



‘ABDALLĀH MĀZANDARĀNĪ, SHAIKH

‘ABDALLĀH MĀZANDARĀNĪ, SHAIKH (1256-1330/1840-1912), a theologian (*mojtahed*) who, through his *fatvās* and proclamations, lent powerful support to the constitutional movement. He was born in Bārforūš (present-day Āmol); in his early youth, after preliminary studies in Iran, he proceeded to the ‘*atabāt* to study under the leading scholars of the day. He settled first in Karbalā, where his chief teachers were Zayn-al-‘ābedīn Māzandarānī and Shaikh Ḥasan Ardakānī, and then moved to Naʿjaf, where he was to spend almost all the rest of his life. There his teachers were Shaikh Mahdī Kāšef-al-ḡeṭā’, Mollā Moḥammad Īravānī, and, most important, Shaikh Ḥabīballāh Raštī, whose principal pupil and successor he became. He began to teach independently already in the lifetime of Shaikh Ḥabīballāh; and when his master died in 1312/1895, he inherited his considerable following. He was recognized as *marja’-e taqlīd* (q.v.) by all the Gīlānīs and Māzandarānīs resident in the ‘*atabāt*. Soon he acquired still wider fame and acceptance, so that he had become one of the foremost *mojtaheds* of Naʿjaf by the time the constitutional movement began.

Māzandarānī supported the constitution from the very beginning, and came to form, together with Ākūnd Korāsānī (d. 1329/1911) and Ḥājjī Mirzā Ḥosayn Ḳalīlī Ṭehrānī (q.v.; 1326/1908), a trio of constitutionalist *mojtaheds*; their activity in Naʿjaf complemented the efforts of the two *mojtaheds* leading the movement in Tehran, Sayyed ‘Abdallāh Behbahānī and Sayyed Moḥammad



Ṭabāṭabā’ī. From the position of relative immunity afforded by their residence in the Ottoman territory, Māzandarānī and his colleagues dispatched a flow of telegrams to Iran that encouraged and guided the constitutionalists and condemned their opponents as traitors to religion. Their declarations afforded religious sanction to the constitutionalist cause and were decisive on some occasions in rallying popular support.

Despite the influence they came to wield on events in Iran, the position of Māzandarānī and his associates in Najaf was initially weak. The opponents of the constitution, led by a rival *mojtahed*, Sayyed Kāẓem Yazdī, were supported both by the Ottoman authorities and the Arab Shi‘ites of Najaf. They enjoyed such superiority that Māzandarānī, Ḳorāsānī, and Ṭehrānī at one point almost hesitated to venture out to public prayers for fear of physical attack (Mahdī Malekzāda, *Tārīḳ-e enqelāb-e mašrūṭiyat-e Īrān*, Tehran, 1330 Š./1951, III, pp. 69-70; Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, pp. 294, 382). They nonetheless held firm to the constitutionalist cause and sent telegrams to Tehran that both sanctioned the principle of a Majles and also offered guidance on the correct meaning and application of constitutionalism in the context of Shi‘ite Iran (Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, p. 441). When, for example, in Ša‘bān, 1325/October, 1907, the Majles inserted an article in the supplement to the constitution stipulating that all legislation should be in conformity with the *šarī‘a*, Māzandarānī and Ḳorāsānī sent a telegram expressing their satisfaction, and proposed a further article prohibiting the diffusion of irreligion and atheism (Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, p. 411; Malekzāda, *Tārīḳ-e enqelāb* III, p. 90).

In the spring of 1908, when Shaikh Fażlallāh Nūrī came out in open opposition to constitutional rule as contrary to Islam, Māzandarānī and Ḳorāsānī sent a telegram to their counterparts in Tehran denouncing him as a “worker of corruption” whose continued participation in affairs was repugnant to religion (Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, p. 528; Malekzāda, *Tārīḳ-e enqelāb* III, p. 167; Mahdī-qolī Khan Hedāyat, *Ḳāṭerāt va ḳaṭarāt*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1334 Š./1965, p. 164, n. 1). They also criticized Mīrzā Ḥasan Tabrīzī, a *mojtahed* with views similar to those of Nūrī, for his demand that all provisions of the *šarī‘a* be implemented; they pointed out that such perfect application of religious law would have to await the return of the Occulted Imam and the institution of a Majles was a necessary means of lessening the evil that inevitably obtained in the meantime (Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, pp. 286-87). The prestige of Najaf was thus enlisted on behalf of the constitutionalists.

