



# Pahlavi Government Policies Regarding The Mourning Ceremonies of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) (1951-1978 AD/1330-1357 AH)

## Case Study: Isfahan

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) are Shia religious rituals that have been observed throughout various historical periods. With the rise of the Pahlavi government, restrictions on these mourning ceremonies became part of a broader effort towards secularization and modernization of Iranian society, leading to conflict and challenges with the clergy and the people. Isfahan, due to its concentration of prominent Shia scholars and the establishment of a theological seminary, is the primary focus of this research.

**Method:** The research methodology is descriptive-analytical, based on documentary and library sources, focusing on Isfahan.

**Results:** The main research question is: ‘What policies did the Pahlavi government (1925-1978 AD/1304-1357 AH) adopt regarding religious ceremonies in Isfahan, and what was the public reaction?’ The findings indicated that the Pahlavi government implemented policies regarding the mourning ceremonies of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) as a tool to consolidate its authority and shape social behavior according to its political agenda. Through measures such as monitoring the execution of mourning ceremonies, controlling preachers and clerics, preventing the presence of Europeans in mourning ceremonies, issuing announcements and notifications, and verifying the credentials of eulogy readers by the police force, the government managed to partially enforce restrictions on the ceremonies of Imam Ḥusayn (AS); however, it could not completely prevent their observance.

**Conclusions:** The holding of mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) during the Pahlavi era occurred with two distinct approaches. Initially, Reza Shah allowed such ceremonies to gain public favor, but after coming to power, he began to impose prohibitions and restrictions. This trend continued until Mohammad Reza Shah came to power. Mourning ceremonies were gradually restricted by the government, and this was part of a broader effort to modernize and secularize the country. The prohibition of mourning ceremonies was seen as a way to reduce the influence of religious practices and clergy in public life.

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## **Introduction**

The mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) were considered a fundamental religious manifestation, and the holding of religious ceremonies, including the important Shia rituals and symbols, was a starting point through which Iranian Shia rulers established the foundation of their rule by promoting and propagating the religion. This tradition continued throughout successive historical periods until it underwent a transformation during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Throughout this period, the holding of mourning ceremonies and recitations of elegies continued, albeit to varying degrees, in most Iranian cities. However, they gradually became static due to government-imposed restrictions. This policy began in larger cities such as Tehran, Isfahan, Khorasan, and others, gradually extending to villages and remote areas. Mourning ceremonies were never completely halted, and until their complete prohibition under Reza Shah Pahlavi, the tradition of mourning and recitation of elegies remained widespread among the people, even more so in towns and cities than in Tehran. Therefore, understanding and re-examining the Pahlavi government's policies regarding the holding of mourning ceremonies and recitations of elegies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) (1925-1978 AD/1304-1357 AH) within the timeframe of Muharram and Safar, their popular base (urban and rural), and in the traditional and religious city of Isfahan, is of great importance. Unpublished documents in the archives of the National Archives and Library can be instrumental in analyzing this topic.

Regarding the research background, it should be added that no independent research has been conducted on the Pahlavi government's religious policies regarding the holding of mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn in Isfahan based on documents. Although numerous studies have been written on religious ceremonies during the Pahlavi era, none have examined mourning ceremonies in Isfahan during the Pahlavi period based on documents. The time frame of this research is limited to 1330-1357 AH, and the geographical scope is limited to the city of Isfahan, to allow for a deeper and more accurate analysis by focusing on a single city. In addition, the surviving archival documents from Isfahan regarding the holding of mourning ceremonies and the Pahlavi government's policies are more abundant than those from other cities.

### **1. Theoretical Framework**

"Mourning" in the lexicon means patience and perseverance in mourning and signifies grief and affliction. Numerous compounds are derived from the word "Mourning," such as "Days of Mourning": days of mourning, "Mourner" means the state of mourning, "Mourning," "To mourn" means the state of grief resulting from an unfortunate event or the loss or failure to obtain something valuable to the person (Dehkhoda, 1974 AD/1354 SH: under "Mourning").

Mourning for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) and his companions, expressing love for them, and showing sympathy for their suffering, are considered among the most important manifestations of honoring religious rituals and a sign of piety (Mohammadi Rey Shahri, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 11). This mourning is performed in various forms, including: Ta'zieh (passion plays), burning of tents, recitation of elegies, and recitation of lamentations, chanting of elegies, chest-beating, and chain-swinging (Mohaddethi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 256). In this research, "Mourning" refers to the description of how the mourning of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) is conducted and observed.

### **2. The History of the Mourning Ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) until the Rise of Pahlavi I**

The practice of religious mourning ceremonies and Rouzeh-khwani as religious rites of Iranians began in the Buyid era. In subsequent periods, despite the rise of Sunni governments, Shia mourning ceremonies were held, albeit with limitations. With the official declaration of Twelver Shia Islam during the Safavid era, the rulers considered themselves obligated to establish and promote the school of Ahl al-Bayt and spread the Shia faith (Homayouni, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 48). The style of mourning in the Safavid era was simple; however, in the Qajar era, particularly during the Nasser al-Din Shah's reign, mourning gained a special prominence and splendor. The grandeur of the mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) in the Qajar era was characterized by a variety of forms and styles, and Ta'zieh, Shabih-khani (dramatic reenactments), Rouzeh-khwani, and mourning processions were held with great fervor and magnificence.

In the Qajar era, mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) were publicly held in the capital, Tehran, and other cities and villages, and were considered a kind of religious obligation (Najmi, 1977 AD/1356 SH: 348). The erection of Alam (religious banners) and Kutal, the setting up of tents, and the fulfillment of individual and collective vows were

among the actions of the people. Mourning was not limited to a specific class or group of people but was held publicly, with wealthy individuals bearing the expenses of the ceremonies in the main Ḥusayniyas (religious centers) and Tekiyehs (religious buildings) of the city. The general public, through their participation, demonstrated their devotion and sincerity to Imam Ḥusayn (AS). John Wishard, who visited Tabriz during the Constitutional Revolution, adds in this regard: "Muharram is the month of mourning, and almost all classes participate in it, performing ceremonies in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn. All people, from the Shah to the beggar, do not merely wear a simple band on their collar or hat, but wear black hats."

