

The Essence of Modernity

INTRODUCTION

The author of the work translated here is Mīrzā Yūsuf Khān Mustashār ad-Dowla Tabrīzī, one of the prominent liberal thinkers who contributed substantially to the development of a theory of constitutional government for Persia towards the end of the nineteenth century. Biographical information about Mustashār ad-Dowla can be gleaned from his own works and several other sources of the period. Although his contribution is universally acknowledged in his homeland, he is hardly known in the west. Apart from an article by Mehrdad Kia, a few other studies devote short sections to his role before the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) in Persia.¹

He was the son of Mīrzā Kāẓim Āqā Tājir Tabrīzī, a merchant from Azerbaijan, and was born in the city of Tabrīz.² In his home town he followed the traditional curriculum, learning Persian and Arabic literature and religious sciences, and some elements of Islamic Law. He started his political career as a secretary in the English consulate. It was during this time that Mustashār ad-Dowla became interested in politics and curious about European culture

¹ M. Kia, "Constitutionalism, Economic Modernization and Islam in the writings of Mirza Yusef Khan Mostashar od-Dowle" in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4, October 1994, pp. 751-777; Abdul-Hadi Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Persia: a Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Persian Politics*, Leiden: Brill, 1977, pp. 30-7; H. Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khān: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973, pp. 139-40.

² For a biography of Mustashār ad-Dowla see Muḥammad Ṣādiq Fayz, *Mīrzā Yūsuf Khān Mustashār ad-Dowla Tabrīzī, Yak kalima wa yik nāma*, Tehran: Ṣabbāḥ, 1382/2003, pp. 13-23. Our introduction has benefited considerably from this introduction; also see Y. Āryanpūr, *Az Ṣabā tā Nīmā*, vol. I, fifth edition 1357/1978, pp. 280-86; Mīrzā Mahdī Khān Mumtahn ad-Dowla Shaqqāqī & Mīrzā Hāshim Khān, *Rajāl-i wizārat-i Khārija dar ʿaṣr-i Nāṣirī wa Muẓaffarī*, ed. Ī. Afshār, Tehran: Asāṭir, 1365/1986, p. 95.

and technological progress. In 1270/1853 he resigned his position at the consulate, and chose to work in the office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. First-hand information about his political career can be found in his *One Word*, in which he describes how Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shah appointed him to a position of consul in the town Hājji Tarakhān for eight years. In 1278/1861 he returned to Persia and had an audience with Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shah in Tehran. Seventeen months later he returned to Hājji Tarakhān. After three months he set out to travel to several European countries, visiting Moscow, and later St. Petersburg, where he stayed for six months. Here, Mustashār ad-Dowla was appointed *Chargé d’Affairs*. In 1280/1863, he was promoted to Consul General in Tiflis, a position he held for four years. At the end of 1283/1866 he was promoted to *Chargé d’Affairs* in Paris, where he remained for three years. When he arrived in Paris he visited the ‘*Exposition of 1867*,’ which made a great impression on him. From Paris, he made four private visits to London.³

Mīrzā Malkum Khān (1249-1326/1833-1908) has been identified as the person, mentioned in *One Word*, with whom Mustashār ad-Dowla exchanged ideas about the progress of European countries and the decline of Persia, but this is far from certain. His influence is in any case clear from the terms used. Malkum Khān wrote his *Kitābcha-yi ghaybī yā daftar-i tanzīmāt* (Booklet inspired by the unseen, or the book of reforms) in 1275/1858-9. This book introduced many key terms such as *qānūn* (codified law), *islāhāt* (reforms), *majlis-i showrā* (consultative council), *millat* (in the sense of nation), *huqūq-i millat* (rights of the people) and *millī* (national). Mustashār ad-Dowla follows Malkum Khān in his use of these terms to advocate legal reforms, and also in the literary device of presenting his inspiration as a message conveyed from the unseen world. While Mustashār ad-Dowla concentrates on describing the legal system which should result

³ Nāẓim al-Islām Kirmānī, *Tārīkh-i bīdārī-yi Īrānīyān*, Tehran, p. 177.

from the reform, Malkum Khān also advocates the summoning of a national constitutional assembly: a mechanism for getting the reform underway.⁴

According to the author of *Tārīkh-i Bīdārī*, the friend referred to in *One Word* is Malkum Khān, but H. Algar has pointed out that they were not in London at the same time: Malkum's appointment to England did not come until 1873; Mīrzā Yūsuf Khān's term in Paris ended in 1870—the same year in which *Yak Kalima* was written—and he was back in Tehran by August 1871, at the least.⁵ Nonetheless, Algar observes that “Malkum's more remote influence on the composition cannot be discounted” and it is quite possible that Mustashār ad-Dowla was inspired to write the treatise by views he exchanged through letters with Malkum Khān.⁶ Malkum Khān is

