باسمه تعالی

Shiʿism in Iran Since the Safavids

THE SAFAVID PERIOD

The Safavids originated as a hereditary lineage of Sufi shaikhs centered on Ardabil, Shafeʿite in school and probably Kurdish in origin. Their immediate following was concentrated in Azerbaijan and Gilan, although they enjoyed broad prestige over a much wider area. The lifespan of the eponym, Shaikh Ṣafi-al-Din (650/1252-735/1335), corresponded almost exactly to the period of Il-khanid rule in Persia, and Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh, the celebrated vizier, was among those who bestowed land and other favors on the family. The meticulous piety that, according to hagiographical tradition, Ṣafi-al-Din displayed in childhood led him in early youth to embark on a search for a preceptor that took him to Shiraz, where he had hoped to join the circle of Najib-al-Din Bozguš, a Sohrawardi shaikh. Bozguš died shortly before his arrival, and Ṣafi-al-Din was advised instead to return to the northwest and seek out a reclusive member of the same lineage, Zāhed Gilāni. It was only after lengthy enquiries that Ṣafi-al-Din was able to locate him, in the Helyakarān district of Gilan. He was eighty-five years of age at the time, having passed much of his life in what has been described as “rural obscurity” and “prolonged mediocrity” (Aubin); it was Ṣafi-al-Din’s connection to him, cemented by marriage to his daughter, that came to earn him a degree of historical prominence.

The transformation of the Safavids from a hereditary Sufi order of conventional Sunnite orientation into a politico-military grouping espousing a deviant species of Shiʿism began with Ṣafi-al-Din's grandson, Ḵᵛāja ʿAli (d. 833/1429), a full half century after his death. In accordance with royal precedent, Timur had exempted from taxation the land holdings of the Safavids around Ardabil, but a more signal consequence of his favor came in 804/1402, when, at the request of Ḵᵛāja ʿAli, he released into his custody the captives he had taken from the Ottoman Sultan Bāyazid at the battle of Ankara (Sümer, pp. 6-7). *Ḡolāt* Shiʿism was infinitely more rife at the time in Anatolia than in Persia, and it seems entirely possible that Ḵᵛāja ʿAli, although the benefactor of these former prisoners and the effective head of the Safavid order, found it opportune to assimilate their beliefs rather than attempting to modulate them. Whatever be the case, the liberated prisoners became the nucleus of the Safavid fighting force, while at the same time Ḵᵛāja ʿAli established a network of agents and propagandists—called *ḵalifa* in keeping with Sufi usage—in Anatolia, the southern Caucasus, and parts of Azerbaijan and Gilan. The tenure of Ḵᵛāja ʿAli's successor, Shaikh Ebrāhim (d. 852/1448), was relatively uneventful, but the switch to militant *ḡolāt* Shiʿism became unmistakably clear with the next Safavid leader, Jonayd. He went by the title of sultan but in typical *ḡolāt* fashion also intimated that he was a divine incarnation. After a period of exile in Anatolia, he gathered a force of 12,000 in order to raid the Christian kingdom of Georgia but was killed in 865/1460 by the ruler of Širvān before he could reach his destination (Mazzaoui, p. 75). Similar fates attended Jonayd's son, Ḥaydar (killed in 894/1488 by the ruler of Širvān), who bestowed on

the Safavid strike force both its distinctive red headgear and the resulting designation, Qezelbāš, and in front of whom his followers made devotional prostration; and his grandson, Solṭān ʿAli , killed in battle by the Āq Qoyunlu ruler, Rostam. It was against this background that Shah Esmāʿil (q.v.) arose; proclaiming himself in ecstatic profusion a reincarnation of Imam ʿAli, the Twelfth Imam reappeared, and none other than the godhead himself, he lost no time in beginning the coercive propagation of Shiʿism, initially in its *ḡolāt* form.

It will be noted that almost all the events accompanying the rise of the Safavids to power took place in Anatolia, the southern Caucasus, and Azerbaijan. The events underway in those regions can be viewed, *inter alia*, as an intra-Turkoman struggle, in which alignments were not consistently shaped by religious allegiance. Not only did the Safavids find themselves at odds with the Qarā Qoyunlus, a dynasty with Shiʿite tendencies; they also intermarried with the Āq Qoyunlus, the Sunnite dynasty whose rule Shah Esmāʿil brought to an end. The triumph of the Safavids thus spelled an end to these Turkoman rivalries, and its principal consequences might have been felt principally in Anatolia rather than Persia had it not been for the formidable power of the Ottomans; the Safavids had, after all, been able to generate far more enthusiasm for their cause in Anatolia than in Persia, and it was primarily there that the Qezelbāš were recruited (Sümer, passim). It might indeed be argued that the rise to power of the Safavids constituted another Turkic invasion of Persia, one proceeding from the west rather than the east; insofar as the ancestors of the Qezelbāš had once passed through Persia en route to Anatolia, it

might also be called a case of nomadic reflux. The ultimate result was, however, the formation of a distinctively Persian state dedicated to the propagation of Shiʿism. Although coercion played a large part in the initial stages of this venture, it is plain that far more was involved in the profound and lasting assimilation of Shiʿism that took place, which transformed Persia and made of it the principal stronghold and even—in an ahistorical sense—the homeland of Shiʿism.