Those who are able, regardless of the heat, dress entirely in black, even children who chant elegies for Ḥusayn and Hassan in the streets often wear dark clothing. Small black flags on the doors of houses serve as an invitation to passersby to participate in religious ceremonies and prayers held in those houses for the public (Wishard, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 163-162).

The variety of mourning ceremonies during the Qajar era was extensive, including events such as Ta'zieh (passion plays), Rouzeh-khani (recitation of elegies), Chehel eanbar (forty pulpits), Qameh-zani (self-flagellation), and others. Women's presence in the commemorations of Muharram was significant. In this regard, Mahdi Gholi Khan Hedayat writes: "In the government Tekiyeh, the area around the platform was filled with women; nearly six thousand, the men could not find a way in due to the large number of women." (Hedayat, 1964 AD/1344 SH: 88) From a quantitative perspective, mourning ceremonies were held with a massive public turnout, the most prominent and elaborate of which in Tehran was at the mosque of Haj Sheikh Abdolhossein, where the attendees numbered over ten thousand men and women (Mostafavi, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 1, 414; Delrish, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 72). In terms of timing, mourning was limited to Muharram before the Safavid era; however, during the Qajar period, it gained more popularity, and in many neighborhoods of Tehran and other cities, people observed Rouzeh-khani for at least 60 days during Muharram and Safar (Mostofi, 1944 AD/1324 SH: 286-276; Polak: 236).

Flandin, a renowned traveler of the Qajar period who witnessed the mourning of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) in Tehran, reports on the performance of Ta'ziyeh in mosques, Tekiyehs, public thoroughfares, and the large palaces of Tehran, adding: "During the mourning period, some of the saints in the city would go out and express from the depths of their being the virtues of Ḥusayn and Ali (AS). Some would strike iron chains on their bare chests, injuring themselves.

Others, barefoot and bloodied, with blackened faces, would speak of Ḥusayn (AS) in the streets and claim they would endure thirst and heat." (Flandin, 1976 AD/1356 SH: 118)

Japanese Masaharu and Charles James Wills, who visited Isfahan during the Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar era, described the city's mourning rituals, noting the widespread public participation and the closure of shops and markets out of respect (Masaharu, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 137; Wills, 1987 AD/1366 SH: 16). Wills adds: "Besides numerous lamentation gatherings, some provincial governors, out of respect and to strengthen the performance of Ta'ziyeh and mourning for the martyrs, spent large sums of their own money and provided very good Ta'ziyeh performances." (Wills, 1987 AD/1366 SH: 265)

### **3. Mourning Ceremonies during the Pahlavi Era (1304-1320 AH)**

With the rise of the Pahlavi I government (1304-1320 AH), changes occurred in the interaction between the government and religion, particularly regarding lamentation gatherings and mourning ceremonies. However, in the early years, these ceremonies continued. Mostofi notes that at the beginning of Muharram 1300 AH, "Reza Khan ordered a large tent to be erected in the Cossack barracks during the ten days of Muharram, and a detailed and magnificent lamentation gathering was held. Neighborhood groups renewed the old custom of going to the Cossack barracks. They started from the beginning of the ten days and every day a large number came to the Cossack barracks and beat their chests. Meanwhile, Reza Khan and the army officers, like the host of the gathering, entertained the mourners. The level of participation was such that all classes of people attended this lamentation gathering." (Mostofi, 1944 AD/1324 SH: 3, 461) Hasan Ezam Qodsi, a prominent figure during Reza Khan's reign, wrote in his memoirs: "Reza Khan participated in the lamentation gatherings of the guilds at night. In these gatherings, some preachers and lamentation readers praised him from the pulpit and prayed for him. On 'Āshūrā Day, Reza Khan Mirpanj led the Cossack group, with a delegation of officers in front and individuals, flags, and standards in a specific order and formation, from the Cossack barracks, moving from Topkhaneh Square, along Naser al-Din Shah Street to the bazaar. While Reza Khan (Sardar Sepah) entered the market with his collar open, straw on his head, and most of his entourage with flowers on their heads and barefooted." (Ezam Qodsi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 692-693)

Reza Khan's presence at mourning ceremonies and his demonstrated approval of religious rituals show that in his early days in power, he feigned religious piety to gain the support of the people and the clergy, who played a significant role in Iranian society. However, their relationship gradually deteriorated, and ultimately, his actions removed the clergy from power. Once the foundations of Reza Shah's rule were solidified and he no longer needed the support of the clergy and the masses, his behavior changed. Before ascending to the throne, Reza Shah was committed to upholding the dignity of Islam and the clergy, but he believed that the religious scholars lacked the scientific and practical tools to address the challenges of the modern era. Therefore, by proposing the separation of religion and politics, he sought to reduce the social influence of the clergy, which inevitably entailed political power (Heyro, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 47-48).

From 1306 AH, changes were observed in Reza Shah's religious behavior. He was no longer as committed to religious norms as before and, in practice, put pressure on the religious community, namely the clergy. The assassination and exile of Ayatollah Madres, the beating of Ayatollah Bafghi, the diminishing role of the clergy in the judiciary, the replacement of a large portion of Sharia law with French, Italian, and other legal codes, the unveiling of women (Keshf-e Hijab), and the suppression of religious ceremonies such as mourning rituals are examples of this (Fallahzadeh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 157-158).

Reza Shah's first action was to restrict religious ceremonies, especially the mourning rituals for Imam Ḥusayn (AS). To this end, he first moved the Qazakhaneh mourning hall to the Tekieh-e Dowlat and reduced the splendor, grandeur, and duration of the ceremonies. On the ninth of Muharram 1310 AH (Solar Hijri), while many ceremonies such as chain-swinging, stone-throwing, and processions were banned, he attended the Tekieh-e Dowlat, where a simple mourning ceremony was held. In the following year, to further restrict Muharram mourning ceremonies, Reza Khan apparently did not participate in the mourning ceremonies, and only a brief mourning ceremony was held in the municipality (Baldiyeh). To diminish the soldiers' love and devotion to Imam Ḥusayn (AS), elaborate military parades, large musical bands, and much fanfare were organized to divert their attention to the Shah (Basiratmanesh, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 139).