⁴ Another Persian reform writer of the period was Mīrzā ‘Abbās Nūrī (Abdul-Bahā) whose *Risāla-yi madaniyya* (1292/1875) and *Risāla-yi Siyāsiyya* (1311/1893) set out broader principles for social reform, including reform of the legal system and institution of a code of law, and rationalisation of the court system, but also extending to educational reform, democratic accountability, the separation of the religious and political orders, and the summoning of a constitutional assembly to achieve these ends. These ideas were interpretations and applications of the ideas found in his father's writings (Bahā' u-llāh, 1817-1892), the founder of the Baha'i Faith. An influence from Babi or Bahai sources on Mustashār ad-Dowla cannot be ruled out, given the large number of crypto-Babis and crypto-Bahais among educated and court sources of the time (see, eg J.R.I. Cole “The Provincial Politics of Heresy and Reform in Qajar Iran: Shaykh al-Rais in Shiraz, 1895-1902.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* Vol. 22, nos. 1-2 (2002 [2003]), pp. 119-126).

⁵ H. Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khān*, pp. 139-40; see also M. Kia, *Constitutionalism*, p. 764. Other influences are likely: Shaykh Rifā'a Rafī' at-Tahtawī was sent to Paris in 1826 and wrote a travelogue which shows a familiarity with French thought on natural rights, including Montesquieu and Rousseau. He also translated the French Civil Code into Arabic with a commentary. Since the structure of the *Yak Kalima*, with its 19 points, does not correspond to the structure of the Civil Code, it is possible that he has relied on some such commentary.

⁶ H. Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khān*, p. 140.

the person responsible for coining new words to express modern European political and social concepts.⁷ One of these coinages was to use the word *qānūn* to mean codified law, which is accessible to the public and rationally administered, in contrast to the way in which the Sharīʿa and the common law were administered in Islamic countries.

Whoever the friend mentioned in *One Word* may have been, Mustashār ad-Dowla says that he asked him: “Why have other countries achieved such progress, while we have remained in such a state of lethargy and disorder?” The friend answers, “The foundation and origins of the European system of administration are one word, and every sort of progress and benefit one sees here result from this single word. (...) The people of your country are far from the essence of the topic. (...) A few of you attribute the administrative system and progress of Europe to derivative and transitory things. Some of you think that they are based on sciences and industries such as the telegraph, steam-powered boats and carriages, and military equipment. These are the results and not the prerequisites. You only form inadequate ideas based on superficial reasoning. You do not give any attention to the underlying mechanisms. When you wish to throw open the doors of progress and civilisation in Persia, you fail to identify the *one word* at the beginning of your task. Every time that one of the Muslim scholars writes on this topic, purely for the sake of service to his homeland, he describes the history and industry of Europe without referring to the foundations and origins of their administrative processes. This is why the efforts of the functionaries of Islamic governments are fruitless and the writings of authors on this topic are useless and without impact.”

In 1285/1868-9, Mustashār ad-Dowla was summoned to Tehran, where he continued his reformist activities. Being a friend

⁷ On Malkum Khān see P. Avery, *Modern Iran*, London: Ernst Benn Limited, 1967, p. 115ff.

of Hājī Mīrzā Husayn Khān Sipahsālār, who at that time was the *sadr al-aʿẓam*, he received a cabinet post, but after a dispute, Sipahsālār exiled him to Khurāsān in the year 1290/1873-4. Their friendship reportedly came to an end when Sipahsālār asked him to break off his friendship with Mīrzā Maḥmūd Khān, known as Nāṣir al-Mulk. Sepahsālār and Nāṣir al-Mulk were not on good terms and often clashed. Mustashār ad-Dowla refused to break off his friendship, saying: “I am friend to both of you, and I do not desire to break off my friendship with Nāṣir al-Mulk without any reason!” In 1290/1873-4, while he was in Khurāsān, he wrote the book *Kitābcha-yi Banafsh* or *Risāla-yi Rāh-āhan* (A treatise on the railway), praising its benefits. To further his modernist ideas, he asked the clergy to issue a *fatwa* in favour of building a railway between Tehran and Khurāsān. Because of his involvement with social and political affairs in Khurāsān, it was not long before he was appointed Governor of this large province. In 1291/1874, he was summoned to the royal court in Tehran where his services to the country were recognised. He met Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shāh, who offered him a robe of honour, and appointed him to a senior post for the foreign ministry (*wizārat-i khārijī*), serving in Azerbaijan.

In 1299/1881-2, the Ministry of Justice fell into the hands of Mīrzā Yaḥyā Khān Mushīr ad-Dowla Qazwīnī, who had been educated abroad and advocated a modern European system of Justice for Persia. He recruited Mustashār ad-Dowla to his Ministry, appointed him as his deputy, and granted him the title of Mustashār ad-Dowla (‘Counsellor of the State’). Mustashār ad-Dowla accepted this office, emphasising that “the decrees issued and implemented by the Ministry must be based on the Quran and in accordance with the code of laws.” Unfortunately, he was not long in this office. He attributed his resignation to the prevalence of customs such as bribe-taking and the overturning of court verdicts. During the same period, articles were published in Persian newspapers such as *Akhtar*, in which Mustashār ad-Dowla’s enemies complained about him and the way he was running the Ministry. Hostile people