It was, however, nothing less than a reign of terror that inaugurated the new dispensation. On capturing Tabriz in 907/1501, a city two-thirds Sunnite in population, Shah Esmāʿil threatened with death all who might resist the adoption of Shiʿite prayer ritual in the main congregational mosque, and he had Qezelbāš soldiers patrol the congregation to ensure that none raise his voice against the cursing of the first three caliphs, viewed as enemies of the Prophet's family. In Tabriz and elsewhere, gangs of professional execrators known as the *tabarrāʾiān* would accost the townsfolk at random, forcing them to curse the objectionable personages on pain of death. Selective killings of prominent Sunnites occurred in a large number of places, notably Qazvin and Isfahan, and in Shiraz and Yazd, outright massacres took place. Sunnite mosques were desecrated, and the tombs of eminent Sunnite scholars destroyed (Aubin, 1970, pp. 237-38; idem, 1988, pp. 94-101).

An integral part of the Safavid imposition of Shiʿism was the eclipsing or suppressing of the Sufi orders, most of them Sunnite in their orientation. As Ebn Karbalāʾi lamented, Shah Esmāʿil "uprooted

and eradicated most of the lineages of *sayyed*s and shaikhs" and "crushed all the *selsela*s [lines of succession], destroying the graves of their ancestors, not to mention what befell their successors" (II, pp. 159, 491). The extirpation of the Kāzaruniya, the oldest Sufi order in Persia existing at the time, was certainly abrupt and thoroughgoing: when Shah Esmāʿil conquered Fars in 909/1503, he desecrated the tomb in Kāzarun of its founder, Abu Esḥāq, and massacred some 4,000 people in its vicinity (Aubin, 1959, p. 58). In general, however, the process was gradual and sporadic, if unmistakable in its tendency; the mid-10th/16th century appears to have been a turning point. Although the Lālaʾi branch of the Kobrawiya to which Ebn al-Karbalāʾi belonged never converted to Shiʿism, one of its members served Shah Esmāʿil as *ṣadr* (q.v. at *iranica.com*) before all trace of this hereditary line of shaikhs disappeared.

The Naqšbandiya, an order emphatic in its adherence to Sunnism, survived for a remarkably long period in northwest Persia. Ṣonʿ-Allāh Kuzakonāni (d. 929/1523), a disciple of ʿAlāʾ-al-Din Maktabdār of Herat, fled Tabriz for Bitlis when Shah Esmāʿil took the city, but, impelled by nostalgia, returned there several years later. Although he refused the full prostration before the shah decreed by protocol, he lived out the rest of his life apparently unmolested and left behind two *ḵalifa*s; they were active, not in the city itself, but in its rural hinterland, which may account for their ability to function. One of them, Darviš Jalāl-al-Din of Ḵosrowšāh, was succeeded by Mawlānā Elyās of Bādāmyār (d. 965/1558), but the situation seems to have become untenable soon after his death. Moḥammad Bādāmyāri, a

successor to Mawlānā Elyās, found it politic to quit the region of Tabriz for Urmia, a still largely Kurdish and therefore Sunnite city; his line survived there for some three generations, although one of its members, Shaikh Maḥmud, decided, with ultimately fatal results, to seek his fortunes in Diyarbekir. In Qazvin, the propagation of the Naqšbandiya, under the auspices of Sayyed ʿAli Kordi, a disciple of Ḵᵛāja Aḥrār, actually started after the Safavids had taken control. Perhaps because of his success in attracting devotees, he was summoned to Tabriz and executed in 925/1519 (Algar, 2003, p. 22). The five *ḵalifa*s that he left all died peaceful deaths, but they left no spiritual issue. The persecution of Naqš-bandis may have been more general than this sparse record suggests, for Mirzā Maḵdum Šarifi (d. 994/1586), a Sunnite notable who took refuge with the Ottomans, writes that "whenever they suspect anyone of engaging in contemplation (*morāqaba*), they say 'he is a Naqšbandi' and deem it necessary to kill him" (quoted in Eberhard, p. 187).