Opposition to the mourning ceremonies of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) reached the point where, instead of mourning processions, celebratory carnivals were organized during Muharram. Various guilds were compelled to participate, each forming its own contingent. By the late



reign of Reza Shah, these carnivals coincided with ‘Āshūrā night, with dancing troupes, music, and singing filling the streets with revelry and dance (Maki, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 4, 19). Marit Hacks corroborates this, stating that in 1311 AH/1933 AD, the Pahlavi government significantly altered ‘Āshūrā observances. She writes: "This year, to divert the soldiers’ affection from Imam Ḥusayn (AS), they organized special parades, large musical bands, and a great deal of noise." (Hacks, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 192)

These restrictions were ostensibly part of a policy promoting "Modern Lifestyles," aiming to distance the people from the commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn. Consequently, propaganda promoted the idea that the culture of mourning should be forgotten. Opponents of traditional mourning practices, under the pretext that the philosophy of mourning and, particularly, the uprising of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) were unclear to the people, or that preachers disseminated inaccurate news and narrations from the pulpit, criticized the mourning traditions. Instead of striving to eliminate superfluous elements, they opposed mourning ceremonies altogether (Basiratmanesh, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 141). Gradually, restrictions intensified after 1310 AH, and mourning processions faced strong government opposition. Marit Hacks’ report emphasizes this: "In most cities, the movement of processions was restricted to specific areas, such as marketplaces and squares with several sides closed off, and the religious were forced to move around them. The governorate believed that confining the processions to relatively deserted areas would diminish the grandeur of the martyrs." (Hacks, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 191) Restrictions on mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) began in large cities and gradually spread to smaller ones. Reports from European travelers during Reza Shah’s reign in Isfahan emphasize the limitations imposed on mourning ceremonies. According to Richards’ report from Isfahan in 1309 AH, restrictions had begun, and mourning ceremonies were held in specific locations and areas.

Richards, citing the public’s strong belief in mourning rituals, considered the government’s chances of success in restricting these rituals to be low (Richards, 1963 AD/1343 SH: 29). A report by Hunt, referring to Muharram in Isfahan, states: "Every year on this day, Isfahan would become completely deserted; not a single taxi could be seen in the streets. The radio did not broadcast any music, and television programs were solely dedicated to news. No cinemas were operating, and black flags were displayed above all the shops, which were completely closed" (Hunt, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 43). In another report, Gabriel refers to the village of ‘*Arūsān* (in Khor and Biabanak), noting the low-key nature of the Muharram

mourning ceremonies in 1302/1312 AH: "This day, which usually unfolded with pomp, splendor, and noise, passed very quietly in little *'Arūsān*." (Gabriel, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 62)

Documents and reports indicate that in the early years of Reza Shah's reign, there were no restrictions or prohibitions in Isfahan, and the people of Isfahan observed mourning rituals during the first ten days of Muharram (SAKMA: 3930/293/97). Indeed, the Ministry of the Interior issued an order to the police department permitting the holding of mourning ceremonies on the nights of Muharram in 1302 AH (SAKMA: 82087/293). In this regard, mourning and Rawzah gatherings were mostly held peacefully in Isfahan homes during the first ten days of Muharram (SAKMA: 60211/310). After a time, following Reza Shah's trip to Turkey on June 3, 1934, fundamental consequences arose in cultural matters, particularly regarding mourning rituals. During this period, while following the transformations in Turkey under Atatürk, Reza Shah attempted to emulate those changes in the expansion and establishment of a republic (Rahmanian, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 138). Observing Turkey's economic and social progress, he remarked: "I never imagined that the Turks had progressed so much and advanced so far in adopting European civilization; now I see that we are far behind and must strive with all our might for the country's progress, especially in the liberation of women." (Maki, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 6, 157; Alamuti, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 175)

Inspired by Atatürk's secularization policies, Reza Shah sought to counter religion with nationalism, aiming to diminish the influence of religion in social and political spheres. To this end, he established state schools to compete with religious schools, removed the clergy from official registration offices, implemented European-style laws, prohibited visas for Hajj and other religious pilgrimages, confiscated religious endowments (Waqf), and restricted religious mourning ceremonies (Agheli, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 51; Gholfi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 132). However, Reza Shah's forceful policies, implemented without considering the context differing from Turkey, only resulted in popular resistance and confrontation with the authorities. Gradually, during the middle years of Reza Shah's reign, increasing restrictions led to the suppression of mourning ceremonies and lamentations. Orders were issued to prevent Muharram and Safar mourning ceremonies (SAKMA: 343/291), and the arrest of mourners and passion play performers in Isfahan in 1316 AH (solar Hijri calendar) became common practice, spreading throughout the country (SAKMA: 1860/291).

The clergy and religious scholars of Isfahan strongly opposed the restrictions and prohibitions on mourning for Imam Ḥusayn, protesting the prevention of mourning ceremonies (SAKMA:



18364/310). Consequently, they began holding these ceremonies in private homes. For example, Ayatollah Akhund Mulla Mohammad Javad Safi of Golpayegan sent a protest telegram regarding the police preventing Muharram mourning in mosques, religious lodges (Tekyeh), and public places. Ultimately, the government permitted the ceremonies to be held in private homes (SAKMA: 16682/310) (cf. Appendix 1). Reza Shah's order inadvertently led to the rise of a new form of mourning: Home-based mourning ceremonies. During this period, people maintained the spirit of mourning for Imam Ḥusayn by holding weekly or monthly mourning gatherings in their homes.

During the latter half of Reza Shah's reign, mourning ceremonies during Muharram and Safar were banned in many cities of Isfahan, including: Golpayegan (SAKMA: 17570/293/97), Chamgerdan-e-Riz (Lengan) (SAKMA: 2327/293/97), Shah Reza (SAKMA: 21399/293/97; 83431/293), Lengan (SAKMA: 1742/291), Koushk Sadeh village (SAKMA: 732/339/97; 49/339/97), and Nain (SAKMA: 10745/293/97). The restriction and prohibition of mourning for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) during Reza Shah's rule was a means of controlling public behavior and promoting a specific view of modern Iranian society. Generally, news of the restrictions and prohibitions on mourning ceremonies was met with strong resistance from the people of Isfahan, but in subsequent years, this resistance was gradually controlled and suppressed by the government to a significant degree, to the point where, during this period, people participated in mourning ceremonies while accepting the government's conditions and laws.

