

Formation of a Religious Landscape

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Formation of a Religious Landscape

Shi'i Higher Learning in Safavid Iran

By

Maryam Moazzen



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Cover illustration: Elevated view looking east from roof showing sanctuary dome and minarets of The Madrasa-yi Sultānī. Photo by Baroness Marie-Therese Ullens de Schooten photograph, Courtesy of Special collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.

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Preface

The Safavid dynasty's period of rule (1501–1722) is one of the most important epochs in Iran's religio-political history as well as in the history of Shi'i higher learning. It was during the Safavid period that Twelver Shi'ism gradually transitioned from being a minority sect to constituting Iran's official religion.¹ This transformation was facilitated by the evolution of Shi'i educational and scholarly undertakings. Not only did Twelver Shi'i religious scholars have the opportunity to spread their knowledge on a wider public scale, but during Safavid rule Shi'i literature also grew remarkably. Thousands of treatises were written both in Arabic and in Persian on legal, philosophical, and theological subjects, and many compendia on various scholarly subjects were produced. This literary corpus helped establish and sustain systems of religious authority that persist in Iran to this day.

The Safavid dynastic era has attracted great interest among scholars, especially in the past four decades during which a large number of studies have been published. This extensive body of literature examines Safavid society, history, culture, and the socio-political roles played by Safavid 'ulamā' (religious scholars). Scholars interested in Shi'i intellectual history in general and Safavid intellectual history in particular tend to concentrate on the socio-political functions of religious scholars and their doctrinal positions. This may be due to the role that the Shi'i 'ulamā' played and continue to play in socio-political events such as the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran that had an enormous impact on the politics of neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Bahrain and Iraq.

Although we have a good understanding of the socio-political and religious functions of the Safavid 'ulamā', we lack a coherent picture of what they taught and how they contributed to the advancement of Shi'i scholarship.²

1 Iran did not become predominantly Shi'i until the Qajār period in the nineteenth century. Bausani, *The Persians* 139. Hamid Algar argues that in the process of this transformation, which inevitably legalized and formalized Shi'i learning, Twelver Shi'ism's essentially esoteric and gnostic character was relegated to the periphery and forced underground. Algar, *Religion and state* 5.

2 Just to give a few examples here, I mention the works by Saïd Amir Arjomand who has discussed the socio-political roles played by the 'ulamā'. See in particular Arjomand, *The clerical estate* 169–219; idem, *The law, agency, and policy* 263–93; idem, *The office of Mulla-Bashi* 135–46; idem, *The mujtahid of the age* 178–212. See also Keddie, *The roots of the ulama's* 211–29. Some scholars interested in the topic also focused their scholarships on the educated elite. Ground breaking studies by Richard Bulliet, *The patricians of Nishapur: A study in*

Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the impact of the advent of the Safavids on Shi'i higher learning. At best, our current state of knowledge provides a general description of Safavid educational undertakings, but this is of little use when it comes to understanding the richness and complexity of everyday life in Safavid madrasas. This study seeks to fill these lacunae by exploring the ways in which religious knowledge was produced, authenticated, and transmitted in the second half of Safavid rule – from the reign of Shāh 'Abbās I (1588–1629) to the end of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn's era (1694–1722). It also examines the manner in which Safavid madrasas facilitated intellectual discourse while serving as sites in which socio-religious groups, and political elites' religious policies came together, allowing the madrasa to function as a powerful locus of Shi'i culture.

medieval Islamic social history (1972) and Roy Muttahedeḥ, *Loyalty and leadership in an early Islamic society* (1980), a classic study of 10th- and 11th-century society in Buyid Iran, explain the role of the 'ulamā' in the socio-cultural and political life of Persia during different places and times.

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Note on Transliteration and Style

Arabic and Persian names, words, and book or article titles have been transliterated in accordance with the system used for the *Encyclopaedia of the Quran*. Arabic and Persian terms that have entered the English language, such as madrasa, imam, shah, etc. have not been italicized unless they form part of a proper name.

The *Encyclopaedia of the Quran* for Arabic and Persian

Consonants

ء	’	ص	ṣ
ب	b	ض	ḍ
پ	p	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	‘
ج	j	غ	gh
چ	ch	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	گ	g
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
ژ	zh	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ی	y

Arabic and Persian Vowels

	Long	Short		Doubled
ا	ā	a	ي	iy
و	ū	u	و	uww
ي	ī	i		

Introduction

Imperializing Twelver Shi'ism and Its Impact on Shi'i Higher Learning

When Ismā'īl (r. 1488–1524), the founder of the Safavid dynasty, declared Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of his realm, his decision marked a major watershed in Islamic history. This historical event gradually, yet profoundly, erased previous societal norms and religio-cultural traditions, which led to the creation of new mores and reconstructed the values of Iranian society. Despite the fact that Shi'i Muslims were more secure during certain periods of the first millennium of Islamic history, they were mainly marginalized and even prosecuted at times. Indeed, the rise of Twelver Shi'ism to imperial-sponsored dominance was not without precedent, yet the transformation of Shi'ism to a state religion at the turn of sixteenth century proved to be a long lasting and fundamental development.¹ Among Shah Ismā'īl's successors, only Ismā'īl II sympathized with the campaign mounted to re-instate Sunni Islam as the dominant religion in the empire.² The attempt was aborted soon after it began.³

-
- 1 For example, the Buyids (947–1055) are known as a political dynasty that favored the Shi'a. For more information see: H. Busse, *Chalif und Grosskönig* 415ff; Hodgson, *The venture of Islam* ii, 35–39; Kramer, *Humanism* 41–43; Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 118–25. In the aftermath of the Mongol invasions the Shi'a also experienced both ideological and political ascendancy. The Mongol IlKhāns generously founded a number of madrasas and *dār al-siyādas* (house for descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), and patronized leading Shi'i 'ulamā'. Oljeitū even converted to Twelver Shi'ism around 1309–10 for a short while and declared his newly chosen faith to be the state religion of the IlKhānate. For more details on Oljeitū's conversion to Twelver Shi'ism see: Ja'fariyān, Sulṭān Muḥammad Khudābandah "Oljeitū" 41–45; Pfeiffer, *Conversion versions* 35–67.
 - 2 Ismā'īl II (d. 1577), the third Safavid shah is generally known as the monarch who espoused Sunni Islam and mistreated leading Shi'i *mujtahids* i.e. 'Abd-al-Ālī b. Nūr-al-Dīn 'Alī al-Karākī (d. 1585) and Sayyed Ḥusayn al-Karākī (d. 1593), and banned the practice of *tawallā wa tabarrā* or public cursing of the first three caliphs and the Sunnis. For more on him and his religious policy see Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* 623–29, 653–54; Mazzaoui, *The religious policy* 53; Roemer, *The Safavid period* 252; Afushta'i-Naṭanzī, *Nuqāwat al-āthār* 39–42, 60–61; Munajjim-i Yazdī, *Tārīkh-i Abbāsi* 29, 34–35, 38–39; Munshī, *Ālam-ārā-yi Abbāsi* 213–15, 218–19, Savory's tran. 319–20, 328–30; Stanfield-Johnson, *The Tabarra'īyan* 65–67. In his *The practice of politics in Safavid Iran*, Colin Mitchell, however, offers a different perspective on Ismā'īl II. He maintains "there is sufficient chancellery evidence to support the assertion that Ismā'īl II was committed to maintaining Safavid sovereignty in its Shi'ite ideological framework while

The rise of the Safavid dynasty has been examined extensively in the works of scholars including Jean Aubin, Michel Mazzaoui, R. Savory, H. Roemer, and Andrew Newman among others.⁴ As B.S. Amoretti and other scholars of the early Safavid period argue, the Safavid owed their initial success to religious activities and spiritual movements that had their roots in earlier centuries, in particular the fifteenth century, the hallmark of which was a surge of religious and spiritual creativity. Various religious movements whose leaders had new and different interpretations of Islamic tenets appeared. Sufi orders gained considerable importance and influence, and Twelver Shi'ism gained momentum. Millenarian sentiments flourished among the masses, thanks to would-be messiahs and *mahdīs*. These *mahdīs*, who took their ideas from the most diverse sources and gave them a new form and set of meanings, created a situation of mass disorientation and anxiety in which age-old beliefs about a messianic triumph came to serve as vehicles for social change. There was also the complex process of hybridization of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish cultural elements. Conflicts between Turkish tribes and agricultural societies now became missionary crusades for the transformation of civilizations. The period produced a fluid mix of religious practices involving Sufism, extreme Shi'ism, and Sunni Islam, which resulted in a cultural-political reconstruction and transformation. Thus, there developed a new type of civilizational dynamics.⁵

Ismā'īl assumed power after his successful integration of messianic and millenarian sentiments that were prevalent mainly among the Turkish tribes living in Anatolia.⁶ But he neither intended to legitimize his rule in tribal-Turkish

seeking to undermine the power and scope of the Shi'ite clerical structure" (Mitchell, *The practice of politics* 153). He argues that by attempting to halt the trajectory of jurists such as Sayyid Husayn al-Karakī and "instead privilege networks of scribes, accountants, *adibs*, and scholar-bureaucrats, Ismā'īl II in fact established a dynamic that characterized Safavid court and chancellery politics for the next two decades." See Mitchell, *The practice of politics* 158.

- 3 In his study on the lost biography of Bahā' al-Dīn al-'Āmilī and the Reign of Shah Ismā'īl II, Stewart notes that – during the short reign of Ismā'īl II – "a lasting marriage between the Safavid government and the Shi'ite religious establishment" occurred. He concludes, "The crisis represented by his reign galvanized Shi'ite scholars and brought together within this category several groups that, in earlier times, had had quite different concerns and agenda and had often opposed each other." For more information see, Stewart, *The lost biography of Bahā' al-Dīn* 203.
- 4 For a comprehensive annotated bibliography on Safavid Iran see Matthee, *Safavid dynasty*.
- 5 For more analysis of the religious situation of Iran in the fifteenth century see the following, Amoretti, *Religion* 610–56; Nasr, *Religion in Safavid Persia* 271–86; Bashir, *Messianic hopes* 2–28; idem, *The Imam's return* 21–33; Roemer, *The Safavid period* 195–98ff; Aubin, *La politique religieuse* 235–44; Mazzaoui, *The origins* 83–84; Arjomnad, *The shadow of God* 81–82.
- 6 Mazzaoui, *The origins* 66–67; Aubin, *L'avenement des Safavides* 50–1; Roemer, *The Safavid period* 340–1.

terms nor liked to assume the role of a *mahdī*.⁷ He would have rather placed himself in the lineage of Shi‘i Imams.⁸ According to the author of *‘Ālam-ārā-yi Shāh Ismā‘īl*, the young shah wished to propagate the religion of his father and forefathers, i.e. Twelver Shi‘ism, despite warnings from his army commanders “who informed him that since the majority of people [of Iran] do not approve of a Shi‘i ruler, given from the rise of Islam no Shi‘i dynasty ever ruled anywhere, it would be not advisable for the shah to make [Twelver] Shi‘ism the state religion.”⁹ In response, the shah said: “With the support of the Imams I fear nobody, and whoever protests, I shall kill him and if I must, I will kill everyone.”¹⁰ Soon after he declared Shi‘ism as the state religion, Ismā‘īl ordered that the preachers of provinces must read the names of the Twelve Imams, in the sermon (*khutba*) and say: “I bear witness that ‘Alī is God’s friend (*walī*). The practices that had not been done in the cities of Islam for five hundred and twenty-eight years,” as reported by Ḥasan Rūmlū.¹¹ Such references are conspicuously absent in the *farmān* (royal decree) issued in 1505, four years after Tabriz’s conquest. Indeed, as indicated by Hunarfar there is not even any mention of the descent of the Imams; Ismā‘īl is described as the successor of the age, the spreader of justice and beneficence, and the just leader.¹²

Deracinating a deeply rooted religious tradition, i.e. Sunni Islam, among people who would readily sacrifice their lives for their faith, and convincing the enriched and powerful religious authorities including the *shaykh al-Islams* and other religious officials to adopt a new faith, ought to be harsh and bloody. Using a combination of persuasion and terror, Safavid shahs vigorously attempted to install Shi‘ism in Persia. In their zeal to implant Shi‘ism, Ismā‘īl and his courtiers undertook harsh measures to compel the people under his control to convert to Shi‘ism.

The systematic use of terror was highly effective in silencing resistance. As an example, Qulī-Jān Beg, an officer in Ismā‘īl’s army, gathered people in Herat’s congressional mosque and ordered them to curse the enemies of the

7 But as Colin Mitchell notes, in the texts produced in the early Safavid court, Ismā‘īl I is described as “a harbinger of Apocalypse” and as “a divine agent whose mandate was to avenge the calamities inflicted on the Shi‘ite community.” See Mitchell, *The practice of politics* 30–31, 42.

8 Minorsky, *The poetry of Shāh Ismā‘īl I*, esp. 1042a, 1043a. See also Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* 296–301; Newman, *Safavid Iran* 13–15.

9 Munshī, *‘Ālam-ārā-yi shāh Ismā‘īl* 58. See also Khvandamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar* iii, 467–8.

10 Munshī, *‘Ālam-ārā-yi shāh Ismā‘īl* 60; Shukrī, *‘Ālam-ārā-yi Ṣafāvī*, 62–5; Shīrāzī, *Takmilat al-akhbār* 41; Aspānqchī, *Inqilāb-i Islam* 47–9, 116–17, 270–71. He includes an *istiftā‘* from Sunni scholars concerning Shi‘ism (118–19).

11 Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh* i, 61.

12 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 86–8.

religion [Shi'ism] and the Safavid rule. Whoever refused to do so was put to death; notable victims of the policy were Herat's chief judge, preacher [*imam-i jum'a*], and magistrate. Then he asked the *shaykh al-Islam* [of Herat] to curse the first three caliphs and after he [the *shaykh al-Islam*] begged him profusely [to exempt him from cursing], Qulī-Jān told him that instead of cursing [the first three caliphs], he must pay five thousand *tumans* to be forgiven. The *shaykh al-Islam* did as he was told. After he brought the money, Qulī-Jān killed him nonetheless. Then he said to the audience: "Whoever curses the first three caliphs, he would receive one *tuman*." As soon as the Shi'a of Herat became aware of this, they flocked to the mosque and each received one *tuman* after cursing the [first three] caliphs, and all the five thousand *tumans* were given to the cursing Shi'is.

They celebrated for three days in Herat; many Sunni nobles of the city were killed and people started cursing the caliphs loudly in public. After this massacre Ismā'īl entered the city and Qulī-Jān led the people of Herat to welcome him. A certain Amir Najm informed him of what Qulī-Jān had done to the people of Herat. He [Ismā'īl] was smiling when listening to his account and then praised Qulī-Jān for his shrewdness in taking *shaykh al-Islam's* gold and giving it to the Shi'a of Herat. He gave the rest of the *shaykh al-Islam's* possessions to Qulī-Jān.¹³

Public cursing of Sunnis was implemented widely to compel Persians to demonstrate their adherence to Shi'ism. The author of *Jahān gushā-yi khāqān* reports how *Tabarrā'īān* forced people to confess that they love 'Alī and his family and to disavow the three first caliphs and people who denied 'Alī of his right of succession to the prophet. He writes, "since the time Shi'ism was declared as the state religion, muezzins were asked to include the following statements to *adhān*: I bear witness that 'Alī is the representative/friend of God. Hasten towards the best of action. After *adhān* they were to encourage people to curse the enemies of the Imams and to express their love towards the Imams and their followers. There were a group of people who were called *Tabarrā'īān* who – in every street, market and neighborhood – publicly curse the enemies of the Imams, especially the first three rightly guided caliphs, and people must

13 Munshī, *Ālam-ārā-yi shāh Ismā'īl* 397–400; Shukrī, ed. *Ālam-ārā-yi Šafavī*, 63–5; Shīrāzī, *Takmilat al-akhbār* 40–41. The conversion process in Herat continued after this event. Around 1567 Shah Ṭahmāsb made Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Šamad the *shaykh al-Islam* of the city. During the almost eight years he propagated Shi'i precepts among the denizens of Herat who knew little if anything about Shi'ism and Shi'i way of life. Afandī, *Rīyāḍ al-'ulamā'* ii, 120. For more information see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 39–40.

have agreed with them by saying even more or bear the consequences. *Qurchīs* (royal guards) and axe holders would kill whoever failed to do so."¹⁴

Much as Ismā'īl and his courtiers took harsh measures against Sunni population of his realm, he was kind towards his Turkmen disciples. He shared his booty with them and divided the conquered lands into appendages, which they administered as governors and tutors of Safavid princes. Sayyid families were also rewarded stipends and tax immunities. As Jean Aubin puts it he had created a form of communism where soup kitchens were set up for the poor.¹⁵

The Reaction of the Sunni 'Ulamā'

The Safavid imperial patronage of Shi'ism particularly enraged the Sunni Ottomans in the west and the Sunni Uzbek tribes in the east. Religious friction grew in particular after Sultan Selīm I (d. 1520) executed large numbers of his Shi'i subjects as heretics and potential spies. The challenge of the rise of Twelver Shi'ism became also an occasion for the Sunni 'ulamā' to respond, and they did. Against the Shi'ism elevation, they issued *fatwas*, exchanged letters with Shi'i rulers and 'ulamā' and wrote polemics that are great material for separate research. The following are only a few examples of this rich literature in which Sunni 'ulamā' denounce Shi'i teachings and practices as religious novelties without grounding in authentic Islamic tradition.

In 1514 Selīm defeated Ismā'īl. A mutiny among his troops, however, forced Selīm to withdraw – they reportedly refused to fight against and kill Shi'i Muslims. In the course of the mutiny, Selīm I sent a letter to the leading 'ulamā' of his realm asking them, "is this sect that due to the endeavors of the Sufi, i.e. Shah Ismā'īl is spreading, one of the valid religious schools in Islam or not?" They answered that,

Since it has been proven to the Sunni religious scholars that this sect is in opposition to the Quran, prophetic tradition and Muslims' consensus, it is therefore false and not accepted by Islam. Whoever accepts and

14 Ja'fariyān, *Şafaviya dar 'arşa-yi dān* i, 22–3. In his *al-Khişāl*, Ibn Babawayh (d. 991) lists *tawallā* and *tabarrā* alongside *shahāda* (the testimony that there is no god but God and that Prophet Muhammad is His messenger), observing prayers, paying alms, fasting, and so forth as the ten acts that guarantee the Shi'i believer entry to heaven. For more information see Ibn Babawayh, *al-Khişāl* 400–02, 449, 521.

15 Aubin, *L'avenement des Safavides* 42; idem, *Études Safavides* I 50; Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* 297, 335–36.

follows this sect is an infidel. It is the duty of the caliph of Islam to punish the infidels and to forbid this wrong and fallacious sect from spreading and becoming popular in Islamic lands, because these people consider the eternal Quran as created and interpret figuratively (*ta'wīl*) its meanings. Moreover, they do not accept analogy concerning the issues that have no clear rulings [in the Quran and prophetic traditions]. They do so to oppose Sunnis and consider this opposition and objection necessary. They do not consider consensus of the Muslims valid and view the two *shaykhs*, i.e. Abū Bakr and 'Umar as well as 'Uthmān, as usurpers of the caliphate and as infidels. They curse them and accuse the mother of believers, 'Āyisha, of various kinds of immoralities and [attribute to her] the worst kind of charges. They also curse and condemn the leading companions of prophet Muhammad and consider Sunni Muslims worse than combating non-Muslim infidels. They believe it is permitted to take their [the Sunnis] properties and lives for themselves. They also consider many forbidden things as permitted and many permitted things as forbidden and change Quranic rulings. All the present religious scholars at the assembly signed the fatwa and submitted it to the sultan.¹⁶

This sort of religious proclamation alongside religious extremism poised by the ruling elite and religious authorities inside the Safavid realm continued to cause tremendous trouble and loss of lives amongst the Shi'a living in the Ottoman Empire. For instance, Shi'i scholars residing in Mecca and Medina sent a letter to the Safavid ruler explaining that, because of his condemnation

16 Aspānqchī, *Inqilāb-i Islam* 47, 18–19. The author adds that the sultan sent the document to the army, who in spite of the *fatwa* showed no desire to fight the Persians! The tradition of public cursing continued despite the fact that some leading Safavid Shi'i scholars did not deem it essential. Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Ṣamad who had a debate with a certain Sunni scholar of Aleppo on the subject matter of *imāma*, also discusses the traditions of *tawallā* and *tabarrā* after the Sunni scholar expresses his willingness to convert to Shi'ism if it were not for the Shi'i ritual of cursing of the companions of the Prophet. Ḥusayn writes: "I knew that if I were to profess to him the admissibility of curing them [Sunnis] in our school of law, he would never convert to Shi'ism even if I provided him with a thousand proofs. So I said to him: According to our school of law, it is not compulsory to curse them [the first three Rightly Guided Caliphs] and only the zealous among the masses do so. As for the 'ulamā', none of them had called for the necessity of cursing them, and their books are [clear on this matter]." Cited in Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 34. For more on the opinions of Shi'i scholars on *tawallā* and *tabarrā* and how public cursing [of the Sunni] used as an instrument of conversion see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 26–27, 35.

of their leaders in Isfahan, they were suffering the consequences in the holy sanctuaries due to that condemnation and reproach!¹⁷

The Sunni Uzbek Shaybanids who rose to prominence when Muhammad Shaybānī, known as Shaybak Khān or Shāhī Beg Khān, were also quite unhappy with Ismā'īl's support of Shi'ism. Shaybak Khān, who had conquered Samarkand in 1501 and Farghāna in 1505, was defeated by Ismā'īl in a battle near the city of Marv in 1510. He was killed trying to escape after the battle.¹⁸ Nonetheless the Shaybanids continued to pose problems on the eastern borders of the Safavid Empire. A few decades later, when 'Abbās I was preoccupied with internal problems, the Uzbeks (who had become united once again) intensified their attacked on Khurāsān.

In 1590 they finally captured Mashhad after a four-month siege. The Uzbeks led by 'Abdallāh Khān's son, 'Abd al-Mu'min, killed many people and plundered the city. The shrine of Imam Reḡā was pillaged, its priceless library was destroyed, and thousands of people were carried off into slavery. Finally, 'Abbās I drove out the Uzbeks from Khurāsān in 1598. While Mashhad was under siege, one of the 'ulamā' of Mashhad sent a letter to the Uzbek Khān asking him why he is killing the people of Mashhad, since the majority of them are sayyids and descendants of Prophet Muhammad. 'Abdallāh Khān asked the religious scholars of Transoxiana to provide him with a reply in which they should make it known that the Shi'a are infidels and thus killing them is permitted. In their letter, 'ulamā' of Transoxiana emphasized that as long as people follow Islamic teachings and avoid cursing the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and in particular the first three caliphs, and stop accusing 'Āyisha and other wives of the prophet of despicable actions, nobody would harm them, but if they continue doing so then they are no longer and deserve to be killed.¹⁹

It seems the 'ulamā' of Transoxiana are not concerned with criticizing Shi'i doctrines per se as their Ottoman counterparts were, but rather were quite distraught by some Shi'i practices in public. More than two centuries later, while attempting to normalize Iran's relations with the rest of the Muslim world, Nādir Shāh Afshār (d. 1747) penned a letter containing his pledge sent to the Shrine of 'Alī in Najaf. In it he acknowledges that, during the rule of the Safavids, many people lost their lives and the Muslim world became divided

17 Khvānsārī, *Rawḡāt al-jannāt* iv, 362.

18 Ismā'īl conquered Samarkand and annexed it to his own realm. In letters exchanged between Muhammad Shaybānī and Ismā'īl, the Safavid shah explains why he has taken it upon himself to spread Shi'ism and implement the Shi'i school of law. Qāḏī Aḥmad Qumī has recorded the letters. See Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* 105–08.

19 Shāmlū, *Qīṣaṣ al-khāqānī* i, 155–8.

as the result of actions of Safavid shahs, which were endorsed by Shi'i scholars. He writes that Muslims were in agreement that after the demise of the Prophet, the four rightly guided caliphs led the *umma*. They faithfully observed Islamic teachings until,

in 906 (1501) when shah Ismā'īl-i Ṣafavī assumed power, and with the advice and guidance of religious scholars of Azerbaijan, Gilān and Ardabil, adulterated the truth about their caliphates and turned away the hearts of masses from following and obeying them and also made the despicable act of condemning and cursing them from mosques' pulpits prevalent among people. After it became widespread among people, Sunni neighbors [i.e. the Uzbeks and the Ottoman Turks] began war and regarded killing and plundering this sect [i.e. Twelver Shi'ism] permitted, which resulted in killing, plundering, civil war and chaos among Muslims to the degree that Muslim captives were sold in Europe [*farang*]. This reprehensible act continued till the time of shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn.²⁰

Despite all the loss of lives and properties, Shi'ism had firmly rooted among the Persians; Nādir himself, in the above-quoted letter, tried to convince the Ottoman ruler that the Ja'farī sect is Islamic and is far from the reprehensible traditions set by the Safavid ruler.²¹

Madrasas and the Consolidation of Shi'ism in Persia

The founders of madrasas had a variety of motives. Safavid sources, notably *waqfiyyas* and chronicles, state that the founders hoped to gain the favor of God by establishing a place where Muslims could study the religious sciences and worship God. Yet the ruling elite had other objectives in commissioning the construction of mosque-madrasas, as will be discussed in detail in chapter one. Before delving into the story of madrasa expansion in Safavid Iran, including the role of the madrasa in Iranian conversion to Shi'i Islam and the advancement of Shi'i higher learning, I will first present perspectives on a central scholarly debate pertaining to the madrasas' larger sociopolitical context. Did madrasas primarily serve to systematize and professionalize Islamic learning? Or did they simply become venues for the powerful elite to propel their agen-

²⁰ Marwī, *Ālam-ārā-yi Nādirī* iii, 984–85.

²¹ Marwī, *Ālam-ārā-yi Nādirī* iii, 985–88.

da, bolster the legitimacy of their rule, and gain the support of the religious class, thus marginalizing their dedication to the transmission of knowledge?

This debate has been lively in recent decades. Scholars such as Jonathan Berkey and Michael Chamberlain are most interested in the learned society, specifically the application and transmission of religious knowledge to social practices, rather than the content of Islamic higher learning. Thus they have reached certain conclusions concerning the role of madrasas and the nature of Islamic higher learning that contrast with studies undertaken by scholars such as George Makdisi and Devin Stewart, whose research is primarily concerned with the development of Islamic law.

Both Berkey and Chamberlain strongly doubt that the rise and proliferation of madrasas changed the process by which individuals received their education and became recognized as scholars. They maintain it was by affiliation with his teachers that a student was identified and defined as a part of scholarly community, and that madrasas had little impact on this process. They substantiate their argument concerning the centrality of the teacher-disciple relationship in the transmission process and the marginality of the madrasa based on a range of textual evidence. For example, both Berkey and Chamberlain note that the madrasa is scarcely mentioned in the biographical entries, whereas documents contain numerous references to the study circles of certain prominent scholars that took place in mosques, Khānqāhs, or even in the teachers' own homes.

Scholars of Islamic law, however, argue that madrasas did indeed play a crucial role in formalizing educational practices in general and systematizing legal studies in particular. George Makdisi's profound and pioneering scholarship on medieval Islamic education, *The Rise of the Colleges*, offers a description of medieval Islamic legal education in its legal, social and political context.²² After surveying the evolution of institutions of learning in Islam, notably the madrasa, Makdisi meticulously examines the organization and methodology of Islamic higher learning, and the relationship between madrasas and the educational institutions of medieval Europe.²³ Makdisi discerns an organized

22 Makdisi argues that the madrasa was essentially a privately supported institution based on a charitable trust and dedicated to educating its students in Islamic law. He holds that the philosopher, the theologian, and the scientist were not part of institutionalized learning. In fact, they received their education through *shūba*, the master-disciple relationship, which compensated for the lack of madrasa learning (*The rise of colleges* 282–85).

23 Roy Mottahedeh questions Makdisi's assertion concerning the evolution of madrasas from mosque to mosque-Khān complexes and finally to madrasa. He maintains that Makdisi mistranslated "Khāns" built by Badr b. Ḥasanwayh, a ruler of part of western Iran

structure in Islamic legal education in which madrasas played a crucial role. He delineates the basic topics and works students studied in the course of their education.²⁴ He argues that while a basic course of study in Islamic law could be completed in four years, completing the longest program of study could take from ten to twenty years.²⁵

Berkey, Chamberlain, and Daphna Ephrat have refuted many of Makdisi's views. They undertake a broad argument against Makdisi's assertion that madrasas transformed instructional practices significantly. They maintain that Islamic learning between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries was indeed much less systematic and professionalized than Makdisi claims. In his study of medieval Islamic education in Mamlūk Cairo, Berkey forcefully argues that the numerous institutions established by pious endowments in the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries, while important as places of learning, did not change the highly personal character of Islamic higher learning.²⁶ He states that the spread of such institutions never resulted in any formalization of the educational process, and since madrasas and similar institutions did not confer degrees or teach set curricula, the whole system remained, as it were, thoroughly nonsystematic.²⁷ Berkey also maintains that the absence of a fixed course of study, in combination with the fact that students could acquire their knowledge from numerous professors teaching within the madrasas or outside of them in variety of locations including mosques, Khānqāhs and so forth, meant that madrasas did not have the capacity to change the character of Islamic learning. He concludes that, "an education was judged not on loci but on personae."²⁸

In his *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350*, Michael Chamberlain explores how the Damascene elite (*aʿyān*) "acquired

(d. 1014), instead asserting that the word "Khān" used in Ibn Jawzī's description of Badr's architectural undertakings means caravansaries for strangers and not lodges for out-of-town students as Makdisi translates it (The transmission of learning 65). For Makdisi's translation see, *The rise of colleges* 29–30.

24 Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 80–84, 96, 181, 282 ff. Makdisi also refutes the opinion of an earlier generation of scholars who viewed madrasas as an institution devised to fortify Sunni Islam and to thwart political and intellectual supremacy of the Shi'a during the tenth and eleventh centuries. See for example, Tritton, *Materials on Muslim education* 103; Pederson, Some aspects of the history of the Madrasa 530–32, 35.

25 Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 96–99, 111–52.

26 Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 7–9, 16, 20–7, 43, 216–18. Berkey's ideas reflect those of Tibawi, Origin and character of the madrasah 225–38 and *Materials on Muslim education* 32.

27 Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 44.

28 Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 23.

and used rare symbolic capital by which they claimed power, resources, and social honor and passed them on within lineages.”²⁹ While he offers valuable insights on how the educated elite gained positions in madrasas and similar religio-cultural institutions, he goes even further than Berkey in understating the importance of madrasas in shaping educational practices. Like Berkey, he argues that – because education could take place in a variety of venues – one should not grant madrasas special consideration. He writes, “There is remarkably little evidence that [madrasas] were specialized institutions of learning, as the knowledge transmitted in them was little different from that transmitted elsewhere.”³⁰

Chamberlain also maintains that, because the teachers could choose any texts to teach, madrasas lacked an established curriculum. Therefore speaking of a coherent education that trained students with a set of skills and provided them with recognized credentials is impossible. He writes, “What appear as credentials were tokens not only of an individual’s acquisition of the texts carried by his shaykh, but of the whole complex of manners, moral conduct, deportment, and scripted forms of self-presentation that in sum made up the notion of *adab*.”³¹ Thus, he rejects Makdisi’s findings that professors gave examinations, and that *ijāzas* conferred by professors provided academic credentials. He even criticizes Berkey for suggesting that an informal system of education existed in the madrasas of Mamlūk Cairo.³²

According to Chamberlain, the madrasa was a means by which the *a’yān* sought religious knowledge that provided them with the eligibility to hold appointments and to claim a kind of social honor (*ḥurma*). He writes that the elite “generally did not acquire learning in order to gain professional knowledge or qualifications. The object of learning was the prestige of the cultivated personality, which produced *ḥurma* and *istihqāq*.”³³ He argues that the transmission of hadith and fundamental books functioned as “ritual and initiatory practices.”³⁴

In her *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni ‘ulamā’ in Eleventh-Century Baghdad*, Daphna Ephrat makes similar statements about madrasas. Like Berkey and Chamberlain, Ephrat draws on an impressive number of both published and unpublished primary sources. She analyzes

29 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 23.

30 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 85.

31 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 107.

32 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 69–90.

33 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 66.

34 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 150.

considerable data in order to provide patterns that characterize the ‘ulamā’ who lived in Baghdad, migrated there, passed through the city in their travels, or held teaching positions in madrasas and mosques there. In her attempt to emphasize the autonomy of the ‘ulamā’ and the strong bond between teachers and their disciple – particularly in the hadith field – Ephrat overemphasizes the personal character of that transmission process and consequently dismisses the possibility that any formal education happened in the madrasa. She states, “the madrasa, it may be argued, was but a glorified *ḥalqa*,”³⁵ and “teachers came to the madrasa in order to obtain an official post and its accompanying salary, and students in order to receive stipends and living quarters.”³⁶ However, she later contradicts herself and notes that madrasas in fact provided an opportunity for the most competent scholars to enter into state patronage networks. She writes, “We thus find religious scholars establishing their reputation and obtaining top level positions in the legal administration well before they would assume the endowed chair in the madrasa.”³⁷

Ephrat’s argument regarding the informal nature of madrasa learning is based on her statement that the *ḥalqa* was an open classroom, a characteristic that had enabled some scholars to attend the hadith teaching circles during their brief travel stops. The flexible nature of *ḥalqa* had also made it possible for some prominent hadith scholars to hold their teaching in homes by popular request at times. She concludes that the teacher–disciple bond, together with the feelings of loyalty and support that it produced, undermined formal education, and that the rise of madrasas did not change this highly personal process.³⁸

While the approach of the above-mentioned scholars affords their audience significant insights into the social capital obtained in the learning circles, primary literature related to Islamic learning as well as the learned class furnishes information that negates some of their conclusions. As Devin Stewart convincingly argues, there are indeed a number of evidences that support Makdisi’s position. Stewart’s study on *ijāzat al-iftā’ wa al-tadrīs*, the certificate to teach and issue legal opinions, shows that students earned these *ijāzas* after years of studying with scholars of law who could grant these credentials that qualified the *mujāz* (the recipient of *ijāza*) to hold the positions of judge, deputy judge,

35 Ephrat, *A learned society* 78.

36 Ephrat, *A learned society* 85.

37 Ephrat, *A learned society* 117.

38 For more information on the evidences adduced by Ephrat for her claims see chapters 3, 4, and 5 of her book.

professor of law (*mudarris*), deputy professor of law (*nāʿib mudarris*), or repertitor (*muʿīd*).³⁹

Stewart's study of biographical dictionaries and *ijāzas* from the Mamlūk period also refutes claims that *ijāzas* issued during this period carried little significance.⁴⁰ In his research on two fatwas issued by Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī in the mid-14-century, Stewart refutes Chamberlain's view that madrasa students did not share a collective identity or act as a group. He argues that students at the Madrasa-yi Shāmiya selected a *nāʿib al-fuqahā* (the representative of law students) to defend their interests while interacting with the *nāzīr* (overseer of the madrasa) in fourteenth century Damascus.⁴¹

Gary Leiser, who has examined the development of madrasas in Egypt from the latter part of the Fatimid rule period through the Ayyubid dynasty, also maintains that madrasas played a crucial role in transforming Islamic higher learning, especially in legal education.⁴² He notes that madrasas were mainly built during the time that Christians controlled most government offices; therefore, they functioned to train Muslims for the application of Islamic law as well as for government service in lieu of Christians.⁴³ He argues that some figures like Riḍwān b. al-Walakhshī, the first Sunni vizier of the Fatimid dynasty, founded a Shāfiʿī madrasa in Alexandria in order to train Sunnis to be skilled administrators and judges to take positions in the government that were held mostly by Shiʿis and Christians.⁴⁴ Leiser goes on to point out that Salah al-Din also made use of the madrasa institution to strengthen support for himself among the Sunni populations.⁴⁵ Finally, Omid Safi maintains that the madrasas

39 Stewart, *The doctorate of law* 63. His findings tally with those of Leonor Fernandes, *Between qadis and muftis: To whom does the Mamluk sultan listen* 96–99.

40 Stewart, *The doctorate of law* 65–66. In his doctoral dissertation, *The Role of the Madrasah and the Structure of Islamic Legal Education in Mamlūk Egypt (1250–1517)*, Robert H. Moore also skilfully discuss the composition, social motivation, and the impact of the proliferation of madrasas in Mamlūk Cairo on the social status of students and professors of Islamic law education, as well as on the development of the structure of Islamic legal education. He argues that Islamic legal education conducted in madrasas of Cairo had become a highly structured and professionalized undertaking.

41 Stewart, *The students' representative* 185–218.

42 Leiser, *The restoration of Sunnism in Egypt*. Gilbert and Hourani also consider the madrasa as an institution that professionalized Islamic learning. For more information see Gilbert, *Institutionalization of Muslim* esp. 113–27; Hourani, *A history of the Arab* 113–14.

43 Leiser, *The madrasa and the Islamization* 29–47.

44 Leiser, *The restoration of Sunnism* 129–38.

45 Leiser, *The restoration of Sunnism* 265–67.

founded by the Saljuq rulers acted as instruments of state power, allowing the political elite to control religious scholars and to propagate state ideology.⁴⁶

In her study of the expansion of madrasas, Khānqahs, and similar institutions, as well as the career of ‘ulamā’ in Damascus from the late eleventh century through the thirteenth century, Joan Gilbert maintains that madrasas enabled the ruling classes to effectively establish patronage relations with willing elements among the ‘ulamā’. During this period, she notes, a large number of ‘ulamā’ found employment in these institutions, leading to an institutionalization and professionalization of the ‘ulamā’. Gilbert identifies the institutionalization of Islamic education with the “permanent provision of special places of instruction, residence, and employment for a majority of scholars and lasting endowments to pay salaries of personnel and building costs.”⁴⁷

Early madrasas were in fact built to promote one particular *madhhab*. For example, Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092) established the Nizāmīya network specifically to promote the Shāfi‘ī school of law. Nizām al-Mulk’s policy was emulated by Nūr al-Dīn, who established many madrasas in the Syrian towns under his rule.⁴⁸ In her study on Mamlūk politics and education, Leonor Fernandes draws on two fourteenth-century *waqfiyyas* to argue that the primary goal of the madrasas built by two Mamlūk emirs in 1356 and 1383 was to foster the teachings of the Ḥanafī school of law. While hadith was taught in those madrasas; its importance was to remain marginal. The donors gave distinct preference to the Ḥanafī professors and students.⁴⁹

As discussed earlier, conversion to Shi‘ī Islam did increase in numbers gradually and remained geographically patchy. Some Persians, both city-dwellers and villagers, remained staunch in their adherence to Sunni Islam and suffered immensely for quite some time because of this adherence. Some of the people opposing the Safavid rule fled abroad. However, all but a tiny minority of those who objected to Safavid dominance converted to Shi‘ism finally, and

46 For more information see Safi, *The politics of knowledge* 43–103.

47 In her survey of 1,000 legal scholars and Sufi shaykhs living in Medieval Damascus that she investigated, 156 were Ḥanafī legal scholars, 195 were Shāfi‘ī, 31 were Ḥanbalī, and 19 were Mālikī scholars. Hadith scholars made up over half the scholars documented by this survey. For more information see Gilbert, *Institutionalization of Muslim scholarship* 125–6.

48 For more information see Lev, *Politics, education, and medicine* 130–34.

49 Fernandes, *Mamlūk politics and education* 91–93. In his *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Society*, Richard Bulliet also demonstrates how the Ḥanafī and Shāfi‘ī legal schools were used by the elite of Nishapur as political parties through which to express factional rivalries. He also sees the madrasa as an institution with a specialized curriculum and madrasas’ professors certified to teach especially jurisprudence. Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur* 47–60.

some resigned themselves to suppressing their opinions in public and hoping for the dynasty's eventual demise. Twelver Shi'ism, however, offered lucrative positions and spiritual comfort to Turkish Qizilbāsh soldiers who had extremist tendencies, and animated ordinary Shi'is.⁵⁰

The imperial patronage of Twelver Shi'ism and Shi'i educational and religious institutions also generated attractive new career paths and riches for the worldly *sharī'a*-minded Shi'i scholars. Some hundred years after Ismā'īl's made Twelver Shi'ism the official religion of the empire he founded, it was quite entrenched as the established religion, thanks to the lavish sponsorship of Ismā'īl's successors and the support of Shi'i scholars. Despite the fact that Sunnism had been effectively eclipsed among the Persians, it continued to pose a powerful political and religious challenge to the Safavid-sponsored Shi'ism. I explain the matter further when I discuss the reign of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn.

In order to consolidate his rule and authority and fulfill his promise of establishing a new order, Ismā'īl I and his descendants made use of the various and complex socio-political and religious organizations and institutions such as the offices of *ṣadr* and *shaykh al-Islam* that already were available to them.⁵¹ They also either renovated the existing mosques and madrasas or built new ones all over Safavid Empire, and created pious endowments to support the aforesaid learning and religious centers to achieve their socio-political and religious agendas.⁵² Additionally, all the trappings of imperial grandeur were brought into and overlaid onto the Shi'i tradition, as it became an imperial ideology.

50 At time, the Qizilbāsh were appointed to the treasury, the chancellery or other civil posts but rarely appointed to judicial or religious offices. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* 31–2; Savory, *The principles offices* 95–6; Roemer, *The Qizilbāsh* 27–39; Roemer, *The Safavid period*, 213 ff; Floor, *Safavid government* 9–10.

51 For a complete list of military and socio-administrative organizations of the Safavid society, see Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk*; Marcinkowski, *Mirza Rafi'a's Dastur al-muluk*. Both sources give the blueprint for the Safavid society's administrative structure.

52 In his *Ḥabīb al-sīyar*, Khvāndamir reports that Timurid rulers and members of the Timurid elite built a number of madrasas including Ghiyāthiyya, Sulṭāniyya, Ikhlāṣiyya, Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, and Madrasa-yi Gawhar-Shād in Herat, Khvāf and other places. For more about these educational institutions see Khvāndamīr, *Tārīkh-i Ḥabīb al-sīyar* iii, 111, 116, 338, 340, 343. See also Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh* I, 60. For a detailed examination of the Ikhlāṣiyya Complex see Subtelny, *A Timurid educational* 38–61. Modarresi discusses the madrasas built during Safavid rule in Qum, including Qiyāthiyya, Raḍawiyya, Jānī Khān, and Fayḍiyya. For more information on these learning centers see Modarresi, *Turbat-i pākān* ii, 127–139.

The hegemonic presence of Shi'ism reflected in particular in all the Safavid architecture, including shrines of the Shi'i Imams as well as the magnificent mosque-madrasas. These splendid structures not only promoted Twelver Shi'ism, but also abated the pressure that undermined the ability of the Twelver Shi'ism to survive as a powerful religious denomination in the context of a struggle against, or at least a serious concern with, a large and strong Sunni population in Iran itself and the greater Muslim world of the early modern times. Altogether, the evidence at hand indicates a direct causal relationship between the activities of the madrasa and the final decline of Sunnism in Iran.

Indeed, by the time that the full impact of the Shi'i madrasa on Safavid Iran was finally felt, Sunnism was reduced to a shadow of its former glory. Moreover, Shi'i madrasas became indispensable not only to the strength of the tradition itself, but also to the vigor of its members, particularly the religious elite who occupied themselves with elaborating religious knowledge as well as administering educational and religious activities. Religious authority normally flows from what is perceived to be superior scholarship done in the context of a richly supported and robust learning tradition.

In my forthcoming study, "Shi'i Educational Institutions and Practices in Classical Islamic History," I argue that Shi'i educational undertakings similar to Sunni learning have a long history that dates back to the early years of Islamic history.⁵³ Prior to the era of the madrasas, most learning took place in mosques and in the homes of Shi'i Imams and scholars, as well as in *dār-ʿilms* (houses of knowledge) and libraries. Students attended the teaching circles (*ḥalqas*) of Shi'i Imams and eminent Shi'i scholars to hear and record hadiths (prophetic traditions) and *khabars* (the sayings of the Shi'i Imams) and to discuss the issues addressed by these texts.

In the later half of the formative period of Islamic history – namely from the mid-ninth century through the tenth century – Islamic civilization was developing rapidly. Briefly, Muslims received a great influx of new knowledge from the ancient civilizations they encountered through the expansion of the Islamic rule. This abundance of knowledge, in addition to the maturing of Islamic legal, theological, mystical, and philosophical thought, intense intellectual confrontations, and deepening religious divisions, created a need for an educational institution, namely the madrasa, the institution of Islamic higher learning par excellence, that would take students beyond what was being taught in the mosques and the homes of scholars. The increasing complexity of urban life during the late classical period of Islamic history, coupled with the

53 It will appear in the Collected Studies volume on *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam*, scheduled for publication with Brill in 2017.

demand for an educated class primed to join the ranks of administrators and bureaucrats, further contributed to the madrasa's evolution into an indispensable element of the socio-economic and judicial apparatuses of the Muslim world.

The state of the learned class was also changing at this time. As Marshal Hodgson famously argued the *'ulamā'* and the Sufis had become recognized and effective socio-spiritual and religious groups, claiming unique sorts of authority as heirs to the prophet Muhammad; thus they demanded a place in the upper echelons of power. They primarily dominated religious and educational institutions as well as juridical offices.⁵⁴ Moreover, in the tenth and eleventh centuries the number of students attending teaching circles of eminent scholars in mosques across the Muslim world had grown so large that the existing educational system and teaching paradigms became insufficient to accommodate them. All of these new developments created a cultural base for the nascent madrasas during the late classical period of Islamic history.

The high-ranking and wealthy Shi'a Muslims, like their Sunni counterparts, founded a number of madrasas in major cities that were traditional Shi'a strongholds – such as Rayy, Qum, Kāshān, and Najaf – in order to promote their own religious denomination, and to solidify their political power.⁵⁵ For example, in his *Kitāb al-naqd*, 'Abd al-Jalīl Qazwīnī (d. after 1189) reports that across Islamic lands the largest and most beautiful madrasas and mosques were built by the Shi'a.

The period between approximately 1200 and 1500 was also a very crucial historical juncture for Twelver Shi'ism in particular. The Mongol invasions ushered in an age of religious transition during which the Shi'a experienced ideological and political ascendancy. The Ilkhāns generously founded a number of madrasas and *dār al-siyādas* and patronized leading Shi'i *'ulamā'*. In the absence of Shi'i dynasties, however, Shi'i learning remained precarious. In fact, the history of Shi'i higher learning in Iran properly begins with the rule of the Safavids. In time, this development created a long-awaited opportunity for the Twelver Shi'i *'ulamā'* to spread their knowledge on a wider public scale.⁵⁶

54 Hodgson, *The ventures of Islam* ii, 152–54.

55 Qazwīnī, *Kitāb al-naqd* 12, 47, 473; Calmard, *Le chiisme Imamite* 60–65.

56 For more information on *dār al-siyādas* see Qāshānī, *Tarikh-i Oljeytū*, 91–4; Hamadānī, *Savānih al-afkār-i Rashīdī*, 143 (letter no. 29), Lambton, *Landlord and peasant*, 92; Lambton, *Awqāf in Persia* 299, 315–18; Pfeiffer, *Confessional ambiguity* 148–156; Afshār, *Waqf-nāma-yi sih dih* 122–138; Khvāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar* iv, 345; Khvāndamīr, *Khātamat al-akhbār* 192; Golombek and Wilber, *The Timurid architecture* i, 332; Hillenbrand, *Islamic architecture* 59, 423–26; O'Kane, *Timurid architecture* 127–28.

The early Safavid rulers were active in renovating the existing madrasas and mosques; but as I will discuss in chapter one, madrasas built in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, were larger institutions in both number and size. Ismā'īl, his successors, wealthy individuals, military commanders, and merchants and traders, supported religious scholars and mosque-madrasas and shrines by creating *waqfs*, which traditionally embody the Islamic ideal of personal piety, especially if it is the public good endowment (*waqf-i khayrī*) type of waqf. For example, Ismā'īl's wife, Shāh Baygī Begum, replaced the dome of the Shrine of Ma'sūma in Qum and added a courtyard to the complex.⁵⁷

Waqfs not only provided the only regular financial support for the madrasa and other religio-cultural institutions, the act of *waqf* making also had a definite political motivation in many cases, as will be discussed further in the proceeding chapters. Historically, ruling elites have secured the allegiance of civil and religious beneficiaries by means of patronage. As a result, the religious class gained material support for their learning and teaching endeavors, while the political elite attained a pious image in the eyes of their subjects and became an effective proxy to the loci of the sacred and its guardians and representatives. Religious scholars, as the result of the generous patronage of the political elites, could achieve scholarly success, which has been seen as both fulfilling a religious duty as well as social achievement. Hence, succeeding in one's studies normally would lead to a position of influence and power.

Ismā'īl invited Arab jurists and religious scholars to direct and accelerate the propagation of the Shi'i faith in a traditionally Sunni territory to elaborate a body of dogma.⁵⁸ This developed dogma could then be used in the kind of governmental system that the Safavids intended to create, thus distinguishing Iran from its Sunni neighbors.⁵⁹ According to some primary sources and secondary

57 She also donated many properties to this shrine on the 10th of Safar in 929/1522. Hossein Modarressi published the deed of her endowment, which is written partly in Persian and partly in Arabic. The revenues of this pious endowment were estimated at around one thousand *tumans*. See Modarressi, *Turbat-i pākān* i, 131–41.

58 The tradition of inviting religious scholar to administer educational and religious institutions has a long history in Muslim societies. For example, Gary Leiser states that the Ayyubids, finding Sunni learning in Egypt in a state of decay after 200 years of Isma'īlid rule, invited scholars from Syria, Iraq and Iran to staff the educational and religious institutions they established. Leiser, Notes on the madrasa 19. Berkey also states that – under the later Mamlūk sultans – jurists and mystics from Anatolia, the Caucasus and Iran (such as those fleeing the Timurid invasions) were allowed to occupy a prominent place in Egyptian academic and religious life; at least one madrasa was founded specifically to benefit these “foreign Ḥanafī students.” Berkey, Tradition, innovation 91.

59 Aubin, *Etudes Safavides* 1, 43.

scholarship, early Safavid rulers had to resort to non-Persian scholars due to a shortage of Shi'i religious scholars and books in Iran. Rūmlū reports: "In those days men knew not of the Ja'farī *madhhab* and the principles and laws of the *madhhab* of the twelve Imāms because there were not any works on Imāmī *fiqh*. The first volume of the book *Qawā'id-i Islām* (i.e., *Qawā'id al-aḥkām fi Ma'rifat al-ḥalāl wa ḥarām*), one of the works by the prince of erudite scholars, shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, which was in the possession of Qādī Naṣrullāh Zaytūnī, served as the main textbook for the teaching and learning of religious issues until the time when the sun of the true Twelver *madhhab* rose and illuminated the horizon of scholarship."⁶⁰ Apparently Ismā'īl's decision angered Persian scholars and provoked the opposition of Iranian nobles.⁶¹

The Permissibility of Collaborating with Temporal Power

As religious life in Safavid Persia took its Shi'i form, Shi'i elite, both religious and nobles (sayyid families), were able to expand their power and wealth within the religious sphere precisely because the new religio-political order privileged them. By establishing and funding religious institutions, they managed to acquire and exercise considerable influence in religious sphere. The more structured nature and administrative complexity of Shi'i religious life furthered the consolidation of power in the hands of the religious, political, and military elite whose financial resources, social connections, and professional expertise proved invaluable. Religious scholars and institutions benefited immensely from relationship with the wealthy, prominent, and powerful members of the Safavid society.

Traditionally, however, association with secular rulers was discouraged by the Shi'i Imams and had been one of the subjects of debates among Shi'i religious scholars. For example, al-Kulaynī quotes the Prophet Muhammad who said: "Jurists (*fuqahā*) are the authorized representatives of the prophets on the stipulation that they do not follow a ruler. If they did that, avoid them to secure your religion."⁶² In time, however, many Shi'i jurists and powerful families such as the Nawbakhtīs, who contributed to the development of the Twelver Shi'ism at a time of confusion following the Minor Occultation, saw no problem in collaborating with the political establishment. Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī (d. 937), one of The Four Deputies (*nawwāb, sufarā'*) of

60 Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh* i, 61.

61 For more on this, see Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 135.

62 al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl-i kāfī* i, 58.

the Twelfth Imam, had close ties with the court of al-Muqtadir (d. 932), the 'Abbasid Caliph, through his grand Vazīr, Abu al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muhammad Ibn Furāt (d. 924). Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan, known as al-Shaykh al-Tā'ifa al-Ṭūsī (d. 1066), one of the greatest Shi'i jurists, maintains that,

accepting a job offered by a just ruler who enjoins good and forbids wrong, and who conducts himself justly, is permitted, and sometimes it is even necessary to do so, because it makes it possible [for the scholar] to enjoin good and forbid evil. And if the sultan is unjust and one is almost sure that collaboration with him can restore good and prohibit evil, and also can lead to collection of fifth [*khums*] and alms to be distributed among the needy and fellow Muslim brothers, and if he is sure that this association does not hurt any religious obligation and does not lead him to commit sin, it is praiseworthy to accept the offered opportunity [by an unjust ruler].⁶³

The majority of *Uṣūlī* Shi'i jurists, including Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022), Ibn Idrīs al-Ḥillī (d. 1202), 'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1326), al-Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 1384), and al-Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī (d. 1534), are in agreement with al-Ṭūsī.⁶⁴ Sayyid Ni'matallāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1699), a student of Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, writes: "A scholar should avoid seeking the proximity of kings and the wealthy, and if he can, he should even run away from them to protect knowledge. If a scholar seeks the proximity of the powerful, he betrays the deposit [i.e. knowledge] entrusted to him." But he quickly adds that if religious scholars made themselves close to a ruler in order to "elevate the word of God, to promote the religion, to eradicate heretics, to command right and forbid wrong, this is one of the best things that they can achieve."⁶⁵ Perhaps a number of Shi'i Arab émigré scholars, who had expert knowledge in jurisprudence, accepted Ismā'il's invitation and joined his court because they believed they would be able to promote the religion, to eradicate heretics, to command right and to forbid wrong with the help of a Shi'i dynasty.⁶⁶

63 al-Ṭūsī, *al-Nihāya*, 356–7; Ja'farian, *Safaviya dar 'arsa-yi din* i, 112–3.

64 For more information see 'Allāma Ḥillī, *Qawā'id al-aḥkām* 132; al-Karakī, *Jāmi' al-maqāsīd* iv, 44; Ja'fariān, *Safaviya dar 'arsa-yi din* i, 111–16. See also al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, xvii, 191–2, where he includes a chapter on licenses regarding whether to collaborate with an unjust ruler in order to benefit the faithful.

65 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 341.

66 For some information on the Safavid imperial uses of the Shi'i *mujtahids'* legal expertise see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 61–68.

The aforementioned Shaykh ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-‘Ālī, Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī, was the most famous Arab scholar to accept Ismā‘īl’s invitation.⁶⁷ Al-Karakī justified his close ties with the Safavid court by referring to great scholars such as Sayyid Murtaḍā, Sayyid Raḍī, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, and ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī who also had maintained close relationships with their contemporaneous rulers and accepted high-ranking positions, substantial gifts, and large parcels of land offered to them.⁶⁸ In his *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, Khvānsārī says that Shah Ismā‘īl was sending the sum of seventy thousands *dinārs* to Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī so that he would spend the sum on his madrasa and students.⁶⁹ Ismā‘īl’s son, Tahmāsp continued to support the ‘ulamā’ generously because of their ability to interpret day-to-day events according to Islamic teachings, and to anticipate the ramifications of such events as discussed by Abisaab.⁷⁰ The aforesaid Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī took upon himself the supervision of Iranians’ conversion to Shi‘ism under Tahmāsb, a mission that continued until his death.⁷¹ Al-Karakī saw the Safavids as a political force that could establish Twelver Shi‘ism as an assertive and normative faith rather than a marginal one, which consequently would result in improving the position of the Shi‘i religious scholars. In his own words:

Every pragmatic scholar knows scholars can reach a high rank with the patronage and support of strong and powerful rulers, who also attained their power with the help of scholars. The ‘ulamā’s lack of association with the powerful and their reluctance to guide and direct rulers has caused not only the decline of the ‘ulamā’s position but also the fall of educational institutions into ruin.⁷²

67 Madelung, al-Karakī; for more on al-Karakī see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 15–26, Newman, *Safavid Iran* 24.

68 al-Karakī, *Rasā‘il al-Muḥaqqiq* i, 289–9.

69 Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* v, 170.

70 Abisaab claims that, “As a temporal ruler and builder of a state, Shāh Tahmāsp increasingly turned to stable sources of religious legitimacy, ones that could be harnessed by him or which lend themselves to state control.” She also asserts that Tahmāsb boosted the position of the Persian aristocrats to weaken the hold of the Qizilbāsh, and that ‘Āmilī scholars, including Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, had a significant position in Tahmāsb’s court. Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 32.

71 For more on al-Karakī and his descendants see, Ja‘fariyān, *Kāwushhā-yi tāza* 79–152.

72 al-Karakī, *al-Kharājīyyāt* 40–41.

However, a number of scholars, including the accomplished philosopher Ghiyāth al-Dīn Maṣṣūr Shīrāzī Dashtakī (d. 1542),⁷³ Mīr Ni‘matullāh al-Ḥillī,⁷⁴ and Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān Qaṭīfī (d. after 1539), challenged al-Karakī’s position on several issues like the Friday Prayer, land-tax (*kharāj*), and accepting gifts from monarchs.⁷⁵ It seems al-Karakī’s willingness to devise solutions for what was uncovered fully and clearly in the normative resources troubled a more conservative scholar such as Qaṭīfī. Shah Ṭahmāsb, who had become preoccupied with quelling the more pressing matters of open conflicts among ‘ulamā’ attached to his court, wrote in his memoir:

At this time scholarly controversy arose between the *Mujtahid* of the Age (i.e. al-Karakī), and Mīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn Maṣṣūr, the *ṣadr*. Even though the *mujtahid* of the age was triumphant, they did not acknowledge his *ijtihād*, and were bent on hostility. We (i.e. Tahmāsb) took note of the side of the truth, and affirmed him in *ijtihād*.⁷⁶

Rūmlū also reports, “At last his (al-Ḥillī’s) feud with the Seal of the Mujtahids (i.e. al-Karakī) led to his being expelled and he was made to go to Baghdad. Muḥammad Khān Takallū, the governor of Baghdad, was ordered to prevent Ḥillī from meeting with shaykh Ibrāhīm Qaṭīfī and al-Karakī’s other enemies.”⁷⁷ ‘Abdullāh Afandī quotes Majlisī who had said: Qaṭīfī was not very knowledgeable and he was not eligible to challenge Shaykh ‘Alī al-Karakī. Afandī adds: “The other day I heard him [Majlisī] saying Qaṭīfī was inferior to al-Karakī. Majlisī denied Qaṭīfī’s religiosity.”⁷⁸ The animosity among al-Karakī, Dashtakī,

73 Muḥammad ‘Alī Ranjbar states that Shah Ṭahmāsb appointed Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī, Ghiyāth al-Dīn’s father, as the *mutawallī* of the Madrasa-yi Maṣṣūriyya in Shiraz and his family held the position for several generations. Ranjbar, *Mutawalliyān-i Madrasa-yi Maṣṣūriyya Shiraz* 48–51. For more information on Madrasa-yi Maṣṣūriyya and its *mutawallis*, see Ranjbar, *Mutawalliyān-i Madrasa-yi Maṣṣūriyya Shiraz* 48–61.

74 For a short while he studied under al-Karakī but left his teaching circle soon after. He was appointed as the *ṣadr* in 935/1528. Al-Ḥillī was not quite pleased with al-Karakī’s influence in court decisions. Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh* i, 253–4.

75 For more on their arguments see the following, Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh* i, 254–56, 303–04; Ibrāhīmī Ḥusaynī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* 237–39; al-‘Amilī, *Amal al-‘amil* ii, 8. According to Modarressi, al-Karakī had accepted many land grants from the shah in the region of Najaf as a hereditary endowment including the revenues of land tax (*kharāj*). For more information see Modarressi, *Kharāj* 54; al-Karakī, *Rasā’il al-Muḥaqqiq* i, 237–9, 244–45.

76 For more see Tahmāsb b. Ismā‘īl, *Tadhkira* 14.

77 Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh* i, 255.

78 Afandī Iṣfahānī, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā’* i, 55.

and Mīr N‘imatullāh al-Ḥillī, who had been *ṣadr* jointly with Mīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dashtakī Shīrāzī, grew to the degree that Shāh Tahmāsb released them both from their official positions and sent al-Ḥillī into exile.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, Shāh Tahmāsb issued a *farmān*, in which he confirmed al-Karakī’s position.⁸⁰ Copies of the decree were dispatched to all major towns and cities of the kingdom and people were enjoined to follow the rulings of al-Karakī or face punishment.⁸¹ Al-Karakī’s descendants continued to play important roles in the consolidation of Shi‘ism in Persia, which extended to the educational system, the mosque pulpits, and other religious institutions.

Trying to win over the minds and hearts of the Shi‘a and Persians, Tahmāsb actively continued the tradition set by his father, building and restoring religious structures all over Iran and the holy cities of Iraq. According to Qumī, Shāh Tahmāsb was sending a few thousand *tumans* annually to the shrines of Imam Riḍā, Ma‘ṣūma, and shaykh Ṣafaī al-Dīn Ardabīlī in Mashhad, Qum, and Ardabīl respectively.⁸² Safavid Shahs also patronized paintings and manuscript illustrations with religious themes.⁸³

Ṭahmāsb undertook upon himself to develop a new line of political government that embraced Persian culture while not losing sight of also sustaining the support of the Qizilbāsh and Arab immigrant Shi‘i ‘ulamā’.⁸⁴ In essence, the most successful Safavid rulers found a balance between all these competing groups. For example, Ṭahmāsb, in addition to supporting religious scholars and apparatuses, commissioned the illustration of Ferdowsī’s *Shāh-nāma*, which chronicles the legends and histories of Iranian kings from primordial

79 For more on Ghiyāth al-Dīn see Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* viii, 18–19. Aḥmad Qumī recorded the royal decree to the Governor of Baghdad in this regard. Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* 237–38.

80 Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* 238. ‘Abdullāh Afandī recorded a copy of the *farmān* in his *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā* iii, 455–60; Khvānsārī recorded an abridgement of this very important royal decree as well. Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* v, 169. Turner maintains that Tahmāsb’s *farmān* was of immense historical significance, since it marks the beginning of what is loosely termed the Twelver Shi‘i ‘ulamā’ as an autonomous center of power. Turner, *Islam without Allah?* 89.

81 Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* 238. Turner also claims that during the reign of Shāh Ismā‘īl, both political and religious authority had been vested in the personage of the Shah with the advent of Tahmāsb; however, religious authority was stripped from the ruler and devolved upon the *mujtahid*. Turner, *Islam without Allah?* 89.

82 Modarressi, *Turbat-īpākān* i, 23.

83 For more information Gruber, *When Nubuwwat encounters* 46–73. See also Suleman, *The iconography of Ali* 215–32.

84 For more information see Newman, *Safavid Iran* 33–35.

times to the Muslims' conquest of Persia in the 7th century, in three successive episodes: the mythical, the legendary, and the historical. It has been regarded as a masterpiece of Persian language that has been essential both in survival of Persian language and maintaining Iranian identity and culture. The *Shāh-nāme*h of Shah Ṭahmāsb, also known as the *Shāh-nāma-yi Shāhī*, is arguably the most richly illustrated copy of Ferdowsī's epic ever produced in the history of Iranian painting. Accompanying the 759 folios of text, written in excellent *nasta'liq* script, are 258 paintings of magnificent quality and artistic creativity. It was begun around the early 1520s, and carried out for at least another twenty years under Shah Ṭahmāsb. Upon its completion, the manuscript was sent as a gift on the occasion of the accession of the Ottoman sultan Selīm II (r. 1566–74).

Shi'ī Higher Learning in Safavid Iran

In my historical and textual analyses of the various aspects of Shi'ī higher learning, including the religious and political relations and structures in Safavid Isfahan's madrasas, as well as in my analyses of Safavid pedagogical practices, I draw on a broad range of primary sources including biographical dictionaries, autobiographies, *ijāzas*, deeds of endowment (*waqfiyyas*), chronicles and historical resources, European travelers' accounts, anthologies and polemics written by Safavid 'ulamā', administrative annuals and chancery literature, and works by the Safavid 'ulamā'. Although biographical dictionaries often provide little information about the lives and vocations of scholars, the madrasa or madrasas where he acquired his training, and the length of their educational training, and their information is at times repetitive, contradictory, and even inaccurate, they are one of the key sources for the study of educational practices. As recent scholarship has shown, the authors of these biographical dictionaries were mainly concerned with showing the continuity of scholarship in certain branches of knowledge.⁸⁵

The autobiographies of some leading Safavid scholars, such as Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī, and Bahā' al-Dīn Isfahānī, known as Fāḍil Hindī (d. 1724), are also important sources for the study of educational practices in early modern Iran. They usually refer to textbooks and different branches of knowledge the authors studied in their formative years. *Ijāzas* to transmit are, however, the most essential tools for studying the intellectual his-

85 Kadi, Biographical dictionaries 93–122; Humphreys, *Islamic history* 190; Gibb, *Islamic biographical literature* 55.

tory and curricula of religious higher learning.⁸⁶ Even though *Ijāzas* tend to be formulaic, they contain valuable information about who studied with whom and when. More importantly, they reveal the range of subjects and disciplines – both religious and rational – and particularly the various texts, which the licensee (*mujāz*) was permitted to transmit. *Ijāzas* also contain important biographical and bibliographical data about scholars and thus are essential to reconstruct entire scholarly traditions and networks. The deeds of madrasas endowment also contain invaluable information about the curriculum and the textbooks taught. The passages on the academic and moral obligations of the teachers, students, and other personnel of such endowed pious institutions are a welcome antidote to the cursory reports on academic life in Safavid historical and biographical literature.

Although the authors of Safavid historical chronicles are mainly concerned with reporting the lives and times of the Safavid shahs, military commanders, wars, natural disasters, epidemics, and other notable affairs, they also contain materials pertaining to the religious concerns and policies of the Safavid shahs and particularly their relationship with and patronage of the ‘ulamā’. European travelers’ accounts provide useful information about the Safavid socio-political, economic, and religious institutions, but the authors’ biases need to be examined more closely. Although administrative manuals are generally concerned with the administrative organization of the state, they do supply information about official posts, some of which were held by religious scholars, their job descriptions as well as and the fees they received.

In addition to above-mentioned primary sources, I have consulted the many important works on Shi‘i intellectual history and the period of the Safavid rule published during the last four decades. For the study of Shi‘ism and its intellectual history, I have profited in particular from the excellent studies by Wilferd Madelung, Heinz Halm, Etan Kohlberg, Hossein Modarressi, and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, while for the role of the Safavid scholars and the socio-political careers of the prominent and influential religious scholars of ‘Āmili background, the works of Saïd Amir Arjomand, Devin J. Stewart, Rula Jurdi Abisaab, and Andrew J. Newman constitute the foundation for my own research. In the area of Safavid cultural history, I have consulted the works of Jean Calmard and Kathryn Babayan. Although Babayan does not discuss the role of the madrasa as a very important institution for reconstructing Shi‘i cultural memory, her narrative about the “cultural landscape of early modern Iran,” as well as the way she shifts the emphasis from so-called orthodox narratives to heterodox

86 For a good example of the use of *ijāzās* issued by Shi‘i scholars see Schmidtke, *The ijāza* from ‘Abd Allāh 64–85.

experiences in understanding Safavid society, provide an important fresh perspective. I have also profited from the works of Andrew Newman, Todd Lawson, and Robert Gleave, who offer detailed discussions about Safavid intellectual debates in general and on the Akhbārī (traditionalist) and Uṣūlī (rationalist) schools of thought in particular. For economic history and the institution of *waqf*, I relied on the studies of Ann K.S. Lambton, Robert D. McChesney, and Rudi Matthee, while for Safavid art, architecture, and urban culture I have made use of the works of M. Haneda, Robert Hillenbrand, and Stephen P. Blake, among others.

As discussed earlier, despite the rich secondary literature on Safavid era, there is a dearth of scholarship on Shi'ī higher learning and Safavid madrasas, where Shi'ī doctrinal training was developed. Each chapter of this study explores a particular aspect of the Safavid madrasas, but collectively it illustrates the academic life of Safavid Iran. Although this study focuses primarily on educational practices, it also includes an examination of the socio-political motivations of Safavid elite in establishing madrasas and of their roles in shaping intellectual discourse. More precisely, I examine the Safavid shahs' religious policies and their patronage of Shi'ī higher learning and those religious scholars who were put in charge of developing a Shi'ī legal system and cultural norms.

Because *wāqifs* (donors), who were mainly members of the political elite and military and affluent Safavid subjects, to a great extent defined and shaped the direction of intellectual discourse and designed the orientation of the madrasa curriculum, it makes sense to discuss their attitudes towards pedagogy before delving into the curriculum and the methods of instruction. Therefore, after outlining the historical foundations of the rise of Shi'ism to the state religion, the first two chapters consider how madrasas were used as an effective agency to consolidate Shi'ism in Iran by examining the tradition of madrasa building by Safavid shahs and powerful and wealthy individuals, particularly Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn. The content of the next four chapters is based on the information and analysis presented in the first two.

In the first chapter "Mosque and Madrasas of Safavid Isfahan," I survey and interpret the outward manifestations of imperial Twelver Shi'ism by studying madrasas and mosques of Safavid Isfahan. The very fact of their constructions and extensive pious endowments – of which I propose an interpretation – allow us to understand one of the crucial agencies used to facilitate the process of Iranian conversion to Shi'ī Islam, and have been also significant to the dissemination of religious knowledge, the understanding of Shi'ī values, and the promotion of personal piety. Additionally, from the inception of Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion, religious sites and rituals served as the mnemonics that not only had a profound impact on many areas of life at every level

of Safavid society, but also were significant to the dissemination of religious knowledge, the understanding of spiritual and ethical values, and the promotion of personal piety. Although I would not claim that the madrasa was the most important reason for the final triumph of Shi'ism over Sunnism in Iran, I argue that it certainly was one of the primary instruments for the firm establishment of Shi'ism in Iran and one that has been largely overlooked. Indeed, as part of their religious policies, the Safavid monarchs, particularly from the time of 'Abbās the Great (r. 1587–1628), established educational institutions to advance religious higher learning and promote a Shi'i ethos among their subjects.

The second chapter “The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī: *Waqfs*, Administrative Structure, and Academic Life,” examines the tradition of a madrasa building by Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, the last effective Safavid ruler, and by powerful and wealthy individuals living during his reign. By analyzing the *waqfiyyas* of madrasas and mosques, in particular, the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, I shed light on the mechanisms and structures for organizing Shi'i educational and charitable foundations, the motivations expressed and implied in their establishment, the branches of knowledge transmitted, the kinds of religious activities supported, and the beneficiaries selected – all of which indicate the founders' attitudes toward learning, religion, and the role of the religious elite. The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī articulates the relation among politics, cultural practices, and the transmission and production of religious knowledge. Its various functions also reveal the complicated relationship that existed between political elite and religious authorities. I argue that because members of the political establishment were typically founders of new madrasas, political ends were inevitably fused with religious values in the resulting endowed foundations.

This chapter therefore aims to explain the complex motivations that Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn and other Safavid elite experienced in founding madrasas and other religious and cultural establishments. Certain developments during the reigns of his predecessors will also be noted, because the religious policies and initiatives of previous Safavid rulers continued to have major bearing on religious trends during the last decade of the seventeenth century and early years of the eighteenth century. I also examine the administrative structure of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī and describe the duties of its personnel, as well as the living conditions of the students residing in it. To achieve this objective, I rely mainly on the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī's *waqfiyyas*.⁸⁷

87 Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn endowed properties to his madrasa from 1706 to 1714, and a number of deeds of endowment pertaining to the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī have been preserved in 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Sipintā's collection of the *awqāf* (pious endowments) of Isfahan. Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 117–242.