After the suppression of the constitution in Jomādā I, 1326/June, 1908, all



constitutionalist voices among the 'ulamā' in Iran were silenced, and the role of Māzandarānī and his colleagues in Najaf became correspondingly enhanced. It was indeed the combined effect of their *fatvās* and proclamations and the armed resistance of the Tabrīzīs that brought about the restoration of the constitution one year later. The *fatvās* issued in this period by Māzandarānī, Ḳorāsānī, and others in Najaf were bold and decisive in tone. When informed by Behbahānī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī that the royalist troops were massing for their attack on the Majles, Māzandarānī and Ḳorāsānī responded with two telegrams, one informing the constitutionalists of continued support for the constitution and urging them to persist, and another addressed to the troops, prohibiting any action against the constitution as equivalent to an act of war against the Occulted Imam (Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, p. 645; Malekzāda, *Tārīḳ-e enqelāb* IV, p. 29).

When, on 18 Jomādā I/19 June, Moḥammad 'Alī Shah sent a telegram attempting to justify his actions as motivated by concern for religion and true constitutionalism, Māzandarānī, Ḳorāsānī, and Ṭehrānī sent an uncompromising reply. They demanded that the monarch fulfill his undertakings and regard himself as bound by law and the constitution (Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, p. 617; Malekzāda, *Tārīḳ-e enqelāb* III, p. 30-32; Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī, *Tārīḳ-e mo'āṣer yā ḥayāt-e Yaḥyā*, Tehran, 1331 Š./1952, II, pp. 358-65). Later the same year, they addressed to him a still stronger communication, which was printed and widely distributed, reproaching him for his hypocrisy and treachery, condemning the whole record of the Qajar dynasty, and concluding with the invocation of curses upon tyranny (Malekzāda, *Tārīḳ-e enqelāb* V, pp. 111-13; Ṣahīr-al-dawla, *Asnād va kāṭerāt*, ed. Īraj Afšār, Tehran, 1351 Š./1972, pp. 387-89; Dawlatābādī, *Tārīḳ-e mo'āṣer* III, p. 32).

At almost the same time as the royalist coup d'état in Tehran, a change of opposite nature took place in Istanbul with the restoration of the Ottoman constitution. This development strengthened the position of Māzandarānī and the constitutionalists in Najaf. Yazdī was discountenanced, and links were established between Māzandarānī and the Ottoman government. In Ša'bān, 1326/September, 1908, we find them seeking the intervention of Sultan 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd in order to obtain the reestablishment of the Iranian constitution (Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism*, pp. 164-65). Some communication with the British diplomatic representatives also took place, without any satisfactory result (see report of J. Ramsay, British consul-general in Baghdad, dated 4



August 1908, quoted in Hairi, *op. cit.*, p. 166). More important were the close links now formed between Najaf and the Anjoman-e Sa‘adat in Istanbul, an organization of Iranians resident in the Ottoman capital favorable to the constitution. Many of the *fatvās* and proclamations issued by Māzandarānī and Ḳorāsānī were telegraphed to Iran—especially Tabrīz—by way of Anjoman-e Sa‘adat, which also printed and distributed copies of them in large quantities. Liaison between Najaf and Istanbul was assured by Asadallāh Mamaqānī, who went to Istanbul as personal representative of the *mojtaheds* (Malekzāda, *Tārīk-e enqelāb* V, p. 105; Dawlatābādī, *Tārīk-e mo‘āṣer* II, pp. 369-70).

In their communications of support to Tabrīz, Māzandarānī and his colleagues again likened hostility to the constitution to warfare against the Occulted Imam. Invoking the memory of Karbalā, they declared that obeying Moḥammad ‘Alī Shah was tantamount to obeying Yazīd, and that the blockade of Tabrīz by the royalist forces was the same as that imposed on the camp of Ḥosayn (Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, pp. 729-30; Malekzāda, *Tārīk-e enqelāb* IV, pp. 174-75; Dawlatābādī, *Tārīk-e mo‘āṣer* II, pp. 367-68). Later they expressed themselves still more clearly, calling for the overthrow of “this blood-thirsty tyrant” and prohibiting the payment of taxes (Kasravī, *Mašrūṭa*⁵, p. 730; Ṣāḥīb-al-dawla, *Ḳāṭerāt va asnād*, p. 403).