#### **4. Pahlavi II's Policies Regarding the Mourning Ceremonies of Imam Ḥusayn (1950-1977 AD/1330-1357 SH)**

During the Pahlavi II era, from the 1950s onward, mourning ceremonies were held officially and openly, but according to specific laws and regulations, and in a limited manner. Avery points to the importance of holding mourning ceremonies, writing: "Although Reza Shah and his son Mohammad Reza Shah attempted to implement a policy of secularizing the country, the 'Āshūrā ceremonies remained important days on the Iranian calendar." (Avery, 1988 AD/1367 SH: 139)

Another report by the Japanese researcher Ono, refer to the religious restrictions of the Pahlavi government after 1342 SH, states that "They were extremely careful about the situation and kept the Muharram mourning ceremonies very limited. For more than ten years, I witnessed how (the government) limited and controlled the Muharram mourning ceremonies

in various ways. This kind of suppression, which restricted ceremonies in which most people participated, was excessive." (Ono, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 103-104) Reports from European travelers about mourning ceremonies during the Pahlavi era (1925-1979 AD/1304-1357 SH) emphasize the restrictions and prohibitions, which ultimately led to more serious measures. The holding of these ceremonies within the framework of laws and regulations determined by the government demonstrates the importance of holding mourning ceremonies and the significance of this event.

Indeed, it can be acknowledged that the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) had long been ingrained in the Shiite culture of the people, and despite limitations, it gained even greater popularity.

#### **4.1. Supervision of Mourning Ceremonies**

Supervision of the mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) and the prevention of religious matters from being exploited for political incitement were among the first actions of the Pahlavi government regarding the Muharram mourning ceremonies in 1330 SH (SAKMA: 6668/293/97). In this regard, the government issued instructions on how to conduct the mourning ceremonies, especially for mourning processions on the days of *Tāsū‘ā* and *‘Āshūrā* (SAKMA: 322/364/97; 2687/293/97). Governmental documents and reports emphasized the maintenance of order and security during Muharram and Safar in Isfahan (SAKMA: 2583/291). For example, the report of the Isfahan police chief on the necessity of vigilance states: "During the first ten days of Muharram, the people of Isfahan engaged in mourning in their homes, Takayas (religious houses), and mosques, and on the nights and days of *Tāsū‘ā* and *‘Āshūrā*, organized groups of chest-beaters formed for mourning, moving through the relevant sections with complete order. With the prior preparations and the vigilance of the police officers, no untoward incident occurred, and order was maintained." (SAKMA: 3930/293/97) In this context, the government, in cooperation with the police, instructed all its officers to be fully prepared to deal with any possible incident on *Tāsū‘ā* and *‘Āshūrā* to prevent clashes and unrest. The action, follow-up, and emphasis on vigilance, maintaining order, and security in mourning ceremonies were consistently implemented in most of Isfahan's counties. Examples include Shah Reza (SAKMA: 923/364/97), Najafabad (SAKMA: 79948/293), Golpayegan (SAKMA: 17304/293/97), Khansar (SAKMA: 33139/293/97), and Sade (Khomeini Shahr) (SAKMA: 154/339/97). The maintenance of

order and security through supervision of mourning ceremonies was so widespread and effective that officers and village headmen who were unwilling to cooperate with the government were sometimes forced to do so in response to the government's needs, and they were careful to avoid direct or indirect anti-government propaganda.

The Pahlavi government, to exert stricter control and surveillance over religious ceremonies, mandated the cooperation of village headmen (Kadkhoda) and gendarmes throughout the country. The aim was to control and monitor even the most remote towns and villages. To this end, the Isfahan police department annually identified all mosques and religious gatherings (Hey'at) to oversee and maintain order during mourning ceremonies, publishing a register of mourning gatherings to ensure the cooperation of village headmen and gendarmes (SAKMA: 526/364/97). The Isfahan police department issued a confidential circular stating: "During Muharram, it is imperative to reiterate – and this has been sufficiently instructed before – that utmost care must be taken to maintain public order and prevent any actions contrary to central directives and regulations, ensuring that no untoward incident occurs." A copy of this letter was sent to the village headmen of all Isfahan counties, including: the headmen of Mobarakeh, Ghahderijan Langan, Bagh Baderan, Gazbarkhar, Dowlatabad Barkhar, Khorasgan, Rinan, and the municipality of Sade (SAKMA: 1942/291). Village headmen, attending mourning and mourning recitation ceremonies, were obligated to submit reports to the Isfahan police department (SAKMA: 401/364/97). Simultaneously, a police officer was present in mosques and homes during mourning recitations, reporting the proceedings and sermons to the police department (Sadr, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 308). Any negligence or shortcomings by village headmen and officers in controlling mourning recitations and ceremonies were punished by the police department (SAKMA: 469/364/97). Despite this, numerous reports indicate that these directives did not significantly alter the conduct of mourning ceremonies. The report of the village headman of Mobarakeh, Isfahan, supports this; he wrote in part: "By giving the necessary instructions to the headmen of the area of responsibility and taking the necessary precautions in this village, no incident occurred. Mourning recitations were held regularly in all villages and homes." (SAKMA: 2000/291) (cf. Appendix 3). Reports filed by village headmen and police officers regarding strict control and surveillance led the Pahlavi government to exert even greater pressure on the conduct of mourning ceremonies.

This demonstrates complete infiltration of mourning processions and locations, enabling rapid information gathering and reporting to the police.

