

The Politics of Gift Exchange in Early Qajar Iran, 1785–1834

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INTRODUCTION

In the eleventh-century Persian epic poem the *Shāhnāmah*, in the story of “Kasrā Nūshīrāvān” that is found in the second half of the epic, the so-called “historical” portion, Firdawsī describes a scene in which a group of nobles from various cities and regions in Transoxiana (*az āmūī tā shahr-i chāch u khutan*) assemble and together they recall the periods of good and ill fortune in their homeland’s history.¹ Afrāsiyāb’s reign, they say, resulted in “dark and bitter days” while Kai Khusraw ruled over a peaceful world free from strife.² Their reminiscences finally reach their own time and they give thanks that their ruler, the Sāsānian emperor Kasrā Anūshīrāvān (r. 531–579 CE), has established justice (*dād*) in his realm and therefore made his people rich and prosperous. Firdawsī goes on to say, in a noteworthy passage, that representatives from the different regions of the Sāsānian kingdom gathered before the shah and with “one heart and one tongue” pledged allegiance to the ruler and presented him with gifts (*hadiyah*).³

As this story in the *Shāhnāmah* suggests, the giving of gifts, tributes, and honors has a long history as a vital component of administration in Iran and the

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¹ For more on the “mythical” versus “historical” halves of the *Shāhnāmah*, see Ehsan Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” in Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3(1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 359–478. See also the Introduction to Dick Davis’s translation, Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, Dick Davis, trans. (New York: Viking, 2006), xiii–xxxvii.

² Abu al-Qasim Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, ed. (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987), vol. VII, 276.

³ See *Ibid.*, 278. For a translation of this and the preceding sections, see Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner, trans., *The Shahnama of Firdausi* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1905), vol. VII, 359–60.

Persianate world⁴ beyond, and was seen as a direct reflection of a sovereign's just, and by extension legitimate rule.⁵ After long being a neglected topic, gift giving in the Iranian context has become the subject of a growing body of historical scholarship, which can be divided into two broad categories. One is the literature that takes a macro-historical approach to describe the role of gifts in Persian culture over the course of hundreds, if not thousands of years. These studies have been useful in presenting the "big picture" and often emphasize the underlying continuities in gift-giving practices through different eras.⁶ The other category is those works that focus primarily on the objects that were exchanged, either from a material cultural and art historical perspective or from a broader sensitivity to the "value of things."⁷ These studies build

⁴ I use "the Persianate world" to mean approximately what Marshall Hodgson referred to as the "Persianate zone": a region where "local languages of high culture ... depended upon Persian wholly or in part for their prime literary inspiration," and thus where the *Shāhnāmāh* would have been read or recited. See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 2: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 293. In recent years, scholars have questioned whether the term "Persianate" can be used to define a region beyond the framework of language. See, for example, Said Amir Arjomand, "Defining Persianate Studies," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1, 1 (2008): 1–4; Richard Eaton, "The Persian Cosmopolis (900–1900) and the Sanskrit Cosmopolis (400–1400)" (paper presented at "The Persianate World: A Conceptual Inquiry," Yale University, 9–11 May 2014); Abbas Amanat, "Introduction," in Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds., *The Persianate World: Towards a Conceptual Framework* (forthcoming ca. 2016).

⁵ The *Shāhnāmāh* was written four centuries after Kasrā's reign, and obviously should not be read as a literal account of historical events during the Sāsānian era. In fact, in their translation of the epic poem, Arthur and Edmond Warner use the scene of the gathered noblemen to warn of the unreliability of the *Shāhnāmāh* as a historical source, overlooking its usefulness for understanding political and cultural practices in the Persianate world: "The historical reminiscences put into the mouths of dwellers beyond the Oxus and even the Jaxartes are of course valueless." See Warner and Warner, *The Shahnama of Firdausi*, 360, n. 1. Further evidence of the significance of the *Shāhnāmāh* in the political culture of Qajar Iran is provided by the fact that Fath 'Alī Shah (r. 1797–1834) commissioned his court poet to write an epic poem of his own reign, the *Shāhanshāhnāmāh*, purposefully modeled on Firdawsi's epic.

⁶ The most comprehensive survey of the role of gifts in Iranian history is the entry on "Gift-giving" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. See Multiple Authors, "Gift-giving," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, X/6, 604–17, at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gift-giving> (accessed 29 Mar. 2015), and the associated bibliographies. The entry on the Qajar period, by Willem Floor, is available at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gift-giving-v> (accessed 4 Sept. 2014). For a useful collection of articles and essays on the role of gifts in pre-Islamic Iran, see the proceedings from a 1986 conference published as: Pierre Briant and Clarisse Herrens Schmidt, eds., *Le Tribut dans l'Empire perse: Actes de la Table ronde de Paris, 12–13 décembre 1986* (Paris: Peeters, 1989). Ann K. S. Lambton presents an overview of the *pīshkīsh* from the eleventh to nineteenth centuries: "Pīshkash: Present or Tribute?," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, 1 (1994): 145–58. For a philological and civilizational perspective on the meaning of "gifts," see Franz Rosenthal, "Gifts and Bribes: The Muslim View," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 108, 2 (1964): 135–44.

⁷ For a study of gift exchange in twentieth-century Iran, see Anne H. Betteridge, "Gift Exchange in Iran: The Locus of Self-Identity in Social Interaction," *Anthropological Quarterly* 58, 4 (1985): 190–202. Further afield, see Sinem Arcaç, "Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501–1618" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2012); Linda Komaroff and Sheila Blair, eds., *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

upon the seminal work of anthropologists and sociologists, who demonstrated that the exchange of gifts in premodern societies was primarily defined by moral considerations of reciprocity—presents were “given and reciprocated obligatorily”—and that the given objects were not neutral, as in the case of commodity exchange, but bore the identity of the giver and recipient.⁸ In spite of this growing literature, however, many areas remain underexplored. Chief among them is the role of gifts in the political culture, administration, and state-building projects of Iranian history. Part of the explanation for the dearth of scholarship on the political economy of gifts may lie in their ubiquity: gifts are mentioned so often that it is easy to gloss over them.⁹ Like food, animals, disease, and other aspects of life that appear frequently in historical sources, it can be difficult to determine what, if any, political and economic significance they had.¹⁰

Gifts, tributes, and honors were the backbone of the Qajar state and society. Their abundance in the Qajar period has led some observers to share

2011). For essays exploring the meaning and value attached to cloth in South Asia and the Islamic world, see C. A. Bayly, “The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700–1830,” in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 285–321; Jamal Elias, “The Sufi Robe (*khirqā*) as a Vehicle of Spiritual Authority,” in Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 275–89; Michelle Maskiell and Adrienne Mayor, “Killer Khilats, Part 1: Legends of Poisoned ‘Robes of Honour’ in India,” *Folklore* 112, 1 (2001): 23–45; Michelle Maskiell and Adrienne Mayor, “Killer Khilats, Part 2: Imperial Collecting of Poison Dress Legends in India,” *Folklore* 112, 2 (2001): 163–82.

⁸ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, W. D. Halls, trans. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 3. See also Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1926); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures Élémentaires de La Parenté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949); Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Paris: Droz 1972); James G. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 8–10; David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). For a useful survey of the anthropological and sociological literature on gift giving, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 3–10; Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in A. Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63.

⁹ Anthony Cutler has made a similar argument in “Significant Gifts: Patterns of Exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Diplomacy,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, 1 (Winter 2008): 79–101, 81. My thanks to the anonymous *CSSH* reviewer who brought this to my attention.

¹⁰ For discussions of the problems associated with pursuing the political and economic significance of food, animals, and disease, respectively, see: Warren Belasco, “Introduction: Food History as a Field,” in Paul Freedman, Joyce E. Chaplin, and Ken Albala, eds., *Food in Time and Place: The American Historical Association Companion to Food History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 1–20; Alan Mikhail, “Unleashing the Beast: Animals, Energy, and the Economy of Labor in Ottoman Egypt,” *American Historical Review* 118, 2 (2013): 317–48, 317–18; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 18–52.

the view of George Curzon, the British statesman of the imperial era, that gift exchange constituted “the cardinal and differentiating feature of Iranian administration” and that there was something exceptional about Iranian and Qajar gift-giving practices.¹¹ In fact, evidence suggests that gift-giving practices were shared across premodern Eurasia and that tribute systems, of which those practices were a part, were a “uniformity” and a “widely shared element of culture.”¹² Early Qajar rulers relied not only on an established administrative class to serve in their bureaucratic ranks, but also drew on pre-existing practices like gift giving that they inherited from the Safavid and post-Safavid eras and which served as a means of reconstituting a government that could rule over a vast territory—two and a half times the size of modern France and 100,000 square miles larger than contemporary Iran.¹³ In that sense, gift exchange was a vital component of Qajar administration and political life, but one that it shared with other tributary empires and which should not be reified to the level of cultural difference.¹⁴

Nevertheless, this essay takes a different tack than the scholarship outlined above. I focus on a relatively short period of time—the first few decades of the Qajar period (1785–1925)—but more importantly examine the practices associated with gift giving in early nineteenth-century Iran as a window onto the political culture of the early Qajar state and as a lens through which to analyze statecraft and means of governance during the early Qajar period. I will, in other words, focus on the political strategies behind the exchange of gifts. There are countless references to gifts in the diplomatic correspondence, letters, royal decrees (*farmān*), chronicles, and other sources from the early Qajar period that provide ample evidence that gift exchange constituted a significant part in administering the Qajar state. Sometimes the gifts are mentioned in passing, as when chroniclers write of “gifts and presents” (*tuḥaf va pīshkash*) sent to the royal court.¹⁵ In other instances, the actual objects given are

¹¹ George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1892), vol. I, 438. Ann Lambton has asserted in a similar vein: “The giving of gifts, though not peculiar to Persian society, is particularly common in that society”; “Pīshkash,” 145.

¹² For more on the notion of “uniformities,” see C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 1–14, 41–44.

¹³ The area of territory that was at least nominally under Qajar control prior to 1813 and 1828 and the conclusion of the Russo-Persian wars includes, in their entirety or at least in part, the modern nation-states of Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan, totaling close to 700,000 square miles.

