



BEḤĀR AL-ANWĀR

BEḤĀR AL-ANWĀR (Oceans of light) by Mollā Moḥammad-Bāqer b. Moḥammad-Taqī Majlesī (d. 1110 or 1111/1699 or 1700), an encyclopedic compilation in Arabic of Imamite traditions (references are to the lithograph edition unless otherwise indicated). This project, which occupied Majlesī for most of his adult life, grew from a modest work known as *Fehrest beḥār al-anwār* or *Fehres moṣannafāt al-ashāb*, which is essentially an early version of the *Beḥār*; this work was published in 1070/1659, when Majlesī was thirty-two. It consists of a table of contents (corresponding roughly to that of the final version) and traditions taken from ten Imamite works, six of them by Ebn Bābūya (editor's note to the printed edition of the *Beḥār* CV, pp. 31f.; cf. *al-Darī'a* XVI, p. 377, no. 1752). A few years later Majlesī embarked on a great expansion, involving practically the entire corpus of Imamite *ḥadīth*. In his introduction to the *Beḥār*, the author emphasizes the crucial religious significance of this corpus. He notes that much of it is little known, having been largely forgotten, either as a result of suppression by Sunni rulers or because Imamite scholars preferred later compilations to the early works. Majlesī (I, p. 5 = I, p. 6 of the printed ed.) describes his aim as providing the believers with the means to “humble the despicable heretics” (i.e., the Sunnis). This is to be achieved by collecting the available literature—including texts thought to be lost—and arranging its contents by subject matter.

Majlesī spared no effort in his attempt to realize this aim. He was able to draw on the help of such luminaries as Ne‘mat-Allāh Jazā‘erī (d. 1112/1701) and Mīrzā ‘Abd-Allāh b. ‘Īsā Efendī (d. between 1130/1717 and 1140/1727), both of



whom were among his pupils (Karl-Heinz Pampus, *Die theologische Enzyklopädie Biḥār al-Anwār des Muḥammad Bāqir al-Maḡlisī* [1037-1110 A.H. = 1627-1699 A.D.], Bonn, 1970, p. 138); on occasion he also obtained financial assistance from the Safavid court, as when attempting (unsuccessfully) to obtain a manuscript of Ebn Bābūya's *Madīnat al-'elm* from the Yemen (Ṭabresī/Ṭabarsī, *al-Fayẓ al-qodsī*, prefixed to *Beḥār* I, p. 6 [my pagination] = CV, p. 34 in the printed edition; *A'ẓān al-šī'a* XLIV, pp. 97f., 100; *al-Ḍarī'a* XX, p. 252). He was a good organizer: once he had decided to incorporate a particular passage, he often had scribes do the actual copying, though he also wrote a considerable portion of the text in his own hand (see editor's note to the printed edition, CV, pp. 30f.).

Work on the *Beḥār* did not proceed quite according to plan. Vols. 1-5, 9-13, 22 were completed between 1 Rabī' II 1077/1 October 1666 and 27 Rajab 1081/10 December 1670; vols. 6-8 followed on 20 Ramaẓān 1084/29 December 1673, in Ḍu'l-ḥejja, 1086/February-March, 1676, and in Ḍu'l-ḥejja, 1091/January, 1681, respectively (the information in Pampus, p. 139, is to be corrected accordingly). Next came the *Ketāb al-ṭahāra* (completed on 14 Šafar 1094/12 February 1683) and the *Ketāb al-ṣalāt* (completed on 21 Ša'bān 1097/13 July 1686), which together comprise vol. 18; they were followed (in Jomādā II, 1104/February, 1693) by vol. 14. While working on vol. 15, Majlesī realized that the chapters on companionship (*ešra*), originally intended to form part of it, were becoming longer than expected; he therefore announced (at the beginning of vol. 15) his intention to devote a separate volume to them. This volume was subsequently given the number 16. Since, however, the original plan had called for this number to be allotted to the *Ketāb al-ādāb wa'l-sonan*, there ensued two volumes, each bearing the number 16. The *Beḥār* is therefore alternatively referred to as consisting of 25 or 26 volumes. The problem was later resolved by incorporating both the *Ketāb al-ešra* and the *Ketāb al-ādāb wa'l-sonan* within one volume, labeled vol. 16.