#### **4.2. The Necessity of Controlling and Monitoring Preachers and Clerics**

The popularity and fame of preachers and clerics in the mourning ceremonies of Imam Ḥusayn, due to their elegies and lamentations, gave them power and popular support. During mourning periods, especially on *Tāsū'ā* and *Āshūrā*, they recounted the events of Karbala to the people. However, some preachers also addressed contemporary political and social issues, using the pulpit to criticize the government and incite and mobilize the people for political action (Mazaheri, 2022 AD/1402 AH: 510). Fear of the power and influence of the clergy during this period led to stricter control and surveillance of preachers and clerics during mourning ceremonies (Muharram), with clerics (preachers) often required to adhere to specific guidelines (SAKMA: 632/364/97). The aim of this control mechanism was to maintain social order and political stability by controlling and monitoring clerics (preachers) as a tool for ideological control. Clerics' and preachers' speeches, especially in mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn, provided the best opportunity to criticize the Pahlavi regime. Therefore, to prevent speeches against government policies and contemporary social issues (inflammatory speeches), clerics in Isfahan were required to sign pledges in 1345 SH (SAKMA: 372/364/97; 2687/293/97). In addition, the police forced those organizing mourning ceremonies and lamentation gatherings during Muharram to obtain permits and sign pledges (SAKMA: 965/364/97). Meanwhile, some clerics in Isfahan were permitted to perform Ta'ziyeh (passion plays) and deliver laments (SAKMA: 2563/291), but preachers and clerics whose backgrounds were not previously approved and who were banned from preaching had their names announced annually by the Isfahan police during Muharram and Safar. This strict government and police approach to mourning ceremonies continued until the end of the 1940s, with the gendarmerie adding to the list of banned preachers each year. A list of banned preachers and clerics during Muharram and Safar in Isfahan and other cities is available in archival documents (SAKMA: 814/364/97; 402/364/97; 3685/291; 406/364/97; 912/364/97).

The Pahlavi government aimed to centralize power and limit the influence of traditional religious authorities, often leading to tensions with religious communities. Controlling and monitoring the clergy (preachers) was so important to the Pahlavi government that it

provoked various reactions among the general public. In fact, the government's goal was to reduce their social interaction with society and the people, and ultimately diminish their power and influence.

#### **4.3. Preventing the Presence of Europeans at Mourning Ceremonies**

The presence of Europeans during Muharram, especially on *Tāsū 'ā* and *'Āshūrā*, was a major concern for Iranians. Some travel accounts from the Qajar and Pahlavi periods show that the presence of Europeans, due to their Christianity, was sometimes unobstructed, and Iranians treated them with tolerance. Flandin, who himself observed mourning ceremonies, writes in his travelogue: "During the mourning period, foreigners are respected." (Flandin, 1976 AD/1356 SH: 118) However, Wishard notes that foreign Christians, fearing potential attacks by Muslims during Muharram, preferred not to be in public places (Wishard, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 168). Benjamin explains this by stating that Iranians believe that the sacred scenes of Ta'ziyeh should not be witnessed by the impure eyes of a foreigner or someone outside the faith, and generally advises foreigners not to watch Ta'ziyeh at all; because the religious sentiments of the people are so aroused that they cannot tolerate a foreigner beside them (Benjamin, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 275). Therefore, it can be said that the reason for this might be some interactions and reactions with travelers who were religious minorities in some religious ceremonies, but this cannot be generalized to all travelers, as some travelers attended mourning ceremonies without hindrance.

During the second Pahlavi era, the presence of Europeans at mourning ceremonies was prevented. Richards, in his travelogue, refers to the dangers of "The presence of Westerners" at religious ceremonies in Iran and writes that "It is only in recent years that British subjects have been free to come and go in the streets during the Muharram ceremonies."

While the British consul previously requested that they remain in their homes and gardens during these days, Richards similarly advised Europeans residing in Iran to avoid mourning ceremonies. He further wrote that, "With all the rapid transformations currently underway in Iran, for the masses whose faith remains unshaken, the Muharram ceremonies are not merely an old tradition but a deeply religious practice, and they cannot tolerate the interference or criticism of non-Muslims." (Richards, 1963 AD/1343 SH: 120) Rosen, emphasizing the Europeans' absence from mourning ceremonies, suggested: "You must promise that tomorrow, your lips will never part, nor will you smile. If the crowd feels insulted, you will

never succeed in escaping their wrath or their clutches. Furthermore, our journey to this region will cause strained relations and misunderstandings between foreigners and Iranians. Never use a camera; the production and dissemination of religious ceremonies is an unforgivable crime." (Rosen, 1990 AD/1369 SH: 305) The sensitivity surrounding the presence of Europeans during these days continued until 1357 SH. This is well illustrated in the reports of travelers like Hunt in the final years of the Pahlavi regime, who noted that "I knew that foreigners were always advised to avoid such ceremonies, the reason being the unpleasantness of observing foreigners at such fervent religious ceremonies." (Hunt, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 43) A noteworthy point in this regard is that the meticulous recording of observations, hearsay, and Iranian behavior regarding the presence of Europeans during the Muharram mourning period in their travelogues demonstrates the people's reluctance to have Europeans present at the mourning ceremonies.

Government documents and reports show that serious measures were taken to prevent the presence of Europeans on the days of *Tāsū'ā* and *'Āshūrā* in Isfahan. The Isfahan police issued orders prohibiting and preventing the entry of foreign nationals into mourning processions (SAKMA: 3663/293/97; 6281/293/97). Photographing mourning ceremonies was another matter for which Europeans were prohibited (SAKMA: 558/293/97; 5165/293/97).

In this regard, while issuing a warning and emphasizing, the head of the Isfahan Tourist Organization, Cyrus Esfandiary, in 1345 AH (1966 AD), prohibited photography by Europeans, stating that: "Considering that during mourning periods, especially on *Tāsū'ā* and *'Āshūrā*, foreign tourists visiting Isfahan may wish to visit mosques, old neighborhoods, and mourning ceremonies, and may even wish to take photographs and videos, and this may hurt the feelings of mourners, and although, according to the order of the Isfahan Provincial Police Department, this organization has issued the necessary instructions to all travel and tourist agencies and hotels where foreign tourists usually stay, to strongly prevent guiding tourists, especially female tourists, to the aforementioned places, nevertheless, it is requested that your esteemed office also cooperate in this matter and strictly prohibit foreign tourists from visiting and photographing the aforementioned places." (SAKMA: 486/264/97) (cf. Appendix 5) The head of the Isfahan Provincial Police Department, Brigadier General Norouzi, emphasized that "To avoid any inappropriate encounters, order that foreigners refrain from entering mosques, Takayas, holy places, and religious sites in the city for sightseeing, and also from photographing mourning ceremonies and processions." (SAKMA: 478/264/97) Preventing the



entry of Europeans and foreigners into religious places and prohibiting filming of religious ceremonies aroused the religious and devout feelings of the people, which was carefully monitored and controlled in Isfahan.