¹⁴ For more on how imperial projects like those personified by Curzon deploy the discourse of exceptionalism to turn cultural differences into hierarchies, see Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan, “Introduction: Refiguring Imperial Terrains,” in Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 11–13.

¹⁵ For example, see Riza Quli Khan Hidayat, *Tārīkh-i Rawḍat al-Ṣafā-yi Nāṣirī*, Jamshid Kiyāfar, ed. (Tehran: Asatir, 2001), vol. IX, 7310.

specified, like in the case of a gold-sheathed sword sent to a tribal khan as part of an effort to win his loyalty.¹⁶

Gifts fulfilled various objectives in Qajar Iran: they were a form of tribute (*pīshkīsh*),¹⁷ a means of displaying generosity and redistributing wealth in society, a method of political patronage, and a way to ease social, political, and diplomatic relations.¹⁸ They were, in short, part of the effort to legitimize Qajar authority. But they also highlight the real limitations Qajar rulers faced in exerting power in the peripheries of their vast territory and in their relations with diplomats and foreign envoys. Unlike the Safavids, whose claim to rule was grounded in notions of sacred kingship, the Qajars drew on a diverse set of traditions to present themselves as legitimate rulers and establish their political authority.¹⁹ Gift giving was central to this effort. Moreover, although there was much continuity in gift-giving practices and customs between the Qajar state and earlier polities—the *pīshkīsh* ceremonies being the most conspicuous—Qajar gift giving was shaped by the historical circumstances of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gifts comprised by some estimates nearly half of the economic revenue of the early Qajar state, a figure that may seem high but which is understandable in the context of an economy recuperating after nearly seventy years of war and political instability.²⁰ Gifts were not only crucial to the self-image of Qajar rulers, indeed they were essential to the state's survival. At the same time, with the ascendancy of European imperial powers at the turn of the nineteenth century, gifts of precious objects and animals to European dignitaries and visitors came to surpass in importance

¹⁶ The gold-sheathed sword was sent by Faṭḥ 'Alī Shah to Hājī Qāsim Khān Sartīp in 1244 AH/1828–9 AD. See *Farmān'hā va Raqam'hā-yi Dawrah-yi Qājār (Jild-i avval: 1211–60 A.H.)* (Tehran: Mu'assasah-yi Pazhūhīsh va Muṭāla'āt-i Farhangī, 1992), 83–84.

¹⁷ For more, see the discussion on terminology in the following section.

¹⁸ Examples of studies of gift-exchange in other historical times and places include Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*; Anthony Cutler, "Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 247–78; Cutler, "Significant Gifts"; Cecily J. Hilsdale, *Byzantine Art and Diplomacy in an Age of Decline* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁹ For a recent study of the sacred, saintly, and messianic kingship that defined the Safavid and Mughal dynasties, see A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

²⁰ For the reference to gifts comprising nearly half of the early Qajar state's revenue, see "Notes for a Memorandum on the Revenues of Persia," 1811, f. 7, IOR/L/PS/9/67/5, Secret Letters and Enclosures from Persia, Iraq, Syria, etc. (1781–1836), British Library. The economic history of Iran's eighteenth century remains relatively underexplored. For some studies, see Charles P. Issawi, *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 12–13; Thomas M. Ricks, "Towards a Social and Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Iran," *Iranian Studies* 6, 2/3 (1973): 110–26; Willem M. Floor, *A Fiscal History of Iran in the Safavid and Qajar Periods, 1500–1925* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 1998), 233–49; Rudi Matthee, Willem Floor, and Patrick Clawson, *The Monetary History of Iran from the Safavids to the Qajars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 137–78.

the megafauna and illustrated manuscripts exchanged between the Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals in earlier times.²¹

At the same time, however, the story of Qajar gifts is not simply a story of political elites. The exchange of gifts to and from the Qajar state reflected a culture of exchange that existed within broader nineteenth-century Iranian society, and enmeshed the elite in social and economic relations that helped sustain their rule.²² The depictions of Qajar rulers as “autocratic” and “arbitrary,” which often features in the historiography of Iran, obscures the fact that political practices like gift giving were an extension of the cultural norms of giving that existed in broader society.²³ What distinguished the political gifts were the rituals associated with them, and the potential for violence if obligations were not met.²⁴ Gift exchange in Qajar Iran reminds us that, as Karl Polanyi and others have pointed out, premodern political and economic systems, were “as a rule, embedded in social relations.”²⁵

THE SPIRIT OF THE QAJAR GIFT

The contours of a broad culture and ethics of giving and generosity in nineteenth-century Iran can be gleaned from the Persian language’s rich terminology related to gifts. Some words in Persian, like *armaghān* and *sawghāt*, are used only in the context of “souvenir” or “memento,” usually brought over from a journey, while others, like *in’ām*, *ināyat*, and *pīshkish* imply a difference in the status and rank between the giver and the recipient of the gift. Europeans who journeyed to Iran remarked upon the variety of words available in Persian to describe gifts. After traveling there between 1887 and 1888, Edward G. Browne wrote in his well-known *A Year amongst the Persians* that he heard eight different words used among ordinary Iranians to refer to gifts. *Armaghān*,

²¹ For a discussion of the megafauna exchanged between the Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals, see Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 109–36. An early nineteenth-century example of megafauna, in this case a lion, being gifted to European dignitaries can be found in William Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East: More Particularly Persia* (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1823), vol. I, 187–88.

²² Here I have been influenced by John F. Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (New York: Verso, 1993), 10, 67–68, 272.

²³ For examples of the Qajars’ depiction as autocratic and arbitrary, see Ervand Abrahamian, “Oriental Despotism: The Case of Qajar Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5, 1 (1974): 3–31; Homa Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectic of State and Society* (London: Routledge, 2003).

²⁴ Mauss pointed out that gifts could “serve the purpose of buying peace,” but his discussion of this phenomenon was on those institutions related to “gift[s] made to men in the sight of gods or nature” so that “evil spirits” and “bad influences” would be avoided. In the Qajar case, the gifts were made in the sight of the state, whose evil spirits took the form of armed troops. See Mauss, *The Gift*, 15–17.

²⁵ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 279. On this point, see also Timothy Mitchell, “Society, Economy, and the State Effect,” in George Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 76–77.

rah-āvard, and *sawghāt* referred to objects brought back after a journey; *yādīgār* was a keepsake meant to remind the owner of an absent friend; and *hadiyah* was a general term for gift. For the three other words—*ta'āruf*, *pīshk-ish*, and *in'ām*—Browne provided an extended explanation of each and remarked on their rituals and expectations. *Ta'āruf* was used when someone of about the same social rank offered a present to Browne, and no return, at least in the form of money, was expected. *Pīshkish* was the term used when a person of lower rank gave a present to Browne, usually in the form of “flowers, fruits, or fowls,” and the object’s proper value in money was expected in return.²⁶ Finally, *in'ām*, or gratuity, was the term Browne heard used when an offering was made by a superior to an inferior, and was “almost always in the form of money.”²⁷ The latter often took the form of gratuities given to villagers who hosted travelers, caravanserai owners, the *shāgird-chāpārs* who served as accompaniment along each stage of a voyage and were responsible to return horses, servants in the house, and, in general, “anyone of humble rank who offers service.”²⁸ Browne noted that the proper amount to be given was difficult to determine, and the most expensive *in'ām* were always those to the governor’s *farrāshes*—the men sent bearing a present from their master.²⁹

Browne’s categorization applied to the terms as used in relation to him, and therefore differed slightly from their political and administrative connotations. The *farmāns*, chronicles, and other Persian-language sources of the early Qajar period also use a variety of words to refer to gifts and to the act of giving, but the most common are *pīshkish*, *tuḥfah*, *hadiyah*, and *ināyat*. The investiture of robes (*khil'at*) was also common in the Qajar period to reward individuals and as a mark of honor. *Tuḥfah*, *hadiyah*, and *ināyat* can be translated as gift or present. *Pīshkish*, on the other hand, is less straightforward. In the political context, it did convey the meaning of something given from a person of inferior status to a person of superior rank, as Browne noted, and in that sense often has been translated as a tribute: “[*Pīshkish*] originally ... had a fairly neutral meaning, [but] came to mean a present from someone of an inferior status. In the ... fifteenth century, if not before, it came to be used also in the sense of a due or tribute paid to the ruler or his officials.”³⁰ As this definition implies, *pīshkish* could mean both gift and tribute, and even into the Qajar period the sources seem to confirm this. The term was used both to refer to items presented during the ceremonial New Year (*nawrūz*) processions, as well as to the individual objects given by subjects and vassals on other occasions. Because of the multivalent meaning of *pīshkish*, as well as the abundant

²⁶ Edward G. Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1893), 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See also Betteridge, “Gift Exchange in Iran,” 192.

³⁰ Lambton, “Pīshkash,” 145.

usage of other terms in the historical sources to refer to the giving of objects, the words gift, tribute, and honors will be used in this essay to refer not only to the *pīshkīsh* ceremonies, but to other examples of giving.

The ethics of generosity (*karam*), largesse (*sikhāwa*, in Persian *sikhāvat*), and ritualized gift giving that all individuals, but especially rulers, were encouraged to cultivate were described in the “manuals of statecraft” (*dastūr-i shah-ryārī*) or “advice for rulers” (*naṣīḥat al-mulūk*) literature. The genealogy of prescriptions in the “manuals of statecraft” goes back not only to the Qur’an and Islamic ideals, but also to Plato, Aristotle, and pre-Islamic Iran, producing a genre that can be described best as Perso-Islamic.³¹ Books like *Ādāb al-Ḥarb wa’l-Shujā’ah* and Sa’dī’s *Gulistān* prescribed the proper comportment and manners of rulers, toward God as well as toward their subjects, in the form of “counsels” (*andarz*) or “advice” (*naṣīḥat*), and functioned in much the same way as the “mirrors for princes” literature of medieval Europe in which gifts also hold an important place.³² Even the *Shāhnāmah*, from which the story this essay began was taken, was understood, in part, as a book of wisdom and advice on kingship.³³ The exchange of gifts in the early Qajar period should be understood as part of this ethical culture.

