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# An Introduction to the History of Freemasonry in Iran

*Hamid Algar*

The role of freemasonry, as organization and ideology, in the nineteenth-century history of the Islamic world has received little serious attention.<sup>1</sup> Available evidence is, perhaps inevitably, fragmentary, and hardly permits any tenable general conclusion to be drawn. Other than extravagant hypotheses of conspiracy on the one hand, and assertions of innocuity on the other, little explanation has been offered for the appearance and activity of masons and masonic organizations in the Middle East. It would seem, however, that there was in the Islamic world an echo of the masonic involvement in political affairs, particularly in times of unrest and revolution, familiar to us from French, Italian and other European experience. Freemasonry had, moreover, some affinity to certain modes of thought and social organization traditional in the Islamic world, and was thereby helped in exerting a strong though temporary attraction on some strata of society. It will be attempted here to illustrate these themes with reference to Iran.

Credit for the introduction of freemasonry to Iran is generally given to that versatile figure, Mirzā Malkum Khān (1834–1908), and the secret society he founded in Tehran in 1858.<sup>2</sup> Iranian acquaintance with freemasonry dates back, however, at least as early as the reign of Fath ‘Ali Shāh Qājār (1797–1834), and, indeed, coincides with the beginning of serious European political involvement in Iran. The first recruits to freemasonry were diplomatic and other prominent travellers to Europe, who presumably disseminated some information in Iran concerning the European lodges, however sparse and incomplete.

The earliest initiation took place in Paris. In 1808, after the conclusion of the Treaty of Finkelstein between Iran and France, a diplomatic mission under the leadership of ‘Askar Khān Afshār travelled to Europe. Although events in Europe and the realignments brought about by the Treaty of Tilsit had sharply reduced Napoleon’s interest in Iranian friendship, ‘Askar Khān’s residence in Paris lasted long enough for him to gain entry to a masonic lodge. On November 24, 1808, he was initiated into the mother lodge of the Philosophic Scottish Rite, thus inaugurating the connection with French masonry that was to be characteristic of most Iranian masons in the nineteenth century. In the course of a speech delivered at the ceremony, Napoleon’s Minister of State, Regnault de Saint-Jean d’Angély, gave expression to a theme which became customary at masonic gatherings in honour of Iranian initiates: the alleged oriental origin of masonry and its latter-day return to its birthplace through the efforts of Iranian masons. ‘By him [‘Askar Khān] this pure light will return to its ancient cradle: Asia will recover the pious and useful institution with which it has enriched our climes’.<sup>3</sup>

'Askar Khān, in reply, presented the master of the lodge with 'a Damascene sword used in twenty-seven battles' as a symbol of his readiness to serve the order. Fath 'Alī Shāh had entrusted him with two swords attributed to Taymūr Lang and Nādir Shāh respectively, for presentation to Napoleon. It is possible that on seeing the indifference of the French to their alliance with Iran, 'Askar Khān thought it permissible to make a gift of one of the swords to his lodge. He is reputed to have consulted with French masonic dignitaries concerning the establishment of a lodge in his native city of Isfahan on returning to Iran, but there is no record of any masonic foundation in Iran at this early date.<sup>4</sup>

'Askar Khān's example was followed by the first Iranian ambassador of the century to England, Mirzā Abū-l-Ḥasan Khān Shīrāzī. He was proposed for membership of a London lodge by his official host, Sir Gore Ouseley, brother of a minor orientalist and subsequently British ambassador to Iran, and initiated on June 15, 1810, by Lord Moira.<sup>5</sup>

These two initiations took place with the active approval if not sponsorship of the host governments, and it seems clear were intended at least in part as deliberate acts of policy. To tie the fraternal bonds of masonry was a means of securing political influence. Napoleon's connections with masonry and use thereof for obtaining compliance and support are well known, and it is conceivable that the initiation of 'Askar Khān was intended to gain the loyalties of a prominent Iranian to be exploited whenever Iranian friendship might serve French interests anew.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Mirzā Abū-l-Ḥasan Khān Shīrāzī, the evidence of political motive for the initiation is decisive. His *mihmāndār*, Sir Gore Ouseley, not only accompanied him on his return journey to Iran to become the new British ambassador, but was also granted an English patent as provincial Grand Master for Iran.<sup>7</sup> There is no evidence that Ouseley during his residence in Iran did in fact organize a lodge affiliated to English masonry or initiate other prominent Iranians. For him, however, to be linked as ambassador in the fraternal bond of masonry to Mirzā Abū-l-Ḥasan Khān, who subsequently became chief official responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs, was of obvious political advantage. The masonic link was reinforced financially: from 1810, the year of his initiation, until his death in 1846, Mirzā Abū-l-Ḥasan Khān received a monthly allowance of one thousand rupees from the political department of the East Indian Company. This sum was to be transmitted by Sir Gore Ouseley if satisfied with Mirzā Abū-l-Ḥasan's conduct of affairs. Shortly before his death, he requested continuation of the arrangement in favour of his heirs, but payment ceased on the recommendation of the Foreign Office.<sup>8</sup>

It might be remarked in passing that A. S. Griboyedov, Russian envoy to Iran in 1828, was also a mason, but there is little likelihood of his having engaged in masonic activity during his brief and ill-fated mission.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of evidence such as this, certain Iranian historians, of whom Maḥmūd Maḥmūd, author of a voluminous history of Anglo-Iranian relations, may be regarded as an example, have understandably regarded freemasonry as an instrument whereby foreign powers, above all Britain, have enslaved leading Iranian politicians and obliged them to do their will.<sup>10</sup> In this context, the constitutional movement of 1905-11 is seen as the most blatant example of the use of freemasonry for subversive manipulation. We find, however, that evidence similar to that presented above

is largely lacking for the latter part of the nineteenth century. Of subsequent British ambassadors, only Sir Arthur Hardinge interested himself in the promotion of freemasonry. Diplomatic sources reflect only fragmentary and confused knowledge of masonic or pseudo-masonic groups, and later masonic activity in Iran would appear to be largely free of foreign political inspiration.

Earlier in the century, however, prominent Iranian visitors to Britain continued to be initiated into masonic lodges, under the patronage of their hosts. In 1815, a group of five young Iranians was sent on the initiative of the Crown Prince, 'Abbās Mirzā, to study various useful arts and sciences in England. One of the five, Mirzā Šāliḥ Shirāzī, who occupied various government posts on his return to Iran, entered a masonic lodge while in London. In his memoirs, he records the event briefly, remarking that masonry had long been an object of his interest. The Grand Master of the lodge he joined was a certain Mr Percy, and the date of his initiation was November 4, 1818. No further details are given, though elsewhere in his memoirs Mirzā Šāliḥ is expansive on the merits of various aspects of English life. 'To write more concerning this matter is not permissible.'<sup>11</sup> Another of the group, Mirzā Ja'far Khān Farāhānī, is also reputed to have been initiated while in England.<sup>12</sup> There is no trace of any masonic foundation in Iran by either of these initiates.

Some years later, three sons of Ḥusayn 'Alī Mirzā Farmānfarmā, former governor of Isfahan and an unsuccessful claimant to the throne on the death of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh, arrived in England in the company of James Fraser, a former member of the British embassy in Iran. All three were initiated while in London. Fraser describes the day of their initiation, July 16, 1835, as follows, in the facetious manner *de rigueur* for the presentation of 'Oriental' topics in the early decades of the century:

They were greatly excited. The eldest, Riḍā Qulī Mirzā, naturally shy, and imbued with a shrinking dread of all indecorous familiarity, had great doubts about the matter. He had been told—jokingly, I suppose—that certain personal liberties were taken with neophytes, and he declared to me that such he would assuredly resist. 'Wullah! Saheb Fraser,' said he; 'if they attempt anything improper, or even suspicious with me, I will use my fists.' It appeared, however, that all passed smoothly, and that they were very happy, for they returned home full half-seas over.<sup>13</sup>

A less colourful account of the occasion is given by Riḍā Qulī Mirzā himself, who like Mirzā Šāliḥ Shirāzī kept a record of his experiences in England. Less taciturn than his predecessor, he offers some account of the nature of freemasonry, and of the conditions of initiation into its successive degrees.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Riḍā Qulī Mirzā and his brothers, again some semblance of a political motive may be discerned in the initiation: as sons of a claimant to the throne, they could be held in reserve by England as a means for embarrassing or threatening the Iranian government, a means whose pliability might be assured partially by masonic affiliations.