Few Shiʿite scholars of note appear to have existed in Persia at the time of the Safavid takeover, even in Qom and Kāšān, long established centers of the creed, and many Sunnite scholars chose to migrate to India, Arabia, the Ottoman lands, and Central Asia, rather than rallying to Shiʿism and the Safavids. The positive and pacific propagation of Shiʿism in Persia fell therefore to the lot of Arab scholars hailing from Jabal ʿĀmel (q.v. at *iranica .com*) in Syria (or, in terms of present-day geography, Lebanon), Iraq (especially the city of Ḥella), Qaṭif in northeastern Arabia, and Bahrayn. Their arrival in Persia has sometimes been designated as a migration, motivated in the

case of the ʿĀmelis by alleged Ottoman persecution (see Jaʿfar al-Mohājer). If by "migration" is meant a wholesale and permanent exodus, the term is misapplied, for many of the scholars in question traveled back and forth between Persia and their homelands, with the result that many learned families developed separate but interrelated branches in Jabal ʿĀmel, Iraq, and Persia (a phenomenon that has persisted down to the present). The Ottomans certainly accorded privileged status to Sunnite Islam and more particularly to the Hanafite school, but in accordance with the pragmatism they generally observed in religious matters, they did not systematically persecute the Shiʿites of the Arab lands, and even the militant partisans of the Safavid cause in Anatolia were subject to only sporadic massacre. Persia was, however, a land where substantial patronage awaited the Shiʿite ulema as well as a unique opportunity for the propagation of Shiʿism. For their part, the Safavids welcomed these scholarly guests for several reasons: they represented an element that at least initially was unconnected to any of the military or bureaucratic factions with which they had to deal, and their intimate knowledge of Sunnism was a clear advantage in the sectarian polemics that accompanied the recurrent wars between the Safavids and their Sunnite neighbors, the Ottomans to the west and the Uzbeks to the east.

ʿĀmeli scholars began traveling to Persia already in the time of Shah Esmāʿil. The most significant of these early arrivals was ʿAli Karaki Moḥaqqeq, born at Karak in 870/1465, a student of prominent scholars in Ḥella and Najaf. He took the initiative of visiting Esmāʿil at Isfahan in 910/1504, and six years later he was invited by him to Herat

and Mashad to help propagate Shiʿism in those still largely Sunnite cities. Karaki's influence was consolidated during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb, who bestowed on him land and, more significantly, titles such as *mojtahed al-zamān* (jurist of the age) and *nāʾeb al-Emām* (deputy of the [Occulted] Imam); the monarch even went so far as to proclaim Karaki more entitled to kingship than himself and the ruler, simply one of his executive officials (Lambton, p. 77). This was, of course, a fiction, but one convenient for both parties: it enabled Ṭahmāsb to claim a species of religious legitimacy, mediated from the Occulted Imam by Karaki, and it placed Karaki at the hand of the nascent hierarchy of Shiʿite divines. The task he and his colleagues faced in the propagation of Shiʿism was twofold: to normalize the Shiʿism professed by the Safavids and their soldiery, and to persuade recalcitrant Sunnites of the veracity of Twelver Shiʿism. In a sense, the two goals were linked, for the ʿĀmeli scholars disapproved of the violent methods applied by the Qezelbāš in confronting the Sunnites and regarded their own learning and powers of debate as more efficacious (Abisaab, pp. 16-17). They did not, however, repudiate the activities of the *tabarrāʾiān*, and Karaki wrote a treatise justifying the cursing of Abu Bakr and ʿOmar. Several of his descendants inherited his prestige, most notably his grandson, the philosopher Mir Dāmād (d. 1041/1631; see DĀMĀD), and the hereditary transmission of scholarly prowess and power within a handful of families was to become one of the hallmarks of Persian religious life, in the Safavid period and beyond.

A number of other factors were also influential in suffusing Persian culture with the ethos of Shiʿism. Pilgrimage (*ziārat*) to the shrines of eminent Sufis had been widespread in pre-Safavid times, for such purposes as the making of vows and the seeking of intercession; now *emāmzāda*s—the tombs of descendants of the Imams—became the encouraged focus of pious visitation. It is worth noting, however, that most of the important *emāmzāda*s antedated by far the rise of the Safavids; that they had attracted Sunnite as well as Shiʿite visitors; and that no wholesale validation of dubious *emāmzāda*s can be shown to have taken place. The pre-existence of *emām-zāda*s on Persian soil was a fortuitous circumstance that helped in what might be called the geographical conversion of the land. Foremost among the sacred sites was the shrine of Imam ʿAli al-Reżā in Mashad and the complex of buildings surrounding it. Already much adorned by the later Timurids, it was the object of special attention by Shah ʿAbbās (q.v.), whose pilgrimages on foot to the shrine were an inspired form of dynastic propaganda. Qom, site of the burial of Imam ʿAli al-Reżā's sister, was second only to Mashad as a goal of pilgrimage, but it was overshadowed by Isfahan as a center of learning despite its earlier prominence in the development of Shiʿite scholarship. Like Mashad, Qom was the object of royal attention in the Safavid period; four successive rulers chose to be buried there: Ṣafi (d. 1052/1642), ʿAbbās II (d. 1077/1666), Solaymān (d. 1105/1694), and Shah Solṭān-Ḥosayn (d. 1135/1722).