Ādāb al-Ḥarb wa’l-Shujā’ah, written by Muḥammad b. Maṣṣūr b. Sa’īd Mubārakshāh³⁴ in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, and Sa’dī’s³⁵ thirteenth-century *Gulistān* are well-known texts that emphasize the

³¹ For a useful introduction to the vast “manuals of statecraft” literature, see Muhammad Taqi Danishpazhuh, “An Annotated Bibliography on Government and Statecraft,” in Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism*, Andrew Newman, trans. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 213–39. For a more recent survey, see Louise Marlow, “Surveying Recent Literature on the Arabic and Persian Mirrors for Princes Genre,” *History Compass* 7, 2 (2009): 523–38.

³² The opening passage of *The Prince*, for example, prescribes gifts as an effective way to win the favor of rulers. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Luigi Ricci, trans. (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 1.

³³ See, for example, Nasrin Askari, “The Medieval Reception of Firdausi’s *Shāhnāma*: The Ardashīr Cycle as a Mirror for Princes” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2013); Abbas Amanat, “Divided Patrimony, Tree of Royal Power, and Fruit of Vengeance: Political Paradigms and Iranian Self-Image in the Story of Faridun in the *Shahnama*,” in Charles P. Melville, ed., *Shahnama Studies I* (Cambridge: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge, 2006), 49–70.

³⁴ A late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Persian prose writer and courtier in South Asia. See the entries on “Fakr-e Modabbir” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, and “Fakhr-i Mudabbir,” in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, and their respective bibliographies. EIr, “Fakr-e Modabbir,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, IX/2, 164, online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fakr-e-modabbir> (accessed 27 Aug. 2014); C. E. Bosworth, “Fakhr-i Mudabbir,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, 2013, at: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/fakhr-i-mudabbir-SIM_8531 (accessed 29 Mar. 2015); Blain Auer, “Fakhr-i Mudabbir,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*, Brill Online, 2015, at: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/fakhr-i-mudabbir-COM_26926 (accessed 12 Mar. 2015).

³⁵ Thirteenth-century Persian poet and prose writer. See Franklin Lewis, “Golestān-e Sa’dī,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, XI/1, 79–86; online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/golestan-e-sadi> (accessed online 27 Aug. 2014).

importance of generosity as a virtue and provide didactic instructions on gift-giving. Sa'dī's *Gulistān*, in particular, has been described as "probably the single most influential work of prose in the Persian tradition" for its ability to convey advice and counsel through anecdotes and stories.³⁶ In one of the stories in the first part of the *Gulistān*, on the "lives of kings" (*dar sīrat-i pādshāhān*), Sa'dī links the generosity and largesse of rulers to the redistribution of wealth in society, a prerequisite for establishing justice in a kingdom. He tells the story of a wealthy prince who received a large inheritance from his father, and "opened a generous hand, and gave with a just generosity, and bestowed an undeniable prosperity upon the soldiers and people."³⁷ Likewise, *Ādāb al-Ḥarb* shares eighteen stories that demonstrate the traits of "generosity, forbearance, and beneficence" among early Islamic leaders and rulers, including of the Imām Ḥusayn, providing examples for future rulers to emulate.³⁸ The book also includes a significant portion on "the sending of envoys and gifts and presents, and their classification."³⁹ Several dozen possible gifts are listed, including calligraphy of Qur'anic verses and exegesis, strong horses and camels, skins of lions, tigers, leopards, and cheetahs, knives with handles made from ox and rhinoceros bones, precious stones like jade, turquoise, and agate, fine linens and cloths, and generally "anything given in a spirit of friendship" or with the intention of securing peace treaties and agreements (*'ahd-nāmah*) between governments.⁴⁰

Early Qajar courtiers and statesmen also recognized the importance of gift giving, of being depicted in situations where they received gifts, and of cultivating generosity as one of the attributes of kingly and princely character. The *Shāhanshāhnāmah*, written by the early Qajar court poet Faṭḥ 'Alī Khān Ṣabā to emulate Firdawsī's *Shāhnāmah*, includes stories of gifts being offered to Faṭḥ 'Alī Shah. Some illuminated manuscript versions of the book include paintings depicting the *pīshkīsh* offerings, a deliberate attempt to present the Qajar monarch as a legitimate ruler who deserves the gifts of his subjects. In one edition dating from 1810, a miniature depicts Faṭḥ 'Alī Shah seated on the throne used by Nādir Shah and receiving gifts from Mīrzā Rizā Qulī, the head of the royal chancery (*munshī al-mamālik*).⁴¹ Moreover, one can find examples of the ideal generous ruler to which shahs and princes were to aspire in the writings of statesmen like Mīrzā 'Isā Farāhānī

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Sa'dī, *Kulliyāt-i Sa'dī*, Muhammad Ali Furughi, ed. (Tehran: Ilmi, 1966), 132–33.

³⁸ For the story on Ḥusayn, see Muhammad b. Mansur Mubarakshah, *Ādāb al-Ḥarb wa'l-Shujā'ah*, Ahmad Suhayli-Khansari, ed. (Tehran: Eqbal, 1967), 28.

³⁹ Ibid., 142.

⁴⁰ For the full list, see *ibid.*, 147–48.

⁴¹ Fath Ali Khan Saba, "Shāhanshāhnāmah," 1810, f. 64 verso, IO Islamic 3442, Oriental Manuscripts, British Library. A reproduction of the image is available at: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=io_islamic_3442_f064v (accessed 27 Aug. 2014).

Qā'im-Maqām (Mīrzā Buzurg) and his son, the celebrated Mīrzā Abū'l-Qāsim Qā'im-Maqām II, who belonged to the so-called class of “men of the pen”⁴² largely responsible for “transmitting the Persian court culture to the Qajars and educating the princes.”⁴³ Mīrzā Abū'l-Qāsim, the second Qā'im-Maqām, was a minister to the crown prince ‘Abbās Mīrzā during the two rounds of Russo-Persian wars of 1804–1813 and 1826–1828, and was a particularly prolific writer of literary and historical essays, poems, and letters.⁴⁴ In a poem he wrote in praise of and with counsels for the crown prince, Mīrzā Abū'l-Qāsim addressed ‘Abbās Mīrzā as the “prosperous Khusraw,” a deliberate allusion to the legendary Kai Khusraw of the *Shāhnāmah* as well as the famous Sasanian Khusraw II, before counseling the prince on the “route to the Ka'bah of court of kings.” He wrote that the “gifts of a giving king” are among the “particles of existence” that should be guarded by the grace of God, and continues, echoing Sa'dī's parable about generosity and the redistribution of wealth, that “royal gifts are what give life to all things: on the one hand they bring forth prosperity, while on the other hand, they set an example for others to give gifts.”⁴⁵

Beyond the linguistic and normative conceptualizations outlined above, the giving of gifts was enough of a common practice in early nineteenth-century Iranian society that European travelers took note. John Malcolm, the East India Company's representative in Iran, wrote upon his arrival in 1799 and after spending some time in Shiraz that, “Our only occupation at Shiraz was feasting, visiting, and giving and receiving presents.”⁴⁶ In short, gift exchange among Qajar rulers was defined by highly ritualized ceremonies and couched in the language of generosity that made it central to the state-building project of the early nineteenth century. There was also an expectation that they would be given, and as will be shown, failure to meet that obligation could result in violence. The giving of gifts and presents was, nevertheless, a component of everyday life in Iranian society, and part of a broader culture of

⁴² For more on “men of the pen” versus “men of the sword” in the Qajar period, see Ann K. S. Lambton, “Persian Society under the Qajars,” *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 48, 2 (1961): 123–39. For a critique of the distinction between them, see Christoph Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition: A Social and Economic History of the Elites of Tabriz, 1747–1848* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 8–9.

⁴³ Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir Al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831–1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 27.

⁴⁴ His published writings can be found in Mīrzā Abu'l-Qasim Qā'im-Maqām, *Munshā'āt-i Qā'im-Maqām*, Jahangir Qā'im-Maqāmi, ed. (Tehran: Kitābkhānah-i Ibn Sīnā, 1958); Mīrzā Abu'l-Qasim Qā'im-Maqām, *Nāmah 'hā-yi Parākandah-yi Qā'im-Maqām-i Farāhānī*, Jahangir Qā'im-Maqāmi, ed., 2 vols. (Tehran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1978); Mīrzā Buzurg Qā'im-Maqām Farahani, *Jihādīyyah*, Jahangir Qā'im-Maqāmi, ed. (Tehran: Shirkat-i Ufsit, 1974).

⁴⁵ Mīrzā Abu'l-Qasim Qā'im-Maqām, *Dīvān-i Ash'ār-i Mīrzā Abū'l-Qāsim Qā'im-Maqām Farāhānī: Bih Inzīmān-i Masnavī-yi Jalāyir-nāmah*, Badr al-Din Yaghma'i, ed. (Tehran: Sharq, 1987), 16.

⁴⁶ John Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia* (London: J. Murray, 1845), 87.

hospitality and generosity that was not confined to the realm of politics. In other words, the politics of gift giving in the early Qajar state was simultaneously an extension of the norms of broader society and a practice that stood apart.

LOYALTY AND TRIBUTES: *PĪSHKISH*

The Qajars actively cultivated the image of being legitimate rulers with imperial ambitions by resuscitating *pīshkish* ceremonies and institutionalizing public displays of gift giving that were meant to demonstrate their subjects' loyalty. Ideally, the *pīshkish* functioned as a form of tribute in the same way that the gifts in Firdawsi's story about Kasrā Anūshīravān in the *Shāhnāmah* did. In practice, however, rulers felt compelled to ensure the allegiance of provincial leaders and their subjects by imposing tributes upon them, leading some scholars to argue that the *pīshkish* "develop[ed] from a free gift to a tribute imposed on individuals and communities and a tax attached to the land and to certain offices."⁴⁷ This depiction, however, reduces gifts and tributes to separate categories and obscures the dual role of gifts even into the Qajar period, by suggesting that in the early Islamic period gifts were "free." Although they were a form of tribute, they were also viewed as something subjects should want to give and part of an exchange in which rulers would, in return, provide protection, security, or other favors.⁴⁸

Qajar rulers resuscitated the practice of annual *pīshkish* offerings that the Safavids had used during their reign. Every year on Nawrūz, the Iranian New Year, a procession of gifts and offerings from the country's provincial leaders and notables was paraded through Tehran's citadel and formally presented to the shah as part of the holiday's festivities. Far from being a superfluous exercise, the revenue raised from these ceremonies constituted a core part of Qajar administration and economy, accounting for, by some estimates, no less than two-fifths of the government's total income in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁹ The *pīshkish* was counted as a separate category from the fixed revenues of the state, or *māliyāt*.⁵⁰ If British estimates were accurate that in 1811 the fixed revenue was roughly 1.6 million *tūmāns*, then at least an additional 650,000 *tūmāns* would have been raised through the *pīshkish*.⁵¹ The Nawrūz

⁴⁷ Lambton, "Pīshkash," 157.