attributed criticisms of the Persian justice system, published in newspapers, to Mustashār ad-Dowla. They convinced Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shah that Mustashār ad-Dowla was behind these criticisms. This was reason enough for Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shah to order the chamberlain Maḥmūd Ḥasan Khān to seize him and birch him. He was then imprisoned for five months and fined heavily. He remained there until some friends interceded, and he was then placed under house-arrest. Later he was appointed to a senior post in Azerbaijan, but his enemies again complained about him. This time, they brought him and his book *One Word* before Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shah. It is reported that Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shah ordered the guards to beat him with *One Word* on his head and face, so that he suffered swollen eyes.⁸ Afterwards, the Shah sent him in chains to Qazwīn where he remained imprisoned for some time. His house was confiscated and his stipends were stopped.

Finally he was released from prison through the intercession of Zill as-Sultan, the prince-governor of Isfahan, and returned to Tehran. An exceptional source describing his arrival in prison and his physical and mental condition there is the diaries of Ḥājj Sayyāh:⁹ *"They reported that Sa'd as-Saltana had ordered that a carpet should be placed in the room next to ours, and they prepared the shackles for a traveller who was coming from Tabriz. They made the preparations, and for that day they shackled all of us prisoners. That afternoon they said, 'He has arrived at the guesthouse and Sa'd as-Saltana, bearing the telegram from the Shah, went to him in person.' I understood that this was someone very important, and I said 'If you see him, tell me what he looks like! They said, 'It is an old and honoured gentleman who has been broken.' One of the soldiers said, 'I know his title, for a consideration I will tell.' I said, 'If he is a friend of mine, his arrival is not an occasion for gifts, but rather a new disaster visited*

⁸ Y. Āryanpūr, *Az Šabā tā Nīmā*, vol. I, p. 283.

⁹ As quoted in M.Ş. Fayḍ, *Mīrzā Yūsuf*, pp. 20-1.

upon me." He said, "He is Mīrzā Yūsuf Khān, Mustashār ad-Dowla." I was very much dismayed by this news, because this highly respected man is one of the humane, well-educated and praiseworthy men of Persia, and he wrote a book known as *One Word*, and he was a close friend of mine. They returned and said, "Sa'd as-Salṭana read the telegram to him in the guesthouse and he responded: 'I already knew.' Because of Yūsuf Khān's personality, charisma and dignity, Sa'd as-Salṭana was very ashamed and he said, 'One who obeys a command, bears no guilt.' Then he said, 'Entrust your own horses and furnishings to whomever you wish. The chamberlain is at your disposal: you should go with him.'" So he entrusted his horses and luggage to Mīrzā Maḥmūd Amīnī, who was a friend of his. They brought him with the chamberlain and some of his luggage. When he arrived, we were locked in our rooms. They placed guards and ordered that nobody should speak. Then, from the next room, one could hear the sounds of chains and shackles. When I realised that the honoured person who was chained and shackled in the next room was Mustashār ad-Dowla, my heart stopped beating, and I lost the power of speech. My heart burned to think of the condition of the honourable old man, who had been devoted, all his life, to dignity and high-mindedness and the service of his government and the people. I was astounded by the conditions and trends in Persia. When they brought in the lantern I said to the chief guard, Ismā'īl, "How could they bear to put chains on the neck and shackles on the feet of this old man of eighty years, who has devoted his life to the service of the government and the people, in this country and in foreign lands?" He said, "The Shah has ordered it, in a telegram."

Night fell. It was the first day of the month of Muḥarram. It was very distressing for me to see the condition of Mustashār ad-Dowla. Hope was denied to us on every side. When they confine and chain such a great man, of such a venerable age, and with all the weakness of his years, what hope can we have of being freed? The guard Ja'far Qulī came in. I was so upset that I had a fever. I said to the guard: "I would like you to shackle both of my feet, and put a

chain on my neck, only, do not put chains and shackles on Mustashār ad-Dowla. After all, the purpose of chains and shackles is to prevent the prisoners escaping, is it not? Is there any suspicion that that noble man would escape, in his condition?” He said: “You are feverish. If you were not in such a fever, I would do as you wish, so that you would know how delightful it is!” When the guard went, I heard the voice of Mustashār ad-Dowla, raised in complaint. Calling on the guard, who was kind, I said: “Go and see what is being done to this honoured prisoner.” He said: “I am not able to go. It is forbidden. We may not go from room to room.” I said: “Ask his guards.” He asked, and they said: “Since Mustashār ad-Dowla has a hernia and was chained and shackled, his pain has worsened. He is in a bad way and his breathing is ragged. I said: “You should inform the guard Ja’far Qulī.” They said: ‘We are afraid he will be furious and give us a dressing-down.” I said: “You know, if anything should happen to him, it would go badly for Sa’d as-Saltāna and for you all. The Shah would hold you responsible. He ordered that he should be kept under observation, not that he should be killed!”

