



## ‘AŞŞĀR, SAYYED MOĤAMMAD- KĀZEM

‘AŞŞĀR, SAYYED MOĤAMMAD-KĀZEM (b. 1302/1884-85; d. Tehran, 19 Dey 1353 Š./9 January 1975), outstanding Shi‘ite scholar and professor of philosophy at the University of Tehran, who reviewed the new civil jurisprudence drafted under ‘Ali-Akbar Dāvar to ensure its accommodation in the framework of Shi‘ite law (for the discrepancy in dates, see *Sāl-nāma*, p. 312, Āštiāni, 1997, p. 154). His father, Sayyed MoĤammad b. Maĥmud of Lavāsān (d. 1937), was a scholar and author of religious and philosophical works, including a commentary on the *Šarĥ al-manẓuma* of Ḥājj Mollā Hādi of Sabzavār (q.v.; Moĥaqqueq, pp. 13, 29; Jalāli Nā‘ini, pp. 44-45). According to ‘Aşşār himself (in Āštiāni, 1997, p. 154), he began his formal education at the age of three when, along with learning the basics, he started memorizing the Qur‘ān. He then joined ‘Abd-Allāh Khan traditional school (*madrasa*) at the age of five, where he studied Arabic language and literature for three years and spent six years at Khan Marvi and Šadr schools studying Islamic jurisprudence and theology (*feqh wa kalām*). He also studied mysticism and philosophy with Mirzā Ḥasan of Kermānšāh and Mirzā Hāšem of Gilān and attended the teaching discourses of Mirzā Šadrā, while mastering old mathematics with Mirzā ‘Alī Akbar of Yazd, an expert on Islamic sciences. On the latter’s advice, he later joined the modern school of *Dār al-Fonūn* where he studied new mathematics and the French language. Due to ‘Aşşār’s eagerness about the new educational system, ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Mohandes, the head of the *Dār al-Fonūn*, asked him in 1909 to go to Tabriz and establish a similar college there.



‘Aşşār, who needed a job to improve his financial situation, left for Tabriz, and became a teacher of Mathematics; it was an inopportune time during the Constitutional Revolution. MoĤammad ‘Ali Shah had staged a coup d’état in the summer of 1908 against the constitutional government and Tabriz, the major center of resistance to the coup, was being threatened by Russian forces. The city was eventually occupied by the Russian army, which summarily tried and executed a number of local leaders including Mirzā ‘Ali Teqat-al-Eslām, ‘Aşşār’s close associate who was studying Mollā Şadrā’s *Asfār* with ‘Aşşār. With the help of a local merchant, ‘Aşşār managed to leave Tabriz for Paris, where he went to study medicine at the Sorbonne, but his dire financial situation soon forced him to return to Tehran, and from there to Najaf to resume his traditional education. There he studied under the leading religious authorities of the time, including Shaikh al-Şari’a of Isfahan, Mirzā MoĤammad-Taqi of Shiraz, and Żiā’-al-Din of Arāk over a period of nearly twelve years and received the license of *ejtehād* (Anjoman-e ātār wa mafāker-e farhangi, pp. 33-34). He returned to Tehran in 1921 and began a new teaching career in both traditional and modern schools, and later at the University of Tehran, which had been recently established (‘Aşşār’s autobiography, in Āştiāni, 1997, pp. 155-57; MoĤaqqueq, pp. 23-27). When the University’s faculty were banned from wearing the turban, ‘Aşşār decided to resign from his post rather than replace his religious outfit in accordance with the new regulations. ‘Aşşār died at the age of ninety and was buried at Shah ‘Abd-al-‘Azim shrine in south Tehran at the tomb of Abu’l-Fotuh Rāzi (MoĤaqqueq, p. 27).

‘Aşşār’s contribution to the Persian educational system lies in his reconciliation of traditional learning with the concepts of modern knowledge. His conciliatory approach is reflected in his work on comparative mathematics (*al-Jam’ bayn al-riāziyāt al-qadima wa’l-ĥadiĥa* “Conciliation between old and new mathematics”) and culminated in 1927 in the comprehensive review he undertook, together with his father-in-law Shaikh ‘Ali Bābā of Firuzkuh, of the text of the new civil code that had been drafted, upon the request of the government, by a small group of well-informed jurists. This civil code is still considered to be among the best texts of Persian law.

‘Aşşār was a teacher devoted to his profession. He never aspired for a high-profile position and was always generously willing to share his vast knowledge with others. He was a modest man of a friendly, gentle personality with a witty sense of humor and, at the same time, of uncompromising high principles, as evidenced by his refutation of his own father’s so-called



suggestions for improvement concerning Hājj Mollā Hādi’s *Šarḥ al-manẓuma*, rightly considering it quite inferior to the original version (Moḥaqqaq, pp. 16-17).

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