Among these early initiates, mention may be made finally of a certain 'Abd ul-Fattāḥ Garmrūdī, who accompanied Ḥusayn Khān Muqaddam Ājūdānbāshī on a diplomatic mission to Britain, France and Austria in 1839. Again the initiation took place in London.<sup>15</sup>

None of these contacts with freemasonry resulted, so far as can be ascertained, in the establishment of a lodge in Iran. In 1819, there appeared

in Paris a short-lived 'Persian Rite', allegedly founded the year before in Erzerum, but its claim to the title 'Persian' would appear to be little more than a reflection of the traditional desire to find oriental roots for masonry. The erroneous supposition of Erzerum to be an Iranian city indicates the spuriousness of the claim.<sup>16</sup>

There is, nonetheless, evidence that even in the first half of the nineteenth century freemasonry was by no means unknown in Iran itself. Iranians initiated in Europe appear to have been eager to embrace freemasonry, irrespective of the politically motivated encouragement of their hosts. The eagerness derived from a general interest in the matter attested by several European travellers to Iran in the period. The wandering evangelist Joseph Wolff, when passing through Shiraz in 1824, met a certain Mujtahid Shaykh Ḥasan who admitted to a partiality for the conversation of foreigners, especially *farmasons* (freemasons), for, he said, it sharpened the understanding.<sup>17</sup> Seven years later, he encountered Sulaymān Pāshā, governor of the town of Khūy in Azerbaijan, who besides being well acquainted with the New Testament claimed to be a freemason: 'he said that Freemasonry was to be found in the fourth chapter of the Revelation of St John'.<sup>18</sup> Another governor interested in freemasonry is mentioned by the traveller W. R. Holmes.<sup>19</sup> The missionary Perkins, writing in 1843, reported a widespread interest in freemasonry, conceived of as 'the quintessence of skepticism, infidelity and atheism'.<sup>20</sup> Similar testimony is given by Morier in a footnote to his celebrated picaresque novel, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*.<sup>21</sup>

Not only was some approximate idea of masonry current in Iran thus early in the century, but also the popular appellation of the masonic lodge—*farāmūshkhāna* or house of oblivion—had already been coined. Invention of this term, together with the introduction to Iran of freemasonry, has been attributed to Mīrzā Malkum Khān. In fact, however, use of the word can be traced to the late eighteenth century, and it appears to have been an Indian coinage. In 1730, the British had founded a lodge in Calcutta which attracted numerous initiates, Muslim as well as Hindu,<sup>22</sup> and Iranian merchants resident in the city may also have joined the lodge. An Iranian traveller by the name of 'Abd ul-Laṭīf Shūshtari visited Calcutta in 1789, and in his memoirs of travel entitled *Tuḥfat ul-'Ālam* he wrote as follows: 'Another of the sects famous in Europe and especially among the French is that of the freemasons [*frāmīsun*]. . . . The Indians and Persian-speakers of India call this group of people *farāmūshī*, a not inappropriate title, for in answer to all questions they reply, "we cannot remember". . . . Many of the Muslims of Calcutta have joined this group.'<sup>23</sup> The term *farāmūshī* and the related *farāmūshkhāna*, used to denote the lodge, may then have passed from Indian into Iranian usage by the medium of travellers and merchants such as Shūshtari. After *Tuḥfat ul-'Ālam*, *farāmūshī* and *farāmūshkhāna* are next encountered in the memoirs of Mīrzā Šāliḥ Shīrāzī and those of 'Abd ul-Fattāḥ Garṃrūdī, while Holmes and Perkins confirm their spoken currency in Iran.

It is of interest to note in passing that the word *farāmūshkhāna* was also current in the Persian of Central Asia: it occurs in a work of the celebrated Bukharan writer and statesman Aḥmad Dānīsh (1827–97) who regarded masonry as an instrument for the obliteration of all social distinctions.<sup>24</sup>

While the precise date and manner of its entry into usage cannot be

ascertained, the origin of the term *farāmūshkhāna* may be conjectured with confidence. It was doubtless intended to be an approximate mimic-rendering of the English ‘freemason’, or, as Gobineau suggested, of the French *francmaçon*.<sup>25</sup> This imitative form in its literal meaning suggested the secrecy surrounding masonic rites, and the deliberate ‘forgetfulness’ of the initiate concerning his experiences in the lodge. Alternatively, it might refer to the oblivion and freedom from worldly care vouchsafed by the licentious practices at times vaguely imputed to the lodges, or even to the ‘forgetting’ of one’s pre-masonic existence upon initiation.<sup>26</sup> While the word *farāmūshkhāna* was destined for a long career, *farāmūshī*, used to designate an initiate, was soon replaced by a more accurate imitation of *francmaçon*: *frāmāsūn* or *farmāsūn* (derived probably through Ottoman Turkish).<sup>27</sup>

The term *farāmūshkhāna* has come to be associated above all with the secret society established in Tehran in 1858 by Mīrzā Malkum Khān, an Armenian of Julfa nominally converted to Islam. This was the first lodge to be founded in Iran, and while it was not affiliated with or recognized by any of the European obediences, and freemasonry was not previously unknown to Iranians, Malkum Khān occupies a legitimately prominent place in the history of Iranian masonry. Judgment of the precise nature of the ‘house of oblivion’ is rendered especially difficult not only by the general secrecy surrounding all things masonic, but also by the charlatanry and mendacity of its founder. Precise assessment of the aims of the *farāmūshkhāna* will have to await the discovery and evaluation of more evidence than is now available.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, of the many interpretations of its activity and significance, few can compare in interest with the words of Malkum himself, fanciful and obscure as they may in part be. Many years after the dissolution of the *farāmūshkhāna*, he reminisced to an audience in London including the publicist W. S. Blunt on the succession of events which had led him to England. He claimed, falsely, to have grown up as foster-brother to Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh, who appointed him prime minister on his accession to the throne.

At the age of twenty, I was practically despotic in Persia. I saw the abuses of government, the decline of material prosperity in the country, and I was bitten with the idea of reform. I went to Europe and studied there the religious, social and political systems of the west. I learned the spirit of the various sects of Christendom, and the organisation of the secret societies and freemasonries, and I conceived a plan which should incorporate the political wisdom of Europe with the religious wisdom of Asia. I knew that it was useless to attempt a remodeling of Persia in European forms, and I was determined to clothe my material reformation in a garb which my people would understand, the garb of religion. I therefore on my return called together the chief persons of Tehran, my friends, and spoke to them in private of the need which Islam had of purer doctrine.<sup>29</sup>

The plan was, then, to disseminate an identification of westernizing reform with the dictates of religion through instituting a select and secret group of highly placed men believing in its accuracy or desirability. This facile identification of reform with religion, conceived of purely as a tactical device, formed a constant theme in Malkum’s writing, and later found expression to a wide audience in the columns of the celebrated journal *Qānūn*. Initially, however, the device was to be introduced only

to the limited circle constituted by the members of the *farāmūshkhāna*.

Another, less useful, indication of the nature and purpose of the *farāmūshkhāna* is given by the contents of a conversation between Malkum Khān and his friend and confidant, Mīrzā Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzāda (Ākhundov), the celebrated Azerbayjani playwright and essayist, that took place in Tiflis in March 1872. Ākhūndzāda summarized and recorded Malkum’s pronouncements in seven sections, and the last of these treats of his conception of the essential duties of man. These are seven in number, and their fulfilment enables man to attain the rank of perfection, while neglect of them will cause him to descend into the animal realm. The duties are to shun evil; to strive to do good; to fight against oppression; to live peacefully with one’s fellows; to seek learning; to diffuse learning; and ‘as far as is within one’s power to strive to maintain harmony among one’s compatriots and fellows’. Ākhūndzāda inquired whether these seven duties did not constitute the concerns of the *farāmūshkhāna*. Malkum replied: ‘Yes, in the course of speeches [lit., sermons] under the *farāmūshkhāna* these principles are sometimes mentioned. But the concerns of the *farāmūshkhāna* are many, and go beyond these principles.’<sup>30</sup> The general ethical principles enunciated here by Malkum as forming part of the concern of the *farāmūshkhāna* point possibly to its masonic inspiration, while those concerns that went beyond them may well have been the reformist goals and tactics suggested in his London talk.

Malkum had indeed learned something of freemasonry during his studies in Paris, but contrary to his later declaration, it was not on his first return to Iran in 1852 that the *farāmūshkhāna* was established. Its foundation was to be preceded by a further journey to Europe and his own initiation into European freemasonry. In 1856, a mission was sent to Paris under the leadership of Mīrzā Farrukh Khān Ghaffārī to regulate, under French auspices, the consequences of the brief Anglo-Iranian war of 1856. To this mission Mīrzā Malkum Khān was attached, doubtless because of his familiarity with the French capital and its language. Just as some fifty years earlier an Iranian ambassador had been initiated into the Grand Orient with the blessing of the French government, so too on this occasion diplomatic contact was to be reinforced with the links of masonry. On December 10, 1857, a mass ambassadorial initiation into the lodge ‘Sincère Amitié’ took place at the headquarters in Paris of the Grand Orient. In addition to Mīrzā Farrukh Khān Ghaffārī, head of the mission, Mīrzā Malkum Khān, Mīrzā Zamān Khān, Narimān Khān (later ambassador in Vienna), Muḥammad ‘Alī Āqā, Mīrzā Riḍā and ‘Alī Naqī, all on the staff of the embassy, were also initiated into the order.<sup>31</sup> Under the Second Empire, France no longer had the military and strategic ambitions in Iran that Napoleon I had cherished, but it retained nonetheless some aspiration to political, cultural and commercial influence. Napoleon III, like his forebear, kept close control of the Grand Orient almost as an organ of state, and secured the position of Grand Master for his cousin, Prince Lucien Murat. There can, then, be little doubt that the initiation of the Iranian embassy in 1857 was intended in part to further French political and cultural influence in Iran. Statements made at subsequent initiations of Iranians confirm that the Grand Orient conceived of the initiation of foreign brothers as an ideal means for the dissemination of French culture and civilization. This was hardly the aim pursued by Malkum when he instituted the *farāmūshkhāna*.