He paid some three hundred thousand *tumans* for his freedom. This was a sum he had inherited from his father. After his release he returned to Tehran, but in 1309/1891 he was again seized and exiled to Qazwīn.

Because Mustashār ad-Dowla had no income, Shaykh Muḥsin Khān granted him 1,000 tumans from the government. He died in the year 1313/1895. According to Nāẓim al-Islām Kirmānī, the author of *Tārīkh-i Bīdārī*, he wrote a will during his final illness, addressed to his friends, saying: “Whenever I may die, after my departure, drag me to my grave with ropes when nobody is looking, because I am going to that Great One, the creator of all beings, whose majesty and grandeur are unrivalled. May he have mercy on his humble servant and immerse my soul in seas of his mercy. If at that time it is not acceptable to transport my body in that way, my will is that my bier should be carried on the shoulders of common

porters and buried in the eastern courtyard of Qabr Āqā.”¹⁰ Nāẓim al-Islām Kirmānī reports that, in accordance with his Will, all his friends hired porters to carry his bier to the eastern courtyard of that graveyard, which is situated in Southern Tehran.

Even during his final illness, in 1306/1888 in Tabriz, he composed a critical letter for the crown prince Muẓaffar ad-Dīn Mīrzā. Being feeble and unable to write, he was aided by Ḥasan ‘Alī Khān, the Amīr-i Niẓām. In this letter, he addresses the crown prince personally, asking him to apply the ideas he had formulated in his *One Word*. Since Mustashār ad-Dowla outlines his view on many issues not covered in *One Word* in this letter, we have cited it in its entirety at the end of this introduction.

Both Mustashār ad-Dowla’s *One Word* and this letter contain daring statements directed at the ruling king and cabinet. At a time when the king had absolute power over the whole country and every critical voice would be silenced by death, Mustashār ad-Dowla offers an alternative, which will give more freedom to individuals as well as securing the position of the king. In *One Word*, he underscores several times the equality between a king and a beggar before the code of laws: “The king and beggar, subjects and soldiers are bound to follow it and no one has the power to oppose the book of law.” In another place, he emphasises: “there is no place for interference and giving orders in public affairs on the basis of one’s own opinion and personal idiosyncrasies, but only in accordance with what is written in the code of law.” Again he states: “No king is entitled to decree a single blow of the bastinado for the least of men.” Surely in an absolutist monarchical system in which all rights are preserved for the king, the following statement was a direct insult and undermined the King’s position: “no individual person in the world, whether king or beggar, civilian or soldier, has the right to rule. That is, they are not rulers, but are delegated

¹⁰ Nāẓim al-Islām Kirmānī, *Tārīkh-i Bīdārī*, p. 171.

responsibilities. If they are called ‘rulers,’ this is in a metaphorical sense, and not in reality.”

The chief aim of Mustashār ad-Dowla is not to criticise the person of the king, but he lists shortcomings of the government, describing the appalling situation of Persia compared to European nations. Towards the end of his letter to the Crown-Prince he warns the government that if the rule of law is not implemented, people will demand it violently. Mustashār also states that “others,” meaning foreign powers, will force constitutional government on countries such as Persia. The way he chooses to present his reform was to become familiar in Islamic political literature: every European idea that he introduces is supported with several verses from the Quran and traditions. In this way, he tries to convince both the ruling monarch and the traditional clergy, who had a strong influence in society, that the ideas of reform, the rule of law, and constitutional government do not conflict with the Islamic holy law (*sharīʿa*). On the contrary, they can all be found in the Quran and traditions.

Despite continual suffering, hardship and adversities, Mustashār ad-Dowla continued to patiently champion freedom, justice and liberty throughout his life, as a civil servant and author. In addition to *One Word* and his influential letter to Muẓaffar ad-Dīn Shah, he wrote several other books such as *The Joseph Mystery*, *The Education of Children*, *The Book of Reckoning* and other papers and essays that were published in Persian newspapers.¹¹

¹¹ The following treatises are also written by Mustashār ad-Dowla and published in Tehran at Bīnā Publisher: *ʿIlm-i ṭabaqāt al-arḍ*; *Ramz-i jadīd-i Yūsufi-yi Tabrīz*; *Risāla dar wujūb-i iṣlāh-i khatt-i islām*. We did not have access to these sources at the time this research was carried out.

AN EVALUATION OF ONE WORD

In the second half of the nineteenth century, wide-ranging translations of European works were introducing the reading class to the concept of political evolution, to European political philosophy, to the structure of European society. *Yak kalima* should be placed in the midst of a virtual storm of books, traveller's accounts, newspapers and pamphlets in Persian, in which Iranians examined themselves in the mirror of Europe. Like many other texts of the period, such as James Morier's *The Adventures of Haji Baba of Isfahan*, Mustashār ad-Dowla deals with the theme of decline. He appeals to his wide experience in European countries to lend authority to his claim that Iranian society was backward in almost all respects, and that he knew the remedy: introducing codified law. *Yak kalima* can be characterised as a demand for justice (*ʿadālat*) as it was understood in Europe, alongside Islam and religious law. Mustashār ad-Dowla sees *ʿadālat* as an old perso-islamic concept, but claims it can also be found in the French term *égalité*. His chief aim in all his writings, particularly his *Yak Kalima*, is to replace the arbitrary power of tribal, urban, royal and clerical establishments with an independent, democratically endorsed, code of law, in which Muslims and non-Muslims, men and women of all social classes would be treated equally.