The calendar also played a discernible role in the lasting popular assimilation of Shiʿism. The commemoration of the martyrdom of

Imam Ḥosayn on ʿĀšurāʾ (q.v.), the tenth day of the month of Moḥarram, came effectively to be the most significant religious occasion of the year, marked by ceremonies of mourning that became progressively more elaborate throughout the Safavid period, culminating in the dramatic performances known as *taʿzia*. The recitation of verse or prose depictions of his sufferings, together with those of other members of the Prophet's lineage, was regarded as a meritorious act that might be undertaken at any time during the year. Widely celebrated, too, was the ʿId al-Ḡadir, Ḏu'l-Ḥejja 18, the day on which, according to Shiʿite belief, the Prophet had nominated Imam ʿAli as his successor. The negative counterpart of this occasion was the annual festival of ʿOmarkošān, the often ribald celebration of the assassination of ʿOmar, the second caliph.

The near-complete eradication of Sunnism from the Iranian plateau, achieved by these and other means, must clearly have been gradual, and at least in some places it consisted initially of the pragmatic and superficial acceptance of a coerced creed. The Sunnite notables of Qazvin in particular proved obdurate, and several of them were executed during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb for religious deviance (Bacqué-Grammont, p. 83, n. 231). Nonetheless, enough of them survived to qualify (or claim to qualify) for the reward offered by Esmāʿil II during his brief Sunnite interregnum to all who had steadfastly refused to curse the first three caliphs (Golsorkhi, p. 479). There is evidence, too, for the persistence of Sunnite loyalties in some localities into the reign of ʿAbbās I, particularly in eastern Persia. In 1008/1599 he launched a campaign of persecution against the Sunnites

of Sorḵa (Semnān), but three decades later Sunnism was still widespread in the city, although less so in its environs. The same monarch's exclusion of Sunnites from the tax exemptions he occasionally decreed points both to a significant survival of Sunnism in certain areas and to a determination to eradicate it. As far west as Hamadān, the Sunnites were numerous enough to provide the headman (*kadḵodā*) of the city; he was executed by Shah ʿAbbās in 1017/1608 (Arjomand, pp. 120-21). In only one recorded instance was ʿAbbās ready to countenance the unmolested profession of Sunnism in a territory under his control; on a visit to Tāleš, he resisted suggestions that he compel its people to abandon their hereditary Shafeʿism, citing the military services they had provided to his ancestors (Algar, forthcoming). Some areas of Tāleš did convert to Shiʿism, but it may have been as late as the 19th century.

Generally speaking, however, by the end of the 16th century, Sunnism had effectively vanished from most of the central Safavid domains. The patchwork of pre-Safavid Persia yielded to a fairly straightforward pattern of Shiʿism dominating the central plateau and Sunnism relegated to frontier areas that were either contested with neighboring powers or inhabited by ethnic minorities. The Kurds ruled by Persia retained their traditional Shafeʿite loyalties (excepting, of course, the Ahl-e Ḥaqq), although the amirs of Ardalān as well as some Kurds in the city of Kermānšāh and its environs did make the transition to Shiʿism. Herat passed back and forth between the Safavids and the Uzbeks, and each period of dominance was accompanied by the persecution of Sunnites or Shiʿites according to the order of the day.

The misery visited on the Sunnites by the Safavids, especially during the reign of Shah Esmāʿil, was, however, more severe than that endured by the Shiʿites under Uzbek dominance; while the Safavids engaged in wholesale massacre, to a degree that alarmed even the indigenous Shiʿite population, the Uzbeks tended to focus on well-to-do Shiʿites, whose wealth could be confiscated under the pretext of combatting heresy (Szuppe, pp. 121-42). As a result of these and subsequent contests lasting into the early 19th century, both Sunnites and Shiʿites were to be found on either side of the eastern frontier of Persia when it was finally demarcated. Jām (also known as Torbat-e Sayḵ Jām) became the most significant city in Persian Khorasan with a Sunnite population; Zayn-al-ʿĀbedin Širvāni (d. 1253/1837) remarked of its population, with obvious displeasure, that "they are all Hanafites and extremely fanatical" (p. 197). The population of Širvān (Šarvān), a principality in the southern Caucasus ruled by Persia, with intervals of Ottoman rule, from the time of Esmā'il I until its annexation by Russia in 1813, remained Hanafite, although a Shiʿite minority came into being. Severe clashes between Sunnites and Shiʿites were frequent as late as the 19th century, with occasional involvement of Daghistani tribesmen on behalf of the Sunnites (Širvāni, p. 325). Most of Lārestān and the northern shore of the Persian Gulf was able to retain a Shafeʿite character, in large part perhaps because of the region's traditional mercantile links with Arabia and India.