Chapter three, “Reshaping Shi’a Cultural Memory: Commemorative Rituals and Constructing Identity,” looks at the broader cultural contexts of madrasas. Building on the arguments presented in Chapters One and Two, I discuss how this era of religious consciousness was characterized by the appropriation of new cultural styles, ideas, and forms of material culture that served as important generational markers of difference. I explain how Safavid madrasas were more than centers of disseminating religious knowledge and preserving the Shi’i intellectual heritage. Madrasas functioned as a multifaceted institution that served much wider goals. Madrasa not only acted as an agent in the social construction of collective memory but also played an important role in retrieving, reconstructing, re-articulating, and contextualizing or contemporizing the past to suit Safavid needs. I argue that during Safavid rule, Shi’i cultural memory was constantly being reconstructed and re-read in the light of current circumstances, perceptions, and cultural memory. For instance, through public memorializing, the deaths of the Imams came to serve as a symbolic and moral resource for organizing and interpreting the Shi’i community’s new experiences and for mobilizing it to face new crises.⁸⁸ These commemorative experiences, along with active memorializing, helped Safavid society to mediate between events of the past and the present and to find direction for future actions.

After discussing the concept of *‘ilm* (knowledge) as defined by Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1626) and Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), chapter four examines the curriculum of the Safavid madrasas. Based on biographical dictionaries, autobiographies and the large number of extant *ijāzas* issued by Safavid scholars over a period of two centuries, I argue that, in the sixteenth century, the Uṣūlī *mujtahids* (jurisconsults) dominated higher learning and played an active role in directing cultural and religious institutions. The revival of Akhbarism (traditionalism), which had a substantial influence on cultural and intellectual affairs, curtailed the *mujtahids’* dominance.

Chapter five sets out to describe the pedagogical methods that Safavid scholars employed to transmit religious knowledge. Despite the fact that various Shi’i intellectual schools of thought had differing description of knowledge, and regardless of what Safavid *mujtahids*, Akhbārī *muḥaddiths* (traditionalists), and philosophically-minded scholars considered as sources of knowledge and the varied ways they interpreted them, they used a number of technical

88 Commemorative rituals, in particular, continued to influence Iranian society. In her *Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shi’ism*, Flakerud explores the contemporary visual and material culture of Iranian Shi’i devotional rituals, especially visual portraits of Imam ‘Alī (Part I), and pictorial renderings of the Battle of Karbala (Part II).

terms in the *ijāzas* (licenses to transmit) they issued to their students, which indicate the manner in which an act of learning and transmission occurred. Generally a student read to his teacher such authoritative texts as the four great hadith collections (*al-kutub al-arba'a*), namely: *Kāfi* by Abū Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 941); *Man lā yahḍurahu al-faqīh* by Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Bābūya or Bābawayh, known as Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 991); and *Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*, by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, known as al-Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa (d. 1067),⁸⁹ or a number of legal and exegetical texts written by the most eminent jurists and Quran commentators as well as widely recognized *sharḥs* (commentaries) written about any of these genres. The decorum pertinent to teaching and learning as well as lengths to which Safavid scholars went to cultivate networks of intellectual contacts with their counterparts are also discussed in this chapter.

In chapter six, the major problems that faced the Shi'i higher learning are discussed. More precisely, this chapter examines the critiques by such scholars as Mullā Ṣadrā, (d. 1640), the famed Safavid philosopher, Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1679), a renowned traditionalist, Muḥammad Bāqir Khurāsānī, known as Muḥaqqiq Sabzawārī (d. 1679), the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan and a prominent *mujtahid*, and Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī (fl. early eighteenth century), an eminent Safavid pedagogue. Although these scholars had different intellectual perspectives, there is a great deal of commonality in their critiques. All of them depict the intellectual attitudes of early modern Iran and criticize what they referred to as the literalist (*zāhirī*) religious authorities. All of them thought that the formal religious sciences taught in madrasas, as well as theological and philosophical speculation, fell short of what education should be. Mullā Ṣadrā and Muḥsin Fayḍ in particular strove to determine the approaches that they deemed would lead to what they referred to as "epistemic certitude" (*yaqīn*).

A historical and analytical examination of religious higher learning in the late Safavid period in its socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts leads to a number of conclusions. First, higher learning was supported mostly in response to the internal demands of Safavid society. Establishing mosques and madrasas played a part in each Safavid ruler's cultural programs. Shahs with special interests in intellectual concerns generously offered patronage to learning in anticipation of a certain level of loyalty from the religious authorities. They fully expected that Shi'i jurists trained in madrasas would help them create social and spiritual cohesion among their subjects.

89 For an examination of the historical development of the *al-kutub al-arba'a*, see Sachedina, *The just ruler* 65–80. For an analysis and comparison of *al-Kāfi* by al-Kulaynī see Newman, *The formative period* 94–200.

Mosque-Madrasas of Safavid Isfahan

The Safavid Shahs were active builders of madrasas, mosques, and other religious centers, particularly in the later decades of their rule. A large number of madrasas were constructed during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, although their exact number is disputed. Jean Chardin reports that Isfahan had 162 mosques, 48 madrasas, and 1,802 caravansaries within its walls. Chardin profiles many of Isfahan's madrasas including Şadr, Şafavî, and Mîrzâ Khân, as well as a number of the city's madrasa-mosque complexes.¹ However, Jâbirî Anşârî, the author of *Târîkh-i Isfahan wa Rayy*, disputes Chardin's numbers. He believes that the number of madrasas and mosques in Isfahan was greater than that reported by Chardin while the number of caravansaries was less. Rafî'î-i Mihrâbâdî lists 79 madrasas of Isfahan, most of which were either built or renovated extensively during Safavid rule. He reports that 28 of them are currently functioning.² Dhabîḥullâh Şafâ likewise documents 30 madrasas and 180 mosques of Isfahan, the majority of which were built during the Safavid period and underwent extensive renovation during the Qajar and Pahlavi periods.³ The works of Hunarfar, Heinz Gaube and Eugene Wirth, and Stephen P. Blake also provide us with a brief description about some of the above-mentioned madrasas of Safavid Isfahan.⁴

Isfahan, once the capital of Persia during the Saljuq period from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, became the center of power and Shi'î learning

1 Chardin, *Safarnāma-yi Chardin* 7, 124–28, 136, 195, 199, 207, 218, 280; 8, 52, ff.

2 See Rafî'î-i Mihrâbâdî, *Āthâr-i millî* 28–47, 431–510; Jâbirî Anşârî, *Târîkh-i Isfahan* 32.

3 Şafâ, *Târîkh-i adabîyyât* v, 236–39. For a description of Isfahan's mosques see Rafî'î-i Mihrâbâdî, *Āthâr-i millî* 510–741, 47–56. For more information on caravansaries of Isfahan including their names and function see Sipintâ, *Târîkhcha-yi awqâf* 22–26.

4 Hunarfar, *Ganjîna-yi âthâr* 302–10, 317–20, 329–33, ff; Gaube and Wirth, *Der Bazar* 158–69. In his *Târîkh-i madâris-i Īrân: az 'ahd-i bâstân tâ ta'sîs-i Dâr al-Funûn*, which is general survey of madrasas in Iran from the ancient time till the time of foundation of the *Dâr al-Funûn*, Ḥusayn Sultânzâdah briefly introduces a number of religious colleges built across Iran. Also in her *Maktabkhânehâ va madâris-i qadîm-i Āstân-i Quds-i Raḡavî bâ takya bar asnâd-i Şafavîyah va Qâjârîyah*, Fâtîmah Jahân-pûr provides valuable information about religious colleges of Mashhad including Madrasa-yi Sulayman Khan, Madrasa-yi Hajj Salih, Madrasa-yi Navvab, Madrasa-yi Faziliya. The latter madrasa had two hundred sixty students and professors were asked to take attendance daily. For more information on these madrasas, see, *Maktabkhânehâ va madâris-i qadîm* 1, 139–43.

when Shāh ‘Abbās I (d. 1629) moved the capital from Qazvīn to Isfahan after his victory over the Uzbeks in 1598. Iskandar Beg Turkamān reports that the royal household was transferred to Isfahan and Shāh ‘Abbās proclaimed the city as his *maqarr-i dawlat* (capital) in 1597–98. At the same time, he gave orders for the erection of “magnificent” buildings.⁵ As the new capital of the Safavid Empire, it became a city characterized by a variety of cultural and architectural manifestations of power, wealth, idealism, as well as the religious policy of Safavid shahs. Many awe-inspiring places of worship and learning emerged at particularly strategic locations within the city, which conferred meaning and legitimacy to the authorities that built or made use of them. Safavid Isfahan, where grand mosque-madrasas and places loomed large, became a city that was representing both the temporal power and a physical record of the consolidation of Twelver Shi‘ism in Safavid Iran.

Pre-Safavid Mosque-Madrasas

The establishment of centers for religious higher learning had a long history in Isfahan. Members of pre-Safavid dynasties, including the Saljuqs, Ilkhānids, and Aq Qoyunlu, had built numerous madrasas and mosques over the centuries in Isfahan, some of which were still functioning at the time of the Safavids’ advent.⁶ Safavid rulers and their family members, as well as other wealthy and pious individuals living during Safavid rule, continued the age-old tradition. Safavid rulers also renovated some of the mosques built by earlier rulers. For example, Madrasa-yi Bābā Qāsim, which is now known as Madrasa-yi Imāmiyya, has been extensively documented by Hunarfar who published all historical inscriptions of this madrasa in addition to providing a brief description of its

5 See Munshī, *History of Shah ‘Abbas* 724. Most scholars consider this year as the time of the Safavid capital’s transfer from Qazvīn to Isfahan. Rosemarie Quiring-Zoche, however, argues Isfahan gradually acquired the status of Safavid capital and gained more of a central focus as later Safavid rulers lost their enthusiasm for battle. On this view see Quiring-Zoche, *Isfahan* 105; Haneda, *Maydan et bagh* 87–99. Various scholars contemplated why Shāh ‘Abbās I transferred the Safavid capital from Qazvin to Isfahan. See for example, Roemer, *The Safavid period* vi, 270; Mazzaoui, *From Tabriz to Qazvin* 520–22; McChesney, *Four sources on Shah ‘Abbās* 116; Blake, *Shah ‘Abbās and the transfer* 45–164.

6 Rafi‘i-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 28–56; Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 216, 223, 250 ff; Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 28–34.



FIGURE 1
Bābā Qāsim's Tomb.

IMAGE CREDIT: M. MOAZZEN &
KARIM MOMENI

history and size.⁷ Additional structures include Madrasa-yi Dardasht,⁸ Madrasa-yi Naṣrābād,⁹ and Madrasa-yi Sayyid Rukn al-Dīn Yazdī. This last complex was built in seventh/fourteenth century. It had a *dār al-hadīth* (center for learning *hadīth*), *dār al-kutub* (library) and a *dār al-adwīyya* (hospital). Rafīʿī-i Mihrābādī published the *waqfiyya* of the madrasa.¹⁰

Further examples of renovated mosques include Madrasa-yi Khvāja Malik-i Mustawfi and Madrasa-yi Fakhriyya. The later was a residential madrasa built by Fakhr al-Mulk b. Niẓām al-Mulk al-Ṭūsī that functioned until 1098/1686.¹¹ A few more structures worth mentioning are Madrasa-yi Khvāja Ṣadr al-Dīn ‘Alī

7 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 302–13.

8 For more information on this madrasa see Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 317–2; Rafīʿī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 45.

9 For more on this madrasa see Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 329–33.

10 See Rafīʿī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 35–37.

11 See Rafīʿī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 44.



FIGURE 2
Madrasa-yi Bābā Qāsim or Madrasa-yi Imāmiyya.
IMAGE CREDIT: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 3 *Madrasa-yi Bābā Qāsim or Madrasa-yi Imāmiyya.*
IMAGE CREDIT: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 4 *Madrasa-yi Bābā Qāsim or Madrasa-yi Imāmīyya.*

IMAGE CREDIT: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI

Ṭayyib¹² and Madrasa-yi Jaʿfariyya, which remained open until the eleventh/eighteenth century.¹³ Some of the mosques built in pre-Safavid periods could accommodate live-in students. For example, Masjid-i Jāmiʿ-i ʿAbbāsābād had a number of rooms – Shaykh ʿImād al-Dīn, the son of Mīrzā Ibrāhīm-i Khush-niwīs (a famous calligrapher) who went by the pen name of Arfaʿ, lived as a boarder there.¹⁴ Over time many of these madrasas and mosques were replaced by new madrasas, were converted to mosques, or were illegally confiscated.¹⁵ A few old madrasas that were reconstructed during Safavid rule and in later periods, such as Madrasa-yi Bābā Qāsim and Madrasa-yi Turkhā, have continued to function until today. Madrasa-yi Turkhā, according to Jābirī Anšārī, was built during the reign of Aq Qoyunlus and was repaired by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm-i Tājir during the Qajar rule.¹⁶

Masjid-i Jāmiʿ-i Isfahan is, however, the oldest and most important architectural monument that has survived in Iran. As the main congregational mosque of Isfahan, it remained a center of learning and worship from the time of its

12 For more on this madrasa see Naṣrābādī, *Tadhkira* 457; Rafīʿi-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 47.

13 Jābirī Anšārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 190–92.

14 Naṣrābādī, *Tadhkira* 404.

15 Rafīʿi-i Mihrābādī introduces these madrasas briefly. Rafīʿi-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 35–39, 44–45. In his *Garjīna-yi āthār* 302–14, Hunarfar describes Madrasa-yi Bābā Qāsim. Jābirī Anšārī also briefly reports on the numerous madrasas and mosques built by the Safavids' predecessors. Jābirī Anšārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 245–98.

16 Jābirī Anšārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan wa Rayy* 245; Rafīʿi-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 440–41.



FIGURE 5 Southeast iwān, view from southwest in courtyard, Masjid-i Jāmi'i Isfahan.

IMAGE CREDIT: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI

construction in early Islamic history.¹⁷ This magnificent historical building was modified by repairs and additions after its reconstruction, which was overseen by Nizām al-Mulk Ṭūsī (d. 1092), the vizier of Saljuq ruler Malik-Shāh (d. 1092), up until the end of the twentieth century by various dynasties including the Saljuqs, Ilkhānids, Muzzafarids, Timurids, and Safavids. He and his powerful wife, Tarkān Khātūn, are buried in a madrasa that he built next to the mosque.

Hunarfar published all the *katības* (inscriptions) of the *masjid*. There are a number of inscriptions and royal decrees issued by rulers including Malik-Shāh, Uzun Ḥasan b. 'Alī (d. 1457) and some Safavid rulers on various *eyvāns* of the mosque. Ṭahmāsb's epigraphic addition to the south *eyvān* contains salutes to the fourteen infallibles (*Chahārdah ma'ṣum*), thus linking the historic mosque in Isfahan to the new Shi'i focus of the Safavids.

Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī (d. 1070/1659) and Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1699), who held their teaching circles there, are buried in this mosque. Hunarfar quotes Mufaḍḍal ibn Sa'd Māfarrūkhī, the author of *Kitāb maḥāsini Isfahan*, who reported that before the mosque was ruined by fire, around five thousand people regularly gathered in the mosque to perform group prayer. Many teaching circles were held in the mosque. Jurists and theologians held their debate sessions there, while some religious scholars and Sufis were praying. Across the mosque, he reports there was a library with multitude rooms and storages, where there are many books on every branch of knowledge. The

17 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 79.



FIGURE 6 *Detail view of inscriptions, Masjid-i Jāmi'-i Isfahan.*
IMAGE CREDIT: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI

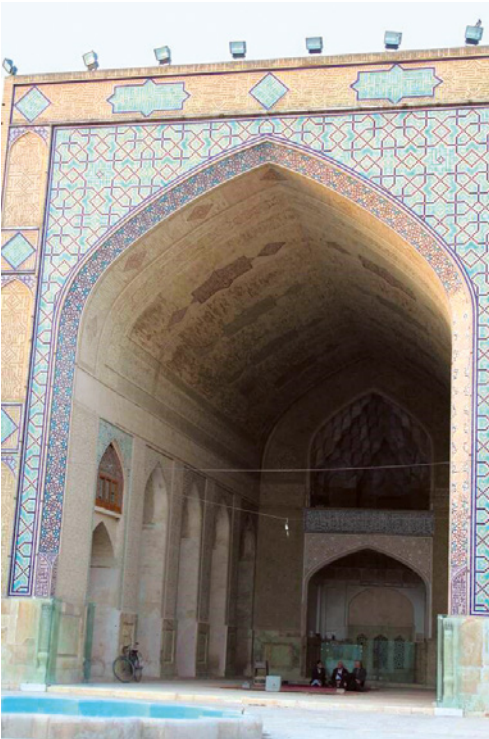


FIGURE 7
*View of northeast iwān
from courtyard and
arcades.*



FIGURE 8
*Detail view of stucco ornament,
Masjid-i Jāmi'-i Isfahan.*
IMAGE CREDIT: M. MOAZZEN &
KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 9
*Southwest iwān, view from courtyard into vaulted area, Masjid-i
Jāmi'-i Isfahan.*
IMAGE CREDIT: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI

library had a three-volume catalogue, in which books on Quranic commentary, *hadith* and literature and mathematics and natural sciences were listed.¹⁸

Safavid Mosques and Madrasas

Aware of the significance of sacred spaces in shaping as well as providing deep meaning to cities, particularly in terms of their synergistic correlation with residential patterns of urban development, Safavid Shahs committed themselves to preserving the existing educational and religious spaces in Isfahan while simultaneously expanding its sacred landscape. They must also have been mindful of the role that splendid religious structures could play in building long-lasting collective identities and official narratives around an ostensibly shared history, or set of ideas. As argued by Hoelscher and Alderman, monuments and memorials are by definition places specifically designed to impart certain elements of the past, and, by definition, forget others.¹⁹ As such, it is no surprise that Safavid elites, who alongside Shi'ī 'ulamā' regarded themselves as guardians of Twelver Shi'ism, from the beginning of their rule sought urgently to promote Shi'ism through the construction and restoration of magnificent religious premises. Mosque-madrasas did far more than simply provide the setting where learning took place. They became dynamic institutions in the construction, development and persistence of Shi'ism itself. Thanks to their multiple functions, their embedded layers of religious, social, and cultural meaning, they also facilitated the formation and maintenance of internal relationships within the community.

From the time of Ismā'īl who ordered the restoration of the mosque-madrasa complex of 'Alī in Isfahan, which before its restoration was known as Madrasa-yi Sanjariyya, as well as another madrasa located next to this complex, Madrasa-yi Sulṭān Muḥammad Saljūqī, which came to be known as Madrasa-yi Ḥājj Ḥasan after its renovation, Safavid elite and Shi'ī 'ulamā' collaborated closely to make mosques, madrasas and shrines as the loci that served to validate ideas and ideals that Safavid society wished to construe for posterity and also provided the concrete basis for official narratives.

Shaykh 'Alī Minshār al-Karakī was appointed as the *mutawallī* of the aforementioned 'Alī complex.²⁰ A small madrasa adjacent to the mausoleum of

18 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 70–168. See also, Grabar, *The great mosque* 7–61 ff.

19 Hoelscher and Alderman, *Memory and place* 347–56.

20 Rafi'i-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 713. He thinks the madrasa acquired its new name after 'Alī Minshār. For more on the 'Alī complex see, Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārikh-i Isfahan* 219–22; Hunarfar,

Hārūn-i Wilāyat was restored as well.²¹ The inscriptions on the portal of the shrine reveal the connection between Shah Ismā'īl and the family of the Prophet Muḥammad.²² The names of the Shi'ī Imams as well as verses of the Quran that entwine numerical symbols of Twelver Shi'ism with the name of Ismā'īl decorate the portal in angular Kufic bands of script. Shah Ismā'īl also built a shrine for *Imām-zāda* Sahl b. 'Alī and widened the Old Square of Isfahan by building four bazaars around it.²³

Between 1512 and 1513 Mirzā Shāh-Ḥusayn (a vassal of Durmish Khān Shāmlū, Isfahan's governor under Shāh Ismā'īl) rebuilt the mausoleum of Hārūn-i Wilāyat; it is a shrine to a figure who is variously identified as different holy personalities.²⁴ Female members of the Safavid dynasty also contributed to the enrichment of cultural activities in mid-sixteenth-century Persia. Parī-Khān Khānum (d. 1576), the daughter of Shāh Tahmāsb, and Zaynab Begum (d. 1642), the unmarried aunt of 'Abbās the Great, built two madrasas in Isfahan.²⁵

Tahmāsb, like his father Ismā'īl, worked with his courtiers to build and restore several public buildings, including shrines and mosques, all over Iran and the holy cities of Iraq. The Persian inscription framing the *qibla aiwān* of the Isfahan Jāmi' mosque, which dates to the rule of Shāh Tahmāsb, mentions the beautification and repair of the mosque by Tahmāsb. In 1543, Masjīd-i Quṭbiyya was renovated extensively by Amīr Quṭb al-Dīn-i Bāb al-Dashtī, the same individual who established a *waqf* to support this mosque located in Isfahan. Hunarfar published a synopsis of the *waqf* inscribed on one of the walls.²⁶

Ganjīna-yi āthār 369–79; Rafi'ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 712–17; Khvāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-sīyar* iv, 595–98. Madrasa-yi Ḥājī Ḥasan was still functioning at least until 1308/1929. Rafi'ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 469.

- 21 For more information on this shrine complex, see Khvāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-sīyar* iv, 500; Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 360–69; Jazī, *Tadhkirat al-qubūr* 777–85, 508–10.
- 22 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 372; Rafi'ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 713–14.
- 23 For more information on this *Imām-zāda* see Ḥusaynī Astarābādī, *Tārīkh-i sultānī* 33.
- 24 Some sources say he is Hārūn b. 'Alī, the son of the tenth Shi'ite Imam, while some report he is Hārūn b. Muḥammad b. Zayid b. Ḥasan; others say he is Hārūn b. Mūsā b. Ja'far. Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 360.
- 25 Rafi'ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 29. For more on Parī Khān Khanum see, Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā* i, 201, 219–20, 223, passim; Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* 622, 660, 662; Szuppe, *Lentourage des princesses* 72–76, 78–89; Szuppe, *Economic activities of Safavid women* 247–61; Szuppe, *The jewels of wonder* 325–48; Szuppe, *Status, knowledge* 140–69; Golsorkhi, *Pari Khan Khanum* 143–56; Hambly, *Women in the medieval* 344; For Zaynab Begum see, Ruggles, *Women, patronage* 128; Nashat and Lois Beck, *Women in Iran* 168; Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* 359.
- 26 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 380–81; Rafi'ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 720–22; Jābirī Ansārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 247–48.

In the same year, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṣafi built a mosque-madrassa complex in Isfahan and named it Dhulfaqār, after the sword of ‘Alī.²⁷ Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-‘Āmilī (d. 1576), the father of Shaykh Bahā’ī, must have taught in some of these madrasas. Upon his arrival in Iran in 1552, Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad started teaching the religious sciences in Isfahan before joining the court of Ṭahmāsb in 1556. Unfortunately our sources do not give more information about the madrasa(s) where he taught.²⁸

During the later period of Safavid rule, particularly throughout the reign of ‘Abbās I, Persia experienced a commercial boom that resulted in cities growing and trade expanding.²⁹ This flowering of the Safavid economy set the stage for its intellectual and cultural growth. Many grand mosque-madrasas and palaces were built. The settings where these monumental buildings stood were not places designed primarily for the passive viewing of works of art and architecture. They were vibrant public spaces, alive with the tumult and commotion of the city, that subsequently became instruments by which the ideals and beliefs of Safavid elites were articulated splendidly.³⁰

Shāh ‘Abbās I, who had commissioned the construction of many architectural projects all over Iran, ordered the construction of a congregational mosque-madrassa in the newly built Naqsh-i Jahān Square, as well as two other madrasa-mosque complexes, namely, Masjid-i Shāh and Masjid-i Shaykh Luṭfullāh, all in the beginning of the year 1611. Iskandar Beg and Walī Qulī Shāmlū provide a summary of this mosque-madrassa complex’s *waqfiyya*, which was written by Shaykh-i Bahā’ī two years before the mosque construction was completed.³¹ In addition to these religious and cultural buildings, he

27 For more on this building and its *waqf* see, Hunrfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 384–86; Rafi’i-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 470–71, 615–17.

28 al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* vi, 58; Afandī, *Riḡāḍ al-‘ulamā’* ii, 120–21; Stewart, *The first Shaykh al-Islam* 387–405.

29 Floor, *The economy of Safavid* 55–61; Floor, *A fiscal history* 15.

30 At times Shah ‘Abbās had to deal with major elite oppositions to his architectural undertakings. For example, the nobles of the old quarters of the city were not quite keen towards the new urban infrastructures built by the Shah. Thus he has to maintain a delicate power relation between himself and those noble families. For more information see Haneda, *The character of urbanization* 381–3; McChesney, *Four sources* 117–19; Blake, *Half of the world* 22–23, 150–1

31 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 49–50. Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 254–55; Munshī, *Tārīkh-i ‘ālam-ārā* ii, 831; Shāmlū, *Qiṣaṣ al-khāqānī* 186–198. For more information on Shāh ‘Abbās’s architectural activities see Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i Tārīkhī* 392–514; Pope, *A survey of Persian art* ii, 1179–1201, 1406–10; McChesney, *Waqf and public policy* 165–190; McChesney, *Four sources* 103–134.

commissioned the construction of Chāhār Bāgh Avenue and the magnificent bridges slung across the Zāyandeh Rūd that made Isfahan a symbol of Safavid prosperity and wealth. S. Blake argues that, “Shāh ‘Abbās’s creation of the Maidān-i Naqsh-i Jahān marked the establishment of a new state. Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn’s construction of the Sulṭāni Madrasa, on the other hand, reflected his personal piety, his obsession with religious law.”³²

There must have been legal documents and deeds of endowment to ensure the servicing and maintenance of the public buildings built by ‘Abbās I. Unfortunately, currently we only have access to a limited number of summaries, copies, and cited documents relating to these pious foundations, in the form of historical sources and inscriptions.³³ Sipintā and Iskandar Beg provide a detailed list of ‘Abbās’s *waqfs* that he made on behalf of the *Chahārdah Ma’sūm* (the twelve Imāms in addition to the Prophet Muḥammad and his daughter Fāṭima).³⁴ ‘Abbās’s *mawqūfāt* is a combination of commercial properties and extensive agricultural lands.³⁵

Based on the information furnished by *mawqūfāt-i Chahārdah Ma’sūm*, it is clear that ‘Abbās I invested lavishly in the shrine of the Imams and their progeny that the Shi’a have historically considered as imbued with the divine.³⁶ Over the course of the history of Shi’ism, these “sacred places” – to use Eliadian terms – have centered the community and created a spatial link between the divine power above and the mundane world below. In addition to beautifying

32 Blake, *Half of the world*, xix.

33 The author of *Tārīkh-i ‘Abbāsī* reports that as soon as the construction of the *maydān* was finished, the Shāh endowed the square and all shops around it on behalf of the infallible Imāms. McChesney, *Four sources* 119. For the text of the deed of endowment, see Shāmlū, *Qīsaṣ al-Khāqānī* i, 186–97; McChesney, *Waqf and public policy* 165–90.

34 Considering his waqf expenditures, it seems that Shah ‘Abbās showed more devotion to some Shi’i imams than others. For example, he donated 1000 *tumans* to ‘Ali and the same sum to Husayn. Other imams each received 300 *tumans*, except for Imam Reza, to whom he donated the sum 700 *tumans*. The highest amount—1549 *tumans* – was donated to Prophet Muhammad. For more information on Shah ‘Abbās’ waqfs, see Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 44–73.

35 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 44–45, 64–72; Munshī, *Tārīkh-i ‘ālam-ārā* ii, 760–61. There are a number of microfilms kept in Kitābkhāna-yi Markazī-i Dānishgāh-i Tehrān that contain detailed information concerning *mawqūfāt-i Chahārdah Ma’sūm*. See Microfilms nos. 6767, 7058 and 2459. Idāra-yi Awqāf-i Isfāhan has started to publish all *waqfiyyas* related to the pious endowments of Isfahan, and most likely some of the original documents will be published for the first time in this series.

36 They were spaces that Mircea Eliade in his seminal book, *The Sacred and the Profane*, especially in pages 20–67, describes as places deemed sacred because people come to believe a divine or supernatural power dwells in them.

and restoring some of the most sacred Shi'a loci, Abbās I also invested heavily in places that were not considered inherently holy by creating stately mosque-madrasas that came to be viewed as sacred spaces. These newly built religious spaces, which simultaneously displayed political and religious powers, could enable individuals to experience moments of spiritual power.

Historical sources and biographical accounts attest to 'Abbās's respect for the leading scholars of his time, including Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī (d. 1621), the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan;³⁷ Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir b. Mīr Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Astarābādī, known as Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631), who was later dubbed *mu'allim-i thālith* (the third teacher) for his contributions to philosophy;³⁸ and Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā and Ṣadr al-Muta'llihīn (d. 1640).³⁹

Both Shaykh Bahā'ī and Mīr Dāmād were accomplished jurists and philosophers and at times experienced sharp criticism from rival scholars. Thābitiyān published a letter by Mīr Dāmād wherein he blames 'Izz al-Dīn Mullā 'Abdullāh

37 Shaykh Bahā'ī wrote works on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, Arabic grammar and morphology, and law. His interest in the sciences is evident in works such as the astronomical treatise *Fī tashrīḥ al-aflāk* (Anatomy of the Heavens) and the summa of arithmetic, *Khulāṣat al-ḥisāb* (of which a German translation by G.H.L. Nesselmann was published as early as 1843). In addition to these, he wrote a book of divination (*Fāl-nāma*) and other works on the occult sciences. Bahā'ī was also a poet like Mīr Dāmād and is best remembered for his two allegorical *mathnawīs*, *Nān wa ḥalwā* and *Shīr wa shakar* (both published, together with other works, in Cairo in 1347/1928–29 and later in Tehran ed. Ghulām-Ḥusayn Jawāhiri, 1341/1962 under the title *Kulliyāt-i ash'ār wa āthār-i fārsī-i Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Āmilī*). For more information on Shaykh Bahā'ī see al-Āmilī, *Amal al-āmīl* 1 155–60; Arjomand, *Religious extremists* 16, 25–27. Baḥrānī, *Lu'lu'āt al-Baḥrayn* 16–23; Browne, *A literary history* iv, 253, 407, 426–28; Munshī, *Ālam-ārā* i, 155–57, ii, 967–68; Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* vii, 56–84; Newman, *Towards a reconsideration* 165–99; Mudarris Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab* ii, 382–98; al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a* xxvi, 231–35, 239–44; Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'a* v, 62 and iii, 340; Stewart, *The lost biography* 177–205; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 58–61.

38 For a list of Mīr Dāmād's works, with information on editions, see al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a* xliv, 113–15; Mudarris Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab* viii, 56–62. For more on his ideas see Nasr, *Spiritual movements* 672–3; Nasr, *The school of Isfahan* 915; Corbin, *History of Islamic philosophy* 217–18; Rahman, *The God-world* 242–46; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 71–79.

39 For a concise biography of Mullā Ṣadrā see Rizvi, *Reconsidering the life of Mullā Ṣadrā* 181–201. Mīr Dāmād had a close relationship with the Safavid court during the reigns of both 'Abbās I and Shāh Ṣafī (1629–42). Shāh 'Abbās consulted with him on religious matters. For example, on one occasion the Shāh asked Mīr Dāmād “to confirm whether fighting against the enemy (the Ottomans) is a religious duty or not. And if a believer (i.e., a Safavid soldier) gets killed in this battle, will he be considered a martyr?” The original manuscript of this *istiftā'* is kept in Gawhar-Shād Mosque at the back of the first folio of manuscript no. 1298. See also Ja'farīyān published this *istiftā'* (seeking the advice of a *mujtahid*). Ja'farīyān, *Kāwushhā-yi tāza* 131–32.

b. Ḥusayn Shūshtarī (d. 1612) for not comprehending subtle theosophical points and philosophical discourses. Mīr Dāmād calls Mullā ‘Abdullāh and people like him a bunch of bats, writing, “Understanding my discourse is an art – it requires skill – and arguing with me and naming it dispute is not a virtue.” He adds, “Obviously, dull-witted and ignorant people cannot understand subtle points.”⁴⁰ It is surprising that ‘Abbās I did not build madrasas in honor of jurist-philosophers such as Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahā’ī or that any madrasas or mosques became associated with their names. The shah, however, founded madrasas and mosques with extensive charitable endowments that came to be known as the *Madrasa-yi Mullā ‘Abdullāh* and *Masjid-i Shaykh Luṭfullāh Maysī*; both are located on the famous Naqsh-i Jahān Square.⁴¹

Mullā ‘Abdullāh Shūshtarī attended Muqaddas-i Ardabilī’s (d. 1585) teaching circle in Najaf before moving to Isfahan. Apparently he had some problem with Shāh ‘Abbās so he left Isfahan for Mashhad. According to Khvānsārī, the author of *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, when Shāh ‘Abbās visited Mashhad they met and Mullā ‘Abdullāh suggested that the shah endow his properties. The shah accepted his advice and established his famous *waqfs* known as *Chārdah Ma’sūm*. Khvānsārī’s statement is not, however, supported by the historical documents. For instance, in his report on the establishment of *Chārdah Ma’sūm awqāf*, Iskandar Beg does not mention that Shāh ‘Abbās donated his properties on the advice of Mullā ‘Abdullāh.⁴²

Shūshtarī returned to Isfahan, and the shah built him a madrasa, which, according to Chardin, was the largest and richest madrasa in Isfahan. Sipintā published a *waqf-nāma* of a certain Mīrzā Muḥammad who donated the revenues of a kiln, two caravanserais, shops, and houses in the nearby Gaz Bāzār to the madrasa and its residents.⁴³ One thousand students were reportedly studying at the *Madrasa-yi Mullā ‘Abdullāh*. Shāh Sulaymān repaired this

40 Thābitiyān, *Asnād wa nāmahā* 360–61. See also Munshī *Ālam-ārā* i, 244; Ḥamawī, *Anīs al-mu’minīn* 136, 142–3. Ḥamawī also recorded a section of *Maṭā’in al-mujrimīyya*, a book by the student and brother-in-law of Mīr Dāmād, Aḥmad b. Zayn al-‘Ābidīn al-‘Āmīlī (d. 1644), in which he explains the issues that Shaykh Bahā’ī and Mīr Dāmād disagreed upon. Ḥamawī, *Anīs al-mu’minīn* 145, 188–9.

41 While in Mashhad Luṭfullāh Maysī engaged in debates with Mullā ‘Abdullāh over such issues as *ijtihād* and the possibility of performing Friday prayer in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. Munshī, *Ālam-ārā* ii, 1417.

42 See his report on this event in Munshī, *Ālam-ārā-yi ‘Abbāsī* 2, 760–62. Khvānsārī maintains that, as the result of Mullā ‘Abdullāh’s encouragement, the shah built an additional madrasa in Isfahan for Shaykh Luṭfullāh Maysī. Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* v, 45–55.

43 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 470–75; Gaube and Wirth, *Der Bazar* 137; Blake, *Half of the world* 158; Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 348–55.

madrasa in 1677. In recent decades the madrasa has been repaired again.⁴⁴ This madrasa has remained one of the most important learning centers of Isfahan and eminent scholars continue to teach there. Rafi‘ī-i Mihrābādī reports that upon Mullā ‘Abdullāh’s death in 1612, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī started teaching in this madrasa.⁴⁵ This claim cannot be accurate, however, because at the time of Mullā ‘Abdullāh’s death Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī was not even born yet. Perhaps Majlisī became a teacher in this madrasa later in his life, but certainly not right after Mullā ‘Abdullāh’s death.

Shaykh Luṭfullāh al-Maysī (d. 1622), who in his childhood had moved with his family from Jabal ‘Āmil to Mashhad after receiving his educational training which was centered on religious sciences, especially *fiqh*, started teaching in Mashhad.⁴⁶ He also held an administrative position at the Shrine of Imām Riḍā, for which he received a stipend from the revenues of its endowments.⁴⁷ When the Uzbeks attacked Herat he left Khurāsān to join the Safavid court in Qazvin and then in Isfahan. Shaykh Luṭfullāh was appointed as the *Shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan. During his tenure, he encountered a number of challenges to his legal rulings.⁴⁸ A certain Isfahanī guildsman and his friends challenged Luṭfullāh’s “clerical authority” and “accused Luṭfullāh of abrogating the sacred law by committing an innovation and fabricating sources in a number of religious practices.”⁴⁹ ‘Abbās I also appointed him as the Friday prayer leader and the teacher at the mosque-madrasa, which later came to be known as Madrasa-yi Shaykh Luṭfullāh. He was teaching hadith and jurisprudence there.

Construction of the mosque-madrasa began in 1602–3 and was completed in 1618–19. Epigraphic bands were created by ‘Alī-Riḍā ‘Abbāsī, the famous calligrapher of this period, on both the exterior façade and the extensive interior decoration of the mosque.⁵⁰ Inside the domed chamber’s epigraphic panels, the shaykh’s name is mentioned at the end of a poem in Arabic, invoking the names of the Fourteen Infallibles and pleading intercession for Shaykh Luṭfullāh in the hereafter. The work is signed by the otherwise unknown calligrapher Bāqir Bannā.⁵¹ The inscriptions indicate the date of construction and name the participants; the major foundation inscription on the portal dates

44 Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 268; Rafi‘ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 497–98.

45 Rafi‘ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 496.

46 Khvānsārī, *Rawdāt al-jannāt* i, 78; Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā’* iv, 417–20.

47 Munshī, *Ālam-ārā* ii, 1007–08; Munajjim-Yazdī, *Tārīkh-i ‘Abbāsī* 113–14. For more information on him see Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* 185; Keyvani, *Artisans and guild life* 40, 193–94; Ja‘fariyān, *Ilal-i bar uftādan* 318–19ff; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 81–87.

48 Keyvani, *Artisans and guild life* 125–142–145.

49 Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 83–84.

50 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i Tārīkhī* 402, 407–10.

51 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i Tārīkhī* 413–15.

the beginning of construction to 1603, and a second inscription at the base of the dome's interior gives a date for decoration as 1616. A third inscription on the *mihrāb* tells us that the building was completed in 1618.⁵²



FIGURE 10 *View of portal and dome from west. Masjid-i Shaykh Lutfullāh.*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 11 *View of portal and dome from west across maydan. Masjid-i Shaykh Lutfullāh.*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI

52 Rafī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 28.

The Royal Mosque complex (renamed Masjid-i Imam after the Revolution of 1979) was the first congregational mosque to have been built by Abbās I as well. Usually larger mosques, like this Friday congregational mosque, contained madrasas, which had rooms for non-local students. This mosque marked the zenith of the half-century monument building endeavor that transformed Isfahan into the new Safavid capital city. Built between 1611 and 1630–31, this large mosque (some 19,000 square meters in area) was built at the southern end of the Maydān-i Naqsh-i Jahān. The ten-foot *mīhrāb* of the mosque was, according to Chardin, made of marble crowned with a gold-encrusted cupboard holding a Quran believed to have been copied by Imam ‘Ali al-Riḍā, as well as the bloodstained robe of Imam Ḥusayn.⁵³ The inscription across the portal was created by the famed Safavid calligrapher ‘Ali Riḍā ‘Abbāsi.⁵⁴ It states that Shah ‘Abbās funded the project from the royal treasures (*khālīṣa*) for the spiritual benefit of his grandfather Shah Ṭahmāsb. The effort exerted in the production of these monumental buildings reflects their significance as physical records of ‘Abbās’ aspirations, wealth and dedication to Twelver Shi‘ism.

Muḥibb-‘Ali Beg Lala, the chief supervisor of imperial buildings, under whose supervision the complex was erected, dedicated thirty percent of the entire endowment from his personal funds. The rest was paid by ‘Abbās I.⁵⁵ The doors of the mosque-madrasa complexes were open day and night, religious activity of one form or another hardly ceasing during the waking hours. There were, in addition to teaching sessions, regular observance of the prescribed daily prayers, and almost incessant chanting of verses from the Quran at all times during waking hours.

Other powerful emirs and wealthy individuals of ‘Abbās’ reign also erected madrasas and mosques, among them the Madrasa-yi Isfandiyār Beg, which over time fell into ruin.⁵⁶ Khvāja Malik Mustawfi built a madrasa across from the famed Naqsh-i Jahān, and Āqā Ḥusayn Khvānsārī studied there for a while.⁵⁷ Falsafi mentions there was another residential madrasa named Madrasa-yi Şafawiya, which was located in the Bīniqābān (prostitute) neighborhood.⁵⁸ Although splendid monuments are traditionally seen as tools of communication from the elite to the general citizenry, the numerous large madrasa-mosque complexes built in Isfahan during the seventeenth century by

53 Quoted by Blake, *Half the world* 143.

54 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i Tārīkhī* 428–29.

55 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i Tārīkhī* 429–30.

56 Rafi‘i-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 28.

57 Rafi‘i-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 38, 40; Falsafi, *Zindigānī-i Shāh* i, 289.

58 Falsafi, *Zindigānī-i Shāh* iii, 277.



FIGURE 12
*Masjid-i Imam, view down hallway
with domed bays.*

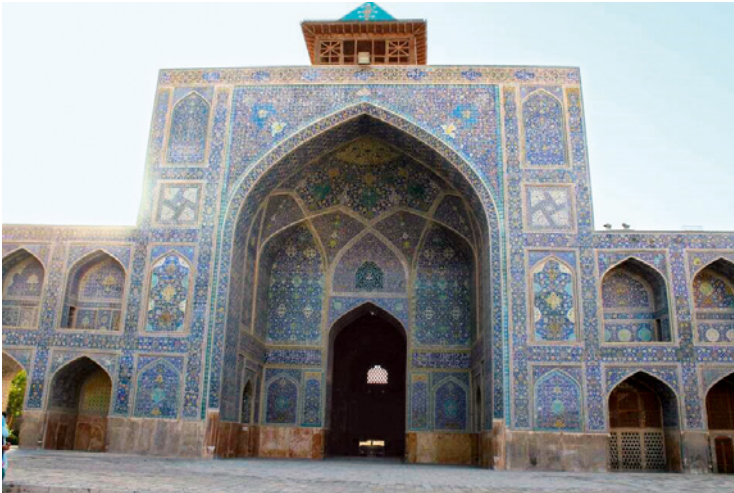


FIGURE 13 *Masjid-i Imam, view of northwest iwān and arcades.*



FIGURE 14 *Distant view from northeast across Maydan-i Naqsh-i Jahān, showing entry portal with facade of southwest (qibla) iwān and dome looming in background.*



FIGURE 15 *The Royal Mosque complex (renamed Masjid-i Imam after the Revolution of 1979).*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI

powerful military elites and courtiers as well as some affluent Safavid subjects could be regarded as pricey signs of loyalty and political obedience of the powerful emirs and the wealthy towards the Safavid shahs. The construction of a mosque-madrassa cost resources that might have been used in other ways, including personal enrichment for elites. In addition to demonstrating their loyalty to the Safavid shahs in a conspicuous manner, they supported the official narrative sponsored by the Shahs and the 'ulamā'.

Sometimes madrasas were added to established mosques. Madrasa functions were also discharged in buildings such as *imāmzādas*, which due to their form and function could be put to use as learning centers. Many *imāmzāda* throughout Iran and Isfahan carried out the functions of mosques and madrasas in early modern times. Some of the above-mentioned visually spectacular structures, which exhibit extensive technical ingenuity and organization that would be essential to their construction, have continued to serve many generations of the Shi'a.

After 'Abbās the Great

The successors of 'Abbās I and their courtiers actively continued to repair and construct religious establishments including shrines, mosques, and madrasas. Shāh Šafī (d. 1642) ordered repairs to the shrines in Ardabil, Qum, and Mashhad, and to the Friday mosques in Kāshān, Qazwīn, Qum, and Isfahan.⁵⁹ But as the Safavid Empire grew more powerful and especially in the second half of the Safavid rule, shahs began to remove themselves from the daily business of running an empire and entrusted the vizier to control the state. Since then, powerful military and administrative elites alongside the most affluent members of the Safavid society commissioned the construction of most madrasa-mosques built during the seventeenth century.

For example, Mīrzā Ḥusayn b. Mīrzā 'Alī Riḍā b. Mīrzā Mahdī built a madrasa in the Baydābād neighborhood in 1612. This madrasa accommodated a number of students.⁶⁰ Madrasa-yi Nāširī (called Nāširī because Nāšir al-Dīn Shāh, the Qajarid ruler, renovated it) is located on the south east side of the Shāh Mosque. On its eastern side this madrasa had a number of rooms for students.⁶¹ Mīrzā Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad Jābirī also built a madrasa known as Madrasa-yi

59 Modarressi, *Bargī az tārikh-i Qazwīn* 80; Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i Tārikhī* 435–5.

60 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 649–50; Rafī'i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 500–02.

61 Rafī'i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 502–03.

Nūriyya during this time. In addition to a number of students of religious sciences, artists such as Muḥammad ‘Alī Mudhahhib and Mīrzā Āqā Jān Partaw were living in the Nūriyya Madrasa for a while.⁶² Amir Maḥdī Ḥakīm al-Mulk Ardastānī built Madrasa-yi Kāsa Garān in the last year of Shāh Suleymān’s reign in 1105/1693–94 under the supervision of Muḥammad Mu’min and Muḥammad Ibrāhīm in Isfahan in Kāsa Garān neighborhood. This madrasa, which at the time of its construction was known as Madrasa-yi Shamsiyya (because it replaced the madrasa built by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Yazdī) and Madrasa-yi Ḥakīmiyya, accommodated a number of students. Ḥakīm al-Mulk had established a relatively large endowment for his madrasa. He assigned the sum of fifteen *tumans* for the teacher of the madrasa who, in addition to teaching, would also supervise the running of the madrasa. He also arranged the salaries for one muezzin and two janitors, along with one lamp-man and one water-carrier. Rafī‘ī Mihrābādī published the madrasa’s *waqfiyya*. He mentions that until very recently the trusteeship of the madrasa was in the hands of the family of the *wāqif* (i.e. Dr. Sayyid Arastū ‘Allāj) though now the *awqāf* Ministry controls it.⁶³

Wealthy individuals also contributed to the enrichment of cultural and intellectual life during the later Safavid period. Ḥakīm al-Mulk and his wife Zīnat Begum founded two madrasas, Madrasa-yi Kāsa Garān and Madrasa-yi Nīmāvard. Madrasa-yi Kāsa Garān was built in 1693, the last year of Shāh Sulaymān’s reign, under the supervision of Muḥammad Mu’min and Muḥammad Ibrāhīm in Isfahan. Zīnat Begum established her madrasa in 1693 in the Nīmāward neighborhood, which was famed for its tiles.⁶⁴ The madrasa is a two-story building with two *aiwāns*, one for praying and another for teaching. It has seventy-eight rooms for student residence.⁶⁵ Eminent Safavid scholars including Ḥājj Shaykh Rafī‘, Mullā Ḥasan Nā’īnī, and Mullā Mīrzā Qumayshī’ī were teaching in her madrasa.⁶⁶ According to ‘Atā’ullāh Jadalī (d. 1921), son of Mīrzā Muḥammad-i Mutawallī (d. 1895), and also according to the deed of

62 Hidāyat, *Majma‘ al-fuṣaḥā* v, 840; Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 293. Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 74–109. Sipintā reports that 22 students were residing in this madrasas. Mīrzā Nūr al-Dīn preserved the trusteeship of his madras for himself. He also assigned 12 *tumans* of the revenues of his waqf to the holy cities of Iraq as well as the *Ḥaramayn al-Sharifayn* (*Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 74, 87, 88).

63 Rafī‘ī Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 487–93.

64 Gaube and Writh, *Der Bazar* 242, 213; Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 652–66, 679–81; Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 349.

65 Rafī‘ī Mihrābādī has published this madrasa’s deed of endowment. Rafī‘ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 504–08.

66 Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 307.

endowment of the madrasa dated 1699, Āqā Jamāl Khvānsārī was appointed as the executive and the supervisor of the *mawqūfat* of the madrasa.⁶⁷

Mīrzā ‘Abdullāh Afandī Jīrānī Isfahanī, the author of *Rīyāḍ al-‘ulamā’ wa hiyāḍ al-fuḍalā*, built a madrasa next to his home, which was known as Madrasa-yi Afandī.⁶⁸ Madrasa-yi Mīrzā Ḥusayn in the Baydābād neighborhood was built in 1687–88 by ‘Izzat al-Nisā’ Khānum, daughter of Mīrzā Khānā Tājir of Qum and wife of Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī. She dedicated properties to her madrasa in 1104/1692–93, 1106/1694–95, and 1107/1695–96.⁶⁹ Āqā Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī, son of Muḥammad Taqī Tājir-i ‘Abbāsābādī, a wealthy merchant of the ‘Abbāsābād suburb, built a madrasa in the Shamsābād suburb in 1125/1713–14.⁷⁰

The Largest Shi‘i Madrasa

Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, founder of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, assumed power on 6 August 1694 at the age of twenty-six.⁷¹ Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1699) delivered the enthronement sermon, in which he advised the new monarch to eradicate evil and activities forbidden by the divine law.⁷² He also urged the shah to implement justice by protecting common people, especially the peasants upon whom the economy, and therefore the polity, depended.⁷³ As the perceived legitimate heir to the Safavid throne, Sulṭān Ḥusayn’s coronation went smoothly, yet the force of traditions and legitimacy – although helpful in the establishment and survival of his reign – were not enough to neutralize threats from some Safavid subjects.

According to Safavid sources, Sulṭān Ḥusayn was a complaisant and pious person who started receiving training in horse riding and archery upon his coronation.⁷⁴ Upon assuming power, he took it upon himself to secure

67 Rafī‘i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 504–05.

68 Afandī was a student of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī. For more information on him, see Muḥammad Bāqir Sa‘īdī’s introduction to his translation of Afandī, *Rīyāḍ al-‘ulamā’* i, 1–37.

69 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 649–50; Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 349.

70 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 684.

71 Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyī’ al-sinīn* 549–50, 558, where he notes that in 1119/1708–9 robes of honor were also given to religious figures. See also Nāṣirī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 28 (in the preface), 24 (of the text).

72 See Hā’irī, Majlisī; Nāṣirī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 18–19, 43–44.

73 Nāṣirī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 22. See also Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyī’ al-sinīn* 549–50, 558.

74 Safavid sources claim when Shāh Sulaymān lay dying in 1105/1694, he left his courtiers to choose the new shah. The courtiers and especially eunuch officials decided to make

cooperation of the religious, military and spiritual elites by emulating the values and structure laid down by his forefathers. He provided monetary rewards and privileges through incentives such as tax exemption, the distribution of robes of honor, and the granting of large sums of money or parcels of lands; much of his attention and favor, however went to the religious class.⁷⁵ Historians of the early eighteenth century report that Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn exempted the sayyids, ‘ulamā’, and pious people (*ṣulaha*) from paying the sum of thirty thousand *tuman*, since there was no *ṣadr* to collect that sum.⁷⁶ He sent twelve Tabrizī *tuman* and twelve big trays of sweets to the *khalīfat al-khulafā* (head of Sufis) of the Sufis and asked them to pray for the longevity of his kingship.⁷⁷ He also implemented policies aiming to make the religious class pleased.

According to Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Naṣīrī, Sulṭān Ḥusayn’s official historian, Sulṭān Ḥusayn began his reign intending to change unlawful and corrupt practices under the direct advice and influence of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, for whom the shah extended his tenure as the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan by a royal decree issued in 1695.⁷⁸ Sulṭān Ḥusayn also sent a decree to the governor of Qarabagh ordering him to destroy winemaking facilities and to punish wine-drinkers.⁷⁹ These undertakings made the religious class happy, but

Sulṭān Ḥusayn the king, judging that he would be easier for them to control – they had raised him in the *ḥaram* so that that he did not have even the basic skills of a soldier. Naṣīrī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 28; Marwī, *Ālam-ārā-yi nādīrī* 17; Krusinski, *The history of the late revolution* i, 62–64; Tehrānī, *Mir’āt-i wāridāt* 98.

75 For example Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn gave Khātūnābādī, his tutor and the first teacher of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, the sum of one hundred *tumans* for accompanying him to Mashhad. Upon their return from the pilgrimage to Mashhad, the Shāh bought a house for Khātūnābādī for the amount of 300 *tumans*. Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyī’ al-sinīn* 556–57.

76 Tehrānī, *Mir’āt-i wāridāt* 99–100

77 Naṣīrī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 56.

78 Naṣīrī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 20; Khtūnābādī, *Waqāyī’ al-sinīn* 561–62. Majlisī was the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan during the final years of Shāh Ṣafī (d. 1694). Ja’fariyān, *Dīn wa siyāsat* 97–101, 412–14. The original copy of this *farmān* is kept in *kitābkhāna-yi Āstān Quds* in collection no. 9596. See also Mahdawī, *Zindigīnlāma-yi ‘Allāma* 44–46, 79–80ff; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 126–30.

79 The original copy of his decree banning gambling and other unlawful activities and making women’s *ḥijāb* obligatory, is kept in *kitābkhāna-yi Āstān Quds-i Raḍawī*. For more see *Fihrist-i kitābkhānih-yi Āstān Quds-i Raḍawī* ix, 294. Many other rulers commenced their tenure intending to abolish unlawful activities. For instance, in 1533–4 Shāh Tahmāsb issued a *farmān* banning non-Islamic activities such as gambling, prostitution, music, and drinking. Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh* i, 246. During his long reign, Tahmāsb issued several other royal decrees, some of which were based on dreams in which the Hidden Imam

the army felt spurned. In effect, despite all of his concessions and efforts, the young shah lacked the ability to navigate among various political forces and to build coalitions crucial to thwarting the brewing threats of rebellion in the four corners of his realm. Muḥammad Shafīʿ Tehrānī reports that, while the Shāh exempted the aforementioned religious groups from paying their taxes and debts, he ignored the army. He writes,

Sulṭān Ḥusayn was a God-fearing, learned, and erudite shah. He was always occupied with keeping the company of religious scholars; but unlike his forefathers who took good care of the army (that mostly consisted of the Turkaman and the Qizilbāsh) who kept the axis of Iran's monarchy firm, he paid so little attention [to the army] that for two years the Turkaman did not receive any money. So most of them, in the hope of receiving their fees, gathered in front of the royal court roaring and rioting. Four years passed in this manner until finally all the Turkaman became united and left the Shah's army. As soon as they reached Azerbaijan, they began rebelling, rioting, and invading neighboring villages and cities belonging to the monarchy; they killed people and plundered cities. The Turkaman's riot was the first revolt; Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, upon receiving the news of their raids and plunders (in Azerbaijan), sent out eight thousand soldiers in order to punish and discipline them. But as soon as the Shah's soldiers reached Azerbaijan, the Turkaman killed almost all of them except for a few people who survived to report the ominous news. The Shah again sent soldiers, but they shared the same fate upon arrival. After that no soldier of Sulṭān Ḥusayn's army wished to fight with the Turkaman. The royal guard and the army, which were made up of tribal troops, were not paid enough.⁸⁰

In addition to the military forces, discontent with the rule of the Safavid Shah came from different segments of society. As reported by the Safavid and post-Safavid historical sources, various ethnic and marginalized religious groups challenged Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn's political authority. For example, Naṣīrī reports that while the court was engaged with the coronation ceremony, the Balūch launched a number of attacks in Khurāsān in 1694 and the following

had asked him to wave certain taxes and forbid unlawful and non-religious acts. For more information on these royal decrees see *Shāh Tahmāsb-i Ṣafawī* 22–23, 508–09, 513–14. For an informative analysis of Tahmāsb's dreams see Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* 309–10, 316–17ff; Ahmadi, *The role of dreams* 177–98.

80 Tehrānī, *Mir'āt-i wāridāt* 99–100.

year.⁸¹ Tehrānī also describes the first years of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn's reign, during which Turkaman soldiers, the Khawārij of Oman, and the Sunni Lazgī tribes challenged his political authority.⁸² Some scholars argue that Sunni-populated provinces were revolting against central power in reaction to reforms undertaken by the central government at the behest of religious authorities, especially Majlisī.⁸³

A closer examination of late Safavid and post Safavid chronicles, however, reveals that Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn failed to negotiate effectively within the elite classes and to keep the masses out of politics, thanks to his inability to navigate amongst the various political, religious, spiritual classes and military forces in

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- 81 Nāṣirī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 64–67. Revolts occurred rather frequently in seventeenth century Iran. When Shah Ṣafī (d. 1642) assumed power, a number of insurrections also occurred. As Matthee discusses, when Gilān was converted into crown land, a major revolt imbued with messianic elements occurred. Many people in Gilān became quite unsettled with the imposed heavy taxation. Matthee, *The politics of trade* 122–3; see also Floor, *The economy* 290; Reid, *Studies in Safavid*, 230–2, 247–8; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 91–95. Qazwīnī also reports that many peasants in Dāghistān region as well as many Bakhtiyārīs revolted due to heavy taxation in 1645. Qazwīnī, *Abbās-nāma* 59–61, 271–75. He also reports that in 1661 drought and locust attacks on crops in Isfahan led to a sharp increase in the price of grain. Starving men and women complained to Shah ‘Abbās II (d. 1666), who ordered an end to monopoly by merchants over food crisis (*Abbās-nāma* 307).
- 82 On these revolts see Nāṣirī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 20, 64–67; Tehrānī, *Mir‘āt-i wāridāt* 99–100. Tehrānī with regard to Oman's invasion of Bahrain reports, “It is said that in that riot close to two thousand learned scholars, each of whom was a *mujtahid* from the residences of Bahrain, drunk the nectar of martyrdom (were killed).” He adds, “but the Shāh, after receiving the news of such cruelty, did nothing in revenge for their deaths. He completely ignored the event.” Tehrānī, *Mir‘āt-i wāridāt* 100. It seems Tehrānī's report about Kharajites of Masqat is not correct. Since accepting a conquest-letter (*fath-nāma*), published by Nawā‘ī, the Safavid ruler paid close attention to this invasion and besieged an army under the direction of Faṭḥ-‘Alī Khān, the grand vizier and the commander of Fārs province. Navā‘ī, *Asnād wa mukātabāt* 152–154.
- 83 Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 158–59; Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* 484–85. It has also been argued that the increased influence of the ‘ulamā’ over Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn had a serious impact on religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims who were living mainly in the peripheral provinces of the country. The Zoroastrians in Isfahan were forced convert to Islam. The Armenians of Julfā lost their privileges. Consequently, persecution of the religious minorities and Hindu merchants harmed the Safavid economy. For more information on this, see Khanbaghi, *The fire, the state* 93–131. Matthee also states that, toward the end of Safavid rule, the position of Christians in Iran deteriorated along with all other non-Shi‘i groups in the country. He maintains that the growing pressure on these groups was mostly the result of worsening economic conditions. Matthee, *Christians in Safavid Iran*, 3–43; Matthee, *Persia in crisis*, 201–03, 219–22.

order to build crucial coalitions and thus remain in power. That is why Iran was plagued by constant threats of violence and considerable uncertainty about the Safavid subjects' loyalties.⁸⁴ Much of the primary and secondary existing literature has focused on how he could have avoided the collapse of Safavid rule by solving the problem of court intrigues and averting rebellions by being more forceful and by imposing cooperation and eliminating threats of rebellion by means of force.

However, Quṭb al-Dīn Nayrīzī Shirāzī (d. 1759), a post Safavid scholar, offers a different interpretation. He essentially blames both Safavid Shahs and Shi'ī 'ulamā' for their ignorance and greed. He writes, "Calamity has stricken, blood has been shed, Shi'ī children and women have been held captive, and various diseases have afflicted the whole realm."⁸⁵ He maintains that the Safavid Empire collapsed because rulers and people ignored religious teachings, subsequently failing to enjoin good and forbid evil. He also criticizes Safavid religious scholars for their worldly ambitions and Safavid shahs for their ignorance and for allowing corruption to become rampant within the government as well as the military.⁸⁶

In reality, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn responded to these bouts of political unrest by means of force. Although this military response did impose cooperation and eliminate threats of rebellions in the short term, the use of such force was arguably costly and ineffective in the long run. He may have also received advice that ignoring civilian elite to pay the military commanders and forces would increase the risk that the military itself may intervene to secure (or enhance) its privileges. Being pious and not belligerent by nature, Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn preferred other strategies to elicit cooperation and to keep opponents in line. Identifying himself with the faith became one of his main priorities.

Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn thus maintained a close relationship with religious scholars and commissioned construction of magnificent religious buildings. He consolidated his rule and enjoyed a short respite from his troubles in the eastern and western borders of his realm. In order to enhance his pious image and, more importantly, to show the stability of his rule and economic might

84 For more information see Matthee, *Persia in crisis* 199–241; Newman, *Safavid Iran* 104–16; Ja'farian, *ʿIlal-i bar uftādan* 46–48; Foran, *The long fall of the Safavid* 281–307. Floor states, "During the reign of Shah Soltan Hosein, Persia lost respect and authority, both internally and externally ... [The shah] was under the influence of the harem eunuchs, the harem women and the important theologian, Moḥammad Bāqir Majlisī" (*The Afghan occupation* 19).

85 Nayrīzī, *Risāla-yi siyāsī* 25–26, 70–71.

86 Nayrīzī, *Risāla-yi siyāsī* 29–50.

in the face of all the looming socio-religious and political challenges, he soon founded the Faraḥābād Chāhār Bāgh complex and Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. He also ordered the repair of the Imāmzāda Ismāʿīl and Chihil Sutūn complexes. Andrew Newman argues that the strength of activity and creativity on so many cultural fronts does not suggest a system under fundamental social or economic challenge; rather, as a matter of fact, at the outset of Sulṭān Ḥusayn's reign there was little hint that he would be the "last" ruler of the longest-ruling dynasty in Iran's Islamic history.⁸⁷

As discussed previously, Safavid rulers recognized the role of grand religious structures in building long-lasting collective identities around an ostensibly shared religious tradition, i.e. Shi'ism. Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, like his forefathers, honored the sacred spaces that the Shi'a believed to harbor the power of the divine, proximity to which was deemed to yield spiritual power to individuals. Wishing to link his temporal authority to the places of divine dwelling, the shah established endowments for the holy shrine of Shāh-zāda Ḥusayn in Qazwīn and *Imāmzādas* Ḥamza, 'Abd al-'Aẓīm, and Ismāʿīl.⁸⁸

He also commissioned multiple repairs to the *Imāmzāda* Ismāʿīl complex between 1688–89, and in 1703 he ordered the repair of the tomb of Khvāja Rabī' located in Mashhad. The shah renovated *Imāmzāda* Aḥmad, where a *madrasa* was built in its courtyard next to a mosque.⁸⁹ In 1699 and in 1703 Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn renovated the shrine of Ismāʿīl b. Ḥasan b. Zaid b. Ḥasan b. 'Alī.⁹⁰ In addition to these *Imāmzādas*, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn paid special attention to the shrines of the Imams located in *Atabāt*, the holy cities in Iraq. In a deed of endowment issued in 1711, he proscribed that,

The trustee should arrange for twelve thousand *Tabrizī dīnārs* to be sent to each of the holy shrines in Najaf and Karbalā to purchase incense for the shrines of 'Alī and Ḥusayn – if the extra funds were to exceed the incense cost, the trustee was instructed to inquire if any of these shrines were in need of repair, either in their roof or in their land (i.e., the whole

87 Newman, *Safavid Iran* 115.

88 Modarressi, *Bargī az tārikh* 240–41; Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 266–83.

89 Rafī'i-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 433, 756. According to Abū Nu'aiym Isfahanī, this shrine belongs to Aḥmad b. 'Isā b. Zayd b. 'Alī b. Ḥusayn b. 'Alī who escaped from the wrath of Hārūn al-Rashīd and took refuge in Isfahan and died there. But Khvānsārī maintains that the shrine belongs to Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Bāqir. Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i Tārikhī* 668. Jābirī Anṣārī also believes Aḥmad is the grandson of Imam Muḥammad Bāqir. Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārikh-i Isfahan* 251.

90 Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārikh-i Isfahan* 186–87; Rafī'i-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 750–62.

building); he was also contracted to donate chests, carpets, bookshelves, Quran covers, lamps, and candle holders to these shrines. The extra funds were to be spent on repairs first, but if the holy shrines needed no repair, or if it was not possible [to repair them], the surplus funds were to be submitted to a group of pilgrims who wanted to return home after visiting the holy shrines but who could not make it due to debt. With that fund, their debts were to be paid off and their journeys and return expenses home were also to be funded. If there were few such stranded pilgrims and if there were funds remaining, the sum of fifty thousand *Tabrīzī dīnārs* was to be submitted to each person to cover the expenses of his trip to the holy shrines in Iraq.⁹¹

Moreover, he constructed or repaired more than thirty religious structures, roughly comparable to the amount of work carried out under Shāh ‘Abbās II.⁹² For instance, he established endowments for the holy shrine of Shāhzāda Ḥusayn in Qazvīn, as well as for *imāmzādas* Ḥamza, ‘Abdul‘azīm and Ismā‘īl.⁹³ Arguably no royal dynasty in Iran has set up such vast numbers of splendid buildings, particularly religious structures, like the Safavids Shahs, in particular ‘Abbās I and Sulṭān Ḥusayn. Unlike a crown, grand constructions are magnificent spatial, tangible and visual demonstrations of a ruler’s vision, and his great wealth. Indeed, by establishing a charitable endowment, a *wāqif* affirms his power as a sovereign and shows his ability to give to a community and mobilize them to participate in his grandiose undertakings.⁹⁴

In addition to his many charitable, or public (*waqf-i khayrī* or *waqf-i ‘āmm*), endowments, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn established a number of family, or private (*waqf-i awlād*), endowments as well, which were intended primarily for the benefit of his sons and their descendants.⁹⁵ In 1712, the Shah donated the income from properties in Riḍwān, Fasā, Khafrak, and Marw-dasht and the village of Ḥusaynābād – all located in the province of Fārs – for the benefit of his children. Some of these endowments were confiscated after the collapse of Isfahan as well as during the period in which *awqāf* were confiscated under

91 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 172–74.

92 He also donated many books. On this see Afshar, *Waqf wa amānat dādan* 859–62; Khtūnābādī, *Waqāyī‘ al-sinīn* 563; Modarressi, *Turbat-i pakān* i, 275–76.

93 Modarressi, *Bargī az tārikh* 266–83. See also Rizvi, *The Safavid dynastic shrine* 160.

94 For this aspect of *waqf* see Leeuwen, *Waqfs and urban structures* 1–33, 178–203.

95 For the *waqf-i ‘āmm*, see Lambton, *Awqāf in Persia* 303.

Nādir Shāh.⁹⁶ The Shah also created an endowment in Bihbahān and endowed the village of ‘Alīābād to his children.⁹⁷

In 1704–5, ten years after his accession, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn began building the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī as well as a bazaar and a three-storey caravanserai complex, located along the eastern side of the Chahār Bāgh, south of the Hasht Bihisht Palace. It is the biggest of its kind in Persia apart from the Madrasa-yi Ghiyāthīyya at Khargird that was built between 1438 and 1444. Based on the accounts given by Safavid sources, Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī was designed to fulfill all the requirements of the madrasa as it had functioned in earlier periods, such as the period of Timurid rule, and in other places like Herat and Bukhara. Many madrasas built during the medieval period all over Muslim world were majestic buildings whose official status and grandeur were inspired equally by palatial and religious architecture.⁹⁸ Perhaps it was owing to the status of madrasas that, while in Herat, Sulṭān Muḥamamd Khudā-banda and Shāh ‘Abbās stayed in the Madrasa-yi Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bāyqarā known in written sources as Madrasa-yi Mīrzā or Madrasa-yi Sulṭān Ḥusayn Mīrzā.⁹⁹

The construction of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī began in 1704. The shah ordered eunuch Āqā Kamāl, the treasurer of the royal court (*ṣāhib jam‘-i khazāna*), to supervise its construction. Āqā Kamāl himself built a madrasa in Isfahan in 1695 and named it after Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn.¹⁰⁰ Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī was also known as Madrasa-yi Chahār Bāgh and Madrasa-yi Mādar-i Shāh. It is currently called Imam Ja‘far-i Ṣādiq Seminary (*hawza*). The name given in the madrasa’s *waqf* documents is, however, Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī.¹⁰¹ According to the *waqf-nāma* dated 1706, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn endowed the entire madrasa-mosque complex, its dome, *aiwān*, and courtyard for the benefit of the Shi‘a. He dedicated the chambers around its courtyard as well as buildings, reservoirs, a well, a kitchen, and the rest of the madrasa structure, to the students of religious sciences and to the people who prayed in the mosque of the madrasa.¹⁰²

96 Sipintā has published the text. *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 254–65; see also Şifatgol, The question of *Awqāf* 209–231.

97 Dībājī, *Waqf-nāma-yi Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn* 80–83.

98 Tabbaa, *Constructions of power* 129.

99 Munshī, *Tārikh-i ‘ālam-ārā-yi ‘Abbāsī* i, 286–87, 388; Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārikh* 740–42. Murtaḍā Qulī-Khān also stayed in the Madrasa-yi Āstāna-yi Ma‘şūma when he went to Qum. Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārikh* ii, 837.

100 The madrasa was known as Madrasa-yi Sulṭān Ḥusayniyya. For more on this madrasa see Ja‘fariān, *Waqf-nāma-yi Sulṭān Ḥusayniyya* 259–90.

101 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf*, 150, 160, ff.

102 Naşīrī Muqaddam, *Waqf-nāma-yi Madrasa-yi Chāhār-bāgh* 112–18; Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 149–50.

‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī reports that, “Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn set about building the Royal Madrasa in the Chahār Bāgh district in Isfahan in 1704 and its construction was completed in 1707.”¹⁰³ Nonetheless, various completion dates are mentioned in epigraphs located at various places in the madrasa: at the madrasa’s entrance gate, 1711; inside the madrasa, 1708; inside the madrasa’s chambers, 1708; inside the dome, 1711; in the dome’s inscriptions, 1714; and in the madrasa’s veranda, 1709. So the madrasa was built over ten years from 1704 to 1714. Some historians say the building is a mosque that has rooms for students. In the words of Muḥammad Mahdī b. Muḥammad Riḍā Isfahani, “The entire mosque is a madrasa.”¹⁰⁴ That said, all other primary sources refer to this complex as a madrasa.

Hunarfar maintains that Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn’s mother built a three-story caravanserai, which was known as Sarā-yi Faṭḥiyya (in recent decades, Hotel ‘Abbāsī was built in its place), alongside the madrasa. She also built a market named Bāzār-i Buland (currently known as Bāzār-i Hunar, with a thousand two-story shops) and donated the shops’ revenues to the madrasa-mosque complex.¹⁰⁵ Sipintā attributes the construction of the madrasa to the shāh’s mother and says that Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn only repaired it.¹⁰⁶ Historical and biographical sources, however, do not furnish much information about her, and in the *waqf* documents Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn is named as the sole *wāqif* of the madrasa. In addition to these properties, over the course of six years between 1709 and 1714, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn donated vast agricultural lands and urban properties to support the madrasa’s teacher and students and to pay for the upkeep of the buildings and the religious activities stipulated by the terms of the *waqfs*. The shah endowed buildings, including a coffeehouse (*qahwa-khāna*), public bathhouses, reservoirs, and especially subterranean canals. He created the post of *wazīr-i ḥalāl*, a royal official, whose sole responsibility was to oversee the properties dedicated to the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī and other charitable endowments he had founded.¹⁰⁷

The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī is about 8500 square meters. The length of its courtyard is about sixty-five and one-half meters and its width is fifty-five and one-half meters. It is remarkably decorative, embellished with beautifully colored geometric designs. Its facade, dome and minarets are adorned with tiled mosaics and the architectural features and decoration of the inside are great

103 Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyi’ al-sinūn* 556.

104 Isfahani, *Nisf-i jahān* 69.

105 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 722.

106 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 116.

107 Raḥīmlū, *Alqāb wa mawājib* 66.



FIGURE 16 *The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī.*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 17

The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. Entrance portal on the Chahār Bāgh street.

