A Critical Introduction to Khomeini

As the architect of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini remains one of the most inspirational and enigmatic figures of the twentieth century. The Revolution placed Iran at the forefront of Middle East politics and the Islamic revival. Twenty years after his death, Khomeini is revered as a spiritual and political figurehead in Iran and large swathes of the Islamic world; in the West, he is remembered by many as a dictator and the instigator of Islamist confrontation. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam brings together both senior and emerging scholars in this comprehensive volume, which covers all aspects of Khomeini's life and critically examines Khomeini the politician, philosopher, and spiritual leader. The book details Khomeini's early years in exile from Iran, the revolution itself, and events that took place thereafter, including the hostage crisis and Iran-Iraq war. Lastly, the book considers his legacy in Iran – where Khomeini's image has been used by both reformist and conservative politicians to develop their own agendas – and further afield in other parts of the Islamic world and the West. Written by scholars from varying disciplinary backgrounds, the book will prove invaluable to students and general readers interested in the life and times of Khomeini and the politics of Islam that he inspired.

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A Critical Introduction to Khomeini

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Record of Mosaddeq’s Opponents (Persian; 2004, 2010); and Reflections on Mosaddeq’s Political Thinking (Persian, in press).

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I have followed a simple and accessible transliteration approach that adheres to the most common versions of foreign terms as they are used in English.
Adl
The quality of being just. Referred to conceptually as ‘Adalab.

Ahl al-Bayt
The People of the Household. Refers to the Prophet Mohammad and his immediate family and direct descendants through the lineage of Hassan and Hussein: Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661 AD), Fatima (d. 633 AD), Hassan ibn Ali (d. 669 AD), Hussein ibn Ali (d. 680 AD), Ali Zain al-Abideen (d. 712 AD), Mohammad al-Baquer (d. 733 AD), Ja’far al-Sadeq (d. 765 AD), Musa al-Kadhim (d. 799 AD), Ali al-Ridha (d. 818 AD), Mohammad al-Jawad (d. 835 AD), Ali al-Hadi (d. 868 AD), Hassan al-Askari (d. 874 AD), Mohammad al-Mahdi.

Akhbari
A legalistic designation found within Shi’ism that considers the use of reasoning (‘aql) and ijtihad in discerning religious law from Quran and Hadith impermissible.

Aql
Reason.

Ashura
The tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram, on which the Prophet’s grandson Hussein ibn Ali along with seventy-one companions, including his infant child Ali Asghar, young son Ali Akbar, and brother Abbas, were killed at the Battle of Karbala by the forces of the Caliph Yazid ibn Muawiya in the year 680 AD. The month of Muharram is commemorated annually by Shi’i Muslims with sermons, poetry, and
mournning, the day of Ashura considered the most important.

Ayatollah

Literally meaning “sign of Allah,” a title used to denote scholars that have reached the level of mujtahid, and having studied the Islamic sciences sufficiently are permitted to exercise ijtihad.

Bazaar

Marketplace.

Caliphate

(Arabic: Khilafah) The concept of Islamic succession to the Prophet in the areas of politics and leadership after his death, institutionalized in the governments of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Rashidun) Abu Bakr (d. 634 AD), Umar ibn Khattab (d. 644 AD), Uthman (d. 656 AD), and Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661 AD), and existing in various dynastical forms until its dissolution in 1924 by Mostafa Kemal Ataturk. Considered a sacrosanct institution by many Sunnis, and illegitimate by the Shi’i. See Twelve Imams.

Faqih (Pl. Fuqaha)

A jurisprudent of Islamic law.

Fatwa (Pl. Fatawa)

A religious and legally binding edict or verdict produced by a faqih.

Fedaiyan-e Islam

Devotees of Islam, a clandestine Islamic organization group founded in Iran by Navab Safavi (d. 1955), dedicated to assassinating officials of the Shah’s regime and intellectuals accused of “corrupting” Muslim society.

Fiqh

Jurisprudence.

Gharbzadegi

A concept and term introduced by Jalal Al-e Ahmad (d. 1969) in 1962, translated as “Westoxification,” “Occidentosis,” or “Westruckeness.” Denotes the mimicry and models of Western culture by Iranians at the expense of their own.

Ghayba

(English: “Occultation”) The period of absence or “hiddenness” of the Twelfth Shi’i Imam, extending from his disappearance in 873 AD until the present day, within which there will remain no representatives (Farsi: vakil; Arabic: wakil) in direct contact with him until his reappearance at the end of time. Usually used with reference to the Greater Occultation (Ghaybat al-Kubra), and not the Lesser
Glossary

Occultation (Ghaybat al-Sughra) that occurred between the birth of the Twelfth Imam and the year 941 AD, wherein representatives of the Imam still maintained a direct link with the Shi‘i community and relayed his guidance.

Grand Ayatollah

See Marja-e Taqlid.

Hadith

A narrated tradition detailing the sayings and practices of the Prophet and Twelve Imams.

Haram

Impermissible.

Hawza

Serninary.

Ijma’

Consensus.