Majlesī did not live to see the *Beḥār* through to completion; at his death he left only preliminary drafts of the later volumes (the two volumes known as 16, as well as vols. 17, 19-21, 23-25; there is some doubt as to whether he completed vol. 15). Particularly noticeable is the absence from these drafts of the explicatory comments (*bayān, tawzīḥ*) which Majlesī (following the practice of his teacher Mollā Moḥsen Fayẓ Kāšānī in his *Wāfi*) had provided for many traditions; instead, there are occasional brief notes, probably written by Majlesī's pupil and grandson Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Kātūnābādī (d. 1151/1739),



whose *Ḥadā'eq al-moqarrabīn* is one of the earliest sources on the history of the *Behār*. Majlesī's pupil 'Abd-Allāh Efendī made fair copies of these drafts, but for some reason refused to make either these copies or the originals available to other scholars. After 'Abd-Allāh Efendī's death, Naṣr-Allāh b. Ḥosayn Ḥā'erī (d. after 1166/1752-53, cf. *al-Darī'a* XI, P. 281) was able to copy the fair copies, but even so, not all of this material passed into general circulation. Thus Yūsof Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772) mentions having seen only three of the final ten volumes (*Lo'lo'at al-baḥrayn*, Najaf, 1388/1966, p. 57), and even so late an author as Moḥammad-Bāqer K̄vānsārī (d. 1313/1895) says in his *Rawzāt* (completed in Ḍu'l-ḥejja, 1286/March, 1870) that he has only come across six of them (II, p. 80). Kantūrī (d. 1286/1870) saw neither vol. 14 nor the first part of vol. 19 (*Kašf*, pp. 80f.). In contrast, the earlier volumes of the *Behār* gained relatively wide recognition and were repeatedly copied by Majlesī's pupils and admirers, who often added or omitted material. One of the first scholars to take note of the *Behār* was Majlesī's contemporary Moḥammad b. Ḥasan Ḥorr 'Āmelī (d. 1104/1693) (the two gave each other *ejāzas* to transmit traditions which each of them had collected, *Rawzāt* II, p. 84, VII, p. 103): he cites from vol. 13 in his *Eṭbāt al-hodāt*, completed in 1096/1685 (ed. Hāšem Rasūlī Maḥallātī, Qom, 1378-79/1958-59, I, p. 60, VII, pp. 162-73, 366-77), and notes in his *Amal al-āmel* (completed the following year) that the *Behār* contains 25 volumes (Najaf, 1385/1965, II, p. 248)—an apparent reference to the projected number of volumes as announced by Majlesī.

Even in the late 13th/19th century, not all scholars had a correct idea of the *Behār*: a shaikh from Qom whom E. G. Browne met in June, 1888, not only believed that this work (to which he referred as one of the two “most authentic and esteemed collections of Shi'ite traditions”) was “in 15 or 16 volumes,” but also misidentified its author as the 'Allāma Ḥellī (see Browne's *A Year Amongst the Persians [1887-1888]*³, London, 1950, p. 487). The likelihood of such errors recurring gradually diminished with the increasing availability of the work. Lithographs of individual volumes first appeared at the beginning of the 13th/19th century, most of them in Tabrīz. The first complete edition, dedicated to Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah and to his son and successor Moẓaffar-al-Dīn, was lithographed in Tehran and Tabrīz between 1303/1885 and 1315/1897-98. It was edited mainly by Mīrzā Moḥammad-Ḳalīl b. (Moḥammad) Ḥosayn Mūsāwī Eṣfahānī (d. 1315/1897-98) and was published by a wealthy merchant, Ḥājj Moḥammad-Ḥasan Kompānī Eṣfahānī known as Amīn-e Dār al-Ẓarb, and later, upon his withdrawal in 1314/1896, by his son Ḥājj Moḥammad-Ḥosayn. A useful index entitled *Safīnat al-beḥār wa madīnat al-ḥekam wa'l-ātār* was



compiled by ‘Abbās b. Moḥammad-Rezā Qomī (d. 1359/1940), who also included in it traditions not found in the *Beḥār* itself. A supplement (*mostadrak*) to the *Safīna* was written by ‘Alī b. Moḥammad b. Esmā‘īl Šāhrūdī. A new edition of the *Beḥār* was published in Tehran between 1376/1956 and 1394/1974 (later reprinted in Beirut with slight changes). Of its projected 110 volumes, three (54-56) are taken up by an index; a further six (28-34 = most of vol. 8) were not published at the time (see below), although several of these have recently come out. Though this is not a critical edition, it is based on several manuscripts and lithographs and is considerably easier to use than its predecessor.