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI

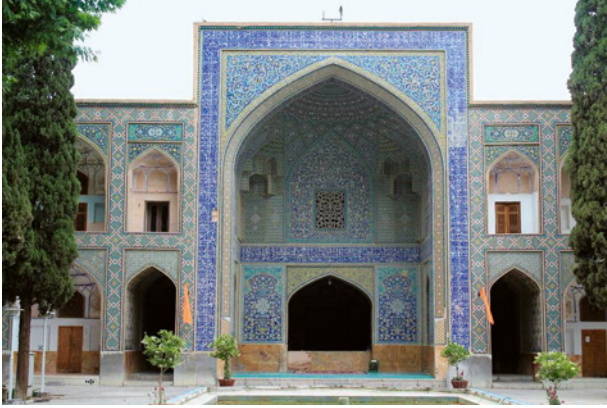


FIGURE 18 *The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī.*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 19
*The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. Exterior view
of typical chamber porch.*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN &
KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 20 *The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. Exterior view of typical upper chamber porch.*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 21 *The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. Exterior view showing porches on the upper floor and arched niches on the lower.*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 22 *The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī.*

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 23

The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī.

IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI

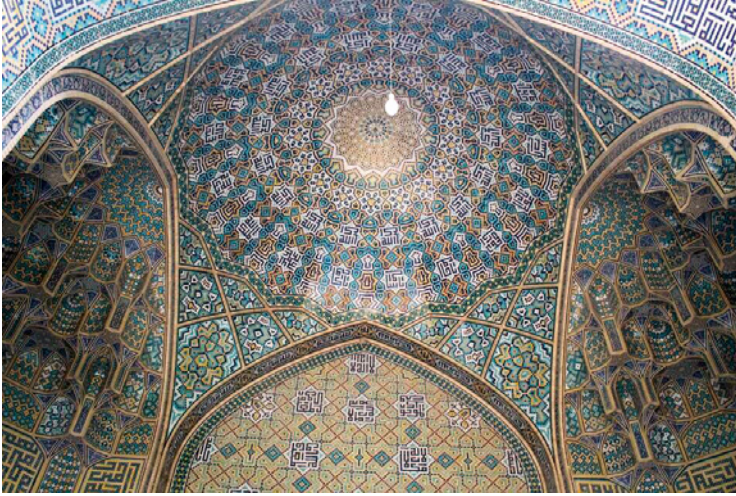


FIGURE 24 *The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. Interior detail showing ornament.*
 IMAGE CREDITS: M. MOAZZEN & KARIM MOMENI



FIGURE 25 *Elevated view of south iwān and sanctuary dome, Baroness Marie-Therese Ullens de Schooten photograph.*
 COURTESY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, FINE ARTS LIBRARY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

examples of Islamic art and workmanship. Four portals open off the courtyard. The dome and much of the walls are covered in bright yellow bricks. The entrance portal, decorated with gold facade and silver, and the tile-works inside the madrasa, are masterpieces of prime workmanship.

Shāh Sulṭān-Ḥusayn ordered 'Abd al-Laṭīf of Tabrīz, the goldsmith of the royal household, to create the door.¹⁰⁸ No expense seems to have been spared for this later addition (1714). The doors were made of twenty *manns* of silver and cost some eight hundred *tumans*, indicative of their enormous value; on the day of their installment, the city was illumined with lights. Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī reports that the sum of eight hundred *tumans* was spent on the main door of the madrasa alone.¹⁰⁹ The students' rooms were built around the large rectangular courtyard, interrupted only by the deep-recessed double-height *eywāns* in the center of each wall. The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī has a hundred and fifty chambers. Some sources give different numbers for the rooms; Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī reports that it contains 156 rooms furnished for students.¹¹⁰ The madrasa's floor plan, however, shows only 150 chambers. A special room located north of the portal was prepared for the personal use of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn.¹¹¹ Although Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī (d. 1715), the madrasa's first teacher, began teaching there in 1706–7, Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī was not inaugurated until 1710.

In addition to Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, a few other madrasas were built in the final decades of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries either by members of the royal family or wealthy individuals, including officials at the court of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn. Individuals such as Najaf-Qulī Beg, Ḥājj Almās, and Āqā Kamāl Khāzin built madrasas, but none of them was as expansive and well-funded as the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī.¹¹² Mīrzā Muḥammad Mu'min Khān I'timād al-Dawla, the grand vizier of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, founded a madrasa in Qum in 1692–1701. It had forty-two rooms for students and a very rich library. The madrasa's *waqf-nāma* written in 1723 lists the property that the donor endowed to the madrasa and its students who were, according to the donor's stipulation, required to occupy themselves with acquiring religious sciences

108 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 691–94; Rafī'ī Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 446–50; Blake, *Half the world* 160.

109 Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyi' al-sinūn* 560.

110 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 291.

111 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 719–20.

112 For more information on these madrasas, see Rafī'ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 28, 29.

and Prophetic and Imāmī traditions and who were instructed not to waste their time while residing there.¹¹³

Similar to all Muslim women of royal or elite status, female members of the Safavid royal household on the whole played a prominent role in the cultural affairs of the state as donors and founders of madrasas and other religious and cultural institutions.¹¹⁴ Safavid female donors followed the tradition set by powerful and wealthy female donors living in various time periods and places.¹¹⁵ Maryam Begum, daughter of Shāh Ṣafī, built a residential madrasa that was completed in 1703.¹¹⁶ The inscription on its wall advises the *mudarris* (teacher) to admit only studious, pious, abstinent, and chaste students and to bar the lazy, slow, and impious. Students at Madrasa-yi Maryam Begum studied *fiqh*, *hadith*, and Quranic exegesis.¹¹⁷ Among other madrasa builders were Dilārām Khānum, the mother of Shāh Ṣafī,¹¹⁸ and Ḥūrī Khānum, ‘Abbās II’s grandmother, who appointed herself as the trustee of her madrasa, and Shahr-bānū, daughter of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, who built a two-story residential madrasa known as Madrasa-yi Shāh-zādahā. She donated the revenue from the Shāh-zādahā Bath to the madrasa. Until a few decades ago, the madrasa was still functioning, but it has now been replaced by an elementary school.¹¹⁹

Despite the fact that madrasa education was common and madrasas spread in this period to almost every corner of the Safavid realm, women were completely excluded from receiving higher learning. There were some women who received their training at home from their fathers or husbands. Among the well-known female Safavid scholars were Ḥamdīa, the daughter of Muḥammad

113 Modarressi published the *waqfiyya* of this madrasa. Modarressi, *Turbat-i pākān* ii, 227–35.

114 For more on their madrasas see Blake, *Half of the world* 46, 167, 90, 121; Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 553–6. On the *waqf* documents for these two schools see Aḥmadī, *Chāhār waqf-nāma* 95–129. For Seljuq and Atabegid female donors see Lambton, *Continuity and change* 149ff; Lambton, *Awqāf* in Persia 310–13. Female members of other dynasties also were active in patronizing arts, religious and educational activities. For Ayyubid female benefactors see Humphreys, *Women as patrons of religious architecture* 35–54. For Timurid female donors see Soucek, *Timurid women* 206–10; Manz, *Women in Timurid dynastic politics* 121ff; Subtelny, *Timurids in transition* 154–58, 171–89.

115 For example, J. Berkey introduces several madrasas including al-Quṭbiyya and Ḥijāziyya established by female members of royal families (*The transmission of knowledge* 162–67).

116 For more information on the Madrasa-yi Maryam Begum see Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 662–67; Gaube and Wirth, *Der Bazar* 118; Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 302–16.

117 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 302–16.

118 Aḥmadī, *Chāhār waqf-nāma* 103.

119 Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 396–08; Rafī‘ī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 39.

Sharīf b. Shams al-Dīn Ruwaydashtī; Fāṭima, daughter of Ḥamdīa; and Amīna Khātūn, the daughter of Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī.¹²⁰

Conclusion

From the preceding preliminary observations, we may argue that imperializing Twelver Shi'ism was responsible for the single farthest-reaching transformation in the Shi'i higher learning. The interactions of this religious development with other historical forces and institutions resulted in one of the most distinctive legacies of the Safavids that shaped the subsequent history of Iran. This transformation continued to develop from the beginning to the end of the empire; however, its historically effective and traditionally authoritative apparatuses and attitudes emerged in the latter half of the life of that empire. Indeed, in the process of creating their empire, Safavid monarchs who initially expropriated previously existing religious and cultural institutions created some of the richest pious endowments and the most magnificent mosque-madrasa complexes and shrines in the course of Shi'i history by assigning a great portion of their wealth in *waqf*. The pious endowments made by the Safavid shahs and their building undertakings during the first century of their rule was but a prelude to the full-scale rise of *waqf*-making during the second century of the Safavid rule. Perhaps one of the reasons that may account for the sizeable increase of madrasa building in the later period of the Safavid rule was due to the fact that Safavid rulers reached the limits of their expansion in the early seventeenth century and entered a phase that Max Weber calls "routinization of charisma." Therefore, they had to find new ways to legitimize their rule. They did so by building sumptuous palaces, madrasa-mosque complexes, and other architectural monuments.¹²¹

The Safavid architectural undertakings could also be identified as a cultural process and construct by which and in which the religious identity of the

120 Afnadi Işfahānī, *Riyāḍ al-ʿulamāʾ* v, 403–10. Afnadi Işfahānī also lists the names of some of the well-known female scholars including Umm al-Ḥasan Faṭīma, al-Shahīd Muhammad b. Makkī's daughter, who received an *ijāza* from his father, and Umm al-ʿAlī, al-Shahīd's wife and subject of his highest praises, who lived in the fourteenth century. Women were encouraged to approach her should they have questions concerning their monthly period, daily prayers or any legal and religious matters. For more information on them and some other Shi'i female scholars see, Stewart, Women's biographies 117–133; Afnadi Işfahani, *Riyāḍ al-ʿulamāʾ* v, 403–10; al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Amal al-ʿāmil* i, 193.

121 Weber, *Economy and society* 249–51; Hillenbrand, *Islamic architecture* 179.

Persians were formed. In particular, Safavid elite had to confront the problems of incorporating peripheral domains and assimilating diverse peoples into one religious community and establishing a degree of religious homogeneity – or at least a semblance of common religious perspective. A direct connection between this new religious geography and identity can be discerned. Indeed the numerous Safavid mosque-madrasas become a rich cultural tapestry of life in which intellectual Shi'i heritage, traditions and representations were put on permanent display and their occupants and visitors were given a sense of participation through the presentation of appropriate interpretative materials. In other words, through constructing a religious identity, the Safavid ruling elite and Shi'i authorities attempted to integrate a people separated by ethnicity, language, religion, and class that made them believe they have a shared past. As such, in addition to providing the continual realignment and recombination of intellectual discourses, political interests, and structures of power, Safavid mosque-madrasas functioned as centers to create a shared narrative of Shi'i history, a framework of meaning that would become a source of common identity, a willingness to sacrifice for a larger cause, and a sense of commonality with one's fellow Shi'i brothers.

Safavid rulers also used a variety of other means to legitimize and consolidate power, including exempting Shi'i Muslims from paying taxes and treating different ethnic and religious groups in ways that utilized their economic contributions while limiting their ability to challenge the authority of the political power.¹²² They were also keen on recruitment and use of bureaucratic elite, as well as the development of military professionals. Safavid shahs also established new trading networks with Christian Europeans, which proved profitable for the rulers and merchants involved in these trade networks. Finally, they used arts and literature to display political power, legitimize their rule, and appeal to their subjects as well as neighboring empires. Military, socio-political, institutional, and cultural mechanisms, including identification with certain religious values and ethos through a variety of mediums such as high art and literature, architecture, rituals, and myths, were all dedicated to the mission of establishing a monolithic religious identity and integrating peripheral loyalties.

122 There is a royal decree issued by 'Abbās I engraved in stone near Simnān in which 'Abbās declares that were one to convert to Shi'ism, he would be exempt from paying taxes. In another decree which is engraved in the wall of Natanz's congressional mosque, 'Abbās I declares that this tax exemption is not given to Sunnis who live among the Shi'a. Ja'fariyān, *Şafavīya dar 'arṣa-yi dīn* i, 34–5.

The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī

Waqfs, Administrative Structure, and Academic Life

Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn's Objectives in Establishing the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī

As a polycentric institution that has been essential in promoting religious-cultural and educational undertakings while also offering social welfare, *waqf* constituted an integral part of Safavid policy.¹ It was used as a mechanism to foster socio-religious and spiritual cohesion as well as to project a pious image of the Safavid shahs. Similar to his predecessors and peers, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn had a whole range of purposes in establishing the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī and other religious structures when he commissioned their building. Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī's deeds of endowment shed some light to some extent on the religious and socio-political motives and even foreign policies the shah had had in founding this pious endowment. Almost all Persian historians and biographers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries portray Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn as a very gentle, peaceful, and pious person.² He undoubtedly had sincere religious feelings. In his youth, he had received religious instruction from Muḥammad Bāqir Khātunābādī, whom he appointed as the professor of his madrasa. Therefore, one of the main reasons in establishing his extensive *waqfs* could be conceived first and foremost as a pious act inspired by his religious belief and his aspirations to get closer to God (*qurba*), to do good (*birr*), and to fulfill his

1 Many scholars have examined various motives that the founders, mostly powerful elite, had when establishing large pious endowments and their diverse financial, religious, and socio-political functions. (Their scholarships are referred to in the preceding pages). Some scholars examined the motives of wealthy ordinary individuals in creating *mawqūfāt* (pious endowments). For example, Gabriel Baer studied the *waqf* as an important tool that supported and reinforced social units or groups based on kinship or quasi-kinship (Waqf as prop 264–297). For more information on general motives for endowing property, including references to the earlier scholarly literature, see Bonine, Islam and commerce 184 and Subtelny, *Timurids in transition* 148–63. Ulrich Haarmann in his study on Mamluk *waqfiyyas* offers a general structure of the Mamluk deeds of endowment as well as their contents (Mamluk endowment 31–47).

2 Naṣrī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 19; Floor, *The Afghan occupation* 19.

obligation to give charity. The latter was generally considered to guarantee a place in Paradise.³

According to the deeds of endowment of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, the shah's designs in establishing the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī were "to disseminate the seeds of good words" and also for the Shi'a and the faithful "to benefit from this pious foundation, so that they would pray for the survival and longevity of the shah's rule."⁴ The obligation to perform the *du'ā* prayers for the benefit of the pious establishment's founder, which has typically been one of the most significant stipulations in any pious endowment deed, was included in the madrasa's *waqf-nāmas*. The prayers of the beneficiaries of the pious endowment were seen as ensuring the success of the benefactor in the transient life and securing his salvation in the hereafter.⁵

Moreover, in madrasa deeds, *waqf* is emphasized as an exchange and an investment that promises abundant returns, potentially repaid either here and now or in the hereafter. In the *waqf-nāmas*, the benefactor's anticipation of divine returns – especially resulting from the prayers of the poor offered in return for charity – frequently manifests in explicit statements to that effect.⁶ For example, one group of the beneficiaries of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī were fourteen Quran reciters required by the terms of the *waqf* to beseech God's favor on behalf of the shah and to endorse his personal quest for salvation while performing their prayers.⁷ From the emphasis placed on the *du'ā* for the benefit of the founding patron, one can conclude that the *du'ā* component was not just some trifling detail lost among other details in the long, pious endowment deed. It reflected the founder's expectations for a spiritual reward.

Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn also had certain socio-political ambitions, which led him to create this pious foundation. Like other Safavid shahs, he made use of the *waqf* institution's symbolic value to create bureaucratic links between temporal power and religious authority.⁸ This learning center was considered

3 For the philanthropic motives for *waqf* see, McChesney, *Charity and philanthropy* 6–8; Sabra, *Poverty and charity* 69ff; Lev, *Charity, endowment*, 53ff. For details about *waqf* supporting educational institutions in the Mamluk world, see Haarmann, Mamluk endowment 31–47.

4 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 125.

5 For more information see Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 224–25, 230.

6 See for example, Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 145.

7 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 125. Ulrich Haarmann reports that in the *Khānqāhmadrasa* Barqūqiyya in Cairo, the fourteen *qurrā'*, who read the Quran from the evening prayer till next morning, two at a time for two hours, received twenty-seven dirham, the other ten received only eighteen dirham (Mamluk endowment 37).

8 As discussed aptly by Beatrice Forbes Manz, through the creation and patronage of religious institutions Muslim rulers exercised influence within the religious class (*Power, politics* 214–22).

an institution in which Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn took special and personal pride. When, on September 15, 1709, Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī gave the inaugural lecture, the shah summoned an audience of military commanders, high-ranking officials, religious authorities, prayer leaders, and students to take part in the opening ceremony of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī.⁹

‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī describes in some detail the inaugural ceremony, which today gives us clues about the method whereby the madrasa began to function as an educational institution.¹⁰ During the ceremony a number of administrative measures were taken, the most important of which were the appointment of the head teacher and other madrasa officials. The highest government officials as well as leading religious scholars of the time were present at the ceremony: Āqā Jamāl Khvānsārī (d. 1710), one of the three Khvānsārīs brothers who – like the Majlisīs – were actively engaged in socio – religious and political life in the late seventeenth century,¹¹ took part along with Mīr Muḥammad Šāliḥ, the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan, Mullā Bahā’ al-Dīn known as Fāḍil Hindī, Mullā Muḥammad Ja’far and Mullā Muḥammad Hādī, sons of Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir Khurāsānī, Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā, son of Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir, the *shaykh al-Islam*, Mullā Muḥammad Ḥusayn, son of Shah Muḥammad Tabrizī, Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn, the author of *Sharḥ-i Lum’ā*, and a number of other scholars.

Among the nobilities who took part in the ceremony were Sayyid Mīrzā Bāqir, the *ṣadr-i khāṣṣa*, and – from the sayyid families – the sons of Khalīfa Sulṭān-i Mar’ashī and of Mīrzā Sayyid Muḥammad Qāḍī. The grandson of Mīrzā Mahdī

9 In order to advance and strengthen the reputation of their madrasas, generally founders chose the most distinguished professors. Political connections and networks, however, contributed to the attainment of positions. For example, Khātūnābādī’s personal ties with Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn played a prominent role in his winning the teaching position at the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. Despite his close relationship with Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn and his attainment of the highest clerical rank in the Safavid court, there is a paucity of information about Khātūnābādī’s academic career. It is surprising that the life and career of the first Safavid *mullā-bāshī* is not discussed in detail in Safavid or post-Safavid biographical dictionaries. Perhaps it is because he did not produce any major works on Islamic law, hadith, or any other branches of religious and rational sciences. For more on him see, Moazzen, *Institutional metamorphosis* 65–88.

10 Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyi’ al-sinīn* 556–57, 559–60.

11 Āqā Ḥusayn Khvānsārī’s two sons Āqā Jamāl (d. 1125/1710), and Āqā Raḍī played important roles in socio-political affairs and in the spread of religious learning in later years of Safavid rule, but never accepted official positions. For more on these scholars, see Afandī, *Riḡāḍ al-‘ulamā* ii, 57–60; al-Baḥrānī, *Lu’lu’āt al-Baḥrayn* 90–2; Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* ii, 367. On his son Āqā Jamāl see Afandī, *Riḡāḍ al-‘ulamā* ii, 211; Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 151; Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyi’ al-sinīn* 559–61.

I‘timād al-Dawla and Mīrzā Dāwūd, the *mutawallī* of Imam Riḍā’s Shrine, and amīrs Muḥammad Sālīm Khān Īshak Āqāsī-bāshī, Muḥammad Zamān Khān Qūrchī-bāshī, Mūsā Khān Tufangchī-bāshī, Shahwirdī Khān Tūpchī-bāshī, Mīrzā Rabī‘, the royal accountant (*mustawfī*), and other high-ranking officials also took part in the ceremony. The only person absent was the Grand *vazīr*, Shāh-Qulī Khān,¹² who could not take part in the ceremony due to illness, but sent fifty large trays of sweets as a gift.¹³ Attendance at such a lecture was a sign of respect to the founder and the scholar who delivered the inaugural lecture.

Furthermore, one of the other main objectives in establishing educational institutions such as Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī was not only to transmit Shi‘i religious sciences but also to counteract other intellectual and spiritual forces, which threatened to undermine the authority of the mainstream religious discourse. Thus Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn wished all learning to be centered upon the “orthodox” religion. (I discuss this further in chapter 3 and 4.) Other donors, such as Shaykh ‘Alī Khān Zangana, who built a madrasa in Hamadan and established a pious endowment to support the madrasa and its residences and employees, stipulated that, “whenever the teacher of the madrasa teaches rational sciences that are in contrast to the religion, he must be expelled from the madrasa immediately and his salary terminated.” He also stipulated that, “whenever a student commits a grave sin he must be expelled from the madrasa.”¹⁴ Although the Afghan invasion and the political instability it brought about resulted in intellectual and economic impoverishment in Isfahan, Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī kept functioning as a center for religious studies and religious rituals.¹⁵ Even today it serves these purposes.

As the deeds of endowment reveal, Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn, as part of his foreign policy and perhaps to extend his power and to create a stronghold in the

12 Shāh-Qulī Khān Zanganah, son of the grand wazīr Shaykh ‘Alī Khān Zanganah, died in 1715.

13 Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār* 688.

14 Sutūdeh, *Sawād-i tūmār* 170. In Chapter 4, I present more examples of the donors who wished the learning in their madrasas to be centered upon religious sciences.

15 In the autumn of 1719 Maḥmūd b. Mīr Weis, the Ghilzāi chief, raided Kerman and sacked the city. Faṭḥ-‘Alī Khān Dāqistānī, the grand vizier, encouraged Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn to move the court to the north-eastern part of the realm, to bring the extra prestige necessary for a successful campaign against Maḥmūd, but the shah moved no further than Tehran, since some of his courtiers advised him against it. The siege of Isfahan lasted for several months from March to October 1722. The shah and his courtiers undertook a variety of special measures to address the root cause of the riots, but none of them was effective. In early October 1722 Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn finally offered Maḥmūd his surrender. Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyī‘ al-sinīn* 558–60, 565–66.

holy cities of Iraq and Mecca and Medina, assigned a part of the revenues of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī's *awqāf* to the sayyid families residing in those cities. Initiated in the time of Shāh Ṭahmāsb, this policy continued until the final years of Safavid rule. Shāh 'Abbās I had also assigned a part of the revenues of the Chārdah Ma'šūm's pious endowments to the sayyid families residing in Medina and near the Shrine of 'Alī in Najaf.¹⁶ According to the author of *'Abbās-nāma*, during the trusteeship of Shāh 'Abbās II the revenues of the Chārdah Ma'šūm pious endowments doubled. These *waqfs* yielded 14,000 *tumans* annually, a portion of which was sent to the sayyid families residing in Medina as stipulated by the donor, Shāh 'Abbās I.¹⁷

Endowments also created connections between rulers and a host of people dependent in one way or another on imperial establishments. Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, like other pious endowments, provided a steady source of financial security for the managerial staff, teachers and students. It also offered incomes to the prayer-leader, muezzins, preacher, librarian and the Quran reciters.¹⁸ Furthermore, those who were in charge of the upkeep of the mosque-madrasa as well as people who did the menial jobs including nurses, cooks, janitors, gardeners, sweepers, lamp-men, door-men and the like would receive a salary from the endowment. On the whole, the *waqf* institution continued to act as the engine of cultural and intellectual activities as well as urban and agricultural developments in early modern Iran, just as it had in earlier periods and other places. However, by creating this large pious endowment, Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn did not intend to organize agricultural activity in the way Timurid shrines developed and managed agricultural activity in Khurāsān.

The Deeds of Endowment of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī

Although all but one of the original *waqf-nāmas* of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī are lost, extant copies of several of the madrasa's deeds allow us to determine the extent of its endowed properties (*mawqūfāt*). Muḥammad Nādir Naṣīrī Muqaddam published a *waqf-nāma* of the madrasa dated in 1709.¹⁹ The original

16 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 67; Shāmlū, *Qīsaḥ Khāqānī* i, 193–96.

17 Şefatgol, *Sākhtār-i nahād* 326–27.

18 For this aspect of the *waqf* institution see Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* 185ff; Lambton, *Landlord and peasant* 106–7, 113.

19 Naṣīrī Muqaddam, *Waqf-nāma-yi Madrasa-yi Chāhār-bāgh* 112–18.

text of this *waqf-nāma* is held in the Iran-i Bāstān Museum.²⁰ Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh, who had seen the document, described it as follows: “*Waqf-nāma* number 8549, held in the Ancient Iran Museum, was written by the calligrapher Mīrzā Aḥmad Nayrīzī in 1720 on European paper and its title is written in gold. It is lavishly decorated with brilliant color.”²¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Sipintā published the deeds of endowment of Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī based on copies of the originals.²² The current research is based on copies of the *waqf-nāmas* housed in the *Idāra-yi awqāf-i Isfahan*, as well as Sipintā’s edition.

The abovementioned deed and other deeds of endowment of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī provide a wealth of information about the way this learning center was managed and how its resources were put to use. With regards to format, Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī’s deeds of endowment have the principal elements of similar documents. All *waqf-nāmas* of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī include the following elements: *basmala*, *ḥamdala* (Praise to God), *tasliyya* (the prayer upon the Prophet Muḥammad and his family), and identification of the donor.²³ The *wāqif* then acknowledges that the world is just a hospice and a bridge to the hereafter. He states that when a man dies he survives through his pious deeds because he establishes this pious endowment which gives eternal profit and acts as a permanent memorial to him.²⁴ Next, prior to enumerating and describing the endowed properties, the document’s lawfulness must be accounted for. The donor declares he has the full right of disposal over the properties in question. This is followed by a statement of stipulations inherent in a *waqf* and an admonition against changing them; that is, that no endowed properties may be sold, transferred under inheritance, or misappropriated during the donor’s life or after his or her death.²⁵

Waqf-nāmas of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī then offer a general description of the properties, which were assigned in perpetuity. The expenses, wages, personnel, and property management, and administration system of the madrasa itself, however, are outlined very carefully. Afterward, there are descriptions of the beneficiaries and pious purposes for which the income of the *waqf* is to be spent. The administrator of the endowment is named, as well as who should replace him upon his death. To safeguard his charitable foundation,

20 There is a microfilm of this *waqf-nāma* in the Kitābkhāna-yi Markazī-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran under number 1735.

21 Cited in Naṣīrī Muqaddam, *Waqf-nāma-yi Madrasa-yi Chāhār-bāgh* 113.

22 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 120–228.

23 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 144.

24 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 145.

25 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 149–50, 175.

Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn encourages the managerial team to faithfully follow the stipulations that he has set down. Since I could not obtain access to ledgers or books belonging to the endowments, it is not possible for me to discuss any possible maladministration. He also includes a set of guidelines for future fiduciaries. The documents close with an invocation and the date of the deed.²⁶

The elements do not always appear in exactly the same order in all deeds of the madrasa. The deeds typically bear the names of the people who have confirmed the provenance of the endowed properties and Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn's seal; a note can be seen in the margin of the *waqf-nāma* written in 1706. Muḥammad b. Āqā Ḥusayn (known as Āqā Jamāl Khvānsārī), Muḥammad Bāqir Khātunābādī, Muḥammad Zamān Hasanī Ḥusaynī, and Faṭḥ 'Alī Khān Dāghistānī (the Grand Wazīr) signed the 1706 deed as witnesses.²⁷ Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥusaynī was the *ṣadr-i khāṣṣa* and, as the fourth witness, signed the deeds. Sayyid Murtaḍā Ḥusaynī, son of Mīr Sayyid 'Alī Khalīfa Sulṭān Mar'ashī who was the son-in-law of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn and father of Abū Turāb Mīrzā – whom Karīm Khān-i Zand in 1749 declared the shah of Iran – also signed the documents as a witness. Sayyid Murtaḍā later became the *ṣadr* during the final years of the reign of Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn. One can safely assume that all the aforementioned witnesses were the most ceremonially important religious figures of their time. Other *waqf-nāmas* were signed by Muḥammad Bāqir Khātunābādī, the *mullā-bāshī*; Mīr Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, the *shaykh al-Islam*; Mīrzā Bāqir-i, the *ṣadr-i khāṣṣa*; Mīrza Dāwūd, the *mutawallī* (the trustee) of the shrine of Imām Riḍā; and Shāh-Qulī Zangana. This marginal note by

26 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 177.

27 For more on Faṭḥ 'Alī Khān see Mar'ashī, *Majma' al-tawārīkh* 93; Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 294. Mar'ashī explains in detail how a number of courtiers ended the work of Sulṭān Ḥusayn's favorite grand vizier I'timād al-Dawla Faṭḥ-'Alī Khān. He writes, "All emirs including *qurchī-bāshī*, i.e., Muḥammad Qulī Khān Shāmlū, the son of Muḥammad Mu'min Khān-i Shāmlū, who after the dismissal of Faṭḥ-'Alī Khān Dāqistānī was appointed as grand vizier, *qullar- āqāsī*, (i.e., Rustam Khān) and Muṣṭafā Khān, the Mīr-Shikar-bāshī and two very important and influential figures at the court, namely, Mullā Muḥammad Ḥusayn-i *mullā-bāshī* and Mīrzā Raḥīm-i, the *ḥakīm-bāshī*, became united against Faṭḥ-'Alī Khān and finally in 1720 found an opportunity to accuse him of conspiracy and rebellion against the Shāh. Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn imprisoned Faṭḥ-'Alī Khān. It was rumored that the *mullā-bāshī* exchanged his noble position with that of an executioner. According to one report and based on another, his son extracted Faṭḥ-'Alī Khān's eyes with the point of a dagger after tying him down. Faṭḥ-'Alī Khān's properties also were taken away. Mar'ashī, *Majma' al-tawārīkh* 49–50. See also Khātunābādī, *Waqāyī' al-sinīn* 569; Mathee, *Blinded by power* 179–220.

Muḥammad Bāqir Khātunābādī is typical of the witnesses' statement in these endowment deeds:

Praise be to God who donated the bounty of the next world to whoever cultivates the seeds of goodness and justice in the farm of this world and waters its garden with the charities running from the spring of good fortune! May the integrity of reason and prayer and peace be upon the master of the school of the cosmos and the teacher of the book of creation – the Prophet Muhammad and his family – and upon the noble Imams undertaking the duties of teaching and guiding and may the salvation on the Day of Resurrection depend on their intercession! ... I complied with his [Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn's] order and carried out as his proxy His Majesty, the donor.²⁸

Normally Safavid *waqfiyyas* were set based on the recommendations that had been given by Shi'ī scholars such as 'Allāma al-Ḥillī.²⁹ Although a donor relinquished all his rights to the properties he donated, he was given wide latitude in the management of his foundation.³⁰ The founder's wishes were imposed on the administration of the foundation, the appointment of trustee, the designation of beneficiaries, and the distribution of income. For instance, he or she could refuse to finance rational/ancient sciences that conventional Muslims deemed as pagan in origin. But he could send huge sums of money to certain holy shrines outside of the country. A *wāqif* could also favor certain families and individuals by entrusting them with profitable and stable administrative jobs running his foundation.³¹ He also had the option to reserve power to himself alone as trustee, stipulating that after his death his descendants would assume the post to the end of his family line. Likewise, he could entrust his

28 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 203. Muḥammad Bāqir Khātunābādī's note, which is written in Arabic, ends with his prayers and well wishes for the shah and for the continuity of his kingship.

29 al-Ḥillī, *Sharā'ī' al-Islam* ii, 442–53. As discussed by al-Ḥillī a *wāqif* must be of age, of sound mind, and owns legally the property(s) he/she intends to donate for charitable purposes. al-Ḥillī, *Sharā'ī' al-Islam* ii, 444–46.

30 There were few general restrictions to the founder's wishes; he could not in any way contravene the tenets of Islam. For instance, he could donate only the things that are considered lawful in Islam; hence he was prohibited from donating pigs, emancipated slaves, and cash. al-Ḥillī, *Sharā'ī' al-Islam* ii, 444.

31 According to 'Allāma al-Ḥillī, Shi'ī *wāqifs* should donate their properties primarily to the Twelver Shi'a as well as the Jārudiyya, one of the sects of Zaydi Shi'ism. al-Ḥillī, *Sharā'ī' al-Islam* ii, 446–47.

foundation to whoever else he wished. Finally, a *wāqif* could make modifications to the designated beneficiaries or the distribution of the income, stipulate his power to increase or diminish the shares of beneficiaries at any time, deprive a beneficiary of his share, and add or exclude beneficiaries. Despite these formidable entitlements, the *wāqif* bears no legal responsibility if his foundations fell into financial ruin.³²

Taken as a whole, the deeds of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī, like many other *waqf-nāmas*, set up more of an ethical than a legal framework for governing charitable fund management. The copies of the *waqf-nāmas* of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī do not suggest any legal measure for how to curb possible misuse and seizure of this pious endowment. The *wāqif* does not envisage any legal body to supervise the execution of his pious endowment's terms. There is no mention of any *qāḍī* in the deeds and the founder does not set forth any condition that the *mutawallī* or his representative must provide the office of *sadr* with a copy of financial transaction records for the madrasa. Legal details may be unnecessary because of the fact that the trustee of this pious establishment was and always would be the most powerful person in the realm, namely the ruler of each age. Trustworthiness, piety, and financial expertise were the main qualities expected from the men delegated to manage the properties of the madrasa; because the donated properties were considered God's and consequently could not be owned by men, they could not be sold, bought, granted as a gift, or inherited. As Shāh Sultān Ḥusayn stipulated, "The donated properties must not be bought, sold, donated, leased or inherited."³³

Analysis of the Endowed Properties

According to the copies of the *waqf-nāmas* of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī, the revenues of one large caravanserai, one grand bazaar with one thousand and two shops, and various other kinds of properties (mentioned in the following tables) were all dedicated to the madrasa.³⁴ Although the name of a village mentioned at the beginning of the document is obscured, other properties donated to the madrasa are enumerated and briefly described, thus making it possible to determine the extent of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī's *mawqūfāt*. Shāh Sultān

32 al-Ḥillī, *Sharāʿ al-Islam* ii, 452.

33 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 174.

34 For a complete list of the properties donated by Shāh Sultān Ḥusayn to the *Madrasa-yi Sultānī* see Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 150–237.

TABLE 1 *The number and kinds of properties endowed to Madrasa-yi Sulṭān*

Gardens	Hamlets	Bazaars	Subterranean canals	Public baths	Caravanserais
33	58	1	35	2	1

Parcel of land	Coffeehouse	Village	Pigeon tower	Mill	Walnut tree	Other trees
11	1	11	1	3	8	864

Ḥusayn donated a mixture of agricultural lands, commercial, and residential properties located mainly in the city of Isfahan and its suburb.

In addition to the 1,002-shop bazaar, agricultural properties of various kinds including arable fields (*zamīn*), hamlets (*mazraʿa*), gardens (*bāgh*), irrigation canals and water shares constituted the majority of the endowed properties. Some of these properties are large and some are only a few shares (*sahms*) in the property.³⁵ The boundaries of the donated properties are described. Although the deeds use very concise terms, contrary to what one might expect regarding agrarian property, they provide little detail about farms. The scribe, while mentioning the name of a village or a garden, very often writes, “There is no need to mention the adjacent properties because everybody knows where this certain property is.”³⁶ Shares of water as well as canals are also part of properties donated by the Shah to the madrasa. As for the properties in the city of Isfahan and its suburb, these consisted almost entirely of commercial buildings such as a big bazaar, a caravanserai, public baths, and a coffee house, which were located next to the madrasa.³⁷

Clearly these diverse properties yielded large revenues, which after deductions for the cost of maintenance and upkeep of the *mawqūfāt*, were divided into ten parts.³⁸ Half of one tenth was given to the manager (*mutaşaddī*)

35 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 156–57, ff.

36 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 151, 152, ff.

37 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 160.

38 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 159.

who was in charge of overseeing the pious endowment.³⁹ After deducting this fee the revenue again was divided into ten parts of which one tenth was the trustee's fee; the rest was used for the expenditures that will be enumerated in tables 2 and 3.⁴⁰

The Administrative Structure of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī

The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī's deeds of endowment describe the qualifications and duties expected of principal staff including the trustee (*mutawallī*), the supervisor (*nāzīr*) and his overseers (*mubāshirīn*), the professor of the madrasa, and the accountant (*mustawfi*). It gives details about their salaries and other material benefits. The trustee was responsible for maintaining and preserving *waqf* goals and for the pious endowment's prosperous utilization.⁴¹

According to the terms of the endowment, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn preserved the trusteeship of the above-mentioned *waqfs* for himself. However, he delegated his fiduciary responsibilities to an official named *wazīr-i sarkār-i ḥalāl* in the deeds of the madrasa. *Wazīr-i sarkār-i ḥalāl* would ensure the buildings, agricultural lands, subterranean canals, and orchards were well maintained. He was urged to follow the instructions outlined in the *waqfiyyas* and to safeguard the properties in order to maintain the madrasa's long-term prospects. He was to give the surplus to the beneficiaries only. Prior to Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, other Safavid shahs also appointed an official to oversee their extensive endowments; for example, Shāh 'Abbās appointed an administrator, named Vizier-i Mawqūfāt-i Chārdah Ma'ṣūm, to oversee the endowed properties, including urban structures and agricultural lands, and to record their revenues.⁴² This person was among the most important administrators of the Safavid state.⁴³ By the late fourteenth century, the Mamluk sultans also appointed an official known as the *ustādār al-amlāk wa al-awqāf wa al-dhakhīra al-sulṭāniyya* to administer their properties and vast endowments.⁴⁴ *Wazīr-i sarkār-i ḥalāl* would

39 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 159–60.

40 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 126–27, 161.

41 For a detail description of the duties of trustees see McChesney, *Waqf in Central Asia*, 3ff.

42 Chardin reports that the revenues of *awqāf* of the richest madrasas of Isfahan are 12000 franc annually. He reports that the revenues of all *waqfs* of Isfahan including madrasas are 100,000 tuman or 4500,000 livers. Munshī, the author of *Ālam-ārā-yi Shah 'Abbās* reports that the value of *awqāf* is more than 100,000 tumans but their revenues are only 7000 after deducting all costs (cited in Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 36). For more on the revenues of the *awqāf* of Isfahan see Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 35–36.

43 For more on the duties of *wazīr-i sarkār-i ḥalāl* see Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 126–27, 159–60, 220–23; Raḥīmīlū, *Alqāb wa mawājib* 48–49, 66.

44 Sabra, *Poverty and charity* 72.

receive 10.5 percent of the endowments' revenues as his fee after the deduction of the cost of the endowment's upkeep.⁴⁵

In order to secure the survival of his *waqf*, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn established a perpetual succession of trustees. He set down the condition that upon his death, the reigning ruler of every age must act as the trustee.⁴⁶ In the deed written in 29/8/1711, we read, "His Majesty, the donor Shah – may God protect him from the dreads of Resurrection Day – reserves the trusteeship of the aforementioned endowment to himself as long as the world is illuminated by his radiant light and after himself to the one who is the reigning king of Iran."⁴⁷ Shāh 'Abbās I also stipulated that the reigning ruler of every age should act as the trustee of his extensive pious endowments which are known as *awqāf Chārdah Ma'ṣūm*. 'Abbās I, who had also donated his horses, emphasizes "if the reigning ruler of any age rides one of these horses it will be as if he rides a pig while holding his two ears in front of the Prophets and the Imams – peace be upon them."⁴⁸

While Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn stipulated that it is prohibited for any individual to abolish his *waqf* or to change any stipulation or to redirect the proceeds to any other destination than that specified, like many founders of the pious foundations he left some loopholes and ambiguities in his own deeds of endowments for the *mutawallis* to make necessary adjustments. Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn permits the *mutawalli* to use his own judgment in the interest of supporting the pious foundation through the most efficient means, so that the resources of the *waqf* would be used towards maximum impact.⁴⁹ In this way, he facilitated the periodic infusion of investment into his *waqf* in order to secure its robustness and longevity. Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, however, asks the future trustees to not encroach upon the endowed property, except in the event that the trustee determines that there is no longer a need for the stipulated program(s), in which case the trustee may interfere with the endowed properties and the set stipulations when he deems it appropriate and necessary. In the *waqf-nāmeḥ* written in 1711, we read,

45 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 126, 160.

46 Dilārām Khānum also stipulated that upon her death the reigning monarch of each age would hold the trusteeship of her endowments (Ahmadi, *Chahār waqf-nāma* 103).

47 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 130. In another deed drafted in 2/7/1711, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn urges the future *mutawallis* to take only their trusteeship fees (Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 174–75).

48 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 70.

49 See for example, Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 130.

[The donor] set down a legally binding condition that as long as he [Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn] is the *mutawallī* – may God most high connect his kingdom to His kingdom, and upon him be prayers and peace – [the Shah] relinquishes his trusteeship fee (a tenth of the revenues) and will use it based on his discretion for any charitable purpose. He expects and entreats from great kings of every era that when they become in their turn the *mutawallī* of this pious endowment, they do not expect anything [extra] from the farmers under any circumstances apart from the legitimate trusteeship fee, and exempt them [from paying taxes] and leave them alone, and do not make any new rule and do their best to build up and run the *waqf* so that they benefit from the rewards as we do in our time. And whenever the legitimate trustee wishes to add conditions over and above the aforementioned conditions, which must be observed in every period and era, to promote order in the madrasa's affairs and to encourage students to study harder, the aforementioned conditions at the time of his trusteeship would be entirely lawful.⁵⁰

Apart from the trustee and the *wazīr-i sarkār-i ḥalāl*, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn also made provision for a management team that worked closely with the *wazīr-i sarkār-i ḥalāl* and was responsible for the all-important functions of financial accounting and auditing. Based on the deeds of the endowment, this team consisted of a *nāzīr* who was in charge of supervising the *mawqūfāt* of the madrasa and a number of other officials including the madrasa professor and accountant (*mustawfī*). The *nāzīr* had to ensure that the charitable endowment was working properly and efficiently. He was to make every effort to increase yields and revenues of the pious endowment.⁵¹ The supervisor's overseers (whose numbers are not given in the documents) would collect cash crops and yields [of the *mawqūfāt*] and spend the funds on the arranged expenditures. They were also to supervise the maintenance of canals, buildings, and agricultural lands.

Furthermore, the overseers had to provide accurate and thorough records of the endowment revenues and were to be aware of all transactions and expenditures, including the maintenance cost of the buildings and canals, and the amounts paid as fees, stipends, and other expenses.⁵² The smooth running of the madrasa depended on the productivity of agricultural lands and the profitability of the commercial properties dedicated to the pious endowments.

50 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 130–31.

51 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 161.

52 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 127, 161.

Therefore, the management needed to be competent in the area of financial management. After all, educational and religious institutions, as established and funded by pious endowments, were also financial institutions. The lack of professional competence in the area of financial management could cause numerous problems for the pious endowment. The success of agricultural activity on lands belonging to pious endowments depended mainly on the competence of the *nāẓir*, his overseers, the accountant, and other financial functionaries. The *nāẓir* would receive five percent of the total revenues as his fee.⁵³ The salaries of his overseers are not mentioned in the documents.

Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī had one accountant (*mustawfi*). According to the endowment deeds, he was responsible for recording and keeping track of the transactions of the pious endowments. In the *waqfiyya* written in 1711, the *wāqif* prescribed, "Every year the sum of twelve *tumans* must be given to the accountant of the aforementioned auspicious madrasa to which the legitimate trustee has appointed him. The aforementioned accountant must be an honest, pious person, who must do his best to record the revenues of the *waqfs* and other affairs pertinent to the *mawqūfāt*. He must not receive any other money from the royal court for the aforementioned service."⁵⁴

No ledger books or financial statements, however, are available to the public from the madrasa. In the deed written in 1711, the *mutawallī* adds an extra eight Tabrīzī *tumans* to the salary of the accountant.⁵⁵ The salaries of the trustee, *wazīr-i sarkār-i ḥalāl*, and supervisor (*nāẓir*) were not in the form of a fixed amount but rather constituted a percentage of the revenues. Although Safavid administrative manuals, including *Tadhkirat al-mulūk* and *Dastūr al-mulūk*, inform us that one of the prime duties of the office of *ṣadr* is to control *waqfs*, madrasas, and mosques, the donor of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī did not stipulate that the managerial team of the madrasa should provide the office of *ṣadr* with copies of records reflecting the endowment's revenues and expenditures.⁵⁶

However, in *Tadhkirat al-mulūk*, there are references to the *daftar-i mawqūfāt* (the endowments bureau) and its director was called *wazīr-i awqāf*. He was

53 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 161.

54 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 167.

55 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 128

56 Roger Savory says that initially the *ṣadr's* main duties involved imposition of doctrinal uniformity, which had been largely achieved by the end of Ismā'īl's reign; thereafter, the energies of the *ṣadr* were devoted mainly to the overall administration of the religious institution and to the supervision of *waqf* property. As a result, the political influence of the *ṣadr* declined. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 30. Said Amir Arjomand challenges Savory's view in Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 301.

authorized by the Safavid shahs with broad powers to supervise the dispatch of the accounts by the *mutawallīs*, the auditing of such accounts, the registration of the properties, and so forth. But as Jābirī Anṣārī reports, the Afghan invaders threw a lot of official documents in the *Zāyanda-rūd*.⁵⁷ Madrasas as large as Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī usually housed several professors and required administrators but apparently in the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī instructions was presented by a single professor, as the deeds of endowment mention the fee of only one professor. Likewise, in a large madrasa built by Shaykh ‘Alī khān-i Zangana in Hamadan, instructions were apparently presented by a single teacher, as those deeds of endowment also mention the fee of only one teacher. According to the deed of the madrasa, Shaykh ‘Alī khān assigned 25 *tumans* of the revenues of his pious endowment as the teaching fee for the teacher who was to teach religious sciences and auxiliary sciences.⁵⁸ The professor of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, in addition to his teaching duties, was entrusted with a number of administrative duties.⁵⁹

TABLE 2 *Positions and fees of the managerial team of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī*

Positions	Fees
Trustee (<i>mutawallī</i>)	10% of entire revenues of the endowments (Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, the first trustee, relinquished his trusteeship fees)
<i>Wazīr-i sarkār-i ḥalāl</i>	10.5%
Supervisor (<i>nāzīr</i>)	5% of entire revenues of the endowments
Accountant (<i>mustawfī</i>)	20 Tabrīzī <i>tumans</i>
Professor	70 Tabrīzī <i>tumans</i>

57 Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan* 35.

58 Sutūdeh, *Sawād-i ṭūmār* 170. Each of the eleven professors of the Jāmi‘-i ‘Abbāsī, who were stipulated to teach five days a week, received different fees. Among the teachers of the mosque-madrasa Mīr Ismā‘īl Khtūnābādī, and Mullā Muhammad Taqī Ṭabasī who were given each 10 Tabrīzī *tumans* in cash and 4 *tumans* in kind. For more on the professors of the mosque and their teaching fees see Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 58–60.

59 For more information on Khtūnābādī’s life and career see al-Amīn, *‘Ayān al-Shī‘a* ix, 253–54; Moazzen, *Institutional metamorphosis* 65–88.

To provide perspective on the worth of the above fees, the below table shows the values of different Safavid currencies and their values in European currencies as well as the fees received by court officials.

4000 <i>tumans</i>	60,000 ecus
200 <i>tumans</i>	9000 francs
1 <i>tuman</i>	15 ecus
1 <i>tuman</i>	45 livres (lira)
1 <i>tuman</i>	30 rupees
1 silver ‘Abbāsī	4/64 milligram
1 ‘Abbāsī	200 dinārs
Half ‘Abbāsī	100 dinārs
50 ‘Abbāsī	1 <i>tuman</i>

Sipintā reports that the weight of one ‘Abbāsī is 4.64 milligrams of silver and one *tuman* is fifty ‘Abbāsīs and there has not been a currency named *tuman*. One *tuman* was equal to 15 ecus or 46 French livres.⁶⁰ Grand vizier would annually receive between 823 *tumans* to 1200 *tumans* or 540,000 French livres while *şadrs* each received one thousands *tumans*; some *şadrs*, like Mīrzā Abu Ṭālib, the *şadr-i khāşşa*, was even paid 1360 *tumans* annually.⁶¹ Religious officials, including the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan, *Mullā Bāshī*, and the qāḍī of Isfahan each received 200 *tumans* annually.⁶²

The Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī’s Personnel

The endowment deed for the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī stipulates the salaries and duties of the madrasa’s personnel, including the head servants (*khādīm-bāshī* or *sarkār-i ‘amala-yi madrasa*), a storehouse-man (*taḥwildār*), eight servants, two lamp-men, three custodians (*farrāsh*), three doormen, two water-carriers, and a gardener. The document spells out how the *khādīm-bāshī* has to be present at the madrasa most of or all day and has to make every effort to keep it clean and well organized. He is instructed to make sure that workers are doing their best, neither cheating nor doing wicked acts. For this service, he is to not receive any

60 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 36.

61 For a detailed discussion on salaries and benefits of Safavid officials see Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Siyāsāt wa iqtisād* 176–84.

62 Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Siyāsāt wa iqtisād* 180.

other money from the royal court.⁶³ The *taḥwīldār* is supposed to keep a record of rugs, copper pots and pans, dishes, and other things submitted to him. He has to be present at the madrasa so that whenever students need rugs or dishes he gives students what they need then takes it back after they use it.⁶⁴ The madrasa's general workers are instructed to undertake general services, such as removing snow from the madrasa's roof, as well as performing their specific described services. If one of them should become sick or otherwise unavailable, the deed spells out how he should tell the teacher and choose a substitute for himself until the obstacle is eliminated.⁶⁵ In addition to the general laborers, the *wāqif* provided the fees for eight servants who should be selected for their honesty and piety. They are asked to make themselves available day and night serving the madrasa's students. The servants must neither miss nor postpone anything, and they should be screened by the teacher who should ensure they are pious, hard-working people. Each night one of the eight servants could stay outside of the madrasa for the night, but the other seven must stay overnight to serve the students.⁶⁶

The two *chirāghchī* (lamp-men) must be present at the madrasa at the beginning and at the end of each night to keep the lamps on. They provided supplies for the lamps as well.⁶⁷ The three custodians should sprinkle water [to settle dust], then clean up the mosque, the open courtyard, the teaching hall, the madrasa, the lower and upper corridors, necessities (latrines), the madrasa's gate, and the kitchen, as well as carry out other jobs that janitors normally do including spreading rugs, collecting them, and the like.⁶⁸ Every day and night two of the three doormen must be present at the madrasa. One must watch the small door and the other must be present at the large door. They should be aware of and informed of what is happening at night (in and around the madrasa.)⁶⁹ The two water-carriers must renew the water of the madrasa's pools and of its restrooms. They could carry the water by either ox or on foot.

63 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 167.

64 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 167.

65 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 167–68.

66 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 167–68.

67 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 168.

68 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 168.

69 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 168. Although, a doorman job was to maintain order and to evict those who might cause a disturbance in the building, Ibn al-Ḥājj sees the doorman stationed at the entrance as a physical barrier intended to prevent any of the general population from entering the madrasas. He says the doorman of a madrasa should act like a doorman of a mosque, who allows anyone who desires entry to enter a mosque. Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal* ii, 91.

They are entrusted to never let the water get dirty so they very often should replace it. They also must take care of and feed the cow used for carrying water to the madrasa.⁷⁰ Then there is the gardener who must keep himself busy with plowing the little gardens of the madrasa, fertilizing them with compost and planting flowers in them. He should also take care of the resident donkey and provide its fodder.⁷¹

In addition to all these personnel whose main duties are to keep the madrasa-mosque complex clean and in good order, the fees of a librarian, four muezzins, and fourteen Quran reciters are provided for in the deed of endowment. The madrasa librarian who is in charge of receiving books, cataloging them, and putting them in their appropriate places, would receive the sum of seven *tumans* annually. By the terms of the *waqfiyya*, the librarian – who is appointed by the trustee to handle the donated books – must spend most of his time at the madrasa so that students may borrow the donated books. He also should keep track of books and take care of them to prevent any loss or damage.⁷² He could lend them to the students only based on the stipulations mentioned at the back of each donated book.⁷³ The following is a sample of the notes written in the back pages of donated books. At the back of Mullā Şadrā's *Sharḥ-i Hidāyat al-ḥikma* – apparently one of the books donated to the library of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, and currently kept at the library of the Gowhar Shād Mosque in Mashhad, no. 1363, we read,

... This least of all servants of God, donates this manuscript to the Shi'a who seek religious sciences, and I assign myself as its *mutawallī* of this book and upon my death I leave it to the care of the *mutawallī* of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. I legally stipulate that whoever needs this volume, should obtain it from the professor of the madrasa and do not keep it longer than six months and return it to the professor of the madrasa [at the end of six months], and whenever he needs to keep it for more than six months, he may keep the book by asking the professor of the madrasa. He must not take the book out of Isfahan. Whoever changes this deed, may Prophet Muhammad foredoom and damn him!⁷⁴

70 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 169. The Shah Mosque or Jāmi'-i 'Abbāsī Mosque had four water-carriers who received 8 *tumans* as their fees. Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 57.

71 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 169.

72 In the text of the deed, the scribe writes *diyā'* which means real estate, properties. Obviously here that is out of context – it must be *ḍay'ā'*, which means loss.

73 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 167.

74 Ja'fariyān, *Şafaviyya dar 'arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 745.

In a separate deed of endowment about the library of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī, currently kept in the Ayatullāh Mar'ashī Library, no. 9607, we read,

... All the books endowed to the madrasa's library must be recorded and submitted to the librarian of the madrasa and when any of the students needs a book, after obtaining a permission of the madrasa's professor, he can keep the book as long as he needs to benefit from it. He should not keep it longer than needed. If any of the non-resident Shi'is needs any books, they also [can borrow books] after obtaining the permission of the madrasa's professor as well as a receipt containing the seal of the professor [of the madrasa] and then may go to the librarian and leave the receipt with the librarian and then borrow the book and keep it as long as he needs it. He must not take the book outside of Isfahan. If the professor does not trust him, he may ask for a deposit and then give him the book. If anybody wants to take along any books during his visitation of the shrines of the Imams, he may take the book outside of Isfahan after obtaining a receipt containing the seal of the professor of the madrasa and upon his return from his *ziyārat* he must return the book to the librarian of the madrasa. He must do his best to keep the book safe from getting ruined or damaged. As long as he is in Isfahan, he must return the book(s) to the professor of the madrasa so that he is certain that the book is in good shape and then if he needs it again, he may ask the professor to lend the book to him again.

The professor of the madrasa must do his best to safeguard all the books as well as to provide the needs of students and whoever from the Shi'a need any books kept in the library of the madrasa. His Excellency, the donor, legally stipulates that books donated to the madrasa must not be bought, sold, and given as gifts or pawned and also must not be exposed to perishing and relocation! Borrowers must also not keep the books longer than needed and do not leave them idle. When the people of knowledge study them, they should remember the shah, the donor, and pray for him during their prayers remember the shah, the donor, and pray for him.⁷⁵

Husayn b. Muḥammad Taḥwīldār reports that, during the Afghan occupation, the *mutawallī* of the madrasa hid the books in a grotto. After a while, many books were ruined. Taḥwīldār reports some books were subsequently sent to the library of the holy Shrine of Imam Riḍā and some were sent to the library

75 Rasūl Ja'fariyān published a copy of the *waqf-nama*, see his *Ṣafaviya dar 'arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 746–49.

of Shah Šafī, while others were kept in the library of the Royal Madrasa.⁷⁶ Apparently Safavid librarians were unaware of the art of book conservation. Father Raphaël Du Mans (d. 1696), who stayed in Persia about five decades and was the principal interpreter at the Safavid court translating letters brought by ambassadors and envoys from European states to the Safavid court, reports “at the royal court, unlike our country, there is no system for shelving books. Books are kept in boxes, chests; thus, interested people cannot find the books that they need readily.”⁷⁷

In addition to the madrasas’ libraries, leading scholars of the time such as Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī owned large collections of books. Ḥazīn Lāhijī also reports that, during the Afghan occupation, he had lost many of his two thousands books.⁷⁸ Fāḍil Hindī, one of the eminent scholars of the late Safavid period, also had a large library.⁷⁹ Traditionally, libraries were founded to promote Shi‘ism, but overtime they became rich treasures of books. It is interesting to note that the richest Shi‘i libraries are attached to the holiest Shi‘i shrines. Outstanding among them are those in the shrines at Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, and Mashhad.

TABLE 3 *The positions and wages of the personnel of the Madrasa*

Positions	Wages
Fourteen Quran reciters	200 <i>dīnār-i Tabrīzī</i> daily
Four muezzins	12 <i>tumans</i> annually
A librarian	7 <i>tumans</i> annually
The chief servant	12 <i>tumans</i> annually
Storehouse-man	7 <i>tumans</i> annually
Two lamp-men	Each 25 <i>riyāls</i> daily
Three custodians	Each 25 <i>riyāls</i> daily
Three doormen	Each 25 <i>riyāls</i> daily
Two water-carriers	Each 25 <i>riyāls</i> daily
A gardener	Each 25 <i>riyāls</i> daily
Eight caregivers (<i>khadama</i>)	20 <i>tumans</i> (each 25 <i>riyāls</i>) annually
Madrasa’s general labor	595 <i>riyāls</i> daily
A shoe-holder	2 <i>tumans</i> & 5000 <i>dīnār-i Tabrīzī</i> annually

76 Taḥwīldār-i Iṣfahānī, *Jughrāfiyā-yi Iṣfahan* 47; Ja‘fariyān, *Šafavīya dar ‘arša-yi dīn* ii, 745.

77 Ja‘fariyān, *Šafavīya dar ‘arša-yi dīn* ii, 748–52.

78 Ja‘fariyān, *Šafavīya dar ‘arša-yi dīn* ii, 752.

79 For more on these personal libraries see, Ja‘fariyān, *Šafavīya dar ‘arša-yi dīn* ii, 748–52.

General Expenses of the Madrasa

According to the *waqfiyya* written in 1122/1711, the sum of twenty-nine *tumans* must be spent on illuminating the mosque, prayer courtyard, teaching hall, corridors of the upper-story rooms, the madrasa's entrance, and other places where students would come and go and need to be lit. The lamps of the madrasa and mosque must be lit by sheep fat and other materials considered suitable.⁸⁰ The sum of approximately six *tumans* must be spent on fodder for the donkey – if something happened to the donkey, its caregivers were instructed to buy what the animal needed and submit it to the employers from the revenues of the *waqfs*, separate from the deed's sum of money.⁸¹ Approximately eight *tumans* must be spent on replacing and repairing rugs and mats of the mosque, courtyard, teaching hall, and so forth, as well as on replacing and repairing buckets, skins, and lanterns. This fund should also be used towards the cost of heavy snow removal and other usual expenses.⁸²

Stipends and Living Expenses of Students

The deeds of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī generously supported students.⁸³ Students enjoyed not only free education but also were given substantial monthly stipends. The professor of the Royal Madrasa is to choose ideal students who possess fine natural dispositions, intelligence, and discernment, and who could occupy themselves with benefitting from the madrasa's opportunities and by being beneficial to others after the termination of their stay at the madrasa. The professor, who is in charge of distributing students' stipends, must divide the sum of 528 *Tabrizī tumans* from the remaining 8.5 percent of the revenues among the madrasa's chambers. In the deed we read,

His Excellency, the successful donor, the absolute ruler on the face of the earth, in the deed of the endowment lawfully made the condition that the residents of the auspicious madrasa who receive stipends must be pious Twelver Shi'a -may God increase their numbers. They must possess the right faith, and observe religious rituals and live in the madrasa in accordance with the norms and customs of the day. The madrasa's professor must assign them to the madrasa's chambers, and if any student

80 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 166.

81 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 166.

82 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 166.

83 Receiving stipends, daily food rations and living accommodations was a general practice in the Muslim world. For example, Berkey discusses the amount of the stipends paid to students and other amenities provided for them at several madrasas in Cairo. Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 91–94, 194.

does not possess the desirable features and other conditions stipulated by the trustee of every age, and if the professor does not deem his being in the madrasa advisable, the professor must expel him and house someone who possesses the itemized characteristics in his place and give him the stipend. The students must not be corrupt or wicked. If the professor feels there is a need to have a student act as the head-student, he can choose one of the students and give him an extra 100 *dīnārs* daily to do whatever is required from a head-student.⁸⁴

Each room would receive one hundred *dīnārs* daily, in addition to the stipend from other pious endowments. The same amount should be disbursed regardless of whether one student lives in the room or two, provided that they are Imamī and well-mannered people, who have not been described as wicked, sinners, or people of bad faith. It seems it had been the duty of teachers to choose students and to distribute stipends among them in all other Safavid madrasas. Chardin in this regard writes, “Students greatly respected their principals (teachers) to whom they owed not only their instruction, but also their entry to college.”⁸⁵ Students were expected to not leave their rooms idle and must always be present at the madrasa and keep themselves busy with acquiring religious sciences.⁸⁶ This residential model not only provided opportunities for intellectual dialogue and social engagement beyond the teaching hull, but also created an atmosphere for a deeper immersion in religious values and ideals designed by the founders of the madrasas.

Students and personnel of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī receive medical attention. In a deed written in 1711, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn donates the revenues of a village to students of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī and whoever needs medical attention. In the deed we are told that whenever one of the students, Quran reciters, madrasa’s servants or staff, or anyone else goes to the madrasa from the Twelver Shi‘a seeking medicine and medical attention, they should be treated and fed. They must be given whatever they need by way of medicine, food, fruit, or

84 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 169–70. The 37 students residing at the Jāmi‘i ‘Abbāsī each received two *tumans*. For more information see Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 61.

85 Ferrier, *A journey to Persia* 131.

86 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 127. Ulrich Haarmann reports that in the *Khānqāhmadrasa* Barqūqiyya in Cairo, “Young students were carefully watched, not only with regard to their academic duties – attendance at meetings was checked by supervisors from their own ranks (*kātib ghaybat al-Ṣūfiyya*) – but also with respect to their private lives; only five nights a month were they allowed to leave the madrasa; Beardless young men were strictly kept off the premises unless they were close relatives of the inmates; getting married meant eviction from the madrasa” (Mamluk endowment 37).

medical attention.⁸⁷ If they need a nurse, they should be provided with a male or female nurse.⁸⁸ The teacher is instructed to sign and stamp all the receipts. If some funds remain, they must be given to a hospital next to the Qayṣariyya and the ‘Abbāsābād hospitals.⁸⁹

In a *waqfiyya* written in 1712, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn donates the revenues of a whole village and the shares of five other villages to be spent on purchasing charcoal to be divided among the chambers of the madrasa for use in winter and other times that the teacher deemed appropriate. If crops and revenues of the properties leave a surplus after the price of charcoal, the extra money should be spent on purchasing animal oil or firewood, whichever seems more useful for the residents. The animal fat must be divided among the chambers of the madrasa for lighting the rooms in the same way that the charcoal is distributed. [If the teacher decides to buy firewood], it should be given to the *taḥwildār* of the madrasa for distribution to the residents who need it for cooking.⁹⁰ According to the deed, the teacher’s signature is necessary for these expenditures.⁹¹

It is fair to say that in the variety of facilities it offered students, the Royal Madrasa stood very high among the madrasas of its age. Although a total comparison is not possible, it is helpful to compare the stipends of the teacher, students, and officials of the Masjid-i Shāh with the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. Such a comparison shows a relative increase over the one-hundred year period: in 1614 the eleven teachers of the Madrasa-yi Masjid-i Shāh complex received different sums of cash and various amounts of grain. For example, Mullā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Gīlānī received seven *tumans* plus five hundred *mann* of wheat⁹² and five hundred *mann* of barley as his teaching fee annually. Mullā Muḥammad ‘Alī Simnānī, another teacher at the Shah Mosque-madrasa complex, was paid only one *tuman* plus six *kharwār* (ass load) of grain as his teaching fee.⁹³ In 1710, on the other hand, the professor (*mudarris*) of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī was paid 70 *tumans* a year in addition to the 200 *tumans* received for the office of

87 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 222.

88 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 222.

89 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 222.

90 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 190.

91 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 188–90.

92 According to Matthee, the weight standard used by the Iranians was the *mann-i* Tabriz, which equaled almost 3 kg. There were other kinds of *mann* including *Mann-i shah*, which was about 5.8 kg. The *waqfiyya* of the Madrasa-yi Masjid-i Shāh does not clarify if the *mann* mentioned in the document is the *mann-i shah* or any other types of *mann*. For more information on various kinds of *mann*, see Matthee, *The politics of trade* 48, 246–49.

93 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 59–60.

mullā-bāshī. In 1614 each student was given the sum of two or three *tumans* a year as his stipend, whereas in 1710, the students of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī were given 100 *dinārs* per day plus charcoal, medicine, and food.⁹⁴ Each chamber of the Madrasa-yi Ḥakīmiyya or Kāsa-Garān, which was built a few years earlier than the Madrasa-yi Sultānī, received only 50 *dinārs*; its teacher, who acted as the supervisor (*nāzīr*) of the endowment in addition to his teaching, would receive only 15 *tumans* annually.⁹⁵

The students residing in the madrasa must use the rooms for study only. The length of time that students are permitted to stay in the madrasa is not specified in the deeds of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī. In his *al-Durūs al-sharʿiyya* on the duration that students can stay in a madrasa, al-Shahīd al-Awwal writes, “Whenever a student fulfills his learning goal, he can be asked to leave the madrasa he is living in and there is no legal problem with [asking him to leave the madrasa].” He also holds that, “If a student is not studying while residing in a madrasa, he can be expelled from it even if the donor had not set down a condition about this situation in his deed. It is, however, unlikely that the *wāqif* did not include a condition in this regard.”⁹⁶ However, in the deeds of the madrasa it has been emphasized that, if a student shows no sign of scholarly accomplishment or if he commits immoral acts, he should be expelled, since his stay needlessly drains resources from the madrasa’s endowment. Because the money assigned to students is for their education and attending classes, students are encouraged to give their attention to their learning and are not allowed to take up professions or crafts to earn an income. Students are also expected to lead an austere lifestyle, to worship regularly, and to possess an extraordinary sense of purity.⁹⁷

In his *Farāʿid al-fawāʿid dar aḥwāl-i madāris wa masājīd*, written around 1716, Muḥammad Zamān b. Kalb ʿAlī Tabrīzī, a student of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, Āqā Jamāl Khvānsārī, and Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Khātūnābādī, who resided in the Madrasa-yi Shaykh Luṭfullāh Maysī, supplies invaluable information about the rules for living in madrasas. He writes, “Whoever occupies a chamber in a madrasa must keep learning what is taught there, and as long as he is learning he can reside in the madrasa unless the donor set a time limit in his madrasa’s deed of endowment; if the student meets the deadline he must leave

94 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 61.

95 Rafīʿī-i Mihrābādī, *Āthār-i millī* 490.

96 al-ʿĀmilī (al-Shahīd al-awwal), *Durūs al-sharʿiyya* iii, 69–70.

97 In his didactic manual Ibn Jamāʿa discusses the decorum of residing in madrasas including the choice of the right madrasa as well as its teachers and its life amenities and accommodations. For more information see, Ibn Jamāʿa, *Tadhkirat al-sāmiʿ* 253–302.

the madrasa.”⁹⁸ Tabrīzī maintains that many students do not observe this rule, which can lead to student failure. “They stay for a long period in madrasas suffering and in the meantime they are not learning that much.”⁹⁹ Jean Chardin also reports that “there are some students living in madrasas who pay little attention to learning; they are only there for the sake of this small benefit [of living in a madrasa and receiving some stipend]. Students of sixty years old can be seen as I have said, who have wives and children. As a result there are colleges which are places of desperate ignorance where one secures what one can not so much for the love of knowledge, but to live more easily without working.”¹⁰⁰

According to Tabrīzī, a student is allowed to live in a room alone as long as the donor did not mention in the deed of the endowment that rooms must be shared.¹⁰¹ He also states that if a student leaves the chamber for no acceptable reason, he completely loses his right over the room, whether he had left his belongings behind or not and whether his absence was long or short. If he leaves due to a problem, there are a number of opinions. The majority of scholars maintain that the student loses his right over the room if his absence results in the room’s vacancy or if he has taken his belongings with him.¹⁰²

For example, Maryam Begum (d. 1720) is one of the donors who stipulates that, if a student cannot make sufficient progress after a year, he must be expelled from the madrasa. Students of her madrasa must finish their schooling within five years, but extensions of up to two years were sometimes granted. No student was allowed to remain longer than seven years. If a student’s wife, father, or mother lived within the city limits or within four *farsangs* (twelve miles) of the city, he could not stay in the madrasa for more than two nights at a time.¹⁰³ The number of possible free days per annum for the teacher and students are not mentioned in the deeds of the Madrasa-yi Sultānī. We know the teachers of the Madrasa-yi Masjid-i Shāh were to teach five days a week.¹⁰⁴ Students of the Madrasa-yi Masjid-i Shāh, however, could not leave their

98 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 228.

99 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 229.

100 Ferrier, *A journey to Persia* 131.

101 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 229.

102 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 229–30. He quotes Shahīd al-Thānī who stated that the *mutawalli* should decide whatever he thinks is the right action to take in this regard.

103 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 302–16.

104 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 58.

chambers vacant and always had to be present at the madrasa and receive their daily stipends.¹⁰⁵

The Madrasa's Budget in the Case of a Deficit

According to Madrasa-yi Sultānī's *waqf-nāmas*, if revenues of the *mawqūfāt* did not suffice for all the expenditures it describes, the *mutawallī* had to make sure that the mosque, madrasa, and all endowed properties, including buildings, agricultural lands, and canals, were in good shape and that the general expenses of the madrasa and mosque were met and salaries of the personnel were paid fully. The remaining funds were to be divided equally among the students residing in the madrasa's rooms. Each room's resident would receive fifty *dīnārs* and the teaching fee was reduced by half.¹⁰⁶

During the month of Ramadan, only ten people were to be fed and the fund assigned to every person who breaks his fast in the madrasa was not to be reduced. Instead, the number of people coming to break their fast in the madrasa each evening would have to be reduced.¹⁰⁷ In the case of a deficit, each Quran reciter would receive only fifty *dīnārs* or less daily, unless the fund was so reduced that nobody was willing to recite the Quran in the required manner. In this case, they would recite the Quran once a day and, if the fund was insufficient, every two days or more.¹⁰⁸

If something happens that some expenses could not be met, repair cost and other necessities of the mosque and the madrasa should be undertaken and paid for to the extent necessary. Muezzins, personnel, custodians, and other people working there should be paid in accordance with what is normal. Whatever remains must be divided between the teacher who would receive half his teaching fee (twenty-five *tumans*) and the rooms residents. Each room must receive the sum of fifty *dīnārs* daily and the accountant, head servant, librarian, *taḥwildār*, and gardener, must receive equal fees. Whenever they could not each receive half their salary, the sum of twenty-five *dīnārs* would be given to student residents, and the librarian should receive three *tumans* and five hundred *dīnārs*.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly enough, surplus remaining from the revenues was usually used to acquire new properties, but in this case the shah stipulated

105 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 61.

106 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 171.

107 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 171.

108 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 171–72.

109 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 171–72, 130.

that it would instead be spent on religious observances. This topic will be explored in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Historically, the distribution of material resources in the form of pious endowments had been a common way of establishing connections between ruling elite and masses. Mosques and madrasas supported by the elite created employment opportunities for a variety of people, from teachers, Friday and daily prayer leaders, muezzins, preachers, and Quran reciters, to people who did the administrative jobs and menial laborers. The group who benefitted the most from the *waqf* was obviously the religious class. The ‘ulamā’ were linked to the *waqf* both as beneficiaries and as administrators. Increasingly, members of the religious class were appointed mainly as *mutawallīs* and professors enjoyed the assured income that pious endowments provided not only for themselves, but also for their descendants. Ann Lambton argues that the entry of members of the religious class into the ranks of great landlords was the most notable change in the composition of the land-owning class in Safavid times.¹¹⁰ There were, however, religious elites who ostentatiously rejected governmental employment or refused outright to accept any official positions. The poor also benefitted from distributions of food and money. All these people, in addition to people who studied and lived in those establishments, were asked to pray for the longevity of the patrons’ lives and their salvation in the hereafter.