The 'house of oblivion' was established by Malkum Khān on his return to Iran in 1858. Ostensible leadership of the organization was vested in Malkum's father, Mīrzā Ya'qūb, a man who was acquainted with several of the Qajar princes, in particular Mas'ūd Mīrzā Zill us-Sultān, and who had functioned as interpreter for both the Russian embassy in Tehran and the Iranian office of foreign affairs. Meetings were held at the house in the Masjid-i Ḥauḍ area of Tehran of Jalāl ud-Dīn Mīrzā, one of the numerous offspring of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh.<sup>32</sup> Jalāl ud-Dīn Mīrzā was one of the earliest writers to attempt the development of a 'pure Persian', one unmixed with Arabic loanwords, and was, too, for many years a correspondent of Faṭḥ 'Alī Akhūndzāda, sharing with him his hatred of the Arabs and of Islam.<sup>33</sup> His association with the *farāmūshkhāna* may be regarded as circumstantial evidence for one element of its ideological inspiration, evidence supported by certain themes in Adīb ul-Mamālik's masonic poem to be discussed below.

The life of the *farāmūshkhāna* was to be short, ending with dissolution by royal decree on October 18, 1861. According to one account, the *farāmūshkhāna* was originally presented to Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh as a device for securing the loyalty of the most important men in the realm: the monarch himself was to be Grand Master, and his courtiers, ministers and generals were to be bound to him by the masonic oath.<sup>34</sup> We have seen, however, that the monarch was not head of the society, even in a formal capacity. It has been suggested instead that Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh imagined the *farāmūshkhāna* to be a harmless society for the diffusion of elementary scientific knowledge, a suggestion that is not as implausible as it might appear. On his first return from Paris in 1852, Malkum had joined the staff of the newly founded Dār ul-Funūn, an institution designed to acquaint selected Iranian students with modern European learning. There he not only functioned as interpreter for some of the foreign instructors, but also carried out simple scientific experiments for the benefit of the students. This, together with the fact that many of the graduates and students of the Dār ul-Funūn had joined the *farāmūshkhāna*, may well have caused Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh to conceive of it as some kind of scientific society.<sup>35</sup> To such an association he could have had little objection: he had been greatly impressed by Malkum's feat in establishing the first telegraph line in Iran, from the royal palace to the Lālazār gardens.<sup>36</sup>

Royal tolerance of the *farāmūshkhāna* was disturbed by a number of factors. The rise of Babism a few years earlier, and particularly the attempt by four Babis on the Shah's life in 1852, had intensified the suspicion and fear that already permeated the atmosphere of political life in Iran. Those Babis who remained in Iran had recourse to *taqīya*, to prudential concealment of belief, in order to survive unmolested. As a result, accusations of Babism could be easily and damagingly raised against personal enemies and political rivals. It was thus inevitable that the accusation of Babi sympathies should be made against the *farāmūshkhāna*, which, after all, wore the mask of a secret organization.<sup>37</sup> Such accusations were probably groundless, although Malkum, in the curious pseudo-autobiographical statement delivered in London, showed a certain fascination with the phenomenal rise of Babism and attempted to identify himself implicitly with it.<sup>38</sup>

It has been asserted that the Russians urged Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh to proscribe the *farāmūshkhāna*, fearing that the emergence of a group

determined to reform Iran would block the avenues of Russian penetration and dominance.<sup>39</sup> Probably, however, certain groups in Iranian society were more actively interested in obtaining its proscription and dissolution. In addition to politicians and courtiers who saw in Malkum a potentially dangerous rival, it is likely that the ulama were opposed to the 'house of oblivion' as an irreligious innovation brought from France. A member of the *farāmūshkhāna*, Mirzā Muḥammad Khān Nāzīm-i Daftar, wrote many years after the dissolution that 'the leading ulama of Tehran in concert denounced and prohibited it, destroyed and set fire to it, and levelled it to the ground'.<sup>40</sup> The *farāmūshkhāna* had, however, no headquarters, using the house of Jalāl ud-Dīn Mirzā for its meetings, and it is unlikely that the ulama would have dared to raze to the ground the house of a Qajar prince, even on a religious pretext. Mirzā Muḥammad Khān's story was doubtless the product of his imagination and of the passage of time. Nonetheless, it may be taken to reflect, in lurid manner, the enmity of the ulama to the *farāmūshkhāna*. When, several years after the prohibition of the *farāmūshkhāna*, Malkum had returned to Iran in the capacity of special adviser to the prime minister, this hostility was soon revived and expressed with particular force by Mullā 'Alī Kanī, the most influential of the ulama of the capital.<sup>41</sup>

The 'house of oblivion' was suspected of propagating republicanism, which, because of the French Revolution, was associated with irreligion and the disruption of the social order. In the words of a contemporary chronicle, 'he [Malkum] used to say that a republican regime should be established in accordance with the system prevailing in most European states, and that individual citizens should participate in the allotment of posts and the assignment of functions in the affairs of the country and the matters of the state'.<sup>42</sup> It is unlikely that Malkum was in fact urging the members of his organization to work for the displacement of the monarchy and the institution of a republic, and in any event the republican system of government was not that prevailing in most European states at the time. Nonetheless, between courses such as legal and administrative reform, the constitutional limitation of royal power, and the institution of a republic, little distinction was made in Iran, either in the middle of the nineteenth century or for a long time after, and the proponents of change, such as Malkum, seldom furnished clear definitions of what they considered desirable. Since Malkum Khān was proffering to Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh treatises and suggestions on reform, shortly after instituting the *farāmūshkhāna*, it is comprehensible that the monarch, his suspicions suitably aroused, should have feared a republican conspiracy working to depose him and centred on Malkum's secret organization.

Thus it was that on September 18, 1861, the following decree was published in the official gazette:

It has recently come to our knowledge that certain of the lowly ruffians of the city have spoken of founding and organizing European 'houses of oblivion', and expressed a desire to establish such. Therefore a clear imperial decree is issued that if henceforth anyone utter the expression and phrase 'house of oblivion', let alone attempt to establish such, he will be subject to the full chastisement and wrath of the state. Let use of this word be completely abandoned, and let none concern himself with these absurdities, for he shall without doubt receive thorough-going punishment.<sup>43</sup>

Mirzā Ya'qūb, as titular head of the organization, was banished, and

Malkum was obliged to follow him abroad some two years later.<sup>44</sup> For the next forty years, the chief traces of Iranian masonic activity are again to be found in Europe. Nonetheless, the *farāmūshkhāna* did not disappear without leaving some imprint on the affairs of Iran.

It is difficult to form a precise idea of the membership of the *farāmūshkhāna* during its brief life. As mentioned above, many of the members were students or graduates of the Dār ul-Funūn. Beyond these, it may be assumed that many were attracted to the lodge by the air of secrecy surrounding it, and by the mysterious reputation previously enjoyed by freemasonry in Iran. The serious involvement of such persons in the ultimate aims of the organization, tentatively outlined above, may be doubted. On the other hand, a number of figures who subsequently attained some prominence in Iranian history were also members of the *farāmūshkhāna*. Among them may be mentioned in particular Mirzā ‘Alī Khān Amin ud-Daula, a faithful associate of Malkum who held various ministerial posts under Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh and was prime minister to his successor, Muẓaffar ud-Dīn Shāh, from mid-1897 to June 1898.<sup>45</sup> It has also been asserted that a number of the ulama, despite the general hostility of their colleagues to Malkum, joined the *farāmūshkhāna*, among them Hājji Mirzā Zayn ul-‘Ābidīn (d. 1904), who subsequently became Imām Jum‘a of Tehran,<sup>46</sup> and Sayyid Ṣādiq Ṭabāṭabā’i. The involvement of the latter in the *farāmūshkhāna* is of special interest, for his son, Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā’i, was to be one of the leading figures among the ulama supporting the constitutional movement, and had himself masonic or pseudo-masonic connections.<sup>47</sup> According to the account of Nāẓim ul-Islām Kirmāni, who was associated with the work of Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā’i during the Constitutional Revolution, Sayyid Ṣādiq Ṭabāṭabā’i for long shunned any association with Malkum Khān and his *farāmūshkhāna*. One day he went to visit a friend in Shimīrān, the northern suburb of Tehran, and Malkum Khān, as soon as he learnt of this, set out in pursuit. These ensued an encounter between the two men as a result of which Sayyid Ṣādiq Ṭabāṭabā’i became totally converted to Malkum Khan’s purposes.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, Kirmāni records nothing of the content of their discussion, but it may be suggested that Malkum’s eagerness to enroll Ṭabāṭabā’i proceeded from his tactical identification of reform with religion. For this identification to be credible, it needed the verification and support of prominent ulama. Whether in supplying this verification, first Sayyid Ṣādiq and then Sayyid Muḥammad believed the identification to be true, or, like Malkum, merely found it expedient, is a matter of speculation.

