

Sybil Ory Morris
2354 Myrtle Avenue
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806
504-383-3395

KHALIF OF KHOMEIN

Twenty-three reliefs in stone run up the steps of the massive entrance to the audience-hall of Darius and Xerxes (former leaders of the great Persian Empire) at Persepolis in Iran. These reliefs portray twenty-three deputations from twenty-three satrapies bearing gifts and taxes to their leader. Like their predecessor, Cyrus the Persian, Darius and Xerxes coveted gifts and were infected with gold-fever. All of them hoarded more than they spent and their parsimony hastened the eventual end of the empire.

Within eye distance of these reliefs in the desert among the ruins of Persepolis on October 13, 1971 sat the recently deposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran, Shahanshah or King of Kings, at that time the leader of his country. Perhaps he recalled what Marlowe asked in "Tamburlaine the Great," "Is it not passing brave to be a king, and ride in triumph through Persepolis?" For the Shah was hosting 600 guests from 69 nations to celebrate the 2,500-year anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great (who ruled from 550 to 529 B.C.) and his own 30-year reign.

The purpose of the \$100,000,000. panoply of pomp and glory was as medieval as its style: to emphasize the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty and to draw the attention of the world to Iran's exceedingly

traditional greatness. The fetes lasted for four days and nights. Ironically, the heir to the golden Peacock Throne served roast peacock served in its own brilliant plumage.

A fantasy out of Arabian nights was created for the occasion. A splendid star-shaped city was formed from dazzling blue and white tents, air-conditioned to keep the 102 degrees on the desert. In these the guests were housed. The party was protected by more than air-conditioning. In preparation for the event an entire tribe had been removed from Persepolis, 2,500 potential troublemakers had been locked up, and the University of Iran, 430 miles away, was closed. Party grounds were sealed by barbed wire and guards with submachine guns. However, fires of discontent smoldered on the periphery.

The Shah envisioned a dream "to build the Great Civilization, a society that would be ideal, based on the greatest justice possible, without becoming idle or lazy." He called his reforms the "White Revolution" and intended it to be a bloodless campaign for land reform, literacy, public health, and profit-sharing. Somehow his good intentions miscarried. A loyal Iranian summed up the Shah's majestic plans, "They are childish, totally unrealistic. Look at our miserable villages and even the streets of Tehran. . There's enough practical work for us to do without such nonsense."

Attempts were made to regroup peasants into large, mechanized enterprises--but only a fraction of the large rural force was employed and the total farm output suffered. Huge irrigation dams were built--but canals for distributing the water were neglected. Education plans were forced upon the people--yet two-thirds of them remained illiterate. Smart boutiques and palatial mansions appeared in the city--a city in which there

was no sewer system, just cesspools. An entrepreneurial elite came out of the busy bazaars--but masses of Iranians were untouched by the new wealth.

By 1971 the Shah had rid himself of many troublemakers. But it is difficult to kill a spirit. The day at Persepolis fanned the fury of the people and for eight years a plan to overthrow the Shah's government fomented. The idea simmered, gained momentum, and, finally, with Vesuvian force, erupted. In early 1979 the purple power pendulum of Persia swung full circle. An astonished world saw Reza Pahlavi, tears of realism dripping into the box of Iranian soil he carried in his arm, exchange the role of exile with one upon whom he had forced exile, an Ayatollah from Khomein.

Relatively unknown, this obscure figure emerged from the wings to perform this miracle with the cunning mastery of Alexander the Great when he put down his enemy Darius III Codomannus to conquer the Persian Empire. The new self-appointed, people-supported leader of Iran is a 78-year-old Ayatollah from Khomein.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini looks like a figure from a Persian miniature. His beard flows and is white. Black-turbaned and brown-robed, he resembles the 16th century sufi saint Sheikh Salim who sat under an apple tree listening to a stringed sitar as he predicted the birth of a son to the Mogul Emperor Akbar. Paradoxically, this holy man reverberates the color and drama of past armed conflicts. One look at the depth of the flash in his eyes and the intensity of his followers as they fought to victory evokes an instant image of Arab horsemen uttering blood-curdling cries, exotic robes streaming in the wind, scimitars flashing in the sun.

Holy Khomeini was born in 1900, one of six children, in the town of Khomein. As Ayatollahs commonly do he took his surname from his town. His primary religious training was in his hometown, then Arak, and finally in Qom, a holy city of the largest Moslem sect, the Shiites. He married in 1927 and he and his wife had three daughters and two sons.

Loudly vocal, Ayatollah Khomeini was arrested for the first time by the government of the Shah in 1963 when he bitterly attacked an ambitious land reform scheme and a reform aimed at the gradual emancipation of women. Several arrests thereafter preceded his exile by the Shah to Izmir, Turkey in 1964. By this time this frail-seeming man had a large and loyal following and anti-Shah sentiment spread like flame. A stay of exile in Iraq followed. The fervent leader spent the last period of his 14-year exile in Neauphle-le-Chateau near Paris.

R. W. Apple, Jr., London bureau chief of the New York Times, on special assignment in Iran wrote this revealing insight:

Every revolution needs its symbol and the Ayatollah fills that role. In a society morbidly fascinated by martyrdom, his own suffering has earned him great respect and the unofficial title of 'imam,' after the first 12 Shiite leaders, most of whom met violent deaths.

The spirit of Khomeini was never stilled for a moment. Through shrewd maneuvers supported financially by rich merchants from the souks, the gaunt, intransigent leader managed with conductor virtuosity to orchestrate a striking coup which has left the world agape and bewildered. By such simple devices as recorded phone calls, ubiquitous cassette tapes, a profusion of portraits, and a kind of Kismet (predestination) mentality, young and old Iranians were transfigured into raging Moslems.

With the authority of a true Moslem khalif, a holy, angry man

returned to Iran and threatened to call a holy war against the Shah-appointed interim Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar and his military followers. It was only a matter of time before Bakhtiar moved the mountain to Mohammed.

One of the suras of the Moslem Koran reveals that "The Lord created man from a clot." Will the "Khalif of Khomein" be able to control--and contain--the millions of Iranian clots? He is rather resented by other Ayatollahs--the ones from Qom, Mashhad, and Tehran--for reasons of professional jealousy and disagreement over tactics and objectives. Thousands of young mullahs who were instrumental in the return of their leader are far more radical and attuned to reborn Islamic militancy than the Ayatollahs. In a parallel with pure, unadulterated Khomeini supporters are Islamic extremists, Trotskyites, Constitutionalists, Anarchists, and Moscow-manipulated Marxists.

A pondering world waits to read the next chapter of Persian history. It yearns for the mosaics of Iran to fall back into place; it longs to read once more the rose-colored verses of Omar Khayam. People throughout the world hope that the searchers in Iran can find the peace found in the innocent wanderings of the Qashqai and the Kurds--that Khomeini's Mohammed and Darius' Zoroaster could unite to weave a supreme Persian pattern. We want once again to hear the tales of Scheherazade.