#### **4.4. Publication of Advertisements and Announcements**

The police department, while announcing its readiness to prevent riots, obstacles, and problems, obliged the heads of mourning ceremonies and the owners of the venues to obtain permission to hold mourning ceremonies in Muharram. Otherwise, if mourning ceremonies were held secretly and clandestinely in some houses, the homeowners would be prosecuted and imprisoned. In the 1960s (1340s AH), the head of the national police department issued a notice to the head of the Isfahan police department (Brigadier General Porto):

With the arrival of Muharram, particularly the days of *Tāsū'ā* and *Āshūrā*, when the esteemed residents of Isfahan are engaged in mourning ceremonies, it is requested that you cooperate wholeheartedly with your police colleagues, who bear a heavy responsibility for maintaining order and peace. Efforts should be made to conduct the mourning ceremonies in a manner befitting the religion and the dignity of the country. Therefore, refrain from activities such as self-flagellation (*Qameh zani*), reenactments, self-imprisonment, displaying effigies, using *Kotal* (a type of mourning implement), constructing a symbolic marriage bed (*Hejleh*), displaying a symbolic two-winged steed (*Dhū al-Janāh*), displaying offerings (*Khancheh*), and other practices lacking religious sanction. Observe the following points: 1) All liquor stores and cafes/restaurants will be closed from 24:00 on the 8th of Muharram until 18:00 on the 12th of Muharram; 2) All cinemas and theaters will be closed from 24:00 on the 8th until 18:00 on the 12th of Muharram; 3) From 24:00 on the 8th of Muharram until 18:00 on the 12th of Muharram, the sound of music should not be heard in public places. 4. For the comfort and well-being of the esteemed residents of Isfahan, the installation of loudspeakers outside mosques and religious houses is strictly prohibited. Their use inside mosques and religious houses is contingent upon obtaining prior permission from the gendarmerie, and even then, it will be permitted only until 21:00 (SAKMA: 402/364/97) (cf. Appendix 2). The sensitivity surrounding the enforcement of these regulations was such that this announcement was sent to all counties of Isfahan to ensure that mourning ceremonies were conducted under closer supervision (SAKMA: 1098/293/97). Following this order, the gendarmerie administration emphasized that the people should cooperate in implementing this order. It is

important to note that documents and reports indicate that the people of Isfahan cooperated fully with the gendarmerie (SAKMA: 921/364/97). The points mentioned above demonstrate the Pahlavi government's insistence on and the people's cooperation in observing the laws and regulations governing mourning ceremonies. The government's determination to enforce this law in Isfahan was of particular importance.

#### **4.5. Mandatory Verification of the Backgrounds of Preachers by the Gendarmerie**

The Pahlavi government instructed the gendarmerie that, in order to plan for more precise control of mourning ceremonies, the backgrounds of preachers and those who delivered sermons had to be verified.

Therefore, verifying the backgrounds of religious reciters and obtaining commitments from them was another policy of the Pahlavi government to further restrict mourning ceremonies and recitations (Rawzah) in Isfahan (SAKMA: 543/364/97; 24968/293/97). Statistics on all mourning ceremonies and recitations (Rawzah) were recorded for more precise control and supervision by the Shahr bani (Gendarmerie). Preachers and persons who recited Rawzah in Isfahan were required to give commitments to prevent inflammatory speeches against the Pahlavi government (SAKMA: 509/364/97; 945/364/97; 943/364/97) (cf. Appendix 4). In this regard, Reciting Rawzah was conducted in coordination with the Shahr bani to prevent banned preachers in the counties of Isfahan (SAKMA: 403/364/97). Shah Reza (SAKMA: 544/364/97) and Qomsheh (SAKMA: 956/364/97) were among the counties that held mourning ceremonies after verifying the backgrounds of the Rawzah reciters. Statistics on the backgrounds of Rawzah (SAKMA: 920/364/97) and a list of the Rawzah reciting ceremonies of preachers and the control of Rawza reciting ceremonies in Isfahan (SAKMA: 542/364/97) show that the Pahlavi government closely monitored the backgrounds of Rawzah reciters and required government officials to assist the government with accurate reports and prevent inflammatory speeches by some of them.

#### **Conclusion**

The holding of mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) during the Pahlavi era occurred with two distinct approaches. Initially, Reza Shah allowed such ceremonies to gain public favor, but after coming to power, he began to impose prohibitions and restrictions. This trend continued until Mohammad Reza Shah came to power. Mourning ceremonies were gradually

restricted by the government, and this was part of a broader effort to modernize and secularize the country. The prohibition of mourning ceremonies was seen as a way to reduce the influence of religious practices and clergy in public life. At this time, the Pahlavi government decided to consider policies for the performance of mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn (AS) in both cities and other regions, so that they would be carried out according to a plan and with greater control.

This research selected Isfahan province due to the abundance of available documents. Analysis of archival documents reveals that the policies implemented by the Pahlavi government were unsatisfactory due to the forced interaction between the clergy and the government. Therefore, the Pahlavi government, through measures such as monitoring mourning ceremonies, controlling preachers and clerics, preventing European participation in mourning ceremonies, disseminating advertisements and announcements, and requiring police verification of the backgrounds of religious orators, sought to reduce the power and influence of religion in society. The Pahlavi government rigorously pursued religious restrictions, aiming for social control and preventing political discussions that might be initiated by preachers and clerics among the public. However, despite these restrictions and imposed pledges, these measures did not prevent the holding of ceremonies. Through the efforts of the people, Muharram and Safar mourning ceremonies and other mourning rituals continued during the Pahlavi era, albeit in more private and subdued forms. Ultimately, the conflicts surrounding these prohibitions highlighted the tension between modernization efforts and the preservation of traditional values in Iranian society, leading to increased dissatisfaction with the Pahlavi regime.