The extent to which initiates to the *farāmūshkhāna* were aware of its lack of affiliation to French masonry is similarly uncertain. Mirzā Farrukh Khān is reputed to have been among the opponents of the *farāmūshkhāna*, and his opposition may have been caused in part by the knowledge that Malkum had no authority from the Grand Orient to establish a lodge in Tehran.<sup>49</sup> In general, however, Iranians knew of Malkum as a mason and probably assumed that his ‘house of oblivion’ was a regularly constituted lodge. When Mirzā Āqā Khān Kirmāni first wrote to Malkum from Istanbul offering him his services in the cause of opposition to Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh, he felt it necessary to make it clear that although he was not a mason, he was still capable of good work.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, one of the Qajar princes, Sulṭān Uvays Mirzā, before leaving for Germany,

wrote to Malkum (who was then in London), introducing himself as a mason and asking him for a letter of recommendation to a Berlin lodge.<sup>51</sup> It is probable that not until the foundation of the 'Reveil de l'Iran' in 1908, a lodge affiliated to the Grand Orient, was the irregular nature of the *farāmūshkhāna* generally recognized.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, masonic activity among Iranians abroad continued: new initiations took place, while those already initiated occasionally participated in the work of the lodges. On February 28, 1860, a further ambassadorial initiation took place in Paris, again into the lodge 'Sincère Amitié'. Those initiated on this occasion were the ambassador, Ḥasan 'Alī Khān; the counsellor, Mīrzā Muḥsin Khān (later ambassador in Istanbul); Mīrzā Šādiq Khān and Naẓar Āqā, an Assyrian from Urūmiya who later himself became ambassador in Paris. The initiation of Farrukh Khān Ghāffārī and his embassy some two years earlier was recalled, and Farrukh Khān's devotion to freemasonry received special praise. 'It is well-known that His Excellency Farrukh Khān is today among those directing the policies of his country and one of those whom His Majesty the Shah of Persia honours with his confidence. There is reason to think that the general ideas which are the essence of freemasonry have not been without influence on his lofty mind and will not be devoid of profit for the future of that land, now undergoing a great regeneration through impregnating itself with the spirit and genius of France.'<sup>53</sup> It is of interest that Farrukh Khān rather than Malkum Khān should have received special mention for services to freemasonry in Iran; and we have here another indication that the existence of the *farāmūshkhāna* was either unknown or unwelcome to the French Grand Orient. There is on the other hand no evidence that Farrukh Khān did in fact attempt to promote freemasonry in Iran, and possibly the fulsome words spoken in Paris were intended as a polite indication that he should begin to do so.

In July 1873, the same lodge held a reception for a group of visiting Iranian masons, including Mīrzā Riḍā Khān and Narīmān Khān. Malkum Khān had expected to attend, but at the last moment sent his excuses. A speech was delivered by the master of the lodge in honour of the guests, which again illustrates the somewhat pompous and patronizing attitude of the French lodges to their foreign initiates: 'You love France, our beloved and unhappy homeland, you speak its language, you have received your education at its schools, and to cap it all, you have requested the masonic initiation from our Orient.

'It is not at all, my Brothers, the distinguished titles and ranks with which you are invested that have gathered round you tonight the elite of Parisian masonry; it is your filial attachment to the Orient of France, attested by your presence, and your fidelity to the masonic vow for the propagation of our principles, that have conquered our hearts and won our applause.'

To this address both Narīmān Khān and Mīrzā Riḍā Khān responded, expressing sympathy for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian War, and informing the members of the lodge of the death of Farrukh Khān.

The meeting closed with a speech by a Jewish mason, Dalsace, in which he urged the Iranian guests to assist in bettering the status of the Jewish community in Iran, and reminded them of a similar appeal addressed to Naṣīr ud-Dīn Shāh during his visit to Europe by Adolphe Crémieux,

president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and a prominent member of the Grand Orient.<sup>54</sup>

Iranian diplomats were also associated with the masonic lodges of Istanbul, which had from the 1850s onward played a role of some importance in the social, cultural and even political life of the Ottoman capital. Most important among the lodges in the work of which Iranian masons participated was the 'Proodos' or 'Progress' lodge, which met at the Hachopoulos Han, was connected with the Grand Orient of Greece and held alternate meetings in Turkish and Greek. Linguistic, national and religious rivalries appear at one time to have threatened the harmony of the lodge, but to have been suppressed by the efforts of its Greek master, Scalieri.<sup>55</sup> On August 7, 1873, Mīrzā Najaf 'Alī, first dragoman at the Iranian embassy in Istanbul, was initiated into the 'Proodos' lodge,<sup>56</sup> and in December of the same year, a meeting was arranged for the initiation of the Iranian consul in Antioch, Mūsā Antippa. The meeting was attended by Mīrzā Najaf 'Alī, Mīrzā Muḥsin Khān (then ambassador in Istanbul),<sup>57</sup> and Malkum Khān, *en route* at the time from Iran to London. Mikā'il Khān, brother of Malkum, who had evidently been initiated at some point, and Narimān Khān had also been invited, but were unable to attend.

Mūsā Antippa's responses 'appeared hardly to be in conformity with masonic morality', and his initiation was postponed. The meeting, however, continued, and Scalieri addressed himself ceremonially to the Iranians present. 'Yes, illustrious Brothers, it is up to you to kindle anew in Persia, homeland of the Zoroasters [*sic*], the torch of this philosophy to which we fondly refer the origin of our order.'

Malkum Khān, in replying, praised the principles of freemasonry and promised to do his utmost for their further propagation in Iran. Although his brief stay in Istanbul would not permit him to participate in the work of the 'Proodos' lodge, he promised regular attendance on the part of Mīrzā Muḥsin Khān.

Scalieri again spoke, and, unlike his counterpart at the 'Sincère Amitié', made glowing reference to the 'masonic devotion' of Malkum Khān, which was 'universally known. In fact, we have not forgotten that it was he who some time ago founded a lodge at Tehran, and that he suffered considerable loss as a result of this noble initiative.'<sup>58</sup> It is worthy of note that this acknowledgement of Malkum Khān's services to masonry, implying recognition of the *farāmūshkhāna* as a regularly constituted lodge, was uttered in Istanbul and not in Paris, probably in ignorance of the truth.

With the growth of discontent and the movement toward revolution that took place in Iran in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, a recrudescence of masonic groupings in Iran is visible, for the first time since the proscription of the *farāmūshkhāna*. Some evidence for the activity of these is provided in a dispatch of Sir Arthur Hardinge, British minister in Tehran, dated September 6, 1901. Throughout the summer of that year, discontent at the financial policies of the government and its growing subservience to Russia had been noticeable, and found particularly clear expression in *shabnāma's*, pamphlets distributed at night denouncing the government. Hardinge held various elements responsible for the *shabnāma's*: rivals and enemies at court of the prime minister, Amīn us-Sulṭān, such as Qavām ud-Daula, head of military finance, and Vazīr-i Humāyūn, former minister of the

post, on the one hand, and pan-Islamic groups supported by the Ottoman Empire on the other. Union between these elements was achieved, according to Hardinge, by a masonic lodge founded in Tehran in Mirzā Muḥsin Khān, who as we have seen was initiated to masonry in Paris in 1860 and later participated in the meetings of the 'Proodos' lodge in Istanbul. On his dismissal from the post of ambassador, he had been appointed in succession Minister of Justice and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Among the members of the lodge he founded were, according to Hardinge, Maḥmūd Khān Ḥakīm ul-Mulk, Naṣr ul-Mulk Hidāyat, Qavām ud-Daula, Mirzā Naṣrullāh Khān Mushir ud-Daula and Mukhbir ud-Daula. 'I have good private reasons for suspecting that my informant . . . is right and that the masonic brotherhood in Persia, which was founded by Mohsin Khan for certain personal and political aims of his own . . . (though since Mohsin Khān's death it has no longer had a regular lodge) does number among it certain persons who take advantage of their connection with it for purposes utterly alien to the principles of freemasonry and seek to use it as a bond of union between the aristocratical miscontents of the Opposition and Court parties and Mahomedan fanatics and revolutionists whose views and objects are entirely different.'<sup>59</sup> Hardinge, despite his trust in his informant, was probably mistaken in attributing to Mirzā Muḥsin Khān the foundation of a lodge in Tehran, that is, a body affiliated to and recognized by European masonry. It is more likely that a loose group of Iranian masons, all initiated abroad, had certain common political interests the promotion of which they attempted to co-ordinate, and that Mirzā Muḥsin Khān presided over this group, but not in the capacity of Grand Master.