The Shiʿism which thus transformed the religious map of Persia was by no means uniform. Among the matters on which disagreement persisted among the ulema throughout the Safavid period was the

precise juristic status of the monarchy. Despite public displays of drunkenness and other violations of morality by several Safavid monarchs, and the suggestion, noted by the traveler Jean Chardin (q.v.), that a religious scholar ought ideally to rule directly, not the shah (Chardin, VI, p. 65), the debate centered not on the institution of monarchy, but on two concrete issues in jurisprudence: the religiously mandated land tax known as the *ḵarāj*, and the Friday prayer. Insofar as the *ḵarāj* was indistinguishably merged with other sources of state revenue, the acceptance of royal stipends by a religious scholar could be taken to imply full acceptance of the Safavid state as a legitimate dispensation. In keeping with his general validation of Shah Ṭahmāsb—albeit fictively as his own appointee—Karaki justified his levying of the *ḵarāj* and the resultant permissibility of receiving state funds. He was opposed in this by his contemporary, Ebrāhim Qaṭifi, and later in the century by Aḥmad Moqaddas Ardabili (d. 993/1585, q.v.; Lambton, pp. 271-72).

The permissibility of holding the Friday prayer during the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, who alone might either lead the prayer or depute someone to do on his behalf, had long been a subject of contention among Shiʿite jurists. In keeping with the status of *nāʾeb al-Emām*, Karaki declared himself authorized to organize Friday prayers and attendance at them to be religiously incumbent (*wājeb*). This was the view of many other scholars, including major figures of the period such as Bahāʾ-al-Din ʿĀmeli (q.v.), Fayż Kāšāni, and Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi, but it was opposed by Qaṭifi and one of Majlesi's students, Fāżel Hendi (d. 1137/1724), who saw in the holding

of Friday prayers an unauthorized revival of the "special deputyship" of the Twelfth Imam that had ended with the death of his fourth named agent in 330/941 (Lambton, pp. 273-74). In the time of Shah ʿAbbās (1587-1629), the name of the monarch was included in the sermon pronounced before the Friday prayer, in clear imitation of Sunnite and specifically Ottoman practice, and he was himself encouraged to attend, with limited success, making the prayers a celebration simultaneously of royal and clerical authority. The appointment of an Emām-e Jomʿa (Friday prayer leader) was at the disposition of the monarch, as were positions of shifting importance such as the *ṣadr-al-mamālek*, *šayḵ-al-Eslām* (administrative head of the religious class in the capital and other major cities), and, towards the end of the Safavid period, the new clerical executive, the *mollā-bāši*. Despite differences among the ulema on issues touching the Safavid monarchy, it may be said that their view of the institution was instrumentalist: it was accepted as a reality, empirically useful for the establishment of a *šariʿa*-oriented society, but never incorporated into their system of belief, in marked contrast to the Sunnite embrace of sultans and caliphs.

Another set of differences among the Shiʿite ulema of Safavid Persia related, not to details of jurisprudence with political significance, but to the very methodology of their discipline. Rationalist and traditionalist currents had both long existed in Shiʿite jurisprudence, and by the Saljuq period they had come to be designated as Oṣuli and Aḵbāri respectively. The Oṣulis espoused the permissibility, even necessity, of recourse to juristic exertion (*ejtehād*)

for the deduction of detailed religious rulings from the sources of the *šarʿia* during the continued occultation of the Twelfth Imam; by contrast, the Aḵbāris laid heavy emphasis on the primary or even exclusive evidentiary value of the traditions (*aḵbār*) of the Prophet and the Imams. This division of learned opinion should not, however, be regarded as even approximately similar to that which opposed Hanafites to Shafeʿis in pre-Safavid Iran (although Aḵbāris polemically accused Oṣulis of surreptitious borrowings from Hanafite doctrine); the word *maḏhab* cannot be applied to these two traditions of Shiʿite jurisprudence. For whatever the historical reality that had played out in the cities of Persia, the Hanafites and Shafeʿites extended to each other a theoretical recognition of legitimacy, a situation that did not obtain between Oṣulis and Aḵbāris; each group identified its own position as the perennially authentic doctrine of Shiʿism and regarded that of the other as an innovation. Moreover, the divide between the contesting tendencies in Shiʿite jurisprudence had no demographic reflection; cities were not separated into localities owing allegiance to the one or the other.

It was in the Safavid period that Oṣuli-Aḵbāri polemics came acrimoniously to the fore, doubtless because the ulema were now involved for the first time in ministering to a demographically significant population. Mollā Mo-ḥammad Amin Astarābādi (d. 1033/1624 or 1036/1627, q.v.) provided a comprehensive statement of the Aḵbāri position in his *al-Fawāʾed al-madaniya*, a work written in Mecca, not Medina, despite the implication of its title. This book became the target of several refutations, and its author was accused of

introducing strife into the Shiʿite community. The Aḵbāri position nonetheless enjoyed supremacy throughout the 17th and much of the 18th centuries, and many luminaries of the period adhered to it, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis; among them were Moḥammad-Taqi Majlesi (d. 1070/1660), Mollā Moḥsen Fayż Kāšāni (d. 1091/1680), and Neʿmat-Allāh Jazāʾeri (d. 112/1700). The prominence of the Aḵbāris was reflected also in the compilation of voluminous collections of Shiʿite Hadith, especially the *Wāfi* of Fayż Kāšāni and the *Tafṣil wasāʾel al-Šiʿa* of Ḥorr al-ʿĀmeli (d. 1104/1693, q.v.; Stewart, pp. 179-85).