In Jomādā II, 1324/July, 1909 constitutionalist forces advancing from Isfahan and Gilān and elsewhere conquered Tehran and deposed the shah. A telegram was immediately sent to Najaf, thanking Māzandarānī and his colleagues for their efforts; and a similar declaration of gratitude was made at the first meeting of the reopened Maḥles (Malekzāda, *Tārīk-e enqelāb* VI, p. 95; Kasravī, *Āzarbāyḡān*³, Tehran, 1340 Š./1961, p. 76). The *mojtaheds* responded with messages of congratulation, calling upon the new Maḥles to show more unity than the old one (Malekzāda, *Tārīk-e enqelāb* VI, pp. 108-09; Nāẓem-al-eslām Kermānī, *Tārīk-e bīdārī-e īrānīān*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, Tehran, 1346 Š./1967, pp. 239-40). The irreligious tendencies that had aroused the concern of Māzandarānī and Ḳorāsānī in the first Maḥles were, however, to reappear. They found it necessary to protest, in a telegram to Nāṣer-al-molk in Rabī‘ II, 1328/June, 1910, at the continued absence of any restraint on atheism, and the open irreligiosity of the political authorities (Hairi, *Shi‘ism and Constitutionalism*, p. 224). Later in the year they singled out Sayyed Ḥasan Taqīzāda for particular criticism, condemning his attitudes as contrary to Islam (text of their declaration in Esmā‘īl Rā‘īn, *Ḥoqūq-begīrān-e Engelīs dar*



Īrān, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 439-40).

A more serious threat to constitutional rule in Iran was posed by the increasingly aggressive stance of both Britain and Russia, particularly the latter. Māzandarānī and Ḳorāsānī now turned their attention to this external danger. They protested against a British memorandum stating the intention to raise a force under British command in southern Iran, allegedly to establish security (Kasravī, *Āzarbāyjān*³, p. 150), and gave *fatvās* calling for a boycott of Russian goods (ibid., p. 241). Seeing Iranian independence threatened, they abandoned their preoccupation with constitutionalism and joined with quiescent and even royalist '*olamā*' to call for an effective union of the Ottomans and Iranians, under the leadership of the sultan, to save the freedom of the last two independent Muslim nations (see the declaration of the Shi'ite '*olamā*' of the '*atabāt*', headed by Māzandarānī, dated 1 Ḍu'l-ḥejja 1328/4 December 1910, reproduced in *RMM* 13, 1911, pp. 385-86). In Raĵab, 1329/July, 1911, the Russians openly invaded Iran and attempted to restore Moḥammad 'Alī Shah to the throne. Their attack coincided with the Italian onslaught on Libya. Māzandarānī and his associates, condemning both invasions in the spirit of Pan-Islam, sent telegrams to Sultan Mehmed Reşad calling for *ĵehād*, and others to various parts of the Muslim world, especially India, asking for solidarity (Neẓām-al-dīn-zāda, *Hoĵūm-e rūš be Īrān va eqdāmāt-e ro'asā-ye dīn dar ḥefẓ-e Īrān*, Baghdad, 1330/1912, pp. 144-45, 204-05, 221-26; Hairī, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism*, p. 232). Not content with issuing of *fatvās*, Māzandarānī and the other '*olamā*' of the '*atabāt*' set out for Iran late in 1329/1911 in order personally to wage *ĵehād* against the Russians; but they were discouraged from proceeding beyond Kāẓemayn, first by the sudden death of Ḳorāsānī and then by the receipt of reassuring messages from the Iranian government (Kasravī, *Āzarbāyjān*³, p. 246; Hairī, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism*, pp. 228-35; letter of Taqīzāda to E. G. Browne dated 6 January 1912, in *Nāmahā'ī az Tabrīz*, ed. Ḥasan Javādī, Tehran, 1353 Š./1974, pp. 85-86).

Māzandarānī died in Naĵaf on 4 Ḍu'l-ḥejja 1330/11 November 1912, with his political objectives largely unattained. He had defined, however, with great clarity the clerical understanding of modern political concepts such as constitutional rule ("the limitation of the sovereign power by laws established in conformity with the Ja'farī *madḥab*"), liberty ("freedom from subjection to arbitrary impositions by the wielders of power"), and equality ("the absence of distinction between strong and weak, rich and poor, with respect to rights



under the law”—see Kermānī, *Bīdārī*, intro., pp. 238-40). He also left a legacy of religiously authoritative comment on Iranian politics by the ‘*olamā*’ of Najaf that persisted for many decades.

In addition to his numerous proclamations, Māzandarānī also wrote a book in Arabic on fundamental religious obligations, entitled *Ohbat al-ma’ād* and printed in Baghdad in 1327/1909 (Ṭehrānī, *Ḍarī’a* II, p. 486), as well as some unpublished treatises on *feqh* and *kalām*.

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