⁴⁸ Roy Mottahedeh has demonstrated that even in early Islamic societies, a reciprocal relationship marked by benefits, favors, and gifts between rulers and the ruled tied the two sides to one another: *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 72–73.

⁴⁹ "Notes for a Memorandum on the Revenues of Persia," IOR/L/PS/9/67/5, f. 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 6–10.

⁵¹ "Statement of the Fixed Revenue of Persia, 1811," 8 Aug. 1811, IOR/L/PS/9/67/6, Secret Letters and Enclosures from Persia, Iraq, Syria, etc. (1781–1836), India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library. During the first few decades of the nineteenth century, one *tūmān* equaled roughly half a pound sterling. See Sir Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia: During the Years 1817, 1818, 1819, and 1820* (London:

ceremonies were by far the most important source of gift revenue, but other forms also existed, including gifts from merchants who attended the royal camp and casual gifts.⁵² Of course, on the provincial and local level, Nawrūz gifts were in more modest amounts. A series of letters from the early nineteenth century mentions small New Year's gifts given by notables in Azerbaijan, in amounts ranging from 50 to 200 tūmāns.⁵³

Administratively, the responsibility for making note of the gifts that came into the central treasury fell on the shoulders of the *pīshkish-nivīs* (registrar of the *pīshkish*). The origins of the office are unclear, but it existed at least from the Safavid period. In the *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk*, the early eighteenth-century manual of Safavid administrative practices, the *pīshkish-nivīs* is described as the person who “whenever presents were brought to the King” would make “a detailed list” of the objects before handing the list over to the chief royal eunuch, and was paid an annual salary of 15 tūmāns in addition to one-tenth of the one-tenth tithe levied on the gifts.⁵⁴ Whether the office existed in the early Qajar period is difficult to tell, but registers of received gifts exist from the Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah period (r. 1848–1896), suggesting that the position existed in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ From the early nineteenth century, however, we have numerous decrees (*farmāns* or *raqams*) that the shah or prince-governors sent acknowledging *pīshkish* offerings and which functioned as a kind of receipt of payment as well as a public acknowledgment of tribute paid.

Some of the best descriptions we have of the *pīshkish* ceremonies come from European travelogues. James Morier explained that this *pīshkish*, though called a “voluntary gift,” in fact “must be offered every year at the festival of the No-rooz; and like the regular taxes, is required in the same proportion, according to the means of the people.”⁵⁶ In 1812, William Ouseley was

Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821), vol. I, 250–51; Frederic Shoberl, *Persia: Containing a Brief Description of the Country and an Account of Its Government, Laws, and Religion, and of the Character, Manners and Customs, Arts, Amusements &c. of Its Inhabitants* (Philadelphia: John Grigg, 1828), 107; H. C. Rawlinson, “Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, Through Persian Kurdistan, to the Ruins of Takhti-Soleimān, and from Thence by Zenjān and Tārom, to Gilān, in October and November, 1838; With a Memoir on the Site of the Atropatenian Ecbatana,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 10 (1840): 1–64, 6.

⁵² “Notes for a Memorandum on the Revenues of Persia,” IOR/L/PS/9/67/5, ff. 6–10.

⁵³ See Mirza Ali Khan Qadimi, “Majmū‘ah-yi Murāsālāt va Farmān’hā va Makātib-i Dawrah-yi Qājār,” n.d., ff. 60 and 66, MS 8556, Majlis Library, Tehran.

⁵⁴ Vladimir Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk: A Manual of Šafavid Administration* (London: Luzac, 1943), 47. See also Rafī‘a Jabiri Ansari, *Dastūr al-Mulūk-i Mirzā Rafī‘ā*, Muhammad Ismail Marchinkowski, ed. (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād va Tārikh-i Dīplumāsī, 2006), 271.

⁵⁵ See “Kitābchah-yi Qubūz-i Ajnās-i Pīshkish bih Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh,” n.d., MS 11596, Majlis Library, Tehran.

⁵⁶ James Justinian Morier, *A Journey Through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople, in the Years 1808 and 1809* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1812), 236.

invited to sit in on the procession, and although the invitation “was not generally accepted,” he managed, with the assistance of an Iranian friend, to view the proceedings privately. He observed the king sitting in a small room overlooking the square (*maydān*) of the Tehran citadel, watching as a long line of over one hundred mules, each carrying on its back “a beautiful Indian shawl, and a bag containing 1,000 *tūmāns* in gold coin,” sent by the Amīn al-Dawlah of Isfahan, made its way through the gates.⁵⁷ Other British representatives also estimated Amīn al-Dawlah’s portion of *pīshkīsh* to amount to 100,000 *tūmāns*.⁵⁸ Several other processions, sent by princes and notables from other provinces, had already passed through before Ouseley had arrived.⁵⁹ James Fraser, traveling through Iran in 1821 and 1822, estimated that the shah received between 1,000,000 and 1,200,000 *tūmāns* during the Nawrūz processions, and though cash was the preferred form, those who could not give in this shape gave it in shawls, jewels, horses, goods, and other merchandise.⁶⁰

The Nawrūz processions doubled as an opportunity for Qajar administrators in the capital to learn about the conditions and concerns in the provinces, and they highlight some of the tensions in center-periphery relations in the early Qajar period. On the one hand, provincial leaders and notables used the opportunity to bring their requests and petitions (*‘arīzah*) to the shah and had them read in his presence in a highly formal and ceremonious manner, similar to other royal functions in Qajar Iran. On the other, provincial governors and leaders were under pressure to meet their obligations and secure their positions by raising the necessary amounts of cash and goods to send as gifts to the king, a reality that supports the depiction of the gradual but fitful appropriation of urban elites into the Qajar administration during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Christoph Werner, for example, has drawn attention to the transition during the first few decades of the nineteenth century from “de facto urban autonomy to a provincial court” in Tabriz, a process that he terms the “qājārisation” of the state.⁶¹

⁵⁷ The Amīn al-Dawlah of Isfahan was ‘Abdullah Khān Ṣadr-i Isfahānī, who served as governor of the province from 1806–1824 and oversaw the recuperation and growth of Isfahan’s economy after its collapse during the eighteenth century. For more on him, see Ahmad Azud al-Dawlah, *Tārīkh-i ‘Azudī*, Abd al-Husayn Nava’i, ed. (Tehran: Ilm, 2007), 71–76, 115–19; Muhammad Hasan Khan Itimad al-Saltanah, *Ṣadr al-Tavārīkh: Sharḥ Hāl-i Ṣadr A’zam ‘hā-yi Pādshāhān-i Qājār*, Muhammad Mushiri, ed. (Tehran: Ruzbihan, 1978), 31, 105, 131–32, 140; Mahdi Bamdad, *Sharḥ-i Hāl-i Rijāl-i Īrān dar Qarn-i 12, 13, 14 Hijrī* (Tehran: Zavvar, 2008), vol. II, 278–81; Karim Sulaymani, *Alqāb-i Rijāl-i Dawrah-yi Qājāriyyah* (Tehran: Kitābkhānah-i Millī-i Īrān, 2000), 43, 144.

⁵⁸ See, for example, “Notes for a Memorandum on the Revenues of Persia,” IOR/L/PS/9/67/5, f. 7.

⁵⁹ The description of the Nawrūz procession appears in Ouseley, *Travels*, vol. III, 338–39.

⁶⁰ James Baillie Fraser, *Narrative of a Journey into Khorasan in the Years 1821 and 1822* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), 214–15.

⁶¹ Werner, *Iranian Town in Transition*, 148.

From the perspective of administrators in the capital, the failure by provincial leaders to pay their *pīshkish* was not an easily resolvable problem, and was compounded by the economic challenges and infrastructural limitations of early nineteenth-century Iran. With travel from Tehran to provincial capitals like Tabriz, Mashhad, and Shiraz taking weeks, the enforcement of payment was usually left to local leaders, and without an effective and efficient way to ensure the *pīshkish* was paid, the shah had to resort to unsophisticated tactics when faced with the lack of payment. In May 1808, Muḥammad Nabī Khān and Mīrzā Aḥādī, two representatives from the province of Fārs, were called upon to appear before Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah and give an account of the administration of the province. After spending some time giving an explanation, the shah asked them if they had brought the 70,000 tūmāns in arrears as *pīshkish*. When it became clear that the two men did not have it, the shah summoned his servants to beat them and throw them out the window, at which point the Amīn al-Dawlah offered himself as security for the payment of the arrears, saving their lives.⁶² Further evidence of the precarious situation of provincial governors, who were caught between the demands of the capital and their local realities, is illustrated by the case of Ḥusayn ‘Alī Mīrzā, the prince-governor of Fārs. In 1829 Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah marched on Fārs with six thousand troops in order to collect the arrears of *pīshkish* and taxes his son owed. As the royal retinue made its way to Shiraz, it collected money from villages and towns through which it passed, despite the attempts by some residents to hide out of fear. Upon arriving in Shiraz, a group of leading notables met the shah in order to hold him off, and after a couple days, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Mīrzā was able to collect 200,000 tūmāns to give to his father.⁶³ Nevertheless, threats of violence and coercion were not always necessary in ensuring *pīshkish* payments. In April 1827, Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah sent a *farmān* to his son Muḥammad Taqī Mīrzā, the governor of Burūjird, acknowledging the receipt of 4,972 tūmāns as the Burūjird *pīshkish* offering.⁶⁴

Qajar chronicles usually depict *pīshkish* offerings in starkly different terms, mentioning them in passing and with little discussion of the amount given. Instead, it was more important to note who was giving the *pīshkish*, from where it came, and whether it was a “fitting tribute” (*pīshkish-i lā’iq*). For example, in 1787, when Āqā Muḥammad Khān’s⁶⁵ political authority

⁶² James Justinian Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople, between the Years 1810 and 1816* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818), 94–95.