The Safavid period is notable also for the flourishing, among a significant number of the Shiʿite scholars, of gnostic and philosophical thought, two overlapping disciplines known respectively as *ʿerfān* (q.v.) and *ḥekmat*; the difference between the two is primarily one of emphasis, experiential with *ʿerfān* and intellectual with *ḥekmat*. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the "school of Isfahan" in that several of the scholars in question resided in Isfahan, which was indeed the intellectual as well as political capital of Persia from the beginning of the 11th/17th century onwards (see isfahan school of philosophy); the most significant of them was, however, Ṣadr-al-Din Širāzi, also known as Mollā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640, q.v. at *iranica.com*), who spent much of his life in a village near Qom and then in Shiraz. A number of elements were fused in this endeavor: Avicennan philosophy as mediated by Naṣir-al-Din Ṭusi (d. 673/1274), especially its emanationist elements; the Ešrāqi (see ILLUMINATIONISM) thought of Sohravardi Maqtul (d. 587/1191), which claimed to transmit the

teachings both of Hermes and of ancient Persia; and, most importantly, the concepts and worldview of Moḥyi-al-Din Ebn al-ʿArabi (d. 638/1240), entitled Šayḵ al-Akbar (the supreme shaikh), justly so in view of his lasting influence both on Sunnite Sufism and on Shiʿite *ʿerfān* and *ḥekmat*. An alternative characterization of the "school of Isfahan"—which was not of course unified in every respect—would be that it sought to unify the perspectives of obedience to revelation (*šarʿ*), mystical illumination (*kašf*), and rational demonstration undertaken by the philosophers. In addition to Ṣadrā, mention may be made of his two principal students, ʿAbd-al-Razzāq Lāhiji (d. 1072/1661) and Fayż Kāšāni; Bahāʾ-al-Din ʿĀmeli (d. 1030/1622), perhaps the most versatile scholar of the entire Safavid period; Mir Dāmād, a grandson of ʿAli Karaki; and Mir Abu'l-Qāsem Fendereski (d. 1050/1640, q.v. at *iranica.com*).

Quite apart from the profound influence of Ebn al-ʿArabi, *ʿerfān* had several other elements undeniably reminiscent of Sufism: a terminology delineating spiritual progress toward the divine presence, an emphasis on the relationship between master and disciple, and a claim to initiatic descent from Imam ʿAli and the subsequent Imams of the Prophet's Household. Sufism had, however, generally borne a Sunnite stamp throughout its history, a feature that was experienced as problematic, and most of the practitioners of *ʿerfān* therefore sought to distance themselves from it. Some scholars, notably Nur-Allāh Šuštari (d.1019/1610) in his *Majāles al-moʾmenin*, therefore sought retrospectively to claim for Shiʿism all those Sufis who had expressed their veneration for the Imams. A more

reasonable undertaking was Fayż Kāšāni's authoring of *al-Maḥajjat al-bayżā fi eḥyāʾ al-eḥyāʾ*, a redaction of Ḡazāli's *Eḥyāʾ ʿolum-al-din*, in which Hadith from Sunnite sources are replaced by those of Shiʿite provenance.

In the light of all this, it is not surprising that Sufi orders with Shiʿite affiliations fared not much better than their Sunnite counterparts. Shah Esmāʿil bestowed on Shah Qāsem Fayżbaḵš (d. 917/1511), son of Sayyed Moḥam-mad Nurbaḵš, an extension of the family lands near Rayy as a token of his favor, but Shah Qāsem's son Bahāʾ-al-Din earned the wrath of the same Safavid ruler not long after, and, as it was delicately phrased by Moḥammad Ḵᵛāndmir, "in accordance with the requirements of fate, he was interrogated and passed away" (*Ḥabib al-siar* IV, pp. 611-12). Perhaps as a defensive measure, another grandson of Nurbaḵš, Qiwām-al-Din, who had already tried to establish his dominance in Rayy, began building castles and fortifications on the family lands, but to no avail, for he was put to death in 937/1530 on the orders of Shah Ṭahmāsb (Bashir, 2003, pp. 87-92). Although the Nurbaḵšiya no longer functioned thereafter as an organized Sufi community with hereditary leadership, it persisted as a line of spiritual filiation; scholars as prominent as Bahāʾ-al-Din ʿĀmeli and Mollā Moḥsen Fayż Kāšāni have been identified as Nurbaḵši.

