point to ways in which nationalism and the nation-state have concentrated power over male bodies, leading perhaps to a greater discussion of masculinity. Lastly, although provocative, some of the arguments presented in DeSouza's book attempt to break new ground in the studies of Sufism, mystical Islam more broadly, and their translations, yet these important narratives remain under-developed.

As part of a gender studies discourse that has long incorporated sociological and historical disciplines, *Unveiling Men* is a much-needed, risk-taking book that begins an essential conversation in the study of masculinity in Iran. As DeSouza had to contend with a limited literature devoted to analyzing a history of male bodies, queer identities, and masculinity in Iran, this book breaks new ground in a number of ways. I would recommend this as a valuable work to graduate and undergraduate students alike in History, Gender Studies, and Middle East and Islamic Studies.

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The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny, Alireza Doostdar, Islamic Studies and the Anthropology of Religion, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018, ISBN 9780691163789 (pbk), 295 pp.

Many Iranians are fascinated by the spectacular feats performed by psychics: curing a disease with a talisman, exorcizing evil spirits from a possessed person, foretelling someone's future, and encounters with the souls of the dead are just a few examples of such acts. Whether a *rammāl*, a *shaykh*, a modern spiritual healer or a motivational speaker, these socially aberrant characters have occasionally influenced modern Iranian culture. What is more, these phenomena have not only fascinated people but also impacted their worldview and belief system. Culturally significant as this case might seem, it has remained understudied by scholars of Iranian studies. This lacuna has now been filled by Alireza Doostdar's much anticipated book. This book looks into the variegated modes of "rationality" with regard to psychically charged phenomena, which he terms the "metaphysicals." The plural inflection suggests that the phenomenon under study includes a variety of individual and collective experiences, epistemic modes, historical roots and social strata. For Doostdar, this term "refers to a modern rationalized form of the unseen and the occult" (p. 9). It includes practices of "spiritual healing, sorcery, jinn possession, dream visions," and "saintly marvels" (p. 8), to name a few popular examples.

At the core of this book lies extensive fieldwork carried out over a discontinuous period of two years starting from 2006, during which Doostdar met with a number

of occult practitioners, their followers and their students, and participated in their gatherings. Concurrently, he kept track of the relevant reports and broadcasts in Iranian media. Next to this ethnographic core, Doostdar occasionally draws from the works of historians and engages with certain primary sources of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In this way, this book offers an instructive scholarly survey of the field, one that can be characterized as a work of historical anthropology. Doostdar's subject matter has often been marginalized not only in the traditional Shiʿi scholarship but also in the academic research on contemporary Iranian culture. His study brings to light significant territories located in between the historical categories of religion and science in Iran, categories that have often been viewed as antithetical to one another. Through his historical anthropological approach, Doostdar paints a complex picture of how Shiʿi Islam and the science of nineteenth century Iran co-evolved, and how the two have shaped modern Iranian society—with many historical ruptures as well as continuities from the nineteenth century to the present.

The book is divided into three parts with a total of twenty-four chapters, three addenda for each part and a conclusion. The first part, comprised of ten chapters, titled *Rammal*, deals with the ways in which *rammāl*s—or occult specialists as Doostdar calls them—have been treated within the governmental and religious power structures as well as by the elites of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The second part of the book, titled *Scientist*, with eight chapters, examines the metaphysicals in relation to the scientific discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—institutionalized as well as popular. The third part, comprising six chapters, limits its historical scope to the years following the Iraq-Iran war from roughly the late 1980s onwards. Titled *Friends of God*, this part takes as its focal point the historiography of a very specific form of piety that surfaced in the aftermath of the war.

Doostdar's style is extremely lucid, well-structured, academically sound and yet accessible to the general public. His text is rich with vivid descriptions interspersed with acute theoretical and historical analyses. His elegant and flowing prose, together with the wealth of the materials that it presents, make a valuable contribution to the field. Next to history and anthropology, other disciplines such as political science, media studies and literature studies can also converse with the book. In short, the book introduces, at one and the same time, a new range of materials and a fresh theoretical perspective, open to interdisciplinary connections, within the field of Iranian studies.

The main and broadest argument of this book is that the study of contemporary "metaphysical inquiries" is indispensable for a proper understanding of Islam in modern Iran (p. 4). As the author firmly states, far from being an irrational category, the complex social scenes of the "metaphysicals" in Iran have left strong impressions of rationality and reason. (Re)appropriating scientific as well as religious theories and methods, diverse Iranian metaphysicals have activated modes of reason "with specific styles and distinctive epistemic structures" (p. 18). Doostdar understands them as *in* and *of* themselves productive of social livelihood and agency. He avoids any formulation of the metaphysical in terms of categories external to society, but theorizes them instead as part and parcel of the social sphere (p. 19).