It was possibly this group (referred to as 'the members of a Persian lodge') which, Hardinge recalls, 'invited me to affiliate it with our own Grand Lodge, to which I accordingly applied for help. The reply was rather discouraging: the distance and the difficulty of controlling, from England, a young lodge in a country new to masonry, and the possibility of abuses, led the English Masonic authorities to the conclusion that they had better not incur any responsibilities in Persia. One prominent Persian statesman, the Anglophile Nasr ul-Mulk [*sic*, but correctly Nāṣir ul-Mulk] had been initiated at Oxford, and might, I think, have made a good beginning as Grand Master.'<sup>60</sup> The suggestion for affiliating the Iranian masonic group with the British Grand Lodge may well have come from Hardinge himself, and not from the Iranian masons. Hardinge was in general diligent in recruiting various persons and groups, particularly the ulama, in the service of British diplomacy.<sup>61</sup> In the light of this possibility, his strictures on 'certain persons who take advantage of their connection with it [the masonic brotherhood] for purposes utterly alien to the principles of freemasonry' appear somewhat ironic.

Although Hardinge's attempt to affiliate the Iranian masonic group with the British Grand Lodge was unsuccessful, in 1908, three years after his recall, the lodge 'Reveil de l'Iran', regularly constituted and affiliated to the Grand Orient of France, was founded in Tehran with the permission of the monarch, Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh. The first Grand Master was a Frenchman, the head of the Alliance Française school in Tehran, who in addition to gathering into the lodge Iranians initiated abroad, began the recruitment of new members from a wide variety of backgrounds. Although the Shah had given his consent to the foundation of the lodge, he evidently

harboured doubts about the wisdom of permitting it to exist, for the lodge found it expedient to send two of its clerical members, Šādiq Mujtahid Sanglaji and Ismā'il Mujtahid Bihbihānī, to assure the monarch of the innocuity of masonry. Their mission was unsuccessful, and the lodge was obliged to close. Soon after, it was briefly resurrected, only to be proscribed and dissolved permanently by Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh after his *coup d'état* of 1911 and the destruction of the constitutional movement.<sup>62</sup>

To the brief life of the lodge 'Reveil de l'Iran', we are indebted for one of the few literary monuments of Iranian masonry, the masonic poem of Adīb ul-Mamālik Farāhānī (1860–1917), entitled *Ā'in-i Frāmāsūn va Farāmūshkhāna* (The Rites of the Freemasons and the House of Oblivion).<sup>63</sup> The poem, which is dated Shavval 3, 1325 / November 10, 1907, and consists of 539 rhyming couplets, outlines the chief principles of masonry through a series of questions and answers somewhat similar to a catechism in form. Its chief interest lies in the attempt made to give masonry a Perso-Islamic framework of expression, by incorporating Iranian and Islamic themes into its alleged protohistory.

At the beginning of the poem, God's creative fiat *kun* (Be!) (Qur'ān, VI / 73) is interpreted in a manner consonant with the masonic concept of the deity as architect of the universe: the two Arabic letters composing the word *kun*, *kāf* and *nūn*, are held to symbolize a set-square and a compass respectively (11.1–3). Thence it is deduced that all the Prophets were propagators of masonry, and that the 'ancient house' (*al-bayt al-'atiq*) founded at Mecca by the Prophet Ibrāhīm, the Ka'ba (Qur'ān, XXII / 29), was in reality nothing other than the first masonic lodge (11.4–7). The twelve Imams of the Shi'a inherited the masonic doctrine from the Prophet Muḥammad, and the true signification of the term 'People of the House' (*ahl al-bayt*) is in fact 'People of the Lodge' (1.18).

After this masterly reinterpretation of Islamic themes, Adīb ul-Mamālik proceeds to invoke Sufism by referring to the masons as 'wayfarers on the path' (*sālikān-i ṭariq*) (1.33), and to relate his own initiation into the lodge, which he calls *Luzh-i Bidāri* ('Lodge of the Awakening'). Here, another Qur'ānic theme is brought into service. Adīb ul-Mamālik compares himself to Qiṭmīr, the dog who became companion to the 'sleepers in the cave' (*aṣḥāb al-kahf*, Qur'ān, XVIII / 9 ff.), thereby declaring himself to be a lowly and unworthy creature favoured by the company of the spiritually elect (11.51–56).

This canine simile brings to an end the introductory section of what is a somewhat loosely structured poem. Adīb ul-Mamālik then embarks on his main task, a summary exposition of masonic doctrine organization and ritual. There is little here of interest: we may note, however, his justification of the seven grades of masonry by a reference to the seven verses of the *Fātiḥa*, the opening chapter of the Qur'ān (1.114); his designation of the Grand Master as *pīr*, a term used in Sufism to denote the spiritual preceptor (1.357); and his use of the phrase 'Brethren of Purity' (*Barādarān-i Ṣafā*) to refer to the masons, doubtless intending to imply that that tenth-century movement was in fact masonic (1.288).

We come now to the most interesting section of the poem, that dealing with the alleged transference of the masonic light to the Prophet Muḥammad. It is explained first that the masonic initiate is made to stand at the north of the room where the ceremony is taking place, for the north is the

region of darkness, and the mason is he who has left that realm for the realm of light, which is the essence of masonry. Although all the Prophets preached nothing other than masonry, Zoroaster was *par excellence* the Prophet of Light, and it was from him that the light was conveyed to the Prophet Muḥammad. Here, Adīb ul-Mamālik presses into service for one last stage in his long posthumous career the Persian companion of the Prophet, Salmān al-Fārisī, who at his hands becomes a Mazdean priest:

Light is the memory of his [Zoroaster's] wisdom:  
 he was the kernel, all others the shell.  
 If you seek for a sign thereof in the Qur'ān, it is  
 clear in the Throne Verse [*Āyat al-Kursī*, Qur'ān, II / 255].<sup>64</sup>  
 The pious *mobed* of the Persians, the secret-knowing  
*dastūr* Salmān,  
 Brought to perfection the secret of Zoroaster at the Ka'ba.  
 When Aḥmad [=the Prophet] rode his horse toward the Ka'ba,  
 he saw there a man from the People of the House.<sup>65</sup>  
 Since he was a displayer of truths, he chose him  
 as was fitting.  
 As the infant deserves its mother's love, the Arab  
 and the Persian became brothers.  
 From Persian sulphur the land of Arabia became as  
 brilliant as Paradise.  
 The Qur'ān expressed the wisdom of the Zand; bū Qubays<sup>66</sup>  
 pitched tent on Mount Alvand [11.395–403].

There is something of a parallel to this remarkable legend, reminiscent of medieval Christian fantasies centering on the monk Buḥayra, in the oral traditions of the Khāksār dervish order. The Khāksār speak of Salmān as one of many *mobed*'s who were expecting the appearance of a Prophet in the Hijaz. They relate that he sets out in search of the expected Prophet and that after some years spent as a Christian arrived in Medina shortly after the migration of the Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca. He embraced Islam, and was initiated by the Prophet and 'Alī into their most secret doctrines. Fortified with the esoteric doctrine, he became the founder of the Khāksār order.<sup>67</sup> In the Khāksār version of the legend, Salmān receives esoteric doctrine from the Prophet instead of transmitting it to him; but it is possible that Adīb ul-Mamālik adopted the material from a Khāksār source, and then modified it to suit his combination of masonic and nationalistic purposes.

Appreciation of Adīb ul-Mamālik's poem and the lodge to which it is dedicated, 'Le Reveil de l'Iran', should not cause us to neglect a pseudo-masonic group active in the first decade of the present century, the *Majmā'-i Ādamiyat* or 'League of Humanity'. This successor to the *farāmūshkhāna* was organized in Tehran in the last decade of Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh's reign and owed its existence chiefly to the initiative of a follower of Malkum named 'Abbās Qulī Khān Qazvinī Ādamiyat. He had been inspired by a meeting with Malkum during the latter's visit to Tehran in 1886 to undertake the production of copies of Malkum's treatises on reform for private distribution, and the League of Humanity appears to have devoted itself initially to the same task.<sup>68</sup> Malkum did,

however, compose a special treatise on the aims and organization of the league,<sup>69</sup> and in his celebrated journal *Qānūn* (The Law), published from 1890 onwards in London, made frequent if cryptic references to the organization.<sup>70</sup> These exaggerated descriptions of the extent and influence of the League of Humanity give little indication of what its true importance may have been. Nonetheless, lodges existed not only in the capital but also in a number of provincial cities. In Kirmānshāh, the League of Humanity evidently extended charitable aid to its less wealthy members, for the Iranian and later Tajik poet, Abūl Qāsim Lāhūti, was sent to school in Tehran at the expense of this lodge, of which his father was a member.<sup>71</sup>

The political activity of the League of Humanity can be verified from the constitutional revolution of 1906 onwards. Its Tehran members, led by 'Abbās Quli Khān, attempted in May of that year to dissuade government troops from firing on demonstrators.<sup>72</sup> Later, when the constitution had been proclaimed and the first Majlis convened, the League strove for moderation and reconciliation between Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh and his opponents in the Majlis, at one point succeeding in enrolling the monarch himself as a member of the League. In these activities, the organization was subject to remote supervision by Malkum Khān, then Iranian ambassador in Rome and playing out the last stage in his political career. With the dissolution of the first Majlis in 1908 and the death in the same year of Malkum Khān while on a visit to Switzerland, the League, losing both its main purpose of activity and its direction, ceased to exist.<sup>73</sup>

Several years after the demise first of the League of Humanity and then of the 'Reveil de l'Iran', further masonic lodges were founded in Iran, affiliated to both British and French obediences, and certain of these survive to the present day.<sup>74</sup> While they may on occasion have functioned as political interest groups, available evidence is not copious enough to permit a profitable discussion of their role.<sup>75</sup> It is in any event certain that in the past fifty years masonry has not held the same widespread fascination for prominent Iranians that it exercised throughout the nineteenth century.