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558/293/97; 5165/293/97; 486/264/97; 478/264/97; 16568/310; 5106/293/97; 163310/293; 16311/310; 163308/310; 402/364/97; 1098/293/97; 921/364/97; 526/364/97; 1942/291; 401/364/97; 469/364/97; 2000/291; 543/364/97; 24968/293/97; 509/364/97; 945/364/97; 943/364/97.

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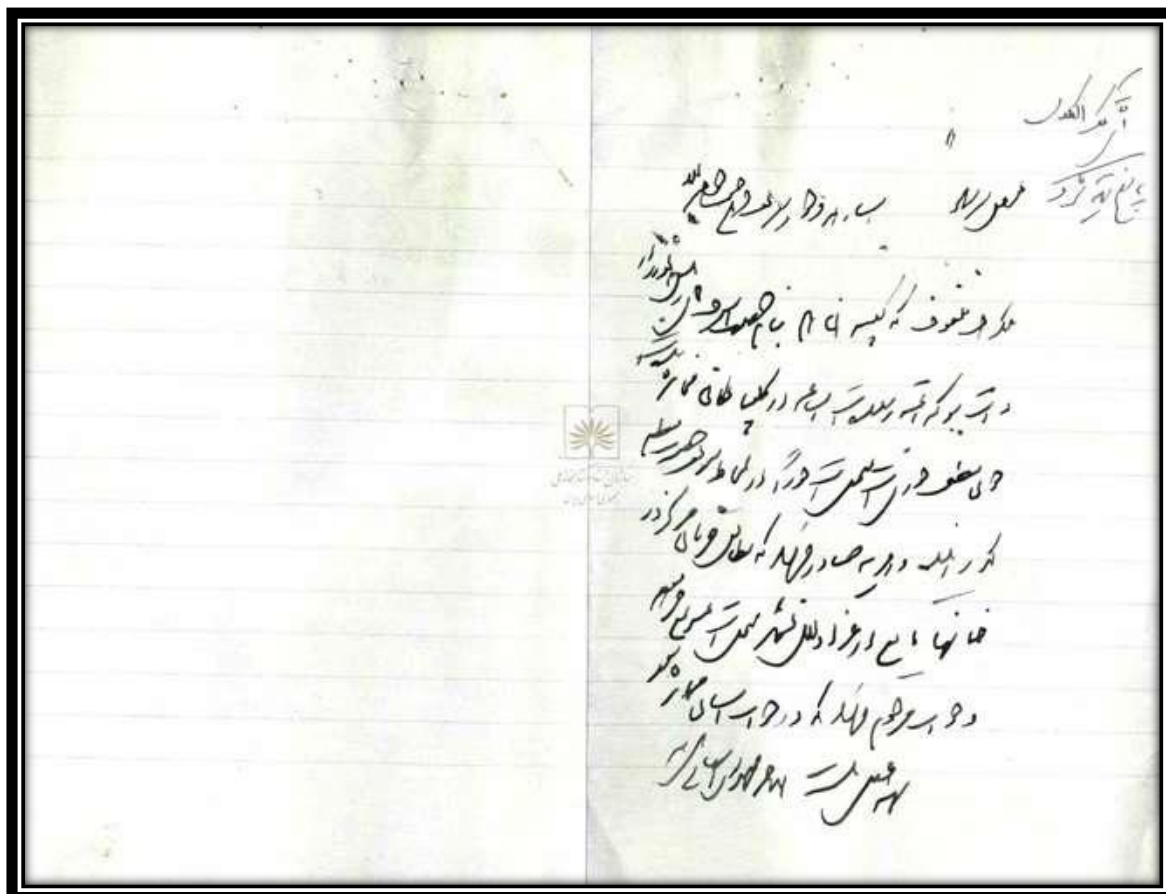
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### Attachments

Attachment (1): Telegram from Ayatollah Safi Golpayegani protesting the police's prevention of Muharram mourning ceremonies in mosques and public places in Golpayegan in 1320 AH.



(SAKMA: 310/16682)



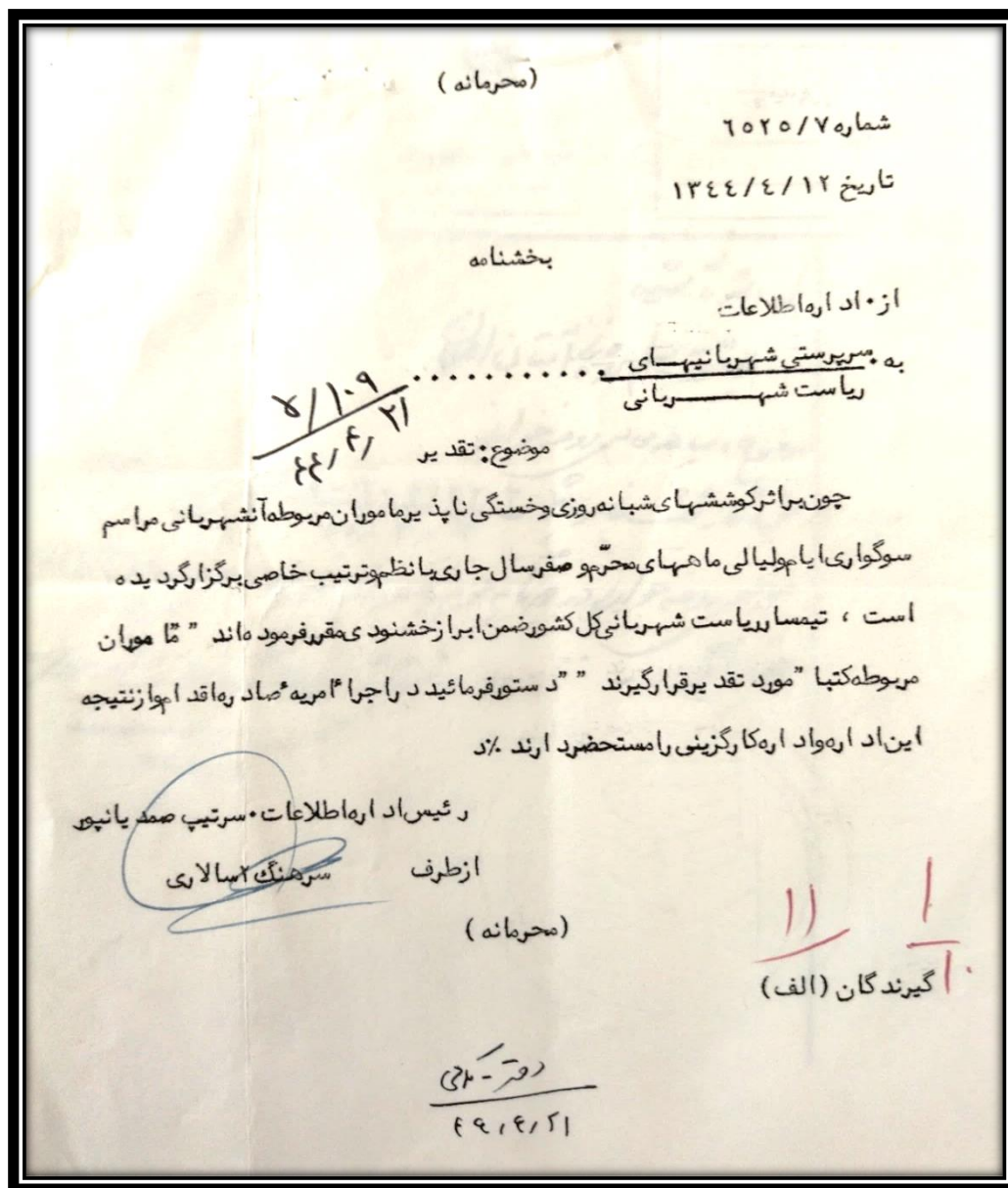
Attachment (2): Isfahan Province Police Department announcement regarding the observance of regulations during Muharram (Tāsū‘ā and ‘Ashūrā), 1348 AH.