As for the Neʿmat-Allāhis, their presence in Persia as an active Sufi tradition (*ṭariqat*) was probably on the decline even before the Safavid seizure of power, thanks to Shah Ḵalil-Allāh's migration to the Deccan some sixty years earlier. Members of the family held a number

of administrative posts under both Esmāʿil and Ṭahmāsb, primarily in Yazd, and they were given wives from the Safavid house. Some of them, it is true, also laid claim to spiritual functions and used typical *ṭariqat* names intended to betoken high status, but their prominence, both spritual and worldly, was at an end by the mid-11th/17th century.

The only Sufi order to survive the Safavid era more or less unscathed was the Ḏahabiya, a Shiʿite offshoot of the Kobrawiya that can be traced with reasonable certainty to Ḡolām-ʿAli Nišāpuri (d. 938/1531). He and his followers may indeed have participated in the propagation of Shiʿism in early Safavid Khorasan, aided in the task by the roots they struck among merchants and artisans. The Ḏahabis avoided any hint of antinomian tendency by donning the garb of the ulema and presenting their precepts and practices as a natural extension of the teachings of Shiʿism. They nonetheless came under attack in Mashad early in the 17th century with the result that they transferred their center to the more congenial atmosphere of Fars; even there their security was threatened in the closing decades of Safavid rule, causing Sayyed Qoṭb-al-Din Nirizi (d. 1173/1760), their leader at the time, to seek refuge in Najaf. This was the last external crisis the order had to face (Zarrinkub, 1983, p. 263).

Non-Twelver Shiʿite communities were much affected by the rise of the Safavid dispensation. The Zaydis of Daylam and Gilān were persuaded to embrace Twelver Shiʿism during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb (1524-76), apparently without coercion. Although small Zaydi

communities may have persisted much later, this effectively marked the final stage in the absorption of Zaydism by Twelver Shiʿism in Persia, a process which had begun much earlier (Madelung, p. 92).

As for the Ismaʿilis (see ISMAILISM), their fortunes were, typically, more complicated. Imams of the Qāsemšāhi line had established themselves at Anjodān, a large village near Maḥallāt in central Persia, not long before the Safavid triumph; Mostanṣer Beʾ-llāh (d. 885/1480), thirty-second of the line, is the first Imam known definitely to have resided there, and like his predecessors he appears to have affected a Sufi exterior, possibly as a Neʿmat-ollāhi initiate, for he was known locally at Shah Qalandar. From Anjodān, apparently successful efforts were made to contact Ismaʿili communities scattered across Persia and to have them acknowledge the authority of the Qāsemšahi Imam by sending him their tribute. The thirty-fifth Imam, Nur-al-Din Moḥammad Abu Ḏarr ʿAli, a contemporary of Shah Esmāʿil, gained the favor of the Safavids sufficiently to be given a wife from the royal household, which suggests that he was feigning Twelver beliefs (the practice of *taqiya*; Daftary, 1990, pp. 471-73). The nature of Qāsemšahi belief became still more opaque when Abu Ḏarr ʿAli's son and successor, Morād Mirzā, began associating with the Noqṭawis of Kāšān, a millenarian sect with insurrectionary ambitions. As a result, in 982/1574, Ṭahmāsb ordered him to be captured and his community in Anjodān to be punished; he escaped but was recaptured and executed (Daftary, 1990, pp. 472-73). The next Qāsemšahi Imam, Ḏu'l-Faqār ʿAli Ḵalil-Allāh, reverted to the relatively straightforward ruse of professing Twelver Shiʿism; he was rewarded with a Safavid bride, and his

community, with exemption from taxation. The affairs of Anjodān thereafter remained peaceful until the transfer of the Imamate to the nearby village of Kahak.

The rival Moḥammadšāhi Imamate was vested at the time of the Safavid conquest in the person of a certain Shah Ṭāher Ḥosayni. Like his predecessors in the Mo-ḥammadšāhi line, he resided in Ḵund, a locality near Qazvin, before being invited to the court of Shah Esmāʿil. There he aroused suspicion because of the devoted following that indiscreetly accompanied him while he was making his rounds, but he was permitted to settle in Kāšān. The resident Twelver scholars of the city seem to have penetrated his cover of *taqiya*, and they accordingly denounced him to Shah Esmāʿil; in addition, like his Qāsemšahi rival, Morād Mirzā, he was consorting with the Noqṭawis then proliferating in Kāšān. Accordingly, in 926/1520, an order went forth for Shah Ṭāher's execution, but he succeeded in fleeing to the Deccan, where he attached himself to a local ruler, Borhān Neẓāmšāh, and converted him to Twelver Shiʿism. Such zeal on the part of an Ismaʿili Imam for the propagation of a fundamentally incompatible doctrine does indeed "seem rather strange" (Daftary, 1990, p. 489), and it can be explained only by invoking, yet again, *taqiya*. Indeed, it was a question of multiple dissimulation, for Shah Ṭāher additionally cultivated links to leaders of the Neʿmat-Allāhi order, who like himself were exiles from Persia. His son, Ḥaydar, however, was hospitably lodged at the court of Ṭahmāsb when sent there on a mission by Borhān Neẓāmšāh; he returned to the Deccan on the death of Shah Ṭāher in 925/1549. The

Moḥammadšāhi line was perpetuated in India until the late 12th/18th century, but it no longer had any following in Persia.