The interest in masonry of visiting Iranians, particularly ambassadors, was encouraged by both Britain and France, early in the nineteenth century, for political reasons. It was doubtless thought, whether correctly or not, that the masonic link would create in the initiate a loyalty not only to his lodge, but also to the state that sponsored his initiation. In the case of the Grand Orient there is discernible, too, a patronizing assumption that together with masonry the French quintessence of civilization was being vouchsafed to a few devoted foreigners. For their part, the Iranian masons, many of whom were initiated on their first visits to Europe, may well have felt flattered by their admission to this mysterious and exclusive organization, that included so many figures of prominence in European life. This feeling may have gone with a conviction that the firm but invisible links with European powers provided by masonry would prove helpful for the advancement of their political careers.

Apart from these political considerations, there are other causes which may be suggested for Iranian interest in masonry. Despite all the legends concerning its protohistory, masonry is clearly a European product, and entered the Islamic world as one ideological importation from Europe among others. Nonetheless, certain remarkable points of similarity may be found between freemasonry on the one hand and traditional religious and social groups on the other.

The most striking resemblances—though not strictly relevant to the case of the Iranian masons—are those existing between the organization of the masonic lodge and that of the chivalrous brotherhood of Anatolia and elsewhere, the organ of *fütüvvet*. In both cases we encounter concern for the secrecy of ritual and ceremony; a hierarchy of degrees, often bearing the same names in both traditions (from apprentice [*çirak*] to Grand Master [*üstâd-i azam*]); and even a common ritual of initiation, the binding on of an apron or piece of cloth.<sup>76</sup> Resemblances may also be noted between the masonic lodge and many Sufi brotherhoods: a clandestine or semi-clandestine organization; a ceremony of initiation; the claim to esoteric knowledge; and disdain for the outward forms of established religion are all shared by the two.<sup>77</sup> It is not therefore surprising to find Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī and Hacı Bayram Veli being claimed as the ancestors of masonry in the Islamic world,<sup>78</sup> and on occasion a transition being effected from Sufi to masonic affiliations.<sup>79</sup>

Such similarities may have played some role in the preparation of prominent Iranians for entry to masonic or pseudo-masonic groupings. Indeed, in 1899 a confluence of masonic and Sufi traditions took place when Zahir ud-Daula, a disciple of the celebrated mystic Şafi 'Alī Shāh, founded in Tehran the *Anjuman-i Ukhuvvat* or 'Society of Brotherhood'. While this society contained many with previously Sufi loyalties, ethical principles were emphasized rather than mystical teachings, and an elected leadership took the place of the traditional *pir*.<sup>80</sup> The influence of such similarities between masonry and traditional forms of organization should not, however, be overestimated. Many Iranian masons of the nineteenth century were either themselves Christian or from a Christian background, such as Malkum Khān and his brother Mikā'il (Armenian), and Nazar Āqā and Narīmān Khān, both Assyrians from the Urumiya area. In Egypt and in Turkey, Muslim participation in the lodges was preceded by that of foreign and local Christians, and the Muslim component of the membership appears always to have been proportionally and even numerically less than the Christian. There, the lodge provided a milieu for a small number of Muslims to associate with prominent and wealthy Christians, whereas in Iran the need for such a milieu did not exist. It was only in the Iranian diplomatic service abroad that Christians attained any prominence, and there too that we find them joining masonic lodges. The relative unimportance of the Christian minority in Iran may, indeed, have been one reason for the late foundation there of an accredited lodge.

The claim of masonry to have established a religion of humanity and passed beyond the divisive claims of established religions may have formed one element in its appeal to some Iranians of Muslim background. It is interesting to find certain European travellers of the early and mid-nineteenth century regarding as freethinkers many of those whom they encountered and who styled themselves Sufis, and comparing their religious attitudes with those inculcated by freemasonry.<sup>81</sup> To such individuals, the masonic lodge may have appeared to be an ideal form of organization, offering the possibility of nominal profession of Islam and of an amorphous 'religion of humanity'. Similarly, if the legend of the transmission of the masonic light from Zoroaster to the Prophet Muḥammad, as expounded by Adib ul-Mamālik, was commonly or widely accepted by Iranian masons, the lodge was probably conceived of too as a means for the nurturing of

nascent Iranian nationalism, with its generally muted implications of hostility to the Arabs and to Islam.

More important than any of these considerations was, however, simply the convenience of the lodge as a unit of clandestine political organization. The model of the masonic lodge was found useful for political activity in conditions of autocracy much as had been the case in a number of European countries. Malkum Khān found it expedient to institute the *farāmūshkhāna* in imitation of the masonic lodge; and his initiative was followed in turn by many other secret or semi-secret groups that were particularly numerous in the time of the Constitutional Revolution. We find, for example, Shaykh Muḥsin, son of the celebrated Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī, requesting Malkum to draw upon his experience and supply him with a set of regulations for a semi-secret society he had just established in Tehran.<sup>82</sup> Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī, whose father was a member of the *farāmūshkhāna* and who himself is alleged to have had masonic affiliations, was active in the work of the secret societies of the early constitutional period. It was primarily in these societies that the tactical—if partially accurate—identification of the dictates of religion with those of westernizing reform was impressed on the ulama, and through them that their co-operation with the constitutional movement was secured.<sup>83</sup> Indirectly, then, one of the aims of the *farāmūshkhāna* may have been achieved, and Malkum's vision of the masonic lodge as a suitable means for political operation in Iran justified.

Access to masonry and its ideology was restricted to a small class of ambassadors and other privileged individuals who visited European capitals; their masonic affiliations are ultimately little more than a curiosity in the history of the Iranian encounter with Europe. Its organizational technique, on the other hand, which had something in common with that of the traditional chivalrous brotherhoods, the guilds and the Sufi orders, found wide application, not only among aristocratic miscontents but also among the urban population who made up the secret societies of the constitutional period. It is this which secures for masonry a modest place in the history of Iran.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Since the completion of this article a year ago, two works have appeared dealing with the history of freemasonry in Iran. The first, Maḥmūd Katirā'ī's *Frāmāsūnri dar Irān* (Tehran, 1347 solar/1968), covers, in 260 pages, approximately the same period as this paper, and offers little substantial information previously unknown. It reproduces, however, some interesting documents relating to the lodge 'Reveil de l'Iran' (pp. 194–232). The second is a vast compilation in three volumes and more than two thousand pages by Ismā'īl Rā'in, entitled *Farāmūshkhāna va Frāmāsūnri dar Irān* (Tehran, 1348 solar/1968). Rā'in's book is the fruit of several years' study and investigation, and contains a vast amount of novel information, above all on Iranian masonry in the present century. In places, it is disappointingly uncritical, and the central theme is frequently obscured by a mass of extraneous material. As a source for all future studies of Iranian freemasonry it will nonetheless be indispensable, and the essential accuracy of its material on contemporary masonry is attested by the banning of the book in Iran shortly after its publication. The third

volume contains a remarkable series of photographs and documents establishing the masonic affiliations of numerous politicians and other prominent persons, and for easy reference a list of these masons is included as an appendix. Interestingly enough, the accusation has been raised that Rā'in has omitted his own name from the list, despite his alleged membership of an American-affiliated lodge, and chosen to concentrate instead on lodges attached to British and French obediences. *Khabarnāma-yi Jibha-yi Milli-yi Irān*, Tir 1348 / July 1969, pp. 6, 8. In any event the evidence assembled by Rā'in goes some way to disproving my statement that masonry no longer exercises a widespread fascination for prominent Iranians.