⁶³ Hidayat, *Tārīkh-i Rawzat al-Ṣafā-yi Nāshirī*, vol. IX, 7923–27. See also Hasan Fasa’i, *Fārsnāmah-yi Nāshirī*, Mansur Rastgar Fasa’i, ed. (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1988), vol. I, 740–41.

⁶⁴ A copy of the *farmān* was published in Susan Asili, “Dah Farmān az ‘Aṣr-i Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh,” *Tārīkh 3* (2002): 91–110, 103–4.

⁶⁵ Āqā Muḥammad Khān was the founder of the Qajar dynasty. He began consolidating political power in 1779, after escaping from captivity. By 1796, he had conquered most of the former Safavid domains and crowned himself shah. For more, see Gavin Hambly, “Āghā Muḥammad Khān and the

was still largely confined to northern Iran and the Zands in southern Iran still made competing claims to rule, Zakariyā Khān arrived in Tehran with “gifts, presents, and a petition of loyalty.” After presenting the *pīshkīsh*, he was invested with a robe of honor (*mukhalla’ shud*) and sent home. The defining detail provided in the chronicle about Zakariyā Khān was that he was a notable from Georgia (*Gurjistān*) who served as the deputy to the governor of Tbilisi, Ereklī Khān, a point that the author of the chronicle no doubt made to underscore the tributary status of Georgia to Āqā Muḥammad Khān and Qajar rule.⁶⁶

It was usually in those cases where the item given helped reinforce Qajar authority that the chronicles specify the object. Items that helped underscore the legitimacy of the Qajars and drew attention to their image as royalty who resurrected earlier tropes of kingship were particularly important and deserved mention. The early Qajar chronicle *Tārīkh-i Zu’l-Qarnayn* informs us, for example, that in 1801 or 1802 Hājī Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khān, the governor of Isfahan, offered the gem-studded “Sun Throne” as a *pīshkīsh* to the shah.⁶⁷ Isfahan, referred to as the “abode of the sultanate” (*dār al-salṭanah*) in Persian chronicles, served as the capital of the Safavid empire for over a century, and despite being eclipsed by Tehran as the capital under the Qajars, continued to be a major provincial city comparable to Tabriz, Mashhad, and Shiraz.⁶⁸ Isfahan’s former imperial grandeur and significance meant it was home to noble families whose loyalty was a priority in the early years of the Qajar period. Qajar rulers employed various strategies, including marriage alliances, to solidify their rule in the city. In fact, the “Sun Throne”⁶⁹ was offered as a *pīshkīsh* on the occasion of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah’s marriage to Ṭāvūs Khānum, an Isfahani who was close to Hājī Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khān, and who eventually became the shah’s favorite wife.⁷⁰

Establishment of the Qājār Dynasty,” in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 104–43.

⁶⁶ Hidayat, *Tārīkh-i Rawzat al-Ṣafā-yi Nāṣirī*, vol. IX, 7310.

⁶⁷ Mirza Fazlullah Shirazi Khavari, *Tārīkh-i Zu’l-Qarnayn*, Nasir Afsharfār, ed. (Tehran: Kitābkhānah, Mūzih va Markaz-i Asnād-i Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Islāmī, 2001), 163.

⁶⁸ For more on the significance of Isfahan in Qajar Iran, see Heidi Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King: Zill Al-Sultan and Isfahan under the Qajars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 1–55.

⁶⁹ The “sun throne” was later renamed, in honor of Ṭāvūs Khānum, *takht-i ṭāvūs* (the Peacock Throne), not to be confused with the Peacock Throne that Nadir Shah plundered from Mughal India in 1739, and which disappeared following his death.

⁷⁰ A few letters written by Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah to Ṭāvūs Khānum survive in the National Archives in Tehran. In the letters, the shah expresses love for his wife, asks about his children, and notes that he is sending some presents along with the letters. See “Nāmāh’ hā-yi Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh bih hamsarash Ṭāj al-Dawlah,” in Majmū’ah-yi Buyūtāt-i Salṭanātī, 1304 AH/1886 CE, 295/7986, National Archives of Iran (Kitābkhānah-yi Millī-yi Īrān), Tehran. For more on Ṭāvūs Khānum, see Azud al-Dawlah, *Tārīkh-i ‘Azudī*, 19–27, 71–76, passim.

The point here is not to prove whether all *pīshkīsh* payments were made voluntarily or motivated by sincere wishes to pay tribute, but instead, to demonstrate that the *pīshkīsh* served a political function as a legitimizing tool. Ann Lambton framed her essay on the *pīshkīsh* on the question of whether the term referred to a “free gift” or a “tribute,” and took a macro-historical approach in arguing that it evolved over the centuries to “a tribute imposed on individuals and communities and a tax attached to the land and to certain offices.”⁷¹ But the evidence suggests that *pīshkīsh* was an ambiguous term that in fact was meant to be both a free gift and a tribute; early Qajar rulers viewed it as a demonstration of loyalty that subjects should *want* to give, and not as a tax or as a kind of imposed bribe. In a letter ‘Abbās Mīrzā, the crown prince and governor of Azerbaijan, wrote to his brother Rukn al-Dawlah in August 1829, he defends himself against accusations that he solicited a “bribe” (*rīshvah*) from the Amīn al-Dawlah and goes on to say that if the Amīn al-Dawlah wants to give anything, let it be a *pīshkīsh* given of his own free will, not a payment given in the name of others.⁷² This is not meant to suggest that there was in reality a clear line that marked the difference between the *pīshkīsh* and bribes, but simply to illustrate the fact that, at a discursive level, Qajar rulers viewed the two in different terms.

In spite of the difficulties with the enforcement of giving *pīshkīsh*, it nevertheless constituted a core part of the Qajar administration and economy. The *pīshkīsh* offerings contributed two-fifths of the total revenue of the Qajar state; only the revenue collected from the land exceeded this amount. Moreover, the resuscitation of the *pīshkīsh* ceremonies was part of a broader effort by Qajar rulers to portray themselves as heirs to a long tradition of kingship and who deserved the loyalty of their subjects. Items like the Sun Throne that were offered as gifts further emphasized the claims to royalty by the Qajars. In reality, however, the occasional difficulties in securing the *pīshkīsh* illustrate the tensions and fitful relationship between central administrators and provincial elites and rulers.

LARGESSE AND PATRONAGE

If the reception of *pīshkīsh* from vassals and subjects was crucial to the Qajars’ presentation of themselves as legitimate rulers, then equally important was the display of largesse by rulers, in the form of redistributing wealth and granting honors. Fath ‘Alī Shah patronized the construction, renovation, and reconstruction of more buildings than any ruler since Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1587–1629). He extended the Gulistān Palace in Tehran, rebuilt the city walls, renovated

⁷¹ Lambton, “Pīshkash,” 157.

⁷² Mirza Abu’l-Qasim Qa’im-Maqam, “Munshā’āt-i Qā’im-Maqām Farāhānī,” n.d., f. 9 recto and verso, MS 782, Majlis Library, Tehran; Qa’im-Maqam, *Nāmah’hā-yi Parākandah-yi Qā’im-Maqām-i Farāhānī*, vol. II, 130–31.

religious shrines in Mashhad and Qum, and also sponsored projects in other cities, like Kashan, Simnan, Qazvin, and Zanjan.⁷³ As with any other monarch, these projects were meant to present the shah as a legitimate ruler who could construct befitting royal structures. In 1799–1800, for example, he constructed the Qaşr-i Qājār (Qajar Palace) with lush gardens that included flowers, fruits, cypress, and fruit-trees.⁷⁴ But some of the projects were also a form of patronage that redistributed wealth back into society in the manner prescribed by the Perso-Islamic ethics of generosity and giving.

The most important manifestation of the Qajars' patronage was that shown the Shī'ī religious establishment. Compared to their Safavid predecessors, who claimed political legitimacy partly on religious grounds, the Qajars had a more tenuous relationship with the Shī'ī establishment. The power vacuum and political turbulence of Iran's eighteenth century contributed, as is now well known, to an assertion of authority by Shī'ī religious leaders that temporal rulers like the Qajars had to manage.⁷⁵ To be sure, there were instances when religious leaders pressured the Qajar government into action, as when Shī'ī mujtahids⁷⁶ called for a *jihād* against Russia during the Russo-Persian wars of the early nineteenth century.⁷⁷ Financial assistance, gifts, and a general show of generosity towards these religious leaders were nevertheless crucial elements in gaining their support.

A case from early in Fath 'Alī Shah's reign provides a telling example of how the language of generosity was used in official correspondence, and illustrates the political etiquette and strategy of the shah with regard to Shī'ī centers

⁷³ Jennifer M. Scarce, "The Arts of the Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries," in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 890–958; Jennifer M. Scarce, "The Architecture and Decoration of the Gūlistān Palace: The Aims and Achievements of Fath 'Alī Shah (1797–1834) and Nasir Al-Dīn Shah (1848–1896)," *Iranian Studies* 34, 1–4 (2001): 103–16; Yahya Zuka, *Tārīkhchah-yi Sākhtimān 'hā-yi Arg-i Sālṭanatī-i Tīhrān* (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āṣār-i Milli, 1971).

⁷⁴ Mahmud Mirza Qajar, *Tārīkh-i Sāhibqirānī: Ḥavadīs-i Tārīkh-i Silsilah-yi Qājār (1190–1248 A.H.)*, Nadirah Jalali, ed. (Tehran: Majlis, 2010), 125–26; Hidayat, *Tārīkh-i Rawzat al-Ṣafā-yi Nāsirī*, vol. IX, 7474–76.

⁷⁵ Hamid Algar has argued that in the nineteenth century there was an "uneasy and fitful coalition" between Qajar rulers and the Shī'ī religious establishment, with the latter serving as a voice for the concerns of the masses. See Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). For critiques of Algar, see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Juan Cole, "Shi'ī Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* 18, 1 (1985): 3–34.

⁷⁶ A *mujtahid* is a person qualified to exercise *ijtihād*, or independent judgment in a legal or theological question.