The Noqṭawi movement with which both Ismaʿili branches became entwined originated as what might be called a super-heresy, that is, as an offshoot of the Ḥorufiya that was regarded as heretical by the parent movement itself. Its founder was Maḥmud of Pasiḵān, a village near Fuman in Gilan, known to the Ḥorufis as Maḥmud-e Mardud ("Maḥmud the rejected") or Maḥmud-e Maṭrud ("Maḥmud the banished") after his expulsion from their ranks for alleged arrogance; he died in 831/1427, supposedly a suicide, having cast himself into the waters of the Aras river (Kiā, pp. 5-6). The designation Noqṭawi is taken from the doctrine that the earth is the starting point (*noqṭa*) of all things, the remaining three elements being derived from it; alternatively, it may refer to the use of two, three, or four dots, variously arranged, as cryptic abbreviations in the writings of the sect. The primacy of the earth led the Noqṭawis to believe in a peculiarly materialist type of metempsychosis, according to which the particles of the body are absorbed as a single mass into the soil, to be reintegrated, by way of ingestion, on a plane of existence determined by the degree of virtue the deceased attained while alive. Traces of the former configuration are, however, apparent in the new: dogs could be recognized as having once been Qezelbāš Turks, their wagging tails being a trace of the swords they once wielded; and waterfowl as transmogrified clerics, their constant splashing being a relic of obsessive ablutions (Kiā, pp. 30-31). From this insight can be deduced a profound hostility to the twin pillars of the early Safavid state, the

military and the religious. Insurrectionary ambitions were also implicit in the cyclical view of history cherished by the Noqṭawis: they believed that the appearance of Maḥmud marked the beginning of an 8,000-year "Persian epoch" (*dawra-ye esteʿjām*) in which Gilan and Mazandaran replaced Mecca and Medina as foci of sanctity (Kiā, p. 11). This doctrine may have helped facilitate the symbiosis of the Noqṭawis with the Ismaʿilis, who had espoused a similar view of history at certain stages in their tortuous evolution.

After an incubation lasting some eight decades, the Noqṭawi movement surfaced in Kāšān during the reign of Shah Esmāʿil I. Despite the measures he took against it, the Nokṭavi community in Kāšān persisted into the time of Ṭahmāsb, causing him to arrest many of its members, notwithstanding their intimations to him that he might be the Mahdi. The movement had spread meanwhile to other cities, including Sāva, Nāʾin, Isfahan, and most importantly Qazvin, where its leadership was assumed by a certain Darviš Ḵosrow; he housed his some 200 followers in a *takiya* (Sufi lodge) and managed to survive into the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I. For a while, the monarch tolerated the Noqṭawis and even permitted himself to be initiated into their ranks, either out of curiosity or as a means of surveillance, but in 1002/1593, fearful of the movement's insurrectionary potential, he had Darviš Ḵosrow arrested and put to death. Further arrests and executions ensued in other cities, notably Qazvin, where the sect briefly resurfaced in 1041/1631 only to be suppressed most bloodily. Artisans and literati in a handful of cities attracted by its millennarian promise had been its

principal supporters, never numerous or powerful enough to pose a real threat to the political and social order (Algar, 1995b, p. 116).

Another element of urban turmoil was provided by the factions (see HAYDARI AND NEʿMATI) that regularly battled each other in all three of the successive Safavid capitals: Tabriz, Qazvin, and Isfahan. It has been speculated that their designations went back respectively to Mir Ḥaydar Tuni (d. 830/1426) and Shah Neʿmat-Allāh Wali and that their mutual hostility arose from the Shiʿite proclivities of the former and the Sunnite loyalties of the latter. This, however, is uncertain; what is clear is that by the Safavid period neither group was aware of, or interested in, its origins. Their enmity showed itself with particular violence during Moḥarram, when the factions vied with each other in the extravagance of their mourning ceremonies. These irrational contests must be regarded in the first place as another surfacing of the perennial tendency to factionalism in Persian cities, not unlike the Shafeʿite-Hanafite riots that had marred cities such as Rayy down to the Mongol invasion. Thus Tabriz was divided into five Ḥaydari and four Neʿmati wards, and Isfahan into two roughly equal halves. The Ḥaydari-Neʿmati conflict was far from unwelcome to successive Safavid monarchs, who clearly saw in it a means of weakening urban solidarity; in a display of the imaginative sadism that frequently characterized his policies, Shah ʿAbbās I even went so far as to command battles between the two factions for his personal amusement (Mirjafari, p. 158). So deeply rooted was their mutual enmity, however, that it far outlasted the Safavid period, and temporarily divided the ranks of the constitutionalists in early 20th-century Tabriz.

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