Various volumes of the *Beḥār* were translated into Persian and some into Urdu; there are also numerous excerpts, abridgements, and supplements (for details see Pampus, pp. 164-70; in the meantime several new Persian translations of individual volumes have appeared). Particularly noteworthy is the use which Majlesī himself made of the *Beḥār* in his Persian works, some of which are abridged or extracted from volumes of his magnum opus. In his introduction to the *Ḥayāt al-qolūb*, for example, Majlesī speaks of the need to make the material in the *Beḥār* accessible to those with no knowledge of Arabic. And indeed, the three volumes of the *Ḥayāt* are abridged Persian translations of such material: vol. 1 (completed in mid-Šawwāl, 1085/January, 1675) is taken from *Beḥār* vol. 5; vol. 2 (completed on 25 Du‘l-ḥejja 1087/28 February 1677, see the abridged translation of James A. Merrick entitled *The Life and Religion of Mohammed as Contained in the Shee‘ah Tradition of the Hyāt-ul-kuloob*, Boston, 1850) corresponds to *Beḥār* vol. 6; and vol. 3 (which remains incomplete) covers part of *Beḥār* vol. 7. Traditions from *Beḥār* vols. 6, 9-13 were incorporated by Majlesī in his *Jalā’ al-‘oyūn*; his *Meškāt al-anwār* (composed, like the *Jalā’*, during the reign of Shah Solaymān) is based on *Beḥār* vol. 19/1, while *Beḥār* vol. 19/2 forms the basis for the *Zād al-ma‘ād* (completed in Ramaẓān, 1107/April, 1696).

The importance of the *Beḥār* for the study of Imamite literature can hardly be exaggerated. It reflects the accumulated knowledge of a millennium of Imamite *ḥadīth* scholarship, and covers most aspects of Imamite religious thought: the concept of knowledge (*‘elm*) (vol. 1); *tawḥīd* and the divine attributes (2); free will and predestination, death and the after-life (3); arguments (*eḥtejājāt*), mainly of the imams, in defense of Imamite beliefs (4); stories of the prophets (5); biographies of the Prophet and his forebears (6); the special position of the imams (7); the injustices perpetrated against ‘Alī and the



ahl al-bayt by the first three caliphs and Mo'awīa (8); biographies of Fāṭema and the first eleven imams (9-12); the twelfth imam and issues bearing on his occultation (13); cosmology and natural history (14); the concepts of belief and unbelief (15); practical ethics and correct social and religious behavior (16); exhortations (17); the position of the Qur'ān (19/1); the various kinds of supererogatory prayers (*do'ā'*) (19/2-4); the "pillars of Islam" and legal traditions (*feqh*) relating thereunto (18, 20-21); pilgrimages to the graves of the Prophet, the imams, and other holy men (22); positive law (23-24); the *Ketāb al-ejāzāt* (25). While most of the works on which Majlesī drew are available today in printed editions, others are still known chiefly through quotations in the *Behār*. Majlesī always identifies the source of each passage in his work, whether it was written by himself or copied from an earlier authority. As a rule, the sources used are quoted accurately; occasional slips (examples of which are given, e.g., in *Rawżāt* IV, pp. 25, 291f., 338) are due to the haste with which the work was carried out (*A'yān al-Šī'a* XLIV, p. 97). Although Majlesī aimed at comprehensiveness, there are some texts which he was able to use only partially or not at all, since he only obtained them while the work was already in progress. He intended to incorporate the missing material in a supplement (to be entitled *Mostadrak al-behār*), but he did not live to write it. The most important of these texts are listed by Ṭabarsī (*Fayẓ* apud *Behār* I, pp. 11f. = CV, pp. 60-75 in the printed edition; idem, *Mostadrak al-wasā'el*, Tehran, 1382-84/1962-64, III, p. 295; cf. idem, *Ma'ālem al-'ebar*, appended to *Behār* XVII, p. 250). Furthermore Majlesī, in conformity with his stated views, refrained from using Imamite texts with a Sufi or a philosophical bias, thus excluding from the *Behār* a major component of the Imamite literary tradition. He had no qualms, however, about citing Sunni sources, whether for lexicographical or for polemical purposes (see the introduction to the *Behār* I, pp. 10f. = I, pp. 24f. in the printed edition).