Although genuine piety may have motivated Safavid elite to endow, the wish to insure the loyalty and respect of the leading members of the religious class, as well as to hold sway over Islam’s most important religio-cultural and educational loci, ought to be considered part of the dynamic process of establishing their authority as well as demonstrating their wealth and might. Creating pious endowments gave Safavid ruling elite access to the scholarly talent of those who attended those madrasas. Pious endowments also led to substantial urbanization and economic development. A number of studies have examined the roles that *awqāf* played in fostering economic development in early modern Iran. Amin Banani argues that establishing ostentatious public buildings, in the context of certain struggles for power and privilege, and tensions endemic to the history of Persia are proofs of the effective internal controls and external

110 Lambton, *Landlord and peasant in Persia* 126–7.

manifestations of the wealth and supremacy of the Safavid rulers vis-à-vis the Ottomans and the Uzbek.¹¹¹ Wealthy people followed suit, perhaps mainly to avoid paying taxes as well as to maintain a measure of immunity from confiscation. By preserving the right of the *tawliya* for themselves and their families, they continued to enjoy a rather major part of the revenues from their endowed properties while making some contributions to charities, hoping to secure a lofty place in the hereafter as well.¹¹²

111 Banani, Reflections on the social 89–90, 95.

112 Recently the Office of Pious Endowment of Isfahan has published a large number of deeds of such endowments. For more information see Ishkavarī, *Asnād-i mawqūfāt-i ssfahan*.

Reshaping Shi'a Cultural Memory

Commemorative Rituals and Constructing Identity

Contextualizing Cultural Memory

Throughout the history of Shi'ism, commemorative rituals have provided a comprehensive framework for interpreting a wide array of historical encounters between the Shi'a and the dominant Sunni culture, thereby allowing Shi'ism to construct itself as a community of learning and remembering.¹ This self-construction required both a high degree of institutionalization as well as specialists to preserve the religious identity of the Shi'a and to transmit religious knowledge to the next generation. Madrasa-mosque complexes as well as the shrines of the Shi'i Imams and their progeny have served as the best institutions to achieve these goals.

This chapter examines the role of the Safavid madrasas, especially, the Madrasa-yi Sultānī, in promoting a deep-rooted Shi'i identity, and also in establishing a degree of religious homogeneity – or at least a semblance of common religious perspective – among Safavid subjects by assimilating diverse peoples into one religious community. I argue that during the rule of the Safavids, an era of intense religious consciousness, both political elites and religious authorities made use of a variety of material means and existing rhetorical tools to shape the cultural and religious identity of Safavid society as well as future generations. In addition to making use of military and socio-political institutions, Safavid elite invested in visual and performative culture in the forms of architecture, paintings, calligraphy and specifically commemorative rituals. The Safavids thus created an impressive “Geography of Memory” that outlasted the era and still constitutes an impressive heritage for prosperity. As I discuss in the proceeding pages, Safavid madrasas were not only centers for disseminating religious knowledge and preserving Shi'i intellectual heritage. They became significant loci where the community's past was rearticulated through the active memorializing of pivotal events in the religious calendar of

1 This chapter is a revised and extended version of my article, “Rituals of Commemoration, Rituals of Self-Invention: Safavid Religious Colleges and the Collective Memory of the Shi'a,” that appeared in *Iranian Studies* 49 no. 4 (2016), 555–75.

the Shi'a, the process by which the Shi'i past was contemporized as salient to suit the needs of Safavid power and society.

In Shi'ism, commemorative rituals have been the sine qua non for religious and cultural identity as well as political success. This is why monuments to the Shi'i Imams and their progeny abound wherever the Shi'a are, and history and its mythic aftermath are ubiquitous and integral aspects of Shi'i societies. To ensure that the Shi'i past does not die over time, history was transmuted into tradition and commemorative rituals. These cultural memories came to be the foundation upon which the Shi'i community established its unity and specificity. Over the centuries, key figures of Shi'i history such as the first and the third Imams, i.e. 'Ali and Ḥusayn, as well as other Imams, evolved from human beings of flesh and blood into sacred and infallible persons. These deified figures have been used to personify such concepts as heroic martyrdom and revolutionary ideals; their enemies are portrayed as evil, cowardly, and repressive.

Substantial research has been published on Shi'i commemorative rituals, most of it by historians of cultural anthropology and sociologists who are mainly interested in *ta'ziya* (the rituals commemorating the tragic death of Ḥusayn and his family in Karbala on Muḥarram 10, 61/ Oct. 10, 680), which became pivotal to Shi'i communal identity and still finds tremendous resonance with Shi'a all over the world.² While some scholars compare the rituals commemorating the death of Ḥusayn and his family with the Christian practice of Passion plays, others examine the socio-political and religious dimensions of commemorative rituals in Shi'ism. For instance, Jean Calmard argues that commemorative rituals have been the most important means of bolstering the legitimacy of states.³ Mahmoud Ayoub argues that the recollection of tragic events in the history of Shi'ism has been a source of salvation for those who participated in the rituals.⁴ On the other hand, Kamran S. Aghaie asserts that commemorative rites are the means of expressing social and political ideals in Iranian society, and also the means of showing direct opposition to the state, a notion that is discussed by Hamid Dabbashi as well.⁵

2 On the battle of Karbala and its importance in shaping the Shi'i communal identity see Ayoub, *Redemptive suffering* 25–7, ff.; Nakash, *An attempt to trace* 161–81. According to Yarshater, pre-Islamic Persia provided *ta'ziya* rituals with a ready mould, and the *Ayadgar-i Zareran* offers parallels to many aspects of Ḥusayn's memorial ceremonies. Yarshater, *Ta'ziyeh and pre-Islamic mourning* 88–94.

3 Calmard, *Le patronage des Ta'ziyeh* 121–30; Calmard, *Les rituels Shiites* 109–50; Calmard, *Shi'ite rituals and power II* 139–190.

4 For more information on this interpretation of Shi'i commemorative rituals, see Ayoub, *Redemptive suffering*, 147.

5 Aghaie, *The martyrs of Karbala* xii, 12. Dabbashi sees *ta'ziya* as the performance of social dissent. Dabbashi, *Ta'ziyeh as theatre of protest* 91–99. Nakash notes that Iraq's rulers were

Although these arguments point to both psychological/religious and political meaning in the rituals, I am interested in how commemorating constitutive events in the history of Shi'ism is also an important means of storing and transmitting religious knowledge and culture. Through commemoration, members of the community become either participants or spectators and witnesses. Thus, they play a role in the act of transmission. Theorizing these practices as the transmission of embodied cultural memories offers a new means of critical thinking with regard to the madrasa institution.

As mentioned earlier, the Shi'i community developed a complex interplay of memories that were constitutive of its very existence.⁶ Generally historical religious memories survive through an array of mnemonic sites and practices. Mosque-madrasas and shrines became where commemorations were mainly carried out and collective memory was shaped and reinforced. Shared values and putative hopes for the future – directed towards nurturing an emotional bond with particular religious figures and narratives – led to the process of both establishing a monolithic identity as well as procuring peripheral loyalties. Within these splendid establishments, history became tangible and visible for Safavid subjects' contemplation, especially during extravagant celebrations of the Shi'i calendar's holy dates and lively commemorative rituals that advanced a rather scripted religious narrative.

As argued by Paul Connerton, while the constitutive relationship between memory and place is most obvious in the realm of material culture, it is also – and no less – performative. He states that through repetition and the intensification of everyday acts that otherwise remain submerged in the mundane order of things, performances like rituals, festivals, and public dramas serve as a chief way in which societies remember.⁷ The combination of the awe-inspiring structures with the commemorative and ritualized performance and celebrations became a powerful mnemonic mechanism, which, as Patrick Hutton puts it, would produce a “mental geography in which the past is mapped in our minds according to its most unforgettable places.”⁸

Taken together, therefore, splendid structures imbued with sacredness, plus the commemorative events and public participation in them, constitute “the practice of representation that enacts and gives social substance to the

concerned with the effectiveness of the Muḥarram rites as a political instrument and how they tried to reduce it. Nakash, *The Shi'is* 157–62.

6 In his *al-Naqd*, Qazwīnī frequently refers to these commemorative rituals. Qazwīnī, *al-Naqd* 41, 43ff. See also Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and leadership* 160–62.

7 Connerton, *How societies remember* 5ff.

8 Hutton, *History as an art* 80.

discourse of collective memory” in the words of Daniel J. Sherman.⁹ Emile Durkheim had already argued that a community is able to maintain its unity and personality by upholding and reaffirming its members’ collective sentiments and ideas at regular intervals; an individual remembers his role as a member of a larger group when he or she attends religious festivities and rituals.¹⁰ These ritual experiences also help people mediate between events of the past and the present and to negotiate meanings for the future, as Mieke Bal argues.¹¹ Historical sources report that, from the beginning of their rule, Safavid rulers were actively involved in either construction or restoration of madrasas, mosques and shrines – the public institutions that represent a shared past. For example, in addition to renovating several *imāmzādas* and constructing the Madrasa-ye Sulṭānī, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn paid special attention to the shrines of the Imams located in the *‘Atabāt* (the holy cities in Iraq). In a deed of endowment issued in 1711, he proscribed the following:

The trustee should arrange for twelve thousand Tabrīzī *dīnārs* to be sent to each of the holy shrines in Najaf and Karbala to purchase incense for the shrines of ‘Alī and Ḥusayn – if the extra funds were to exceed the incense cost, the trustee was instructed to inquire if any of these shrines were in need of repair, either in their roof or in their land (i.e., the whole building); he was also contracted to donate chests, carpets, bookshelves, Quran covers, lamps, and candle holders to these shrines. The extra funds were to be spent on repairs first, but if the holy shrines needed no repair, or if it was not possible [to repair them], the surplus funds were to be submitted to a group of pilgrims who wanted to return home after visiting the holy shrines but who could not make it due to debt. With that fund, their debts were to be paid off and their journeys and return expenses home were also to be funded. If there were few such stranded pilgrims and if there were funds remaining, the sum of fifty thousand Tabrīzī *dīnārs* was to be submitted to each person to cover the expenses of his trip to the holy shrines in Iraq.¹²

9 Sherman, *Art, commerce* 186.

10 Durkheim, *The elementary forms* 427. See also Assmann, *Religion and cultural memory* 7–9.

11 For an elaboration on this approach to memory, see Mieke Bal et al., *Acts of memory* vii–xvii.

12 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 172–74.

Founders of Safavid madrasas usually assigned a sizeable amount of revenue from their endowments to collectively-celebrated, commemorative constitutive events in Shi'ī history, which were considered as important as transmitting religious knowledge and celebrating holy dates in the Islamic calendar. For instance, in the *waqfiyya* of the Madrasa-masjid-i Shāh complex, Shāh 'Abbās I provided for the cost of soup [*halīm*] that was to be distributed among the public on the day of 'Āshūrā. He also made provision for the fee of the Imams' dirge reciter and the cost of other religious observances.¹³ Madrasa patrons in Sunni societies typically maintained a similar practice, assigning a part of their endowment revenues to the commemoration of the most important festivals on the Islamic calendar.¹⁴ Of course, there were also donors who did not sponsor the commemorative rituals at all. For example, various donors of the 'Alid Shrine provided for the fees of muezzins, Quran reciters, and the imam to lead prayers but not for any Islamic festivals.¹⁵

The Safavid shahs also encouraged and sponsored visits to the shrines of the Imams (*ziyārat*). The scholars of their era put great emphasis on the salvational value of commemorative rituals and *ziyārat*.¹⁶ Shrines and *imāmzādas*, loaded with historical and religious import, came to function as spiritual and communal focal points. From the outset, visiting the shrines of the Imams was a major feature of Shi'ism and carried the utmost importance in Shi'ī Islam: by visiting the Imams' shrines one acknowledges their authority as the rightful leaders of the Muslim community. Commemorative rites and *ziyārat* tradition were particularly effective in persuading the Safavid subjects to convert to Shi'ism thanks to their broad social reach and immediate impact on the audience.

Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, in the tradition of his forefathers, not only patronized rituals commemorating the suffering of the Imams, but also tried to keep their memory alive through his own frequent pilgrimages to their tomb-shrines. By promoting the *ziyārat* tradition, he sought to promote a key tradition in preserving Shi'ī collective memory and group identity as distinct from that of the Sunnis, and to create a climate in which *ziyārat* and commemoration of events in the Shi'ī religious calendar would occupy a central place in Safavid

13 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 58, 60, 67, 68.

14 See for example, Subtelny, *A Timurid educational* 47–48.

15 See McChesney, *Waqf in central Asia* 133–34.

16 See for example, Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* xlv, 180–82, 184, 198, 270. For a detailed study of the *ziyārat* tradition and its socio-cultural and economic implications see Nakash, *The Shi'is* 163–83.

socio-religious life.¹⁷ Shrines and *imāmzādas* came to function as spiritual and communal focal points – as places of memory that stand between the real and the imagined. For the Shi‘a these usually arduous trips were valuable because the shrines were believed to have divine or other-worldly powers such as curing diseases and disabilities. The shrines also functioned as the locus where the Imams could intercede with God on behalf of the visitors.

In the *waqfiyyas* issued in 1122/1711, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn set down that every year the sum of forty Tabrīzī *tumans* had to be submitted to three pious Shi‘is to perform *hajj* and visit the holy shrines of the Imams on behalf of Shāh Sulaymān (because he did not go to *hajj* and did not visit the shrines of the Imams himself). The sum of twenty *tumans* were to be given to a person selected by the *mutawallī* or his agent to go to Mecca and Medina, and the other twenty *tumans* had to be divided between the other two individuals, one of them to visit the shrine of Imām Riḍā and the third person to go to the holy cities of Iraq. These three people had to go to Qum to visit the tomb of Shāh Sulaymān; from there the person who received twenty *tumans* would have to leave for Mecca and Medina and perform *hajj* on behalf of Shāh Sulaymān while one of the two other individuals was to visit the shrine of Imam Riḍā on behalf of Shāh Sulaymān; the third man was to go to the holy cities of Iraq and visit the holy shrines of the Imams on behalf of Shāh Sulaymān.¹⁸ In the same document, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn also stipulates that the sum of twelve Tabrīzī *tumans* was to be given either to four Twelver Shi‘is wanting to visit the holy shrines of the Imams in Iraq but without the financial means to do so, or to the people who already visited the shrines, but who were in debt due to this journey and who did not have the money to return home.¹⁹ In another *waqfiyya* issued in 1122/1711, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn donated the revenues from a few parcels

17 The act of pilgrimage, in the words of Yitzhak Nakash, “meant a movement from a mundane center to a sacred periphery which suddenly became central to the individual” (*The Shi‘is of Iraq* 165).

18 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 129–30.

19 In two other *waqfiyyas* issued in 1711, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn set down that every year the sum of forty Tabrīzī *tumans* from the revenues of 1197 shares of the Jushārān garden were to be given to three pious individuals as described above to perform *hajj* and visit the holy cities of Iraq and the shrine of Imam Riḍā at Mashhad on behalf of Shāh Ṣafī. Also in another *waqfiyya* of the same date, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn orders that the same amount of money from the revenues of eleven of the twelve shares of the Garden of Sa‘ādat-ābād and other parcels of land had to be given to three pious individuals to perform *hajj* and visit the holy cities of Iraq and the shrine of Imām Riḍā at Mashhad on behalf of Shāh ‘Abbās II. Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 229–35; 243–50.

TABLE 4 *Pilgrimage to Mecca & Medina and visitation to the Shrines of the Imams*

Pilgrimage and visitations	Cost
Pilgrimage and visitation on behalf of Shāh Sulaymān	40 <i>tumans</i>
Pilgrimage and visitation on behalf of Shāh Ṣafī	40 <i>tumans</i>
Pilgrimage and visitation on behalf of Shāh 'Abbas II	40 <i>tumans</i>
Sponsoring the cost of visitation of 4 Twelver Shi'is	12 <i>tumans</i>
Gift of cash to a group of Twelver Shi'is residing in Najaf	Each should receive a minimum of 3 Tabrīzī <i>tumans</i>

of land to a group of Twelver Shi'is residing in Najaf so that each would receive a minimum of three Tabrīzī *tumans* to a maximum of five.²⁰

Safavid Madrasas and Commemorating Cultural Memory

Madrasa-mosque complexes served simultaneously as focal points for dialogue between plebeians and the academic, religious, and political classes, as well as focal points for a complex dialogue between past and present. As Safavid deeds of endowment reveal, the founders of the madrasa-mosque complexes generally sponsored pedagogical activities in addition to covering the cost of a wide range of elaborate rituals and religious observations. In most cases, however, the deeds of the mosque-madrasas furnish much more information on how the Shi'i holy days and especially the Muḥarram commemoration should be observed, as opposed to what topics and how they should be taught. This seems to indicate that the main concerns of the founders were to secure the continuous observation of the commutative rituals.

The deaths of the Imams and particularly the Ḥusayn family massacre at Karbala, which had gained the status of an archetypal atrocity from the early history of Shi'ism, became testaments to the sufferings of the Shi'a and examples of their victimization. Shi'i *maqātil* literature contains copious information about the violent death of the Shi'i Imams. They also describe the attitudes of persons, groups or sects that took part in socio-political and religious

²⁰ Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 206–13.

clashes.²¹ Ḥusayn's martyrdom in particular led to commemorative activities crucial for subsequent Shi'ī identity formation. Because of its archetypal significance within the collective memory, commemoration of Ḥusayn's martyrdom had an enormous potential to shape Shi'ī perceptions.²² In one of the deeds of the endowment of Madrasa-ye Sulṭānī (issued on 2/7/1711), Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn stipulates that the sum of 351 *tumans* and 8100 *Tabrīzī dīnārs* should be spent on mourning rituals and rites. This included the ritual recitation of the sufferings and martyrdoms of the Imams, particularly those of 'Alī and Ḥusayn in the Madrasa-ye Sulṭānī. In *rawḍa-khvānī* sessions, the ritual recitation of the sufferings of the Imams – a hagiographically embellished version of the historical accounts of the events of Karbala – is normally recited in dramatic and deeply emotional style. Ḥusayn Vā'iz Kāshifi (d. 1504), an elegist himself, recounted the suffering of the Imams, especially events of Ḥusayn's martyrdom in Karbala in his *Rawḍat al-shuhadā* (Meadow of Martyrs). This book has become one of the most commonly recited elegies at dirge sessions (*rawḍa-khvānī*), during Muḥarram processions.²³ In the deed we read:

On the 21st of Ramadan, the sum of one *tuman* and four thousand *dīnārs* must be spent on reciting the tragedy of the martyrdom of 'Alī, and on the passion play requirements and tools, and also on providing *halīm*, *ḥalwā*, and bread that must be distributed among the needy Shi'as on the evening of that day.²⁴

During the first ten days of Muḥarram every year in the aforementioned madrasa (i.e., the Madrasa-ye Sulṭānī), passion plays and commemorative ceremonies for Imam Ḥusayn and his family must be conducted. The sum of thirty *tumans* must be spent on *ta'ziya* expenses, including the fee for the reciter of the sufferings of Imam Ḥusayn and his family in Karbala, the fees of a preacher (*minbarī*), and a person who curses the first three caliphs (*tabarrā'ī*), as well as the cost of candles, lamps, meals, and para-

21 For a comprehensive examination of this genre of literature see Gunther, *Maqātil* literature 193–212.

22 Muhsin al-Musawi argues, "Mobilization of a sense of tragedy among communities takes place through an internalization of the narrated and performed event, the betrayal of the Prophet's grandson, and its provocation of a collective sense of guilt. The narrative and performance of the event creates a community in mourning that is larger than any individual or collaborative project" (*The medieval Islamic republic* 48–49).

23 For more information on this text see Amanat, *Meadow of martyrs* 250–78.

24 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha -yi awqāf* 163; Shāh 'Abbās I also donated the sum of 1 *tuman* and 2000 *dīnār-i Tabrīzī* as the fee of the *rawḍa-khvān*. Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 58.

phernalia for the aforementioned *ta'ziyas* according to the situation and requirements.

On the evening of the day of 'Āshūrā, the sum of 101 *riyals* must be spent on providing *halīm*, *ḥabwā*, and bread that should be distributed among needy students and people.²⁵

On the 20th of Safar, the day of *arba'in* (forty days after Ḥusayn's martyrdom), the sum of three *tumans* must be spent on bread, *ḥabwā*, and *halīm* that must be given to the people residing at the madrasa and needy people whether men or women.²⁶

In another *waqf-nāma* of the Madrasa-ye Sultānī, issued on the 28th of Ramadan in 1711, Shāh Sultān Ḥusayn stipulates that the revenues from an orchard known as Bāgh-i Burj and some other parcel of lands must be given to a pious Twelver Shi'i chosen by the teacher of the Madrasa-ye Sultānī. This pious recipient should recite the Quran daily and the rest of the funds should be used to cover the cost of ceremonies performed during the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram. Furthermore, the Shāh stipulates that the Muḥarram processions must involve emotional recitations and that passion plays should be as realistic as possible, so as to make people remember and recollect the sufferings of Ḥusayn and his family that culminated with the tenth day of the month of Muḥarram ('Āshūrā) when Ḥusayn was slain.

European travelers give detailed accounts of these annual commemoration ceremonies. P. Della Valle reports that during the processions of Muḥarram, elaborate paraphernalia were used to enhance realistic representation of the tragedy.²⁷ Calmard suggests that it was during the reign of Shāh 'Abbās I that "the mourning ceremonies dedicated to the Imam 'Alī and Imam Ḥusayn had become a big communal feast comprising an increasing number of dramatic elements – often very realistic – in pageants incorporated into processional rituals."²⁸ The main purpose of the rite was to lift the audience out of their mundane existence and into the spiritual sphere of the stories the preachers (*minbarīs*) were narrating by enhancing the drama of the stories, thus the historical veracity of the stories was not a concern as such. In the deed we read:

25 Serving mourners with food and drink is considered a good deed and a blessed act that is still practiced every year during the 9th and 10th of Muḥarram and Safar 20.

26 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 165.

27 Della Valle, *The pilgrimage* 143–44. M. Membre also describes the *ta'ziya* ceremonies during the reign of Tahmāsb. Membre, *Mission to the Lord* 52.

28 Calmard, *Shi'ite rituals* 154.

From the same revenues [i.e., revenues from the Burj garden] should be paid the fees of the *rawḍa-khvān* [person who recites the suffering of the Imams], *pā-minbarī* (*rawḍa-khvān*'s assistant), the *marthiya-khvān* (elegist), the *tabarrāī* [person who curses the enemies of the Imams], the cost of feeding the servants providing these services, and the cost of light and other necessities pertinent to this commemoration. [The people directing this service] must do their best to make the event attractive and provide whatever is needed to make participants in this rite cry and weep more. They must also do whatever they can to make the rite look more heart rending. They should hold this service at the Masjid-e Jadid-e 'Abbāsī and if that is not possible, it should be held wherever people are more interested in assembling to commemorate the beginning of the month of Muḥarram.²⁹

The commemorative response to the suffering and death of the Imams also constituted an indictment: those tyrants who spilled the blood of the innocent Imams were guilty. The Shi'a condemned those responsible and disassociated themselves (*barā'a*) from the enemies of the Imams.³⁰ As argued in the previous chapters, the custom of condemning and cursing the first three caliphs and the enemies of the family of the Prophet – 'Alī and Fātima and their children, according to the Shi'a – has a long history. The doctrine of *barā'a* was well developed in Imami Shi'ism by the late eighth century. 'Abd al-Jalīl Qazwīnī refers to the well-established tradition of cursing the first three caliphs in the 12th century.³¹ Through the act of cursing, the Shi'a showed their commitment to the Prophet's family.³² In his manual on *futuwwa* (chivalry), Vā'iz Kāshifī writes that one of the secrets whispered by the master craftsman into the ear of the adept is a disavowal (*tabarrā'*) of the adversaries of Muḥammad's family in affirmation (*tawwallā*) of 'Alī's family and his party.³³

Once the Safavids declared Shi'ism the official religion, such curses were shouted everywhere from bazaars to madrasas. Muḥarram was the ideal time for this cursing, when Shi'i eulogists exuberantly praised 'Alī and passionately eulogized the tragedy of Karbala in madrasas and mosques. It seems that even in the later period of Safavid rule, the Safavid Shahs and 'ulamā' needed to resort to popular culture to consolidate Shi'ism. In the eighth volume

29 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 238–42.

30 For the doctrine of *barā'a*, see Kohlberg, *Barā'a* in Shi'ite doctrine 139–75.

31 Kohlberg, *Barā'a* in Shi'ite doctrine 144–47; Qazwīnī, *al-Naqd* 110–11.

32 Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 33–34.

33 Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* 223.

of his *Bihār al-anwār*, Majlisī includes instructions on cursing the Sunnis and their leaders.³⁴ The early Safavid rulers, under the supervision of Shaykh 'Alī Karakī, made cursing an official ritual. Shāh Tahmāsb initially used this practice as a mechanism of public conversion to Shi'ism.³⁵ In a letter sent to the Ottoman ruler Sulaymān Shāh Tahmāsb defended the tradition of cursing the three "rightly guided" caliphs (i.e., Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān) and counted their wrongdoings. He threatened Sulaymān by warning him that he would ask *Tabarrā'iyān* and Qalandarān to curse him together with the Umayyad, Marvanid, and 'Abbāsīd rulers and Barmakids in streets, bazaars, mosques, and madrasas. He called the *tabarrā'iyān* "free-rein fighters."³⁶ However, not every scholar approved of the practice of cursing. For example, in a debate with a Sunni scholar from Aleppo, Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Samad states that, "according to our school of law, it is not compulsory to curse them [i.e., Abū Bakr and 'Umar] and only the fanatical among the laity do so. As for the 'ulamā', none mandated the necessity of cursing them, and their books are clear on that."³⁷

Historically, the ubiquity of ritual representations of such historical memories has also helped the Shi'ī community to demonstrate to its critics and detractors both its loyalty to their beloved Imams as well as its strength and religious cohesion. Yearly Muḥarram processions of numerous people trailed by spectators certainly have had a sheer visual grandeur that was itself a challenge to Sunni attitudes. The commemorative rites thus became opportunities to show that the Shi'ā are no longer the marginalized "heretics" Sunnis imagined them to be. In addition to the politically assertive and memorializing functions of commemorative rituals, in the course of the rites eulogists showcased the innocence, suffering, bravery and sacrifices of Ḥusayn and his followers, the brutality and cruelty of their enemies, and the impassivity of

34 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* viii, 369.

35 Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 26–27.

36 Navā'ī, *Shāh Tahmāsb Ṣafavī* 215. On this letter see also Mitchell, *The practice of politics* 81–87. For more information on the practice of public cursing see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 26–27; Stanfield-Johnson, *The Tabarra'īyan* 47–71. In a lengthy letter that Tahmāsb sent to 'Ubaydāllah Khān in 1532, while addressing the recent Uzbek attempts to annex the region of Khurasān, the scribe elaborates and defends the Shi'ī doctrine. As noted by Mitchell the anti-Sunnism and sectarian polemics are especially vociferous with respect to the memory of the first three caliphs, and the Safavid scribe holds little back in this regards: "Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman, may they be cursed, who before the revelation of Islam, were liars and hypocrites both on the inside and the outside, and drowning in a sea of error." Navā'ī, *Shāh Tahmāsb Ṣafavī* 43. For more information on this letter see also Mitchell, *The practice of politics* 73–78.

37 Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 34.

TABLE 5 *Commemorative rituals carried out in the Madrasa-ye Sulṭānī*

Commemorative rituals	Costs
Commemorative ceremonies & passion plays during the first ten days of Muḥarram	30 <i>tumans</i>
Feeding people on the evening of the day of ‘Āshūrā	101 <i>riyals</i>
Feeding students and the public on the day of <i>arbaʿīn</i>	3 <i>tumans</i>
Reciting the tragedy of the martyrdom of ‘Alī & passion play and its paraphernalia	1 <i>tuman</i> & 4000 <i>dīnārs</i>
Celebrating the birthday of Muḥammad	14 <i>tumans</i>
Celebrating the birthday of ‘Alī	14 <i>tumans</i>
Celebrating the ‘Īd-i Ghadīr	14 <i>tumans</i>
Celebrating the ‘Īd al-Aḏḥā	301 <i>riyals</i>
Passion play and other rituals on the abovementioned days	341 <i>riyals</i>

Sunnis, who do not condemn the brutal massacre of Muḥammad’s beloved grandson. The Shi’a capacity to ground these heroic deeds in some overarching cosmic order that conferred moral substance and validity was paramount to the foundational function of the constant acts of remembering in creating a full-fledged Shi’i identity.

The Instructional Values of Commemorative Rituals

During the period of Safavid rule, ritualized activities commemorating the tragic death of the Imams became opportunities not just for narrative recitations of the Imams’ lives and deaths, but also for instructional activities aimed at inculcating and securing commitment to the virtues that the Imams embodied in their lives and deaths. Rituals also boosted the religious sentiments of both students residing at the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī and other madrasas, as well as the wider community. There was, therefore, a synergistic correlation between commemorative and pedagogical activities. A violent death, commemorated as a martyr’s death, was instrumental in establishing the virtues the person embodied and what his tragic death exemplified. In other words, commemorative narratives coalescing out of the violent death of the Imams aspired to

be far more than mere records of events for posterity. The deaths of 'Alī and Ḥusayn gave rise to commemorative activities focused upon the virtues these Imams embodied in the stories of their lives. It was emphasized that they were killed because of steadfast commitment to a set of emblematic virtues.³⁸ In addition, annual festivals of collective remembering and narratives of the *manāqib khvāns* presented the audience with the ideals of a community as much as the events of individual lives.³⁹

Validating and conveying cultural knowledge that came from a variety of sources and experiences in Safavid madrasas and other religious-cultural institutions added yet another layer of discourse on the nature of Shi'i higher learning. The Muḥarram commemorative rituals as well as *manāqib* literature, both of which showcase the complex intersection of representation and didacticism of lives as they were and as they ought to be, did more than simply represent exemplary deeds and lives of the Shi'i Imams. By configuring those characters and their deeds within a particular image of the world, the *manāqib* genre and especially their narrators (*naqqālān*) also conveyed a specific way of conceptualizing the possibilities of those deeds. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes, narratives generally derive their ultimate significance from the "continual mutual interaction" between the "real and represented world."⁴⁰ *Naqqālān* intended not only to retrieve and to frame a particular past event as a major temporal milestone, but also to confirm and to make that event come alive now.

In light of the information provided by the *waqf-nāmas* of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, it can be inferred that Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, like other Safavid ruling elite, was well aware of the fact that a Shi'i vision for identity could be fortified by means of eulogistic recitations (*manāqib/rawḍa-khvānī*) in honor of the Imams of the Shi'a, in addition to commemorative rituals and shrine visits. Indeed, the Shi'a have come to know, understand, and make sense of their socio-cultural and religio-political world through the *manāqib/rawḍa-khvānī* tradition. These age-old traditions have created and historically positioned universes of meanings for the Shi'a. Safavid political and religious elites made use of this available universe of meanings to constitute collective loyalties, to

38 For example, in his *Bihār al-anwār* Majlisī assigned volumes 43 to 50 describing the life of the Imams and their virtues. Qazwīnī also describes the virtues of 'Alī. Qazwīnī, *al-Naqd* 137–43.

39 For the history and culture of *manāqib khvānī* see Mahjūb, The evolution of popular eulogy 25–54.

40 Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination* 253–54.

legitimize their rule, and if necessary to mobilize and inspire recent converts to fight, kill, and die for their religious beliefs.⁴¹

Additionally, by reconnecting a nondescript present with an illustrious past – namely the bravery, sacrifices and sufferings of the beloved hero of the Shi‘a, Ḥusayn, and his brave followers – *rawḍa-khvāns* and *manāqib-khvāns* established unity and continuity along two lines: diachronically, the present was put in linear continuity with an honored past from which it proceeded, while synchronically, the Shi‘a were united under one banner, i.e. the holy flag of the innocent, brave and righteous Imam Ḥusayn. Imams came to personify the pedigree of Shi‘ism and have been commonly invoked by a diverse group of people.

Imam Ḥusayn and his followers in particular had gained entry into the collective memory of the Shi‘a through their heroic endeavors; commemorative rituals remembering his and their sacrifices transformed the abstract knowledge of the past and reconstructed them as lived experience. The commemorative narrative backed by the Safavid elite, both political and religious, highlighted the perception of a divide between Shi‘i and Sunni Muslims. Shi‘i Muslims were portrayed as a pious group of people associated with heroic struggles, in contrast with the highly negative image of Sunnis cultivated at the time. Sunnis were characterized as excessively passive in the face of the massacres of Imam Ḥusayn and his followers, and were also blamed for the deliberate suppression of ‘Alī’s right to Muḥammad’s succession.

Madrasas and Social Coherence

Celebrating joyous events in the Islamic and Shi‘i calendars, Safavid madrasas acted to create social coherence. The birthdates of Prophet Muḥammad and the Imams, as well as other holy dates such as ‘Īd-i Ghadīr, continued to act as occasions for Shi‘i expressions of unity. At every ‘Īd-i Ghadīr, the Shi‘a renewed their commitment to ‘Alī as they witnessed the re-enacted martyrdom of Ḥusayn in every ‘Āshūrā. In one of the deeds of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn stipulated that the sum of forty-six *tumans* should be spent on royal feasts, holy days, and ‘Īds that were to be held in the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī. He set down the following conditions:

41 For example, Shāh ‘Abbās I asked Muḥammad Bāqir Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631) to confirm whether fighting against [the Sunni Ottomans] was a religious duty or not. And if a believer (i.e. a Shi‘i Safavid soldier) got killed in this battle, would he be considered a martyr? In response to the Shāh’s *istiftā’*, Mīr Dāmād wrote that “war against the Ottoman army is in accordance with right religion and it is a necessary and legitimate fight.” Cited in Ja‘fariyān, *Kāvushhāy-i tāzeh* 134–37.

- On the 17th of Rabīʿ al-Awwal, the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad, the sum of fourteen *tumans* must be spent on feasting and on feeding sayyids, religious scholars, pious people, students of [religious] sciences, the people residing in the madrasa and the like, and the needy and poor people, whether men or women, or sayyids or non sayyids.⁴²
- On the 13th of Rajab, the birthday of Imam ʿAlī, the sum of fourteen *tumans* must be spent on feasts and feeding [people].
- On ʿĪd-i Ghadīr, the 18th of Dhu al-Ḥijja, which is the biggest celebration, the sum of fourteen *tumans* must be spent on feasts and feeding people in the madrasa.
- On the day of ʿĪd al-Adhā (The Sacrifice Feast), sixteen healthy, fleshy, and average-priced sheep that possess the conditions for being sacrificed must be bought and brought to the [Madrasa-ye Sulṭānī].
- During these days the sum of 341 *riyals* must be spent on the Passion play and other rituals.⁴³
- The sum of approximately eleven *riyals* must be spent on purchasing torches for the *iḥyāʿ* nights, feasts, and other times that a torch is needed and on the brazier in winter time [to warm up] the teaching hall, when the professor is teaching.⁴⁴

Like all other patrons of religious institutions, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn paid special attention to the month-long holy period of Ramadan. The well-orchestrated complex of Ramadan festivities was an articulation that affected groups of disparate interests. The festivities were aesthetic as well as socio-political. They also reinforced religious legitimacy. During the Ramadan festivities, people came together to celebrate the holiest month of the Islamic calendar and the shah's charitable and pious character. Moreover, Ramadan festivities helped to build a sense of community and gave cultural and social meaning to the lives of individuals.

Every evening during Ramadan was a celebration. The evening meal for breaking the fast (*ifṭār*) was a time of animated activity; people gathered in the Madrasa-ye Sulṭānī not only to eat and drink but also to receive financial aid.

42 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 164. The Sunnis commemorate the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet at the 12th of the month of Rabīʿ al-Awwal.

43 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 164. ʿAlī's birthday is considered as important as Muḥammad's birthday and celebrated in the same way, while ʿĪd-i Ghadīr is equated with ʿĪd al-Adhā, the most important Islamic celebration.

44 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 166.

Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn stipulated that: “The sum of two hundred ninety-six *riyals* and one tenth of a *riyāl* was to be spent on providing meals every night of the month of Ramadan for forty-one poor and needy fasting Twelver Shi’a from amongst the students and others, whether sayyid or not, women or men, married women or widows.”⁴⁵ It is significant that the shah’s words afford special attention to the madrasa meal served to people breaking their fast. Perhaps he was told that, by feeding people, he was “feeding his own power” in addition to boosting his pious image. The Ottomans also supplied and distributed food to their subjects, thereby constituting a source of legitimacy for themselves.⁴⁶ He orders that:

The meal must consist of bread, cheese, sweet paste (*ḥalwā*), dates, and sherbet. Breads must be round and small and dates must be black or similar to the dates produced in Medina. Dates must be seeded and stuffed with almonds and the like. In preparing *ḥalwā*, fine oil and flour and sugar must be used to sweeten it and honey and syrup of grapes must not be used [to sweeten it], and if they want to make *ḥalwā* from starch, they must add saffron. Sherbet must be made with sugar, willow-water, and sweet basil seeds and in seasons when good ice is around, it must be added to sherbet. The nights of the 19th, 20th, and 21st of Ramadan are the time of mourning [the martyrdom of ‘Alī] so they should exclude *ḥalwā*, sherbet, and dates [from the menu] and instead of those [sweet foods] they must make meals that are not sweet. The cost of these substitute foods must be approximately one hundred *dīnārs*.⁴⁷ ... Also the *mutawallī* must give the sum of twelve Tabrīzī *tumans* to one of the religious scholars so that he will distribute that money in the month of Ramadan among the needy fasting Shi’is. Each should receive two hundred *dīnārs* with which to break his fast.⁴⁸

In addition to his instructions for celebrating holy occasions and feeding the needy in the month of Ramadan, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn also specified the fees

45 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 162.

46 For more information see Singer, *Constructing Ottoman beneficence*, 131.

47 These rituals are perhaps designed to support memory. Leaving out the sweet meals and desserts from the menu is incorporated as a symbolic aid to memory. Ulrich Haarmann reports that in the *Khānqāhmadrasa* Barqūqiyya in Cairo also “[h]igh amounts of money were spent on sweets not only during the month of Ramadan (350 dirham), but also on the day of ‘Āshūrā (300 dirham)” (Mamluk endowment deeds 37).

48 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 129–30, 199.

TABLE 6 *Religious observances during the Month of Ramadan*

Religious observances during the month of Ramadan	Costs
Feeding 41 poor and needy fasting people during Ramadan	293 <i>riyals</i> and one tenth of a <i>riyal</i> (on each night)
Giving money to 41 people every night during Ramadan	100 <i>dīnārs</i>
Giving money to needy people other than those who break their fast in the madrasa during the <i>Ihyā'</i> nights	100 <i>dīnārs</i>
Giving the <i>zakat-i fitr</i> of 41 people who break their fast at the madrasa during the last night of Ramadan	100 <i>dīnārs</i>
Cost of purchasing Kāshī dishes and large wooden trays used during Ramadan	5 <i>riyals</i>
Purchasing torches for the <i>Ihyā'</i> nights, feasts, and so Forth	11 <i>riyals</i>
Giving money to needy fasting people during Ramadan	200 <i>dīnārs</i>

for fourteen Quran reciters in the Madrasa-ye Sulṭānī's endowment deed (issued on 15 of Rajab in 1711).⁴⁹

Reconfiguring Cultural Memory

Usually political changes reshape cultural memories and fashion them in the image of different narratives that better suit particular interests and needs. Indeed, the content and forms of Shi'i commemorative rites and traditions changed in some measure after the Safavids assumed power. This mutation was not random or arbitrary: it paralleled, reflected, and played a role in the reworking of identity that transformed a community characterized by multiple loyalties, of which an incipient religious identity was only one of these identities. It became a community that imagined itself as a unified organism with a common past.

While Safavid rulers and 'ulamā' encouraged commemoration of the events deemed essential to boosting Safavid religious sentiments and supplementing

49 Sipintā, *Tārīkhcha-yi awqāf* 165–66.

the old memories, they vehemently suppressed the rituals they regarded as heterodox. Perhaps these stories were rejected because they evoked patterns of behavior and ethics within a Persianate conceptual frame, as argued by Kathryn Babayan.⁵⁰ In fact, in the process of creating a new religious identity, Safavid educational and religious institutions reinforced historical religious memories by selecting those that served their purpose, by creating new memories, or by fusing them; in fact, certain memories were frequently excluded.⁵¹

Such motivated choices in remembered events are evident in the works of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1698), the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan, particularly in his Persian-language books. In his *ʿAyn al-ḥayāt*, Majlisī quotes numerous sayings of the Prophet and Imams in which they urge their followers to avoid listening to baseless tales and Zoroastrian myths. He maintains that stories of the *Shāh-nāma* by Ferdowsī and the tale of Ḥamza are all merely unfounded stories and encourages some ‘ulamā’ to even renounce reading and listening to those stories. He quotes a prophetic tradition reported by Muḥammad Taqī, the ninth Imam, in which the Prophet said, “Remembering ‘Alī is worship and one of the signs of a hypocrite is that he does not like to take part in the assemblies in which he [i.e., ‘Alī] is remembered. He’d rather listen to baseless tales and Zoroastrian myths instead of listening to ‘Alī’s virtues.” Prophet Muḥammad urges people to remember ‘Alī in their assemblies and says that “remembering him is like remembering me and remembering me is like remembering God. Thus whoever avoids assemblies in which ‘Alī is remembered and listens to baseless stories is one who does not believe in the Hereafter.” In his *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, Majlisī also emphasizes that listening to myths such as the story of Ḥamza and stories about the Miracles of Sufi *shaykhs* is forbidden.⁵² Some Shi‘i ‘ulamā’s rejection of ancient Iranian myths was probably due to similarities that exist between certain Shi‘i beliefs and Zoroastrian beliefs. The Shi‘a were accused of adopting some of the ancient Iranian beliefs as mentioned by Qazwīnī, who in his *al-Naqd* dismisses these accusations.⁵³

As Babayan and other Safavid scholars have shown, Safavid rulers, especially from the time of Shāh ‘Abbās I, began subduing the *ghulāt* (extremists, e.g., Qizilbāsh and Nuṭṭawīyya) whose ideas, ideals, and memories of the past chal-

50 Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* 165.

51 For an excellent examination of the Safavids’ suppression of so-called heterodox sects and ideas see, Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* 121–150, 161 ff.

52 Majlisī, *ʿAyn al-ḥayāt* 547–48.

53 Qazwīnī, *al-Naqd* 444–48

lenged mainstream beliefs.⁵⁴ The process of silencing the Sufis and extremist sects had existed since the beginning of the Safavid rule as reported by Ḥāfiẓ Ḥusayn Tabrīzī. In his *Rawḍāt al-jinān va-jannāt al-janān*, Tabrīzī writes that Ismā'īl “crushed all the Sufi orders; and also destroyed the graves of their ancestors, not to mention what will befall their successors.”⁵⁵ Hamid Algar maintains that the Naqshbandis, like other Sunni Sufi orders, were perceived to have actual or potential influence on society and thus became the targets of Safavid hostility.⁵⁶

The Nuḡṭawiya, whose ideas according to ‘Abd al-Qādir b. Mulūk Shāh al-Badā‘unī centered around notions of transmigration of souls, maintained that all animal and vegetable matter originated in the same “earth atom” (or *nuḡṭa-i-khāk*). Al-Badā‘unī reports that many of his contemporaries who had migrated to the Mughal court from Iran either openly or covertly followed this sect, and among them he mentions Muḥammad Sharīf Nishābūrī, ‘Alī Akbar Herātī, and Tashbihī Kāshānī. As for the latter, al-Badā‘unī writes that, after already having visited India three times, he has returned again and attempts to seduce men to heresy by inviting them to join the sect of the Basakhwanis.⁵⁷

In fact, the Nuḡṭawiya had already experienced difficulties during the reign of Shāh Ṭahmāsb and Muḥammad Khudābanda. Sharīf-i Āmulī Astarābādī had to flee to the Mughal court for being perceived in Iran as too close to Sayyid Aḥmad Kāshī, a leading Nuḡṭawī. But conflicts with the Safavids reached a height during the reign of ‘Abbās I, when Mullā Qāsim, a Nuḡṭawī who actually challenged the shah’s right to the throne, was executed. H.R. Roemer writes, “Enthusiasts for these and similar views, who were to be found in various Persian cities and in various social classes up to the highest strata of society, were persecuted on the orders of the Shah, and where it was possible to arrest them or to trace them in his entourage, they were sentenced to death.”⁵⁸

Needless to say, one cannot claim with certitude whether or not people who left for India were Nuḡṭawīs. For example, some prominent migrants like Mīr

54 See for example, Khunjī, *Ālam āra-yi Amīnī* 255, 258, 262, 265, 269, 275; Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* chaps. 1–8 passim; Bashir, *Messianic hopes* 189–197; Amanat, *The Nuḡṭawi movement* 281–97; Arjomand, *Religious extremists* 2–27; Tavakoli-Targhi, *Contested memories* 149–75.

55 Karbalāī Tabrīzī, *Rawḍāt al-jinān* i, 481–82, 490; 2: 88, 159.

56 Algar, *Naqshbandis and Safavids* 26. For more on the condition of the Sufi orders including the Naqshbandiyya, the Khalwatiyya, the Ismā‘iliyya, the Dhahabiyya, the Nūrbakhshiyya, and other Sufi orders see Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 112–21, 211; Karamustafa, *God’s unruly friends* 51–84.

57 al-Badā‘unī, *Muntakhab ut-tawārīkh* iii, 283–85, 287, 513.

58 Roemer, *The Safavid period* vi, 273–74.

Mu‘min Astarābādī or Mīr Muḥammad Sayyid Ardistānī are said to have left Iran “under a cloud”, the former because he was accused of heresy at the Safavid court, and the latter because of difficulties with some official in Isfahan.⁵⁹ However, in one of his correspondences written in late 1640, Ardistānī states that the reasons for leaving Iran are, first, “to make our living easy”; and second, “to remit money to aged and infirm members of his family who had remained in Iran”; and, third, to escape “the injustices and the grasping instinct of the *shaykh al-Islam* with regard to the property of the orphans and the poor.”⁶⁰ Other migrants in the seventeenth-century Deccan, such as Mīrzā Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad who had quite substantial properties and *waqf* endowments in Persia, sent letters to Shāh ‘Abbās II, seeking his help to safeguard the properties he and his family left in Persia from encroachment.⁶¹

Babayan states that the Safavids betrayed their revolutionary ideals to reinvent normative Islam once they attained temporal power. For example, she argues that, during the Safavid revolutionary phase, the *Abū Muslim-nāmas* that were products of the culture of Anatolia, Syria, and Iran placed themselves within the drama surrounding the story of the ‘Alid victims of Umayyad and ‘Abbasid oppression. Later on, however, under the influence of religious scholars, they banned the tradition of *Abū Muslim-nāma* recitation.⁶² Abū Tāhir al-Ṭartūsī has chronicled Abū Muslim’s life in his religio-epic text, i.e. *Abū Muslim-nāma*, which is one of the most celebrated of *Abū Muslim-nāmas*. This historical religio-epic, a composite of history and legend, is at once meta-historical and meta-dramatic in the dual vision that it presents to the audience. In consummate epic style, al-Ṭartūsī presents the fallen Abū Muslim and his followers as heroes elevated to the loftiest heights of glory, worthy of comparison with the legendary figures of Shi‘a history as well as ancient Iranian history.

59 Islam, *A calendar of documents* ii, 142–43, 164–65.

60 Islam, *A calendar of documents* ii, 164–65.

61 For more on him and his letters see Islam, *A calendar of documents* ii, 169–73. Based on the above historical documents, migrants to India had different motivations to leave their homeland, only one of which was fear of persecution on religious grounds; some – mainly propertied – individuals left for India mainly because they felt Iran to be limited in providing economic opportunities for them.

62 Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs* xxvii, 101–106, 245–81, and particularly chapter 10: 349–87; Babayan, *The Safavid synthesis* 135–61. See also Ishraqi, *Nuqtavīyeh* 341–49; Roemer, *The Qizilbash Turcomans* 27–39. ‘Abd al-Husayn Zarrīnkūb argues that some storytellers recited stories about Muḥammad b. Ḥanafīyya and Abū Muslim intending to draw parallels between the nature of Abū Muslim’s *da‘wa* and the goals of the Safavid revolutionaries. Zarrīnkūb *Justijū dar tassawwuf* 228–29.

Abū Muslim as portrayed by al-Ṭartūsī could be regarded as a mythologized synthesis of his notion of social justice and devotion. Whether or not his judgment of Abū Muslim is accurate is a peripheral issue for scholars who are concerned with the way in which al-Ṭartūsī's imagination operates in setting him up as such. Indeed, the created Abū Muslim resembles a grand fictionalized character. Rather than envisaging Abū Muslim as a real historical personage with flaws and inadequacies, who makes errors and misjudgments, and who represents the vested interests of a specific class in post-Abbasid revolution Muslim society, al-Ṭartūsī mythologizes him and refuses to locate him in any historical context. He describes him as the prime avenger of Imam Ḥusayn's blood, who even killed the son of Ḥusayn's accursed murderer.

According to al-Ṭartūsī, Abū Muslim left for Iraq by the order of 'Alī which he had received in a dream seen by two of his other followers.⁶³ When he was killed, there were conflicting reactions among his followers. Some denied that it was Muslim who had been killed by al-Mansūr, the 'Abbasid caliph.⁶⁴ Others accepted his death and soon began the tradition of gathering at his grave on the anniversary of his murder. Shāh Ismā'īl and Shāh Ṭahmāsb reportedly destroyed his tomb to prevent people from visiting it. Historian Mas'ūdī reports that "a group of ignorant people in the suburb of Nīshābūr has repaired a tomb and named it the Tomb of Abū Muslim and some ignorant people visit that site."⁶⁵

By reciting al-Ṭartūsī's religio-epic, Safavid storytellers captivated the imagination of the entire social spectrum of Safavid Isfahan, from its bazaars to its coffee houses.⁶⁶ They turned to several iconic metanarratives: the age-old Persian traditions, histories, heroes, Shi'ī extremism, and racial rivalries. In effect, by transforming an historical event into oral narratives, storytellers represented Abū Muslim's uprising in mythical and cosmological terms, while in the process they interlaced the indigenous cosmology of Persians with the history of Shi'ism. The popularity of this religio-epic narrative is evidenced by its appropriation into the revolutionary discourse of the early Safavid time. It may

63 al-Ṭartūsī, *Abū Muslim-nāma* i, 657–60. For more information on this dream see the illuminating and thorough study of Irène Mélikoff, *Abū Muslim, le "porte-hache" du Khorassan*, wherein she classifies Abū Muslim's dream as the dream of initiation. For a detailed study on Abū Muslim see Ghulām Ḥusayn Yūsufī, *Abū Muslim, sardār-i Khurāsān*.

64 According to 'Abd al-Muṭallib b. Yahyā Ṭāliqānī, the Khurramiya believed Abū Muslim did not die and will never die. He will return to restore justice on earth. Sharī'at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 311. See also Madelung, *Religious trends* 77.

65 Sharī'at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 311–12.

66 In his *Tadhkira*, Naṣābādī enumerates some of those coffeehouses (*Tadhkira* 109, 112, 136 ff.).

be argued that, in the acts of recitations and witnessing, both the storytellers and denizens of Safavid Isfahan vindicated themselves through epic exaltation of the fallen revolutionary heroes who had sacrificed their lives for the cause of the Shi'a Imams.

Perhaps due to the fact that they could not tolerate any narrative rivaling the *rawḍa-khvānī* tradition, a number of Shi'i scholars vehemently condemned *Abū Muslim-nāma khvānī* and denounced Abū Muslim as one of the enemies of the Imams and the Shi'a. Transforming Abū Muslim into the quasi-mythical symbol of the revolutionary fighter could also result in the postulation of a platform capable of engendering revolts against the Safavid political establishment. Thus, in a well-orchestrated manner, a number of Safavid polemicists started to censor the memory of Abū Muslim. This took the form of a falsification and repression of his memory, and a reconstruction of his life and times that suited the needs of the Safavid political and religious authorities.

There, against the practice of *naqqālān* and other performers including *maddāḥān*, orators who – according to the Safavid polemicists – were subjecting Shi'ism to intellectual and religious ridicule by appealing to the illiterate with all kind of bizarre and sensational tales about Abū Muslim, Rustam, and other heroes of the historical and mythical past, the polemicists undertook the task of revealing the truth about the fictionalized Abū Muslim and other fanaticized ancient figures.⁶⁷ Such a narrative would not only discredit the tales of *naqqālān*, but also end the spread of false and fantastical accounts as historical truth by storytellers, the polemicists claimed.⁶⁸

Among the denouncers of Abū Muslim was a student of Shaykh-i Bahā'i and Mīr Damād Sayyid named Muḥammad Sabzawārī Isfahānī, also known as Mīr Lawḥī. The object of Mīr Lawḥī's scorn as well as that of his supporters was the common practice of using rhetoric by Safavid storytellers to glorify an "infidel" and his deed that, according to them, was nothing more than a pedestrian incident and an act of betrayal towards the Shi'i Imams. The Safavid polemicists did not wish to set the historical record straight, but rather to deride the

67 For more information on performers (*ahl al-ma'raka*) and artisans see Kāshifī, *Futuwwat-nāma* 276–393. It seems storytellers (*quṣāṣ*) who sat or stood in the streets reciting from memory verses of the Quran, hadith or stories of the pious early Muslims enjoyed certain respect in Cairo. For more information on them see Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 204–5.

68 As argued by Berkey, 'ulamā's desire "to restrict authority to those who shared their training and outlook inevitably encouraged others to develop alternative models and mechanisms of religious authority, models that did not necessarily reject that the ulama but which did nonetheless compete with it" (*Popular preaching* 71).

character of Abū Muslim who had been transformed, to their dismay, into a lasting historical and sacred figure. In the end, what mattered to Mīr Lawḥī and the cohort of his supporters – whom I will introduce shortly – was not the narrative itself nor its veracity, but rather the effect that it produced on the public.

A body of twenty refutation (*rudūd*) treatises, including *Anīs al-mu‘minīn* by Muḥammad b. Ishāq Ḥamawī and *Khulāṣat al-fawā‘id* by ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Yahyā Tāliqānī, was compiled in support of Mīr Lawḥī’s denunciation of Abū Muslim during the final decades of the seventeenth century.⁶⁹ The contents of these polemics illustrate what was considered a heterodox Islamic sphere, as strains of Sufism and extremist Shi‘ism intermingled with mainstream Shi‘i ideas and thoughts. The authors of these polemics explicitly criticized storytellers who propagated myths revolving around Abū Muslim. They argued that storytellers purposely distorted public perception and toyed with the illusion of reality through the use of exaggerated narratives. These polemicists were troubled by the pervasive presence of rival narratives that penetrated an extensive range of socio-cultural realms influencing popular tastes. They were also concerned with the “corrupting effects” of listening to the stories recited by the *naqqālān*, which presented a danger to the Islamic-Shi‘i identity.⁷⁰

In addition, the polemicists complained about the distortion and misrepresentation of the Shi‘i creed as part of an ongoing deviation from “true Shi‘ism.”⁷¹ Like Mīr Lawḥī, they also re-cast Abū Muslim and his followers in a less than favorable light. In his *Izhār al-ḥaqq wa mi‘yār al-bāṭil*, Sayyid Ahmad ‘Alawī al-‘Āmilī argues that Abū Muslim was one of the enemies of the family of the Prophet Muḥammad and not a pro-‘Alid.⁷² In his *Ṣaḥīfat al-rashād*, Muḥammad Zamān b. Muḥammad Raḍawī, another Safavid polemicist, quotes the eighth Imam, al-Ridā, who said, “Abū Muslim was one of our enemies, so whoever likes him is indeed our enemy; whoever accepts him, rejects us, and whoever praises him, disapproves us.”⁷³ In his *Anīs al-mu‘minīn*, Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Ḥamawī quotes al-Ja‘far al-Sādiq who was asked if it is permissible

69 Tehrānī lists seventeen epistles. See *al-Dharī‘a* iv, 151. Sharī‘at Mūsawī published four of those epistles that he could find. Sharī‘at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 179–414. In Sunni Islam, religious scholars were not impressed with storytellers. For example Ibn Taymiyya reported that the storytellers popularized a hadith extolling the faculty of reason, one popular with the philosophical school of the Mu‘tazilis. For more information see Berkey, *Popular preaching* 77.

70 Sharī‘at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 195–98, 289–90, 330–32.

71 Sharī‘at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 287–90.

72 Sharī‘at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 265–69.

73 Sharī‘at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 279–80.

to listen to the words of storytellers. He replied, "It is not permissible, and whoever listens to a storyteller, it is as if he has verily worshipped him."⁷⁴

Finally, in his *Khulāṣat al-fawā'id*, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Yaḥyā Ṭāliqānī has the harshest words against storytellers who, according to him, were fabricating stories about Abū Muslim and Ḥamza and promulgating their tall tales among the people. He writes, "Infidels love Abū Muslim, because he claimed divinity, and Sunnis love him because he supported Banī 'Abbās."⁷⁵ Both Ḥamawī and Ṭāliqānī paint Abū Muslim as the hero of Zoroastrians, and state that once the news of Abū Muslim's assassination had reached his Zoroastrian devotees, their leader revolted to reclaim the blood of Muslim. Ḥamawī and Ṭāliqānī also state that a large number of Abū Muslim's followers considered him as God.⁷⁶

The above-mentioned polemics also represent unequivocally the impetus of cultural dynamism in Safavid Isfahan. Safavid Isfahan maximized communal socializing and entertainment; some denizens of Isfahan spent hours listening to the amazing stories narrated by *naqqālān*.⁷⁷ For a public accustomed to the earthy language and fantastic aura of storytellers, the transition to the dry narratives of the 'ulamā' was not easy. Some religious scholars, including Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, realized the need to broaden their audience to encompass a wider group. They styled their teachings and writings in the vernacular of the common believer and produced popular religious manuals in Persian.

The narratives given by Safavid scholars did not aim to reveal past events with objective accuracy. They aspired to craft statements about the past that would resonate as "true" in the context of the age in which they were produced. In fact, despite claiming to expunge the so-called heretical ideas and practices from Twelver Shi'i practices, Safavid 'ulamā' nurtured some of the popular *ghulaww* practices, such as cursing rituals, that were rejected by many leading Shi'i scholars.⁷⁸ For their part, the 'ulamā' also adapted elements of folk reli-

74 Shari'at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 195.

75 Shari'at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 313.

76 In all the above-mentioned polemics, Abū Muslim is declared one of the *Kaysāniyya*, and had a humble origin and was an illegitimate son of a slave. Shari'at Mūsawī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 192, 292–94.

77 For more information on the tradition of storytelling (*naqqālī*) see Page, Professional storytelling 195–215. She describes the background and setting of professional storytelling in present day Iran while examining some aspects of how the craft of storytelling is transmitted and "how this transmission relates to the way in which storytellers actually construct their performance."

78 As an example Muḥsin al-Āmilī actively discouraged extreme forms of flagellations (chest beating and the use of chains passages.) For more information on his attitude

gion present among the Qizilbāsh and Persian Sufis alike.⁷⁹ They even embellished historical religious memories in their literary sources.⁸⁰ This tendency is evident in Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī's *Bihār al-anwār*, and his Persian works including (*Jilā'*) *Jalā' al-'uyūn* and *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*. He embellished not only the references to Karbala, but also the work's numerous hagiographic accounts of 'Alī and Ḥusayn, who is reported to have performed miracles such as curing the sick, helping regrow dismembered limbs, and causing infants to speak.⁸¹

In addition to the storytelling tradition, Sufi practices and philosophical inquiries were criticized by *mujtahids*, some of whom strongly opposed mysticism and firmly rejected philosophy as an innovation (*bid'ā*).⁸² As early as Tahmāsb's reign, a number of 'ulamā' began challenging Sufi beliefs and practices.⁸³ Continuing on this path, his son later penned *Umdat al-maqaāl fi kufr ahl al-dlāl*.⁸⁴ Ahmad-i Ardabīlī (d. 1585) denounced some twenty-one Sufi groups for such heretical beliefs as ascribing partnership to God, abandoning prayer, fasting, dancing, singing, listening to poetry and music, and so forth.⁸⁵ In spite of religious scholars' censure of Sufi teachings and rituals, Tahmāsb patronized rather lavish Sufi rituals conducted at the shrine of Shaykh Safi in Ardabīlī.⁸⁶

In the later period of the Safavid rule, Muḥammad Tāhir Qumī, the *Shaykh al-Islam* of Qum (d. 1686) who wrote a number of polemics such as *Ḥikmat al-'arīfīn fi radd shubahāt al-mukhālīfīn ay al-mutaṣawwīfīn va al-mufalsīfīn*,⁸⁷ *Tahāfut al-akhyār*, *al-Fawā'id al-dīniya fi radd 'alā al-hukamā wa ṣūfiya*, and

and other Shi'i 'ulamā's attitude towards flagellations see Ende, The flagellations 19–36. See also Nakash, *The Shi'is* 154–57. Herein he discusses the reactions of some Shi'i *mujtahids* towards flagellation and other Muḥarrām rituals.

79 Calmard, Shi'i rituals and power 11 166 ff; Morton, The Chūb-i *ṭarīq* 242–44.

80 See for example al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iv, 72–73ff; Rizvi, Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, 239–42.

81 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* xlv, 180–82, 184, 198, 270; Majlisī, (*Jilā'*) *Jalā' al-'uyūn* 659–71; Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn* 43–48, 129–30, 135.

82 The nature of critiques of jurists will be discussed in Chapter 6.

83 For more on ostracizing of the Sufis see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 24–26.

84 Ja'fariyān, *Ḥal-i bar uftādan-i safaviyān* 323–45; Ja'fariyān, *Safaviya dar 'arsa-yi dīn* i, 390, iii, 1141–54.

85 For more on him see Cooper, Some observations 149; Cooper, The Muqaddas al-Ardabili 263–66.

86 For more information on these Sufi rituals and practices see Rizvi, *The Safavid dynasty* 41, ff.; Rizvi, Its mortar mixed 323–52.

87 Ja'fariyān, *Dīn wa siyāsat* 241; Mudarris Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab* iv, 487; Kashmirī, *Nujūm al-samā'* 46; *Āmilī, Amal al-āmil* ii, 277.

Muhibbān-i Khudā, continued the tradition of condemning Sufis' ideas and practices. In these works he rejects the ideas of Sufis and mystical philosophers, including Shaykh Bahā'ī and Mullā Sadrā, for believing in the unity of existence. He believed their infidelity was greater than the unbelief of the Jews and Christians because they denied the difference between the Creator and the created – he felt that whoever did not denounce them and did not call them unbelievers was himself an infidel without religion. Shaykh 'Alī b. Muḥammad 'Āmilī (d. 1691) also harshly refuted Sufis in his *Zād al-murshidīn fi radd al-ṣūfiyya*.⁸⁸ Muḥammad Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (d. 1693), the *Shaykh al-Islam* of Mashhad, cited one thousand traditions as evidence against the Sufis.

Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī, a student of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, associates Sufism with a denial of the rights of the family of the Prophet and collusion with their enemies. He blames Sufis for carrying out as well as encouraging deviant practices such as the loud chanting of God's names, singing, dancing, humming, dancing ecstatically next to the sarcophagus of the Imam, and striking their heads on the tomb until blood flowed and so forth. In another account, he narrates the story of a celibate Sufi of Shiraz who frequented the shrine on Thursday nights with a handsome young boy singing loudly while wasting away the day in idleness. He accuses Sufis of drinking and forsaking marriage while indulging in pederasty. He also maintains sometimes Sufis claim divinity, other times prophecy and sometimes the imamate. He believes Sufi leaders are crooks who claim to embrace poverty and enjoin it on their disciples who they rob.⁸⁹

The conflict between Sufis and the guardians of Shi'i-influenced Islamic "orthodoxy" during Safavid rule was not an unprecedented occurrence. Indeed, in the course of Islamic history, both conventional Shi'i and Sunni scholars' emphasis on their perceived "orthodoxy" has caused an ongoing dialogue and at times conflicts and bloody confrontations with Sufis. Within the history of Sufism, Sufis who fostered forms of knowledge and praxis that were in conflict with mainstream religious beliefs and conducts were subject to suspicion and often hostility. Some Sufis, though relatively rare, seem to have claimed that during their personal contact with God (*mukāshafa*), certain truths were revealed to them. Obviously such claims resulted in an inevitable conflict between religious authority and such Sufis.

88 Tehrānī, *al-Kawākib al-muntashira* 454.

89 For more information on al-Jazā'irī's criticisms of Sufis see *al-Anwār al-Nu'māniyya* i, 193–216. See also Rizvi, Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī 236–39.

Another reason for this antagonism could be attributed to the interpretation of the Quran. All Muslims scholars have utilized spiritual exegesis (*ta'wīl*) in advancing their own rendition of Islamic faith to some measure, but Sufis were among the pioneers in this development and the most devoted practitioners of it. There were always concerns about the limits and the claims made regarding the esoteric meanings of the Quran. Mainstream scholars argued that to the extent that visions and unveilings (*kashfs*) confirmed tradition, they were acceptable; but insofar as any vision or message from God advanced something new or at odds with tradition, especially a message accessible only to the favored few [among the Sufis], they were to be rejected.

The age-old strife between Sufis and conventional religious scholars was, however, mainly rooted both in the mechanisms of control evident in the counteractions of mainstream religious authority towards Sufis, and in social aspects of Sufism that had emerged mainly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the form of Sufi brotherhoods. These new forms of Sufism were publicized in the sense that they were accessible as much in the market place as in the *khānqāh* (Sufis hospice) and expressed for the most part in the vernacular, often by individuals who had not received a solid religious education. Paradoxically, although these new developments in Sufism would seem to counteract the suspicion of esotericism voiced by mainstream religious authorities, they actually provoked fears because they were seen as giving dangerous ideas a broader reach among strata of society that were less subject to close supervision. In other words, as long as Sufism was largely the purview of spiritual elites, it was regarded a relatively safe phenomenon. When it spread out among the masses it automatically became more dangerous to the guardians of "orthodoxy."

Yet, when suspicions of mystical heresy once again smoldered in Safavid Iran, many of the nodes of conflict were strikingly familiar. The specific charges brought against Safavid Sufis, such as pantheism and moral corruption, were old.⁹⁰ 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb argues that the Safavid 'ulamā' were essentially not opposed to Sufis, nor were central mystical ideas alien to their works and ontology – they were mostly threatened by the radical impact of their socio-economic content on the masses. As Zarrīnkūb argues craftsmen in several guilds challenged the clerical aristocracy and the state by undermining the *shari'ā* and expressing defiance towards the *mujtahids*.⁹¹ He states that clerical rejection of popular Sufism was directed against the Sufis who

90 Zarrīnkūb, *Arzish-i mirāth* 105–06.

91 Zarrīnkūb, *Justujū dar tassawwuf* 259–60; Zarrīnkūb, *Persian Sufism* 177–78.

encouraged their followers to challenge the “orthodoxy” upheld by the state and its religious elite. The jurists viewed with great alarm the Sufi concepts of the pole (*quṭb*) and the seat of deputyship (*maqām-i wilāyat*) that circulated with the widespread popularity of the works of Ibn ‘Arabī.⁹² He argues that conventional Shi‘i ‘ulamā’, while striving to uproot popular Sufism, had inadvertently claimed a form of spiritual guidance as a pole.⁹³

That being said, despite the fact that during the latter half of Safavid rule Sufis were rapidly deprived of opportunities and privileges to which they had grown accustomed, and were only given baser types of employment such as royal guards, sweepers of the palace buildings, gatekeepers, and jailers, they were not persecuted violently.⁹⁴ Even with the animosity expressed by Safavid legal-minded ‘ulamā’ towards Sufis and the steady decline of Sufi power and political status, it seems Safavid ruling elites maintained their ties with the Sufi establishment until the end of their rule. The Safavid shah had a deputy among the Sufis, the *khalīfat al-khulafā*, and obedience to him was tantamount to obedience to the shah.⁹⁵ Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, as soon as he assumed power, sent twelve Tabrizī *tumans* and twelve big trays of sweets to the *khalīfat al-khulafā* of the Sufis just as his forefathers had, and asked them to pray for the longevity of his kingship. In a royal decree, he entrusted Sayyid Ibrahim with the following responsibilities of *khalīfat al-khulafā*’:

He [*khalīfat al-khulafā* of the Sufis] was responsible for directing his followers to the love (*wilāyat*) of the Prophet’s family. He should ask them to observe all religious duties, including religious cleansing, paying alms (*zakat*), and fifth (*khums*), fasting, *hajj*, visiting holy shrines of the Imams, and the like. He also should forbid his followers from committing unlawful acts such as denying what was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, eating a human corpse and pork, drinking wine, stealing, having homosexual relationships, adultery, and the like.⁹⁶

92 Zarrīnkūb, *Justujū dar tassawwuf* 262.

93 Zarrīnkūb, *Justujū dar tassawwuf* 262–63. See also al-Jazā’irī, *al-Anwār al-Nu’māniyya* iii, 343; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 116.

94 Moreen, The status of religious minorities 121–23.

95 *Khalīfat al-khulafā* acting on behalf of the shah handled Sufi affairs. For more information on this office, see Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-mulūk* 12; Savory, The office of *khalīfat al-khulafā* 497–502.

96 Naṣīrī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān* 56.

Conclusion

In their attempts to construct a Shi'i "orthodoxy" through the articulation of "true" narrative and public morality, Safavid political elites, along with mainstream religious authorities, were active in appropriating the domain of culture by making effective use of all religious infrastructures and rhetorical tools available to them. As a result, madrasas acted not only as an institution in the transmission of religious knowledge and the social construction of collective memory, but also played an important role in retrieving and reconstructing the Shi'a's own past, and hence their distinct identity within the flux of Muslim religo-cultural identity.

During Safavid rule, the cultural memory of the Shi'a was constantly reconstructed in the context of current circumstances and perceptions. The rise of the *shari'a*-minded Shi'i scholars in Safavid society was a notable force thanks to their articulation of a set of discourses that challenged the role and position of extremist supporters of the Safavids. These discourses simultaneously claimed authority over the interpretation of the realm of meanings associated with what was considered "true" Shi'ism, as well as the role of past heroes and practices among unconventional socio-religious, spiritual and intellectual groups. In the ongoing struggle over the power to define and control the assumed right belief, the dominant discourse sought to claim authority by using the categories of religiously permitted and forbidden to refer to religio-cultural practices. Thus they imposed their religious outlook within the public sphere.

The Safavid court's positioning in the cultural battle converged with that of the mainstream while maneuvering to manage the challenge of the extremist Shi'a. The Safavid court's image was increasingly invested in the religio-cultural arena as a strategy for neutralizing the extremists. The Safavid elite pursued this aim on the grounds of morality and religiosity, using religious-cultural institutions and praxis, e.g. commemorative rituals and the madrasas, as weapons for discrediting revolutionary Shi'ism and non-conformist schools of thought. As learning centers madrasas were, however, first and foremost places for transmitting the curriculum and textbooks considered "orthodox" by the elite who sponsored intellectual and cultural activities, a topic argued in the next chapter.

The Safavid Curriculum

Conflicting Visions, Contested Triumphs

Despite the fact that some people continued to receive their education outside of madrasas – and indeed no madrasa prescribed a fixed course of study, due to the dominance of jurisprudence in Safavid learning circles, especially during the first half of the rule of the Safavids – students aspiring to become *mujtahids* or *muḥaddith* had a relatively structured curriculum to follow. The nature of this curriculum reflects both the dominant discourse and the complicated connections between knowledge and power in education in early modern Iran. Safavid madrasas helped establish the domination or exclusion of certain thoughts and subjects and, in so doing, they defined the intellectual preferences of the leading religious authorities as well as those of political elite. The Safavid curriculum also reflects historical changes in the sources of Safavid legitimacy as well as conflicts amongst religious scholars, a topic examined in more detail in Chapter 6.

