiyatsky gets suspicious
I’ll send him that master fixer
That same duplicitous rogue
Karim-e Rashti that devil of a conjuror . . .
And so on and so forth.\textsuperscript{53}

But ʿEshqi would not give up. He wrote a dramatic piece in his newspaper \textit{Qa-rn-e Bistom} (twentieth century), in which the supreme leader (\textit{qaʾ ed}) and symbol (\textit{mazhar}) of republicanism sings his part first. Above the poem features the picture of a fierce-looking man in military uniform, overshadowed by John Bull, who holds a rifle in one hand and a fistful of money in the other. He declares both that he is a big bully and that he must be excused since he is a foreign agent. Then there is a chorus one by one of pro-Reza Khan newspapers—all of them mentioned by name but also represented by various animals such as a serpent, cat, mouse—confessing their loyalties to the great leader. For example, the mouse (i.e., the \textit{Kushesh} newspaper) tells Reza Khan:

\begin{quote}
I am a little poor mouse, committed to you
I have been elated by your smile
In thieving and fraudulence, I am just like you
Let me get my just desert, just like you . . . \textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

ʿEshqi also wrote the long mathnavi based on the folk tale about a man called Yasi. He is a fraud who takes advantage of a simpleton and steals his syrup of dates (\textit{shireh}) by leaning over the pot of syrup while mounted on a donkey. The poor simpleton is confused seeing the impression of the donkey’s hooves on the ground, and that of Yasi’s hand in the syrup:

\begin{quote}
یاسی ماهست ای یار عزیز
حضور جمبول یعنی انگلیز
Our Yasi, my dear man
Is the venerable John Bull, that is, Britain
\end{quote}

Britain first tried to eat Iran like Yasi ate the syrup by imposing the 1919 agreement. That did not work and she arranged a coup. But Seyyed Ziaʾ upset her design. This time she decided to use an indirect route and so put forward the idea of republican-

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Divan-e Bahar}, 359–66.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Kolliyat-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi}, 245–47.
ism. Just like Yasi, she mounted the donkey to steal the syrup, the donkey’s republican hooves showing on the ground and Britain’s hand, in the syrup’s pot, saying:

‘I shall make an ass of the republican people
And shall do worse than I have ever done before’
But the Iranians saw her trick and began to shout:
The hooves of a republic, the hand of Britain?
Police come, come, thief, thief!
What kind of red and blue flags are these?
People, this republic is a fraud!
Suddenly the people began to boo
The ass took fright and ran off
Neither money nor force helped her win
The syrup remained, the geezer lost the game.55

In the same issue of his newspaper, ʿEshqi wrote another dramatic piece in which the coffin of republicanism is being carried by its mourners. There is a picture of a coffin under which it is written “the corpse of the late fraudulent republic,” and some vultures are clattering their wings over it:

The vultures flew about the corpse
They beat their heads for this catastrophe
They repeatedly beat their heads and breasts
They put their hands in the gold in the coffin
They took their shares of the gold coins
- Alas, our republic was annihilated . . .56

These poems were open, vehement, and insulting and were all published in the same and last issue of ʿEshqi’s newspaper. Needless to say, his accounts of the 1919 agreement, the coup, and the republican campaign were not correct. However, shortly afterward ʿEshqi, who had gone into hiding, was gunned down by two police agents in broad daylight.57 This happened in June 1924, two weeks before the Saqqa-khanéh incident which led to the unplanned murder of the US envoy in Tehran. The government unfairly blamed the opposition for the whole incident

and a period of suppression followed.\textsuperscript{58} In the meantime twelve journalists had taken \textit{bast} (sanctuary) in the Majlis against the murder of ʿEshqi, protesting that there was no security left for them.\textsuperscript{59} Poet-laureate Bahar had been stopped from delivering a firm speech in the Majlis condemning Eshqi’s murder, but he delivered one later defending the opposition from the charge of responsibility for the Saqqa-khaneh incident and protesting against the ensuing oppressive measures taken by the government.\textsuperscript{60} It goes without saying that many in the government and opposition saw it as a British plot, while Britain and the United States suspected the hand of Reza Khan in it.\textsuperscript{61}

It took another year and three months and a great deal of further power struggles—though with declining luck for the opposition—before the republicans could change the regime and replace it with the Pahlavi monarchy. The Majlis vote was taken on October 31, 1925. On the evening of October 29 there was a lengthy debate regarding public petitions received for the deposition of the Qajars. Bahar delivered a long—reasoned and tempered, even subtle—speech on behalf of the opposition. His entire emphasis was on the argument that whatever decision might be taken, it should be strictly according to the constitution.\textsuperscript{62}

Agents had gone there to kill him, but not for that reason—merely to spread fear among the opposition—and in a case of mistaken identity they killed a pro-Reza Khan journalist instead. The idea was to intimidate the dozen or so deputies who were opposed to the move, and, judging by the number of those who defected or were absent from the Majlis two days later when the vote was taken, they seem to have succeeded. However, they would have obtained the vote even without the employment of such tactics.

Bahar went into hiding and wrote a very moving qasideh, reflecting the mood of a man who might well have died a violent death that night, and lamenting the death of


\textsuperscript{60}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61}Katouzian, “Miracles at the Saqqa-khaneh.”

\textsuperscript{62}Bahar, \textit{Tarikh-e Mokhtaras}, vol. 2.
the poor pro-government journalist who had travelled from Qazvin to cover the big event for his newspaper, *Raʿd*:

> شب چو دیوان به حصار فلکی راه زدند
> اختران میخ بر این بر شده درگاه زدند . . .
> خواستند اهرمنان تا ز کمینگاه مرا
> خون بربرند از آن رُو گه و بیگه زدند
> ناگهان واعظ رقیه به کمینگاه رسید
> بر سرش ریخته و زندگی اش تاه زدند . . .
> بر توای واعظ مسکیندل من سوخت ازآنک
> خونیان بر تو چنان ضربت چانگه زدند . . .
> شدی از قزوین تا نمی‌شست رعد کنی
> چای رعدت به جگر صاعقه ناگاه زدند . . .

At night when demons intruded into the castle of time
Stars spot-marked the elevated heavens
The devils came to shed my blood
Hence they bided their time
Suddenly the Vaʿez of Qazvin reached the trap
They led an onslaught on him and ended his life . . .
I pitied you poor Vaʿez because
The murderers hit you to your death . . .
You came from Qazvin to prepare for *Raʿd* [=thunder]
Instead of thunder they hit you with lightning!

Shortly after that, the constitutional era came to an end.

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*Divan-e Bahar*, vol. 1: 367–68.