The distinction between religious law and 'customary' law (the latter in fact referring to the administrative law of the state), implies a separation between the religious order and the political order, each with its code. He is not saying that the *fiqh* books should be disregarded to return to the pure Islam of the Quran, but that they should cease to be the law books actually used in the courts: public law must be based on codes of law that are universally available and written in the language of the people. The Sharīʿa is implicitly reduced to a *source* of law, in the political sphere.

Another theme is the importance of the separation of the legislature and the executive, and the independence and secure tenure of the judiciary. On the latter point, Mustashār ad-Dowla

clearly explains the rationale, but he appears unable to explain why it is so important to separate the legislature and the executive, appealing instead to ‘wise men’ and the fruit of experience.

Although he advocated tenets of liberalism, Mustashār ad-Dowla’s aim was not to disrupt the religious and monarchical order of Iran. Rather he tries to build a bridge of text-based arguments between the foundations of Western political philosophy and traditional Islamic culture, between the Sharī’a and constitutionalism. In *Yak Kalima*, he writes not as an *Islamic* reformer, but as a modernist presenting reform in an islamically acceptable guise. He is writing an apologetic for reform, against criticism from the religiously orthodox. But in his letter to Prince Muẓaffar ad-Dīn Mīrzā he appears as a sincerely religious man, although he does not share the concerns of the orthodox clerics. This can be contrasted to Malkum Khan, who had little personal attachment to Islam, if any, and Ākhūndzāda, another contemporary reformist who rejected Islam and was anti-clerical (as well as anti-Arab).

Rather than criticising the Islamic contribution, Mustashār ad-Dowla attributes Iran’s backwardness to the failure of Islamic peoples to understand the Quran and hadith. These foreshadow many modern principles, and one must be aware of these principles to correctly understand the meaning of the Quran and hadith. Driven by the apologetic need to present reform to the orthodox, his reinterpretations of the texts are sometimes far-fetched, for instance finding a mandate for public works in the Quranic verse (18:6) “*We have appointed all that is on the earth for an adornment for it, and that We may try which of them is fairest in works,*” and in the tradition “*purify your courtyards.*” (page 84). But this question is also far from the core theme of his work. Like many books, *Yak Kalima* would have been stronger with a little pruning towards the end.

THE RECEPTION OF ONE WORD

From the outset, *One Word* was widely praised and its contents were used during the secret meetings of intellectuals before the Constitutional Revolution. There were also criticisms on Mustashār ad-Dowla's attempt to reconcile the Islamic law with the modern European justice system. The secularist Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Ākhūndzāda characterised *One Word* as an “unmatched book” (*kitāb-i bīnāzīr*) and praised Mustashār ad-Dowla's attempt to show the compatibility of Islam with the European system of constitutional government. Yet Ākhūndzāda strongly believed that a book such as *One Word* would have no impact on the government and people of Persia.¹² In a letter he wrote in 1875 to Mustashār ad-Dowla he emphasises that the book has the character of a piece of ‘advice’ and in Persia no one listens to any advice. He puts his finger on several issues, which are difficult points for an Islamic country even today. The first point, he raises is the equality between men and women. In his view, the Islamic law accords a lower position to women and has doomed women to eternal imprisonment, by stipulating the wearing of the veil. It is because of veiling that women are taken to harems and innocent youth are castrated to supervise these harems. The second issue that he considers as an irreconcilable difference between Islamic and modern European laws is equality between people, irrespective of their religion. His third criticism concerns the question of why Islamic law allows slaves and concubines to be bought and sold. Sexual freedom on the basis of mutual consent is the fourth point of incompatibility. Under Islamic law, those who have sexual intercourse outside marriage should be severely punished. Ākhūndzāda's fifth point of criticism is the religious tax and the requirement to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Why, he asks Mustashār ad-Dowla, should one give one

¹² For a discussion of Ākhūndzāda's criticism on *One Word* see F. Ādamiyyat, *Andīshahā-yi Mīrzā Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Ākhūndzāda*, Tehran: Khārazmī, 1349/1970, pp. 155ff.

fifth of his income to a divine, and why should a person who has sufficient means be expected to go to Mecca and spend his money on Arabs? Other points of criticisms are the death sentence, amputations for theft, and the use of the bastinado, which in his opinion belong among savage and uncivilised people.¹³