August 1969

1. A number of masonic encyclopedias and other general works contain scattered references to Middle Eastern masonry, as do some of the accessible masonic reviews. Most discussions of the subject in Middle Eastern languages consists chiefly of material culled from secondary European sources on the history of masonry and present little original information concerning its role in the Islamic world. For an example of this kind of production, see the anonymous pamphlet entitled *Asrār al-Māsūniyya: Aqdam al-Jam'iyāt al-Haddāma wa Akhṭarūhā* (n.p., n.d.). For areas other than Iran, the following bibliographical notes are offered: on Egyptian freemasonry, there exists the study by Jacob Landau, 'Prolegomena to a Study of Secret Societies in Modern Egypt', *Middle Eastern Studies*, I (1965), 135–86. For the history of freemasonry in Turkey, reference may be made to the violently polemical work of the late Cevat Rifāt Atılhan, *Farmasonlar İslâmiyeti ve Tüğü Yikmak için Nasil Çalıtular* (Istanbul, 1953), and the anonymous, pro-masonic *Dünyada ve Türkiyede Masonluk* (Istanbul, 1965). Bernard Lewis has discussed briefly the masonic role in attempts to reinstate Sultan Murad in 1878 and in the events of 1908 in his *Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 172–73 and 207, n. 1. Documents concerning the masonic affiliations of Jamāl ud-Din Afghāni (Asadābādī) have been assembled in *Majmū'a-yi Asnād va Madārik-i Chāp-nashuda dar bāra-yi Sayyid Jamāl ud-Din-i Mashhūr ba Afghāni*, edited by Aṣghar Mahdavi and İraj Afshār (Tehran, 1342 solar/1963), pp. 172–73 and plates 40–43. A paper by Sami Hanna on 'Al-Afghāni and the Freemasons' will shortly be published in the *Middle East Journal*. The initiation of another prominent figure of the nineteenth-century Islamic world, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, the hero of the Algerian resistance, has recently been documented by Xavier Yacomo in *L'Information Historique* (January–February 1967, pp. 27–28 and May–June 1967, pp. 116–17), and commented upon by Mahfoud Kaddache in his article 'Abdelkader Francmaçon', *Revue d'Histoire et Civilisation du Maghreb*, July 1967, pp. 88–93.

2. See, for example, Comte Arthur de Gobineau, *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale* (Paris, 1865), p. 305.

3. Quoted in Serge Hutin, *Les Francs-Maçons* (Paris, 1961), p. 103.

4. R. F. Gould, *History of Freemasonry throughout the World* (New York, 1936), IV, 194, and A. G. Mackay, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (Philadelphia, 1905), p. 575. See also the article of 'Alī Mushirī entitled 'Avvalin Frāmāsūnhā-yi Irāni dar Avāyil-i Nūzdahum', first published in the weekly magazine *Khāndanihā* and later reprinted together with a rejoinder by Ismā'il Rā'in ('Nakhustin Vaziri ki az Inghilshā Rushva Girift Frāmāsūn Būd') as an introduction to translated extracts from Albert Lantoiné's *Histoire de la Francmaçonnerie (Asrār-i Farāmūshkhāna*, trans. Dr Ja'far Shāhid [Tehran, n.d.]), pp. i–ii of the reprint.

5. Gould, op. cit., IV, quoting from the *Freemason's Magazine* for January 2, 1864; Rā'in, op. cit., p. ix.

6. On Napoleon and freemasonry, see Gerard Serbanesco, *Histoire de la Francmaçonnerie Universelle* (Paris, 1964), II, 518 ff. Napoleon's commander in Egypt, General Kléber, established a branch of the Grand Orient during the occupation: it would be interesting to know if it contained Egyptian members.

7. Gould, op. cit., IV, 195. When in 1861 the English lodges operating in the Ottoman Empire were united in a District Grand Lodge with the British ambassador, Sir Henry

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Bulwer, as Grand Master, a somewhat similar situation came into being in Istanbul. See Gould, op. cit., III, 314.

8. 'Secret Memorandum of Political Department of East India Company to the Governor-General', dated July 7, 1810; and letter to the Board of Directors of the Company in London, dated January 31, 1848, both in F.O. 60/118. These and other relevant documents are cited by Rā'in in his article, pp. x-xi. See too the remarks of J. B. Fraser in his *Narrative of a Journey into Khorassan in the Years 1821 and 1822* (London, 1825), p. 150.

9. T. A. Bakunina, *Znamenitye Russkie Masony* (Paris, 1935), pp. 77-86.

10. *Tārikh-i Ravābiṭ-i Siyāsi-yi Īrān va Inglis dar Qarn-i Nūzdahum-i Milādī* (Tehran, 1332 solar/1953), VII, 1811.

11. On Mirzā Sāliḥ Shīrāzī, see Malik ush-Shu'arā Bahār, 'Qadimtarīn Īrāni ki Vārid-i Frāmāsūn Shuda Ast', *Yaghma*, III (1329 solar/1950), 4; Mushiri, op. cit., p. iii; and Farīdūn Ādamīyat, *Fikr-i Āzādī va Muqaddima-yi Niḥdat-i Mashrūṭiyat-i Īrān* (Tehran, 1340 solar/1961), p. 34. The last two quote the relevant section of the British Museum manuscript of his memoirs (see Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, I, 387b, and Storey, *Persian Literature: a Bio-bibliographical Survey*, I, 1149-50). [Since the completion of this paper, the full text of the work has been published in Tehran by Ismā'il Rā'in under the title *Safarnāma-yi Mirzā Šāliḥ Shīrāzī*.]

12. Mushiri, op. cit., p. iii.

13. J. B. Fraser, *Narrative of the Residence of the Persian Princes in London in 1835 and 1836, with an Account of their Subsequent Adventures* (London, 1838), I, 233.

14. Manuscript entitled *Rumūz us-Siyāḥa* in British Museum (see Storey, *Persian Literature*, I, 1153-54). The relevant section is quoted by Mushiri on pp. iv-v of his article. See too Mahmūd 'Irfān, 'Frāmāsūnhā', *Yaghma*, II (1328 solar/1949, 498).

15. Ibid., and A. Bausani, 'Un manoscritto persiano inedito sulla ambasceria di Ḥusein Ḥān Moqaddam Āgūdānbāshī in Europa negli anni 1254-55 A.H. (= A.D. 1838-1839)', *Oriente Moderno*, XXXIII (1953), 485-505. [Interestingly enough, Ḥusayn Khān Ājūdānbāshī himself investigated masonry and submitted a report on the subject to Mohammed Shāh. Unlike other Iranian travellers to the west, he showed no inclination to join the lodges and his impressions of them were unfavourable. In his report, he depicted masonry as a vast confidence trick, and unflatteringly compared the lodges to the London brothels which he found to be doing a brisk trade. See Ismā'il Rā'in, *Farāmūshkhāna va Frāmāsūrī dar Īrān* (Tehran, 1348 solar/1958), I, 281-85.]

16. A. E. Waite, *A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (London, n.d.), II, 275; Mackay, op. cit., p. 576.

17. *Missionary Journal of the Reverend Joseph Wolff* (London, 1829), III, 87.

18. *Researches and Missionary Labours Among the Jews, Mohammedans and Other Sects* (London, 1835), p. 41.

19. *Sketches on the Shores of the Caspian* (London, 1845), p. 182.

20. *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia Among the Nestorian Christians* (Andover, 1843), p. 41.

21. *The World's Classics* edition (London, 1923), p. 283.

22. Hutin, op. cit., p. 125.

23. 'Abd ul-Laṭīf Shushtari, *Tuḥfat ul-'Ālam* (Bombay, 1263 lunar/1847), p. 183.

24. See the description of *Navādir ul-Vaqāyī*, ff. 129-144, in A. M. Mirzoev and A. M. Boldyrev, *Katalog Vostochnykh Rukopisei Akademii Nauk Tadzhikskoi SSR* (Stalinabad, 1960), I, 182.

25. Gobineau, op. cit., p. 306.

26. Jakob Polak, *Persien, das Land und sein Bewohner* (Leipzig, 1865), I, 14.

27. The currency of *farmāsūn* was recorded as early as 1824 by Wolff (*Missionary Journal*, III, 87).

28. For a fuller account of Malkum's *farāmūshkhāna*, see chapter two of my forthcoming *Mirzā Malkum Khān: A Biographical Essay in Nineteenth Century Iranian History*.

29. W. S. Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (London, 1907), p. 83.

30. Mirzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūndūf, *Alifbā-yi Jadīd va Maktūbāt* (Baku, 1953), ed. Ḥamid Muḥammadzāda and Ḥamid Ārāsli, pp. 294-95.

31. Farrukh Khān's certificate of initiation is reproduced in Ḥusayn b. 'Abdullāh, *Makhzan ul-Waqāyī* (Tehran, 1344 solar/1965), plate 21. See too 'Iraj Afshār, 'Asnād Marbūṭ ba Farrukh Khān', *Yaghma*, XVIII (1344 solar/1965), 589. The occasion was

recalled two years after in the *Bulletin du Grand Orient de France: Suprême Conseil pour a France et les Possessions Françaises* XV (5860=1860), 396–97.

32. Khān Malik Sāsānī, *Siyāsatarān-i Daura-yi Qājār* (Tehran, 1338 solar/1959), p. 128; and introduction by Muhiṭ Ṭabāṭabā'ī to *Majmū'a-yi Āthār-i Mirzā Malkum Khān* (Tehran, 1327 solar/1948), I, vii.

33. Some of his letters to Akhundov are printed in *Alifbā-yi Jadid va Maktūbāt*, pp. 373, 374, 393, 394. On his *Nāma-yi Khusravān*, written in 'pure Persian', see Malik ush-Shu'arā Bahār, *Sabkshināsī* (Tehran, 1337 solar/1958), III, 292.

34. Gobineau, op. cit., pp. 305–6.

35. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's introduction to *Majmū'a-yi Āthār*, I, viii.

