



AŠRAFĪ

AŠRAFĪ, ḤOJJAT-AL-ESLĀM ḤĀJJĪ MOLLĀ MOḤAMMAD B. MOLLĀ MOḤAMMAD MAHDĪ, religious leader, born sometime before 1235/1819 and died 1315/1897-98. The only information about him comes from fragmentary accounts given by some of his contemporaries such as Moḥammad Tonokābonī (*Qeṣaṣ al-‘olamā’*, Tehran, 1304/1886-87, pp. 118ff.), and Moḥammad Ḥasan Khan E’temād-al-salṭana (*al-Ma’āṭer wa’l-āṭār*, Tehran, 1306/1888-89, pp. 143-44), who refer to him as a well-recognized religious leader, an authority in Islamic mysticism, and an excellent orator.

Originally from Ašraf (the present-day Behšahr in Māzandarān), he spent most of his life in Bārforūš (the present-day Bābol), also in Māzandarān; see M. Qazvīnī, “Wafayāt-e mo‘āṣerīn,” *Yādgar* 3/3, 1325 Š./ 1946-47, p. 35). Concerning Ašrafī’s advanced education, we do not have any solid information. According to M. Tonokābonī Ašrafī studied under Mollā Moḥammad Sa‘īd-al-‘olamā’ (d. 1270/1853-54), a former colleague of Shaikh Mortazā Anšārī (d. 1281/1864-65, q.v.) and then a distinguished religious leader residing in Bārforūš (*Qeṣaṣ*, p. 124; M. A. Modarres, *Rayḥānat al-adab* III, Tabrīz, n.d., p. 38; P. Ḥosaynzāda, *Šahr-e Bābol*, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964-65, p. 120 and passim). Ašrafī’s name is also mentioned among the disciples of Shaikh Moḥammad-Ḥasan Šāḥeb-al-ḵawāher (d. 1266/1849-50) by M. Ḥerz-al-dīn (*Ma‘āref al-rejāl fī tarājem al-‘olamā’ wa’l-odabā’* II, Naḵaf, 1384/1964-65, p. 227). This report, however, is hard to substantiate because we do know (*ibid.*, II, pp. 225) that Šāḥeb-al-ḵawāher had lived in Naḵaf since the beginning of the 13th/18th-19th century, but we do not know of any period of Ašrafī’s life to have been spent in Naḵaf. Tonokābonī (p.



124) adds that Aşrafī had not had much education and attributes his distinction to his asceticism and his extreme fear of God, and asserts that he had the power to perform saintly miracles (*karāmāt*). His lack of systematic training under distinguished religious authorities of the time is also clearly referred to by Sayyed Moḥammad-Mahdī Mūsawī Eşfahānī Kāzemī (*Aḥsan al-wadī'a fī tarājem maşāhīr mojtahedīn al-şī'a* I, Naḡaf, 1388/1968, pp. 100-01). However, Aşrafī proved to be a highly respected religious authority and it is believed that he reached the rank of *ejtēhād* (independent judgment in Islamic jurisprudence) at the age of twenty-one and received the title of *hojġat-al-eslām* from the then great religious leader of Iran, Sayyed Moḥammad-Bāqer Şaftī (Ḥosaynzāda, *Bābol*, pp. 125-27). The fact that he wrote a Persian *resāla-ye 'amalīya* (a guidance for the individuals wishing to follow the instructions of a specified *mojtahed*) confirms the report of E'temād-al-salṭana that Aşrafī had a certain number of followers (A. Hairī, *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics*, Leiden, 1977, pp. 62-65, 194, 201). It deals with matters related to this world (*mo'āmalāt*) and with religious observances (*'ebādāt*); it was published in Tehran first in 1312/1894-95 and again in 1316/1898-99 (a year after Aşrafī's death), but this time footnoted by and adjusted to the *fatwās* (legal rulings) of Shaikh 'Abdallāh Māzandarānī (d. 1330/1912, q.v.).

Two other books are known to have been written by Aşrafī, both evidence of his mastery in the field of the Shi'ite tradition and jurisprudence. Aşrafī's most important and often quoted book is a catechism called *Şa'ā'er al-eslām fī masā'el al-ḡalāl wa'l-ḡarām* (Tehran, 1312/1894-95, 1316/1898-99), which has earned him the admiration of his biographers (e.g., Mūsawī Kāzemī, *Aḥsan al-wadī'a* I, p. 100). Mollā 'Alī Wā'eż Kīābānī also admired Aşrafī and his books, but the fact that Aşrafī was reputed both as a *marġa'-e taqlīd* (religious authority) and as a Sufi astonished him (*Ketāb 'olamā' mo'āşerīn*, Tabrīz, 1366/1946-47, pp. 62-64). Aşrafī's other book, also in Persian, is entitled *Asrār al-şahāda* and was published twice, once in 1315/1897-98 and another time in 1322/1904.

Aşrafī was also respected by the then shah of Iran, Nāşer-al-dīn (r. 1265-1314/1848-96). They exchanged visits during the shah's two trips to Māzandarān in 1282/1865-66 and 1292/1875 (M. Ḥ. E'temād-al-salṭana, *Mer'āt al-boldān-e nāşerī* I, Tehran, 1294/1877, pp. 156-59; E. Maḡiūrī, *Tārīk-e Māzandarān* II, Sārī, 1345 Ş./1966-67, p. 180). The shah is said to have personally taken photograph of Aşrafī (Ḥosaynzāda, *Bābol*, pp. 126, 127; the



same picture is claimed to belong to Mollā Moḥammad Fāzel Šarabīānī (d. 1322/1904; cf. Modarres, *Rayḥānat al-adab* III, p. 185; Kāžemī, *Aḥsan al-wadī'a*, end of vol. II).

Ašrafī died in 1315/1897 and was buried in the quarter of the Jāme' Mosque in Bārforūš.

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See also *al-Darī'a* II, p. 46; XI, p. 218; XIV, p. 191.

Bāmdād, *Rejāl* III, p. 223.

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Ḳ. Mošār, *Mo'allefīn-e kotob-e čāpī-e fārsī o 'arabī* V, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964-65, cols. 849-50.

Nāšer-al-dīn Shah Qājār, *Safar-nāma-ye nāšerī ba Māzandarān*, Tehran, 1294/1877.

'A. Qomī, *Fawā'ed al-rażawīya fī aḥwāl 'olamā' al-maḏhab al-ja'fariya*, Tehran, 1364/1947-48, p. 628.

Ḥ. Š. Gīlānī, *Tārīḳ-e 'olamā' wa šo'arā-ye Gīlān*, Tehran, 1328 Š./1949-50.

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