PUBLICATION HISTORY OF ONE WORD

Information about the publication history of *Yak Kalima* is meagre. As indicated in the colophon of the lithographed edition, *Yak Kalima* was completed in 1871 in Paris. Several editions have been published in Iran. We do not know when the first edition was published. At least two copies of the first edition are autographed by the author himself. This means that *One Word* was published before his death in 1895. This edition is used for our bilingual edition. A second lithographed edition was published in Tabriz in 1906. It was reprinted in the following year at the Royal Printing House in Tehran. On the authority of B. Mu'minī, Fayz states that the book was also published in 1887. Šādiq Sajjādī republished the book in 1984 in Tehran in a collection of other treatises written during the Qajar epoch.¹⁴ This publication was immediately banned. *Yak Kalima* has become very popular in recent years and has been published at least twice to our knowledge. In addition to Sayyid Muḥammad Šādiq Fayz, who printed the book together with Mustashār ad-Dowla's letter to Muẓaffar ad-Dīn Mīrzā in 2003, ʿAlī-Riḍā Dowlat-Shāhī published an edition in 2007.¹⁵

¹³ Mīrzā Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Ākhūndzāda, *Maqālāt*, Tehran, Āwā, 1351/1972, pp. 96-102.

¹⁴ Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn Wāʿiẓ Isfahānī, et al, *Ruʾyā-yi Šādiqa - Libās-i taqwā*, (Rasāʾil -i Qājārī, vol. 4-5), ed. Šādiq Sajjādī & Humā Riḍwānī, Tehran: Tārīkh-Irān, 1363/1984.

¹⁵ Mīrzā Yūsuf Khān Mustashār ad-Dowla Tabrīzī, *Yak Kalima wa yik nāma*, Muḥammad Šādiq Fayz, Tehran: 1382/2003; idem, *Yak Kalima*, ed. ʿAlī-Riḍā Dowlat-Shāhī, Tehran: Bāl, 1386/2007.

MUSTASHĀR AD-DOWLA'S LETTER TO

*MUẒAFFAR AD-DĪN SHAH*¹⁶

May I be a sacrifice to the holy dust under your feet, I fear that no more than three or four days of life are left to this aged servant. As a servant of your house and well-wisher of your government, I feel that it is my inescapable duty to offer the final thoughts of this dying soul to the holy dust under your feet. By the time you read this petition, this aged servant will have bade farewell to this transitory world. I am totally confident, as a sincere petitioner and faithful servant of your house, that I have never betrayed my king or country. When you read this petition, [know that] there is no place for denials and counter arguments to a call coming from beyond the grave for the sake of friendship, truth and righteousness. His Majesty, the most glorious, may our lives be sacrificed to him, has been selected and elevated by God almighty to a high station and excellence, but at the same time God has summoned him to a very important responsibility as the one worthy of hearing some true but painful reflections.

It is the firm opinion of political thinkers that the extensive kingdom of Persia, which is the natural homeland of the king of Islam, is in a state of jeopardy. The great and rapid progress of neighbours and action and inaction of obstinate and insolent courtiers have so dissipated and weakened the power accumulated over several thousand years by the government of Persia that the patriots of this land are unable to provide a remedy. However the opinion of the wise and politicians of all civilised countries is as follows: The difficulties and dangers Persia is facing can be obviated with just two words, namely to turn our backs on the ways of the past and to begin with the establishment of codified law. In this way we

¹⁶ The text of the letter is taken from *Tārīkh-i Bidārī* and bears the following title: "A letter written by the late Mustashār ad-Dowla, the author of *Yak Kalima*, to the late blessed Muẓaffar ad-Dīn Shah, when he was Crown Prince, in 1306/1888. It was written with the help of Ḥasan-ʿAlī Khān, the Amīr ad-Dowla."

can gain credibility and the respect that the ancient government and people of Persia once had in the eyes of foreign people, civilised nations and neighbouring countries may be renewed. In the eyes of perceptive observers and right-thinking people, this proposition is so self-evident that there is no need for arguments or proof. The ways and means that will ensure the good fortune of the kingdom may perhaps be acquired in this way. Because then the officials in government circles, whether high or low, may consider themselves obliged to apply the articles and instructions of the code in their work, each according to his rank and position. In this way, legal equality can be given to all of the people and subjects, of whatever walk of life and community. The officials should use any measure necessary to achieve the best interest of the people.

But truly because of the mistakes of ministers and government officials it is certainly beyond the range of possibility and beyond human capacity to continue to preserve and guard the splendour and power of the ancient kingdom of Persia by relying on what our forefathers did within Persia and abroad. I swear by the dust beneath your feet, which is the salve to the eyes of Persians, if anyone has the temerity and selfishness to claim that the present management of ministries are completely free of inadequacy and failing, and that no changes are required, this is a claim without substance, clear water that proves bitter and a report not to be listened to. These misguided individuals, from their childhood to the present day are addicted to plundering the poor Persian people. They continue to take away the honour and power of the nation in exchange of fur-lined coats and halters adorned with gold. And by saying the words “the ‘ulamā’ are the support of the government and the king,” they excuse their own guardians of good order and the security of the citizenry – the flattering servants and the standing army – from government responsibility.

