

Introduction

By Hamid Algar ¹

It is in many ways remarkable that ten years after his death and twenty years after the triumph of the revolution that he led no serious, comprehensive biography of Imam Ruhullah al-Musawi al-Khomeini has yet been written, whether in Persian or any other language. He was, after all, the pre-eminent figure of recent Islamic history, for his impact, considerable enough in Iran itself, has also reverberated throughout much of the Muslim world and helped to transform the worldview and consciousness of many Muslims.

Indeed, it may be precisely this magnitude of the Imam's achievement, together with the complexity of his spiritual, intellectual, and political personality that has so far discouraged potential biographers. The materials available for the task are, however, as abundant as his accomplishments were varied, and the present writer hopes to take up the challenge in the near future. What follows is therefore nothing more than a preliminary sketch, intended to acquaint the reader with the outlines of the Imam's life and the main aspects of his person as an Islamic leader of exceptional stature.

¹ English-born Hamid Algar received his Ph.D. in oriental studies from Cambridge. Since 1965, he has served on the faculty of the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where he teaches Persian and Islamic history and philosophy. Dr. Algar has written extensively on the subject of Iran and Islam, including the books *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906* and *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Biographical Study in Iranian Modernism*. He has been following the Islamic movement in Iran with interest for many years. In an article published in 1972, he assessed the situation there and forecast the Revolution “more accurately than all the U.S. government's political officers and intelligence analysts,” in the words of Nicholas Wade, *Science* magazine. Dr. Algar has translated numerous books from Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, including the book *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*.

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