A survey of primary sources shows that the curriculum of Safavid madrasas underwent significant changes during the 220 years of Safavid rule. I will delineate some of these changes and identify the period's dominant discourses and competing intellectual groups. Specifically, I am interested in how Safavid pedagogues defined and evaluated knowledge and whether Safavid higher learning was receptive or responsive to the exigencies of the changing times.

Safavid Scholars and the Concept of Knowledge (*‘ilm*)

In the Quran and in most traditions cited in Shi‘i *ḥadīth* collections, *‘ilm* (knowledge) is not defined by or limited to certain branches of learning. Even some Muslim scholars believed knowledge is indefinable.¹ Muḥammad Bāqir

1 For a list of definitions of *‘ilm* given by Muslim scholars see Rosenthal, *Knowledge triumphant* 50–69. He quotes from a book on Avicennian philosophy wherein knowledge is adjudged incapable of definition, because knowledge “is a condition of the soul which he who is alive finds in his soul at the beginning without any equivocation ...” (*Knowledge triumphant* 50). Some Muslim scholars, however, tried to define knowledge. For example, Ghazālī holds, “Knowledge is that through which one knows,” while al-Bāqilānī maintains “knowledge is

Majlisī, however, quotes a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet himself identifies learning as an act of meditating, listening, remembering, and disseminating. He reports that the Prophet was asked, “What is Knowledge?” to which he replied, “To keep silent.” He was asked, “Then?” The Prophet answered, “To listen attentively.” “Then?” He said, “To remember.” He was asked: “Then?” He said, “To act upon (what is learned).” He was asked, “Then?” He said, “To propagate.”²

Many Safavid scholars, particularly theologians, jurists, and *ḥadīth* transmitters – like the majority of their counterparts throughout Islamic history – identified *‘ilm* as knowledge of the scriptural and religious sciences. Even such Safavid scholars as the traditionalist Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1626) restricted knowledge to knowledge of the Quran and specifically the science of *khabar*. In fact, Astarābādī argues that certitude (*yaqīn*), the ultimate goal of learning and knowing, derives exclusively from the sayings of the the Imams, because the Imams are the only ones believed to have thorough knowledge of the divinely revealed truth.³ Thus, he criticizes the rational, analytical, and speculative approach to the most important learning topic, i.e. Islamic jurisprudence as studied by scholars such as Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, Shaykh al-Mufīd, Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, and ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325) and their students.⁴ In his *Risāla-yi inṣāf*, Muḥsin Fayḍ echoes Astarābādī’s concern and expresses wonder and disappointment that “a community (i.e. the Shi’a) blessed with having the best Prophet to guide them, who had left them a Book and a family (the *thaqalayn*) and who possessed the most comprehensive knowledge of revelation, were still looking for knowledge in books written by the scholars of by-gone nations (*umam-i sālifa*).”⁵ But as I argue presently and in chapter six the

congnition (*ma’rifā*.)” Nāṣir Khusrow writes, “Knowledge is perception (*tasawwur*) on our part of a thing according to its reality.” Finally, Ibn ‘Arabī argues that, “knowledge is a light thrust by God into the heart.” For more definitions of *‘ilm*, see Rosenthal, *Knowledge triumphant* 50–69. See also al-Zarnūjī, *Ta’līm al-muta’allim* 57; Ibn Jamā’a, *Tadhkirat al-sāmi’* 27–38; Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* i, 198.

2 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* ii, 28.

3 Astarābādī, *al-Fawā’id al-madaniyya* 241–42. Yet as argued by Gleave, Astarābādī offered a flexible concept of *‘ilm* in which knowledge was divided into various categories based on both the object of knowledge and the quality of this knowledge. For more information see Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam* 88, 100–01.

4 Astarābādī accused ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī of being an innovator (*ahl al-bid’a*) for having introduced Sunni ḥadīth methodology. He also considered ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī responsible for introducing the strict division of believers into two categories, *mujtahids* and *muqallids* (emulators). For more information see Astarābādī, *al-Fawā’id al-madaniyya* 4, 18, 30 ff.

5 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Risāla-yi al-inṣāf* 186–87.

above-mentioned scholars' commitment to Akhbarism did not make them followers of the apparent meaning of the Quran and Imamī traditions.

On the other hand, a number of Safavid thinkers, mainly philosophers, argued that the term *'ilm* is not confined to religious disciplines – it must be understood in the widest sense possible. For example, Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā and also as Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn,⁶ defines knowledge as a mode of being (*naḥw min al-wujūd*).⁷ In effect, he offers an ontological investigation of the nature of human knowledge, which involves an analysis and description of the way of knowing. In his *al-Mabda' wa l-ma'ād*, he writes, "Our primary method for acquiring knowledge is a reconciliation between the method of theosist philosophers and the Sufi inclination of the gnostics."⁸ Mullā Ṣadrā's thought will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Generally speaking Mullā Ṣadrā rejects the representational theory of knowledge (*al-'ilm al-irtisāmī*) and knowledge-by-acquisition (*al-'ilm al-ḥuṣūlī*) on the grounds of their insufficiency and inability to yield certainty (*yaqīn*).⁹

Towards Reconstructing the Curriculum of the Safavid Madrasas

Before discussing the curriculum of the Safavid madrasas, I briefly introduce the sources that I have used in my attempt to reconstruct the contents. Amongst the most important primary sources are biographical accounts, chronicles, and autobiographies left by some Safavid scholars; European travellers' records; *waqfiyyas*; and *ijāzas*, or licenses to transmit *ḥadīth* and other religious sciences. All of these materials variously furnish us with information on subject matters and textbooks studied in the madrasas of Safavid era. However, the *ijāza* in its various types, including certificates of *samā'a* (audition), *qirā'a* (recitation), *riwāya* (narration), *mashyakha* (an autobiographical report of a scholar that lists his teachers and subjects studied with each), and *ijāza al-tadrīs wa al-iftā'* (licenses to teach and to issue legal opinions) remains

6 In his *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī: His life and works and the sources for Safavid philosophy*, Sajjad Rizvi presents a comprehensive biography of Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī that examines his influences and legacy as well.

7 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār* iv, 278–309, 500–03; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* 108–10.

8 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mabda' wa al-ma'ād* 278.

9 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Kitāb al-mashā'ir*, ed. and trans. Corbin as *Le Livre des pénétrations* 24. In his *Knowledge in later Islamic philosophy, Mullā Ṣadrā on existence, intellect, and intuition*, Ibrahim Kalin offers a thorough discussion of Mullā Ṣadrā's definition of knowledge as a mode of being especially from page 195–245. For a comprehensive analysis of Mullā Ṣadrā's criticisms of various theories of knowledge see, Kalin, *Knowledge* 118–35.

the foremost source of information on the curriculum of Shi'ī higher learning and the transmission of knowledge in that era.

Normally the *mujīz* (the issuer of the *ijāza*) lists one work, or several, or at times a whole body of works that the *mujāz* (the recipient of the *ijāza*) has finished studying with him. The latter is called *al-ijāza al-kabīra*.¹⁰ Although many extant *ijāzas* issued by the Safavid 'ulamā' are brief and formulaic, they reveal the range of subjects and disciplines – both religious and rational – and particularly the various texts studied with the teacher that the licensee could in turn transmit. Copies of some of them can be found in volumes 104 to 107 of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār* and in several books of *ijāzas* written in the seventeenth century or later by prominent Shi'a scholars, including Majlisī's *Kitāb ijāzāt al-ḥadīth*. In his *al-Dharī'a*, Āqā Buzurg Tehrānī lists 806 *ijāzas* issued by the Shi'a 'ulamā' in the entry under *ijāza*.

Safavid and post-Safavid biographical sources, including *Amal al-āmil fī dhikr 'ulamā' Jabal 'Āmil* by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī (d. 1693), *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā' wa hiyāḍ al-fuḍalā'* by Mīrzā 'Abdullāh b. 'Isā Beg Tabrīzī-i Iṣfahānī known as Afandī (d. 1718), and *Rawḍāt al-jannāt fī aḥwāl al-'ulamā' wa al-sādāt* by Muḥammad Bāqir Khvānsārī (d. 1903), only occasionally mention the most important texts that an individual professor was authorized to teach. The authors of these biographical dictionaries were mainly concerned with showing the continuity of scholarship in certain branches of knowledge – they were not primarily concerned with the lives of individuals or with the madrasas in which they studied or taught. Rather, the biographers were interested in showing a scholar's contribution to a certain field of scholarship and how he became one of the authoritative transmitters of religious knowledge.¹¹

The autobiographies of Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1680), and Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1718), are also important sources for reconstructing the curriculum of the madrasa in the late Safavid period. These works usually refer to the textbooks and the various subjects their authors studied or taught in their formative years. European travellers' accounts also provide helpful information about religious scholars and institutions. In his travel account entitled *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse, et autres lieux de l'orient*, Jean Chardin, the famous French merchant who spent more than ten years in Iran, five of which he spent in Isfahan during the 1660s and 1670s, provides

10 For more information on the *ijāza* genre see Schmidtke, *Forms and function* 95–126; See also Stewart, *Capital, accumulation* 145–62, esp. 145–46; Stewart, *The doctorate of Islamic law* 45–90.

11 Kadi, *Biographical dictionaries* 93–122; Humphreys, *Islamic history* 190.

much information about the capital city of Isfahan – its population, libraries, mosques, and madrasas, and their curriculum and method of teaching. He also describes Safavid policies, the city's military organization and strength, economic institutions, finance, the justice system, and the like.

Although the deeds of endowment relating to madrasas rarely list the books studied, they are valuable for identifying the subjects, which were sponsored by the powerful wealthy elite. In other words, they reveal the contours of the dominant discourse in a given period. These documents not only reveal that the *wāqifs* were concerned with making sure the madrasas would continue operating, but they also outline the general content of the curriculum and occasionally even stipulate textbooks that were to be taught. For example, in the deeds of endowment of his madrasa, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn stipulated that the teacher must teach only religious sciences and should exclude philosophical sciences and *ḥikmat* (philosophy) from the curriculum.¹² In the deed we read,

... The professor must be present during the teaching days established for the madrasa and he should occupy himself with teaching and discussing religious sciences including prophetic traditions as well as sayings of the Imams, Quranic exegesis, jurisprudence, principles of religion as well as sources and theories of law and their ancillary sciences including Arabic language, syntax, morphology, logic, and all other sciences that their teaching and learning are lawfully permitted. He should teach them to the extent that is necessary and customary. At least one of his courses should be on one of the celebrated *ḥadīth* books. He should avoid discussing and teaching philosophical and Sufi works. He must do his best to make students focus on their studies and discussions and ensure that students advance further in their studies and also guarantee that the revenues of the endowments spend property according to the *waqf* stipulations...¹³

In the diploma marking the appointment of Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī, Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn also ordered that the professor of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī “must only teach religious sciences and transmit prophetic *ḥadīths* and Imamī *khabars*. He must avoid teaching rational sciences (*‘ulūm-i ‘aqlī*) and philosophy.”¹⁴ Statements like these indicate the extent to which the ruling elites were concerned with maintaining the religious orientation of the

12 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf* 169.

13 Sipintā, *Tārikhcha-yi awqāf*, 169.

14 See Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn's *ḥukm* to Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī in appendix I.

madrasas' curriculum. They also demonstrate the significant role played by *wāqifs* with respect to the curriculum.

In addition to dictating curriculum guidelines, *wāqifs* exercised their influence through the appointment or discharge of professors. Thus the content of the curriculum was a consequence of the close association between the ruling authorities and educational activities. The *waqfiyya* documents prove that education sponsored by the ruling elite is not merely related to power but is intertwined with it. Power instigated culture but it also, through the madrasa organization, defined and shaped the direction of intellectual debates in each period. As Michel Foucault argues, power and knowledge are inseparable and "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power."¹⁵

Although Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, along with other madrasas built by some members of the Safavid household and wealthy individuals, set the official direction in higher learning, they did not monopolize education in Safavid Isfahan. As in all Islamic societies, education was tied to individual scholars who transmitted texts to students in a variety of places. Some scholars avoided the court and shunned teaching in madrasas built by political elites altogether, establishing their own teaching circles. An example of this independent model is the teaching circle of Muḥsin Fayḍ in Kāshān.¹⁶ Some madrasa teachers even taught subjects that were excluded from the curriculum of the madrasa in which they were appointed to teach. For example, 'Abd al-Nabī Qazwīnī reports that Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī, the teacher of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, taught *Sharḥ-i Ishārāt*. He does not mention where these teaching sessions were held or which commentary on Ibn Sinā's *Ishārāt wa al-tanbihāt* was taught.¹⁷

Munyat al-murīd by al-Shahīd al-Thānī,¹⁸ *Farā'id al-fawā'id fi aḥwāl-i masājid wa madāris* (Precious information about the conditions of mosques and madrasas) written in the final years of Safavid rule by Muḥammad Zamān b. Kalb 'Alī Tabrizī, and *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* by Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī are also important sources for reconstructing the curriculum of Safavid madrasas.

15 Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 52.

16 For more information on his teaching circle see, Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi sharḥ-i ṣadr* 61–63.

17 Qazwīnī, *Tatmīm Amal al-āmil* 77–78.

18 As Devin Stewart argues, al-Shahīd al-Thānī never entered Safavid territory and never taught at a madrasa in Safavid Iran. His own experience studying and teaching was mainly in Sunni madrasas. Indeed *Munyat al-murīd* is mainly a reworked version of a Sunni pedagogical manual, *al-Durr al-naḍīd fi adab al-mufid wa-al-mustafid* by Badr al-Dīn al-Ghazzī (d. 1576). For more information on this work, see Stewart, Notes on Zayn al-Dīn 235–70.

In *al-Anwār al-nu‘māniyya*, al-Jazā‘irī offers invaluable insights into the madrasa curriculum in the early decades of the eighteenth century in a chapter entitled “Nūr fi aḥwāl al-‘ālim wa al-muta‘allim” (Elucidating the conditions of the teacher and the student).¹⁹ Although the requisite materials exist in abundance, in-depth research on most scholarly disciplines is virtually nonexistent. In fact, it can be argued that, with the advent of the Safavids, a new and dynamic era of intellectual inquiry was inaugurated in Shi‘i higher learning. Today, almost entire libraries of the manuscripts produced over the first two centuries of Safavid rule remain practically unread. What follows can be described only as a prefatory undertaking.

The Uṣūlīs and the Curriculum

The advent of a Shi‘i polity provided Shi‘i ‘ulamā’ with the opportunity to implement some of their ideals. The religious scholars and in particular the *fuqahā’* (jurists) of the sixteenth century were concerned with elaborating legal and ritual details that had strong socio-political implications, training the next generation of scholars, and spreading Twelver Shi‘ism among the subjects of the newly formed Shi‘i empire. Early Safavid rulers in turn needed religious scholars who could not only convert Persians to Shi‘ism but also could develop a standard religious creed and Shi‘i legal system in order to meet the needs of Safavid society. Hossein Modarressi Tabataba‘i states that leading Shi‘i scholars of the early Safavid period recast knowledge of Sunni jurisprudence in order to meet the changing needs of their societies and their own group as legal experts.²⁰ As Rula Abisaab argues, the ‘Āmilī jurists were perceived as more facile in using *ijtihād* to forge innovation and in assisting the Safavids in their project of building a Shi‘i polity where none had existed before.²¹

As discussed briefly in chapter one, leading among the religious scholars of the sixteenth century was ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-‘Ālī al-Karakī (d. 1534). He encouraged the ‘ulamā’ to become socially committed and wrote extensively on matters such as the land-tax (*kharāj*), holy war (*jihād*), the scope and scale of a

19 al-Jazā‘irī, *al-Anwār al-nu‘māniyya* iii, 338–80

20 Modarressi, *Introduction to Shi‘i law*, 49. Elsewhere, Modarressi states that the early Safavid scholars advocated a socio-political role for the jurists and had little compunction about associating with temporal rulers or receiving financial rewards from them. Modarressi, *Kharaj in Shi‘i law* 47, 54, 56–58

21 Glassen, Schah Isma‘il I 254–68. For more information see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 27–30, ff; Allouche, *The Origins and Development* 146–50.

mujtahid's power, his socio-political role, and the permissibility of performing the Friday prayer during the occultation of the Imam. Al-Karakī believed that during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, the most knowledgeable and just scholar – who in religious literature is called the *mujtahid* – became the deputy of the Imam in all issues pertinent to the deputyship. Later scholars excluded responsibilities on matters such as executing murderers and penal laws from the scope of the *nā'ib al-Imam's* duties. But it was incumbent upon the Shi'a to obey his orders.²² Ismā'il and his immediate successors relied on the 'ulamā' to support their major policy decisions, and the *Uṣūlī mujtahids*, who regarded Islamic law as an ever evolving, responsive, and assimilating sphere of activity, cooperated with the political establishment in developing new rulings to meet the exigencies of the time. Consequently, the *Uṣūlī mujtahids* played an active role in directing educational and religious institutions as well as institutionalization of Shi'ism in Iran during the sixteenth century.

The dominance of Usulism is reflected in both scholarly outputs during the early period of Safavid rule and in the *ijāzas* issued by *mujtahids* to their students.²³ *Ijāzas* issued by Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī, Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān Qaṭīfī and al-Shahīd al-Thānī are relatively long and detailed documents in which the *mujīz* authorized the *mujāz* to transmit an extensive list of works mainly by Ḥillī *mujtahids*. The authors included Jamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Fahd al-Ḥillī; Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Makkī, known as al-Shahīd al-Awwal; Abū Ṭālib Muḥammad b. al-Muṭahhar, known as Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn; Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf b. Muṭahhar; and the works of earlier *mujtahids* and *ḥadīth* transmitters including Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, al-Shaykh al-Raḍī, 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Barrāj, Ibn Zuhra, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb Kulaynī, and Ibn Babawayh.²⁴ In the *ijāzas* issued by al-Shahīd Thānī, he authorizes his

22 For more information see Kadivar, *Nazariyahā-yi dawlat* 15–16.

23 For a list of the legal works produced by early Safavid scholars, see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 156–58. On page 159 she also lists the epistles written by al-Karakī and Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Ṣamad on legal issues. Al-Shahīd al-Thānī's son, Shaykh Ḥasan, issued an extended (*kabīra*) *ijāza* to Sayyid Najm b. Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī in which he critically reconstructed the whole scholarly learning tradition and networks of the Imamī scholars up until his own time. See Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* cvi, 3–79. Stewart lists the extant Twelver manuals of Jurisprudence from the time of al-Mufīd and the ones written before him. See *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 133–43.

24 Āqā Buzurg Tehrānī lists eighteen *ijāzas* issued by al-Karakī. See *al-Dhari'a* i, 212–16. He also lists nine *ijāzas* issued by al-Shahīd Thānī (*al-Dhari'a* i, 193–94). The texts of some of these *ijāzas*, as well as some of Qaṭīfī's *ijāzas*, are printed in the final volumes of Majlisī's *Bihār al-anwār*. For al-Karakī's *ijāzas* to 'Alī b. 'Abd al-'Alī al-Maysī, Ḥusayn b. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Astarābādī, Ḥusayn b. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī,

students to transmit his own works and the works written by al-Ḥillī and Karakī scholars.²⁵

In his *Munyat al-murīd fī adab al-mufīd wa-al-mustafīd*, al-Shahīd al-Thānī offers one of the most comprehensive sequences of courses to be taken by a student of religious sciences in general, and a student of law in particular.²⁶ Before discussing the sequence of courses to be studied, he classifies sciences into the fundamental (*aṣlīyya*), the non-fundamental (*farʿīyya*) and the forbidden, and this classification forms the foundation of his ideal plan of studies.²⁷ The fundamental sciences are:

- 1) *Kalām*, or the principles of religion upon which other religious sciences are constructed because it leads to the knowledge of God, his prophet and vicegerent; through *kalām* one is able to know truth from falsehood or right beliefs from wrong ones.
- 2) The three branches of Quranic sciences: *tajwīd*, *qirāʾa* and *tafsīr*.

Shaykh Bābāʾ Shaykh ʿAlī, and a number of other scholars, see Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cv, 40–83. Majlisī also recorded some of Qaṭīfī’s *jjāzas*, most of which were issued to scholars of Persian and Turkish origins, in which he authorized his students to transmit books on traditional and rational sciences produced by scholars such as Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan al-Dharaq and Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīlī, who were students of Ḥillī scholars, and the works of earlier *mujtahids* such as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī. See Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cv, 85–123.

25 For al-Shahīd Thānī’s *jjāzas*, see Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cv, 137–90.

26 *Munyat al-murīd* similar to other Islamic didactic manuals is prescriptive and not a descriptive text, thus, it may not reflect the realities of academic life. As mentioned earlier *Munyat al-murīd* is mainly a reworked version of *al-Durr al-naḍīd* by Badr al-Dīn al-Ghazzī.

27 Other Muslim pedagogues also classified knowledge. See for example, al-Zarnūjī, *Taʿlīm al-mutaʿallīm* 64; Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* iii, 74, 103, 111 ff. Ibn Khaldūn explains why the so-called forbidden sciences should not be taught. He states that “sorcery should not be allowed because of the damage it causes to human relationships. Alchemy, even though it cannot be a rational science, might reach its goal in the same way as all the magical sciences do, it should be forbidden.” He adds, “same with astrology. It often produces the expectation that signs of crisis will appear in a dynasty. This encourages the enemies and rivals of the dynasty to attack it and revolt against it. We have observed much of the sort. It is, therefore, necessary that astrology be forbidden to all civilized people, because it may cause harm to religion and dynasty” (*The Muqaddimah* iii, 157, 159, 262–3). In his *al-Durr al-naḍīd*, Badr al-Dīn al-Ghazzī (d. 1577) also ranks the various fields of knowledge according to their importance. For information on al-Ghazzī’s classification of knowledge see Moore, *The role of the madrasah* 122–27.

- 3) The two kinds of sciences of *ḥadīth: riwāya* and *dirāya*, the whole purpose of these sciences is to know the wording, meaning, and whether a *ḥadīth* is authentic or fabricated.
- 4) Jurisprudence and all its branches (*abwāb*) including transaction, *ḥalāl*, *ḥarām*, and legal rulings concerning women.

Arabic language, its syntax and morphology, rhetoric, *badīʿ* (poetic technique) and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, as well as ethics, astronomy, trigonometry and mathematics, are described as the non-fundamental sciences by al-Shahīd al-Thānī. He classifies magic, some philosophical enquires, and anything leading to skepticism, astrology, *raml*, and divination as forbidden sciences. He argues that studying lyrics (*ghazal*), or nonreligious themed poetry, although studying them would be a waste of time, is permitted. He also maintains that studying history, various branches of physical sciences, engineering, and mathematics are permitted. He emphasizes that the focus of one's education should be mastering religious sciences first and foremost.²⁸

After identifying different kinds of sciences and categorizing them based on their worth and significance, he goes on to recommend a sequence of study as follows: after memorizing the Quran one should learn the Arabic language and its related sciences including grammar and morphology. One should then set about studying *kalām*, then *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and then *dirāyat al-ḥadīth*.²⁹ Finally, one should discuss Quranic verses and prophetic traditions, particularly the ones in which legal issues are discussed, and then he can study books on

28 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 383. Similar to other scholars who classified Islamic sciences, al-Shahīd al-Thānī describes an idealized hierarchy indicative of the value of religious knowledge with the most important fields being the study of the Quran and ḥadīth and the study of law following them. However, in reality, many chose to concentrate their academic training in the field of Islamic law because of the high demand for it in everyday life.

29 Elsewhere in the Muslim world scholars such as Sanūsī and the Moroccan scholar al-Ḥasan ibn Mas'ūd al-Yūsī also advanced theological reasoning over blind imitation (*taqlīd*). Yūsī writes, "Some theologians and the majority of ḥadīth scholars are of the view that imitation is sufficient. Its essence is to be certain of what has been heard from the leaders of religion, without any doubt or perplexity or hesitation I say: This, God willing, is the correct position, since the aim is to believe the truth and this has occurred. Even if one were to say that the aim is to have insight (*baṣīra*) then we say that this too has occurred, for we say that the meaning of having insight is to believe the truth while knowing that it is the truth in such a manner than one is not among those who merely surmise or guess." Cited in El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history* 208. For more information on Sanūsī's and Yūsī's works and views see El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history* 173–231.

jurisprudence. After mastering those subjects, students should next improve their debate skills to discuss legal issues and topics as well as their vocabulary via debate, reasoning and inference.

Upon mastering all the aforementioned topics, one can then study *tafsīr* because all those sciences are preparatory for this very important branch of learning. Only after purifying one's heart and gaining mastery in all religious sciences can one study philosophical books including physics and metaphysics, mathematics, and ethics. But if somebody does not have time or is not physically fit, or has a career or a business that prevents him from pursuing all those branches of learning, al-Shahīd al-Thānī advises that he should focus on studying jurisprudence as well as purifying his heart.³⁰ Prior to al-Shahīd al-Thānī, Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. 'Alī b. al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 1325) had already briefly described the course of study that a student should take in chapter 11 of his *Nahjat al-mustarshīdīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*. He advises students to first learn Arabic grammar, followed by Quranic commentaries, *ḥadīth* literature, *'ilm al-rijāl*, and the consensus (*ijmā'*) cases, so that he does not give incorrect legal pronouncements.³¹

From the long list of *ijāzas* issued by Safavid scholars, here I analyze several *ijāzas*, including those issued by 'Alī b. Hilāl al-Karakī al-Iṣfahānī and two other scholars, to see if they have followed the plans of study suggested by either al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī or al-Shahīd al-Thānī. After praising Malik Muḥammad b. Sultan Ḥusayn Iṣfahānī, as a dearest brother and a virtuous, consummate, unequalled, and outstanding scholar in all scholarly fields from jurisprudence to *ḥikmat*, 'Alī b. Hilāl al-Karakī confers upon Malik Muḥammad the task of transmitting all the books that his own professors – namely, Sayyid Tāj al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Sayyid Ja'far al-'Āmilī, Aḥmad al-Bayḍāwī, Aḥmad b. Khātūn al-'Aynāthī al-'Āmilī, Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān al-Qaṭīfī, and 'Alī b. 'Abd al-'Ālī al-Karakī – had permitted him to transmit. These included works by al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, al-Shahīd al-Thānī, Zayn al-Dīn b. al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Hilāl, Jamāl al-Dīn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. al-Muṭahhar, and Najm al-Dīn b. al-Qāsim Ja'far b. Sa'īd al-Ḥillī. Al-Karakī also entrusts Malik Muḥammad with transmitting his *fatwās*. He started writing the *ijāza* while in Mashhad and finished it a few weeks later in Isfahan in May 11, 1576.³²

In an *ijāza* issued by Aḥmad b. Ni'amtallāh b. Aḥmad al-'Āmilī for Abdallāh b. Ḥusayn al-Tustarī in 1580, the *mujīz* starts by praising the *mujāz* for accomplishing the arduous journey to Mecca and Medina. He then permits the *mujāz*

30 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 386–89.

31 For more on his view see Cooper, 'Allāma al-Ḥillī 243–48.

32 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* cvi, 80–3.

to transmit all the subjects including principles (*uṣūl*) to branches (*furūʿ*), religious and rational sciences, as well as books of earlier scholars. These earlier books include works by Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Tūsī; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Ḥillī al-ʿIjlī, known as Ibn Idrīs al-Ḥillī, who is known for his extensive use of rational reasoning, unorthodox *fatwas*, and in particular his critiques of al-Shaykh al-Tūsī; Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān; al-Shaykh al-Mufid; Ibn Bābawayh; al-Kulaynī; and Qāḍī ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. al-Barrāj, who was the deputy of al-Shaykh al-Tūsī in Syria. Also included were the works of Abu al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Karājakī, Najm al-Dīn Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar and his cousin Najīb al-Dīn Yaḥyā, Raḍī al-Dīn Abu al-Qāsim, Jamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Ṭāwūs, Jamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Fahad, Miqdād b. ʿAbdallāh al-Sayūrī, Muhammad b. Idrīs, and Muhammad b. al-Makkī, known as al-Shahīd al-Awwal. In addition to scholarly outputs of all the above prominent scholars, Aḥmad b. Niʿmatalāh al-ʿĀmilī confers on al-Tustarī the right to transmit all of his works, including his glosses as well as his original works, the way he (the *mujāz*) deems appropriate.³³

Both of the abovementioned *mujāz*s operated much like the majority of Safavid scholars who issued *ijāzas*: although they did not establish the chains of transmission in detail, they acknowledge the fact that their learning has been authenticated by their teachers whose learning had been authenticated by their teachers in turn; hence they are able to guarantee the veracity of what is transmitted. In addition to authenticating his learning, the *mujāz* also would secure his place within the network of Shīʿa scholars by soliciting and accumulating *ijāzas*. Finally, the *ijāza* system recapitulates the discourse favored by the elites in each age through constant recognition and accreditation of the most celebrated scholarly legacy of Shīʿa scholars in the fields considered the most

33 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* cvi, 94–6. Majlisī also includes an *ijāza* issued by Ibn Abī al-Luṭf al-Maqdisī al-Shafīʿī, to Bahāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad al-ʿĀmilī. al-Maqdisī gives the *mujāz* permission to transmit what he has read or heard from religious and rational sciences, principles and branches, prose and poem, and ḥadīth literature including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muṣlim*, commentaries by Naṣīr al-Dīn ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar al-Bayḍāwī, *al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī, and also works by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad. See *Bihār al-anwār* cvi, 97–100. Bahāʾ al-Dīn Muhammad al-ʿĀmilī received this *ijāza* from a Sunni scholar when he was practicing *taqīyya* or religious dissimulation during his stay in Jerusalem. Devin Stewart argues that historically the Shīʿis' survival in a hostile Sunni environment depended on their practice of *taqīyya*. Shīʿi Muslims maintain that the principle of *taqīyya* is firmly grounded in Islamic law and allows them to conceal their religious identity to avoid persecutions. Many Shīʿi scholars, who lived or visited the Ottoman realm including Zayn al-Dīn and Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī practiced it as a necessity of life. For more information see Stewart, *Taqīyyah* as performance 8.

beneficial by the religious authorities of each era. Based on the information that the primary sources, including the above partially translated *ijāzas* furnish us, the teaching of Islamic law became the chief object of the learning activity, the other subjects being offered as ancillaries to this subject during the first half of Safavid rule.

An exploratory survey of the above *ijāzas* and a number of other *ijāzas* recorded in the aforementioned primary sources reveals that the following works were the main textbooks constantly studied by Safavid students: Ibn Idrīs's *al-Sarā'ir al-hāwī li-tahrīr al-fatāwī*, mostly known as *al-Sarā'ir*; Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, or al-Muḥaqqiq al-Awwal's works, including his *Sharā'i' al-Islām fī masā'il al-ḥalāl wa-al-ḥarām*, *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi'*, and *al-Mu'tabar fī sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*; commentaries and glosses written on *Sharā'i' al-Islām*; 'Allama al-Ḥillī's works including his *Irshād al-adhhān ilā aḥkām al-īmān*, *Talkhīṣ al-marām fī ma'rifat al-aḥkām*, *Tadhkirat al-fuqahā'*, *Qawā'id al-aḥkām fī ma'rifat al-ḥalāl wa-al-ḥarām*, *jāmi' al-maqāṣid aw-al-aḥkām fī ma'rifat al-ḥalāl wa-al-ḥarām*, *Manāḥij al-yaqīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, *Nihāyat al-aḥkām fī ma'rifat al-aḥkām*, *Minhāj al-karāmah fī ithbāt al-Imama*, *Tahdhīb al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl*; as well as the works of his students including the books by Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, Sayyid 'Abd al-Karīm b. Ṭāwūs, and Ibn Sa'īd al-Ḥillī; works by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥillī, also known as Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn, many of which are commentaries on his father's works, were also studied widely.

Al-Shahīd al-Awwal's works including his *al-Lum'a al-Dimashqīya fī fiqh al-Imamīyya*, *al-Durra al-bāḥira min al-aṣḍāf al-tāhira*, *al-Qawā'id wa-al-fawā'id*, *al-Durūs al-shar'īya fī al-fiqh al-Imamīyya*, and his *Kitāb al-bayān*, among his other works, as well as works by Miqdād b. 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Ḥillī al-Suyyūrī (d. 1423) and Jamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ḥillī (d. 1437) were also read widely in Safavid madrasas. Al-Muḥaqqiq al-Thānī or al-Muḥaqqiq al-Karkī's works including his celebrated *Jāmi' al-maqāṣid fī sharḥ al-qawā'id*, *al-Kharājīyāt*, *Nafaḥāt al-lāhūt fī la'n al-jubbat wa-al-tāghūt*, and his *Rasā'il*, the works of his students including 'Alī al-Minshār, 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-'Āmilī, Ḥusayn b. Muhammad b. Makkī, Shaykh Aḥmad b. Muhammad b. Khātūn al-'Āmilī, Qāḍī Ṣafī al-Dīn 'Isā, 'Alī b. 'Abd al-'Alī al-'Āmilī al-Maysī, Sayyid Muhammad b. Abī Ṭālib Astarābādī, and Zayn al-Dīn b. Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-'Āmilī (d. 1559) known as al-Shahīd al-Thānī were also popular textbooks in Safavid madrasas.³⁴

34 As Abisaab noted the works of 'Āmilī scholars were mainly concerned with positive law (*furū'*), particularly acts of worship (*'ibādāt*) and contracts (*'uqūd*). She adds, "But by far the most extensive legal works circled around ritual purity and worship, ablution (*wuḍū'*), direction of prayer, and Friday prays" (*Converting Persia* 29).

Accounts given by the authors of biographical dictioneries also give us a sense of the topics and textbooks typically studied by a student. For example, al-Shahīd al-Thānī had studied *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi* (by al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī) and *al-Lum'a al-Dimashqīyya* (by al-Shahīd al-Awwal) and a number of other books by his own father. After his father's demise in 1519, he went to Mays to benefit from the teaching circle of 'Alī b. 'Abd al-'Alī al-Maysī and stayed there for eight years. In Mays he studied *Sharā'i' al-Islām* (by al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī), *Irshād al-adhhān* and *Qawā'id al-aḥkām* (both by al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī) with al-Maysī. Then al-Shahīd al-Thānī left for Karak to attend the teaching circle of Sayyid Ja'far al-Karakī. After a three-year sojourn in Karak, he traveled to Damascus to study with Shaykh Muhammad b. Makkī. While he was in Damascus, he studied *Saḥīḥ-i Muslim* and *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* with Shams al-Dīn b. Ṭulūn. In 1536 he went to Egypt, where he furthered his studies on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, geometry, prosody, medicine, *tafsīr* and logic while attending the teaching circles of prominent scholars there. Two year later, he went to Mecca in 1538; after performing hajj, he visited the holy shrines of Iraq in 1540. Next, he traveled to Jerusalem and obtained an *ijāza* to transmit ḥadīth from al-Shaykh Shams al-Dīn b. Abu al-Laṭīf al-Maqdisī. In 1543 he traveled to Constantinople, and finally settled in Baalbek and started teaching at the Nūriyya Madrasa.

At this point in his life, a certain al-Rūmī appointed him responsible for the Nūriyya Madrasa. He made another trip to the shrine cities of Iraq in 1546, and upon his return to Jubā' decided to live there for the rest of his life teaching and writing. Among his students were Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī al-'Āmilī (his son-in-law), al-Sayyid 'Alī al-Ḥusaynī al-Jazīnī al-'Āmilī, 'Alī b. Zuhra al-Jubā'ī, al-Sayyid Nūr al-Dīn al-Karakī, and Tāj al-Dīn b. Hilāl al-Jazā'iri. From the long list of his works that became textbooks in Safavid madrasas, the following works are particularly noteworthy: *Masālik al-afḥām fī tanqīḥ sharā'i' al-Islām*, and *al-Dirāyah: sharḥ al-bidāyah fī 'ilm al-dirāyah*.³⁵

The Curriculum of the Madrasas of Safavid Isfahan

In the madrasas of seventeenth-century Isfahan, religious scholars continued to render the sacred authority of the Quran and of Imāmī traditions into religious rulings and precepts. However, over the course of time theosophical notions found their way into the new generation of 'ulamā' which included Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631), Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1620), and their students. These scholars

35 For more information on him see al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, vii, 143–57; al-'Āmilī, *Amal al-āmil* i, 87; Tehrānī, *Ṭabaqāt 'alām* 90–92.

were polymaths and prolific scholars. They possessed deep knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence and all other religious and rational sciences as well as *ḥadīth* literature and Islamic mysticism.³⁶ For example, Shaykh Bahā'ī produced concise legal works such as *al-Ḥabl al-matīn fi aḥkām al-dīn*, *Mashriq al-shamsayn*, and *Jāmi'-i 'Abbāsī*, that gained great popularity amongst scholars.

Shaykh Bahā'ī also became known for his scholarship on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, Arabic grammar and morphology. His interest in the sciences is evident in works such as the astronomical treatise *Fī tashrīḥ al-aflāk* (Anatomy of the Heavens) and the summa of arithmetic, *Khulāṣat al-ḥisāb* (of which a German translation by G.H.L. Nesselmann was published as early as 1843). In addition to these, he wrote a book of divination (*Fāl-nāma*) and other works on the occult sciences. Bahā'ī was also a poet like Mīr Dāmād, and is best remembered for his two allegorical *mathnawīs*, *Nān wa ḥalwā* and *Shīr wa shakar*.³⁷ As for Mīr Dāmād, he was a prolific *mujtahid* and philosopher. Chief among his works ranks *al-Ufūq al-mubīn*, which has been the subject of numerous commentaries. Baḥr al-'Ulūm has written *ta'līqāt* (glosses) on it. In addition to producing important original philosophical works, Mīr Dāmād wrote commentaries on al-Kulaynī's *Kāfī* and al-Ṭūsī's *al-Istibṣār*.³⁸

The study of rational sciences and philosophical enquiries gained momentum in early and mid-seventeenth-century Iran. Safavid rulers supported theosophical and philosophical studies by various means including direct commissioning of philosophical works, provision of philosophers' stipends, and endowment of madrasas that specialized in teaching rational and intellectual sciences. For example, the Georgian military commander Allāhwirdī Khān founded the Madrasa-yi Khān, which was completed in 1615 and was estab-

36 These types of intellectual pursuits were also current in other parts of the Muslim world. In his *Islamic intellectual history in the seventeenth century: Scholarly currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*, Khaled El-Rouayheb explores the dynamics of *taḥqīq* or 'verification' conducted by Muslims scholars whether based on dialectical disputation and debate (*munāzara*), deep reading, or mystical illumination throughout the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. He argues that the study of books by Persian scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries on rational sciences including mathematics, philosophy, medicine, *kalām*, and logic began to be studied widely in Ottoman scholarly circles, and in fact the study of mathematics, medicine and philosophy was considered a religious obligation. For more information see El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history* 13, 17 ff.

37 For more on Mīr Dāmād, see Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* vii, 56–84; Mudarris Tabrizī, *Rayḥānat al-adab* ii, 382–98; Baḥrānī, *Lu'lu'āt al-Baḥrayn* 16–23; Newman, *Towards a re-consideration* 165–99.

38 For lists of Mīr Dāmād's works, with information on editions, see al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a* xlv, 113–15; Mudarris Tabrizī, *Rayḥānat al-adab* viii, 56–62.

lished with the express purpose of teaching philosophy (*ḥikmat*) and science. Allāhwirdī Khān's son, Imam Qulī Khān (d. 1633), the powerful governor of Fars, asked Mullā Ṣadrā to move to Shiraz and start teaching here.³⁹

Shah 'Abbās II (d. 1666) invited to his court the philosopher Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī (d. 1669), who was a student of Mīr Fīndīrīskī (d. 1640).⁴⁰ 'Abbās' II grand vizier, Sayyid Ḥusayn Khalīfa Sulṭān, nicknamed Sultan al-'ulamā' (d. 1654), supported the philosophers and mystically-inclined traditionists as well.⁴¹ Apparently Khalīfa Sulṭān's social standing and political influence spelled the demise of the once-prominent émigré jurists because he patronized the Persian clerical elite.⁴²

The philosophically-minded clerical elites continued to enjoy the support of the Safavid court during the later decades of the seventeenth century. The predominance of mystically-oriented philosophers in the intellectual scene of the second half of the seventeenth-century and onwards manifests clearly in the biographies of the twenty-five eminent scholars of the reign of Shāh 'Abbās II in Shāmlū's *Qīṣaṣ al-khāqānī*.⁴³ This circle enjoyed the patronage of Sulṭān al-'ulamā', and after his death, that of Shāh 'Abbās II. Its scholars included Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī,⁴⁴ Āqā Ḥusayn Khvānsārī (d. 1689),⁴⁵ Mullā 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī (d. 1662), Mullā Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī, and his Qāḍī Sa'īd Qumī,

39 For more on Mullā Ṣadrā's life and this madrasa, see Rizvi, *Philosophy and mysticism* 224–46.

40 Qazwīnī, *Abbās-nāma* 184–85.

41 Sulṭān al-'ulamā' was a student of Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī and Mīr Dāmād, himself a well-known scholar who wrote a number of books such as a commentary on *al-Rawḍat al-bahīyaya* by al-Shahīd al-Thānī. He was the grand vizier under 'Abbās I, a position that he continued under Shāh Ṣafī for two years. Khvājagī Iṣfahānī, *Khulāṣat al-siyar* 40–41. Khalīfa Sulṭān's appointment to the position of the grand vizier was resisted by Mīrzā Qāḍī, the *Shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan, whom 'Abbās II dismissed due to strong animosity between him and Mullā Ḥasan 'Alī Shūshtarī. Some scholars maintain the dismissal of Mīrzā Qāḍī signified the onset of the decline of the influence of the dogmatic 'ulamā'. For more information, see Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 148.

42 Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 101.

43 Shāmlū, *Qīṣaṣ al-khāqānī* 183–201.

44 In 1064/1654 'Abbās II commissioned Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī (d. 1660) to translate *Man lā yaḥḍarauh al-faqīh*, the *ḥadīth* compilation of Ibn Bābawayh (d. 992), on which Majlisī had already written a commentary for 'Abbās II in 1653. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries many fundamental Shi'i texts were translated into Persian. Although Persians had some familiarity with Arabic language, 'ulamā's translation of religious texts into Persian resulted in forms of indigenized Islamic thought and practice specific to the Shi'a.

45 Naṣrābādī, *Tadhkira* 152.

(d. 1692). Qumī was also a student of Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī and ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī. He incurred the wrath of Shāh Sulaymān who imprisoned him for a time in the fortress of Alamūt.⁴⁶ Mullā ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī (d. 1662), Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Mu’min Khurāsānī, known as Muḥaqqiq-i Sabzawārī, and Muḥaqqiq-i Sabzawārī, the latter two simultaneously held the two important positions of *Shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan and the *Imam* of the Friday prayer for a long time, were also held in high esteem by the shah and Sulṭān al-‘ulamā’. Shāh ‘Abbās II made Sabzawārī the *mutawallī* of the madrasa-yi Mullā ‘Abdullāh.⁴⁷ Muḥammad Tunkābunī and Mīr Rafī‘ al-Dīn Nā’inī were also active during the reign of Shāh Sulaymān (1667–1694). Shāh Sulaymān entrusted Āqā Ḥusayn Khvānsārī with various assignments.⁴⁸ Shāh ‘Abbās II had appointed him as the *mutawallī* of the Madrasa-yi Jadda. Khvānsārī wrote commentaries on Ibn Sīnā’s books and a number of legal texts.⁴⁹

Although often short, *ijāzas* issued by Safavid scholars during the first half of the seventeenth century are helpful in reconstructing the madrasa curriculum of Safavid Isfahan. These documents reveal that philosophical works were included alongside the *Uṣūlī*-oriented works and *ḥadīth* collections in the curriculum. For example, Mīr Dāmād issued an *ijāza* to his son-in-law, Aḥmad b. Zayn al-‘Abidīn ‘Alawī, granting him permission to transmit a number of books on the rational sciences, including his own books, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, *al-Īmāzāt wa sharīfāt*, and *al-Taqdīsāt*, as well as a part of Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Shifā’* and parts of his *Ishārāt wa al-tanbihāt* including the commentary.⁵⁰ As for legal and other religious sciences, Mīr Dāmād permitted his son-in-law to transmit *al-Ṭahāra*, a part of *Qawā’id al-aḥkām* by ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī and the commentary on it, part of the *Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī, and a *ḥāshiya* on this same book.⁵¹

Mīr Dāmād also issued an *ijāza* to Sayyid Aḥmad al-‘Āmīlī, conferring upon him the right to transmit parts of Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Shifā’* (*Fann al-burhān*) and his

46 Naṣrābādī, *Tadhkira* 168.

47 Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyī’ al-sinīn* 523; Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* ii, 246; Mullā Kamāl, *Tārīkh-i Mullā Kamāl* 102.

48 Mudarris, *Rayḥānat al-adab* v, 239.

49 On Khvānsārī’s books, see Shāmlū, *Qiṣaṣ al-khāqānī* ii, 36; Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā’* ii, 64. Among his students were ‘Alī Riḍā Tajallī, Muḥammad ‘Alī Shūshtarī, and Khvānsārī’s two sons. In his *Tadhkira*, Naṣrābādī mentions the names of a number of Khvānsārī’s students. Naṣrābādī, *Tadhkira* 157, 168–69, 174–76, 185, 194; Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* iii, 162–65.

50 ‘Alawī wrote a commentary on Mīr Dāmād’s *Kitāb al-qabasāt* that has been published in 1997.

51 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cvi, 152–54.

own books.⁵² Chardin, the French traveller, reports that Safavid scholars were teaching Aristotle; the book was not read in direct translation but rather taught through Avicenna's abridged and interpreted version. Plato and his predecessors were of little account. He also reports that the philosophy of Pythagoras was more familiar, particularly among the Sufis. According to Chardin, the so-called foreign sciences, like philosophy and medicine, which formed part of a learned education, were most often studied in the teachers' homes, as was literature when it was considered a field apart from the Islamic sciences.⁵³

Shaykh Bahā'ī issued an *ijāza* to Sayyid Aḥmad al-ʿAmilī granting him permission to transmit the Shiʿa canonical *ḥadīth* collections, known as *al-kutub al-arbaʿa*, his own books including his *Tafsīr*; *al-Urwat al-wuthqā*, *Mashriq al-shamsayn*, *Arbaʿīn*, and a number of other books.⁵⁴ Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī issued an *ijāza* to Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Yazdī, the brother of Mīrzā Qāḍī, permitting him to transmit both the religious and rational sciences, and in particular *ḥadīth* books, including *al-kutub al-arbaʿa* by the three Muḥammads (i.e., Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Babawayh al-Qumī, and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī).⁵⁵

The teachings of scholars such as Ḥasan ʿAlī Shūshtarī (d. 1664), however, centered on religious sciences – particularly the works by the *Uṣūlī mujtahids*. In an *ijāza* issued to Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, Shūshtarī confirmed that Majlisī had studied a large number of books with him on various religious sciences, including *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, and *uṣūl*. Included are books such as *Sharḥ-i ʿAḍudī on Mukhtaṣar-i Ḥājjibī*,⁵⁶ and books by Shaykh-i Ṭūsī, Ḥasan b. Yusūf b. ʿAlī b. Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, as well as Muḥammad b. Makkī, and the four Shiʿi canonical

52 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cvi, 155–56.

53 Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin* iv, 450–59.

54 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cvi, 152–53. All of the abovementioned works by Shaykh Bahā'ī have been edited and published.

55 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cvii, 67–73. He also issued an *ijāza* to another one of his students permitting him to transmit books mainly on *ḥadīth* and religious sciences. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cvii, 74–78.

56 Many scholars wrote commentaries on Ibn al-Ḥājjib's *Mukhtaṣar*. One of the most renowned is the commentary by ʿAḍud al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad Ījī (d. 1355). There were even “super” commentaries written on Ījī's commentary, for example, those of Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī and Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī. Stewart argues, “The use of these works as textbooks in Shiʿi circles is attested to by the large number of commentaries and supercommentaries that Shiʿite scholars wrote on them as a result of teaching and studying them repeatedly” (*Islamic legal orthodoxy* 98). For more information on Ibn al-Ḥājjib's *Mukhtaṣar* and its commentaries see Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 98–100.

books of *ḥadīth*.⁵⁷ Ḥusayn Khvānsārī issued an *ijāza* on Ramadan 17, 1064/8 January 1654 to Amīr Dhū al-Fiḳār that verified Dhū al-Fiḳār's completed study of books on legal, literary and rational sciences with him. He permitted Amīr Dhū al-Fiḳār to transmit the *al-kutub al-arba'a* on his authority.⁵⁸

Mid-seventeenth-century Isfahan witnessed the struggle among opposing intellectual and spiritual groups, namely philosophers, Akhbārīs, Sufis, and *mujtahids*. Although in some madrasas theosophical texts and books on the rational sciences continued to remain a part of the curriculum, attitudes gradually hardened, thought was stifled and, as a result, the mystically-inclined philosophers lost the patronage of the political establishment. Mystical ideas and philosophical inquiry were violently opposed as heretical innovation (*bid'a*) by the literalist (*zāhiri*) scholars, as discussed in the previous chapter and my article.⁵⁹ Various Safavid intellectual and spiritual groups were constantly challenging each other's sources of legitimacy and reinterpreting Shi'i precepts. The literalist 'ulamā' and jurists who advocated strictly religious learning discredited mystical pursuits and philosophical inquiry. Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī incurred the fury of several of the *fuqahā*' of his day on account of the ambiguities surrounding his doctrinal views. Among his critics were jurists such as Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī, the *Shaykh al-Islam* of Qum (d. 1686), who wrote a fiery polemical tract in refutation of Sufism, which was answered in kind by a treatise attributed to Muḥammad Taqī. Muḥammad Ṭāhir's attack and Muḥammad Taqī's defence appeared in a work entitled *Tawḍīḥ al-mashrabayn wa tanqīḥ al-madhhabayn*, a thousand copies of which were said to have been in circulation in Isfahan.⁶⁰

In order to illustrate the above-discussed attitude toward mystically inclined scholars, I have translated sections of correspondences between Qumī and Muhammad Taqī Majlisī in which they refute each other on matters of Sufism.⁶¹ In the excerpt below, Qumī starts his letter by expressing his concerns about the morality of many Shi'is and followers of 'Alī; because of their ignorance of the people of knowledge, he states that they have been misled by some deceitful people and keep shouting, dancing, whirling and having sexual

57 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* cvii, 38–42.

58 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* cvii, 85–89.

59 Moazzen, Rituals of commemoration 567–68. For more information on the different spiritual and intellectual camps, see Arjomand, Religious extremism 16, 25–27; Newman, Sufism and anti-Sufism 95–108; Newman, Clerical perceptions 135–164; Zarrīnkūb, *Justijū dar taṣṣawwuf* 197.

60 Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'a* iv, 495–98.

61 Ja'fariyān, *Ṣafavīya dar 'arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 605–59.

relations with homosexuals while considering all these activities as acts of worship. Indeed, as he puts it, they have thoroughly strayed from the religious path. Due to this situation, he believed it was incumbent upon him to guide followers of 'Alī to the right path. In response to his concerns, Majlisī writes if our master, i.e. Qumī, wishes to guide the masses who commit some unworthy acts out of ignorance, he should have presented the praiseworthy examples of friends of God first and then rebuked people who do not follow the path of [true] friends of God. He goes on to explain that perhaps some of the [unusual] deeds of the Sufis result from witnessing God's majesty or perhaps from becoming unconscious and lost in Divine love and consequently doing certain things purely unconsciously. In response to Majlisī's reply Qumī writes,

I was at first quite uncertain if I should respond to his Excellency's unpleasant statements, but after making *istikhāra* (seeking of a good outcome from God) and since it was a good *istikhāra*, I decided to respond. I hope his Excellency becomes aware of the fact that, the reason I decided to write this epistle was only to guide the people of fairness and I hope everybody after studying it knows the right path. Dear one: at the end of your second correspondence you claimed that you have purified your heart and soul, but your harsh and uncongenial statements prove otherwise. I am afraid that some of your fair-minded disciples may leave your circle thanks to your harsh and unpleasant utterances! It seems as you have tried to interpret some of the sayings and deeds of the followers of Ḥallāj [that they did and said what they did because they were lost in divine love]; you must have said what you said in the same state of ignorance and unconsciousness! Dear, please bear in mind that my aim in replying is not to retaliate or take revenge, but I wished to correct the *ahkund* and emphasize that you have made false claims; whatever you have claimed is untrue and absurd, and if this was not a religious matter, I would have not wasted my precious time discussing these kinds of subjects!⁶²

Then he goes on to acknowledge that he himself believes in "true" Sufism. However, he maintains that the so-called Sufis who claim to be followers of Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd are Sunni and call themselves the lovers of God, yet they ignore the loving family of the prophet, [the Imams] who were the leaders of the Sufi path. He claims that the true Sufis are Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī, Ibn Tāwūs, Aḥmad b. Fahad al-Ḥillī, and so forth.

62 Ja'fariyān, *Ṣafāvīya dar 'arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 607.

Qumī exclaims that, when he arrived in Qum, he was informed that there are some people in this city who claim heavenly ascension, describing the heavens and even claiming that some jinns serve them. He laments the fact that they had attracted a large number of followers. “As soon as I heard this,” he adds, “I took upon myself to defeat and banish them and close their way to heaven by writing this epistle, but when the *ahkund* [Majlisi] answered my letter, it drove them back to their old deviant ways once again.”⁶³ Qumī criticizes Majlisi for identifying Ḥallāj as the epitome of the Sufi way despite the fact that most Sufis by that point had chastised him. Indeed, asserts Qumī, everybody agrees the Sufi way is the path of the family of the prophet, but since it is a very trying path, it is not requested from everybody to tread this path; only a few devoted elite companions and followers of the Imams endured all the difficulties of this path and attained eternal salvation. He maintains such a grave task could only be achieved by figures such as Kumayl b. Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī, Ghanbar, ‘Alī’s servant, Salmān-i Fārsī, and the like.⁶⁴

Qumī’s association of Sufis and mystical philosophers with infidel thinking was common to the critiques of Sufism and philosophical inquiry at the time. Like Qumī, Shaykh ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-‘Āmilī (d. 1692) criticized scholars such as Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī and Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzawārī for their mystical and philosophical inclinations. Shaykh ‘Alī al-‘Āmilī wrote polemics against both Muḥsin Fayḍ and Sabzawārī.⁶⁵ Khvānsārī, the author of *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, writes that “Shaykh ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-‘Āmilī in one of his books (i.e., *Prohibition of music and the like*) attributed some improper discourses to Muḥsin Fayḍ such as accusing him of believing in the unity of existence (*waḥdat-i wujūd*) and holding that infidels will not be punished eternally in Hell. *Mujtahids*, however, even those who reach a high rank, are not guaranteed salvation.”⁶⁶

Mullā Aḥmad Tūnī, a religious scholar from Khurāsān, joined the side of the dogmatists, and Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā‘irī of Shūshtar (d. 1700) wrote a book criticizing Shaykh-i Bahā‘ī for his association with heretics, Sufis, and “lovers” – those who believed in the Sufi doctrine of Divine love.⁶⁷ It seems the aforementioned scholars had been successful in their battle against Sufi and philosophical learning. There is an *ijāza* by Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī issued to Muḥammad Taqī’s son, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisi, who had asked him to grant

63 Ja‘fariyān, *Ṣafavīya dar ‘arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 609.

64 Ja‘fariyān, *Ṣafavīya dar ‘arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 608–10.

65 Tunkābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-‘ulamā* 300.

66 For more on this, see Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* vii, 10–31.

67 ‘Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā‘iq al-ḥaqā‘iq* i, 178–80, 257–82.

permission to transmit the four canonical Shi'i *ḥadīth* collections. He granted that permission and the right to all he had transmitted from his teacher through reading, hearing, and *ijāza*.⁶⁸ He also rejected philosophical inquiry, arguing that,

The doctrine of the philosophers (*falāsifa*) is contrary to the religion of Islam and the content of the verses of the Quran. Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, who cultivated this form of irreligiousness, were afflicted with melancholia. Ibn Sīnā was a wine drinker, and Fārābī played musical instruments. The Shi'a, by contrast are said to have opposed the infidel philosophers, and are commended for having killed the mystic Suhrawardī in Aleppo because of his concentration on philosophy.⁶⁹

Akhbarism and Its Impact on the Safavid Curriculum

The revival of Akhbarism had a substantial influence on intellectual pursuits, expanding intellectual debate among traditionalists, jurists, and theologians in the second half of the seventeenth century and beyond.⁷⁰ As the result of the flourishing of traditionalism in the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries *uṣūlī* legal studies began to ebb.⁷¹ Indeed Akhbārī scholars efficiently contested the Uṣūlīs' claim to religious knowledge, and for two centuries a sophisticated traditionalism purposed by the Akhbārīs prevailed the Shi'i learning centers, and educational pursuits were centred around the

68 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* cvii, 129–31.

69 Qumī, *al-Fawā'id al-dīniyya*, MS folios 767, 721–23, 775–76.

70 After providing a comprehensive description of the history and doctrines of the Akhbarism (*Scripturalist Islam* 1–30), Robert Gleave holds that “later Akhbari legal scripturalism” started with Muhammad Amīn Astarābādī when he laid the foundation of a new juristic method in his *Fawā'id al-madaniyya* (*Scripturalist Islam* xix, 14, 78–88). Yet he also maintains that Astarābādī “revived” the Akhbari thought (ibid. 33). Modarressi notes that ‘Abdullāh b. Ḥusayn Tustarī (d. 1612) was among the first scholars to promote *ḥadīth* as an independent source of legal knowledge and practice. See Rationalism and traditionalism 155–56. He, however, states that it was Astarābādī who offered the first comprehensive critique of the late scholars and a denunciation of Usulism. For more information see Modarressi, *An introduction to Shi'i law* 52. See also Newman, The nature of Akhbari-Usuli dispute, parts one and two; Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 182–83 ff.

71 Generally speaking, during the rule of the Safavids, *uṣūlī mujtahids* such as Ḥusayn ‘Abd al-Ṣamad (d. 1576) ‘Abd al-‘Alī al-Karakī (d. 1585), and Luṭfullāh al-Maysī (d. 1622) wrote mainly important commentaries on the works of Ḥillī scholars such as Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (d. 1277) and ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325), as well as short essays on issues such as the impermissibility of emulating dead *mujtahids*. For more information on their commentaries, see Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 156–58.

corpus of the sayings of the Imams which were not taken at face value as argued by Gleave, whereas reason, analogy and other hermeneutic tools used by the Uṣūlis were strongly rejected.⁷²

The dispute between Akhbārīs and Uṣūlis was, therefore, mainly concerned with the “epistemology of scholarly opinion.”⁷³ Akhbārīs upheld that true knowledge could be only gained by means of the Imamī traditions.⁷⁴ They repeatedly reminded rationalist *mujtahids* that the religion of Islam was perfected before the demise of Muhammad. Akhbārīs held that the Akhbār of the Imams was far superior to human agency and therefore they declined to endorse the idea that human reason could be an independent source of law. Reason for them was confined to a narrow use of deductive logic, and that is why there was no acknowledgment of the idea that reason could reach new truths unaided by the teachings of the imams; hence innovation, in matters of law and other fields of inquiry, was frowned upon.

The Akhbārīs’ rejection of any *ijtihādī* juristic authority other than the Imams’ sayings skewed not only their view of Sunni legal theory but also, according to Devin Stewart, the history of Twelver Shi’a legal theory.⁷⁵ Norman Calder and Robert Gleave, however, argue that leading Akhbārī scholars advanced a coherent legal method and that prominent Akhbārīs such as Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī exercised sophisticated legal methodology.⁷⁶

According to Gleave, who describes the wide diversity of currents and views within Akhbarism, Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī – despite his formal opposition to *ijtihād* – did not reject all norms of *uṣūl* methodology, only those not sanctioned by statements of the Imams,⁷⁷ a fact that can be confirmed by the

72 Akhbārīs’ criticisms of the *uṣūlī mujtahids*’ scholarly undertakings will be discussed extensively in Chapter 6.

73 As argued by Gleave, the dispute between the two schools revolved around technical aspects of the epistemology of scholarly opinion, not around the level of authority accorded to the scholarly elite. See *Scripturalist Islam* 296.

74 Of course this view was subjected to individual modification and nuance by Akhbārī scholars. Gleave traces the spread of Akhbarism through the network of Astarābādī’s pupils and also through a “proto-Akhbārī”, namely, ‘Abdallāh al-Tustarī (d. 1612) (*Scripturalist Islam* 148–76). Gleave also describes the wide diversity of views among the Akhbārīs. For more information see Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam* 140–76.

75 Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 203.

76 Gleave, *Inevitable doubt* 7.

77 In Chapter 6 of his *Scripturalist Islam*, Gleave offers a thorough discussion of the Akhbārīs’ “act of self-definition” and the shortcomings of the Uṣūlī position as expressed in various lists of differences that were included in various Akhbārī writings. For more information see *Scripturalist Islam* 177–215.

ijāza issued by Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmili, a prominent Akhbārī, to Muḥammad Fāḍil-i Mashhadī, as I explain presently. As Gleave puts it, Akhbārīs were not simply collators of *hadīth* – they had to have some interpretive skills in order to apply the legal regulations found in the *akhbār* to specific circumstances.⁷⁸ He finds that the prominent traditionists, including Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, and Sayyid Niʿmatullāh al-Jazāʿirī, were more receptive to incorporating some established elements of the Shiʿi *uṣūl al-fiqh*.⁷⁹

In contrast to their Akhbārī counterparts, the *mujtahids* felt that logic and reason especially would enable them to systematize, to organize, and to rationally evaluate the merits of religious and legal texts. This view would eventually lay the groundwork for intellectual autonomy; not least of all, it assimilated man’s rational capacities into those of the Imams who were described as people who had the most accurate understanding of the Quran and the *sunna* of the prophet amongst their contemporaries. But *mujtahids* remained discordant to the extent that they could not come up with an agreed-upon legal system. This led Akhbārī scholars to consider the difference of opinion among *mujtahids* as a major flaw of Usulism, as will be further discussed in chapter six. Akhbārī scholars argued that rational legal speculations have become spheres of inquiry whose outcomes were surmises made by fallible men, i.e. *mujtahids*. The fact of the matter is that *uṣūlī mujtahids* were attempting to develop a set of positive legislation that would be considered as definitive as possible, based on a small number of Quranic verses and painstakingly authenticated and authorized sayings of the prophet Muhammad and other authoritative sources of law.

In truth, aside from certain verses and sayings of the prophet with explicit legal content, there are a relatively large number of Quranic verses and *ḥadīths* whose relevance to the daily life of the Muslim community can be unlocked only through interpretation and logical reasoning. The *shariʿa* that is usually considered the fullest expression of Islam for many Muslims is in fact the fallible interpretation of infallible Islamic holy texts. This act of interpretation has involved major consequences for the Shiʿa. The concrete Shiʿi law developed

78 After all, Shiʿi legal experts including Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs, like their Sunni counterparts, have always been faced with the task of deriving legal rulings from the Quran and other sources of law for novel issues when no such voids were supposed to exist.

79 For various Akhbārī groups see Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam* 10–11, 99–100. He argues that some Akhbārīs such as Muḥammad Ḥurr al-ʿĀmili were hostile to the study of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, considering it an importation from Sunni Islam and hence a heretical and redundant science (*Scripturalist Islam* 297–99).

by different modes of interpretation, e.g. *Akhbārī* or *Uṣūlī*, never differed radically.⁸⁰ Despite all the heated discussions between the two camps concerning the permissibility of analogical reasoning and use of personal opinion in arriving at law, these two different schools of legal interpretation are in basic agreement on *uṣūl* and *furūʿ* of the faith.

That said, compared to the *Uṣūlī mujtahids*, some *Akhbārī* scholars showed more reservations in developing new religious rulings; for example, Shah Sulaymān consulted with several ‘ulamā’, including Muḥammad Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī and Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, on whether it was permissible to smoke tobacco or not (strict traditionalists prohibited it). Al-‘Āmilī refrained from giving a clear answer. When the shah insisted, he said, “I would neither declare tobacco and coffee licit nor prohibit them due to fact that they did not exist at the time of the Prophet and the Imams – as such there is no specific reference or text clarifying their legal status.” Al-‘Āmilī further added that, since legal opinions around tobacco and coffee were controversial, caution should be the preferred course of action. Majlisī, on the other hand, who was himself a tobacco smoker, declared that tobacco smoking was permitted. To reach this religious ruling he referred to some *ḥadīth* as well as his own reasoning.⁸¹

As discussed previously, the *Akhbārī* approach to Islamic jurisprudence rested on the Imamī traditions. One cannot, however, describe *Akhbārīs* as merely literalists. *Akhbārī* scholars in effect resorted to some sort of rationalistic approach, which appears to be more in favor of theoretical ideals, and less oriented to the practical needs of the society while grappling with issues not clearly addressed in the Quran and *khavar* literature. After all, *Akhbārīs* are better known for their relentless efforts in collecting Shi‘i *ḥadīths*. In fact, thanks to the revival of *Akhbarism*, the late Safavid period witnessed a dramatic increase in Shi‘i *ḥadīth* production. Chief among the *ḥadīth* compositions were *al-Wāfi* by Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Wasā’il al-Shi‘a* by Muḥammad Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, and *Bihār al-anwār* by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī. The accumulation of traditions in the late Safavid period prepared the ground for the revival of

80 In chapters seven (216–44), eight (245–67), and nine (268–96) of his *Scripturalist Islam*, Gleave showcases the formidable hermeneutical sophistication current among the *Akhbārīs* concerning the Quran, the role, authenticity and significance of the *akhbār* going back to the Imams, and *Akhbārī* methods of hermeneutics. In fact, as aptly argued by Gleave resolving the problem of contradictory *akhbār*, finding the seemingly unambiguous meaning of traditions, defining the relation between the Quran and the *akhbār* – all these pursuits left a sufficient number of hermeneutic challenges for *Akhbārīs* who could thereby establish their own scholarly authority over the believers just as *Uṣūlīs* did.

81 Mahdawī, *Zindigīnāma-yi ‘allāma* 251.

jurisprudence later on. Establishing authoritative links between contemporary scholars and their forebearers was another result of Akhbārīs' labour. Thanks to the Akhbārīs, interest in *'ilm al-rijāl* grew.⁸²

As argued by Said Amir Arjomand, the revival of Akhbarism had certain political implications. He maintains that one of the most important political consequences of Akhbārī traditionalism was the enhancement of the charisma of the (purported) descendants of the Imams. In Weberian terms, the social honor conferred by prophetic descent became a most important basis of domination by the estate of clerical notables.⁸³ Davin Stewart, who has discussed the intellectual and scholarly consequences of the resurrection of traditionalism in 17th century Isfahan, argues that the rise of Akbarism had tremendous effects on religious sciences and related fields. By arguing for a system where authority was ostensibly invested in scripture itself, particularly the *khbars* of the Imams, Akhbārīs denied the religious authority the jurists claim for themselves. He maintains that the Akhbārī revival came about primarily as a critical reaction to developments in Shi'a jurisprudence that took place in the sixteenth century, particularly in the work of al-Shahīd al-Thānī.⁸⁴

Due to the dominance of traditionalists during the final decades of Safavid rule, the rational sciences more or less lost their significance in the curriculum of madrasas at this time. At the very least, funders of madrasas banned their study in the madrasas they patronized. Akhbārīs like jurists deemed the unconventional elements of the philosophers' and Sufis' ideas as "unorthodox." For example, Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī considered the ideas of Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī Dashtakī heretical and incompatible with the Shi'a faith. He claimed that "teaching and learning the works of these two skeptics must be forbidden on the basis of reason and religion."⁸⁵ A prominent *ḥadīth* compiler like Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, who had studied philosophical books in his formative years, regrets the time he spent studying rational sciences (*al-'ulūm al-'aqlī*). In his introduction to *Biḥār al-anwār*, Muḥammad Bāqir reports how he pursued the learning of all Islamic sciences including both traditional and rational ones. He writes, "I stepped into the rose-garden of knowledge, saw both flowers and thorns, filled my arms with its fruits, sipped a

82 This branch of religious science that deals with the transmitters (*al-ruwāt*) in the chain of transmission (*isnād*) appended to *ḥadīth* reports in order to ascertain their transmission genealogies.

83 Arjomand, *The clerical estate* 198, 200–01.

84 Stewart, *The genesis of the Akhbari* 175–76.

85 Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* 500–03; Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam* 6–27

mouthful from each of its streams, and obtained as much benefit as I could.”⁸⁶ He adds, “I abandoned what I had wasted a part of my life acquiring (i.e., the rational sciences), although it is very popular in our time, and turned my attention to that which will help me on my return journey, although this field of scholarship is unpopular in our time.”⁸⁷

Majlisī is widely believed to have persecuted philosophers alongside Sufis. Their persecution continued after Majlisī’s death, as epitomized by the tragic banishment of the philosopher Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ardistānī (d. 1721).⁸⁸ However, contrary to his reputation, Majlisī takes the middle ground in an essay entitled *Risāla-yi Su’āl wa jawāb* when he avoids calling Sufis and philosophers nonbelievers. Regarding philosophers, he claims that their approach is invalid – if God had deemed that people needed only their intellects, he would not have sent prophets and messengers and would have asked people to rely on their intellects to solve their problems. In Majlisī’s view, because God ordered us to obey the prophets and Imams, it is totally wrong to abandon God’s Book and His Prophet’s traditions to rely merely on intellect and expound the Quran and Prophetic traditions based on weak conjecture and philosophers’ ideas. When asked about the *mujtahid* and Akhbārī approaches, Majlisī responded, “I take the middle ground, since both exaggeration and negligence in dealing with issues and matters are reprehensible ... I think the approach taken by a group who reproach the *mujtahids* and accuse them of inadequate religiosity is wrong. Because they (i.e. *mujtahids*) are great scholars of the religion, their hard works should be acknowledged and their mistakes should be forgiven.”⁸⁹ Regarding the Sufis, Majlisī claimed that the Shi‘i Sufis are heading in the right direction but the Sunni Sufis prevent people from acquiring knowledge, since they know no knowledgeable person can accept that the three caliphs (i.e., Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān) were more eligible than ‘Alī to rule the Islamic *umma*. Whoever denies Sufism is on the whole bereft of knowledge.⁹⁰

In sum, under the influence of the Akhbārīs, the study of *ḥadīth* gained momentum and the study of philosophy was frowned upon in the madrasas of the later period of Safavid rule. Despite the opposition of a growing chorus of critics and interventions challenging the teaching of philosophical texts, the study of philosophy nevertheless prevailed, as will be discussed presently.

86 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* i, 2.

87 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* i, 2–4. Based on the *ijāzas* he granted to some of his students, we know he nonetheless continued teaching the rational sciences until the end of his life.

88 Āshtiyānī’s introduction to Mullā Ṣadrā’s *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* 117–25.

89 Cited in Ja’fariyān, *Dīn wa siyāsāt* 210.

90 Cited in Ja’fariyān, *Dīn wa siyāsāt* 210–211.

A Comparative Analysis of Two Akhbārīs' Ijāzas

As representative examples of the vast number of *ijāzas* issued by scholars who lived during later Safavid rule, the two *ijāzas* issued by Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī and Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī to Muḥammad Fāḍil-i Mashhadī stand out. The *ijāza* issued by al-ʿĀmilī to Mashhadī in Shaʿban 16, 1085/15 November 1674 is one of the most comprehensive *ijāzas* among those collected in Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār*.⁹¹ Al-ʿĀmilī was a prolific scholar who produced a large number of books on various religious sciences. The most important are *Wasāʾil al-shīʿa* and *Amal al-ʿĀmil*, along with tracts on legal issues such as inheritance, mathematics, geometry, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, astronomy, financial transaction, and glosses on the *kutub al-arbaʿa*.⁹² ʿĀmilī was the chief judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) and *Shaykh al-Islam* of Mashhad; his teaching circle attracted a large number of students. Mashhadī was a keen collator of ḥadīth. He had studied the four canonical *ḥadīth* works and a number of other books in the teaching circle of al-ʿĀmilī. When Mashhadī asked al-ʿĀmilī to grant him a license, al-ʿĀmilī conferred upon him permission to transmit a whole body of literature on his authority and included him in the chain of transmitters whose authority went back to the Imams.