⁷⁷ See Ann K. S. Lambton, "A Nineteenth Century View of Jihād," *Studia Islamica*, 32 (1970): 181–92.

of power.⁷⁸ A decree issued on behalf of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah in 1802 or 1803 announced that the shah would be sending five golden chandeliers, 217 *tūmāns* in cash, and about 217 loads (*kharvār*)⁷⁹ of goods to the Imam Riżā shrine in Mashhad.⁸⁰ On its surface, the decree is not particularly noteworthy; it does not call for any significant changes in policy, nor does it make reference to significant events or individuals. Instead, it demonstrates the ideal of largesse to which just rulers were to aspire, in addition to being a public act of piety and a subtle appeal for loyalty that the shah sought.

The gifts were sent only five years into Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah’s reign, a few years after a rebellion and famine in Nishāpūr,⁸¹ and just a few months after another rebellion and famine in Mashhad had been resolved only with the intercession of the mujtahid Mīrżā Muḥammad Miḥdī.⁸² The Imam Riżā shrine is one of Iran’s most holy sites, holding the mausoleum of Shī‘ī Islam’s eighth Imam, and is also located in Mashhad, the capital of Khurasan, a fertile, rich, and historically significant region that was one of the last regions to be conquered by Āqā Muḥammad Khān and crucial to the legitimacy of the Qajar government.⁸³ The decree announcing the gifts begins with an introductory invocation of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah’s qualities as a ruler, a typical feature of *farmāns* (royal decrees).⁸⁴ It then proceeds to announce that Mullā ‘Alī Aṣghar, the *mullā-bāshī*⁸⁵ and the

⁷⁸ Scholars have analyzed the formal and ornate characteristics of Persian and Arabic imperial diplomatic correspondence (*tarrasul*) to give greater meaning to the contents of these letters. See, for example, Colin Mitchell, “Safavid Imperial Tarassul and the Persian Inshā Tradition,” *Studia Iranica* 26, 2 (1997): 173–209; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Delicate Art of Aggression: Uzun Hasan’s Fathnama to Qaytbay of 1469,” *Iranian Studies* 44, 2 (2011): 193–214; Adel Allouche, “Tegüder’s Ultimatum to Qalawun,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, 4 (1990): 437–46. A similar methodology could be applied to *farmāns*, though the scholarship on that remains virtually non-existent.

⁷⁹ One *kharvār* is equivalent to slightly less than 300 kilograms, or about 640 pounds. See Rawlinson, “Notes on a Journey from Tabriz,” 14n; Ann K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 406–9. Etymologically, the term is derived from the load that a donkey (*khar*) can carry.

⁸⁰ *Farmān ‘hā va Raqam ‘hā-yi Dawrah-yi Qājār*, 65–66.

⁸¹ Hidayat, *Tārīkh-i Rawżat al-Safā-yi Nāshirī*, vol. IX, 7480–84; Muhammad Sipīhr, *Nāsikh al-Tavārīkh: Tārīkh-i Qājāriyyah*, Jamshid Kiyānfar, ed. (Tehran: Asatir, 1998), vol. I, 102–4; Mahmud Mirza Qajar, *Tārīkh-i Sāhibqirānī*, 126–30.

⁸² Hidayat, *Tārīkh-i Rawżat al-Safā-yi Nāshirī*, vol. IX, 7514–16.

⁸³ An account of the conquest of Khurāsān can be found in Muhammad Saru‘i, *Tārīkh-i Muḥammadī: Aḥsan al-Tavārīkh*, Ghulam Reza Tabataba‘i Majid, ed. (Tehran: Mu‘assasah-i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1992), 281–83.

⁸⁴ For more on the language and structure of *farmāns*, see Heribert Busse, “Persische Diplomatie im Überblick: Ergebnisse und Probleme,” *Der Islam* 37 (1961): 202–45; H. Busse, “Farmān,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online, 2013), at: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/farman-COM_0213 (accessed 1 Jan. 2016); and Bert G. Fragner, “Farmān,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 1999, at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/farman> (accessed 1 Jan. 2016).

⁸⁵ The office of the *mullā-bāshī* is peculiar to Shī‘ism and developed in the early eighteenth century, though its exact function changed over time. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the *mullā-bāshī* served as the “chaplain of the Royal Household” (i.e., the Qajars) and represented

“refuge of grandeur and munificence, the preeminent theologian and essence of the learned men,” would be entrusted with bringing the chandeliers, cash, and goods to Mashhad.⁸⁶ This glowing description of Mullā ‘Alī Aṣghar masks the reality that Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah often reprimanded him for drunken and dissolute behavior.⁸⁷ It is more likely that he was selected for the task because of his long-standing loyalty to the Qajar rulers, a point to which the *farmān* alludes by referring to him as “one of the long-standing supporters of this eternal state [i.e., the Qajar state].”⁸⁸

Other examples of gifts to the Shī‘ī establishment include the 100,000 *tūmāns* Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah sent in 1798–1799 for the repair of the golden dome and shrine of Fāṭimah, the sister of Imām Rizā, in Qum.⁸⁹ A couple years later, he ordered the construction of a new seminary, the Faiziyah, as well as repairs to the Imām Ḥasan ‘Askarī mosque, the hospital (*dār al-shafā’*), caravanserais, baths, and bazaar in Qum.⁹⁰ In an undated letter that Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah sent to Mīrzā Abū’l-Qāsim Qummī, an influential scholar and teacher in Qum,⁹¹ the shah wrote that he was sending 100 *tūmāns* to Qummī personally, and another 100 *tūmāns* to be given to the poor.⁹²

Of course, gifts, displays of generosity, and financial assistance of this sort were not confined to leaders of the Shī‘ī community. During the first few decades of the nineteenth century, famine, cholera, plague, and other kinds of disasters and scarcities were familiar phenomena to Iranian society. Tribal incursions, especially by the Turkmen along the northeast frontiers of Iran, were also a recurring problem for inhabitants of the region. In these

the institutionalization of religious authority within the Qajar household. See Said Amir Arjomand, “The Office of Mulla-Bashi in Shi‘ite Iran,” *Studia Islamica*, 57 (1983): 135–46, 144. For more on the evolution of the office, see Vladimir Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk: A Manual of Safavid Administration* (London: Luzac, 1943), 110–11; Said Amir Arjomand, “The Mujtahid of the Age and the Mullā-bāshī,” in Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 80–97.

⁸⁶ *Farmān ‘hā va Raqam ‘hā-yi Dawrah-yi Qājār*, 65–66.

⁸⁷ Arjomand, “The Mujtahid of the Age and the Mullā-Bāshī,” 48.

⁸⁸ *Farmān ‘hā va Raqam ‘hā-yi Dawrah-yi Qājār*, 66.

⁸⁹ Sipīhr, *Nāsikh al-Tavārikh*, vol. I, 103.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, 106. Mīrzā Šāliḥ Shīrāzī traveled through Qum in 1812 and noted that he saw the new buildings being constructed. Mīrzā Salīh Shīrāzī, “Rūznāmāh-yi Mīrzā Šāliḥ Shīrāzī,” n.d., f. 25 verso, MS Ouseley 159, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁹¹ Qummī died in 1815, so the letter must have been sent prior to that. For more on the life of Qummī, see Muhammad Muhsin Tihriani, *Ṭabaqāt A‘lām al-Shī‘ah* (Najaf: al-Maṭba‘ah al-‘Ilmīyah, 1954), vol. II, 52–54.

⁹² For copies of the letter, see Muhammad Taqī Danīshpazhuh, “Nāmāh-yi Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh Qājār bih Mīrzā Abū’l-Qāsim Muḥaqqiq Gīlānī-Qummī,” *Vahīd* 53 (May 1968): 411–12; Hossein Modarressi Tabataba‘ī, “Panj Nāmāh az Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh Qājār bih Mīrzā-yi Qummī,” *Barrīsī ‘hā-yi Tārīkhī* 10, 4 (1975): 245–76. See also Abbas Amanat, “In Between the Madrasa and the Marketplace: The Designation of Clerical Leadership in Modern Shi‘ism,” in Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 98–132.

circumstances, providing relief to the affected population was an effective way for Qajar rulers to present themselves as just rulers. A letter that Qā'im-Maqām wrote to Allāh-Yār Khān Āṣaf al-Dawlah, Faṭḥ 'Alī Shah's chief minister, is a good example of how Qajar rulers couched assistance to the general populace in the language of generosity and providing for the welfare (*khayr va 'āfiyat*) of society. In the wake of destructive raids by Turkmen tribes that resulted in food shortages and other difficulties, 'Abbās Mīrzā, who was serving as governor of the province at the time, ordered the distribution of cashmere shawls, overcoats, and broadcloths to residents suffering from the cold. Qā'im-Maqām wrote to Āṣaf al-Dawlah with pride that it was as if the "Nawrūz had arrived early," and that the crown prince, in spite of the food shortages, did not restrain from giving money and grain.⁹³ In his letter, Qā'im-Maqām went on to describe 'Abbās Mīrzā's ability to lead his troops capably and recent defeats of Turkmen tribes in eastern Khorasan, suggesting that Qajar statesmen viewed delivering aid to subjects just as essential to effective governance as defending the frontier and military conquests.⁹⁴

The displays of generosity and gift giving were complemented by the granting of honors and offices through the investiture of the *khil'at*, or robe of honor, which was usually accompanied with the appointment to political office.⁹⁵ James Morier witnessed a *khil'at* ceremony in Shiraz in December 1808, in which the prince-governor gave a "brocade coat with a sash, and another vest trimmed with furs" to Āqā Muḥammad Ja'far, the new vice-governor of Fārs. The appointment provides a good example of how the Qajar state relied upon local elites to help govern the provinces. Āqā Muḥammad Ja'far had in fact already served as vice-governor before being removed from office in November 1808 for not preventing the governor of Bushehr, who served under his supervision, from abandoning his post. With the help of his brother, however, Āqā Muḥammad Ja'far managed to recapture the Bushehr governor, at which time the *khil'at* ceremony that Morier witnessed took place.⁹⁶ But the *khil'at* ceremonies sometimes marked the honorable service of an individual who already held an office, and was used as a tool to encourage the continuing loyalty of the official. Ḥusayn 'Alī Mīrzā, the long-serving governor of Fārs, for example, was given an honorary robe in 1810.⁹⁷ Other examples include the case of Kāzīm Khān Javānshīr, who in April 1829

⁹³ Qā'im-Maqām, *Munshā'āt-i Qā'im-Maqām*, 175.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 175–77.