If the government were to establish the code of laws and institute reforms in the kingdom, it would become clear that these nonsensical words have no weight and value in any of the courts and administrations of the countries that have constitutional

governments, but only in Asian countries. If, [after Persian reforms,] the neighbouring governments were to model their procedures on the guidelines of the ministries, governors and political and diplomatic officers of the Persian government, what favours the Persian government could [then] ask of them! And would they not be granted? There is no authorisation that they would not grant in favour of the subjects of the Persian crown, whose articles would benefit Persians. How could they dare or be able to have political and commercial relations with others in their own country without the awareness of diplomatic officials of Persia?¹⁷

[In European counties] they have a book of procedures, which is the code of law. Its articles are periodically revised in accordance with the times, and it is printed every year and is distributed among the groups and individuals of the nation, even to villagers, farmers and labourers, by means of newspapers. Thus the duties and constraints of all of the people are defined. So they progress continuously. The book of procedures for Persians is the bright ideas of courtiers: whatever they desire or wish is good, and all else is pointless. So inevitably, every day they sit back, in all humility and fine words, granting themselves their own lawful rights in relation to others.

It is generally said that the government of Persia is thinking of reorganising government bodies. The wise say that this initiative has no chance, unless codes of law are established. The political thinkers and the wise of the age are raising a clamour, because the peoples of Persia, high and low, consider a code of law as an imitation of the Europeans. The responsibilities for transforming the civil service we have inherited are in the powerful hands of the most excellent individual in the state. And without a code of laws, the steps taken by government officials to improve the conditions of the peoples and of

¹⁷ The question is who is “they” in this sentence: the Persian people in the present situation who cannot lift a finger without reference to the Persian government, or the foreign governments in the hypothetical situation in which Persia

their subjects has not and will not be compatible with the astounding progress of this age. They do not believe that the continuity of Persian monarchy can be [achieved] only by being proud of the ancestors. The ministers and supporters of the government, in the light of their own duties and calling on the help of scholars and intellectuals, must begin to established codes of law and reforms. Because they think that a code of laws would be contrary to their interests, they will never take any steps to further this cause, as long as they live. Therefore it is desirable to reduce the influence of the neighbouring countries, for they are nurses better loved than mothers, and ravenous wolves in the guise of lambs, and guests who destroy your house. Until there is a government under the rule of law, they will not turn their eyes from their own interests. To achieve, their aims, they send several cats to chase a single mouse. And to instigate something in matters of politics or trade, they set in motion various intrigues against one another. Even if the [Persian] treasury had as much money as the English, and there were as many engineers in the factories as among the industrious French, and as many soldiers trained, ready and mounted as the population of China, and as many armoured ships as the United States ... still, it would only succeed if it is with the agreement of political thinkers and officials in accordance with the requirements of the times. For one day of every week, they should consult together to settle the affairs of the government and people on the basis of the truth, in accordance with the verse from the Quran: "Their consultation is in the affair." Because it is self-evident that the commandments of God in every religion are clear and manifest, and justice is the sun shining on the peoples of the world, and it is not possible to conceal it among any people. This aged servant may be said to have learned what he can of the commandments of the glorious Quran and the example set by the Prophet in the Traditions, and I have found that the sanctified religious law of Islam is in no way opposed to law codes that are just.

adopted constitutional government and so dominated the region.

Today my faculties are collected and I am sufficiently aware to understand what would be treasonous harm for the holy person of the Shah and the crown prince, our religion and rite, our country and its sons. I am especially aware that I am at the point of passing to the other world, and will stand before the court of justice of the Creator of the universe. I swear an oath with all my heart, before God, the Lord of power and might, and inform the sacred thoughts of the most holy servants of the blessed and most excellent [Shah], may our souls be sacrificed for him, concerning the matters of the world as follows: considering the exceptional progress of the Europeans and the present condition of the people of Persia, it is inevitable in these difficult times that the government of Persia will join the ranks of constitutional governments in the near future. The provisions of the codified law [should] be implemented in accordance with needs of the king and the country and their natural character and then you will see the results. Through this implementation of codified law, these extensive lands and [their] native peoples and subject peoples will be united under the flag of patriotism. The just principles of freedom of thought and equal rights will be enforced, and then no-one will listen to siren voices, because “present events are a sign of the future.” Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that he should inform the blessed heart of the King of Islam (may our souls be sacrificed for him), through sincere petitions about the equivocation of lying courtiers. Indeed, their every effort is directed at their own short-term advantages, not to supporting the sovereignty of the government of Persia. It is self-evident that in the future no people, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, will be able to live without a codified law. Whenever they themselves have not been eager to promulgate a code of law as in the case of Serbia and other cases, outsiders have forced the Ottoman government, with all its power, to accept a code of law. They will also not leave us alone and will force our hand.

I swear by the pure essence of One God that the establishment of a code of law is not in any way contrary to the true doctrine of Islam, and will not do any harm to Islam or the Muslims. On the

contrary, by implementing a code of law, Islam and the Muslims will attain benefits beyond their expectations. They will be freed and live peacefully without the interference of foreigners. In the eyes of the people of the world, they will live in glory and grandeur.