Al-ʿĀmilī's *ijāza* to Mashhadī starts with a short prayer and continues with introductory remarks, providing information about the *mujīz* and *mujāz*. Al-ʿĀmilī acknowledges Mashhadī's erudition and his noble character. Then he describes in detail the texts that Mashhadī studied with him. Afterward, al-ʿĀmilī lists an imposing number of works on various religious sciences including Quranic commentary, Islamic jurisprudence, *rijāl* (the science of men of ḥadīth), *dirāya* (understanding, judging the truth of a report in the light of one's previous knowledge and experience), Arabic grammar and morphology, *al-maʿānī*, *al-bayān*, *badīʿ* (rhetoric) and logic, mathematics), and even *ṭibb* (medicine), all written by eminent scholars over the course of centuries extending from the early decades of Islamic history up to the end of the seventeenth century. In addition to authorizing the transmission of his own works, al-ʿĀmilī conferred upon Mashhadī permission to transmit all the texts that his own teachers had permitted him to transmit. Following these introductory permissions, al-ʿĀmilī lists the books by Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-ʿĀmilī, known as al-Shahīd-i Thānī including *Sharḥ al-Sharāyīʿ* and *Sharḥ*

91 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cvii, 107–21.

92 For a complete list of his works, see al-ʿĀmilī, *Amal al-āmil* i, 27–33, herein the editor of the book, Sayyid Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī, listed 55 books and tracts by ʿĀmilī.

al-lum'a. Then he mentions a comprehensive chain of transmitters who had given him the license to transmit al-Shahīd al-Thānī's works.

He next goes on to list the works of more than seventy Shi'ī 'ulamā', including al-Āmilī scholars such as Najīb al-Dīn al-Āmilī, Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad Shaykh Bahā'ī, his father Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Ṣamad, Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī, and al-Shahīd al-Awwal. Then he lists the works of Ḥillī scholars such as 'Allāma al-Ḥillī and Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, Baghdadī scholars including Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, and Shaykh al-Mufid. Finally, al-Āmilī lists the books written by Qumī scholars, including works of Barqī and Ṣaffār al-Qumī. The texts listed by al-Āmilī were recognized as being as fundamental to the history of Shi'ī higher learning as they were to Shi'ī intellectual history. As an Akhbārī scholar, al-Āmilī did not permit his student to transmit any books on *kalām* and rational sciences, but they could study the works of Shi'ī *uṣūlī mujtahids*.⁹³ Besides his rejection of philosophy and theology, al-Āmilī rejects books written by Sunni scholars on major religious sciences. In his *al-Fawā'id al-Ṭūsīyya*, al-Āmilī's comments suggest that, unless absolutely necessary, the Shi'a should not study Sunni works in four fields: the two *uṣūls* – that is, *uṣūl al-Dīn* (principles of religion) and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (sources of Islamic law), Quranic exegesis and *ḥadīth*.⁹⁴

Just two weeks after al-Āmilī issued his *ijāza*, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī granted an *ijāza* to Mashhadī on Ramadan 1, 1085/30 November 1674, while visiting the Shrine of Imam Riḍā in Mashhad. The document granted Mashhadī permission to transmit “all works written by Muslim scholars on various religious and rational sciences, including *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*,” as well as Majlisī's own books.⁹⁵ Majlisī's *ijāza* to Mashhadī is not as detailed as the *ijāza* issued to him by al-Āmilī. In fact, *ijāzas* issued by Persian 'ulamā' who lived in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century are notoriously short and brief. The most comprehensive *ijāzas* were composed, for the most part, by prominent immigrant Arab scholars at the height of their careers. Immigrant Arab 'ulamā' apparently sought by means of such texts to establish their reputation within their professional circles. As Rula J. Abisaab argues, 'Āmilī scholars had become marginalized and had lost the generous support of the Safavid shahs in the late Safavid period.⁹⁶

93 Gleave argues that there were Akhbārīs like Ḥurr al-Āmilī who simply collected reports of the imams concerning non-legal matters, especially theological doctrine current in *kalām* works; they offered no personal reasoning for how these might be brought together into a coherent doctrine (*Scripturalist Islam* 11).

94 al-Āmilī, *al-Fawā'id al-Ṭūsīyya* 252.

95 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* cvii, 151–53.

96 Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 121–30.

Majlisī was undoubtedly one of the most powerful, prolific, and well-known Safavid scholars based on the numbers of students his teaching circle attracted. ‘Abdullāh Afandī and Sayyid Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā’irī report that Majlisī had more than one thousand students who studied a wide range of subjects with him, including Quranic commentary, *fiqh*, *kalām*, and – above all – *ḥadīth*.⁹⁷ He issued *ijāzas* as early as 1659, indicating he was already a prominent scholar at that time. In his *Fayḍ-i qudsī*, a biography of Majlisī, Mīrzā Ḥusayn Nūrī assigned a chapter to Majlisī’s students, wherein he lists forty-nine of his students. In his *al-Rawḍat al-naḍra fī tarājim* and *Kawākib al-muntashara*, Āqā Buzurg adds more names to Nūrī’s list. Sayyid Aḥmad Ḥusaynī, the editor of Majlisī’s *Ijāzāt al-aḥadīth*, lists the names of 204 of Majlisī’s students and provides brief biographical accounts of each.⁹⁸ In another book, Ḥusaynī presents 115 *ijāzas* issued by Majlisī, the majority of which are short documents. Typically, Majlisī acknowledges that a certain scholar read one of the four-*ḥadīth* books (*al-kutub al-araba*) or some other authoritative texts to him. There are, however, longer *ijāzas* that he issued to some of his students, such as Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī (d. 1688 or 1690); Bahā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Jilī, to whom Majlisī issued several *ijāzas* dating from 1661 to 1666; Niẓām al-Dīn Muḥammad Bisṭāmī; Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ardabīlī (d. 1689); Muḥammad Ashraf al-‘Āmilī, who wrote a gloss on Mīr Dāmād’s *Qabasāt*; Amīr Muḥammad Bāqir al-‘Āmilī, known as Pīshnamāz (d. 1711); Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nūrī (d. after 1721); and Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā’irī. All of these individuals became great scholars in their own right.⁹⁹

The Curriculum of Safavid Madrasas during the Reign of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn

The *waqf* documents of madrasas built during the final decades of the Safavid rule reflect the Safavid court’s opposition to philosophical enquiry and Sufism. Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn and Maryam Begum as well as many other donors banned philosophical studies in the educational institutions under their patronage in favour of a concentration on *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, and Quranic sciences. The tone and tenor of the abovementioned madrasas’ deeds of endowment indicate that the funders favored a curriculum anchored in Prophetic and Imāmī tradition, and concentrated on religious sciences. This approach was meant to infuse a Shi‘i perspective into all areas of learning to promote an identity informed by

97 al-Ḥusaynī, *Talāmīdha* 20.

98 al-Ḥusaynī, *Talāmīdha* 21.

99 Majlisī, *Ijāzāt* 19–25.

Shi'i intellectual and religious traditions in which keys for interpreting truth were to be found in Shi'i holy texts. This worldview was to express itself exclusively through Shi'i beliefs, values and practices. These expressions were required to develop in such a way as to maximize their positive impact upon the religious and spiritual formation of all members of Safavid society, including both the madrasa community and the lay population at large as discussed in Chapter 3.

Despite the fact that deeds of endowment always state what is important and valued and what things are excluded or ignored, in reality the advised curriculum was a small part of what a professor actually taught. As discussed by 'Alī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām (d. fl. 18th century), rational sciences were the main topics of learning and many students preferred them to studying *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence. This is because they had become convinced that philosophical study is the most effective medium to persuade the infidels of the veracity of Islamic religion. Jadīd al-Islām, whose original name was Antonio, was an Augustinian Portuguese (not a particularly high religious authority) who opportunistically converted to Islam in Isfahan in 1696, as claimed by Francis Richard.¹⁰⁰ However, according to his own writings, he had received extensive trainings and hence had become an authority in his own religious tradition. He confesses that, after a great deal of research and investigation, "I discovered that Islam is the true religion." He adds, "Since I knew the language of the Christians, and was aware of their deceit, I could not, as a Muslim, have passed over the matter in silence. Consequently, I decided to collate the Arabic translation of the Old Testament with its Latin version, and to translate it into Persian. My work, then, would demonstrate the misinterpretations of the Christian learned men and would disclose a great deal of cunning ..."¹⁰¹

Jadīd al-Islām was hoping that, by reading his book, the Twelver Shi'i 'ulamā' would become aware of the truth and would come up with strong positions from which to refute Christian argumentations. He penned 14 epistles in which he mainly criticizes Sufis, but also discusses the intellectual atmosphere of early 18th century Iran. He particularly questions mystical philosophers who have made Sufism popular. He makes it clear that he strongly doubts their claim of achieving such a grave task [persuading the infidels of the veracity of Islamic religion] while being ignorant of basic Islamic teachings. He reports that students of his era spent a great deal of time studying rational sciences and theological and philosophical texts because they found them more in-

100 Richard, *Un Augustin portugais* 73–85.

101 Ja'fariyān, *Şafavīya dar 'arṣa-yi dīn* iii, 1006–07.

teresting. He maintains that the students he met with possessed insufficient understanding of, and familiarity with, religion, Islamic law, Quranic exegesis, and *ḥadīth*. Jadīd al-Islām criticizes students for their lack of knowledge of what he considers true Islamic teachings, and relates that,

I have had many conversions with people who claim to be knowledgeable and had spent years of their lives in madrasas learning, and who consider themselves as one of people of knowledge, yet when as a novice who has not yet acquired a comprehensive knowledge of *ḥadīth*, I asked them a *ḥadīth* concerning one of the necessities of religion, they did not know it and I had to teach them! Their reason was that they had spent all those years studying philosophical books including *Sharḥ-i Hidāya*, commentaries and glosses on *Shifāʿ* and *Ishārāt* and didn't have enough time to study *ḥadīth*! As you notice here, donors who endowed their hard earned money building madrasas and established endowments for the madrasas so that [future] 'ulamā' receive their training there and in turn educate followers of 'Ali of religion. Instead of that objective they have spent their time learning the kind of knowledge that the donors did not have in their minds while establishing their madrasas. I am not saying that building madrasas is not a good deed, I rather say that the infidels who know nothing and nobody except for Aristotle and Plato and their works must be expelled from madrasas and instead of them people of *ḥadīth* and religious scholars should hold teaching posts. Indeed the benefit of this is more and higher than building the madrasa itself.

It is only surprising that philosophers and philosophical enquiry is being preferred to *ḥadīth* of the Imams and legal books written by the leading Shi'a jurists. All in all, some of these people who had not immersed themselves in studying philosophy to the degree that have become heretic yet offer some futile excuses. When I met with a group of philosophy students and reminded them that studying the works of Plato and Aristotle will not serve religion and religiosity, they said: Nowadays, stipends are given to students based on their knowledge of works of Plato and Aristotle and people like us who pursue learning out of financial necessity and to make a living by means of learning, and now that when we see studying philosophy would help us to receive stipends as well as prosperity in Isfahan, we keep studying philosophy and avoid studying jurisprudence and *ḥadīth*! What can I say, at this time that philosophy has gained upper hand by support of Satan and Islam has become undermined, I hope God may help those people who due to financial needs

study philosophy so that when they are financially provided, philosophy looses its value in their eyes.¹⁰²

He goes on to report, “these philosophers who now consider themselves *ḥakīms* thanks to their limited knowledge of *al-Shifāʾ* and so forth, which as a result have become heretics, say we want to have nothing to do with *ḥadīth*; we are the people of intellect and thus [would not be intellectually satisfied by] transmitted sciences including *ḥadīth*.¹⁰³ We accept whatever is confirmed by intellect and reason.” He continues,

Since the time of Adam and during the times of prophets of God including Noah, Abraham, Moses, and all other prophets of God, there have been many religious scholars and faithful who without any knowledge of philosophies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were able to know God and were capable of convincing atheists who rejected the existence of God, with their own intellect. Therefore, it is clear that there is no need to teach and learn works of Socrates and Aristotle in order to perfect religion or to know God. Because if it was necessary, we may conclude that God, Most High, in the past five thousands years has sent down an insufficient religion! It is impossible that God had sent down an incomplete religion!

Secondly, during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and some of the Imams, teaching philosophy was not prevalent. According to historians, it was during the reign of the ‘Abbasid caliphs [Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 809), al-Maʾmūn (d. 833), are considered responsible for the introduction of Greek works into Islam and their translation into Arabic] that this stealer of religion [i.e. philosophy] was introduced to Muslims. Because that God-damned [‘Abbasid ruler] made people occupied with something so that they abandon seeking prophetic and Imamī *ḥadīths*, and people gradually vacated the teaching circles of the Imam of their time. Because if a large number of people attended the teaching circle of the Imams, it could threaten the Abbasid rule. Therefore, he enquired about philosophy and books of philosophers from *farang* and assigned stipends to the students who studied philosophy so that philosophy and philosophical enquiry became popular among Muslims.

102 Jaʿfariyān, *Ṣafavīya dar ʿarṣa-yi dīn* ii, 677.

103 At times in Sunni madrasas philosophers were also accused of corrupting the beliefs of the students. For more information see Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 83–4.

It is reported that during the first year of teaching philosophy in Baghdad, seventy persons became heretics. Now in Isfahan there are several thousands heretics, but thanks to the prevalence and abundance of religious scholars, jurists and *ḥadīth* transmitters, as well as due to fear of wrath of the Shah of Islam, these heretics held their gatherings and teachings like bats, in *khānqāhs* and in secret ...¹⁰⁴

Safavid philosophers including Mullā Ṣadrā and his students, however, insisted that philosophy is indeed a mode of Prophetic knowledge. In his *Risāla fī ḥudūth al-‘ālam* [On the Incipience of the Cosmos], Mullā Ṣadrā offers a brief genealogy of this Prophetic knowledge that initiated with Adam:

Know that philosophy first issued from Adam, the chosen one of God and from his progeny Seth and Hermes and from Noah because the world can never be free of a person who establishes knowledge of the unity of God and of the return [to God]. The great Hermes disseminated it [philosophy] in the climes and in the countries and explained it and gave benefit of it to the people. He is the father of philosophers and the most learned of the knowledgeable ... As for Rome and Greece, philosophy is not ancient in those places ... until Abraham became a prophet and he taught them the science of divine unity. It is mentioned in history that the first to philosophize from among them [the Greeks] was Thales of Miletus and he named it philosophy ... After him came Anaxagoras and Anaximenes of Miletus. After them emerged Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato.¹⁰⁵

As explained earlier, the founders of the Safavid madrasas stipulated that the goal of learning must be to bring a student to a thorough understanding of Shi‘i values and virtues. Therefore a teacher’s lesson plans and discussions should lead students to an integration of learning and faith. All areas of learning should also build a well-informed Shi‘i community and create a sense of the sacred. As such, the Shi‘i faith must be proclaimed daily through prayer, rituals, and teaching the tenets of faith. In practice, however, teachers and students did not always strictly follow the guidelines set forth by the

104 Ja‘fariyān, *Ṣafavīya dar ‘arṣa-yi dīn* iii, 1011. For more information on Jadīd al-Islām’s view on this matter see, Ja‘fariyān, *Ṣafavīya dar ‘arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 676–86.

105 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla fī ḥudūth al-‘ālam* 153–4.

founders of the madrasas.¹⁰⁶ The deliberate exclusion of philosophy and the other so-called ancient sciences did not stop students from acquiring them, and books on these subjects were copied and made available to their seekers. The personalized system of education had benefits for students who could freely choose their teachers and the subjects of their learning. For example, a certain Muhammad Shīrāzī reports that he taught philosophy for forty years in Isfahan. Mullā Ḥamza Gilānī and Ḥājj Khalīl Ḥarījī also taught philosophy. They were not highly original thinkers, but mostly produced commentaries and glosses on earlier philosophical books.¹⁰⁷

In his *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya*, Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī, a contemporary of 'Alī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām, prescribes a curriculum that is very similar to the one suggested by al-Shahīd al-Thānī. The sequence of courses recommended by al-Jazā'irī encompasses all Islamic religious sciences, including legal and theological texts. He classifies the religious sciences into the sciences of *kalām*, Quran, *ḥadīth*, and jurisprudence. Like al-Shahīd al-Thānī, he recognizes *'ilm al-kalām* (Islamic theology) as the foundation for the rest of the religious sciences and considers it the noblest branch of learning because, he says, by this means the principle of religion is learned. He argues that the science of *ḥadīth* is one of the most important branches of knowledge, ranking just after the Quranic sciences. Al-Jazā'irī advises teachers to teach the "noblest" and "more important" branches of knowledge in the following order: *uṣūl al-dīn*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, Arabic grammar, rhetoric, and so forth. He forbids the study of sciences such as magic, some philosophical books, astronomy, and *raml* (divination by means of figures or lines in the sand). He considers studying history and poetry a waste of time, and claims that learning natural and mathematical sciences and crafts are forbidden unless they are studied within a religious context.¹⁰⁸

Al-Jazā'irī also provides invaluable information about his own studies and the textbooks and the course of study that a teacher should plan for his students. He reports that his teacher taught him *Kitāb al-tahzīb* by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī. Then he discussed verses of the Quran in which legal issues are mentioned. He then taught us *Masālik al-jawādiyya* and *al-Masālik al-afhām* by Shaykh Jawād Kāzīmī, a student of Shaykh Bahā'ī and al-Jazā'irī's other teacher, whom

106 Tāj al-Dīn Subkī for example complains about professors who strayed in their lectures from the subjects stipulated in the deeds of endowment for the madrasas in which they taught. See Subkī, *Mu'īd al-ni'am*; 153; Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 83.

107 Ja'fariyān, *Ṣafaviyya dar 'arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 727.

108 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 374-77.

he does not name. Al-Jazā'irī says that, after learning those subjects, he studied books on jurisprudence. He advises a teacher first to teach a book that familiarizes students with jurists' terminology and scholarly approaches and then to teach another book demonstrating the way jurists develop religious rulings and derive *furū'* from the principles (*uṣūl*):

After a teacher has taught all these subjects and books, he should teach Quranic commentaries such as *al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī, a *tafsīr* known for its focus on the Arabic language; *Maḥāṭib* by al-Rāzī, who provides philosophical and theological comments; *Tafsīr al-Tha'labī*, which has interesting stories; and the *Tafsīr* by 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshī, which contains esoteric commentaries on the Quran. Then, if the teacher wishes to help his students refine their souls, he must teach books on natural sciences, mathematics, practical philosophy, and mysticism. These sciences ought to be taught to a select few who have the capacity for learning such sciences.¹⁰⁹

Al-Jazā'irī concludes, "If the teacher or the students do not have enough time, the teacher should first teach jurisprudence, because it strengthens the religion and leads to an orderly life." He adds, "Know that I learned the order of the above-mentioned sciences from [the books of] Zayn al-Dīn 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Āmilī al-Jubā'ī al-Shahīd al-Thānī, from whose knowledge all the recent scholars have benefited."¹¹⁰

Although the dominance of traditionalism had weakened the development of *Uṣūlī*-oriented legal theories during the late seventeenth century and the early decades of the eighteenth century, al-Jazā'irī's description of his own studies, his preferred course of study, and the *ijāzas* issued by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī reveal that Islamic jurisprudence remained one of the main subjects in the curriculum of Safavid madrasas. The Safavid court always needed a group of 'ulamā' to develop a method or program for organizing the judicial and cultural affairs of the realm. As Safavid rulers and scholars struggled to find answers to broad social, economic, and political questions for which more innovative and flexible interpretative techniques were required, it was inevitable that even the traditionalists co-operating with the Safavid court would have to utilize reason as well as other sources for the elaboration of religious law.

109 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 379–80.

110 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 380–81.

Conclusion

Higher education under the Safavids was not confronted by a rapidly changing society. Therefore no major societal changes demanded a shift in the curriculum from the classical tradition to a more practical and vocational approach that was changing the contour of learning in Europe for instance. Given the fact that the focus of religious learning was to maintain the authenticity of the act of transmission, educational undertakings hardly led to any major change. Moreover, Safavid educators showed no major desires to ask the question of “how” the world was created; rather, they were mainly concerned with “who” initiated the process. Hence, madrasa learning continued to foster a God-centered education. The main goal of learning was, therefore, to bring a student to an understanding of Islamic laws, values and virtues, providing knowledge of the Creator as well as the Lord’s creation. If one is to be educated, dictated the thinking of the time, this cannot be accomplished without explaining life in terms of the One from whom he came and the One to whom he would return. Hence, it is in scriptures that a person discovers who he is and what he is intended to be.

However, as the Shi’i faith gained more momentum in Iran, interpretations, opinions and dialogues became increasingly dynamic and complex. At the same time, the mastery of theological and academic “essentials,” including legal studies alone, were no longer enough. Safavid mystical philosophers, for instance, came to believe that their ideas and works would prepare students to meet the evolving challenges of a new, emerging Shi’i identity with innovative, dynamic, and ecumenical dialogue, which would empower seekers of knowledge with a more profound and culturally relevant compass to craft the present and future. Therefore, Safavid curriculum was not totally static. It was indeed an ongoing developmental process that had a fluid nature. Although a teacher might have refrained from teaching philosophical texts in compliance with the stipulation of a *waqfiyya*, he could still teach these texts in his home. Hence, although Safavid madrasas helped establish the domination or exclusion of certain ideas and practices in addition to constructing religious laws and – in so doing – defined and spread a particular brand of orthodoxy, they could not terminate the study of subjects that fell outside the purview of the madrasa curriculum.

Engagement with Religious Knowledge

Dialogical and Hermeneutical Modes of Transmission

In the Quran and prophetic traditions, learning and the knowledgeable are highly praised. In the Quran we read: “Say, ‘Are those who know equal to those who do not know?’ Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding.”¹ Prophet Muhammad calls ‘ulamā’ the “heirs of prophets”² and states that, “seeking knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim, male and female,”³ and “look for the knowledge of *ḥadīth* and get it written, as I am afraid that religious knowledge will vanish and the religious learned men will pass away ... Circulate knowledge and teach the ignorant, for knowledge does not vanish except when it is kept secretly (to oneself).”⁴

The above-mentioned Quranic verse alongside numerous Quranic references to *‘ilm* and a vast number of prophetic sayings have become the cornerstone of all Islamic civilizational and cultural undertakings. The quest for knowledge has been regarded as sacred and an act of worship; so much so that every devout Muslim in one way or another would ideally engage with obtaining, reproducing, using, and disseminating religious knowledge throughout his/her whole life. Being involved with religious knowledge has always played a significant role in the development of the social status and persona, as well as the establishment of piety and religiosity of persons within Muslim societies. Amongst those scholars whose work supports this statement through its systematic attention to Islamic education and the relations of knowledge to power, particularly noteworthy are Michael Fischer, Dale Eickelman, Timothy Mitchell, and Michael Chamberlain.⁵

Historically, greater knowledge of Islamic teachings bestows upon the possessor of that knowledge an enormous social prominence. The more one knows about God’s will and intentions for mankind, the better he or she represents God on earth. The ability to disseminate and discuss religious sciences

1 Q 39:9.

2 Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* 1, 32, 34.

3 Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* 1, 30.

4 Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* 1, 52.

5 Fischer, *Iran* 30, and especially Chapter 6; Eickelman, *Knowledge and power* 58ff; Mitchell, *Colonising* ix–xi ff.; Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 56–7 ff.

was not, however, a guaranteed source of power and privilege. A scholar was not simply a transmitter of knowledge; he was expected to embody Islamic virtues by conducting himself accordingly in private and public.

Despite all the emphases on the quest for, and dissemination of, knowledge, popular and even scholarly stereotypes assert that Islamic education is little more than rote learning; that is, the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat what the teacher gives them.⁶ This chapter discusses various teaching techniques used by Safavid scholars in order to demonstrate how religious knowledge that originated in the Quran, the Prophetic traditions, the Imamī traditions, legal treatises, and textbooks was affected by its modes of transmission including recitation (*qirā'a*), writing commentaries and glosses (*sharḥ* and *ta'līqā*), discussion (*mubāḥatha*), debate (*mudhākara*), memorization (*ḥifẓ*), contemplation (*fikr*), *ḥadīth* criticism (*dirāya*) and dialectical disputation (*jadāl*). It also examines the role and place of teachers in the learning process, especially the decorum observed in teaching and learning.

Safavid Pedagogy: Legal Rationalization or Authentic Knowledge

As the previous chapter sought to demonstrate, various Safavid schools of thought had different theories of knowledge. Hence they adopted diverse pedagogical methods. In fact, the preferred method of teaching and the standard by which the authenticity of transmission was measured reveal the dichotomies between *mujtahids*, philosophers, and Akhbārīs. By considering revelation to be the main engine in the production of religious knowledge, and by making Prophetic and Imamī traditions and personal reasoning its interpretative basis, Akhbārīs and *mujtahids* developed religious laws and dogmatic principles. Traditionalists (Akhbārīs), however, insisted that one's reading of the religious literature should comply with the Imams' reading. Therefore, they repudiated the interpretive principles used by *mujtahids*, especially those that extended the meaning of the scripture and the *khābars* and that filled those gaps in the law that have no evidence in the Quran and *ḥadīth* corpus.⁷

There were, however, moderate traditionalists – such as Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī – who allowed the limited use of reason to come up with religious rulings.⁸ Both moderate and strict traditionalists rejected the study of such

6 See for example, Talbani, *Pedagogy*, power 70.

7 Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* 471, 571.

8 Modarressi argues that the fact that Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī and his student Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī took a middle ground between traditionalism and Usulism illustrates

rational sciences as *kalām* and conventional philosophy.⁹ It was, however, permissible to learn these sciences in order to repudiate philosophers and theologians by employing their own tools.¹⁰

Conversely, *mujtahids* generally argued that a qualified scholar could apply his individual reasoning to sources/principles of law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and develop religious rulings to address the increasingly diverse aspects of social life. *Mujtahids* gave different rulings concerning issues that were not clearly addressed in the Quran or *ḥadīths*.¹¹ Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. ‘Alī b. al-Muṭahhar al-Hillī (d. 1325), a *mujtahid* par excellence, had already described the course of study that a student should take to become a *mujtahid* in chapter 11 of his *Nahj al-mustarshidīn fi uṣūl al-dīn*, in which he advises students to learn the consensus (*ijmā‘*) cases in particular alongside Quranic commentaries, *ḥadīth* literature, and *‘ilm al-rijāl*. This course of study would enable him to avoid giving incorrect legal pronouncements and also improve his capacity to issue religious rulings drawing on the principles of jurisprudence.¹² As the next chapter will explore, Akhbārīs, including Muḥsin Fayḍ, saw the difference of opinions among the *mujtahids* as a major flaw.

Mystical philosophers such as Mullā Ṣadrā believed a student should transcend the outward manifestation of religion and try to ascend to “the world of holiness” through what they called self-knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-naḥs*). They rejected the literalists’ (*‘ulamā-yi qishrī*) educational undertakings because, as Mullā Ṣadrā argued,

The majority of theologians and the literalist scholars rely only on listening and transmitting [a fixed body of literature]. They have lost the way. They want to fix the Divine law through the knowledge acquired by

how top-ranking ‘ulamā’ permitted a measure of reasoning, however limited, within their ranks (*An introduction* 54).

9 See for example, Astarābādī, *al-Fawā’id al-madaniyya* 571; Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi inṣāf* 187–88, 190–91. Both Astarābādī and Muḥsin Fayḍ, however, had deep knowledge of Islamic rational sciences (*‘ulūm al-aqlī*).

10 As I discussed in Chapter 4, in many *ijāzas* he issued, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī confirms that he taught rational sciences to the *mujāz* (the person who received *ijāza*).

11 For example, Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān Qatīfī (d. after 1539) challenged al-Karakī’s position on several issues like performing the Friday prayer in the absence of the Imam, land-tax (*kharāj*), and accepting gifts from monarchs. Afandī quotes Majlisī, who had said Qatīfī was not very knowledgeable and was not eligible to challenge Shaykh ‘Alī al-Karakī. Afandī adds, “The other day I heard him saying Qatīfī was inferior to al-Karakī.” Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā’* i, 55.

12 For more on his view see Cooper, Allama al-Hillī 243–48.

means of the senses, which are prone to mistakes and errors, without seeking the help of mysticism's light.¹³

Mullā Ṣadrā championed a unique philosophical method that attempted “to transcend the simple dichotomy between a discursive, ratiocinative mode of reasoning and knowing, and a more intuitive, poetic and non-propositional mode of knowledge” as Sajjad Rizvi puts it.¹⁴ In his *Iksīr al-‘ārifīn*, Mullā Ṣadrā argued that humans already have what they need to achieve perfection (*kamāl*):

Everything man needs to achieve perfection and ascend to the world of holiness – that is, the realities of existent things, the configurations of this world and the afterworld, and the worlds of creation and the common world – is written on the Adamic tablet and engraved on the human page with an inimitable script and a divine engraving.¹⁵

For Mullā Ṣadrā, knowledge of self and knowledge of God are inextricably entwined because “the book of the soul signifies the Book of God and her speech is His Speech.”¹⁶ He emphasizes that human beings are created in the divine image and they actualize this image if they purify their souls. Thus, in his opinion, the learning process starts with knowing oneself and with the purification of the soul, as stated in the celebrated maxim “he who knows himself knows his God.”

At times, the debate among opposing intellectual camps would go too far, as I shall explain in chapter six. Some advocates of one of the above-discussed approaches strongly rejected and disapproved of certain scholarly pursuits because of the vehemence and zeal with which some intellectual practices had been carried on in certain learning circles. All the aforementioned schools of thought, nonetheless, recognized the Quran and traditions of the Prophet and imams as the sources of knowledge, and each camp insisted on a particular course of enquiry to make the word of God, the message of the prophet and the wisdom of the Imams manifest, understood, and lived in a manner appropriate to the present conditions of time and place. More importantly, every scholar was after seeking the truth. In the give and take of scholarly discussion, mutual criticism constituted the means by which the religious class was striving to safeguard the search for truth. *Uṣūlī mujtahids* gave credit to human

13 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* 70.

14 Rizvi, Mulla Sadra.

15 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Iksīr al-‘ārifīn* 22.

16 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Iksīr al-‘ārifīn* 23, 26.

intellect and the logical and rational findings and personal understandings and opinions on topics that are not found explicitly in the scriptures, so much so that they maintained human reasoning prepares the way for development and the ongoing implementation of Islamic teachings as ideal praxis.

Some Akhbārī scholars, on the other hand, held that there are different levels of authoritative teaching. To them, the teachings of the Imams are by their nature core and central to the faith, whereas findings of prominent *mujtahids* are more removed from the core of faith due to the scholarly methods employed to yield those ideas. For example, Astarābādī denies the validity of three of the four well-known sources of religious knowledge in Islam, namely, *ijmāʿ* (consensus of ‘ulamāʾ), *ʿaql* (intellect, reason) and *ijtihād* (a religious scholar’s individual reasoning), considering them to be Sunni innovations (*bidʿa*).¹⁷ He argues that the expertise of the *mujtahid* of the age is not grounded in the most certain sources of knowledge, namely the *ḥadīth*, the *khbar* and the Quran, but rather based on dialectic and speculation, which are fallible methods that cannot legitimately serve as the basis for rulings on sacred law. Eight chapters (180–368) of his *al-Fawāʿid al-madaniyya* are dedicated to discussion on this subject.¹⁸

Uṣūlī scholars, however, reminded their traditionalist opponents of the strong possibility that *ḥadīth* and *khbar* literature could have been tampered with. That said, Akhbārīs believed that even in infallible sources of knowledge one could recognize the possibility and even the need to be understood and interpreted beyond the external and apparent meanings, which is one of the functions of learning.¹⁹ Furthermore, a consequence of scriptural reliance that was emphasized by Akhbārīs was the fact that it gave lay people direct access to the most sacred religious texts and provided them with the possibility of individual interpretation.

Perhaps the Uṣūlī *mujtahids* viewed this aspect of Akhbarism as the educated beginnings of heretical movements. The masses’ unfiltered access – that is, circumventing the works of scholars – to the most sacred texts could become a direct challenge to the well-established *ijtihād* tradition, which saw itself as losing its monopolistic grasp on dissemination and interpretation of

17 Astarābādī, *al-Fawāʿid al-madaniyya* 100, 106, 265–71, 352–59; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 106. For more information on the Shiʿa rejection of Sunni jurisprudence see Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 176–82.

18 In his *Safīnat al-najāt*, Astarābādī also criticizes the late Uṣūlī *mujtahids*. Cited in Modarressi, *An introduction* 52. Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 110–12; Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 191.

19 For more information on this aspect of Akhbarism see, Lawson, Akhbārī Shiʿī 173–210.

Islamic tenets and laws. The elevation and preaching of the scriptures was considered to come at the expense of such practices as the *ijtihād*, the *mujtahid* and *muqallid* institutions, and its hieratic monopoly of the scholarly realm. There was always this concern that the emphasis on individual understanding of the sacred message itself may lead to many abuses. Opposing the formalism of Usulism, in which scriptural understanding was neglected in favor of analogy and dialectical disputation, some valued intuitive and visionary knowledge above every other kind of knowing. Others felt hermeneutical understanding of the Quran and *ḥadīth* should suffice humanity.²⁰

The Modes of Transmission of Religious Knowledge

Regardless of what Safavid *mujtahids*, traditionalists, and mystical philosophers considered to be sources of knowledge and their various interpretations, the technical terms they used in the *ijāzas* they issued to their students indicate how the act of learning and transmission occurred. Sometimes students listened to a text or a number of texts read by the teacher, indicated by the term *samaʿa*; they also read (*qaraʿa ʿalā*) these texts to the teacher. Sometimes the teacher related a report (*ḥaddatha* or *akhbara*) to them. Generally a student read to his teacher standard texts such as the four *ḥadīth* collections (*al-kutub al-arbaʿa*), a number of legal texts written by the most eminent jurists, or widely recognized commentaries (*sharḥs*) written on these, as well as other religious sciences and their auxiliary sciences such as rhetoric and logic. Based on the large number of extant *ijāzas* issued by Safavid scholars over the course of two centuries, and autobiographical accounts, we know that recitation and narration (*riwāya*) – which had been the foundation of Islamic pedagogy, in both literal and general methodological senses – continued to be widely used in Safavid learning circles. In an *ijāza* issued by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī to Sayyid Niʿmatullāh al-Jazāʾirī in 1684, Majlisī states that,

He read to me (*qaraʿa ʿalayya*) and heard from me (*samʿa minnī*) and acquired from me (*akhadha ʿannī*) a significant number of scholarly works on rational (*ʿaqlī*), traditional (*naqlī*), and literary (*adabī*) sciences, particularly the collections of the Imams' *khabars*. Now that he has reached a level of deep comprehension of these materials as a result of a long

20 On the intuitive and “visionary yet rational, esoteric yet in accord with the literal text of scriptures” form of authority, as well as the notion of authority in Twelver Shiʿism in the context of extreme rivalries between scripturalist literalism versus rationalism, elitism versus egalitarianism, and spirituality versus legalism, see Cole, *The world as text* 145–63; Lawson, *Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī* 19–31.

learning process, and now that he has composed a significant number of scholarly books on various fields of religious sciences and gnosis (*ma'rifa*), I hereby permit him to transmit what I was permitted to transmit from the books written in various religious scholarly fields, including Quranic exegesis, Prophetic traditions, Islamic law, logic, Arabic grammar and rhetoric, and so forth.²¹

In the introduction to his *Lawāmi'-i ṣāhibqirānī* comprising twelve *fā'idas* on various aspects of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the transmission of knowledge, the characteristics of the 'ulamā', the *ijāza* system, and the legitimacy or illegitimacy of *ijtihād*, Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī discusses seven modes of transmission of knowledge in this order of preference: 1) The teacher reads a work to his pupil from beginning to end; 2) The teacher reads part of a work to his pupil; 3) The pupil reads the work to the teacher; 4) The pupil is present when another pupil reads the work to the teacher; 5) The teacher gives a copy of the work to the pupil, telling him to relate this work to the teacher; 6) The teacher gives the pupil permission to relate a particular book on his authority; 7) The pupil finds a work in the possession of his teacher, and then relates the work with qualification.²²

The primacy of oral transmission is evident in Majlisī's typology. It reveals the textual character of authority as well. Like many other 'ulamā', he believed the authoritative character of Islamic learning was maintained through oral transmission controlled by the 'ulamā'.²³ Students were frequently advised to learn from scholars and not from books. It was in oral transmission that instruction most closely approximated the ideals of what the Shi'a believed to be legitimate transmission of knowledge – it had to be conveyed authoritatively from a teacher to the students assembled in his presence. Learning from a text harbored the possibility of misreading and faulty interpretation.²⁴

21 Majlisī, *Ijāzāt al-ḥadīth* 299–304.

22 Cited in Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam* 145–46.

23 As Berkey notes, "Knowledge was found in texts ... the power of 'ulamā' as a social group reflected their ability to regulate access to and control of this community of texts." For more information see Berkey, *Popular preaching* 70.

24 In his *Islamic intellectual history*, El-Rouayheb, however, argues that as a result of the increased importance of the instrumental and rational sciences, especially the discipline of dialectics (*ādāb al-baḥth*), and the far-reaching reforms of the Ottoman learned hierarchy during the sixteenth century, a more "textual model of the transmission of knowledge" became prevalent in the central Ottoman lands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (*Islamic intellectual history* 98). He refers to Aḥmad b. Luṭfūllāh Mevlevī's work, *Ādāb al-muṭāla'a*, in which Mevlevī explains the proper manner of studying and perusing

Some scholars maintain that Muslims did not take full advantage of print technology when it appeared because print threatened to undermine the person-to-person transmission of knowledge and conceptions of authoritative transmission associated with those styles. Print also had the potential to lead to the fragmentation of authority.²⁵ Dale Eickelman argues that the deep inroads into the ‘ulamā’s privileged access to authoritative religious knowledge, coinciding with the current reality of mass education, widespread print media, and diversification of media, suggests that earlier scholars were right about print’s capacity to fragment authority.²⁶

In a chapter of his *al-Anwār al-nu‘māniyya*, entitled “*Nūr fī ādāb al-mu‘allim wa al-muta‘allim*” (Elucidating the decorum pertinent to teacher and student), Sayyid Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā‘irī discusses the basic paradigms of learning, including recitation, study (*muṭāla‘a*), writing commentaries (*ta‘liqa*), discussion (*mubāḥatha*), debate (*mudhākara*), memorization, and contemplation (*fikr*).²⁷ As much as he was concerned about modes of teaching and learning, al-Jazā‘irī was also interested in exploring ideal learning procedures. In his opinion, the best course of study begins with a student memorizing the Quran:

Because the Quran is the source of all other branches of knowledge and indeed the *raison d’être* of knowledge, a student will never learn jurisprudence and *ḥadīth* except by memorizing the Quran. Secondly, in order to avoid confusion, he must study only the books that he can understand. He must not study too many books because it will waste his time. He must read books one by one and move to the next book only after finishing and understanding the current book completely. He must not embark upon reading books for disputation and the like before being trained sufficiently to understand those books. He must verify books with his teacher before memorizing them ... He must memorize books at dawn, write in the middle of the day, and discuss them in the late afternoon. At night, he must study and debate. Based on my own experience, memorizing at night is better than during the day, and with an empty stomach and a place far from noise and distraction. It is better to start learning on a Tuesday or a Saturday and to end on a Thursday.²⁸

books on one’s own. For more on this book and similar works see El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history* 99–125.

25 This topic will be further discussed later in this chapter.

26 Eickelman, Mass higher education 1–13; *Muslim politics* 37 ff.

27 al-Jazā‘irī, *al-Anwār al-nu‘māniyya* iii, 343–44.

28 al-Jazā‘irī, *al-Anwār al-nu‘māniyya* iii, 363–65, 377–78.

Learning was thus not an act of passive recitation to a teacher or just listening to him and memorizing his words; it involved deep understanding and intellectual productivity. Safavid scholars issued *ijāzas* when they found that their students had acquired deep enough knowledge of the texts they studied and when they found them capable of producing scholarly works. For example, in an *ijāza* he issued to Mīr Dāmād, ‘Abd al-‘Alī b. ‘Alī Karakī states that his student, “in spite of his young age, has attained deep knowledge of a large number of subjects and has done scholarly research on these subjects and contributed immensely to many fields of scholarship; hence I hereby permit him to transmit what he has learned from me and relate on my authority my father’s books and what I was permitted to relate.”²⁹ That said, not all students were as accomplished and brilliant as Mīr Dāmād. There were *ijāzas* issued to students who studied only part of a *ḥadīth* collection. Many *ijāzas* issued by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, for example, are in fact permissions to transmit only a part of one of the four books by the three Muḥammads (i.e. Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Bābawayh al-Qumī, and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī). Scholars also obtained *ijāzas* from each other after meeting only briefly on their travels.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Memorization

As I discussed in chapter 3, religious and cultural identity may be maintained either by commemorating significant events at regular intervals, or by memorizing certain traditions and offering constant interpretations of them. Memorization and constant repetition have helped Muslims, both Shi‘a and Sunni, to maintain the authenticity of reports and texts fundamental to them.³⁰ Both al-Shahīd al-Thānī and Sayyid Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā‘irī, similar to many other Shi‘a and Sunni pedagogues, recommend that students start their learning by memorizing the Quran. This practice was extended to some textbooks that were widely considered as fundamental. Many authoritative texts on jurisprudence and other subjects, including Arabic grammar, were composed and

29 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* cvi, 85–86. For more examples see *Bihār al-anwār* cvi, 81, 106, 152, ff.

30 For more information on the significance of memorization in Islamic learning see Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 99–103; Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 28–30; Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 145–48; Eickelmann, *The art of memory* 485–516.

studied in verse form to facilitate memorization.³¹ Versification has long represented a principal channel for the assertion of scholarly views and rebuttal, as well as for the display of erudition and ingenuity.³²

Memorizing the Quran was considered the appropriate first step in the process of learning, regardless of which subjects were to follow.³³ Whoever knew the Quran in fact had secured the supreme source of guidance and knowledge as well as a moral compass within himself. Helen Boyle has described this learning process as unique for the memorizer [of the Quran], possibly in a direct and literal sense as the meaning of the Quran unfolds in his mind, but also in a metaphorical sense by its very sacredness becoming inscribed on the body of the memorizer.³⁴

Al-Shahīd al-Thānī writes,

Start your learning by memorizing God's book because it is the source of all knowledge and the most important book. Earlier scholars did not start learning *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence before memorizing the Quran. While trying to memorize it, do not occupy yourself with anything else. Study it every day and when you know it by heart, read it on Friday for the rest of your life! After memorizing the Quran then start learning *tafsīr* literature and other religious sciences and when you memorize from every field some basic texts then you may compare and contrast what you have memorized and learned. Then explain whatever you have memorized to your teacher so as to be sure of what you have learned. Keep doing so all day every day. Memorize books gradually and do not try to know everything by heart at once. Make sure to ascertain that what you have memorized is accurate. You must run it by your teacher to ensure that what you have memorized is accurate and authentic. Do not rely on book alone! You must always have a pen and ink with you to correct your manuscript after checking it with your teacher and your peers. Mark the page where

31 Versified as well as abridgments on Islamic law as well as other religious sciences that could be committed to memory became essential texts books in Safavid madrasas. Al-Karakī's *Jāmi' al-maqāṣid* was for example the most accessible commentary on al-Ḥillī's *Qawā'id al-aḥkām* (Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyī' al-sinīn* 458). Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī reports that he memorized such books as *al-Kāfiyya*, *al-Shāfiyya* and *Alfiyya* by Ibn Mālik. *Al-Jazā'irī, al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 306.

32 For example, such texts as *Alfiyya* by Ibn Mālik were versified in order to help students memorize them.

33 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 363.

34 Boyle, Memorization and learning 491. Eickelmann has also discussed how memorization of the Quran bestows upon its memorizer a special status (*Knowledge and power* 65–6).

you have corrected your manuscript. Memorizing books involves checking [with your teacher], correcting [misspellings], and collating and understanding. Divide your days and nights as follows: the best time to memorize is dawn, morning for debate, noon [for] writing, and night for studying, discussion and debate. Memorize when your [stomach] is not full, and at night and far from all noise and distractions such as flowers, plants and brooks and the like!³⁵

For this reason, having a strong memory was one of the most important tools for a student. Almost all Muslim pedagogues commented on how one could improve memory. Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī gave the following tips for improving memory: be industrious and committed; reduce consumption; pray at night; recite the Quran; recite night prayers from memory; memorize the Quran; perform other virtuous deeds following the Prophet Muḥammad's model such as brushing teeth; and carry out good deeds such as trying your hardest in any matter undertaken. He also recommended avoiding wrongdoing and sins, not eating things that cause phlegm or continuous defecation, and abandoning worldly sorrows.³⁶

According to Tabrīzī the causes of loss of memory include: "eating sour apples, phlebotomy from the nape of the neck, eating green coriander, urinating in stagnant water, eating things half-eaten by mice, and reading [texts written] on tomb stones."³⁷ Although this sounds ridiculous, it nevertheless

35 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 263–65. He echoes al-Zarnūjī who held that "the best periods to study are at the beginning of adolescence as well as the hour of dawn and that between the setting of the sun and the first vigil of the night. And it is necessary to put all one's energy into the study of knowledge at all times. But if one becomes irked by one discipline one occupies oneself with some other subject." al-Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta'lim al-muta'allim* 117–8. Al-Ṭūsī also advises a seeker of knowledge to have ink on hand on every occasion so that he can jot down items of interest. He also reminds students to question venerable men and acquire information from them. According to al-Ṭūsī, Wednesday is the best day for a student to begin his study; that is the day practiced by predecessors and recommended by traditions. The best times to study are the hours of dawn and that between the setting of the sun and first vigil of the night according to al-Ṭūsī. Al-Ṭūsī, *Ādāb al-muta'allimīn* 65, 107.

36 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 257. See also Ibn Jamā'a, *Tadhkira al-sāmi'* 77; Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 99.

37 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 257; al-Ṭūsī maintains among the activities that cause poor memory, scholars mentioned eating fresh coriander and sour apples, beholding a man crucified, reading the inscriptions on tombs, passing through a train of camels, throwing live fleas on the ground, and the application of the cupping glass to the nape of the neck. al-Ṭūsī, *Ādāb al-muta'allimīn*, 113–17.

highlights the importance scholars accorded to memory and memorization. In *Iḥtijāj* by Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ṭabarsī, it is also suggested that praising God, Prophet Muhammad, and his descendants causes whatever is forgotten to come to mind again.³⁸ Reciting certain benedictions also results in remembering what is forgotten.³⁹

But Muslim educators had practically developed certain techniques that helped students. As noted by Robert Gleave, works of jurisprudence, law, theology and Quranic exegesis display remarkable stable structural features since the 11th century up until the 18th century. The chapter order is generally stable, and the opinions entertained in each section are, in the main, rarely augmented by novel opinions after the end of 14th century. This predictability aided the students’ learning and memorization of the text, whilst simultaneously introducing the students to new aspects of a particular discipline. He argues that this generic conservation should not be taken to indicate any lack of scholarly originality in the classical period. Adept scholars could work within the established rules and make doctrinal developments and innovations with the discipline incrementally.⁴⁰

Although religious knowledge was mainly transmitted orally, committing materials to writing was recognized as most important in the process of learning. Memory alone was not to be trusted. Recording was also to be done from the mouths of professors and from their works, and when the work was considered important, it was copied in whole. Putting pen to paper was important in spite of the emphasis placed on stocking the memory. Books were indispensable because one had to refresh one’s memory in order to keep intact what had been handed down.

Lecture and Recitation

Safavid contemporary sources describe a learning procedure that started with an initial oral recitation or a dictation from an authoritative or fundamental text, chosen from the vast number of books that constituted the traditional

38 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* xci, 51. Al-Zarnūjī also holds that “the most powerful factors in strengthening *memory* are industriousness and assiduousness. Also a reduction of eating as well as praying at night and reciting the Quran are among the causes of remembering.” al-Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta’līm al-muta’allim* 130–02.

39 For more information see Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* xcii, 339, 83, 9.

40 For more information see, Gleave, *Scriptural Sufism* 158–59. As argued by Julia Bray Muslims scholars used lists to aid memory as well. For more information see, Bray, *Lists and memory* 210–31, wherein she argues that “the mnemonic classificatory list is in many ways the most sophisticated and culturally revealing kind ...” (ibid. 213).

curriculum discussed in the previous chapter. Then the teacher would expound upon certain words, terms and ideas, and may respond to any questions purposed by students, citing authoritative texts such as the Quran, or the *ḥadīth*, or the opinions of prominent scholars.⁴¹ During the teaching, notes would be taken, especially by those avid learners who wished to transmit further the material received in a lecture (and afterwards produce a written version from memory). Al-Shahīd al-Thānī describes the decorum pertinent to attendance in a teaching circle where textbooks are recited as follows:

A student should not start reciting the book before the teacher permits him to do so. [When he is permitted to recite] he should beseech God to protect him from Satan[’s deception and harm], then evoke God’s name and praise the prophet and his family and pray for the teacher[’s well-being] and his parents and his teachers and scholars, himself and all Muslims and in particular the author of the book [that he is going to recite]. He should do as such when reciting a book, repeating it, studying it and collating (*muqābala*) at the presence of the shaykh or in his absence.⁴²

Although certain texts became central among the Shi’a scholarly community and people who reproduced, commented upon and interpreted those texts gained marked religious authority, al-Shahīd al-Thānī was known to remind students that texts – no matter how well-established and authoritative – are silent on their own. They become relevant to scholars through their enunciation and citation, and through acts of reading, reference, and interpretation.⁴³ Shi’i learning, like that of all other pedagogical activities conducted throughout Muslim world, was authenticated when written texts were enunciated before a teacher or by teacher.⁴⁴ Indeed *ṣuḥba* and *mulāzama* as argued by Makdisi were basic characteristics of Islamic learning.⁴⁵

41 The practice continued to the modern times. See Messick, *The calligraphic state* 21–2, 84–88.

42 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 247.

43 Ibn Jamā’a also warns students not to seek knowledge from books alone (*Tadhkirat al-sāmi’* 87).

44 See for example Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 140–46; Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 24–28; Chamberlain also explains this tradition and states that, “Books were never so much read as performed” (*Knowledge and social practice* 148).

45 For more on *ṣuḥba* see Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 128–9; Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 34–35.

Despite the significance of texts in Islamic learning, religious authority – that is, the authority to represent what is written – did not embrace printing technology until the mid-nineteen century. Chardin reports that when he was in Isfahan, he suggested several times to import some printing machines to Persia and install one in Isfahan. But there were people who argued against this undertaking, explaining that the air in Persia is dry, thus causing paper to become brittle after a short time and rendering the use of printing technology difficult. In spite of this technical issue expressed by some detractors, he states that the importation of a printing machine would have been easily accomplished if ‘Abbās II were still alive, but his son and successor is not interested in this enterprise and the encouragement and justification of various scholars did not persuade him. He continues, “but since Persians value learning immensely, calligraphy and manuscripts have advanced tremendously and have become fine arts.” He adds,

Despite the fact that the price of manuscripts is high in comparison with our printed books, there are sufficient books around that are not very pricy. That said, it is difficult to obtain books by every author; therefore, whoever wishes to have a copy of any needed work, he must order a scribe to make a copy for him. In order to have the manuscript he must provide enough paper and then make a deal with the scribe concerning his payment. The price of copying is calculated based on one thousand lines. It is very pricy and there are only few people who are willing to pay such a price; the regular price of a book is 27 *sous*. Who the author is, or what the subject of the book is, and how famous or less known the author is, do not affect the price of copying. It is thus clear how the price and rarity of books can create obstacles in the path of progress and dissemination of knowledge and culture and how it makes it difficult for scholars and researchers to pursue learning and explore new ideas. There are also many misspellings and mistakes in manuscripts. At times, it is really difficult to understand what has been written.⁴⁶

Father Raphaël Du Mans (d. 1696), concerning printing technology, also writes,

Persians are deprived of printing technology in light of which sciences advance and how an author becomes famous. They only use manuscripts and, while making copies, many mistakes are accrued either due to ignorance or the carelessness of copiers. Books get transformed in surprising

46 Cited in Ja'fariyān, *Şafavîya dar 'arşa-yi dîn* ii, 741.

ways. Indeed, while an author is alive, if his book becomes popular many copies are made of his book, but [the scribes] change it the way they wish! Therefore, if an author sees a copy of his own book after a few years, he would have difficulty recognizing his own work due to all the changes made by the scribes!⁴⁷

In either of the above-mentioned European travelers accounts, there is no mention of any setbacks or opinions expressed by religious scholars that printing might infringe upon or undermine their authority, or that printing technology might bring changes in the patterns of Islamic education. Nor do they report that any Muslim religious elite showed any interest in printing technology, such as regarding it as a potential vehicle for the effective dissemination of his ideas. In Chardin's report there is no hint of any awareness demonstrated by the 'ulamā' that printed texts could enable them to reach wider audiences than could ever be conceivable by reliance solely on manuscripts, and of how printing technology could expand their small circle of influence. We must not forget that reading and writing were necessary for those destined for high religious careers. The majority of the population received only a rudimentary education in *maktabs* (Quranic schools.) Only the most gifted and dedicated students proceeded to become *mujtahids* and scholars, and they either copied the books they needed themselves or could afford to pay someone else to make copies for them. Perhaps less educated people would benefit from listening to a teacher and debates conducted in his teaching circle rather than learning from printed texts on their own.

Class Procedure

Jean Chardin relates his observation of the elaborate process that students went through in a day at the madrasa in Safavid Isfahan:

The student sits on his heels and the teacher makes a sign for him to begin, and he reads from an author for two or three lines and then is silent. The teacher gives an explanation and the student begins to read again, or another student takes the same lesson and reads another passage and the master gives an explanation as before and so the sequence continues for an hour or two. Afterwards, the student puts his books and his satchel in front of the teacher, gets up and stands with his head bowed, his hands, crossed on his stomach, which is the respectful posture in Persia. If the teacher believes it is fitting to continue with the lesson,

47 Ja'fariyān, *Şafavīya dar 'arşa-yi dīn* ii, 741–2.

he motions to him to sit down again, but if not, he dismisses him with the words, God be with you. When a student finishes a lesson in one place, he goes to another teaching circle either in the same madrasa or another madrasa. Sometimes it is the same subject with another teacher, but normally it concerns another branch of knowledge.... I have often seen a teacher giving four or five lessons of different kinds in one session to different students taking different subjects on the same day.⁴⁸

Based on the information provided by Chardin, we can assume that teachers taught multiple disciplines at the same time, aiming to expound upon the intersections between the various topics and issues to students. Students were not only encouraged to discern the connections between various religious sciences from complex and multiple perspectives but were also provided a context to integrate the use of different skills. Therefore, in addition to listening to teachers and reciting texts before them, students were encouraged to become directly involved in the learning process through debate, disputation, and writing commentaries on the most celebrated authoritative texts. It is also noteworthy that students attended teaching circles conducted in various mosque-madrasas perhaps to have a share in as many endowments as possible. Teachers themselves also taught and collected fees in several places concurrently.

Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, the famed Shi'ī pedagogue, advises students to

Attend the teaching sessions of your teacher as much as possible. Do not ever think that you need not his guidance and you can learn from books and notes of your peers. Do not get bored of his teaching if it gets prolonged, and do not suffice only to listening to a lecture. Attend other lectures and discuss what you have learned with your peers. When entering a teaching session greet everybody as loud as they all can hear you. And show more due respect to the teacher. Some scholars argue that there is no need for greeting especially when a discussion is underway. When entering the room do not try to sit next to the teacher! You should sit at the end of the circle but if the shaykh and his companions urged you to sit closer [to the shaykh], then you may.⁴⁹

He goes on to emphasize that students should not crowd the personal space of the shaykh by siting very close to him, so as to touch his clothing or prayer mat

48 Chardin, *Siyāhat-nāma-yi Chardin*, trans. 'Abbāsī iv, 234–35.

49 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 268–69.

or pillow that is behind his back, and that they should be assiduous in their attendance. Unless they have an excuse for being absent, valid in the eyes of the religious law, they must not miss teaching sessions except for one or two days maximum.⁵⁰ He continues,

Treat your peers and the audience with respect because respecting them is as respecting the teacher. In addition, do not bother persons seated in the teaching circle by asking them to move and give their place to you, but rather greet them and shake their hands. Do not sit in the center of the teaching circle. But if there is no space and there are too many people, you may sit in the center of the teaching circle. As a rule, treat everybody with respect by greeting them, shaking their hands, and refraining from bothering them by crowding their personal space and behaving disrespectfully. Do not talk in the middle of a lecture. When you wish to recite to the shaykh, keep to your turn and do not jump ahead of a peer who is ahead of you in line unless you ask for his permission. Remember that recitation to the shaykh is organized based on when students enter the classroom. Whoever enters first he would be ahead of the people who enter teaching hall after him. But if you go to restroom or so forth, your turn should be considered.⁵¹

Al-Shahīd al-Thānī writes that assistants (*mu'īd*) and the professor can also organize the recitation time slot, and no one can change the schedule without their permission. He continues, “when it is a student’s turn to recite he should sit in front of the teacher and should bring his book along; he should not put the book on the ground but should keep it in his hands. Students should also pay due respect towards their elder peers as well as the *mu'īd* and should not dispute them and challenge them before getting to know the true story behind any situation.”⁵² Normally, the more senior in education, the closer the individual would be seated to the teacher. All classes began and ended with a prayer.

Mudhākara and Discussion (mubāḥatha)

Memorization and recitation were not meant to encourage rote learning devoid of comprehension and reasoning. These widely used learning methods

50 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 270.

51 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 270–72.

52 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 273–74. Makdisi describes *mu'īd* as an “advanced graduate student” whose role was similar to that of the *repetitor* in the universities. For more information on the function of *mu'īd* see Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 193–5, 276 ff.

were reinforced with understanding and reflection. Learning by means of memorization and recitation was cultivated further through *mudhākara*, which generally is understood as one person calling to mind with another person a narrative, or discourse, and so forth. It also means speaking of something with another person. *Mudhākara*, therefore, is a reciprocal action of aiding one another to memorize and to understand better. It was highly recommended that a student discuss and confer about what he has learned with his peers and should do so as soon as he leaves the class, while his memory is still fresh and before his mind has the chance to become distracted and forget some of what he has learned.⁵³ Al-Shahīd al-Thānī holds that *mudhākara* and *mubāḥatha* are the best ways of studying. He even argues that, if one cannot find somebody with whom to discuss, he can do it on his own and repeat what he has heard or learned to himself so that he retains them in his mind. He should also encourage his peers to study, debate and discuss lessons with each other, and he should avoid jealousy, arrogance, and the belittling of others.⁵⁴

Legal studies, in particular, were entwined with critical understanding and creative inquiry. Indeed, in this field of study, learning shifted from the *riwāya* (authentic transmission) phase to the *dirāya* (understanding), a learning method based mainly on the confrontation of various legal opinions in discussion and debate. The true *mujtahid* not only learned prophetic and Imāmī traditions and could transmit them authentically in turn, but he was also able to understand those traditions and make intelligent use of them by applying logical analogy and reasoning, which was tantamount to *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Al-Shahīd al-Thānī makes a strong plea for the acquisition of religious knowledge and its understanding (*tafaqquh*). He censures those who limited themselves to transcribing or note-taking without taking the trouble to study and understand what they had written. He recommends students to

Discuss whatever you have memorized from the abridged works and record your corrections and edition and comments on points, words, and phrases that you did not know, and then move on to the more compli-

53 Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 103–04.

54 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 275–76. Ibn Jamā'a also believes *mudhākara* and *mubāḥatha* are the best ways of studying. See *Tadhkirat al-sāmi'* 142–45. Al-Ṭūsī also advises students to ask questions and debate (*munāẓara*) in order to internalize one's learning and encourage arguments to cross over from one field to another. Al-Ṭūsī, however, encourages students first to learn and understand books and then to become involved in disputation. For more information see *Ādāb al-muta'allimīn* 77. On the importance of peer learning see also Eickelman, *Knowledge and power* 98–100.

cated and advanced topics. Studying thus involves reading, editing, and writing commentaries (*ta'liqa*) on everything you have read or heard from your professor. Do not suffice only to reading and listening. When it comes to learning, you must also write down and memorize them. Learn while you are young, healthy and free from all concerns including family and career that would occupy your minds later in life.⁵⁵

Question (su'āl), Dialectical Disputation (jadal), and Debate (munāzara)

While encouraging students to ask questions, Shi'i pedagogues reminded them that their questions should arise out of the desire to learn more, and not out of the temptation to trouble teachers or show off their own intellectual abilities. Students were also warned to not question things which would perturb them upon disclosure, reminding them of this Quranic verse: "O believers, question not concerning things, which, if they were revealed to you, would vex you; yet if you question concerning them when the Quran is being set down, they will be revealed to you. God has effaced those things; for God is All-forgiving, All-merciful. A group of people before you questioned concerning them then disbelieved them."⁵⁶

In *ḥadīth* and *khabar* literature there are sayings in which the prophet and the Imams are asked questions that they categorized as useless.⁵⁷ In fact, it was considered a scholar's right not to be troubled by irrelevant questions.⁵⁸ Yet it was also said that a student must not be ashamed of asking questions, because, as Ja'far al-Ṣādiq said, "Knowledge is a lock and its key is questioning."⁵⁹ As in this case, there are *ḥadīths* with different and often sharply conflicting, or at least inconsistent, content on different issues. Concerning *su'āl*, al-Shahīd al-Thānī recommends that students "avoid questions intended only to prove one's lack of knowledge on a specific topic. Questions should be asked out of real desire to know, and not to prove the inability of certain persons! Getting into futile debates to prove somebody's incompetence and to annoy him is wrong-headed and sinful."⁶⁰ He adds,

55 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 267.

56 Q 5:101–103.

57 See for example, Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* xxiii, 183.

58 al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* i, 37; al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'mānīyya* iii, 343, 360.

59 al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* i, 40; al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'mānīyya* iii, 360.

60 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 170–72.

A student should ask questions until he is certain that he understands the issues under study wholly. You should not, however, ask irrelevant questions and also should not insist on asking the same questions over and over. While asking questions is permitted, wasting the time of a teacher by asking irrelevant questions is reprehensible.⁶¹

Disputation (*jadal*) is described as a sign of human ignorance in the Quran, which characterizes those who engage in such disputation as perverse, stubborn, arrogant, and unreceptive to God's word.⁶² Alongside the condemnation of disputation, one also finds a certain acceptance willed by God who says, "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance."⁶³ Tabrīzī relates a *ḥadīth* from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shi'ī Imam, who expressed his contempt for the practitioners of *jadal* by claiming that those seeking knowledge fell into three categories: the members of the first group seek knowledge so they can defeat their opponents in disputes; the second group seeks knowledge to gain worldly status and amass wealth, mainly through deception and cheating; and the third group utilizes their knowledge to attain God's satisfaction. These first two groups are clearly more interested in disputation than in knowledge. He states that,

The first group annoys Muslims in disputes and if they are in an assembly, they start talking about themselves, explaining that they have had a number of debates with a certain scholar and have written several books; since they are ignorant and impatient, they also mention that a certain student mistreated them but was forgiven in spite of the fact that they were capable of having him killed and beaten. Although they portray themselves as humble and knowledgeable, they are not afraid of God's [wrath], so His Excellency (i.e., Ja'far al-Ṣādiq) cursed them. As for the second group, the sixth Imām said, Since their goal is wealth and worldly positions, as soon as they meet wealthy and powerful people, they start flattering them and showing humility to deceive them. And when they meet people of their own class, from scholars and students, they treat them with outmost arrogance. Therefore, they accept bribes and gifts from the rich and powerful and abandon their religion, so may God blind

61 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 258–59.

62 McAuliffe, *Debate and disputation* i, 511–14.

63 Q 16: 125.

their hearts' eyes and banish their names from the rank of scholars so that their names may not tarnish the good reputation of scholars.⁶⁴

Inspired by this *khabar* and similar sayings, Shi'i pedagogues always warned students about the negative effects of unbridled disputation and the emotions that could arise from it. There was always a fear that *jadal* might be used as mere intellectual aggression and self-promotion – a mechanism of repudiation – rather than a means by which to evoke wholehearted acceptance of the truth. The “people of disputation” (*ahl al-jadal*) were accused of self-aggrandizement instead of convincing their opponents. Although references in the Quran and *ḥadīth* to dialectical disputation (*jadal*) are overwhelmingly negative it was not condemned entirely and was a prevalent mode of intellectual enquiry in some teaching circles. Some disputations were considered desirable, provided they were fair and involved reflection. In his *The mantle of the Prophet*, Roy Mottahedeh says that, “These highly developed techniques (*jadal* and *mas'alah sāzī*) tended to homogenize learning and to encourage arguments (and technical vocabulary) to cross over from one field into another.”⁶⁵ Tabrīzī, the Safavid pedagogue, advised students to pursue knowledge by means of discussion, argument, and questioning:

It is essential that one do these things [i.e. disputation (*jadal*) and debate (*munāẓara*)] with fairness, alertness, and reflection, and by fortifying oneself against quarrel and anger. It is incumbent upon the student in the quest for knowledge that he meditate at all times on the subtle matters of knowledge and that he adapt himself to it for only by contemplation can subtle problems be solved. Students should benefit at any time and in any circumstances from anybody.⁶⁶

Although at times *jadal* and *munāẓara* are used interchangeably, they are etymologically and methodologically different. In *jadal*, usually one's main focus is to cause his adversary to shift from one thesis that he thinks is false to

64 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id*, 248–49; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* 1, 49; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 2, 47, 80, 195. The Shi'a *ḥadīth* collections extensively reported sayings of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq on the same topic, for instance see al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* 1, 46–7; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 95, 226.

65 See Roy P. Mottahedeh, *The mantle of the Prophet* 108.

66 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id*, 248. Al-Jazā'irī also discusses the decorum pertinent to *munāẓara* (*al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 370).

another that he believes is truth, by way of argumentation.⁶⁷ *Jadal* was also used to establish lines of authority, as Makdisi puts it, “in the absence of an organization to determine orthodoxy, like a body of religious scholars convening to consider matters of doctrine, discipline, law or morals.” In this situation, he continues, “The bounds of orthodoxy are determined on the basis of the consensus of doctors of the law.”⁶⁸ In a *munāẓara*, however, the main goal is to attain the truth; the practitioner of *munāẓara* does not claim to know the truth but rather is seeking it, while the practitioner of *jadal* usually believes that he knows the truth, and thus attempts to convince his opponent. Therefore, *munāẓara* was seen as the best and the most significant method of learning among jurists. Sayyid Ni‘matullāh Jazā‘irī encourages students first to learn and understand books and then to become involved in debate.⁶⁹ Al-Shahīd al-Thānī describes the decorum pertinent to the debate, its conditions and its harms, as follows:

The main objective of a *munāẓara* is to reach and explore the truth. One should become engaged in *munāẓara* in order to enjoin good and forbid evil. A *munāẓara* session should address an issue on which there lacks prior agreement; that is, an unresolved issue. It should be void of scorn, ridicule, vexation, and mockery. The person who engages in a *munāẓara* should be knowledgeable not only on one school of thought/ law, but he should know them all. A *munāẓara* should be on an important religious matter or a current topic. It should not be on bizarre topics. *Munāẓara* done in private is better than in public or at the court of elite. When the truth is explored via *munāẓara*, the parties engaged in it should show their gratefulness and it does not matter who explored it first. The persons conducting the *munāẓara* should focus on one question and only one issue and avoid moving from one point to another.⁷⁰

He goes on to complain that he has seen *munāẓara* sessions in which people were not after revealing the truth, but rather insisted on their point of view

67 For a detailed discussion on *jadal* see Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 103–09, 128.

68 Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 106.

69 al-Jazā‘irī, *al-Anwār al-nu‘māniyya* iii, 363–65, 377–78. al-Zarnūjī also advises the student to pursue knowledge by means of discussion, argument and questioning. He writes, “It is essential that one do these things with fairness, alertness and reflection, and by fortifying oneself against quarrel and anger” (*Kitāb ta‘līm al-muta‘allim* 103–104).

70 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd*, 314.

and rejected other opinions unfairly, mostly based on their stubbornness.⁷¹ Al-Shahīd al-Thānī emphasizes that the essential condition to become engaged in a *munāẓara* was to know all available opinions on the particular topic that was to be debated. Thus, he advises the debater to already commit to his memory religious teachings and the works of prominent Muslim scholars, and to sharpen his logical analysis skills. A student must also be familiar with the ever-growing repertoire of questions and explanations on similar topics by reading the arguments made by a certain scholar, and then studying other books on the same subject matter. He should then gather the points of disagreement and contention among those multiple texts. Once he has learned the points of disagreement, then he can make use of logical and rational analysis to either reconcile the two sides of an argument or put forward a new solution.⁷²

It was not, however, enough to know all previously known and debated questions and the sequence of arguments and counter-arguments; one could become a renowned debater and celebrated scholar, especially someone aspiring to become qualified to issue legal opinions, by innovating new questions, developing new arguments, and especially by offering new solutions. At the same time, al-Shahīd al-Thānī warns the practitioner of *munāẓara* to not become conceited, hence marring his fame as well as his religiosity by bragging, showing off his knowledge and skills, and trying to overwhelm his opponent. When he is unable to subdue his opponent, he must not resort to ridicule or downright insolence, or speak in obscure and convoluted or overly-embellished language. He classifies these reprehensible behaviors as some of the harms of *munāẓara*. Al-Shahīd al-Thānī maintains that these are signs of a half-baked scholar's internal shortcomings such as arrogance, selfishness, jealousy, hypocrisy, worldly ambitions, and so forth. He considers these characteristics as bad as the sin of drinking, for example, as opposed to the major sins such as adultery and murder, and adds that falsification, deceit, trickery, and guile should not be a part of *munāẓara*.⁷³ The ideal debater, according to al-Shahīd al-Thānī, is one who has the courage to stand up to his opponent, but who can control his temper and does not allow it to prevail over him. He reminds his reader that there are two benefits in *munāẓara*: to encourage people

71 El-Rouayheb discusses the evolution of "the science of *munāẓara* or *ādāb al-baḥṭh*" in seventeenth-century Ottoman society. He maintains that many manuals and particularly super glosses on *ādāb al-baḥṭh* (dialectics) and *munāẓara* (debate) during this period were mainly written by the Ottoman scholars (*Islamic intellectual history* 35, 68, 60–128 ff).

72 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 314–15.

73 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd*, 315.

towards learning, and to sharpen the mind and empower one's self to better understand knowledge.⁷⁴

Munāẓara proved to be the most significant pedagogical method used by *mujtahids* because it was constructed upon sound knowledge of the Quranic, prophetic, and Imani teachings as well extensive knowledge of the works of earlier and contemporary scholars, combined with dialectical skills.⁷⁵ This combination allowed a student to analyze, synthesize, and arrive at the best possible legal opinion and the best possible defense of that opinion. After all, excellence in legal studies, which was the salient feature of Islamic learning, was achieved through debate as well as clarity of thinking and an ability to express oneself elegantly and economically. The practice of *munāẓara* and constant inquiry, which allowed the free flow of legal opinions, kept Islamic higher learning dynamic.

Writing Commentary (sharḥ) and Glosses (ḥāshiya)

In his autobiography, Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī reports: "When I was in madrasa in Shiraz, on hot summer days when my classmates slept on the roof, I locked the door of my room and kept myself busy studying books, writing glosses, and correcting my notes until the muezzin called for morning prayer. This was my condition for three years. At this time, I began to write a commentary on the *Kāfiya*, and another entitled *Miftāḥ al-labīb*, on the *Tahdhīb* of Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn Muhammad."⁷⁶ In addition to being an important teaching tool, the tradition of writing commentary served other diverse purposes. In Twelver Shi'ism, certain texts and works came to embody normative and formative values. These texts gave rise to a class of scholars whose main intellectual endeavor was to interpret and comment upon this canon.⁷⁷ Over the centuries a rich literature of interpretation and commentary on the canonical *ḥadīth* collections as well as on the most important works in every scholarly field from Arabic grammar to *uṣūl al-fiqh* was produced.