Ijtihad

Interpretation of classical sources of jurisprudence, using one’s reason, in order to ascertain new rulings within a modern context.

‘Ilm

Knowledge pertaining to Islam and Islamic law.

‘Irfan

Islamic mysticism/gnosis. Not to be confused with Sufism, which is the more systematic and organized practice of ‘irfan within a tariqa (Sufi order).

Ithna ‘Asheri

Literally meaning “Twelver,” the predominant school of thought within Shi‘i Islam that takes its name from the belief in the legitimacy of Twelve successive Imams following the death of the Prophet.

Ja‘fari

A school of fiqh developed by the sixth Shi‘i Imam, Ja‘far al-Sadeq. See also Ithna ‘Asheri.

Khatt-e Imam

Line of the Imam. Refers to the fundamental principles of Ayatollah Khomeini’s political platform.

Khums

A 20 percent taxation applied to surplus income and savings within the Usuli-Shi‘i community paid to the chosen marja-e taqlid of a believer, which is subsequently redistributed among the Shi‘i community on behalf of the Twelfth Imam.

Madrasa

School.

Majlis

Place of meeting. Within the context of political affairs, refers to a council or parliament.

Marja-e Taqlid

Literally “source of emulation,” and sometimes referred to as Grand Ayatollah, the highest rank of scholar within Shi‘i Islam, permitted to issue fatawa and solicit emulators. See muqalid.

Marja‘iyat

See Marja-e Taqlid.
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Mazhab
(Pl. Mazaheb)
(Arabic: Madhab) School of fiqh, usually refers to four most orthodox Sunni schools (Hanbali, Hanafi, Maliki, Shaf’i) and two most orthodox Shi‘i schools (Ja‘fari, Zaydi), but also to a number of minority schools.

Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK)
People’s Mojahedin of Iran, a Marxist-Islamic terrorist organization established in 1965.

Mostazafin
(Arabic: Mustadaffan) Oppressed.

Motlaqeh Vali-ye Faqih
Absolute guardian jurist, with the absolute authority to rescind and introduce laws according to his interpretation of fiqh, and (if necessary) according to broader political objectives associated with safeguarding an Islamic state.

Mujadid
A personage found within Sunni theology said to appear every century in order to “renew” the Islamic faith.

Mujtahid
(Pl. Mujtahideen) An Islamic scholar that has either begun studying or completed studying the highest level of religious studies and is permitted to exercise ijtihad and thus no longer bound to being a muqalid of an Islamic authority other than themselves. See Muqalid.

Muqalid
(Pl. Muqalideen) A Muslim that, in lieu of being able to exercise ijtihad on his or her own, emulates and follows the religious rulings of a marja-e taqleed.

Occultation
See Ghayba.

Resalah
A book of fatwah that pertains to the everyday practice of Islamic faith, written and issued by different marja-e taqleed.

Shariah
Literally meaning “path” or “road,” refers to Islamic law.

Tajdid
The act of renewing or reviving Islam. See Mujadid.

Taqiya
Religious dissimulation, employed by both Shi‘i and Sunni under circumstances of religious persecution, where one’s life would be threatened on the basis of being visibly Muslim.

Tudeh
Iran’s communist party, established in 1941.

Twelve Imams
A succession of twelve rightful leaders of the Muslim community following the death of Prophet Mohammad, appointed and drawn from his family
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Ulema (Sgl. ‘Alim) Religious scholars.
Umma The transnational Islamic community.
Usuli A legalistic designation within Shi‘ism that regards it as permissible and in many cases mandatory to discern contemporary religious laws from Quran and Hadith by use of reasoning (‘aql) and ijtihad.

Vali-ye Faqih (Arabic: Wali al-Faqih) The leading Islamic scholar within the system of Velayat-e Faqih. See Velayat-e Faqih.

Velayat-e Faqih (Arabic: Wilayat al-Faqih) Guardianship of the Jurist. The official ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran, developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, which holds that in the absence of the Twelfth Shi‘i Imam, legitimate authority and leadership over the Islamic community should fall to an expert in fiqh drawn from the ulema, who will act as his delegate.

Wilayah (Farsi: Velayat) Authority or guardianship.
On September 24, 1902, Khomeini is born in the town of Khomein. His family stems from a line of religious training, descending from the seventh Imam of the Ahl al-Bayt, Imam Musa al-Kadhim. In 1903 his mother, Hajieh Agha Khanum, raises him following the murder of his father, Mostafa Hindi. At the age of six, Khomeini begins his studies, focusing on the Quran and elementary Persian. In 1920, he moves to Arak to study theology under the tutelage of the famous Shaykh Abdul-Karim Ha’eri, a leading marja-e taqlid. In 1921, the seminary is moved to Qom and Khomeini follows his teacher, becoming part of the Fayzieh seminary and residing at the Dar-al Shafa School. In 1929, Khomeini forges a family by marrying Khadijeh Saqafi (also Batul, Ghods-e Iran Saqafi). The two have five children that survive infancy: Mostafa (d. 1977), Ahmad (d. 1995), Zahra, Farideh, and Sadiqeh. In 1937, Ha’eri dies. Ayatollah Borujerdi succeeds him as the leading religious authority in Qom and the rest of Iran. Khomeini develops an interest in philosophy and 'irfan, influenced heavily by Plato, Mulla Sadra, Ibn Arabi, and his teacher at the time, Mirza Muhammad Ali Shahabadi. In Shahabadi’s work he finds a synthesis of politics and 'irfan. In the 1930s, Khomeini lectures at Fayzieh and has his work on hadiths, ethics, and mysticism published. In 1943, Khomeini publishes his first book, Kashf-e Asrar (Secrets Unveiled).
On May 4, 1944, Khomeini makes his first public political statement. In it, he beckons Muslims to struggle against foreign domination.