In this condition in which I have no hope of living, it is my duty to explain some points concerning the relationships between the Persian government and foreign governments, for the sake of the officials of the royal House. The conduct of the European governments and their present policies demand that the matter should be given the closest attention.

Prior to the war of 1877 between the Russian and Ottoman governments, the whole civilised world was convinced that all European countries strive day by day to promote the means of peace among human kind and prosperity for the peoples of the world, and seek to universalise the tradition of justice, freedom and integrity. We were firmly convinced that the source of life, the order of nations, and the well-being of individuals were all tied to the political centres of the courts of the European governments. The people of Europe consider some of the costumes and traditions of Eastern governments to be savage, uninformed and ignorant while they characterise the methods of European governments as educated, civilised and human. But if we are strictly fair, we will see that the methods of the contemporary Europeans are no different to those of African savages, because the former savagery of the Africans has decreased—in fact it is no more—whereas extreme savagery has become widespread among the Europeans. If they are satisfied with their own legitimate rights and their objective is universal wellbeing, why are they building up their military power, hostility and dominance to such an extent? And they call this legitimate, while they sacrifice millions upon millions of God's creatures without any reason and for the sake of pursuing and achieving their base lusts. The Persian government is also obliged to defend its own rights and to use all proper means to establish friendship with foreign governments. The English and Russian governments have their rights as Persia's neighbours, but their

jealousy and envy for one another put the Persian government in the most difficult position and in order to protect its rights, it has been forced to behave in a way that cannot be endured.

In the first place, we should have common policies with the Ottoman government and Afghanistan, just as we are brothers in faith and neighbours, and we should consider unity among Muslims to be a bounty. However the enemies of Islam have not permitted this, thus far, and they have taken over most Islamic countries. So long as they live, they will do their utmost to sow disunity among Muslims, and will use open, secret and spiritual influence to hold Muslims back from the speedy attainment of their goal. Sad to say, Muslims today are sleeping the sleep of negligence. The Muslims above all should be attentive to these issues, putting aside bigotry and fanaticism, so that they may no longer be afflicted, weak and despised.

Secondly, they should make a diplomatic and commercial treaty with the government of France which, after the English and the Americans, is the richest nation on earth and which has no bad intentions towards Persia. They should entrust the building of railways and factories inside Persia to them. The great ambition of the proud French nation is very like that of the Persian people. With all the governments they have encountered they have sought to establish a good reputation, not to practice deception and get a bad name. It will not be long before the establishment of a bank in Persia means that all the gold and silver coinage of Persia is gone, in exchange for trade-goods and European manufactured goods. Given the government's high expenditure and low income, it will not be long before it needs to borrow for the first time from the Europeans.

If the Persian government were to give the concessions that it has issued to foreign governments to the French, it would be possible to obtain a sufficient sum from them at a rate of 3 or 4 percent and the easiest terms, for the purpose of starting factories and opening mines, and the interest on the debt would be paid from the yield of the factories and mines. Unfortunately, it appears that

the courtiers are obtaining this loan from the Russians on the harshest terms. So much so, that the stain of it will not be washed from the faces of the Persian people, with water and scrubbing, until the end of the world. In the light of this borrowing, the Persians must quickly protect their position in the face of their neighbours. It is not sufficient for them to simply cling to their own rights. They say: "It [codified law] is an imposition," but it is a new kind of imposition, an imposition that is continually capable of producing protection and victory, an imposition which is today the cause of the power and grandeur of the governments of Europe, and the source of their progress. This will not be possible unless an effort is made to make all of the diverse peoples who live in Persia partners with a stake in their country's good or bad fortune. The will not become partners and stake-holders unless they are given freedom to write and to make all efforts to disseminate knowledge and found colleges. If the tree of equality is to bear fruit, the most important thing is to put the ministries of justice, finance and the Royal Household in order, so that by justice, and in accordance with codes of law, the wealth and possession of all citizens, without distinction or favouritism or consideration for persons, may be guarded from domestic or foreign violation. Then the government itself will have no need for others to establish a bank or build factories or railways, but will rely on the possessions and wealth of the peoples of this country. This matter is so vital that immediate efforts are required.

I am sure that many will slander this aged servant, alleging that I am an enemy to Islam and the Muslims. This servant has never voiced any complaint about them. I have put Persia and the Persians in their hands, and I have resigned myself. Since they do not understand what I am saying, and they do not understand my vision, let them say whatever they want to say. Our offspring and descendants in the future will know whether those libellers are Muslims or I, who have fought for the progress of the people of this country like a martyr in the path of God throughout my life, to prevent the dignity and grandeur of Islam and the Muslims being

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trampled in this way. Now I address a petition without any self-interest to your Most Sacred Threshold, beseeching you to look kindly on this aged servant, whose soul will soon ascend to the Court of Unity, in response to the Exalted Command: “O soul at rest, return to your Lord,”¹⁸ passing from this transitory world without any regret and repenting my unworthy acts.

¹⁸ Quran 89: 27-8.