The *sharḥ*, ranging from mere explication of difficult words, terms, and concepts to lengthy doctrinal elaboration, helped students achieve a better un-

74 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd*, 334.

75 Despite the fact that *munāẓara* was seen as the most important learning methods by the *uṣūlī mujtahids*, of the many works on *ādāb al-baḥth* listed by Brockelmann and Wisnovsky, only a gloss ascribed to Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī on Mullā Ḥanafī Tabrīzī's commentary on the treatise of Ijī is mentioned. For more information see Wisnovsky, *The nature and scope* 170; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history* 69.

76 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* 4, 307–10

77 For more on canon see Assmann, *Religion and cultural memory*, 64–65.

derstanding of the *matn* (text). It was quite common, for instance, to cite the obscurity or prolixity of an earlier work as a motivation for writing a commentary. *Ta'liqa* was another kind of commentary activity. Makdisi states that students who pursued jurisprudence as part of their training would write *ta'liqa* on the authority of their professor of law. The *ta'liqa* was based on a professor's lectures or books. He adds that a *ta'liqa* could be a set of lecture notes for the personal use of a professor of law in teaching his own course, or a finished product that could be used by other professors. An advanced student also collected notes taken from the lectures of his teacher, or his works in the form of a *ta'liqa*.⁷⁸

Although commentaries were first and foremost restatements and interpretations of earlier ideas, they served as one of the most important mediums through which authority was articulated. As argued by Muhammad Qasim Zaman, an authoritative interpretation of a corpus of texts gave scholars enormous power and respect in pre-modern Islamic society.⁷⁹ Commentaries, especially Quranic exegesis, were also a means of polemical exchange.⁸⁰ Every so often the commentators supplemented the authoritative texts with new meaning(s) and context(s) based on their ideology and intellectual predilection. For example, in his *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Mullā Ṣadrā not only elucidated the meaning of the prophetic traditions from a philosophical perspective, but also demonstrated how the literalists had frequently gone astray in their understanding of the Imams' sayings. In his *The calligraphic state: Textual domination and history in a Muslim society*, Brinkley Messick asserts that medieval works of law were "open texts," the very "internal discursive construction" of which required constant interpretation and commentary. He also maintains that writing commentaries is not only an act of dialogue and communication with the past but also helpful in developing certain scholarly fields.⁸¹ As Muhammad Qasim Zaman has shown, Islamic jurisprudence developed largely by means of interpretive elaboration on basic texts.

78 For more information on *ta'liqa* and the tradition of *ta'liqa* writing see, Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 111–26. He maintains, "The *ta'liqa* was a product of disputation. As such it could have been developed not only in law, but in other fields where disputation was also practiced; namely, grammar, *kalam*, and medicine" (*The rise of colleges* 123).

79 Zaman, *The ulama in contemporary Islam* 38.

80 See for example, Pulcini, *Exegesis as polemical discourse*, especially Chapters 3 & 4; Zaman, *The ulama in contemporary Islam* 40–50.

81 Messick, *The calligraphic state* 30–36.

The discursive form of the commentary was, in fact, one of the principal means through which the law was not only elaborated but also expanded and modified to meet the exigencies of changing times. Commentaries allowed scholars to preserve the identity and authority of their school of law, their legal tradition, while simultaneously providing them with the means to make sometimes important adjustments in that tradition.⁸²

Commentaries can also be thought of as one of the most important tools in preserving the cultural memory of a community. Jan Assmann argues that, “the normative and formative impulses of cultural memory can only be gleaned through the incessant, constantly renewed textual interpretation of the tradition through which the identity of a community is established. Interpretation becomes the gesture of remembering, the interpreter becomes a person who remembers and reminds us of a forgotten truth.”⁸³ Perhaps for this reason, many, if not all, Safavid ‘ulamā’ wrote a commentary on at least one of the four canonical *ḥadīth* books. Writing and studying commentaries, super-commentaries (*sharḥ-i sharḥ*), and glosses served various purposes including helping students to achieve a deeper knowledge of texts, articulate intellectual authority, and preserve cultural memory. Thus the tradition of writing commentary cannot be seen as a sign of intellectual stagnation, as stated by Fazlur Rahman: “The later medieval centuries saw a marked decline – indeed a stagnation – of intellectual life in the Muslim world. From the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onward there was an era of manuals, commentaries, and super commentaries.”⁸⁴

The Place of Texts in Learning and Etiquette Pertinent to Writing and Shelving Books

According to al-Shahīd al-Thānī, books are significant because they preserve knowledge, thus the author’s intention must be pure.⁸⁵ He adds that one

82 Zaman, *The ulama in contemporary Islam* 38. See also El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history* 124, wherein he notes that gloss works are “the critical assessment of the claims being made in the glossed text.”

83 Assmann, *Religion and cultural memory* 43.

84 Rahman, *Islam and modernity* 45.

85 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 340. For a detailed discussion on the significance of books in Islamic learning see Gunther, Praise to the book! 125–143. He states both al-Jāhīz and Ibn Qutayba “perceived the book as both a store of knowledge and a guarantee of its

should do his best to acquire books he needs to conduct his studies. Despite the significance of books in learning, studying is considered more important and therefore, if one can obtain books, he should not occupy himself by copying them himself. He can put his time to a better use, which – according to al-Shahīd al-Thānī – is studying. He adds that one can also always borrow books and it is even considered more praiseworthy than spending time making a copy of any book that can simply be borrowed. Once one borrows a book, he must do his best to keep the book intact and in good shape. He must not edit and collate a borrowed book without acquiring the permission of its owner first. While studying or copying a book, one should not put it on the ground.⁸⁶ Finally, books should be organized based on their subjects and authors, as follows:

The Quran should be placed at the top, then *ḥadīth* books, then Quranic exegeses and *ḥadīth* commentaries, then sources and principles of religion, then sources and theories of *fiqh*, then books on *fiqh*, and then books on Arabic language and its related sciences. One should be mindful of not piling large books on top of small size books, because it can cause them to fall and become ruined. The names of the books should be written on the last page of the book so that one might easily know the book and withdraw it from the collection.... He also should not fold the corner or margins of pages, and should not put a piece of wood in the book as a page marker. He rather should use a fine paper or something like that to avoid ruining the book.⁸⁷

The purchased or borrowed books should be handled with utmost care, al-Shahīd al-Thānī states. The buyer or borrower should check the book carefully from the beginning to the end to see if the chapters are placed in an orderly manner. He should also check the accuracy and the quality of the copying. Once he has bought or borrowed a book he must keep it clean and in the state of religious purity. Any book should start with the name of God and his prophet and his family and end with praise for God and the prophet. Whenever the name of God is mentioned in any text, it should be followed by phrases like “Glory to Him, the Exalted” and the like. If Prophet Muhammad’s name is

authenticity in the course of transmission” (ibid. 139). See also Rosenthal, *The technique and approach* 6–7.

86 Ibn Jamā’a and al-Zarnūjī also offer similar recommendations. Ibn Jamā’a, *Tadhkirat al-sāmi’* 123–24; al-Zarnūjī, *Ta’lim al-muta’allim* 51.

87 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 345.

mentioned often, one can use *SALM* instead of writing the whole phrase every time. If the names of Prophet Muhammad's companions are mentioned, they should be accompanied by phrases like "May God be Pleased with him" or the like.

According to al-Shahīd al-Thānī, the main goal of writing is accuracy and not just elegant handwriting; thus one should not be obsessed with penmanship. When writing or copying a book, one must exert the proper pressure with his pen while writing, neither holding it forcefully nor feebly. A high quality pen made of quality wood like ebony should be used. One should avoid writing in a complicated way that would later present a challenge to oneself or other readers. He should collate his copy of the manuscript with the original manuscript to ensure the accuracy of his copy. If he has made mistakes he should write the correct word(s) or phrase(s) at the margin of his copy. In addition to discussing the important points presented above, Al-Shahīd al-Thānī gives a wealth of other advice on how to produce better copies. For example, he maintains that "one must not end a line with the first half of names combined with Allāh or Rasūl al-Allāh, and start the next line with Allah. The name should appear together."⁸⁸

Teachers and Learning

The teacher enjoyed a pivotal position in Islamic education, so much that the extent of a person's learning was first measured by the reputation of his teacher(s) and then by the number and kinds of books he had studied. Many *ḥadīths* of the Imams and the Prophet stressed the importance of teachers and their high position. According to Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 650), "Looking at the face of a scholar is better than emancipating a thousand slaves."⁸⁹

A teacher's function was not confined merely to instructing and training students in the prescribed subjects. A scholar's personal behavior was expected to set a standard for the entire community.⁹⁰ A scholar committing a sin or making a bad judgment was thought to cause wickedness, wrongdoing, and

88 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 337–65. In Chapter 4 of his educational manual Ibn Jamā'a discusses how a student should handle books (*Tadhkirat al-sāmi'* 223–52).

89 See Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* i, 203. Al-Kulaynī quotes Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the fifth Imam, who said, "Talking with a scholar on a rubbish heap is better than talking to an ignorant man on fine carpets." Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* i, 39.

90 In his *Kanz al-fawā'id*, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Uthmān al-Karājakī (d. 1057) reports that the sage Luqmān advised his son, "O, my son, talk with scholars and seek their company and

false judgment to appear among people.⁹¹ Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī quotes ‘Alī, the first Imam, who said, “If a scholar stumbles (i.e., makes a mistake) he will destroy the world.”⁹²

Religious scholars managed the religious establishments and served as the main guardians of Islamic cultural and intellectual traditions.⁹³ Moreover, because the community valued knowledge, the knowledgeable had the kind of authority that ruling establishments wished to link their own authority.⁹⁴ Safavid patronage of Shi‘i scholars, therefore, constituted a major part of Safavid religious policies. Many religious scholars of the time competed against each other to win the Safavid rulers’ favor, since they were well paid for their services. For example, the author of *Dastūr al-mulūk* reports that “the *shaykh al-Islam* received the sum of two hundred *tumans* annually from the royal treasury.”⁹⁵

In addition to substantial fees, large parcels of lands were granted to religious scholars.⁹⁶ For example, Shāh Tahmāsb issued a royal decree that gave al-Karakī vast parcels of lands and exempted him from paying taxes.⁹⁷ Shāh ‘Abbās II also granted a district in Ardakān to ‘Alī Riḍā Tajallī.⁹⁸ He also gave Muḥaqqiq Sabzawārī the sum of 200 *tumans* for his pilgrimage expenses to Mashhad. He had already given him 500 *tumans* to donate to the shrine of the eighth Imam.⁹⁹ Shāh ‘Abbās II, however, tried to minimize the profits that some leading religious scholars were receiving as *mutawallīs* of pious endowments by reshuffling their posts and restricting their privileges.¹⁰⁰

Teaching posts were normally inherited by the progeny of the appointed scholars. A prominent scholar may have received the highly coveted teaching position on the merit of his scholarly achievements, but after him his children

visit them in their houses; maybe you can become one of them or similar to one of them.” Cited in Majlisī’s *Biḥār al-anwār al-nu‘māniyya* i, 205.

91 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār al-nu‘māniyya* ii, 52.

92 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār al-nu‘māniyya* ii, 52.

93 See al-Jazā’irī, *al-Anwār al-nu‘māniyya* iii, 347–50.

94 Some Shi‘i scholars even claimed that ‘ulamā’ were the actual rulers and Safavid shahs were their deputies. For example, see Kashmīrī, *Nujūm al-samā’* 111.

95 Mīrzā Rafī‘ā, *Dastūr al-mulūk* 33.

96 For more information, see Fragner, Social and internal economic 506–11; Floor, *A fiscal history* 57–60; Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* 186.

97 For more on this decree see Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* v, 171.

98 Naṣrābādī, *Tadhkira* 169.

99 Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyī‘ al-sinīn* 525–29.

100 For more information see Lambton, *Landlord and peasant* 106–7.

usually would inherit the position simply because of family ties.¹⁰¹ J. Berkey argues that, “the inheritability of teaching posts became, in fact, a leitmotif of the institutionalized side of higher education in medieval Cairo.”¹⁰² Indeed, madrasas as well as other religious institutions served the interests of the prominent scholarly families first and foremost to such an extent that at times some religious scholars had to pay their way to be appointed to high offices. For example, the Dutch in 1716 observed that the *qāḍī* of Shiraz had spent enough money to be appointed the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan.¹⁰³

Even if the progeny of a teacher were not outstanding and competent scholars or even if they were not advanced enough in their studies, the appointment would proceed. Although madrasa education was a necessary preparation for induction into the administrative or religious class, the relationships among educational capital, birth, and patronage shaped career trajectories of ‘ulamā’ in Safavid Iran. There were, however, a number of scholars who wished to have nothing to do with the ruling elite, and some probably remained very cynical about the Safavid shahs’ religious rhetoric and policies, while still others found the milieu of daily politics harsh and unfulfilling.¹⁰⁴ At times the Safavid shahs’ behavior and decisions frustrated religious scholars. For example, the pro-Sunni policies of Ismā‘īl II enraged the leading jurist of his time, Sayyid Ḥusyan Mujtahid. Despite such examples, overall the ‘ulamā’'s criticisms of the Safavid ruling elite were few.

In sermons delivered at coronations by *shaykh-Islams* and in advice literature produced by Safavid scholars, monarchical authority was advocated as the protector of the right religion, justice, and agricultural wealth. A number of Safavid scholars produced important works in the genre of advice literature, among them the following. In 1634, ‘Alī Naqī Ṭughā‘ī Kamarahī, the *shaykh*

101 For more information on who controlled the teaching appointments see Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 47–48; Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 96–107.

102 Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 123. He concludes, “the proliferation of endowed institutions of learning served above all the interests of the educated elite, and afforded them the opportunity to guarantee their progeny’s succession to their academic honors and income” (ibid. 127).

103 Matthee, *Persia in crisis* 200. It seems it has been an ancient practice in the Muslim world. In his *al-Dāris fī tārikh al-madāris*, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Nu‘aymī al-Dimashqī cites Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 1336), who complains that appointments to academic employment became objects of sale (al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris* i, 255). See also Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 171; Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 96.

104 A good number of Sunni scholars also either did not accept teaching positions or resigned from one out of piety, because they were not certain that some *waqfs* were created lawfully. See, for example, Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 95–97ff.

al-Islam of Shiraz and Isfahan, wrote *Himam al-thawāqib* in which he criticized the Safavid administrative system. Sulṭān Ḥusayn Wā‘iẓ-i Astarābādī, a student of Shaykh Bahā‘ī, wrote *Dastūr al-wuzarā’*, a manuscript of which is kept in Kitābkhāna-yi Āstān-i Quds, as manuscript no. 3492.¹⁰⁵ As in earlier periods of Persian history, the religious class supported the ruler’s claim to his divinely ordained dominance and authority, which could not be questioned. It was popularly believed that the shah had perfect wisdom and knowledge and acted by divine instinct.¹⁰⁶ Of course, no shahs could be all-powerful in practice. They all had to consider and maintain the interests of other powerful elites, including leading religious scholars, military emirs, noble families, and Sayyids. Only a wise and determined shah could convince all these diverse powerful and wealthy social groups to cooperate with him effectively.

Decorum Pertinent to Teaching

According to Safavid pedagogues such as Sayyid Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā‘irī and Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī, a good teacher is a truthful, modest, and humble person who treats his students well. He is never supposed to become bored – if he does, God will take away his knowledge, belittle him in the eyes of people, and remove peoples’ love for him from their hearts. Even if he encounters someone who is not his student, whether of higher or lower rank in terms of scholarship, he still must discuss issues with him fairly.¹⁰⁷ He should never think that, simply because he has acquired some knowledge, he need not continue to learn any longer. Nor should a teacher shun someone who lacks the right objective or pure intention, for such a student may improve after being educated. If a teacher feels that his student has accomplished his learning, he should praise him in assemblies and gatherings and help him enhance his position.¹⁰⁸ Al-Jazā‘irī’s and Tabrīzī’s educational ideas are very similar to the medieval Muslim pedagogues’ educational theories.¹⁰⁹

105 For more on this book and other sources on this subject, see Ja‘fariyān, *Dīn wa siyāsāt* 200–18.

106 Sabzawārī, *Rawḍat al-anwār* 65–67.

107 All these pieces of advice are essentially inspired by divine revelations and Prophetic traditions. For information about teaching principles and techniques according to the Quran, see Günther, *Teaching* 203–4.

108 al-Jazā‘irī, *al-Anwār* iii, 350–58. Tabrīzī, *Farā‘id al-fawā‘id* 276; Abi-Mershed, *Trajectories of education* 18–19, 24–25.

109 Ibn Jamā‘a for examples discusses that it is for teachers and rather it is their prerogative to have good manners and conduct as well as sufficient knowledge of proper methods

A teacher has to prepare in advance before teaching. He was expected to wear clean clothes and sit down gracefully and calmly and continuously remember God's name before he entered a lecture hall. Chardin describes teachers as follow: "In appearance, the teachers, mainly *mujtahids*, were modest and serious, understanding, reserved in speech, unassuming in their customs, and simple in all their needs. They generally would go about dressed in white and rarely were they unaware of the modern developments in Europe."¹¹⁰ According to al-Shahīd al-Thānī, one can start teaching when he has obtained thorough knowledge of the topic and learned how to safeguard knowledge by sharing it only with people who appreciate it. He must avoid teaching people who have no pure intention. A good teacher also knows how to teach by example and not by words alone. He is an affable and humble person who generously disseminates knowledge and reveals truth and tells truths in accordance with the audience's level of understanding.

A good teacher encourages students to learn by explaining the virtue of learning, and he wants for them what he wants for himself; he considers whatever he dislikes loathsome for his students as well. He makes them aware of bad behavior in addition to forbidden ones, shows humility towards his students, and avoids pompousness. He enquires about their wellbeing, especially the absentees. A good teacher tries to get to know his students by name, their honorable name (*kunya*) and last name, family and hometown. He shares his knowledge with his students kindly and generously, and warns them of occupying themselves with unnecessary issues and topics. He shows the ultimate desire to teach by encouraging his students to memorize the topics under study, asking exact and thought provoking questions, and he is fair in discussion and debates. If a student makes a good point, he acknowledges it. He also treats his students equally and respectfully and avoids comparing them with each other. He takes into account the seniority of students. He does not denigrate certain branches of sciences; for instance, if one is interested in jurisprudence, a teacher should not discredit *ḥadīth* and *tafsir*. He has a firm character. Finally, the most successful teacher is like a physician who prescribes the best remedy and advises the best and most suitable treatment course.¹¹¹

A good teacher also makes sure to prepare himself intellectually and physically. He wears clean attire by opting for all white, for it is the best color for clothing. He avoids wearing bedizened garments and chooses cloths that con-

of teaching. Ibn Jamā'a, *Tadhkirat al-sāmi'* 41–83. See also Günther, *Be masters* 367–88; Günther, *Advice for teachers* 89–128.

110 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 354; Chardin, *Siyāhat-nāma* iv, 200–11.

111 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 177–203.

vey dignity and demonstrate refinement.¹¹² Both al-Jazā'irī and Tabrīzī also advised teachers to examine treatises, books, and codes of law very carefully, since the consequences would be dire if they failed to familiarize themselves. But apparently many Safavid teachers were bereft of the desired qualities. As Tabrīzī reports, “teachers demand that students learn only a set of terms and nothing else.”¹¹³

Upon arriving in the teaching hall, the teacher should say a short prayer. He then takes his place in the teaching circle with dignity, humility, and tranquility while facing the *ka'ba*, and acknowledges his intention of teaching and spreading Islamic teachings.¹¹⁴ Tabrīzī echoes this point, maintaining that the teacher should sit toward the *qibla* in such a manner that everyone can see him. He must commence his lecture by reciting “In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate,” then recite a few verses of the Quran. Whenever he is questioned about something to which he does not know the answer, he should simply say, “I do not know the answer” and must not be ashamed. Kulaynī quotes Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq who said, “Whenever a scholar is questioned, and he says God knows, [that means] he is a true scholar, because an ignorant man never says this!”¹¹⁵ Teachers were urged to be modest and to avoid being greedy, jealous, hypocritical, or fanatic. Majlisī quotes Ja‘far al-Šādiq who said, “Eight things are calamitous for religious scholars: greed, jealousy, hypocrisy, fanaticism, love of being praised, pondering something about which the truth cannot be discovered, bombastic speech, showing little modesty toward God while boasting, and not implementing what they know.”¹¹⁶

Al-Shahīd al-Thānī maintains that a good teacher also avoids unnecessary movements of the body, especially the hands and eyes, and always keeps calm. He avoids too much joking and laughing because, if he does that frequently, he harms his dignity and self-respect. He demonstrates his consideration by sitting in such a manner that everybody can see him without much trouble and conducting himself with dignity in his teaching session. He starts his teaching session by reciting the Quran and saying some supplications. He tries to make students fully understand subjects under discussion by using the easiest

112 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 204.

113 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 277; al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 354–56. Tabrīzī's general observations justify Marshall Hodgson's sweeping assessment of Islamic education as “the teaching of fixed and memorizable statements and formulas which could be learned without any process of thinking as such” (*The venture of Islam* ii, 438).

114 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 205–07

115 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 356.

116 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* ii, 52.

and sweetest language and approach, and he establishes priorities by clarifying which topics should be discussed and addressed first when he intends to teach several topics. He does not prolong his teaching session realizing otherwise he would bore students and they would lose interest.

He also states that a good teacher does not embark upon teaching when he is emotionally disturbed, concerned or preoccupied. He shows respect towards his audience's time by being punctual, and he maintains a clear voice that is not too loud or low and muffled. He would not allow his teaching session to be disturbed by unnecessarily loud disagreements, raised voices, misbehavior and rudeness while teaching or conducting discussions. He does not ignore the topic at hand or veer off topic. He tries to calm people when debates get heated and some students lose their calm by reminding them of good behavior and proper decorum. He maintains fairness and integrity during debates; he acknowledges the truth and avoids bad mouthing the audience and people who are not present. In fact, he will not make fun of people or ridicule them either. He also will not allow misbehaving persons to disturb the teaching sessions.

Al-Shahīd al-Thānī states that the experienced teacher respectfully addresses the attendees and listens to their questions. Whenever a student has a question concerning his notes or a phrase in his book, he first makes sure he understands the question fully and then answers him accurately. Even if a student asks a basic or improper question, he will not make fun of him or scorn him, especially when he does not do so intentionally. He is welcoming towards strangers and those from out-of-town. He is not afraid of saying "I do not know" when asked a question to which he does not know the answer. He will correct notes taken by students. He should end his teaching sessions by giving advice and sermons concerning "the purification of hearts" and by encouraging students to learn "the underlying secrets of knowledge." He should remain in class for a short while after everybody else has left, because there might some people who have questions or need help. He does not rush to the door at once and clamor to leave the teaching hall; the rush can be dangerous. Finally, he should not ride among students and should instead wait for them to leave and then ride home.¹¹⁷ Tabrīzī laments that teachers rarely did this in his time.¹¹⁸

Al-Shahīd al-Thānī continues a good teacher would appoint a smart and observant *naqīb* who would be in charge of establishing order amongst the audience, placing people in their rightful spots, awakening the sleepy ones, reminding the careless ones of proper behavior, and encouraging them to listen to the lecture and quiet the noisy people. He should also appoint a head

117 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 220.

118 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 277; al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iii, 354–56.

student so that he would help students with their studies and act as a person to go to when they have questions and they cannot see the teacher. As a result, a teacher can save some time and improve the condition of his students.¹¹⁹ He may start his teaching on Monday or Wednesday. Some scholars start teaching on Sunday.¹²⁰

Etiquette Pertinent to Attending Lectures

In the tradition of their processors, Shi'a pedagogues – including al-Jazā'irī and Tabrīzī – advised students to pay the utmost attention to the selection of their teachers because teachers played an essential role in guaranteeing a successful academic future. A good teacher was the most knowledgeable, the most pious, and the most advanced in years. Tabrīzī writes, “Sunnis hold various views on the age at which a teacher should start teaching; some say one should not teach unless he has reached the age of forty and some say other things.”¹²¹ Al-Jazā'irī states that, “if a student chooses a teacher hastily and then leaves the teaching circle of the unqualified, no blessing will come to him.”¹²² *Khabars* quoted frequently in Shi'i didactic literature indicate the proper manner for attending a teaching circle. For example, Tabrīzī cites this saying of 'Alī, the first Imām:

Upon joining your teacher's teaching circle, greet everybody and distinguish your teacher by greeting him separately. Sit in front of him and not behind him; do not make use of body language [hinting by eyes and hands]; do not stop him by frequently presenting different ideas of other scholars and do not get frustrated if his lecture is long.¹²³

Students were advised to hold their teachers in high regard. Shi'a pedagogues, like their Sunni counterparts, commented extensively upon the ways students

119 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 207–20.

120 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 266–67.

121 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 278. Apparently, a scholar at any age, as long as he met the criteria, could teach. The fact that students were advised to seek the teaching circle of the most knowledgeable teachers means that the learner was an active participant in the instructional process.

122 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār* iii, 362–63. Al-Zarnūjī also expresses the same concern. See *Kitāb ta'līm al-muta'allim* 74. He thus advises students to choose a teacher who is the most learned, the most pious and the most advanced in years. al-Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta'līm al-muta'allim* 74. See also Ibn Jamā'a, *Tadhkirat al-sāmi'* 133–35; Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* iii, 370.

123 al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* i, 37; Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 263.

should respect their teachers.¹²⁴ For example, Majlisī cites ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, the fourth Shi‘a Imam, who said,

As for whoever taught you *‘ilm* must be held in high regard, you must not try to surpass him. [You must] treat him with utmost respect and also revere his teaching circle; when he lectures you must listen to whatever he says very carefully and give all your attention to him and not shout at him even if the teacher talks loudly, unless he is sitting far from you. In this case, you may raise your voice to the extent that he hears you. If someone asks the teacher a question, you should not answer that question but rather allow the teacher to respond. Do not talk with somebody while the teacher lectures; do not talk maliciously about somebody in his presence; if you are in an assembly where someone remembers him in an ill manner, you must not allow him to make spiteful comments about him. You must not sit with his enemies and you must not become the enemy of your teacher’s friends.¹²⁵

The ideal student – as described by al-Shahīd al-Thānī, who offers the most detailed account of how a student should conduct himself in a teaching circle as well as the proper relation between teacher and student and among student and his peers – is he who improves his intention [as for what reason he is pursuing knowledge], and purifies his heart from impurities. He embarks upon acquiring knowledge while he is still young and free from worldly concerns such as family and career that would occupy his mind and impede his learning progress. A good student detaches himself from all distractions as much as he is capable and avoids situations occupying his mind and distracting him from his goal, which is to excel in his studies. He is keen on learning and retaining what he has learned all the time and aims high. He starts his learning pursuit by learning the most important and valuable subjects; he finishes one book and learns a topic thoroughly before pursuing other topics.¹²⁶ Al-Shahīd al-Thānī continues to explain that a good student

124 For example see al-Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta’līm al-muta’allim* 78–98; Ibn Jamā’a *Tadhkirat al-sāmi’* 111–132; Günther, *Be masters* 383–84.

125 Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār* lxxi, 5.

126 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 224–34. al-Zarnūjī’s description of an ideal student has so much in common with al-Shahīd’s account. For more information see al-Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta’līm* 88–98. In the third chapter of his manual, Ibn Jamā’a also discusses in much detail the ideal students, their educational characters and their responsibilities. According to him good students respect their teachers, select the right teacher and madrasas, choose

holds his teacher in high esteem, acknowledges that he has benefitted from his teaching session. He also regards his teacher as his spiritual master and as physician who can cure ignorance. He praises his teacher in his presence and in his absence, and is grateful towards his teacher even when he rebukes him. He is among the first students who enter the classroom and he is patient even if the teacher is tough and demanding. He views his teacher's demands as beneficial for his intellectual well-being. He does not visit his teacher unannounced and unexpectedly outside of the classroom. He knocks gently, three times, before entering a teacher chamber and he pays visit to his teacher when he is not occupied or concerned. He attends a teaching circle when his mind is fresh, and he is not sleepy, or angry, or hungry, or thirsty and so forth; he cleans and brushes his teeth and shaves and rids himself of bad odors and wears his best clothes because learning is an act of worship. He also does not recite before his teacher when his mind and heart is occupied, or he is bored, sleepy, hungry, thirsty, or in pain. When he enters a teaching circle in a non-public teaching session, and the teacher is busy teaching or talking or studying, a good student leaves his presence fast and does not disturb his teacher. All in all he is considerate of his teacher's time and state.¹²⁷

Al-Shahīd al-Thānī criticizes the idle or delinquent student who engages in conversation with his neighbors during the recitation of textbooks. This student not only fails to learn, but is also in danger of engaging in slander. Students were only considered serious scholars once they were committed to a master, with whom they actually contracted for a course of study.¹²⁸ al-Shahīd al-Thānī urges students attending teaching circles to maintain their silence and humility and not sit very close to teacher. A student must not also turn his back towards the teacher and should not extend his feet in front of him; he should maintain a reasonable distance from him. A good student also avoids unnecessary movements with his fingers, hands and the like. He wears proper clothing and does not play with his clothing. While sneezing he covers his

the best companions, acquire the proper course of study habits and procedure as well as the proper course of study and so forth. Ibn Jamā'a, *Tadhkirat al-sāmi'* 83–221.

127 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 251–52.

128 al-Zarnūjī also believes that students should avoid slander and company with the loquacious, since who talks a lot robs you of your life and wastes your time. Also he must avoid association with corrupt people and those who are sinful and negligent of their religious duties. al-Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta'lim al-muta'allim* 127. A fact emphasized by al-Ṭūsī, *Ādāb al-muta'allimīn* 110.

mouth and does not make a loud noise. He listens to his teacher carefully and gives his attention to him at all time. A good student speaks courteously with his teacher, never questions his authority, and insists that he should explain to him – for example – where he has seen that point. He should especially avoid expressing that he knows more than his teacher. That is tantamount to discrediting his scholarly capacity. A good student does not raise his voice before his teacher, but speaks clearly when needed. He would not wink or talk to his teacher discourteously. He will not bother his teacher by questioning him back and forth and being persistent. He does not talk to his teacher the way he talks with other people, such as saying for example, ‘do you understand what I am saying? Did you get me?’¹²⁹ Al-Shahīd al-Thānī also advises a student,

Do not joke in his [teacher’s] presence and do not make fun and ridicule [his teacher]. To be considerate toward his teacher and do not expect perfection from him. He must remember that all human beings are fallible except for God, angels, prophets and God’s friends. Do not cut off your teacher’s speech and talk when he is not done talking and do not talk with your peers when he is teaching but rather give all your attention to him. Listen carefully to your teacher when he is relating a story, reciting a poem, or saying an adage even you have heard it already. When you receive a book read it before him, and keep it safe and do not ruin it and don’t keep it long term because the shaykh may need it.¹³⁰

The spatial setting of lesson circles is highly significant in suggesting the relation between students and teacher. Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, for example, advises students to “not touch the shaykh’s cloths and don’t get very close to him. When walking with the shaykh, walk in front of him at night and walk behind him during daytime; keep in mind you should not bother him in anyways. Watch your steps, and be mindful of where you are walking on. Do not – for example – walk on his garment, and if you are walking in front of him discretely keep a short distance from him (do not go far), keep his left side clear, and do not walk side by side with him unless he allows you. Do not push him to the side by rubbing against his shoulder or riding very close to him. In summer walk toward the shade and in winter toward the sun.”¹³¹ He has more advice on how to walk with the teacher. For example, “If you come across the shaykh on the street, greet him, and if you see him at a distance from yourself do not shout your

129 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 252–56.

130 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 256–57.

131 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 260–61.

greeting and do not call him from a distance and from his behind. You should get near him then greet him and treat him nicely and warmly.”¹³²

Morning was considered the best time for study. Tabrīzī mentions that a student should go to madrasa either on Thursday or Saturday and if he wishes he can start on a Friday because, as mentioned in the prophetic traditions, “commencing undertakings on Friday is very good.”¹³³ Students were also encouraged to occupy themselves with learning and to avoid doing such activities as teaching young children, and reciting and memorizing poems in their free time. Tabrīzī maintains that, if poems contain wisdom it is permissible to recite them, but it is forbidden to recite them on Fridays or at night. He urged students to refrain from teaching young children for as long as possible. If students had to teach, they were to be paid for teaching poetry, calligraphy, and the like, but not for teaching the Quran.¹³⁴

Al-Jazā’irī warned students to avoid the company of the unscrupulous, because if students make friends with unprincipled people, they cannot only fail to acquire knowledge but can also put themselves in danger.¹³⁵ Tabrīzī also holds that “Students must avoid mocking the faithful or admiring prostitutes and young boys.”¹³⁶ But even as some Safavid teachers were devoid of the qualities desired by Shi’a pedagogues, so too were some students less than ideal. According to Tabrīzī, there were unqualified teachers who managed to teach only a set of terms. They failed to achieve any higher learning goals, which might have provided students with all the necessary scholarly skills so that they could contribute to various fields of scholarship.¹³⁷

132 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 262. al-Zarnūjī also holds that it is necessary “to avoid walking in front of the teacher or sitting in his place ... Also, one should not begin speaking in his presence without his permission, and then one should not speak to any great extent before him and so forth. In short, one should seek his approval, avoid his resentment and obey his commands in those things which are not sinful in the eyes of God.” One should also respect the teacher’s children and those who belong to him as well. Al-Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta’līm al-muta’allim* 78–87.

133 Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 265; al-Jazā’irī, *al-Anwār al-nu’mānīyya* iii, 364.

134 Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 266.

135 al-Jazā’irī, *al-Anwār al-nu’mānīyya* iii, 359.

136 Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 267.

137 Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 277. The goals of a successful education are spelled out in an *ijāza* issued by ‘Abd al-‘Alī b. ‘Alī Karakī to Mīr Dāmād that I translated part of and presented in the previous chapter. al-Karakī granted Mīr Dāmād the permission to transmit knowledge when he was certain that Mīr Dāmād had attained deep knowledge of a large number of subjects and had done scholarly research on these subjects and contributed to many fields of scholarship and that he would be able to do so in future.

Within the ideal educational system described by such Safavid pedagogues as Tabrīzī and al-Jazā'irī, as discussed earlier, debate and discussion were essential tools for learning and vehicles for deeper understanding of textual meaning as well as for developing new ideas. Because many teachers were unprepared and unqualified, students had neither the skills nor the motivation to use their free time more effectively. Therefore, as Tabrīzī reports, "It has become customary among some students to sit in a chamber or other place, particularly during holidays, and make themselves busy with joking and laughing and if they are talented they play music, speak riddles, recite poetry, and compose."¹³⁸ Here amid the monotonous detail of petty disorders and oft-repeated offences, Tabrīzī preserves now and then a vivid bit of student life in Safavid madrasas. To be sure not all students kept themselves occupied with these trivial activities; there were hard-working students who sacrificed even their health and well-being for the sake of learning.

The above didactic manuals, particularly al-Shahīd al-Thānī's *Munyat al-murīd*, contain detailed information concerning the expected desired conduct of teachers and students, their ideal characteristics, and the proper relationship with one another in the process of education, as well as the curriculum, teaching and learning methods. But the ideal imminent scholar of the manuals is somewhat colorless but obedient, respectful, eager to learn, assiduous at lectures, and vigilant in debate, and very studious, and only involve himself with sanctioned so-called extracurricular activities such as certain sports. In other words, from this genre we do not learn, for example, if any students did any illicit deeds such as brawls or even forbidden activities such as gambling, staying up to all hours, or associating with loose women.

In the manuals, the harshest words are given against the aimless students whose only concern is to receive stipends; hence they drifted about from teacher to teacher and from madrasa to madrasa. These idle students never completed any courses or even heard regular lectures. If they attend a lecture they are distracting their industrious peers by talking with them, and spending the rest of their time reciting poetry and playing games.

These treatises on the whole, and the advice that these treatises contain are apt to be of a very general sort, applicable to one age as well as another. In other words, they lack concrete illustrations. In them we find no informa-

138 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 267. Unlike Tabrīzī who perceived reciting poetry as a waste of time, Ibn Sinā and the majority of medieval Muslim thinkers, valued poetry highly as a means of education for several reasons. For more on poetry and its use in learning see Günther, *Be masters* 379–80.

tion for instance on personal lives of students, possible financial problems, illness, emotional condition, feelings such as homesickness considering many students from lesser gentry and middle classes would leave their hometowns and families behind to attend the teaching circles of prominent scholars living sometimes very far from their hometowns.¹³⁹

The Language of Instruction

Although Persian was the language of the Safavid court, belles-lettres, diplomacy and high culture, Arabic was the lingua franca of religious learning. Since the great majority of textbooks studied, including the commentaries and glosses on them, were in Arabic, consequently, the teacher lectured on his subject by reading the textbook and explaining its contents and sharing his personal opinions. It is unclear whether the actual language of instruction in Safavid madrasas was Arabic or Persian. Additionally, we are also not certain if the debates conducted among students discussing Arabic textbooks were done in Persian or Arabic. We are, however, sure that one of the main purposes of the studies at Safavid madrasas was to perfect the student's knowledge of Arabic as well as to acquaint him with the thought and method of most celebrated scholars in each of the above-mentioned fields of study.

Although a student followed no prescribed course of study, it was expected to spend a number of years attending lectures, studying various books on different religious sciences under the direct supervision of a well-established teacher and participating in regular debates. As was discussed earlier, Safavid educators emphasized that religious knowledge could be only gained based upon the correct usage of Arabic language, including the rules of grammar and norms of rhetoric and composition. Such language skills were authoritative and led to a sound religious education.

139 Some information can be found in biographies and autobiographies about personal lives of students. There is, however, no precise information about when a student began his education. Richard Bulliet holds that typical students began their education by the time they reached the 4.8–10 age range, and the average student's learning career lasted about 16.9–20 years. He concludes, however, it is difficult to ascertain with precision students' ages because the educational system as a whole lacked formal parameters. Matriculation, graduation, set curricula, age limits, degrees, admissions qualifications, the whole panoply of modern educational administration was absent, with the likely exception of a man who would be allowed to teach. For more information see Bulliet, *The age structure* 109, 111, 117.

Despite constant advice of ‘ulamā’ about the critical role of Arabic literacy in higher learning, apparently the lack of Arabic was a big issue in scholarly circles of early modern Iran. A number of scholars were blamed for not having a good enough knowledge of it. For example, Afandī criticized Rajab ‘Alī Tabrīzī for his lack of Arabic and for the fact that he was ignorant of the “religious sciences.” He also blamed Muḥammad Qawām al-Dīn Iṣfahānī, a philosopher and student of Tabrīzī’s, who according to Afandī lived as a recluse and lacked any religious or divine knowledge, for his “corrupt ideas.”¹⁴⁰

Arabic language, chosen by God to transmit His messages, always has fostered a deep sense of affinity among Muslims and integrated Islamic civilization throughout Islamic history. Over times, however, after the collapse of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate and the emergence of regional dynasties, Arabic literacy declined among non-Arab Muslims. Despite the fact that Arabic was the main language of religious learning, the scope of Arabic as a living literary and scholarly language declined noticeably. A translation movement happened in Safavid Persia, and scholars were commissioned to translate fundamental books from Arabic into Persian. For example, the main scholarly achievements of Khātūnābādī, the first professor of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī, focused on translating into Persian a number of significant Shi‘i works including *Majma‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān* by Abī ‘Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1153) as well as al-Ṭabarsī’s *Makārim al-akhlāq*. His other translations include: *al-Mashkūl* by Ḥājj Bābā b. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Qazwīnī; *Uyūn al-ḥisāb* by Muḥammad Bāqir Yazdī, the famed mathematician of the Safavid period; *al-Balad al-amīn* by Ibrāhīm Kaf‘amī; and *Ahd-nāmih-yi Mālik-i Ashtar* and *Kā‘ināt al-jaww* (or *Athār-i ‘alawī*) by Raḍī al-Dīn Abī Naṣr al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, with the popularization of Persian as the language of high culture and diplomacy in early modern times, Persian came to receive an Islamic overtone and was seen as the language of Islam, especially in the subcontinent. Persian also continued to be used for mystical literature as well as for popular works destined for a wider audience. Some scholars such as Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī used Persian language to reach wider audience. He wrote a number of his books, including *al-Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, with a Persian audience in mind. The narrative of the Shi‘i martyrs was also recited in Persian in *rawḍa khvānī* sessions.

140 Afandī, *Riyād al-‘ulamā’* iii, 230.

141 For more information on Khātūnābādī’s translations and works see Moazzen, Institutional metamorphosis 67–8.

Travel in Pursuit of Knowledge

In a teacher-centered education, travel in search of knowledge and the most renowned scholars was one of the most important elements for enriching one's learning experience. The Quran repeatedly exhorts Muslims to "travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who rejected Truth."¹⁴² The Prophet Muhammad also encouraged Muslims to seek knowledge as far as China. It is no wonder that *riḥla* (travel in pursuit of knowledge) became a feature of Islamic education. Through travel in its various forms, Muslim scholars and seekers of knowledge exchanged ideas with their counterparts all over the Islamic world. Muslim travel had a range of motivations, from *ḥajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and *hijra* (emigration) to *riḥla* and *ziyāra* (visits to shrines) for spiritual, intellectual, and religious reasons. At times, a scholar might have incorporated all of these purposes in a single journey.¹⁴³ Although these trips were often long and perilous, the biographical accounts dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the earlier period of the Safavid rule indicate a high degree of mobility among scholars. They crisscrossed from the south of Lebanon and the island of Bahrain to India and Isfahan, both to acquire knowledge and to enhance their career opportunities. While some Arab Shi'i scholars made Iran their home, a number of Iranian scholars such as Abū al-Faṭḥ Gīlānī, Abū al-Faḍl al-Qāḍī, Sayyid Nūrullāh Shushtarī, and the famed Mīr Faṭḥullāh Shīrāzī moved to India.¹⁴⁴

Scholars and students knew no boundaries in their desire to master the essential subjects. It was normal for younger scholars to travel far from their hometowns to pursue their education with more knowledgeable or prestigious teachers. Likewise, scholars from established centers of learning travelled to smaller or more distant communities. In his autobiography entitled *Risala-yi sharḥ-i ṣadr*, Muḥsin Fayḍ describes his formative years, during which travel in pursuit of knowledge and to seek the most knowledgeable scholar played an important role:

I started my education in my hometown of Kāshān, learning formal and exoteric religious sciences including Quranic exegesis, Islamic jurisprudence, the principles of the religion, and auxiliary sciences in the teaching circle of my uncle ... At age twenty I left Kāshān for Isfahan and took

142 Q 3:137; see also the following verses, 6:11; 12:109; 16: 36; 29:20; 30:9; 30:42.

143 Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim travellers, pilgrimage* xii; Netton, *Golden roads, migration*, esp. Chap. 6; Gellens, *The search for knowledge* 53.

144 Hussain, *Madrassa education in India* 24–36.

part in the teaching circles of a number of scholars, but because I was in search of esoteric knowledge (*‘ilm-i baṭīnī*), nobody in Isfahan could teach me such knowledge. While in Isfahan I learned some mathematics and the like. Finally I left for Shiraz in search of Prophetic traditions and there became a student of the *mujtahid* of the age, that is, Sayyid Mājid b. Hāshim Ṣādiqī Bahrānī, an expert in exoteric sciences who taught me the knowledge of what is permitted and what is forbidden and other legal issues. Finally, Bahrānī issued me an *ijāza*. Then I went back to Isfahan and joined the teaching circle of Shaykh Bahā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘Āmilī who also issued me an *ijāza* to transmit *ḥadīth*. Afterward, I left for Ḥijāz; during the pilgrimage I met Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī who also issued me an *ijāza* to transmit *ḥadīth*. On the way back home bandits killed my brother ... In spite of this event, I continued to visit various places in search of knowledge and perfection (*kamāl*), seeking out the teaching circle of every scholar who had any spiritual knowledge. Finally I went to Qum and became a student of Mullā Ṣadrā, the foremost (*ṣadr*) mystic of the age and the moon in the sky of certitude. Ṣadr al-Dīn (i.e., Mullā Ṣadrā) was the leading scholar in spiritual sciences. In the course of the eight years I was his student I was busy with disciplining and training my soul (*riyāḍat wa mujāhada*) which resulted in my attaining insight into spiritual sciences.”¹⁴⁵

When Mullā Ṣadrā left Qum for Shiraz, Muḥsin Fayḍ accompanied his teacher and attended his teaching circle for two more years. Finally, he returned to his hometown of Kāshān, where he occupied himself with studying and teaching except for the time that he was summoned to Isfahan by Shāh Ṣafī and later by Shāh ‘Abbās to lead the Friday prayer. Although the Safavids marked their political distinctiveness in the Islamic world by asserting loyalty to the Shi‘i tradition, there were wide scholarly networks that linked Muslim scholars all over the Islamic world.¹⁴⁶ Safavid scholars often journeyed in search of knowledge as well as to find patrons to support them and their works.

Studying and Marriage

Shi‘a pedagogues generally advised students to marry only after they had completed their studies. It was thought that “nothing is more harmful in attaining knowledge than marriage.”¹⁴⁷ Tabrīzī writes, “whoever is ensnared in a wom-

¹⁴⁵ Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi sharḥ-i ṣadr* 58–64.

¹⁴⁶ For more information see McChesney, *Iran and Central Asia* 231–67.

¹⁴⁷ al-Jazā’irī, *al-Anwār* iii, 358; Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 261.

an's trap is like a bird captured by an insane child; he plays with it and enjoys it while the bird is restless and about to be killed, exposed to all kinds of mischief and tortures."¹⁴⁸ He also tells this teaching story:

They found an old burglar in an inn.
A wise man suggested: "imprison him!"
A mysterious voice from a corner was heard:
"If you want to punish him, make him marry, give him a wife!"¹⁴⁹

In *Munyat al-murīd*, al-Shahīd al-Thānī insisted that, if a student had not finished the education he aimed for, he should not marry.¹⁵⁰ Ignoring this advice cost Sayyid Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī his marriage, for he left his wife after just three weeks of marriage. He reports that "While I was in Shirāz, my teacher offered me his daughter in marriage, an honor from which I excused myself by saying 'If God wills, after I have finished my studies and become a scholar I will marry.'" al-Jazā'irī was in the middle of his studies in Shirāz when, at his parents' wishes, he returned home. His mother urged him to take for himself a wife. He at first rejected this offer and reminded his mother that his studies were not yet completed. But when his mother insisted, al-Jazā'irī obliged and married. Reproached by a learned man whom he visited while still ill-grounded and after abandoning his studies, he left his parents and his wife (he had only been married for three weeks) and returned to the Manṣūriyya Madrasa at Shiraz.¹⁵¹

Despite the cautions against marriage for students, marriage was still a way of extending connections and binding personal and intellectual relations. Marriage alliances enabled families to maintain their privileges and have access to educational and material success. These relationships proved essential in guaranteeing a successful career.¹⁵² In fact, intermarriage among the members of scholarly families was quite common. This secured highly coveted positions not only in academia and judicial administration but also in charitable and religious institutions such as *waqfs*, mosques, and shrines.

148 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 261.

149 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 261.

150 Tabrīzī writes, "If Shahīd [al-Thānī] had lived in our time, he would not have made this exaggeration in his time!" Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 261.

151 al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* iv, 309, 311–12.

152 For more information on the social uses of knowledge in Islamic societies see Bulliet, *The patricians of Nishapur* 47.

Graduation

Normally, upon finishing the recitation of a text or a set of texts, students asked their teachers to issue them an *ijāza* to enable them to transmit what they had learned. Several types of *ijāzas* were issued by Safavid scholars. There were *ijāzas* issued to transmit *ḥadīth*, and to transmit texts that students studied with their teachers. Sometimes a teacher gave permission to a student to transmit the teacher's *maqrūāt* (what was read by a teacher) and *masmūāt* (what was heard from a teacher), which the teacher had likewise received from his own teacher. For example, Muḥammad al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī issued an *ijāza* to Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī to transmit books on *ḥadīth* in general and ʿĀmilī's *Wasā'il al-shī'a* in particular.¹⁵³ Muḥammad Mu'min b. Dūst Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Astarābādī issued Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī an *ijāza* to transmit whatever he was permitted to transmit from his teacher.¹⁵⁴ Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī also issued to Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī an *ijāza* to transmit whatever he was permitted to transmit from his teachers, which he acquired either through recitation, listening, or *ijāza*.¹⁵⁵

The authorization to transmit (*ijāzat al-riwāya*) granted the recipient the right to transmit a specific text to the next generation of students on the authority of its issuer, and it established the student's place in an unbroken chain of reliable teachers and transmitters (*isnād*) going back to the text's original author. The process of obtaining these certificates was formally maintained, especially in regards to the science of *ḥadīth*, and it played an important part in establishing scholarly credentials. Certificates of transmission were often written on the margins, end pages, or covers of particular books that a student had studied under a teacher.¹⁵⁶

The *ijāza* was not considered a diploma granted to a student at the conclusion of a set curriculum or a course of studies. That is, a Shi'i scholar acquiring an *ijāza* did not deem that his learning endeavor was over. In effect, learning was a lifelong pursuit and a characteristic ideal of Islamic piety.¹⁵⁷ Students often tried to collect as many *ijāzas* as they could to establish themselves as eminent scholars who had benefitted from the teaching circles of a large

153 Majlisī, *Biḥār a-anwār* cvī, 103–06.

154 Majlisī, *Biḥār a-anwār* cvī, 125.

155 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cvii, 129–31. For more examples of ʿamma *ijāzas*, see Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* cvii, 132–134; *ibid.* 135–37.

156 Makdisi, *The rise of colleges* 128–29; Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 21–43; Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 69–90, 108–25; Ephrat, *A learned society* 75–85, 101–4.

157 For more information on this aspect of Islamic learning see, Günther, *Be masters* 368–69.

number of scholars and had become authoritative figures in the chain of transmitters of religious knowledge in general and prophetic and Imamī traditions in particular.

The *ijāza* also guaranteed the integrity of a manuscript copy used by a scholar. There were *ijāzas* issued to students who studied only part of a *ḥadīth* collection. However, comprehensive *ijāzas* were also issued, in which a scholar mentioned a long list of books on various religious sciences and gave the student permission to transmit on his authority. One wonders, however, if someone like Muḥammad Fāḍil-i Mashhadī had actually studied the extensive body of literature listed in the *ijāza* granted him by Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī.¹⁵⁸ The next chapter will shed more light on the conditions of teaching and learning by discussing the criticism of the education by a number of prominent scholars of the late Safavid period.

A doctor of law, i.e. a *mujtahid*, could issue legal opinions (*fatwās*) when he had met all the stipulations made by Shīʿi pedagogues such as al-Shahīd al-Thānī. In his *Munyat al-murīd*, he painstakingly explains the significance of *iftāʿ* (the act of issuing religious ruling), based on Quranic verses, as well as *ḥadīth*, and the decorum pertinent to issuing *fatwās* as well as proper traits that both mufti and the person asking for a *fatwā* should have. Although there was no particular limit of time required for preparation for a graduate of jurisprudence to be considered qualified to issue legal opinions, the didactic books including *Munyat al-murīd* spoke of obligation to do so, but also warned against rushing into the practice. The authorization was issued usually to students at an advanced age. Some gifted and dedicated students would start issuing *fatwās* in their thirties, some in their forties or even later.

As in the case of an authorization to teach a *ḥadīth* book or any other books, the authorization to give *fatwās* came from a recognized and established *mujtahid*. Al-Shahīd al-Thānī describes the mufti as the heir of prophets. He maintains that a mufti is a knowledgeable and just Muslim who had studied jurisprudence, and knows Islamic legal rulings, and can infer legal rulings from detailed reasoning recorded in the Quran, *sunna* of prophet, *ijmāʿ* of scholars, and intellectual reasoning and so forth. He is a believing and practicing Muslim, and is knowledgeable in theology, Arabic syntax, morphology, and language, while also being skilled in logic. In addition, he is well versed in sources and theories of jurisprudence, as well as every verse of the Quran on legal matters, and every *ḥadīth* related to those verses and *ḥadīth* sciences. He also knows the issues that scholars disagree on and the issues upon which they agree, so that he does not issue a ruling that contradicts the *ijmāʿ* of scholars.

¹⁵⁸ I offered an analysis of this *ijāza* in Chapter 4.

Whoever possesses all these qualifications is the best mufti.¹⁵⁹ He adds that there are people who can issue a ruling to the best of their knowledge although they are not as qualified as the first group. He warns that one should not issue a *fatwā* while angry, hungry, thirsty, sad, excited, sleepy, upset, ill or cold or hot and so forth. One may also issue a *fatwā* and then change it, or issue *fatwā* about a specific case that happens again.¹⁶⁰

With regard to decorum concerning issuing *fatwas*, al-Shahīd al-Thānī writes that a mufti should give a clear answer to the question(s) (*mas'ala*) asked orally and in writing. He should avoid using difficult words and unfamiliar terms and if there are more questions in a sent letter, he must answer them based on the order listed in the letter. He should contemplate and ponder every word used in the questions. He should be cautious towards vague terms and words. The answers should be written neatly and legibly among other things. Concerning decorum that the person who asks for a *fatwā* must observe, he writes that the person asking for a legal opinion cannot ask for a *fatwā* from a scholar who he does not know or regarding whom he is not certain about his piety or scholarship.

Thus, a seeker of *fatwā*(s) must address his question(s) to the most knowledgeable scholar. He cannot follow the *fatwā* of a dead *mujtahid* over the *fatwā* of a living *mujtahid*. He must follow whomever he wishes among the living pious and knowledgeable *mujtahids*. He should not ask the same question again. He must personally approach the *mujtahid* or otherwise ensure that he can recognize his handwriting, should he decide to ask his question via letter. He must also show due respect towards the *mujtahid* by holding him in high esteem. If there is no mufti in his town he should travel to the place where there is a mufti. A mufti also should ensure among other things that he understands the questions either asked in a letter or in person correctly, and make sure that the person asking the question would receive his clear, concise, considered and well-rounded answer.¹⁶¹

Conclusion

As demonstrated by primary sources discussed above, a lifelong pursuit of learning is an ideal of Islamic piety and underlies the concept of Islamic education. While the primary focus of learning was the nurturing of religious

159 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 280–90.

160 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 291–93.

161 For more information on this subject see al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 293–307.

belief in the individuals, its scope broadened to incorporate various disciplines to train persons solidly grounded in the virtues of Islam. In so doing, Safavid ‘ulamā’ transmitted knowledge that originated in the Quran, Prophetic and Imamī traditions, legal treatises, and textbooks in different ways including recitation and debate; students fortified their learning by means of discussion, memorization, contemplation as well as writing commentaries and glosses. The next chapter will shed more light on the conditions of teaching and learning by discussing the criticism of the education conducted in Safavid madrasas, by a number of prominent scholars of the late Safavid period.

Safavid Pedagogical Approaches

Theories, Application, Practices, and Critiques

As discussed in Chapter 4, *uṣūlī mujtahids* had monopolized religious learning during the first half of Safavid rule, but in the mid-seventeenth century, the *Uṣūlī*-oriented curriculum faced challenges from both mystical philosophers and *Akhbārī* scholars. Proponents of Islamic philosophy as well as traditionalism advocated redirecting pedagogical activities. They argued that educational restructuring was critical to restoring what they believed to be “true” Shi’ism. This chapter explores the major problems that faced Shi’i higher learning in early modern times. More specifically, it examines the criticisms made by such thinkers as Mullā Ṣadrā, Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzawārī, and Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī concerning educational activities. Although these scholars voiced their concerns in different periods and had differing intellectual perspectives, their critiques have a great deal in common. All of them discuss the intellectual attitudes of early modern Iran and criticize the literalist (*zāhirī*) religious authorities. Each of them thought that the formal religious sciences taught in madrasas as well as theological and philosophical speculations fell short of what education should be. Mullā Ṣadrā and Muḥsin Fayḍ, in particular, strove to formulate the approaches that they deemed would lead to what they referred to as “epistemic certitude” (*yaqīn*). In differing ways and with varying degrees of effectiveness, the critics promoted an ideal of what education should be and wrote to inspire those in the madrasas with a desire to restructure and pursue learning with a higher purpose than personal ambition.

In his monumental work, *al-Ḥikma al-muta‘āliya fi al-asfār al-‘aqliyya al-arba‘a*, known as *al-Asfār al-arba‘a* (*The Four Journeys*), as well as in his other works, including *Kasr Aṣnām al-jāhiliyya*, *Iksīr al-‘arīfīn*, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl*,¹ and *Sharḥ-i Uṣūl-i kāfī*, Mullā Ṣadrā offers a detailed solution to revamp an education system that, in his view, had been weakened by major deficiencies. Likewise, in several of his treatises, including *Sharḥ-i ṣadr* (written in 1655), *al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn*, *Raf‘-i fitna*, *Zād al-sālik*, *Rāh-i ṣawāb*, *al-‘Itidhār* (written in 1666), and *al-Inṣāf* (written 1672), Muḥsin Fayḍ, a keen observer of intellec-

1 *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* in some sources is introduced by different names including *Risāla dar ta‘n-i mujtahidīn*, *Risāla-yi radd bar munkirīn-i ḥikmat*, and *Risāla-yi sih faṣl*. For more information see Nasr’s introduction to *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* 27.

tual and spiritual conditions in the second half of the seventeenth century, criticized *mujtahids* and *mutakallims* alike and offered a scholarship method that differed from that of the *mujtahids* who favored speculation (*ẓann*) over the definitive knowledge (*qatʿ*) offered by the Quran and the Imamī traditions. The Uṣūlī *mujtahids* opposed suggestions to supplement higher learning with subjects outside the religious and auxiliary sciences. The traditional dichotomies between the literalists and the philosophers with mystical leanings were contested once again, with an array of influential figures engaged in heated debates. Literalist and *sharīʿa*-minded scholars accused the Sufis and mystical philosophers of blasphemy, deficiency in intellect, and false reasoning.²

Mullā Ṣadrā and the Problem of Conventional (*rasmī*) Learning

In his *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*, Mullā Ṣadrā champions visionary presential knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī al-shuhūdī*) and holds that being can be known only through this type of knowing.³ He states that every kind of knowledge is ultimately reduced to presential knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī*).⁴ Thus, he is not overly concerned with purely legal or philosophical studies per se. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, only through visionary presential knowledge can one obtain certainty. Thus he states that,

Knowledge of the reality of existence cannot be except through the illuminative presence (*al-ḥuḍūr al-ishrāqī*) and an intuition of the immediate determined reality; then there will be no doubt about its inner nature. It is only through presential knowledge that certainty is yielded. The other models of knowing are insufficient and do not yield certainty.⁵

Mullā Ṣadrā argues that presential knowledge is not a property of the knower, nor is it inherent to states of mind, but rather it is an effect of being. In the act

2 See for example, Afushtahī Naṭanzī, *Nuqāwat al-āthār* 514.

3 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār* iv, 278–97. For more information about this kind of knowledge see Kalin, *Knowledge in later Islamic philosophy* 165–73. Prior to Mullā Ṣadrā, Yahyā Suhrawardī had discussed the presential mode of knowledge. See Suhrawardī, *The philosophy of illumination* 79–81.

4 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* 109.

5 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār* i, 489.

of knowing, the intellect and the intelligible are unified.⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā's two central doctrines – namely, the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), which proves the union between the soul and the Active Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-faʿ ʿāl*), and his doctrine of trans-substantial motion (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyya*) – both defend this union.⁷ The soul (*naḥs*) is the organ of learning, according to Mullā Ṣadrā.⁸ He attempted to formulate this mysterious ability of the soul as follows:

The human soul's knowledge of things other than itself is not a reflection of the forms of things upon the soul; the soul does not have a passive role in the act of knowing. Rather, since man is a microcosm composed of all degrees of existence, his knowledge of things comes from the contemplation of these forms in the mirror of his own being.⁹

Here Mullā Ṣadrā echoes Fārābī, who had maintained that, “The human soul is that which is capable of conceiving a meaning by definition and by understanding the pure reality of that meaning from which all extraneous accessories are shaken off and the sheer reality of it has remained as the common core, to the simplicity of which all variation of instances is reduced ... this state of the soul is analogous to a mirror, and the theoretical reason is the power of the transparency of that mirror.”¹⁰ In discussing the human soul, Mullā Ṣadrā explains that the soul and the cosmos are closely intertwined. It was due to the importance of the soul in his epistemology that he maintains, “The knowledge of the soul (*ʿilm al-naḥs*) is the head of all sciences, and the so-called religious scholars (*ʿulamā-yi rasmī*) do not know this knowledge and will never know it.”¹¹ Based on Mullā Ṣadrā's interpretation of *ʿilm*, knowledge is hierarchical. In *al-Asfār* he writes

6 For more on the notion of *ittiḥād al-ʿāqil wa al-maʿqūl*, see Kalin, *Knowledge in later Islamic philosophy* 159–65. Kalin translated Mullā Ṣadrā's treatise on the Unification of the Intellector and the Intelligible. For this translation see Kalin, *Knowledge in later Islamic philosophy* 256–86; see also Kalin, *Knowledge as the unity* 73–91.

7 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār* iii, 351, 405.

8 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār* iii, 379.

9 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* 109.

10 Ha'iri Yazdi, *The principles of epistemology* 11. For more on al-Fārābī's theory of knowledge see, Ha'iri Yazdi, *The principles of epistemology* 10–13.

11 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* 38. Ṣadrā reiterates the same notion in his *Kasr-i aṣnām al-jāhiliyya* 10. For more information on Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of knowledge see Kalin, Mullā Ṣadrā's realist ontology 81–106; Rahman, *The philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* 210–46; Kamal, *Mullā Ṣadrā's transcendent philosophy*, esp. Chapter 6.

Knowledge and intellection (*al-ta'qqul*) is a mode of being, and being is united with quiddity. In the same way, knowledge is united with what is known (*al-ma'lūm*). Some beings are low in degree and weak and some lofty and strong. Those that are low [in degree] have very little share in meanings (*ma'ānī*) and are confined to one single meaning like a single quantity ... whereas those who are noble [in rank] have the essence of the plenitude of meanings, even if they are small in quantity or have no quantity at all like the rational soul. By the same token, knowledge has various kinds, some of which are low in degree such as sense-perception [since] it is impossible to sense multiple sensibilities through a single sensation. [But] some are higher in rank, such as intellection, in that a single intellect is sufficient to understand an infinite number of comprehensible.¹²

Not all knowledge was meant to be available to all people. In the third volume of *al-Asfār*, he writes, "It is forbidden for most people to undertake to acquire these complex disciplines because those worthy of them are a select few and most exceptional. Guidance to them is a grace from God, the Lofty and the Knowing."¹³ This view of learning, which has a long pedigree in Islamic intellectual history, is very prominent in the teaching of the Imams. The compilers of Shi'ī *ḥadīth* collections recorded a number of the Imams' sayings that suggest not all people have the capacity to learn certain sciences. In his *Bihār al-anwār*, Majlisī reports a *ḥadīth* quoted by al-Kulaynī, who quoted Imam Muḥammad Bāqir, who said, "I know ninety thousand *ḥadīths* that I have not told to anybody and I will never tell." Jābir b. Zayd al-Ju'fī, a confidant of the fifth Imam, said, "I told him you have taught me a lot, and those *ḥadīths*, which are your secrets, I will not relate to anybody; but sometimes I cannot bear the secrets and my heart becomes so pressured as if I were becoming insane. Imam said, "O, Jābir, whenever this condition happens, go to the mountains, and dig a hole and put your head in it and then tell whatever I have taught you there."¹⁴ Some scholars suggest that the hierarchy of knowledge is closely related to the esoteric nature of Twelver Shi'ism, especially in the early period of its history.¹⁵

As discussed earlier, Mullā Ṣadrā believes that the "essence of man", namely his soul, plays a fundamental role in unfolding the "text of being" and the inner

12 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār* iii, 377–78.

13 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār* iii, 446.

14 Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* xlvi, 344. For some information on Jābir b. Zayd al-Ju'fī, see Corbin, *Temple and contemplation* 179.

15 For information on this aspect of Shi'ism, see Amir-Moezzi, *The divine guide* 69–79.

meaning of the Quran as well as the Prophetic and Imamī traditions. For him, certain knowledge of God arises directly from the realization of the soul's own existence and knowledge; the soul – as we know from the Quran – is from God and its knowledge is the surest path to divine knowledge and light. The soul therefore is a spiritual entity using a body, and consequently all perceptions and knowledge arises within the soul. He believes that only through self-knowledge (*'ilm al-nafs*) can one truly understand the nature of the world and gain true knowledge of one's own being.¹⁶

For this reason, among the various branches of knowledge, Mullā Ṣadrā maintains that knowledge of the soul (*nafs*) – which functions as a prerequisite to knowledge of God – is the most important knowledge that one can acquire.¹⁷ *'Ilm al-nafs* clearly remains outside the domain of the formal sciences that he classifies in his *Iksīr al-ārifīn*. In the aforementioned work, Mullā Ṣadrā maintains sciences are either of this world (*dunyawī*) or of the other (*ukhrawī*). The first is divided into three categories: the science of words (*'ilm al-aqwāl*), the science of acts (*'ilm al-af'āl*), and the science of states of contemplation or thought (*'ilm al-aḥwāl* or *afkār*). The sciences of the other world, which are inaccessible to ordinary people and are not destroyed with the death of the body, include the knowledge of angels and intellectual substances, the knowledge of the Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ al-maḥfūz*), and the knowledge of the Exalted Pen (*al-qalam al-a'lā*), i.e., of the Divine decree and of the first determination of the divine essence, which Mullā Ṣadrā also calls by the name of “the reality of Muhammad” (*al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyya*). These sciences also include the knowledge of death, resurrection, and all that pertains to life in the hereafter.

Within the rubric of these four broad categories of sciences, a wide range of subjects is covered. However, Mullā Ṣadrā argues that there are sciences possessing of an ultimate benefit for the soul and those that do not. He insists that the rational sciences, in general, are essential for eliciting genuine conviction, because real faith cannot depend on *taqlīd* (imitation).¹⁸ Surprisingly, the most

16 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* 14; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* 43, 44.

17 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* 38–39. In his *al-Aṣfār* Mullā Ṣadrā divides *'ilm* into divinely inspired knowledge (*ladunī*) and formal (*ṣuwarī*) knowledge. He states that one can reach greater certainty through presential knowledge. Needless to say, he believes this sort of knowledge is much more functional and vital to the process of human perfection than the formal instruction (*'ilm-i ṣuwarī*) acquired in a madrasa with the aid of a teacher. Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Aṣfār* iii, 325.

18 It seems scholars elsewhere in the Muslim world had the same conviction. El-Rouayheb notes the revival of the rational sciences in North African cities including Fes, Marrakesh, and Meknes. He holds that Sufi lodges – often located in rural areas – became the leading centers of scholarship in Morocco and elsewhere. Scholars teaching in those learning

famous branches of religious learning, such as *‘ilm al-ḥadīth* and *‘ilm al-rijāl*, are excluded from Mullā Ṣadrā’s classifications. His classification of knowledge, paramount to his argument against the exoteric-minded scholars, honors the knowledge of soul over formal religious sciences, since it offers greater benefit to human society. Ibn al-‘Arabī held the same view and argued: “Sound knowledge is not given by reflection, nor by what the rational thinkers establish by means of their reflective powers. Sound knowledge is only that which God throws into the heart of the knower. It is a divine light for which God singles out any of His servants whom He will, whether angel, messenger, prophet, friend, or person of faith. He who has no unveiling has no knowledge.”¹⁹

In his various works, Mullā Ṣadrā argues that the literalist scholars’ failure to gain knowledge of the soul, along with their love of worldly status, wealth, and pleasures, caused them to deviate from the right path toward division, disagreement, and confusion. He believes that literalist scholars are misled and seduced by Satan – overpowered by their depraved and [evil]-commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammāra*). He believes that, due to the failure of ‘ulamā’ in knowing their souls along with their misplaced ambitions, higher learning has been reduced to dry legal formalism. Thus, many ignorant people are able to represent themselves as scholars and get access to the powerful in order to obtain worldly status and wealth.²⁰ He warns against what he sees as an ever-widening gap between true learning and the shallow, half-baked training that students receive in madrasas. He believes that *zāhirī* scholars, and perhaps Akhbārīs, are destroying the very essence of Shi‘ism by reducing it to a mere corpus of legal minutiae and *ḥadīth* books. In *al-Asfār al-arba‘a* he writes

I saw that the custom of our time was to inculcate ignorance and disseminate misguidance and thoughtlessness. We became afflicted by a group who attack understanding, whose eyes could not bear the lights of wisdom and the secrets, and whose sight had become consumed like the sight of bats barred from the illumination of knowledge and its effects.

centers including al-Tilimsānī (d. 1632), al-Tha‘alibī (d. 1669), and al-Shāwī (d. 1685), actively promoted rational sciences. For more information on these scholars see El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history* 150–70.

19 Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 218, 19, cited in Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge* 170.

20 A concern also voiced by al-Jazā‘irī. After urging sultans to appoint a religious scholar in every village and quarter to teach their people Islamic religion and to inform them of what harms them and what benefit them, he holds that many religious scholars [doctors of law who should have cured the ignorant] have fallen ill and had failed to live up to the required standard due to their lust and love for this life. al-Jazā‘irī, *Anwār al-nu‘māniyya* iii, 196–97.

They consider profound meditation and reflection upon divine matters to be heresy. They consider attempts to convert the masses from being scum as misguidance and betrayal, as if they were Hanbalis whose literalist books of *ḥadīth* assimilate the necessary, the contingent Eternal, and the incipient. They have extinguished knowledge and its excellence and harassed spiritual knowledge and its upholders.²¹

Likewise, in his *Risāla-yi sih aṣl*, Mullā Ṣadrā fiercely criticizes *sharīʿa*-minded scholars for their strict literalism and anti-spiritualism, and accuses them of shallowness, vanity, and dilettantism. He laments that they indulge in hair-splitting arguments and legal minutiae instead of delving into basic theological issues concerning the nature of reality, life, and truth. He uses strong language to describe the feeble-mindedness of such people and admonishes them for denying spiritual hermeneutics (*taʿwīl*) and the spirituality of religion. In effect, many passages of *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* are Mullā Ṣadrā's criticism of literalist scholars for their superficial understanding of what he believes to be the "true" principles of Islam.²² For example, he argues that the literalist 'ulamā'

assume they are knowledgeable because they have read a few books and attended the lectures of a few teachers and took notes and memorized a number of *ḥadīths* and attained knowledge from a few famed scholars. These people are dying for the admiration of the masses and the reverence of the ignorant. I wish that you read nothing and that you forget whatever you know. It is such bliss if the slate of your mind is plain or in its original purity ... your heart would be filled with gnosis and wisdom instead of trivial information. It is better for you to wash it with the water of forgetfulness and make it pure again so that, God willing, you retain useful knowledge.²³

Mullā Ṣadrā does not disparage the study of *fiqh* and other religious sciences and he appreciates the works of the jurists in developing legal rulings to meet the community's needs.²⁴ But he believes something more is required from the learned, and that learning is more than simple knowledge of what is allowed and prohibited. In other words, Mullā Ṣadrā sees formal learning as a great

21 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Aṣfār* i, 6.

22 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl*, passages 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, ff.

23 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* 74–75.

24 In his *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, Mullā Ṣadrā praises the *mujtahids* and argues that the masses should seek guidance from them (*al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* 377–8).

aid but also as a barrier, because one may be taken up by the consideration of ideas to the exclusion of other kinds of learning that are more essential. He argues that the study of formal sciences is useful so long as one is not attached to it or bound by it. It is neither the end nor the goal. The goal is another way of knowing – another way of perceiving, of being aware. This way of knowing transcends the necessities of *fiqh* and *kalām* and other standard learning pursuits and it may well open the door to all those human yearnings and needs that would be closed off to the formal sciences.