⁹⁵ For *khil'at* production in Qajar Iran, see Willem M. Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry: In Historical Perspective 1500–1925* (Paris: Société d'histoire de l'Orient, 1999), 95–96; Jennifer M. Scarce, "Vesture and Dress, Fashion, Function, and Impact," in Carol Bier, ed., *Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart: Textile Arts of Safavid and Qajar Iran, 16th–19th Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 1987), 33–56.

⁹⁶ Morier, *Journey Through Persia*, 35–37.

⁹⁷ Morier, *Second Journey Through Persia*, 69.

was given a *khil'at* as well as a medal of valor and a riband of loyalty, for his service during the recently concluded war against Russia,⁹⁸ or Mahmud Khān, the deputy (*nā'ib*) of Qarāguzlū, who was given a golden-copper robe and shawl by Faṭḥ 'Alī Shah, also in 1829.⁹⁹

In the context of early nineteenth-century Iran, when the Qajar government was still very much in the process of taking shape, investiture and the *khil'at* were effective methods of strengthening the ties that bound individuals and not superficial and insignificant aspects of Qajar political culture. Scholars have long demonstrated the cultural cache of cloth—its ability to serve as a vehicle of not only power and authority, but of “holiness” and “purity”—in as disparate places and times as early modern South Asia and medieval Spain.¹⁰⁰ One can detect a glimpse of this in the legends that circulated in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century India of the so-called “killer *khil'ats*”—poisoned dresses that contaminated and killed those who came in contact with the cloth.¹⁰¹ These tales were obviously folk legends, but even less fanciful Qajar textual sources convey the special influence of *khil'ats*. In an undated and surprisingly frank letter that Amīr Khān Sardār wrote to 'Alī Pāshā Khān Dunbulī, a scion of the politically influential and powerful Dunbulī family from Khuy, Amīr Khān writes that he has heard that 'Abbās Mīrzā, the prince-governor whom he serves, will give him a *khil'at* soon. He then goes on to admit that he knows he has benefited from the good graces and favors of 'Abbās Mīrzā but nevertheless is certain that the *khil'at* is only a “manifestation of the pleasure of serving” the crown-prince.¹⁰² The giving of *khil'ats*, like the gifts to the Shī'ī religious community, were a means towards achieving the political objective of gaining the support and loyalty of individuals or groups in society.

DIPLOMATIC GIFTS

Thus far this essay has examined gift-giving practices as a form of domestic political strategy, but Qajar rulers also used gifts and honors to influence diplomatic relations, especially with European imperial powers like Britain, France, and Russia. The greater relative importance of European powers at the turn of the nineteenth century distinguished Qajar practices from earlier Safavid ones, which were mainly directed towards the Ottomans and Mughals. The most obvious examples of the diplomatic exchanges of gifts occurred when political negotiations and alliances were at stake. When emissaries

⁹⁸ *Farmān'hā va Raqam'hā-yi Dawrah-yi Qājār*, 95–96.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

¹⁰⁰ Bayly, “The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700–1830,” 285; Elias, “The Sufi Robe.”

¹⁰¹ Maskiell and Mayor, “Killer Khilats, Part 1”; and “Killer Khilats, Part 2.”

¹⁰² Muhammad Amin Riyahi, “Guzārishnāmah'hā-yi Amīr Khān Sardār,” *Barrisi'hā-yi Tārīkhī* 13, 1 (1978): 13–58, 49–50.

were sent abroad, they often took gifts and presents with them. In a letter dated 28 January 1808, Horace Sebastian, a French representative stationed in Istanbul, wrote to the French Foreign Minister in Paris that he had recently seen ‘Askar Khān, the Iranian ambassador, pass through the city on his way to France. In 1808, the Qajar state was in the midst of the first war against Russia and, following the Treaty of Finkenstein of 1807, Qajar rulers were still hopeful for French assistance in driving out the Russian forces from the Caucasus. Sebastian wrote to the French minister that the Iranians had selected an appropriate and serious ambassador (*une ambassade solennelle*) who would be pleasing for the minister, and that ‘Askar Khān was bringing “many prized objects” as presents, including rare manuscripts, as well as the swords of Tamerlane and Nadir Shah. He went on to write that “never had Asia given any European prince such dazzling marks of admiration.”¹⁰³

For a diplomat or emissary, the gifts they were given were a tangible and visible barometer of the political, economic, and social condition of the country to which they were sent on mission. Recipients of diplomatic gifts often interpreted the gifts as a commentary on the stature of the giver, and on the health of the government more broadly. If a gift seemed inadequate or unsatisfactory, the giver not only risked embarrassing themselves, but also the government that they represented. In a letter from April 1729, Muḥammad Rashid, the Ottoman ambassador sent to Isfahan to ratify a treaty with the Afghan ruler Ashraf, relates that the mediocre presents given to him were reflective of the state of affairs in Iran in the wake of the collapse of the Safavid Empire. He goes on to say that the residents of Isfahan were dying of starvation in the streets of the city, and suggests that he was not permitted to enter the city in order to hide the terrible condition of the people.¹⁰⁴

Diplomatic gifts helped forge ties and build relationships, but because of the context under which they were exchanged the question of whether they were “fitting” or appropriate was loaded with cultural weight. Consider the story related by William Ouseley, brother and secretary to a British diplomat traveling in Iran in 1811. During their stay in Tehran in December of that year, the brothers visited the home of a certain Farajullah Khān, described by William Ouseley as a man “with much apparent frankness of character, and a simplicity of manner ... nearly bordering on bluntness.”¹⁰⁵ After Farajullah Khān welcomed them into his home, he proceeded to offer his house and his garden as a gift to Gore Ouseley, no doubt as a mark of deference to the Englishman and an effort to impress the ambassador. Instead of taking this as a

¹⁰³ Letter from Horace Sebastian, 28 Jan. 1808, 271/9 f. 360, Archives des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, France.

¹⁰⁴ Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 294.

¹⁰⁵ Ouseley, *Travels*, vol. III, 153.

sign of hospitality, however, Ouseley read it as yet another sign of the “insincerity” of Iranians.¹⁰⁶ A similar episode occurred later in their travels. Passing through a small, beautiful, and verdurous village in the hills of Khurasan, the Ouseley entourage was approached by the chief of the village, as well as some of its residents. The group brought with them a tray of “fine apples” as gifts, as well as “an offer of the whole territory,” a gesture that was a common way of greeting not only foreign visitors, but also any dignitary or official.¹⁰⁷ William though sensed that the villagers’ feelings were insincere. “Notwithstanding this generosity, they were, I thought, rather pleased when the *mehmāndār* [i.e., their guide] declared his intention of conducting me a little further.”¹⁰⁸

Similarly, giving an inadequate gift ran the risk of offending the person to whom it was given. In 1819, ‘Abbās Mīrzā asked Robert Ker Porter, the English traveler, diplomat, and artist whose travelogue is replete with sketches and drawings, to draw a portrait of Fath ‘Alī Shah and present it to the shah. Ker Porter accepted begrudgingly, writing in a letter addressed to Mīrzā Abū’l-Ḥasan Khān of having wasted two months’ time that he had hoped to use for “more interesting subjects than that of painting.” In the same letter, he went on to complain that upon presenting the shah with the portrait, he received “as a mark of the Shah’s approbation the sum of two hundred tomans and an old shawl with a hole in it, which my servant sold for twenty eight tomans” and continues by asking,

What do you think of this handsome present? Certainly I was not an ambassador, but still, what I presented the Shah with, was more than any ambassador has it in his power to give—therefore claimed if not an equal mark of favor something better than the shabby one sent to the charge d’affaires for me. European sovereigns as you have experienced, as well as myself, make much more magnificent returns, even without anything given first.

As if to underscore the insult to his dignity, Ker Porter closes the letter by mentioning that he saw Mīrzā Abū’l-Ḥasan Khān’s nephew, Mīrzā Ḥusayn, returning from a trip to Vienna with a handsome gold box, inlaid with diamonds and with a picture of the Austrian emperor, valued at no less than 1,000 tūmāns.¹⁰⁹

If an inadequate gift ran the risk of offending the recipient, then a related function of giving presents in diplomatic contexts was to build relationships, akin to the use of gifts domestically. John Malcolm, the East India Company representative sent to Iran in 1799 and the head of the first European mission

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Similar examples can be found in the diaries of nineteenth-century Iranians who traveled within Iran. See, for example, Farzin Vejdani, “Eat, Pray, Petition: The Daily Life and Travels of a Nineteenth-Century Iranian Cleric,” unpublished MS, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Ouseley, *Travels*, vol. III, 211.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Ker Porter, “Letter no. 41, addressed to Mirza Abu’l-Hasan Khan,” 31 July 1819, MSS Eur D527, British Library.

sent to Iran in over a century, spent his first few months in the province of Fārs before heading north towards Tehran. During their time in Fārs, the prince-governor and notables from the area inundated the English with so many presents of ice creams, sweet meats, preserves, and fruit that “all in the camp, down to the keepers of the dogs, were busied in devouring these luxuries.” One of the Irish soldiers in Malcolm’s escort was moved to extol Iran, in between mouthfuls of food, as a “jewel of a country.”¹¹⁰ A similar episode occurred eight years later, with the new East India Company envoy to Iran, Harford Jones, whose mission was intended to counteract the French influence in Iran. Upon arriving in Iran and while stationed in Bushehr, the governor of the city sent Jones a present of some fruit and two horses, one for the envoy and one for the East India company’s assistant resident. Offended at the lack of distinction, Jones sent his horse back. Having understood the perceived slight, nine days later the governor sent fourteen mules carrying fifty lumps of sugar, thirty-five boxes of sweetmeats, ninety-six bottles of lime juice, twenty-three bottles of orange and other kinds of sherbet, twenty-two bottles of preserves and pickles, thirty-nine bottles of wine, four mule loads of melons, and a mule load each of quinces and pomegranates. The whole procession was accompanied by a letter written by Naṣrullah Khān, a minister at the provincial government of Shiraz, filled with compliments and inquiries about health.¹¹¹

When diplomacy collapsed and tensions between officials of two countries arose, an exchange of gifts could signal a desire for the restoration of amicable relations. In February 1827, a dispute erupted in Bushehr among a local Arab tribe over who should be the chief of the tribe. Several members of one faction took refuge in the British residency compound in Bushehr, while the resident himself tried to broker an agreement. Members of the other faction in the dispute, displeased with the British for seeming to take sides, began forming armed positions outside and surrounding the resident’s compound. The situation with the Arab tribe defused after the arrival of the Qajar prince-governor of Fārs, Ḥusayn ‘Alī Mīrzā, and his son, Anūshīrvān Mīrzā, and the ensuing negotiations. But the British resident sought redress from the Qajar rulers for the apparent disrespect shown towards British property, creating tension between the two sides.¹¹² At one point the British resident decamped to a ship off the shore of Bushehr as a form of protest.¹¹³ Finally, after a few weeks, the matter was resolved. To mark the end of the matter and to ensure

¹¹⁰ Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia*, 51–52.