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The historical dimension of Doostdar's work consists of an effort to contextualize the concepts of "rationalization" and the "metaphysical." With regard to the former, he maps out three intertwined conceptual "processes" (p. 4). The first process consists in the practitioners' and the followers' attempts at keeping "superstition" (*khorāfāt*) at bay (p. 5). Second, he recognizes certain processes of rationalization whereby a series of theoretical registers are developed by the practitioners and the followers so as to verbalize, perform and narrate their experiences. Terms such as "psymentology," "defensive four" and "defensive radiation" (p. 5) are explicit examples in the case of Cosmic Mysticism (*ʿerfān-e keyhāni*), but also the appropriation of terms from quantum physics and thermodynamics in other cases are noteworthy (p. 105). The third process traces the formation of a discourse that ventures to bring together "individual dealings with the metaphysical" under the rubric of a "totalizing worldview" (p. 5). These three conceptual threads of rationalization contextualize Doostdar's colorful account of the complex scenes of the metaphysicals in Iran within a broader historical transformation rooted in the early nineteenth .

As for the concept of metaphysical, Doostdar ferrets out three historical contexts for understanding the term: the unseen (*gheyb*), the occult (*gharibeh*) and the metaphysical (*māvarāʾ*). The unseen relates more closely to the theological discourse rooted in the Qur'anic milieu. The occult resonates more strongly with magic and sorcery in the Perso-Arab tradition, which might very well go beyond the theological purview of the Qurʾan. And, finally, the metaphysical, strongly influenced by late twentieth century American culture, refers to a much more recent understanding of that which lies "beyond" the tangible world and this-worldly knowledge. By mapping out these three contexts for the contemporary Iranian metaphysicals, this book lays out a strong foundation for the ethnographic work that runs through all the chapters.

In the eight chapters of the first part, using various methods of research and styles of writing, Doostdar shows how this particular craft has been evaluated, judged and often denigrated in different ways by diverse social actors. He traces the ways in which the social position of *rammāl*s has been vilified and how their craft has often been dismissed as superstition or outright charlatanry (p. 39). Through reading secondary historical sources and examining the media reports and representations, Doostdar argues that both the premodern and modern treatment of occult practices tended to relegate such practices to the category of superstition (*khorāfāt*). On the one hand, he refers to the works of Shiʿi ulama—from Mohammad-Bāqer Majlesi's *Bahār al-Anwār* to Ayatollah Khomeini's *Kashf-e Asrār*—and examines the Shiʿi discursive efforts in maintaining a certain theoretical and practical distance from the occult and occult practitioners. On the other hand, referencing contemporary scholarship on the rise of intellectuals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—including works of scholars such as Afsaneh Najamabadi and Cyrus Schayegh—he argues that some modernists and reformers in the Qajar period conceived of superstitions as "spurious folk accruements to a true Islam" (p. 43); while some other more radical elites considered superstitions not in opposition to, but as part and parcel of, religion (p. 43).

Furthermore, analyzing a television program broadcast just a month before the contentious presidential elections of June 2009—a significant political theme that is

somewhat neglected in Doostdar's book—he depicts the transmutation of occult practices from superstitions to crimes (p. 49). Describing certain significant segments of the program, he concludes that the way the Iranian government approaches *rammāl*s has to do "with maintaining the monopoly of the ulama on matters of moral guidance and the health of the soul" (p. 51). He pushes this line of argument even further when he reports his correspondence with the offices of *marājeʿ-e taqlid* (high-ranking religious authorities) during the tumultuous June of 2009. In a one-paragraph letter (p. 61), he asks the religious authorities about the status of occult practices in the shariʿa. Listing their responses, he demonstrates the lack of any unified consensus over the legal position of occult practices in today's Shiʿi jurisprudence (p. 63). This heterogeneity is further complicated by the curious cases of a *rammāl* who used to be a student in the Qom seminary (p. 66), and of an officer in a criminal investigation unit in Iran who extensively relied on the contribution of a certain *rammāl* to solve impossible crimes (p. 70). This part also looks at how the Iranian occult cultures have negotiated boundaries with literary traditions in the Persian language (pp. 78-91). In this way, the author maps out an array of approaches to occultism, ranging from governmental and religious strategies to popular and mundane "pleasure"-seeking tactics.

In the second part, Doostdar tracks down different strategies of rationalization employed within the scientific realm of modern Iran. This section attends not only to the epistemological but also to the "moral, imaginative, and rhetorical" (p. 101) function of scientific discourses. Here, Doostdar introduces a central historical figure into the picture, namely, Mirza Khalil Khan Saqafi—responsible for the advent of "Spiritism" in Iran (p. 113). This nineteenth century *Dār al-Fonun* graduate also figures in Doostdar's previous works, particularly in his essay "Empirical Spirits: Islam, Spiritism, and the Virtues of Science in Iran" (2016).[1] In this essay, Doostdar argues that the inception of modern education in Iran, following the European model, was not an abrupt change that radically severed it from the past. Rather, he maintains, these seemingly new epistemic modes had been in continuity with the pre-modern models of education in Iran. Overlooking this continuity, as Doostdar observes, undermines the significance of central concepts in Perso-Islamic intellectual history. "Scientific virtue" is the main concept for Doostdar in this case. In his point of view, the science-minded projects of reform in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Iran were genealogically continuous with older epistemic modes. This line of argument finds its most lucid form in chapter thirteen of the book, "Scientific Virtues," where Saqafi is juxtaposed with a prominent contemporary cleric, Nāser Makārem Shirāzi, a few decades younger than Saqafi (p. 128). This historical duet, crossing the past two centuries, shows how both categories of science and religion invented a nebula of scientific virtues with a similar empiricism at their core. Although to different ideological/ideational ends, these intellectual loci were, as Doostdar

[1]A. Doostdar, "Empirical Spirits: Islam, Spiritism, and the Virtues of Science in Iran." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 2 (2016): 322-49.