Mullā Ṣadrā also argues that aspiration to obtain clerical posts and love of the world have led to superficial training in the practical religious sciences.²⁵ He holds that *zāhiri* scholars learn some Arabic and study a few books mainly to deceive the masses into seeing them as scholars and leaders. For these reasons he reproaches those *faqīhs* “whose knowledge does not add up to more than six months of study” but who nevertheless have the audacity to attack “those who have spent fifty years of their life studying these subjects and have devoted their lives and energies to this pursuit, giving up prestige.”²⁶ He writes,

Currently the designation of jurist (*faqīh*) is being used for a person who, by issuing unjust rulings, seeks access to governors and sultans. In the past, the title jurist was ascribed to a person based on his knowledge of the Truth and the Hereafter. He was considered [a jurist] based on his heart and soul. His preoccupations were with cleansing one’s behavior and transforming the bad into good, rather than with knowledge of the rules of usury or divorce, with the division of inheritance and land, or with legal ruses.²⁷

In response to these sorts of critiques, as discussed in chapter one, the jurists had always justified their close cooperation with the political establishment on the grounds that the ruling elite would harness their political clout towards making Twelver Shi‘ism a mainstream faith rather than a marginal one. For example, ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-‘Ālī al-Karakī justifies his close association with the Safavid monarch based on the following rationale: “The ‘ulamā’s avoidance of

25 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Kasr aṣṣnām al-jāhiliyya*, 99–109; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* 75 and passages 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16ff.

26 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi Sih aṣl* 86–87.

27 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi Sih aṣl* 84; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Kasr aṣṣnām al-jāhiliyya* 155–59.

guiding and directing rulers not only caused the decline of the ‘ulamā’s position but also the fall of educational institutions into ruin.”²⁸

Mullā Ṣadrā’s Critique and His Critics

Mullā Ṣadrā was a profound religious thinker who was not concerned with framing a system or criticizing the views of others, but rather with presenting and proving to others his knowledge of the two realities of life, i.e. God and the human soul. As a consequence, he attempts to explain and interpret the nature of God and of the soul with all the means at his disposal, whether he finds help in philosophers of the past and in the Quran and *ḥadīth* literature, or he presents the result of his own reasoning and religious and spiritual experience. It could be argued that he regards philosophy, Sufism and religious sciences as a body of ascertained knowledge from which one could draw illustration and explanation. He is not overly concerned with purely legal issues or philosophical topics per se.

That said, Mullā Ṣadrā had a critical attitude. In addition to the aforementioned criticisms made against “superficial scholars,” he criticized Peripatetic (*mashshā’ī*) philosophers, theologians, and the “literalist” *ḥadīth* scholars, frequently rejecting ideas proposed by them. For example, in his *sharḥ* on al-Kulaynī’s *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, he criticizes theologians and purely literalist and dogmatic disputationists (*ahl al-jadal*) for their ignorance of the sciences of free-minded people (*‘ulūm al-ahrār*).²⁹ In his *Risāla-yi sih aṣl*, he also repeatedly criticizes the *mutakallims*. For example, he singles out “those who appear to be learned but who are full of evil and corruption, some of the *mutakallims* who are deprived of correct logic and stand outside the circle of rectitude and the path of salvation, those who follow the religious law yet are deprived of the law of servitude to the Divine and have deviated from the path of belief in the Beginning (*mabda’*) and the Final Return (*ma’ād*), having tied the rope of imitation (*taqlīd*) around their neck, and having made the denial of the mystics (*darwīshān*) their slogan.”³⁰

These kinds of criticisms have a long legacy in Islamic intellectual history. For example, the Shāfi’ī scholar Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭabī (d. 998) criticizes Muslim theologians for pretending to be knowledgeable. He holds, “These people (i. e. *mutakallims*) may find the path to the truth rough, and the time to gain fortune long if they love speedy gain. Thus they shorten the path to knowledge

28 al-Karakī, *al-Riḍā’iyyāt wa kharājīyāt* 40–41. See also al-Jazā’irī, *al-Anwār al-nu’māniyya* iii, 341.

29 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ-i Uṣūl-i kāfi* 19, 26–27.

30 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi Sih aṣl* 38.

and content themselves with bits and pieces detached from the sense of the foundations of jurisprudence, calling them “causes” (*‘ilal*). They take them as banners for themselves in pretending to be knowledgeable and use them as a shield in their meetings with their opponents, and as a target for them [in order] to start discussing and arguing [with them] in debates and clashes over them. At the end of the discussion, the “winner” will have been accredited with “astuteness” and “superiority.”³¹

Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1328) also criticizes learning practices of his time and reports that some claim to be members of the learned elite, when in fact their training and understanding of their subjects are superficial and incomplete. Some, he says, mistakenly call themselves *faqīh*, or “learned” in the science of Islamic jurisprudence, after studying only *al-Ḥāwī al-ṣaghīr* by Najm al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī (d. 1266). He adds, *al-Ḥāwī* is indeed an important textbook of Shafīī jurisprudence, but reading it alone would not make one a *faqīh*. Others studied al-Zamakhsharī’s *Kashshāf*, and then claimed to be “expert and knowledgeable in the exegesis of the book of God.”³² Subkī goes on to criticize scholars of *ḥadīth* as well for only studying a few *ḥadīth* books and then claiming that they know what needed to be known.³³ Ibn al-Ḥājj also criticizes learning activities in Damascus. He sees them concerned with worldly ends. “You have learned *‘ilm* in order to be called *‘ālim*,” he addressed those who seek social status, accusing them of pursuing studies just to gain *manṣabs* and political posts.³⁴

In response, Peripatetic philosophers and theologians, such as Mīrzā Abū al-Ḥasan Jilwa (d. 1897) and Mullā Rajab ‘Alī Tabrīzī (d. 1669), rejected many of Mullā Ṣadrā’s philosophical formulations and pointed out his inconsistencies and contradictions. They blamed him for a lack of originality and accused him of borrowing extensively from the ideas of his predecessors and presenting them as his own. Mīrzā Abū al-Ḥasan Jilwa in particular accuses Mullā Ṣadrā of stealing the ideas of earlier thinkers.³⁵ ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarīnkūb states that,

31 For more on his criticisms see Günther, *In our days* 13. In his *al-Madkhal*, Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 1336) also offers the most detailed critiques of the educational practices of his time. He maintains that professors who took positions within madrasas could potentially compromise themselves in a number of ways. Furthermore, he argues that financial security and prestige caused many professors to avoid contact with lower classes and individuals they considered beneath their own positions, and he finds this distinction intolerable. For a detailed account of Ibn al-Ḥājj’s critiques see Moore, *The role of the madrasah* 180–246.

32 Subkī, *Mu‘īd al-ni‘am* 114–15, 116–17.

33 For more on Subkī’s criticism see Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 185–88.

34 Cited in Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 105.

35 For more on him, see Ja‘fariyan, *Dīn wa siyāsāt* 234–38. See also Shari‘at Mūsawī, *Kifāya al-muhtadī* 21–129.

“Mullā Ṣadrā’s transcendent philosophy is a combination of Peripatetic and Illuminative philosophies, Islamic theology, and mysticism. In effect, Mullā Ṣadrā and his proponents became the representatives of the mystics and Ishrāqīs who, for a long time, were the subjects of the harsh criticisms of the jurists and *sharī’a*-minded people.”³⁶

One Safavid Peripatetic philosopher was Mullā Murād b. ‘Alī Tafrishī (d. 1641), who, in his *Risāla-yi mubāḥathāt*, discusses the disagreements between Mullā Ṣadrā and Mīr Dāmād.³⁷ Amongst those who rejected many of Mullā Ṣadrā’s major philosophical ideas are Mullā Shamsā Gilānī (fl. 1653),³⁸ Mullā ‘Abd al-Razāqq Lāhijī,³⁹ Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzawāri,⁴⁰ Aghā Ḥusayn Khvānsārī (d. 1686),⁴¹ and Mullā Rajab-‘Alī Tabrīzī’s students, including Muhammad Rafī‘ Pīr-zāda,⁴² Qādī Sa‘īd Qummī (d. 1695),⁴³ Shaykh ‘Alī Qulī Khān Turkamānī, (fl. 1685),⁴⁴ Mullā Mīr Muḥammad Ismā‘īl Khatunābādī,⁴⁵ Mullā Muḥamamd Tunkābunī (known as Fāḍil Sarābī) (d. 1713),⁴⁶ and Āqā Jamāl Khvānsārī (d. 1713).⁴⁷

In his various works, including *al-Asfār al-arba‘a*, *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyya*, and *Risāla-yi sih aṣl*, Mullā Ṣadrā complains about the problems that exo-

36 Zarīnkūb, *Justujū dar taṣawwuf* 245–49.

37 The manuscript of this book (in the author’s own calligraphy), which includes his marginalia, is kept in the Kitābkhāna-yi Markazī Dānishgāh-i Tehrān under number 1803. There is another copy of this source copied by Mullā Zahirā, the author’s son, which is kept in the Kitābkhāna-yi Dānishkada-yi Addabiyyāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehrān, under number 44.

38 Gilānī rejected Mullā Ṣadrā’s theory of the unity of intellectual forms (*suwar al-aqliyya*) with the Truth. Dānishpazūh, *Majalla-yi Jāwidān Khirad* 20.

39 In his *Shawāriq al-ilhām* and *Gawhar-i murād*, Lāhijī, a student of Mullā Ṣadrā and his son-in-law, rejects some of Mullā Ṣadrā’s ideas, including his notion of the unity of the *‘āqil* and *ma‘qūl*.

40 In his glosses on Ibn Sīna’s *Shifā‘* Sabzawāri rejects some of Mullā Ṣadrā’s views.

41 In his glosses on Ibn Sīna’s *Shifā‘*, Khvānsārī rejects some of Mullā Ṣadrā’s views.

42 Tehrānī, *al-Dharī‘a* 21, 190.

43 Mudarris, *Rayḥānat al-adab* iv, 412; Davānī, *Mafākhir-i Islam* 7, 174

44 Tehrānī, *al-Dharī‘a* xxiii, 53; xii, 37; i, 308; ii, 514; vii, 154; xvi, 174; xx, 327; xviii, 137; Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist-i nusakh-i khaṭṭī* xvi, 564–66.

45 For more information on him see Moazzen, Institutional metamorphosis 66. Khatunābādī’s father, Mīr Ismā‘īl, wrote a number of books and tracts on philosophical subjects including a commentary on Ibn Sīna’s *Ishārāt*. See Ja‘fariyān, *Ṣafaviyya dar ‘arṣa-yi dīn* ii, 726.

46 Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist-i nusakh-i khaṭṭī* iii, 213.

47 ‘Āmilī, *Amal al-āmil* ii, 57; Afandī Iṣfahānī, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā* i, 114; Khvānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* ii, 214.

teric scholars (*'ulamā-yi qishrī*) caused him, forcing him to live in isolation.⁴⁸ They responded to his harsh criticisms by calling some of his ideas heretical and profane. They fiercely rejected his mystically inclined ideas. Despite the fact that he condemned popular Sufism, they branded his doctrine Sufi and hence unorthodox.⁴⁹ The dichotomy between mystics (or mystically inclined philosophers) and literalists has a long history in Islamic intellectual history. Traditionally the literalist scholars always opposed the spiritual hermeneutics of the mystics and mystic-philosophers and accused them of misunderstanding or having gone astray from the revelation and the Prophetic traditions, as was discussed briefly in chapter three.

Sayyid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Mīr Lawḥī, who, like Mullā Ṣadrā, was a student of Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahā'ī, was one of the toughest critics of philosophers and Sufis. Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī (d. 1688), a scholar with Akhbārī leanings, took up this cause in a number of his polemics such as *Ḥikmat al-'arīfīn fi radd shubah al-mukhālīfīn ay al-mutaṣawwifīn wa al-mufalsīfīn*,⁵⁰ *Taḥāfut al-akhyār*, *al-Fawā'id al-dīniyya fi radd 'alā al-ḥukamā wa al-ṣūfiyya*, and *Muḥibbān-i Khudā*. He rejected the ideas of Sufis and mystical philosophers, including Shaykh Bahā'ī, Mullā Ṣadrā and Muḥsin Fayḍ, for believing in the unity of existence; that is, Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which had dominated mystical thought for centuries.⁵¹ He believed their infidelity was greater than the unbelief of the Jews and Christians because they were denying the difference between the Creator and the created. Thus, he asserted, whoever did not denounce them and did not call them unbelievers was

48 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār* i, 4–8; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyya* 155; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi siḥ aṣl* 56. He categorizes them collectively as either *'ulama-yi qishrī* or *'ulama-yi rasmī* or *arbāb-i rusūm*, but he does not name any specific scholar.

49 Both Mullā Ṣadrā and Muḥsin Fayḍ wrote books and tracts denouncing popular Sufism. In his *Kasr al-aṣnām al-jāhiliyya*, Mullā Ṣadrā harshly criticizes those who pretended to be Sufis and held extremist views (*Kasr aṣnām* 46–50).

50 There are copies of this manuscript in a number of libraries, including Majlis, Āstān Quds, and Dānishgāh Tehran. See Ja'fariyan, *Dīn wa siyāsāt* 241. For more information on Qumī see Mudarris Tabrizī, *Rayḥānat al-adab* iv, 487; Kashmīrī, *Kitāb Nujūm al-samā'* 46; Āmilī, *Amal al-āmil* ii, 277.

51 As argued by El-Rouayheb the Sufi way of knowing was popular in the Arab East and Sufis were seen as the people of verification (*ahl al-taḥqīq*). Qāsim al-Khānī (d. 1697), Aḥmad al-Qushāshī (d. 1661), Ibrāhīm Kurānī (d. 1690), Muhammad Barzīnjī (d. 1691) and 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731) held that “verification” support the doctrine of “the unity of existence.” For more information on their works and views as well as those of the prominent Egyptian Sufis such as 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (d. 1565) on Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine and works see El-Rouayheb, *Islamic intellectual history* 236–346.

himself an infidel without religion. Shaykh ‘Alī b. Muḥammad ‘Āmilī (d. 1692) also harshly refuted Sufis in his *Zād al-murshidīn fi radd al-ṣūfiyya*, as did Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā’ī (d. 1826) who rejected some ideas of Mullā Ṣadrā discussed in his *Mashā’ir* and *‘Arshīyya*.⁵² Mīr Muḥammad Naṣīr b. Muḥammad Ma’ṣūm Bārfurūshī (fl. 18th century) considered philosophical books to be examples of heresy.

Mullā ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn Karbalā’ī (d. 1723), a teacher at the Madrasa-yi Maryam Begum, in his *Sirāj al-sālikīn* that he wrote for Maryam Begum, refuted the opinions of philosophers and mystics. Āqā Buzurg Tehrānī argues that one of the reasons the Safavid dynasty lost power was their mistake in appointing mystically inclined philosophers such as Mullā Ṣadrā to important judicial positions:

The Safavids lost their power over time because they entrusted important official and judicial positions to Akhbārīs and such philosophers as Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī, and Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī. They dismissed Uṣūlī scholars and instead chose the *shaykh al-Islams* and *ṣadrs* from the Akhbārīs. Mullā Ṣadrā occupied an important job in Shīrāz, Fayḍ in Kāshān, Muḥammad Bāqir [Sabzawārī] in Khurāsān, and Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī in Isfahan.⁵³

Literalist scholars obviously did not understand Mullā Ṣadrā’s transcendent philosophy. As he repeatedly states, for people who have no acquaintance with Islam’s spiritual dimension and the inner meanings of the Quran, the notion of experiential knowledge of divine presence tends to appear both impossible and lacking in authority since it does not arise from common experience. Much of the criticism of him centered on the contention that his ideas had developed into abstraction – that nothing remained but a bunch of statements without real content, far from the principles of religion. His critics argued against the concept of *al-‘ilm al-ḥudūrī* on the grounds that, however much it might facilitate a philosophic idea, it can never be authenticated. Because there is an epistemic asymmetry between self-knowledge and other knowledge, they argued, non-inferential belief could be false. These divergent and opposing orientations were most forcibly discussed in Safavid polemics as pantheism and popular Sufism.

52 Lawson, Orthodoxy and heterodoxy 127–54.

53 Tehrānī, *al-Kawākib al-muntashara* 6.

Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī and Epistemic Certitude

Muḥsin Fayḍ categorically rejected the intellectual pursuits of the *Uṣūlī mujtahids*, *mutakallims*, and conventional philosophers, claiming that they had deviated from the right path of the Prophet and the Imams and relied on intellectual tools that did not yield epistemic certitude (*yaqīn*). He believed that seeking “sure knowledge” (*qaṭʿ*) is a religious obligation for every Muslim who must first purify his soul and then acquire this knowledge from infallible sources, namely the Quran, *ḥadīths* and *akhbārs* (sayings and deeds) of the Prophet and the Imams.⁵⁴ The bulk of his tracts, namely, *Sharḥ-i ṣadr*, *Haqq al-mubīn*, *Rafʿ-i fitna*, *Zād al-sālik*, *Rāh-i ṣawāb*, *Iʿtidhār*, and *al-Inṣāf* are reactive and polemical objections to the *mujtahids* and other scholars.

At the root of Muḥsin Fayḍ’s epistemological principle is the certitude (*yaqīn*) found in the traditions of the Imams. He maintains that canonical *khabar* literature should be viewed primarily as soteriology. He repeatedly cites the famous *al-thaqaalayn ḥadīth* as proof, because he insists that epistemic certainty, which is crucial for securing the Shiʿi faith and for maintaining unity in the community, cannot be attained by means of scholarly tools other than the Quran and the traditions of the Imams.⁵⁵ He also blames the *mujtahids* for causing widespread *ikhtilāf* (differences of opinion) amongst themselves, leading to division in the Shiʿi community.⁵⁶ *Ijtihād* inherently leads to disagreement, for one’s personal opinion on a legal matter will be confronted by other experts. This disagreement (*khilāf*) naturally leads to disputation (*jadāl*) and debate (*munāẓara*), the purpose of which is to defend the validity of one’s own opinion, convince the opponent of its validity, or reduce him to silence by destroying his thesis.⁵⁷

The plurality of opinions among *mujtahids* did not resonate well with the perceived ecumenical nature of the religious discourse advocated by Muḥsin Fayḍ. *Ikhtilāf* was not something to be cherished, but rather viewed as a potential danger to Shiʿi solidarity and unity. Part of the reason for this view lies in Muḥsin Fayḍ’s intense desire for religious uniformity – unity of both opinion

54 For more information on Muḥsin Fayḍ’s views on the soul’s journey towards God see Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi zād al-sālik* 79–91.

55 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi rāh-i ṣawāb* 120–24.

56 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-i suʿāl wa jawāb* 117. A concern that had already been voiced by Astarābādī. He writes, “The frequent reliance of this group of [later *mujtahids*] on reason alone led them to go against the *khabars* reliably transmitted from the infallible Imams on many theological and legal issues. From these disagreements in fiqh resulted many further disagreements in individual legal rulings.” See *al-Fawāʿid al-madaniyya* 29.

57 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Tasbīl al-sabil* 23. See also al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Fawāʿid al-Tūsīyya* 316–17, 413, 440.

and action. But while he harshly criticizes *mujtahids* for having different opinions about legal issues, he fails to acknowledge that the plurality of opinions among *mujtahids* might allow for the complexity and conflict that is part of intellectual productivity and vigor. In his *Rāh-i ṣavāb*, which is his answer to a number of questions, Muḥsin Fayḍ responds to a question concerning *ikhtilāf* among the Shi'a. The questioner asks why there are so many differences of opinion – so many, in fact, that Shaykh Quṭb al-Dīn Rāwandī composed a book about the *ikhtilāfs* between Shaykh Mufid and Shaykh Murtaḍā, to which Muḥsin Fayḍ responds,

The reason for this *ikhtilāf* is that when the misguided people (i.e., the Sunnis) avoided following the Book and the family of the Prophet, they developed the science of *kalām* and the art of disputation which were used to refute the heretical groups and to convince the enemies of the religion. They augmented its [the science of *kalām*] problems to meet their own whims and wishes, assuming that they were correcting their own religious beliefs. They also devised the science of jurisprudence, which is a kind of disputation based on weak speculations (*ẓunūn-i wāhiyya*) and in which it is hardly possible to reach an agreement. They invented this science to deduce religious rulings at a time when the Shi'a were in a state of precautionary dissimulation (*taqīyya*) and did not feel safe. They were associating with misguided people and were hearing false statements presented as truth from them ... They abandoned the approach of the early scholars who were satisfied merely to listen to the infallible Imams ... Beware! Beware! The best approach is for all the community to take their religious beliefs, including the principles (*uṣūl*) and branches (*furū'*), from the Prophet and his appointed successors, who are infallible.⁵⁸

In his *Safīnat al-najāt*, Muḥsin Fayḍ reiterates the same notion. He writes,

When the epoch of the infallible Imams came to an end ... the Shi'a mixed with the Sunnis and became familiar with their books as youths; these

58 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-i su'āl wa jawāb* 117–19. In this regard Astarābādī states, “every path except holding fast to the sayings of the Imams leads to conflicting legal opinions and ascribing things to God (*al-kadhīb 'alā l-Allāh*)” (*al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* 128). He adds, “reason and revelation both demonstrate that scriptures are revealed to remove disagreement and dispute among the believers so that their lives in this world and the next might be in order. But if speculation is considered a permissible method of interpretation with regard to divine laws, then this benefit is lost through the occurrence of disagreement and dispute.” See *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* 129.

were the books that were commonly taught in the madrasas, mosques and elsewhere, for the kings and governments officials were Sunnis, and subjects always follow the lead of their kings. The Shi'a studied the religious sciences together with the Sunnis and read books on Islamic legal theories written by the Sunni scholars ... they (i.e. the Shi'a) approved some of what the Sunnis had written and disapproved some.⁵⁹

Besides critiquing the *mujtahids'* differences of opinion, Muḥsin Fayḍ criticizes their method of scholarship. He is well aware of the impossibility of achieving consensus among the *mujtahids* who develop religious rulings based on probable evidence, in particular their personal opinions and use of *qiyās* (analogy), which he sees as inferential. He states,

They [*mujtahids*] treat the science of jurisprudence as the art of disputation; therefore reaching an agreement is very rare in this field. Their approach was followed for a while, thanks to the official support of some rulers. They changed the method of the early scholars, which involved listening only to what the Imams have said. But these jurists deliberate about what God, the Prophet, and the Imams did not discuss, argue, and debate. That is why all these divergent opinions came about.⁶⁰

By contrast, Muḥsin Fayḍ praises such *ḥadīth* transmitters as al-Kulaynī, Ibn Babawayh Shaykh Ṣadūq, and Raḍī al-Dīn 'Alī b. Ṭāwūs al-Ḥillī, who made religious rulings based on the Quran and the traditions of the Imams. He claims that their works are reliable and their words will never die, "because their discourse is the word of God and His messenger which will not change until the day of the resurrection. These *ḥadīth* scholars did not write about theology and

59 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Safīnat al-naḡāt* 9–10. Hossein Modarressi has argued the early Safavid Uṣūlī *mujtahids* (mainly the 'Āmilī scholars) employed knowledge produced by Sunni jurists and also made use of their legal techniques in order to develop new legal rulings. Modarressi, *Introduction to Shi'ite law* 49; Modarressi, *Kharaj in Islamic* 47, 54–58. Stewart lists a relatively large number of prominent Shi'i scholars including Faḍl b. Shādān (d. 873), 'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 132), al-Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 1384), al-Shahīd al-Thānī (d. 1558) and Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1621) who had received their training in jurisprudence in Sunni circles. For more information on them see Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 65–95, 197–202. He also states that Shi'i scholars participated in legal studies, both as students and teachers, in Sunni madrasas (ibid. 95–96).

60 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-i su'āl wa jawāb* 117–18. Ḥurr al-'Āmilī also rebukes Uṣūlī *mujtahids* for their use of *qiyās*, which is explicitly denounced in the *khabars* of the Imams. See his *al-Fawā'id al-Ṭūsīyya* 193.

uṣūl al-fiqh unless they wanted to refute the opinions of the *mutakallims* and *mujtahids*.”⁶¹

Although the divergent opinions of jurists can be seen as representing intellectual creativity, legal disputes were undeniably divisive. Muḥsin Fayḍ dislikes this inevitable consequence of *ijtihād*. But he consciously avoids labeling jurists as heretics and infidels. Perhaps he thought it did not make sense to use such polemical concepts as “orthodox” and “heretical” to denote different legal currents within Islam. Muḥsin Fayḍ also criticizes the jurists for their literalism and desire for fame and power.⁶² In *Risāla-yi rāh-i ṣawāb*, he describes *mujtahids* as scholars who have strayed and claims that these so-called ‘ulamā’ seek worldly position and wealth. “They take great pleasure in defeating their opponents and rejecting the true scholars. These arrogant ‘ulamā’ praise themselves in assemblies and easily issue religious rulings. They transmit the opinions of the *mujtahids* who came before them without any investigating.”⁶³

Akhbārīs criticized the rationalists’ confidence in reason and proof, which they argued would detract from their respect for other ways of knowing.⁶⁴ In stressing the power and potential of the human intellect in exploring the truth, be it in legal matters or metaphysical issues, rationalism was regarded as the rival of systems claiming knowledge, whether from mystical experience, revelation, or intuition. Additionally, Akhbārīs found philosophers’ confidence in human intellectual capacity troubling.

For instance, Astarābādī denies the validity of three of the four well-known sources of religious knowledge in Islam, namely, *ijmā’* (consensus of ‘ulamā’), *‘aql* (intellect, reason) and *ijtihād* (a religious scholar’s individual reasoning), considering them to be Sunni innovations (*bid‘a*).⁶⁵ He argues that the exper-

61 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-i su‘āl wa jawāb* 125.

62 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla-yi sih aṣl* 7, 36–45.

63 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-i su‘āl wa jawāb* 133–34. In his *Risāla-yi inṣāf*, he reiterates the same critiques. Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi inṣāf* 185–86.

64 There were also some *Uṣūlī* scholars who criticized *mujtahids* such as al-Karakī and his grandson, Mīr Ḥusayn, who had readily assumed the title of “the seal of *mujtahids*”, for claiming that they have reached the highest degree of *ijtihād* or were the ultimate living religious authority. For example, Ḥusayn ‘Abd al-Ṣamad holds that “no *mujtahid* has been safe from a critic, nor a person from a deficiency.” Cited in Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 37.

65 Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madanīyya* 18–29, 47, 100, 106, 265–71, 352–59. Muḥsin Fayḍ holds “the consensus of the Muslims is obviously invalid since it was used to justify the caliphate of Abū Bakr.” See his *Tasbīl al-Sabīl* 26. Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī also claims that the Sunnis invented consensus in order to usurp the caliphate and then to justify any other falsehood they wished. al-‘Āmilī, *al-Fawā'id al-Ṭūsīyya* 434. See also Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 185; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 106; Madelung, *Authority in Twelver Shiism* 173

tise of the *mujtahid* of the age is not grounded in the most certain sources of knowledge, namely the *ḥadīth* and *khabar* and the Quran, but rather based on dialectic and speculation, which are fallible methods that cannot legitimately serve as the basis for rulings on sacred law. Eight chapters (180–368) of his *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* are dedicated to discussion on this subject.

A number of jurists in the mid-seventeenth century refuted Astarābādī's views. Among them are Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī al-'Āmilī, the brother of Ṣāhib al-Madārik (d. 1651 or 1657), and Ḥusayn b. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Karakī (d. 1665).⁶⁶ 'Alī b. Muḥammad 'Āmilī (d. 1692) also criticized Astarābādī for his lack of knowledge of religious sciences. He accused him of using opium and other drugs and lamented the fact the numerous simple-minded people embraced his views.⁶⁷ Among modern scholars Devin Stewart rejects Astarābādī's arguments based on their lack of historical bases.⁶⁸ Robert Gleave has praised Astarābādī for developing a sophisticated legal methodology and hermeneutics, while remaining steadfastly committed to the ability of the Quran and *ḥadīths* to provide answers to theological and legal questions arising within the Shī'ī community.⁶⁹

The extent to which the body of Imāmī traditions was accepted as a source of guidance and knowledge had a tremendous impact on the intellectual debates in Safavid Isfahan as argued in Chapter 4. While there were Akhbārīs who gave precedence to *ḥadīth* and *khabar* literature as the most reliable source of religious knowledge, there were also *mujtahids* who regarded *ḥadīth* literature as a potential source of Islamic law and guidance. Nonetheless they cast doubts about the authenticity of some *ḥadīths*, which was a crucial principle for the Akhbārīs.

In contrast to their Akhbārī counterparts, the *mujtahids* felt especially enabled to rationally evaluate the merits of religious and legal texts. This view did lay the groundwork for intellectual autonomy; not least of all, it assimilated

n.25; Kohlberg, *Aspects of Akhbari thought* 134; Newman, *The nature of the Akhbārī/ Uṣūlī dispute* 22–51; Modarressi, *Rationalism and traditionalism* 141–58; Cole, *Shī'ī clerics in Iraq* 3–35; Calder, *Doubt and prerogative* 57–78.

66 See Modarressi, *An introduction to Shī'ī law* 52; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 106–09; Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 191. Muḥsin Fayḍ also criticizes the late Uṣūlī *mujtahids*. *Safīnat al-najāt* 9–10. Baḥr al-'ulūm also presented their critiques. See Baḥrānī, *Lu'lu'āt al-Baḥrayn* 117–19.

67 For more information see also Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 110–12.

68 Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy* 199–200; Stewart, *The genesis of the Akhbārī revival* 169–93.

69 For more information on Astarābādī's legal theory see Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam* 61–102.

man's rational capacities to those of the Imams. Hence, sophisticated ideas of rationalist scholars were refuted as a rejection of the Imams' teaching. Safavid Akhbārīs' emphasis was to accept the distinction between the authoritative and infallible teaching of the Shi'i holy texts and the non-infallible findings, which – although they appear rationally and logically sound – can be easily dismissed.

To be sure, many prominent Muslim philosophers and *mujtahids*, in spite of their emphatic affirmation of faith and reason, consistently emphasized the value of the Shi'i holy texts. But it must nonetheless be admitted that Usulism on the whole, and by virtue of its basic approach, contained within itself the danger of an overestimation of rationality. There had been, however, an enormous corrective and warning force, from the beginning, which in fact kept the internal peril of uber-rationalism at the expense of revelation and tradition. As a result, there was no sign of any rationalistic conviction that nothing exceeds the power of human reason to comprehend, including the divine revelation. Akhbārīs believed their approach could act as a counterpoise against the rationalism of *mujtahids* and philosophers, who, they claimed, were displaying excessive confidence in the power of human reason.

Theosophers and Pseudo-Philosophers

In the same vein as his teacher, Muḥsin Fayḍ accords *ḥikmat* a lofty status and considers it the most important branch of knowledge. However, he emphasizes that the *ḥikmat* for which he advocates is the inheritance of the prophets and not what was taught in his time. In contrast to the "erroneous" knowledge known as *ḥikmat*, Muḥsin Fayḍ insists that he teaches only the way of the infallible Imams, which is true *ḥikmat*. He argues that, like Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic theology and philosophy have been contaminated by so-called theologians and philosophers and writers. The ancient *ḥakīms* were virtuous people who curbed their desires and had expert knowledge of the truth and of gnosis. Although their words are mysterious and one cannot fathom their meanings from the words (*alfāz*) alone through exoteric reading, their discourses free people from the traps of ignorance and deception. The wisdom of ancient scholars is the legacy of the prophets, which is different from the conventional *ḥikmat* current among recent scholars, since it has deviated.⁷⁰

Muḥsin Fayḍ identifies the *ḥikmat* taught by the followers of the prophets, especially by the Family of the Prophet, with mysticism because "the science

70 Ja'fariyān, *Dīn wa siyāsāt* 283; Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi sharḥ-i ṣadr* 48–49.

of Sufism is indeed an expression of the new and subtle points of *ḥikmat* and secrets of noble sciences that were uttered by the Prophet Muhammad.” He adds, “In every age there are a few real Sufis who possess this kind of wisdom and who are therefore the subject of exoteric scholars’ blame and criticism.”⁷¹ Muḥsin Fayḍ criticizes the so-called philosophers for their ignorance of the religious sciences. He blames them for studying and teaching books that are not related to the religious sciences, claiming that such teachers are more interested in their salaries from charitable endowments of the madrasas. He writes,

Some of them think attaining these sciences separates them from the masses, as if they had acquired sufficient knowledge of the religion and attained certitude, but it is not true at all! Knowledge does not mean excessive learning. Knowledge is a light that God reflects in the heart of whoever He wishes to guide.⁷²

Religious scholars, particularly the Akhbārīs, argued that philosophers falsely regard philosophy as a creed, as a body of truths that could be elaborated and in effect developed. As John Walbridge argues, although Greek philosophy provided the only comprehensive, rational explanation of the universe available to the nations bordering the Mediterranean, for scholars from a civilization organized around a revealed religion, Greek philosophy posed problems and puzzles.⁷³ Hence, some religious scholars went as far as declaring that there is no value in studying philosophy.

Although most philosophers were well versed in the religious sciences – and some even wrote commentaries on the Quran and legal compendiums – compared to jurists, theologians, and Sufis, their intellectual and scholarly focus was not entirely centered on the Quran, the *ḥadīth*, and other branches of religious sciences. Rather, they studied some topics that to them were of prime importance, such as developing their own particular ontology. They argued that jurists enjoy the authority in religious matters and saw this claim as having no bearing on philosophical inquires. Many Muslims, however, did not agree with rationalists and philosophers that reason and revelation are in harmony and complement each other. W. Chittick argues that one of the results of the gradual weakening of the intellectual tradition over the course of Islamic history was the increasing tendency toward dogmatic closure, especially with the shaping of the juridical and theological schools.⁷⁴ Muslim philosophers – even the celebrated Ash‘arī theologian, Ghazālī – disapproved of the dogmatic

71 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi sharḥ-i ṣadr* 52–54.

72 Ja‘farīyān, *Dīn wa siyāsāt* 284–86.

73 Walbridge, *God and logic* 57.

74 Chittick, *Science of the cosmos* 62.

approach taken by conventional Muslims. He, like Mullā Şadrā, states that [some religious] learning too often becomes a veil that prevents any attempt to achieve true knowledge. He writes,

The cause of the veil is that someone will learn the creed of the Sunnis and will learn the proofs from that as they are uttered in dialectics and debate, then he will give his whole heart over to this and believe that there is no knowledge whatsoever beyond it. If something else enters his heart, he will say: “This disagrees with what I have heard, and whatever disagrees with that is false.” It is impossible for someone like this ever to know the truth of affairs, for the belief learned by the common people is the mold of the truth, not the truth itself. Complete knowledge is for the realities to be unveiled from within the mold, like a kernel from the shell.⁷⁵

Having criticized jurists, and philosophers, Muḥsin Fayḍ also blames scholars who have esoteric knowledge alone because “these are like stars that illuminate only their surroundings” – they cannot lead people. Muḥsin Fayḍ prefers those scholars who possess both esoteric and exoteric knowledge, because “these scholars are like the sun that illuminates the whole world,” making them worthy of leading people.⁷⁶

Muḥsin Fayḍ's Critics

A number of Muḥsin Fayḍ's contemporaries and later scholars either refuted or rejected his ideas on the grounds of inconsistency and heresy. For example, according to Mīrzā ‘Alī Tajallī,

Mullā Muḥsin Kāshī's scholarship is flawed and shallow. He changes his mind constantly. For a while he follows Ibn ‘Arabī's mysticism, but then he changes his stance and adopts Muḥammad Ghazālī's approach. For a short period of time he associates himself with Peripatetic philosophers, but very soon he changes his position and adopts the path of the Illuminationists (*Ishrāqīs*). He does not pay attention to the criticisms of his fellow scholars and he carelessly records in his books whatever comes to his mind.⁷⁷

75 Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā-yi sa‘ādat* 36–37.

76 Muḥsin Fayḍ, *Risāla-yi sharḥ-i şadr* 55–56.

77 Cited in Ja‘fariyān, *Dīn wa siyāsāt* 273.

Mullā Faḍlullāh Kāshānī (d. 1700), a relative of Muḥsin Fayḍ's, took issue with his works. He wrote a gloss (*hāshiya*) on Muḥsin Fayḍ's *al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn* in which he criticizes mystical notions as well as Muḥsin Fayḍ's ideas. In his *al-Nafaḥat al-malakūtiyya*, Yūsuf Aḥmad Baḥrānī (d. 1772) refuted and rejected Sufi ideas as well as the opinions of Mullā Ṣadrā and Muḥsin Fayḍ along with those of the *mujtahids*. In his *Lu'lu'āt al-Baḥrayn*, Baḥrānī argues that, "Some of Fayḍ's ideas border on blasphemy."⁷⁸ 'Alī b. Muḥammad 'Āmilī, who wrote polemics against Sufis and philosophers, rebukes both Muḥsin Fayḍ and Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzawārī for their mystical and philosophical inclinations.⁷⁹ In one of his tracts, Shaykh 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-'Āmilī attributed "some improper discourses" to Muḥsin Fayḍ, accusing him of believing in the Unity of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), of holding that infidels will not be punished eternally in Hell, and that even *mujtahids* of high rank are not guaranteed salvation, and so forth.⁸⁰ Although Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī condemned Muḥsin Fayḍ's ideas harshly as well, animosity between the two was brief. In order to seek Muḥsin Fayḍ's forgiveness, Muḥammad Ṭāhir went from Qum to Kāshān on foot to meet him.⁸¹

Muḥaqqiq Sabzawārī's Review of Safavid Higher Learning

In his *Rawḍat al-anwār al-'Abbāsī*, Muḥaqqiq Sabzawārī sets out what he believed was the correct relationship between the shah and the learned class, while reviewing the state of education in late seventeenth-century Isfahan. He classifies scholars into several groups. *Ḥakīms* (philosophers) and *mujtahids* occupy the highest rank, while grammarians and philologists occupy the lowest. He writes,

[True] Philosophers (*ḥakīms*) have deep knowledge of various branches of wisdom including divine, natural, and mathematical sciences and know the principles and branches of these fields. They also have full knowledge of the works and the ideas of earlier *ḥakīms* and sages. They

78 Baḥrānī, *Lu'lu'āt al-Baḥrayn* 121.

79 Tunkābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'* 300. Mullā Aḥmad Tūnī and Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī criticized Shaykh Bahā'ī for his association with heretics, Sufis, and "lovers" – those believing in the Sufi doctrine of Divine love. See 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* i, 178–80, 257–82.

80 Khvānsārī, *Rawḍat al-jannāt* vii, 10–31.

81 For more on his life and works see, Shāmlū, *Qiṣaṣ al-khāqānī* ii, 58; Qazwīnī, *Abbās-nāma* 305–06; Khātūnābādī, *Waqāyī' al-sinīn* 525–35; Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'* v, 80–82. Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī also criticizes Muḥsin Fayḍ and his mentor Mullā Ṣadrā for their mystical and philosophical tendencies. Lawson, Orthodoxy and heterodoxy 134.

have purified their souls from the love of the world and mundane desires; therefore, everybody must hold them in high esteem. They are the epitome of human beings. They are a rare breed. Every few centuries, only one or two true *ḥakīms* are born.⁸²

According to Sabzawārī, people who currently call themselves philosophers are no more than vain imitators of true *ḥakīms* – they are unwilling to search for wisdom and unable to teach virtue. Fearful of betraying their ignorance, these scholars seek only to appear wise by endlessly debating trivial questions in intentionally obscure language. They are almost certain to be regarded as preeminent philosophers. One needs little learning to be a success, just the ability to ridicule, invent, and deceive:

In every age there are many people who claim that they are philosophers (*ḥakīms*) hoping with their false attributions to gain the trust of the ruler and thereby gain worldly status and amass wealth. They spend a while studying the works of the true scholars and then promote themselves as true *ḥakīms* and attract many students who praise them and waste their time learning about their futile disputes and verbal attacks.⁸³

Sabzawārī argues that, in order to improve public life, every society needs *mujtahids* who have thorough knowledge of Quranic verses and Imāmī traditions and have learned what is required to make them capable of *ijtihād*. He describes *mujtahids* as scholars who are more knowledgeable than Quran commentators, *ḥadīth* transmitters, and *fuqahā*. He writes, “Their existence is more necessary than any other group [of scholar], because without them it is impossible to know the permissible from the forbidden.”⁸⁴ Sabzawārī adds that, “there are some people among this group who do not possess knowledge but they claim they are knowledgeable just to gain high-ranking positions and wealth.”⁸⁵

Sabzawārī’s primary concern is not to prescribe particular subjects or methods but to defend the usefulness of learning. To improve public life he prefers learning that is essentially practical rather than speculative in orientation. He feels it is incumbent upon Muslim scholars to search for wisdom wherever it can be found, to read widely and critically the works of philosophers,

82 Sabzawārī, *Rawḍat al-anwār* 597–98.

83 Sabzawārī, *Rawḍat al-anwār* 598.

84 Sabzawārī, *Rawḍat al-anwār* 599–600.

85 Sabzawārī, *Rawḍat al-anwār* 602.

theologians, jurists, and mystics, and to make use of those ideas that conform to Islamic scripture and that reinforce the virtues taught by the Quran and the Imams. Sabzawārī emphasizes that there is nothing wrong with examining the opinions of the philosophers, mystics and jurists:

If a scholar examines the book of the Sufis in order to learn about their beliefs – because every book offers something of value – they [the literalist scholars, generally the people of *ḥadīth* and jurists] accuse him of being a Sufi. They claim all Sufis are unbelievers and that the people of *ḥadīth* and jurists understand only the literal meaning of some verses of the Quran and Prophetic traditions and know nothing about the depth of the noble verses of the Quran and secrets of *ḥadīths*; they deny and ignore the *ḥakīms* and even go further and call them unbelievers. If a scholar studies philosophy books and rational sciences, they say that scholar is a *ḥakīm*, therefore an infidel, and does not have faith. They disapprove and accuse widely. These kinds of people are around in every time and we have them in our time as well.⁸⁶

Despite the fact that he took the middle ground, there were still some *Shari‘a*-minded scholars who rebuked Sabzawārī for his mystical inclination.⁸⁷

Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī’s Observations

As a Shi‘i pedagogue, Tabrīzī mostly echoes the other scholars’ concerns, but he does shed some light on the day-to-day problems of the teachers and students. He condemns identifying education with learning formal sciences because “not only does it keep the possessor away from righteousness, but it also causes depression. Those who constantly occupy themselves with learning formal sciences (*‘ulūm-i rasmī*) will end up becoming depressed.

Formal science is nothing but fuss
Which yields neither a quality [time] nor a [spiritual] state!
And always brings depression to the soul
Alas! My master does not believe this discourse!”⁸⁸

86 Sabzawārī, *Rawḍat al-anwār* 598–99, 602.

87 For example, Āqā Buzurg Tehrānī maintains that Safavids lost their power over time because they entrusted important official and judicial positions to Akhbārīs and philosophers, including Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzawārī. Tehrānī, *al-Kawākib al-muntashira* 6.

88 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 245.

Tabrīzī criticizes those scholars who are engaged only with learning Arabic syntax, morphology, Arabic philology, logic, and legal reasoning.⁸⁹ He also disapproves of learning the kind of jurisprudence in which the main topics are rules concerning “menstrual discharge after childbirth, leases, oaths of condemnation (sworn allegations of adultery committed by either husband or wife), invalidation testimonies, lawsuits, evidentiary hearings, and blood monies,” because

In his lifetime a jurist rarely needs to know these problems. Even if he or others need to know [the rules] concerning these subjects, it is *wājib-i kifā’ī* (i.e. communal obligations that an individual undertakes only so that the community’s obligations are fulfilled). Therefore, one needs not engage oneself learning them and neglect learning the sciences, knowledge of which is considered unanimously by all Muslims to be obligatory. So if a religious scholar is engaged with the aforesaid *wājib-i kifā’ī* duties, he is either an ignorant snob or a hypocrite. He is either betraying his own religion or seeking worldly rank, status, and wealth. Therefore, it is incumbent upon him to become aware of these two illnesses (i.e. ignorance and hypocrisy) and cure himself before they become so strong they destroy him.⁹⁰

Tabrīzī also argues that after learning whatever the early scholars wrote concerning prayer, fasting, recitation of the Quran, and the like, students should learn other subjects such as *‘ilm al-naḥs* which are not discussed in jurists’ books. He advises students to purify their souls from characteristics such as arrogance, hypocrisy, jealousy, and hatred and avoid backbiting, spreading rumors, hypocrisy, reminding Muslims of their shortcomings, etc.⁹¹ Tabrīzī reports that there are some people who know neither the superficial aspect of religion nor its true meaning. They do not attend Friday prayer or perform other recommended religious duties; they choose solitude and claim they are knowledgeable, having contempt for religious scholars. In fact, they are the ones who cause true scholars to become defamed and disgraced.⁹²

Although Tabrīzī acknowledges that there are some benefits to co-operating with rulers and the wealthy, he urges religious scholars to avoid seeking proximity to kings. He maintains that the scholar is the true ruler and he must not

89 Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 246.

90 Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 246–7; al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 155–57.

91 al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Munyat al-murīd* 154–55; Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 247–48.

92 Tabrīzī, *Farā’id al-fawā’id* 243–44.

put himself in a situation or condition that would cause him humiliation and shame; if he does, he belittles himself in people's eyes. A scholar should not accept gifts from kings even though religious law does not expressly forbid it. He should be content with less and live a simple life.⁹³ Tabrīzī cites the following exchange between a learned scholar and a mystic recorded in *Munyat al-murīd*:

A learned individual explained to one of the mystics why rulers and elites of our time do not notice us [i.e. 'ulamā'] and why knowledge has no value for them. The sage replied: Earlier the scholars had such high status that rulers and nobles sought their services and sought knowledge from them while scholars avoided them. Therefore the world seemed worthless in the eyes of the people and the value of their knowledge and learning appeared great ... but scholars of our time seek out rulers and give away their knowledge for their world, so the world seems big in the eyes of the scholars and knowledge appears worthless and insignificant in the eyes of rulers!⁹⁴

Tabrīzī says that there are many students who are doubly ignorant; part of the reason is that they do not have thorough knowledge of some subjects and issues, but it also derives from their firm belief in things of which they lack knowledge. He therefore recommends that students follow the advice given by Abū 'Alī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb b. Miskawayh (d. 1030) who, in his *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, argued that a teacher must encourage an ignorant student to study mathematical sciences such as geometry and arithmetic in order to practice logical reasoning. If he studies these subjects, he will enjoy certitude (*yaqīn*) and his soul will become invigorated after he recognizes the errors of his opinions.⁹⁵

Overall, Tabrīzī's confirmation of Miskawayh's recommendation that one appreciate mathematical reasoning that leads to certitude (particularly exemplified by mathematical proof) is different from the solutions offered by other pedagogues including the ones whose ideas are discussed in this study. Mathematical proofs and logic are recognized as universally essential in validation, explanation, discovery, systemization of results, incorporation into a framework, and the conveying of an unassailable certitude. In fact, similar to

93 Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 251–52.

94 Cited in Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 251.

95 Cited in Tabrīzī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 275.

logic, mathematical proof is a basic medium that provides discipline in the art of thinking as well as an introduction to advanced studies.

The central role of mathematical proofs, which can have explanatory as well as problem-solving power, quenches our deep desire for certainty by verifying assertions in the most logical way. As with certainty, humans have a desire to determine the cause of a phenomenon – to explain why an assertion is true. Mathematical enquiry is quite helpful in that regard as well. Perhaps both Miskawayh and Tabrizī were aware of the fact that logic and mathematics would show students how to follow steps to arrive at conclusions. By studying mathematics, students would also learn that an error in one step makes all the following steps and conclusions wrong. Just learning this point is a step towards wisdom that they could apply to all other subjects.

Moreover, although mathematical concepts such as points, lines, circles, triangles, numbers, and so forth have no external reality and are the product of mental activity, the axioms of mathematics are unrivalled in their clearness and its conclusions are deduced from the most rigid demonstrations. In other words, they are not arbitrary concepts. Mathematical knowledge therefore possesses a truth of its own and its validity is unquestionable and universally acknowledged. It is not strengthened by unanimous approval, yet it leads to unanimous agreement. These characteristics of mathematical knowing introduce students to a system of ideals, which is infinite and immutable – above and beyond each individual mind. Because mathematical truth is self-evident, and because it is exact and draws on certain knowledge gained by mental operations upon a few simple and uncountable definitions and axioms, it proliferates new knowledge. This new knowledge is valuable and rich in practical results. Therefore, according to Tabrizī, learning the science that is all about abstract concepts – which gives us a system of truth, accessible to all and supreme over all – is well worth learning. He argues that, as with mathematics, certain knowledge must be the touchstone of learning.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Isfahan's relative political tranquility and stability during the period from the first decades of the seventeenth century until the early decades of the eighteenth century did create favorable conditions for a dynamic intellectual atmosphere. Philosophers and traditionalists with mystical leanings, such as

96 Tabrizī, *Farā'id al-fawā'id* 275.

Mullā Ṣadrā and Muḥsin Fayḍ, who mastered both rational and traditional sciences and had their own particular epistemological convictions, contested the *Sharī'a*-minded scholars and literalist scholars who preferred knowledge obtained by human effort over that bestowed by divine grace; as a result they criticized conventional religious learning conducted by *ʿulamā-yi rasmī*. The traditional dichotomies between the literalists and the philosophers with mystical leanings were contested once again. An array of influential figures engaged in heated debates and wrote a number of anti-Sufi and anti-philosophical polemics. Mainstream scholars, for example, claimed that they alone had the best and most correct understanding of the Quran and Prophetic and Imāmī traditions, whereas the opposing scholars insisted on more fragmented and subjective knowledge.

The critics whose ideas I presented and discussed were concerned with the decline of learning. In differing ways and with varying degrees of effectiveness, they promoted an ideal of what education should be. Mullā Ṣadrā reinvigorated a type of epistemology in which traditional philosophy was mediated by mysticism. He harmonized scripture, mystical insights, and philosophical truth, while reinterpreting and reformulating Islamic principles in a new light. The doctrine expounded by Mullā Ṣadrā is not to be found in the study of formal sciences or in what is normally understood as Sufism, nor is it to be found in the disciplines of theology or conventional philosophy. He proposed a type of transcendent mystical philosophy different from other intellectual currents.

For Mullā Ṣadrā and Muḥsin Fayḍ, respectively, knowledge of soul and *ḥikmat* and the revelation and Prophetic and Imāmī traditions were indispensable, even inescapable means, for gaining epistemic certitude. In particular, their mystical inclinations prodded them to earnestly reflect on the reformulation of learning. Muḥsin Fayḍ gave *ḥikmat*, which he identified with the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams, a lofty status. What Muḥsin Fayḍ found persuasive about traditionalism was the kind of certitude (*yaqīn*) it led to. On the one hand some *mujtahids* viewed the prophetic and Imāmī tradition as a collection of contradictory and at times unauthentic reports with an unclear relevance to exigencies of the early modern times. On the other hand, Akhbārīs such as Muḥsin Fayḍ regarded diversity of approaches to scriptural interpretation as a threat to unity among the Shī'a.

All four thinkers discussed in this chapter lamented that higher learning had been reduced to dry formalism and that many ignorant persons had been representing themselves as scholars in order to obtain status and wealth. They warned against what they saw as an ever-widening gap between true learning and the shallow and half-baked training that students received in madrasas. They believed that *zāhiri* (literalist) scholars were destroying the very essence

of Shi'ism by reducing it to a mere corpus of legal minutiae and *ḥadīth* collections. They claimed that *zāhirī* scholars learned some Arabic and studied a few books mainly to deceive the masses into seeing them as scholars and leaders. The masses might follow their words and trust them to perform their religious ceremonies and duties, but for scholars such as Mullā Ṣadrā, legal studies was the indispensable beginning; when completely internalized, the law also became an end toward which the spiritual quest was directed.

As Sabzawārī maintained, jurisprudence regulated external behavior alone, yet he believed a true adherent had to also remain pure of heart. By contrast, *mujtahids* believed their professionalism and specialization served the changing needs of their society and that legal studies should therefore be the focus of higher learning. *Mujtahids* accused mystic philosophers and traditionalists of not understanding the pressing mundane needs of the masses. Moreover, *mujtahids* portrayed the Akhbārīs' method of scholarship as reductionist and simplistic vis-à-vis the more systematized and dynamic approach of *ijtihād*. Akhbārīs tried to solve this problem by practicing a hermeneutics that enabled them to recast the religious ideas expressed in the sayings of the Imams into concepts of a fundamentally different culture, notably that of the religious community to which they themselves, as scholars, belonged.

The earliest and most vocal critics and opponents of mystic philosophers were jurists and traditionalists such as 'Alī b. Muḥammad 'Āmilī and Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī. They viewed Sufis and philosophers as rivals whose growing influence posed a serious danger to the principles of religion as they knew it. For their part, mystic philosophers and Akhbārī scholars reproached literalist scholars for placing worldly ambition above wisdom, under the guise of defending the faith. They blamed the decline of learning on the *zāhirī* scholars' motives of vanity and desire for wealth and power. Seeking to advance their careers, literalists were thought to no longer care to learn or teach the subjects that would best serve the needs and interests of the faith. Mystic philosophers and Akhbārīs also criticized the *mujtahids*' useless disputations as a jumble of ludicrous objections and irrelevant analogies, calling such wordy arguments deceptions that did not assist students in their search for truth.

However, these scholarly figures do not account for all Safavid pedagogical activities; the four scholars whose ideas and criticisms are discussed here were collectively disappointed in pedagogical activities. Therefore, they challenged the prevailing thought regarding the appropriate educational setting and curriculum by analyzing the literalism of *zāhirī* scholars and the mundane ambitions of jurists. Yet, despite the expressed unhappiness of the educational undertakings during the Safavid era by the aforesaid thinkers, Sayyid 'Abdallāh al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī al-Tustarī (d. 1759) envies the favorable condition of the

Shi'i scholars of the earlier decades. He reports that the majority of his contemporaries do not pass the stage of mere imitation (*taqlīd*) and even those to whom this does not apply did not go far compared to the scholars of the former generations. He argues that this is not due to their inability to reach a higher level but rather results from the circumstances in times of political turmoil, civil war, and poverty, as well as a general disregard for knowledge, its transmission, and the scholars who produce it.⁹⁷

97 Schmidtke, *Forms and functions* 95–127.

Conclusion

Although there were Shi'i madrasas in pre-Safavid times, the rise of the Safavids to power undoubtedly led to a far-reaching advancement of Shi'i higher learning and authority. It was during the rule of the Safavids that the Shi'i 'ulamā' for the first time developed a long-standing relationship with the political elite. This evolution helped Shi'i 'ulamā' to define and consolidate Shi'i "orthodoxy." As Talal Asad argues, orthodoxy is "not a mere body of opinions but a distinctive relationship – a relationship of power ... to regulate, uphold, require or adjust correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones."¹

The relations between the Safavid ruling elite and religious authorities were mutual and symbiotic – their power and influence characterized and constituted the socio-religious and cultural apparatus of early modern Iran. Safavid rulers were aware of the fact that they could not sustain their rule and legitimacy through military and political coercion alone. They also knew that, in the long run, they needed a certain amount of support from their subjects in order to maintain stability as well as to implement their socio-political ideals and religious programs. Thus, patronizing Shi'i scholars and building magnificent mosque-madrasa complexes were part of the socio-cultural and religious policies of every Safavid shah.

As an important socio-religious group from the advent of the Safavid rule, Shi'i 'ulamā' supported Safavid rule either by accepting official positions – including teaching posts, the offices of *ṣadr*, and the head position of *shaykh al-Islam* – or just by giving political and religious advice to the reigning monarchs. As *mujtahids*, members of the Safavid 'ulamā' developed religious rulings; as judges and *shaykh al-Islams*, they dispensed justice; and as administrators of *awqāf*, they often had substantial influence on cultural and intellectual affairs. For example, Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī was entrusted with many responsibilities. As the teacher of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī he was in charge of training students and was responsible for their well-being. He was also expected to supervise the observance of religious rituals performed in the madrasa. As the *mullā-bāshī*, he had the final say in religious matters.

In the madrasas of Safavid Isfahan, Shi'i 'ulamā' continued to transmit knowledge originated in the Quran, Prophetic and Imāmī traditions, and works of prominent Shi'i scholars, through recitation, disputation, memorization and other teaching methods. Acquiring such knowledge, pedagogical

1 Asad, *The idea of an anthropology* 15.

skills and legal expertise required years of training under the supervision of scholars whose authority had been verified through the *ijāza* system. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, Safavid political elites were actively committed to the promotion of Twelver Shi'ism throughout their realm. The patronizing of madrasas and their residents, both professors and students, was a means of promoting this agenda. Although they did not standardize training, and transmission of knowledge was based on the personal authority of the teacher and certified by the *ijāza*, Safavid madrasas became prime venues where Shi'i scholars spread their knowledge on a much larger scale for the first time in Islamic history. By providing professors with sizeable income and prestige and giving students a place to live and learn without financial burden, the madrasa system transformed higher learning and the Shi'i scholarly class.

As mentioned in the introduction, scholars continue to debate whether the advent and swift spread of madrasas across the Muslim world affected Islamic higher learning, or alternatively wielded minimal impact on the process of transmission of knowledge. Primary sources used in this study illustrate the many layers of organization that characterized Shi'i higher learning and madrasas during the Safavid era. Although the deeds of endowment consulted in this research do not include stipulations requiring examinations to determine students' advancement, they do reveal that *muddaris* were expected to monitor students' academic progress and conduct. In all the deeds of endowment examined for the purposes of this research, the donors emphasize that – should the professor find that certain students have not made satisfactory progress in their studies – they should be expelled from their madrasas and replaced with students who could benefit in their stead.

Autobiographies of prominent scholars such as Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī and Fayḍ Kāshānī as well as the Safavid biographical dictionaries and *ijāzas* discussed in chapters four and five, furnish us with much of the information necessary to reconstruct the core curriculum that students followed in Safavid madrasas. These sophisticated means of ensuring the integrity of a chain of authority clearly demonstrate that there existed set curricula of study during this period that reflect a degree of regularity in the transmission of knowledge.

The didactic literature produced by the Shi'i also illustrates the process and the stages students should follow on their academic path. As discussed in chapter five, Shahīd al-Thānī makes it clear that students of law in particular were required to advance through specific training and acquire certain knowledge and skills to be eligible to issue fatwas. Al-Jazā'irī, Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī and Shahīd al-Thānī's approach to education reflects many of the traditional approaches that defined an earlier period of Islamic education. They offer specific directions for rules of conduct in madrasas and any teaching

circles. Shahīd al-Thānī's detailed accounts on the rule of debate, disputation and other teaching and learning methods, in particular reveal that students had to reach certain benchmarks in order to advance in their studies. All these accounts reveal a structured process that encouraged students to study, to memorize, and to debate fundamental texts in order to gain expert knowledge on various legal issues as well as religious notions and principles. At the end of this process they received credentials to issue fatwas, or to teach religious sciences, or to transmit *ḥadīth*. His discussion of the responsibilities of the *muṭīd* refers to the hierarchy that existed among madrasa students.

As demonstrated in chapter four, curricula of Safavid madrasas demonstrate complex intersections as well as a dynamic process of intellectual exchange between several competing and overlapping groups including jurists from Jabal al-Āmilī, native Iranians, and hybrid religious scholars in their varied Uṣūlī, Akhbārī, and mystical philosophy groupings. The curriculum of Safavid madrasas also reflects alterations in the Safavids' sources of legitimacy. The last three chapters delineate some of these changes and explain some of the dominant discourses. In the sixteenth century, the Uṣūlī *mujtahids* dominated higher learning and played an active role in directing mosques and madrasas as well as the institutionalization of Shi'ism in Iran. By considering revelation to be the main engine in the production of religious knowledge, and by making traditions and personal reasoning its interpretative basis, *mujtahids* claimed that they were better equipped to develop religious laws.

Mid-seventeenth century Iran, however, witnessed the brewing of a dispute between the Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs, who emphasized or overemphasized reason, and the traditionalists, who stressed the adequacy and efficiency of the Quran and *khabar* literature. The standards by which the transmission's authenticity was measured reveal the different views of *mujtahids*, mystical philosophers, and Akhbārīs. Compared with traditionalists and their doctrine of the primacy of the Imāmī traditions, *mujtahids* believed they had developed more diffuse forms of authority and validated the use of a wider variety of intellectual innovation. But, as meticulously and convincingly argued by Robert Gleave, the Akhbārīs nonetheless demonstrated a scholarly sophistication in their legal methodology as well as other fields of religious sciences. Akhbārī scholars also acted as jurists and judges and were engaged in legal interpretation based on the akhbār of the Imams.

Indeed, the revival of Akhbarism in the final decades of Safavid rule had a substantial influence on educational and intellectual pursuits. It undoubtedly enabled the expansion of scholarly debates among the traditionalists, jurists, and mystical philosophers of the second half of the seventeenth century and beyond. Legal studies remained one of the main subjects in the curriculum

despite the rise of traditionalism.² The Safavid court always needed a group of ‘ulamā’ to actively develop a method or program for organizing the judicial and cultural affairs of the realm. It was inevitable that ‘ulamā’ – even the traditionalists – had to utilize interpretive tools, including reason as well as other sources, to develop religious law.

Mystical philosophers, on the other hand, promoted a lofty ideal of what education should be. According to them, learning was a process in which scripture, gnosis, and philosophy are harmonized. Although much of philosophical enquiry was concerned with theological issues, conventional Shi‘i scholars were wary of the study of ancient sciences. There were, however, some scholars who appreciated the rational and logical analysis that philosophy offered. Hence, they constructed their own theological judgments and ontology by harmonizing those apparent contradictions found in the Islamic holy texts through reasoned and logical analysis, and in the process came to rely on the ancient Greek and other civilizations’ intellectual heritage.

Both mystical philosophers and traditionalists came to contrast their own method of discussing and writing about legal and religious matters against those of the *mujtahids* and to argue that their ideas were more authentic than those of the jurists. In truth, the thought of the *mujtahids* possessed considerable variety and depth. These scholars often engaged in debating complex legal issues and religious matters in ways that were far from dry and which dealt with realistic considerations. However, regardless of what method of scholarship and instruction these various schools of thought considered the best way of instilling knowledge, their main concerns were organizing educational undertakings as such to guarantee the reliability of transmitted knowledge and people who convey them. Studies lasted many years. Between one student and another, the length of time required before receiving a license to teach, especially jurisprudence, could vary considerably.

The gulf that separated these schools of thought in interpreting Islamic teaching was less profound than one may imagine. Despite the fact that the mid-17th century saw a decline in royal patronage for the rationalist *mujtahids* in favor of traditionalist scholars, as noted by Rula Abisaab, nevertheless a creative dialogue between adherents of these distinct juridical approaches

2 In my examination of primary literature including the *waqf* documents, I did not, however, discern that law professors and students enjoyed any particular preference over teachers and students of other branches of religious sciences in the madrasas of Isfahan. They were not given, for example, higher salaries or more stipends than others. But based on the critiques discussed in chapter six, because of law’s importance politically, socially and economically, many chose to center their studies in this more lucrative field.

continued throughout the era. Abisaab argues that *ijtihad* (the principle of independent reasoning) – not *ijmāʿ*, as claimed by other scholars – “was central to the Uṣūlī- Akhbārī controversy.”³ As noted in Chapter six, Astarābādī and Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, however, deny the validity of both *ijtihad* and *ijmāʿ* (consensus of ‘ulamāʿ), considering them to be Sunni innovations (*bidʿa*). Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, a prominent Akhbārī, also makes a strong point against rationalist *mujtahids* for their adaptation of Sunni legal methodology, i.e. personal opinions and use of *qiyās* (analogy).

As *mujtahids* were not a monolithic group, Akhbārīs “were themselves a mix,” as stated by Abisaab.⁴ In his description of Akhbārism, Robert Gleave adds that there was a wide diversity of currents and views within the school and notes that there was no agreement on whether it constituted just one legitimate school within the Shiʿa or the only sound interpretation of the teaching of the Imāms.⁵ For example, among the Akhbārīs we come across figures such as Fayḍ al-Kāshānī and Muhammad Taqī Majlisī, who were more disposed towards Sufism and even philosophy, compared to Muhammad Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, who was a traditionalist through and through.

Isfahan’s relative political stability during the period from the first decades of the seventeenth century until the early decades of the eighteenth century afforded the development of a dynamic intellectual atmosphere, which produced a number of original, highly accomplished and creative figures in the various fields of Islamic civilization, as noted in preceding pages. The sources make it clear that learning has always been regarded as a form of worship, with specific value in and of itself. Indeed, some attended the teaching circles with no lofty ambition, seeking only edification from a time spent in receiving higher learning. There were, however, some pseudo-seekers of knowledge who – according to Mullā Ṣadrā, Muḥsin Fayḍ, and Muḥammad Zamān Tabrīzī – had reduced religious higher learning to some kind of superficial and cursory learning and represented themselves as scholars in order to obtain worldly status and wealth.

3 Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 108.

4 Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 108.

5 For example in chapter Seven of his *Scripturalist Islam*, Gleave argues that Akhbārīs, like some early Twelvers, rejected the ʿUthmānic recension of the Quran altogether. The important question for the Akhbārīs was, however, whether the interpretation of the Quran was accessible to Shiʿi scholars without the interpretive statements of the Imams in their *akhbār*. On this question the Akhbārīs divided into two main camps: some, including Astarābādī himself, argued that the Quran was only accessible through the interpretation of the Imams, while others, including Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, claimed that only the *muḥkamāt* (‘sound, unambiguous’) verses were accessible.

Thanks to the Safavids' generous patronage of Shi'i higher learning, and the growth and proliferation of Shi'i madrasas, Shi'i scholars who had limited means of supporting themselves before the rise of the Safavids now came to enjoy and rely on the financial benefits that madrasas and other religious institutions offered. As a result, the lifestyle of the professors and students attached to these institutions transformed. Criticisms of Safavid scholars discussed in chapter six reveal the complex world of Islamic higher learning and also illustrate the ideals and realities that shaped the behavior of Shi'i scholars. While many Safavid scholars competed against each other to win the Safavids' favor and to take a position at the court, maintaining that – in order to guide Muslims in worship and give order to personal, business and governmental affairs – they must collaborate with the ruling elite. There were, however, a number of 'ulamā' who considered themselves independent of the ruling elite and were regarded as such by the population at large. These religiously conscious and cautious scholars considered collaborating with the Safavid court to be a corrupting endeavor; thus they usually refrained from joining the Safavid court. But even the most secluded ones sometimes had to accept the monarchs' invitations to join the court, if even for a short period of time (e.g., Fayḍ Kāshānī).

In principle Safavid madrasas had no substantial impact on the way knowledge was authenticated; yet the increase in the number of madrasas during the Safavid period led to a new form of scholarly orthodoxy as had already been achieved in Sunni societies.⁶ Madrasas were carefully and generously supported by the Safavid elite for a variety of reasons, one of which could have been the fact that the students trained in madrasas provided a pool of eligible talent to assume positions of authority in socio-cultural and religious affairs of the Safavid society. In light of the salience of education in Islamic culture, Safavid elite also used their newly appropriated authority to establish an infrastructure to ensure that education would serve to promote a uniform identity, which would integrate their empire into the cultural and religious spheres.

Safavid madrasas and other religious establishments thus became places where an entire set of values, beliefs, intellectual preferences, and attitudes was developed and relayed to society as a whole. The successful process of Persia's conversion to Shi'ism depended on the ability of the Safavid ruling elite and Shi'i religious authorities to produce a substantial cohort of experts specializing in the conceptual and legal elaboration of Shi'i dogma and culture. Despite the fact that a pattern of patronage and appointment could be

6 For more information on madrasas and the Sunni scholarly orthodoxy see, Berkey, *The transmission of knowledge* 173–4.

discerned, Safavid madrasas cannot be identified as “well-defined corporate bodies” or “state agencies”⁷ because there was no systematic governmental regulation and control. The offices of *ṣadr* and *shaykh al-Islam* only supervised the activities and did not control them strictly. Meaning, these officials did not regulate the madrasas’ curriculum or set out a series of calibrated examinations and a grading system, and so forth.

As multifaceted educational and cultural centers that attested to the Safavid shahs’ power, piety, wealth, stability of their rule, economic might and idealism, madrasa-mosques of Safavid Isfahan became a new sacred geography for the Shi’a, incorporating what Pierre Nora has called “sites of memory.”⁸ Made of durable materials intended to last long, and built in grand architectural forms upon which Shi’i ethos and beliefs were inscribed for posterity, Safavid madrasa-mosques became sites where religious ceremonies and rituals have been held since the time of their completion. In these ritual contexts, Shi’i imams – who personify the pedigree of Shi’ism – are commonly invoked by a diverse group of people, especially through the *ta’ziya* and *rawḍa-khvānī*. All commemorative rituals celebrated in the Safavid madrasas were designed to touch an individual’s psyche in order to revivify the most essential elements of Shi’i collective consciousness and memory. They introduced something from the distant past to be remembered at regular intervals.

These commemorative rituals reconstructed the abstract knowledge of the past as lived experience, thereby creating collective memory and a new religious identity. The commemorative narrative backed by the Safavid elites, both political and religious, accentuated the perception of a divide between Shi’i and Sunni Muslims. The Shi’a were specifically associated with heroic struggles, and contrasted with a highly negative image of Sunnis seen as excessively passive in the face of the persecution and massacre of Ḥusayn and his followers. Sunnis were also blamed for a deliberate suppression of ‘Alī’s right to Muhammad’s succession. These two allegations made possible the active condemnation of Sunnis. As much as the Safavid elite commemorated certain rituals, others were prevented from remembrance. Attempts to fix “official” versions of history clashed with popular forms of storytelling done by the *naqqālān*. What Safavid subaltern and dominant groups share in their efforts to utilize the past resembles the universal activity of anchoring divergent memories in place by means of oral histories, myths, events, and sites.

Every era has something in particular to be remembered by; in addition to classics of history, literature, and philosophy that display layers and dimen-

7 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice* 176.

8 Nora, *Realms of memory*, i, ix, x ff.

sions of Safavid thought, the salient feature of the Safavid period is the magnificent sacred landscape created specially in Isfahan. In the case of early modern Iran, the advent of the Safavid era led to a major religious transformation. This very rupture with the past led to a self-conscious quest for memory. Safavid elite employed monumental architecture as a means of advancing their socio-political power and religious vision. More than just spaces, Safavid religious structures simultaneously functioned as physical testimonies to Shi'i presence in Iran. They became sites where history and geography entwined. This fusion played an integral role in the development, maintenance, and transformation of religious ethos among the Persians during this transformative period.

As conspicuous agents in the social construction of collective memory, they have also played an important role in retrieving and reconstructing the Shi'a's own past, and hence their distinct identity within the flux of Muslim cultural identity. During the final decades of Safavid rule, the traditions of the Imams were increasingly seen as the most reliable sources of knowledge. Their deaths came to serve as a symbolic and moral resource for organizing and interpreting the community's new experiences and for mobilizing the community to face fresh crises. Learning and transmitting the traditions of the Imams, along with the active memorializing of pivotal events from the Shi'i religious calendar, helped Safavid society to mediate between events of the past and the present, and to chart a course for the future.

Appendix

Diploma of appointment issued to Mir Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī by Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, appointing him rector of the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānī.¹

MS, Tehran, Kitābhāna-yi Markazī Dānishgāh-i Tīhrān, no. 2224 (no foliation).²



FIGURE 26

- 1 This is a copy of the *ḥukm* (diploma of appointment) issued by Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn probably in 1117/1705–6. The date of the copy of the document is 1 Rabi' al-awwal 1182/July 17, 1768. It is difficult to determine whether this is an exact copy of the original document or merely a summary of it.
- 2 The MS contains chancery documents and letters (*munshāāt wa makātib*). For more information about this manuscript see Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist-i mikrufilmhā-yi Dānishgāh-i Tīhrān* 1, 230–33.

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