(SAKMA: 97/364/402)

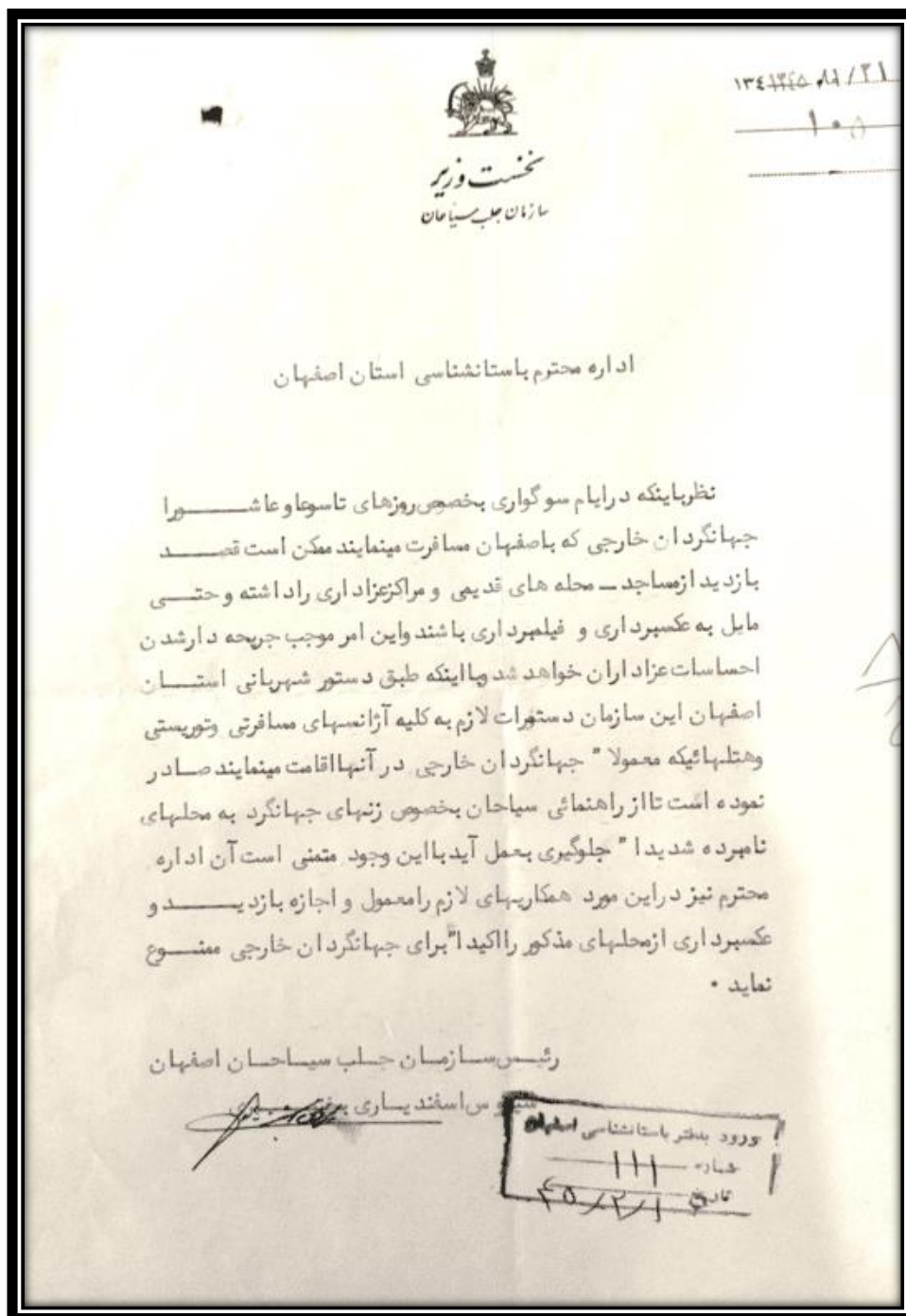


Attachment (4): Appreciation of officers for controlling Muharram and Safar mourning ceremonies in Isfahan, 1344 AH.



(SAKMA: 97/364/943)

Attachment (5): Prevention of European presence in Muharram and Safar mourning ceremonies in Isfahan, 1345 AH.



(SAKMA: 97/264/486)