Kirmānī Shaykhism and the Ijtihād: A Study of Abū al-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī's Ijtihād wa Taqlīd

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Review

Kirmānī Shaykhism and the Ijtihād: A Study of Abū al-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī's Ijtihād wa Taqlīd, Denis Hermann (Series: Bibliotheca academica, Reihe Orientalistik, Band 24), Wurzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2015, ISBN 978-3-95650-097-8, 50 pp.

Shaykhīsm in general, and the Shaykhī School of Kirman in particular, have long been topics of interest for a number of western scholars, among them, perhaps most notably, the late Henry Corbin (d. 1978). In addition, one can identify a growing interest in Shaykhī studies, and mainly in the thought of the first Shaykhī leader, Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (d. 1823), among western universities, which itself testifies to the fact that Shaykhīsm maintains relevance within the realm of modern scholarship. Despite this, however, a significant part of the Shaykhī literature, including key texts of the second Shaykhī leader, Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1843), and other prominent figures such as Mullā Mīrzā Ḥassan Gawhar (d. 1850), remains uninvestigated.

   Denis Hermann's *Kirmānī Shaykhism and the Ijtihād: A Study of Abū al-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī's Ijtihād wa Taqlīd* is a valuable and welcome addition to the existing scholarship on Shaykhī studies. It is divided into four chapters, in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. It closely examines the text of *Ijtihad wa Taqlīd* by Abū al-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī (d. 1968), the fourth in the line of Shaykhī masters of Kirmānī Shaykhīsm. The opponents of Shaykhīsm, mainly the *Uṣūlī* 'ulemā, refer to *ijtihād* (the authorized offer of independent judgment on sharī'a-related questions), and *taqlīd* (emulation or imitation of previous *ijtihādī* rulings in such questions) to vali-

date the heterodoxy of the Shaykhī School. Hermann locates Abū al-Qāsim Khān's theory of *ijtihād* in the framework of the theoretical disputes of *Uṣūlīsm* vs. the *Akhbārī* movement (starting in the mid-seventeenth century, the movement rejected the use of reasoning in deriving verdicts, and believed in the *Qurʾān* and *ḥadīth* as the only primary sources of divine law).

Hermann argues that, while for the former the doctrine of *ijtihād* plays a central role, for the latter, and especially for Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036 AH/1627)—who greatly challenged *Uṣūlīsm* and its reliance on *ijtihad*—the doctrine is only reminiscent of the influence of Sunnism, and therefore must be rejected (p. 7). Hermann shows how Abū al-Qāsim Khān first "proposes a return to the original meaning of the concept of *ijtihād*" (p. 9) and, by redefinition of the term *ijtihād*, displays his discontent and disappointment with the evolution of the faith and its monopolization in the hands of ʿulemā, as well as his decision to speak to the entire community of Shīʿas (p. 9).

By contextualizing *Ijtihād wa Taqlīd* within the socio-political changes of the years 1930 to 1950, Hermann is right about the influence of the milieu: "a time of great political confusion in Iran" (p. 9), which motivated Ibrāhīmī to write this book. Given the fact that the book was written in 1943, not long after Reza Shah Pahlavi's abdication in September 1941, for Ibrāhīmī "those years may well have been a good time to write such a treatise, since the *Uṣūlī* religious schools (*ḥawza-yi ʿilmīyya*) were in a very precarious position and their ability to respond to minorities within Shiism was more limited than usual" (p. 9). Moreover, the years 1930 to 1950 were also remarkable due to "considerable societal changes, including a measurable increase in the literacy rate" (p. 9), in the sense "that laypeople were reading more religious literature than they had in earlier times" (p. 9).

Before we proceed with Hermann's analysis of the text *Ijtihād wa taqlīd*, it is important to remember that the redefinition of *ijtihad* did not start with the Kirmānī Shaykhī masters, who came before Abu al-Qāsim Khān. Contrary to what Hermann claims, the preliminary efforts to redefine the term *ijtihad* had already started with Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsāʾī; a fact which remains ignored by Hermann. It was Aḥsāʾī who took the initiative in assigning *ijtihad* a new definition in his magnum opus *Sharḥ Zīyārat al-Jāmīʿat al-Kabīra*. In his discussion on the status of the imamate, Aḥsāʾī argued that jurists (*fuqahā*) are adherents of the faith of Shīʿism, "because they spread the message of the Imāms and their Traditions (*aḥādīth*) through teaching and instructions."[1] "They are the Imāms' messengers (*rusul*) and transmitters (*naqalah*) to their *Shīʿas*,"[2] and are the only individuals eligible to be given absolute obedience from followers, since they have been raised to eminence through their closeness to the Imāms.[3]

Aḥsāʾī re-defines the term "jurists," putting particular emphasis on their role in spreading the teachings of the Imāms, but does not mention ʿaql (faculty of reason) as a legal principle to extract juridical edicts and injunctions. It should be noted that emphasizing the use of ʿaql in order to conduct *ijtihād* is an inseparable part of the *Uṣūlī* definition of *ijtihad*. Despite the fact that Aḥsāʾī had several authorizations from his masters (which demonstrates his attachment to mainstream

Shīʿism), there are indications regarding his intent in bringing an alternative to the mainstream (*Uṣūlism*), proven by his efforts to redefine *ijtihad*, as well as the emphasis on his recurring dreams of the Imāms. Therefore, the argument that "Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī never had the intention of founding a school, and did not mean to differ from the 'others' save in his strict adherence to the integral theosophical teachings of the Imams of Twelver Shiism,"[4] does not seem plausible.