Khomeini continues lecturing and publishing throughout the 1950s in Qom.

In 1961, Grand Ayatollah Borujerdi dies, and Khomeini positions himself as a major Ayatollah in Qom.

In 1962, Khomeini pressures the clergy into a sustained dissent to repeal a law that requires all individuals elected into local and provincial councils to be sworn into office on an unspecified holy book.

In January 1962, the Shah launches his White Revolution, seeking a referendum for popular approval. Khomeini pleads with the clergy to boycott the referendum in 1963. The turnout is weak on voting day.

On March 21, 1963, Khomeini calls for the Noruz festivities to be canceled as a sign of defiance toward the government’s policies. The response from the government was unequivocally violent.

On April 3, 1963, Khomeini declares that the government is intent on doing away with Islam, and takes its instructions from the United States and Israel.

On Ashura, June 3, 1963, Khomeini delivers a speech drawing a comparison between the Shah and Umayyad Caliph Yazid ibn Muawiyah. This lands Khomeini in prison and sparks the Khordad movement, or June uprising.

In 1964, Khomeini denounces the Shah for extending diplomatic immunity to American military advisers. The Shah exiles Khomeini to Turkey, and a year later, to Najaf, Iraq.

Khomeini spends the next thirteen years in exile in Najaf, during which he teaches religious jurisprudence at the Shaykh Murtaza Ansari madrasa.

Khomeini lectures and writes letters that make their way into Iran via pilgrims who visit Najaf and the holy shrine of the first Shi’i Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib.

On April 16, 1967, Khomeini sends a letter to Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda, accusing the regime of thievery and terror.

During the Six Day War of 1967, Khomeini forbids relations with Israel and the purchase of its products.

In 1967 he issues a fatwa concerning the Family Protection Law of 1967, claiming it to be in defiance of Islam.

In the first months of 1970, he gives lectures on what would be the defining theory of governance for the Iranian Revolution, velayat-e
The premise of this theory is a claim that qualified *ulema* were capable of running the political and juridical functions of the state.

- In October 1971, Khomeini comments on the celebrations marking 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy.
- Khomeini prohibits membership of the Hizb-i Rastakhiz, in defiance of the Shah’s move to forge a one-party political system.
- On the 1975 anniversary of the Khordad uprisings, students from Fayziya hold demonstrations for three days and are met with an entourage of ground troops and military helicopters.
- From 1977–1979, the revolution unfolds in waves of demonstrations at schools, mosques, and seminaries and through strikes by unions and workers.
- Khomeini demands the Shah’s departure before his return from exile. On February 1, 1979, millions fill the streets to hail his return.
- He deems the government of Shapour Bakhtiar illegitimate and appoints his own Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan.
- On March 30 and 31, 1979, 98 percent of those voting in a referendum opt to abolish the monarchy and establish an Islamic government.
- In December, the new constitution was passed through national referendum. Khomeini becomes *vali-ye faqih*, and in February 1980, Abolhasan Bani Sadr became the first elected president of the Islamic Republic.
- On November 4, 1979, a group of students calling themselves Muslim Student Followers of the Imam’s line take control of the US Embassy in Tehran.
- In 1980, Khomeini is named Man of the Year by the US news magazine *TIME*. The magazine describes him as the “virtual face of Islam in Western culture … the mystic who lit the fires of hatred.” During the hostage crisis and amid the state of revolutionary turmoil, Saddam Hussein sees an opportunity to launch an offensive war. The Iran-Iraq war would last eight years, beginning in September 1980.
- Due to mounting economic problems, neighboring Gulf and Arab states’ support of Iraq, and Western aid and support of Iraq, Khomeini decides in July 1988 to accept a truce – as he put it, to “drink the poisoned chalice.”
- During the mid-1980s, the Iranian government becomes complicit in the Iran-Contra scandal.
In February 1989, Khomeini comes under international scrutiny for issuing a *fatwa* condemning the writer Salman Rushdie to death for his “blasphemous” novel *The Satanic Verses*.

Khomeini dies on June 4, 1989, after spending eleven days in hospital. Millions of mourners swarm the streets and attend his funeral.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is elected as the Islamic Republic’s second *vali-ye faqih* by the Assembly of Experts (*Shoray-e khebregan*).
1. Map of Iran