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argues, complicit in bringing a certain mode of knowledge-making into contemporary Iran.

Moreover, these religio-scientific (re)appropriations by and large transgress the methodical boundaries of science and become what Doostdar terms "scientific imaginaries" (p. 136). As the author convincingly argues, these "scientific imaginaries" are more than mere rhetoric and strategies, but are themselves specific "modes of reasoning" which enable productive methodological and conceptual transpositions between two entirely different contexts (p. 142). In this light, a "playful deployment of physics-inspired models for grasping the metaphysicals" (p. 172) falls within such imaginaries and is irreducible to strict scientific models. In this part, Doostdar makes extensive use of relevant literature on the history and anthropology of science, including seminal works by Steven Shapin and Simon Schaeffer in the Western context, and also converses with established scholars in the field of Middle Eastern studies such as Mana Kia, Cyrus Schayegh, Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood.

The third part shifts the focus to a different social stratum. Unlike the actors of the previous two parts—who were mostly enthralled by western sciences and/or certain aspects of popular American culture—those of this part are idealized pious figures: socio-religious templates who were potent enough to replace older cultural tokens such as "revolutionaries and war martyrs" (p. 22). The historiographies of these characters have been closely tied to the ways in which the metaphysicals have become perceivable and conceivable in the Iranian social imagination (p. 227). They operated "not only as technologies of pious self-discipline but also as tools of cultural engineering in the hands of the state" (p. 181). In sum, this part offers a counterpoint to the figures of the *rammāl* and the scientist, who featured in the first two parts of the book.

In summary, Doostdar's book maps out a complex cultural image of modern Iran in its varied dispositions toward the "beyondness" (p. 10) of metaphysical experiences. These dispositions, as laid out in the three main parts of the book, include religio-scientific sensibilities, literary and imaginary fascination, and the state-controlled bureaucratic media. In all these approaches, Doostdar traces a variety of rationalizing processes, each of which generates its own specific mode of reason. In his conclusion to the book, Doostdar notes that the outcomes of such attempts to rationalize have by far surpassed their intention to explain and understand metaphysical phenomena rationally (p. 233). In this sense, he suggests that such processes of rationalization have largely failed, though not deterministically. Their failure, as he argues, should be understood relatively and not teleologically. In other words, he suggests that failure of these processes should not be understood as their inability to fulfill the intended purposes of rationalization, but rather in terms of open-ended processes that guarantee "the continual production of new modes of sociality that take the metaphysical as object" (p. 233). The book has presented a plethora of such open-ended failed attempts to rationalize the metaphysicals. When occult practices turned into popular amusement or literary fascination, or when Shiʿi doctrine had to readjust its discourse to deal with the rise of *rammāl*s, the failures of rationalizing processes are more sharply felt (p. 233). These are examples of attempts that failed to fulfill their intended purpose, that is, to explain rationally the strangeness and the mysteries

of the metaphysicals. Nonetheless, they produced "new modes of sociality" that affected other cultural strata. They have become forces or, in Doostdar's words, "unintended consequences," of metaphysical inquiries (p. 225) that transformed Shi'i teachings. These forces also permeated into society at large, surfaced, more often than not, in the media landscape and shaped a certain public imagination. It is in this light that the author concludes that the problem "is not *whether* metaphysical experimentation is rational." Rather, what matters are "the specific ways in which it draws on, inhabits, recasts, and displaces those modes of reason that have been central to the constitution of Iranian modernity" (p. 236).

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Studies in the History of Medicine in Iran, Willem Floor, Washington, DC, Mage Publishers, 2018, ISBN 978-1-933823-94-2 (hbk), vxi + 210 pp.

This, the author's second study of medicine in Qajar Iran, complements his earlier volume, published in 2004 as *Public Health in Qajar Iran*. It does so by discussing a number of important issues left unaddressed in the earlier volume, which was already quite comprehensive in its treatment of illness and its cures in nineteenth-century Iran, addressing as it did the prevalent diseases, the state of medical knowledge and the transition from traditional, Galenic methods to modern forms of medicine. In the present study the author more specifically focuses on frequently occurring diseases such as plague and cholera, and preventive measures, including quarantine arrangements, taken at the turn of the twentieth century to combat their frequent outbreaks. Interesting and novel, too, are the chapter on medical facilities introduced in early twentieth-century Khuzestan in the context of the emerging oil industry, and the one on an important yet barely known Dutch physician active in Iran in the late nineteenth century, J. L. Schlimmer. All this material is presented on the basis of a large amount of documentation culled from the National Archives of Great Britain, a number of Dutch archival depositories and a wealth of primary and secondary printed works.