¹¹¹ Morier, *Journey Through Persia*, vol. I, 45.

¹¹² For the series of letters sent between the British and local Qajar rulers, see “Letter from Colonel Stannus to the Prince of Shiraz,” 9 Feb. 1827, FO 248/52, f. 112, National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO); “Political Dispatch no. 8,” FO 248/52, ff. 86v and 87; Colonel Stannus, “Letter to Zekee Khān, Minister of Fars,” 16 Feb. 1827, FO 248/52, f. 115r.

¹¹³ Political Dispatch no. 8, FO 248/52, f. 89r, TNA.

that both sides were satisfied, gifts of shawls, fowling pieces, and cut glass shades were exchanged.¹¹⁴

The highest honor the Qajar rulers bestowed upon foreign diplomats and representatives was the Order of the Lion and Sun.¹¹⁵ Iranian monarchs used the image of a crouching lion with the sun rising behind it for centuries—John Malcolm claimed to have seen coins from the Seljuq period bearing it as the arms of a local prince, and Jonas Hanway wrote that upon visiting the palace at Ashraf, built by the Safavid Shah ‘Abbās I in Māzandarān, he saw “over the gate which forms the entrance ... the arms of Persia, being a lion with the sun rising behind it.”¹¹⁶ But it was Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah who created the order that bore the image in 1808. Sultan Selim III had established an analogous decorative order in the Ottoman Empire, the Imperial Order of the Crescent (*hīlal niṣāmi*), in 1799, which may have served as the inspiration for the Qajar iteration.¹¹⁷ Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah gave the honorary mark to several early nineteenth-century European dignitaries, including John Malcolm, Richard Wellesley, Gore Ouseley, and General Gardane, among others, and usually following the conclusion of a treaty or agreement.¹¹⁸ In 1817, for example, Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah presented the Order of the Lion and Sun, Shah ‘Ismā‘īl’s (r. 1501–1524) sword encased in a luxurious belt, ten fine shawls, and seventeen brocaded cloths to the Russian General Aleksey Yermolov following negotiations to have the Russians recognize ‘Abbās Mīrzā as the heir-apparent.¹¹⁹ The order

¹¹⁴ “Savād-i mursalah-yi Sipahsālār-i Mamlakat-i Fārs Anūshīrvān Mīrzā bih ‘ālījāh Kirmil Istānus,” Apr. 1827, FO 248/52, f. 61, TNA.

¹¹⁵ For a useful overview of the Order of the Sun and Lion, as well as other medals and honors, during the Qajar period, see Muhammad Mushiri, “Nishān’hā va Midāl’hā-yi Īrān az Āghāz-i Saltanat Qājāriyyah tā Imrūz,” *Barrisi’hā-yi Tārīkhī* 6, 6 (1972): 185–220; Muhammad Mushiri, “Nishān’hā va Midāl’hā-yi Īrān dar Dawrah-yi Qājār,” *Barrisi’hā-yi Tārīkhī* 9, 1 (1974): 175–240; Angelo M. Piemontese, “The Statutes of the Qājār Orders of Knighthood,” *East and West* 19, 3/4 (1969): 431–73; H. L. Rabino, “Nishān’hā-yi Dawrah-yi Qājār,” Jahangir Qa‘im-Maqami, trans., *Yaghmā* 18, 6 (1965): 318–23. See also Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 77–78.

¹¹⁶ John Malcolm, *The History of Persia from the Most Early Period to the Present Time* (London: John Murray, 1815), vol. II, 563; Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade Over the Caspian Sea ... to which Are Added, the Revolutions of Persia during the Present Century, with the Particular History of the Great Usurper, Nadir Kouli* (London, 1753), vol. I, 293. In the Safavid context, the image of a lion may have also been adopted for its association with the first Shī‘ī Imam, ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib. One of ‘Alī’s numerous titles included *Asadullah* (the Lion of God). I thank the anonymous CSSH reviewer who brought this possible connection to my attention.

¹¹⁷ Edhem Eldem, *Pride and Privilege: A History of Ottoman Orders, Medals and Decorations* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Centre, 2004). Denis Wright suggests that the Order of the Lion and Sun was modeled on the French *Légion d’Honneur*. See Denis Wright, “Sir John Malcolm and the Order of the Lion and Sun,” *Iran* 17 (1979): 135–41, 136.

¹¹⁸ For some examples of the Order being given to dignitaries, see letter from Gore Ouseley, 1 June 1812, Wellesley papers vol. XII, Add.MS 37285 ff. 280 and 299, British Library; and Political Dispatch no. 6, 14 May 1814, FO 60/9, ff. 60, 61, 62, TNA.

¹¹⁹ Irène Natchkebia, “Some Details of the General Yermolov’s Embassy in Persia (1817),” *Iran and the Caucasus* 16, 2 (2012): 205–16, 213.

was occasionally given to non-diplomats for their service as well. In June 1832, ‘Abbās Mīrzā gave the Order of the Lion and Sun, Second Degree, to Muḥammad Khān Sarhang for his efforts in “protecting the buildings, city, and bazaar, as well as the lives of the residents” of Tabriz during an outbreak of the plague.¹²⁰

Like the *pīshkīsh* and *khil’at*, there was a political function to diplomatic gifts, presents, and honors insofar that they were meant to build relationships, ease tensions, and conclude agreements between Qajar rulers and foreign envoys and representatives. For visitors who in all likelihood had limited exposure to the day-to-day circumstances of Iranian society, the gifts they received were a short-hand indicator of the social and economic conditions of Qajar Iran. Inadequate or poorly chosen gifts ran the risk of offending the recipient and lowering the stature of the giver in their eyes.

CONCLUSION

The giving of gifts and honors permeated the political culture of the early Qajar state and was a central component of its administration. The *pīshkīsh* was estimated to make up nearly half of the annual income of the state during the early years of the nineteenth century, making it also economically crucial. Because the *pīshkīsh* was a practice with a long history, its resuscitation under the Qajars was a way for rulers to present themselves as rightful heirs to previous political dynasties. Thus the repeated mention in Qajar chronicles of “fitting tributes” and “appropriate gifts” and the distinction made between bribes and tributes. On the other hand, gifts from rulers to broader society were couched in the language of generosity and an ethos of giving to which rulers were expected to be committed. Similarly, gifts and honors exchanged between the Qajars and the British, French, and Russians were meant to convey an image of the Qajars as worthy rulers, even if inadequate or “unfitting” gifts ran the risk of conveying the exact opposite. The ascendancy of European imperial powers at the turn of the nineteenth century contributed to one of the distinguishing features of Qajar gift-giving practices: Europeans supplanted the Mughals and Ottomans as primary recipients of gifts and honors. And finally, the particulars of gift exchange during the early Qajar period point to a fraught relationship between the political center and the provincial periphery and between rulers and the ruled—there were, as we have seen, instances when *pīshkīsh* payments were not made.

The above depiction of gift giving also reminds us of the “elusiveness of the boundary between state and society” and a reality in which individuals, customs, and beliefs were just as important to governance as institutions and administrative offices.¹²¹ Although the institutions and administration of the

¹²⁰ *Farmān’hā va Raqam’hā-yi Dawrah-yi Qājār*, 110–11.

¹²¹ Mitchell, “Society, Economy, and the State Effect,” 77.

Qajar state have been the subject of much historical scholarship, less attention has been devoted to the social and cultural practices that helped forge the ties that bound individuals to the state. This essay has shed light on one of those practices—gift giving—and demonstrated the similarities between the Qajar state and other tributary empires.

In conclusion, it must be said that this depiction of gift exchange during the early Qajar period should not be mistaken for a belief that the Qajars were in reality “just rulers” who faced no dissent or disapproval. Quite the contrary; there are numerous examples of social upheaval, protests, and rebellions during the early nineteenth century. Qajar rulers were not, for the most part, latter-day Kasrā Anūshīravāns—to return to the *Shāhnāmāh* story with which this essay began. Instead, this essay has illustrated the abundance of gifts in the administration and economy of Qajar Iran and has drawn attention to the politics of gift giving, a proper understanding of which should be included in any analysis of state-formation and statecraft during the early nineteenth century.

Abstract: This article uses gift-giving practices in early nineteenth-century Iran as a window onto statecraft, governance, and center-periphery relations in the early Qajar state (1785–1925). It first demonstrates that gifts have a long history in the administrative and political history of Iran, the Persianate world, and broader Eurasia, before highlighting specific features found in Iran. The article argues that the *pīshkish*, a tributary gift-giving ceremony, constituted a central role in the political culture and economy of Qajar Iran, and was part of the process of presenting Qajar rule as a continuation of previous Iranian royal dynasties. Nevertheless, *pīshkish* ceremonies also illustrated the challenges Qajar rulers faced in exerting power in the provinces and winning the loyalty of provincial elites. Qajar statesmen viewed gifts and bribes, at least at a discursive level, in different terms, with the former clearly understood as an acceptable practice. Gifts and honors, like the *khil'at*, presented to society were part of Qajar rulers' strategy of presenting themselves as just and legitimate. Finally, the article considers the use of gifts to influence diplomacy and ease relations between Iranians and foreign envoys, as well as the ways in which an inadequate gift could cause offense.