In chapter 1, "The Rise of Shaykhism," Hermann, along with his analysis of the later developments of Shaykhīsm after the death of Rashtī, refers to "two principal doctrinal differences" (p. 12) between the Kirmānī branch and that of Tabrīzī: the endorsement of the *ijtihād* and the rejection of *rukn-i rābiʿ* (the Fourth Pillar) by the Shaykhīs of Tabriz. Hermann does not go beyond mentioning these two differences, but one can conclude that these two, in addition to societal factors, could explain why Tabrīzī Shaykhīsm displays relatively less conservative tendencies with regard to socio-political affairs and has therefore been closer to the mainstream Shīʿism, while, by comparison, Kirmānī Shaykhīsm has been more conservative, with regard to both social and religious spheres. Hermann's discussions of the Shaykhī branches after the death of Rashtī, however, need to be clarified. After his death, five of his students claimed leadership, and four of them founded their own school. Therefore, the Shaykhī branches after Rashtī are not limited to two Kirmānī and Tabrīzī Schools.

The doctrine of *rukn-i rābiʿ* is important and merits close attention. *Rukn-i rābiʿ* is mainly developed by Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1871), Abū al-Qāsim Khān's ancestor and founder of the Kirmānī Shaykhīsm. The seeds of the doctrine, however, are older and can be traced back to the writings of Rashtī, the second Shaykhī leader. Hermann mentions the doctrine briefly in chapter 1, along with his explanation of the hierarchic chain of the spiritual ranks in Shaykhīsm. He is certain that *rukn-i rābiʿ* is the fourth and last religious principle of the Kirmānī Shaykhīsm. But what is its relevance to the status of the Shaykhī ʿulemā, and its connection to the office of imamate? The book does not provide an adequate treatment of these questions.

One of the characteristics of the theory of imamate in the Shaykhī writings is the divine dimension of the office of imamate. In the Shaykhī texts, the Hidden Imām lives in the realm of *hūrqalyā* and is distanced from the accessibility of believers; therefore, it is necessary that another level of being/gnosis be created which is called *qurāʾ-i ẓāhira*.[5] In relation to this, both Rashtī and Kirmānī also argue that, due to the distance of the Imām from ordinary people, visible leaders are required to act as intermediaries between him and his followers.[6] According to Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī, there exist eight cities (or eight stations of knowledge) between the Hidden Imām and believers. Would-be disciples are to progress through these eight stations in order to benefit from the knowledge of the Imām. At the end of the path is the eighth station (or the station belongs to the Shaykhī ʿulemā), and the love and belief of their followers in them is called *rukn-i rābiʿ*. So, *rukn-i rābiʿ* is both a station of gnosis (*maʿrifa*) and a religious principle, and it is only through this station that a believer is able to know his Imām.[7] The Fourth Pillar came to be

assigned as the fourth fundamental of Shaykhīsm after *tawḥīd*, *nubuwwa*, and imamate—a point which is also emphasized by Hermann.

All in all, this book is a valuable contribution to current debates on the boundaries of *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* among the Kirmānī Shaykhī masters. The scope of Shaykhī studies so far has been limited to theoretical/conceptual research, and the present work is one of the few case studies focusing on a certain text and the conception of *ijtihād* and *taqlīd*, and seeks to locate Abū al-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī's intellectual achievement in the philosophical and socio-political context of its time. A future edition would benefit from more careful editing in order to correct recurrent transliteration inaccuracies. While in recent history, Shaykhīsm has existed in relative isolation and oblivion in its homeland, publication of books such as *Kirmānī Shaykhism and the Ijtihād: A Study of Abū al-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī's Ijtihād wa Taqlīd* is a welcome indication of the vitality of the Shaykhī scholarship by a wider community of scholars.

Notes

1. Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ Zīyārat al-Jāmi' at al-Kabīra*, vol. 1, 353.
2. Ibid., 353, 378-80.
3. Ibid., vol. 2, 285.
4. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 352.
5. Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ Zīyārat al-Jāmi' at al-Kabīra*, vol. 1, 235. *Qurā'-i ẓāhira* (lit. "the visible cities"), although Hemann refers to it as *ḥujjat-i ẓāhir*.
6. The topic has been discussed in a number of sources, mainly: Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī's (d. 1258 AH/ 1843), and Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī's (d. 1288 H/1871) writings. Rashtī, both in *Risāla-yi Ḥujjat-i Bālighi*, and *Risāla Dar Jawāb-i Suleymān Khān Afshār*, and Kirmānī in *Irshād al-ʿAwām* have developed arguments for the necessity of having intermediaries between the Hidden Īmām and his followers. See Rashtī, *Risāla-yi Ḥujjat-i Bālighi*, 91ff.; Rashtī, *Risāla Dar Jawāb-i*, 28ff.; Kirmānī, *Irshād al-ʿAwām*, 50.
7. Kirmānī, *Irshād al-ʿAwām*, 127-8.

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