36. Irāj Afshār, 'Tiligrāf dar Irān', *Savād va Bayāḍ* (Tehran, 1344 solar/1965), pp. 228–32.

37. Gobineau, op. cit., p. 307.

38. Blunt, op. cit., pp. 82–83.

39. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's introduction to *Majmū'a-yi Āthār*, I, viii.

40. *Ibid.*, I, liii.

41. *Ibid.*, I, x; and Ibrāhīm Taymūri, 'Aṣr-i Bikhbarī yā Tārikh-i Imtiyāzāt dar Irān' (Tehran, 1335 solar/1957), pp. 124–25.

42. Sāsānī, op. cit., p. 146, quoting from Ibrāhīm Navvāb Badāyī' Nagār, 'Ibrat un-Nāzirīn va 'Ibrat ul-Hāḍirīn. See too Mukhbīr us-Salṭana, *Khāṭirāt va Khaṭarāt* (Tehran, 1329 solar/1960), p. 75.

43. Quoted by Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his introduction to *Majmū'a-yi Āthār*, I, viii.

44. *Ibid.*, p. ix; and Sāsānī, op. cit., p. 128.

45. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's introduction to *Majmū'a-yi Āthār*, I, xxi.

46. Yahyā Daulatābādi, *Tārikh-i Mu'āṣir yā Hayāt-i Yahyā* (Tehran, n.d.), I, 337.

47. *Ibid.*, I, 253; Mahdī Malikzāda, *Tārikh-i Inqilāb-i Mashrūṭiyat* (Tehran, 1327 solar/1948), II, 19; and 'Alī Aṣghar Shamim, *Irān dar Daura-yi Salṭanat-i Qājār* (Tehran, 1342 solar/1963), p. 354.

48. Nāzīm ul-Islām Kirmānī, *Tārikh-i Bidāri-yi Irāniān*, 2nd ed. (Tehran, n.d.), p. 120.

49. Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 3rd ed. (London, 1963), II, 398; and Ṭabāṭabā'ī's introduction to *Majmū'a-yi Āthār*, I, vi–vii.

50. Undated letter in Bibliothèque Nationale, Supplément Persan, 1996, ff. 92–93.

51. Undated letter, Supplément Persan, 1989, f. 39.

52. Ignorance of the matter may have persisted even longer. Later in the same year, Yevgenii Ilyin presented to the Imperial Archeological Society in Moscow a paper on Iranian freemasonry in which he treated the *farāmūshkhāna* as a legitimate masonic organization, and claimed for his source certain unnamed Iranian masons ('Iz Istorii Masonstva v Persii', *Drevnosti Vostochnie: Trudy Vostochnoi Kommissii Imperatorskogo Arheologicheskogo Obschestva* [Moscow, 1908], pp. 17–20).

53. *Bulletin du Grand Orient de France*, XV (6850=1860), 396–97.

54. *Le Monde Maçonique: Revue de la Francmaçonnerie Française et Etrangère*, XV (1873), 174–81. On Crémieux, see *Internationales Freimaurerlexikon* (Zurich, Leipzig and Vienna, 1932), col. 469, and *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Berlin, 1930), V. 690–91.

55. Anonymous, *Dünyada ve Türkiyede Masonluk* (Istanbul, 1965), p. 296; and *Le Monde Maçonique*, XV (1873), 35–38.

56. *Ibid.*, XV (1873), 252.

57. Mirzā Muḥsin Khān was reputed to have belonged also to the 'Ser' lodge, a mixed Turkish and Armenian lodge which numbered among its initiates such prominent Ottomans as Prince Murat (later Murat V), Mithat Paşa, Ahmet Vefik Paşa, Namik Kemal and Ziya Paşa (*Dünyada ve Türkiyede Masonluk*, p. 296, and the anonymous article 'Türk Masonluk Âleminde Büyük Simaları: II—Ziya Paşa', *Türk Mason Dergisi*, I [1951], 152–53).

58. *Le Monde Maçonique*, XV (1873), 382–86.

59. Public Record Office, London, F.O.60/637. The dispatch is translated in extenso by Ismā'il Rā'in, *Anjumanhā-yi Sirri dar Inqilāb-i Mashrūṭiyat-i Irān* (Tehran, 1345 solar/1966), pp. 46–55.

60. Sir Arthur Hardinge, *A Diplomatist in the East* (London, 1928), pp. 77–78.

61. See Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), pp. 236–39.

62. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's introduction to *Majmū'a-yi Āthār*, I, xx; Rā'in, *Anjumanhā-yi Sirri*, p. 43. n. 1; and Jahāngir Qā'im Maqāmī, *Tārikh-i Tahavvulāt-i Siyāsī-yi Niẓām-i Irān* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 7, n. 1.

63. *Dīvān-i Adīb ul-Mamālik Farāhānī*, ed. Vahid Dastgirdi (Tehran, 1312 solar/1933), pp. 575–93.

64. This celebrated verse makes no mention of light. It is possible that Adīb ul-Mamālik is confusing it with an equally sublime and well-known verse, the *Āyat an-Nūr* (XXIV/35).

65. Either the Prophet or 'Alī is reputed to have said: 'Salmān is one of us, the People of the House' (Louis Massignon, 'Salman Pak et les Prémices Spirituelles de l'Islam Iranien', *Opera Minora* [Beirut, 1963], I, 453–54).

66. (A)bū Qubays is a small mountain to the east of Mecca where the Black Stone is reputed to have been concealed for a time during the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance.

67. Richard Gramlich, 'Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens: erster Teil, die Affiliationen', *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, XXXVI, I (1965), 82. It is of course true that the name of Salmān appears also in the genealogies of the Qādirī, Naqshbandī and Bektaşhī orders (Massignon, op. cit., p. 462), but only the second of these was at all active in Iran at the time, and was in any event restricted to Kurdistan. Khāksār traditions therefore seem to have been a more likely source for Adīb ul-Mamālik's fantasies.

68. *Ādamīyat, Fikr-i Āzādī*, pp. 206–7.

69. *Ishtihār-nāma-yi Auliyyā Ādamīyat*, contained in *Majmū'a-yi Athar*, I, 182–87.

70. See, for example, number five which contains what purports to be a description of the league by 'a foreign traveller'.

71. A. Qodiri (ed.), *Adiboni Tojikiston* (Dushanbe, 1966), p. 14; E. G. Osmanova and M. Sh. Shukurov (eds.), *Ocherk Istorii Sovetskoi Tadzhijskoi Literatury* (Moscow, 1961), p. 275.

72. Kirmānī, op. cit., p. 408.

73. *Ādamīyat* gives a detailed account of the political activities of the League of Humanity in op. cit., pp. 199–231.

74. A list of these is given by Rā'in in his *Anjumanhā-yi Sirri*, p. 42, n. 1.

75. Ḥusayn 'Alā and Sayyid Ḥasan Taqizāda, both of whom occupied a variety of ministerial posts for a number of years, are reputed to have had masonic affiliations (P. W. Avery, *Modern Iran* [London, 1964], pp. 452–53). The Iqbal cabinet of 1957 is alleged to have contained no fewer than ten masons (R. W. Cottingham, *Nationalism in Iran* [Pittsburgh, 1954], p. 236).

76. The comparison is drawn by Abdūlbakī Gölpınarlı, 'İslām ve Türk İllerinde Fütüvvet Teşkilâtı', *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, XI (1949–1950), 73.

77. On the ceremony of initiation into *fütüvvet* and the guilds, see Louis Massignon, art. 'Shadd' in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1st ed.).

78. A detailed list of resemblances between masonic and Sufi, particularly Bektaşhī, organization is given by Süleyman Külce in *Türkiyede Masonluk* (Izmir, 1948), pp. 32–36. An interesting variation on the theme of Sufi-masonic resemblance may be noted here. A defender of the Nurcu movement in modern Turkey which is frequently accused of 'tarikatchilik', of imitating the proscribed Sufi orders, turns against the accusers, whom he identifies as masons, with the charge that masonry itself has all the features of a *tarikāt* (Eşref Edib, *Risalei Nur Muarızı Yazarların İsnadları hakkında İlmî bir Tahlil* [Istanbul, 1965], pp. 62–64).

79. *Dünyada ve Türkiyede Masonluk*, pp. 294–95.

80. Ataullah Efendi, *şeyh* of the Beyoğlu *mevlevihane* in the late 1880s, was reputed to be more interested in his membership of an Istanbul lodge than in the affairs of the tekki (Ḥājji Pirzāda Nā'ini, *Safarnāma* [Tehran, 1343 solar/1964], ed. Ḥ. Farmān-farmā'jān, II, 120–21).

81. Gramlich, op. cit., pp. 62–63; 'Irfān, op. cit., p. 504.

82. Fraser, *Narrative of the Residence of the Persian Princes*, p. 231; Gobineau, op. cit., chapter five; and A. Sepsis, 'Quelques Mots sur l'Etat Religieux Actuel de la Perse', *Revue de l'Orient*, III (1844), 107–9.

83. Undated letter, *Supplément Persan*, 1991, f. 88.

84. A. K. S. Lambton, 'Secret Societies and the Persian Revolution of 1905–1906', *St. Antony's Papers*, IV (1958), 52–55.