Historically, the texts incorporated in the *Behār* may be divided into several major groups. The earliest go back to the pre-*ḡayba* period (before 260/874). Some are believed by the Imamites to have been composed by the imams themselves; cases in point are the celebrated *Nahj al-balāḡa*, popularly ascribed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, and *al-Šahīfa al-sajjādīya*, containing prayers of the fourth imam 'Alī Zayn-al-'Ābedīn. Others, known as *oṣūl*, were compiled by disciples of various imams, in particular Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq; it was thanks to Majlesī that some of these *oṣūl* were rediscovered and brought back into the mainstream of Imamite literature (E. Kohlberg "al-Uṣūl al-arba'umi'a," forthcoming in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10). The second group



consists of works written during the Lesser Occultation (260-329/974-941) and the Buyid period. Given the central importance in the history of Imamite literature of texts written during those years, it is only natural to find them repeatedly quoted. Particularly prominent are works by Ebn Bābūya (d. 381/991), Shaikh Moḥammad Mofīd (d. 413/1022), ‘Alam-al-Hodā Šarīf Mortaẓā Rāzī (d. 436/1044), and Shaikh Abū Ja‘far Moḥammad Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067). The later ‘Abbasid period is represented by works of Ebn Šahrāšūb (d. 588/1192), ‘Alī b. Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266), and others; while the fourth group, covering the period between the fall of Baghdad (656/1258) and the beginning of the 10th/end of the 15th century, includes compositions by such masters as the ‘Allāma Jamāl-al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Yūsuf Ḥellī (d. 726/1325) and al-Šahīd al-Awwal Šams-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. Makkī (d. 786/1384). Finally, Majlesī also incorporated works written in the Safavid period by (among others) al-Šahīd al-Ṭānī Zayn-al-Dīn b. ‘Alī (d. 965/1557-58) and Shaikh Bahā’-al-Dīn ‘Āmelī (Shaikh Bahā’ī, d. 1030/1621 or 1031/1622).

This enormous body of material comprises a number of different literary forms: commentaries on the Qur’ān, such as the *tafsīrs* of Forāt b. Ebrāhīm (d. ca. 300/912), ‘Alī b. Ebrāhīm Qomī (d. ca. 307/919), Moḥammad b. Mas‘ūd ‘Ayyāšī (d. 320/932), and the *Majma‘ al-bayān* of Faẓl b. Ḥasan Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153); biographies of the imams, such as the *Eršād* of Shaikh Mofīd and the *E’lām al-warā* of Ṭabarsī; doctrinal and theological works expounding the major tenets of Imamite Shi‘ism; legal texts; polemical writings, directed mainly against opponents in the Sunni camp; supererogatory prayers; collections of sayings and anecdotes. Most of this material consists of traditions from the Prophet and the imams, the significance of which was greatly enhanced by the growing influence of the Aḳbārīs (q.v.) in the 11th/17th century; and Majlesī, though not a declared Aḳbārī, was in sympathy with their belief that *ḥadīṭ* is the repository of all religious knowledge.

Being a compilation, the *Behār* does not present a uniform view on all issues; it contains both moderate and radical traditions. Majlesī was aware of various contradictions and inconsistencies, and on occasion attempted to resolve them. The radical traditions in the *Behār* are concerned with three major issues: (1) The integrity of the Qur’ān (XIX, pp. 11-21 = XCII, pp. 40-77 in the printed edition): certain phrases in the Qur’ān referring to ‘Alī’s rights are said to have been deliberately excised by ‘Oṭmān and his accomplices. (2) The status of the Prophet’s companions (*ṣaḥāba*) (VIII, passim): the great majority of the companions, including in particular the first three caliphs, are



portrayed as grave sinners (or even unbelievers) because they usurped 'Alī's rights or acquiesced in this usurpation. These two items were offensive to Sunni sensibilities, and at least since the advent of the Saljuqs they had been watered down or suppressed. (Similar considerations may have been behind the decision of the Iranian government of the day not to permit publication in the printed edition of most of the material in vol. 8, cf. Mahdawī, *Zendagī-nāma* II, p. 272.) These items were also rejected in the middle ages by a number of leading Imamite scholars as incompatible with true Imamite doctrine. Yet with the advent of the Safavids, the often forcible conversion of Sunnis (with which *Majlesī* was associated), and the bitter Safavid-Ottoman rivalry, anti-Sunni sentiments returned to center stage. The inclusion of such radical traditions was thus in accordance with both the political aims of the rulers and the religious convictions of *Majlesī* and his circle. (3) The position of the imams (VII, XIX-XIII, *passim*): they are said to have possessed knowledge of the *ḡayb* and to have performed miracles. This insistence on the imams' superhuman nature, with the attendant emphasis on the beneficial effects of pilgrimage to their graves (XXII, *passim*), was consistent with *Majlesī*'s endeavors to popularize Shī'ism among the masses.

See also *majlesj*, *moḡammad-bāqer*.

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‘A. Qomī, *Fawā’ed al-rażawīya*, Tehran, 1367/1947-48, p. 412.

A’yān al-Šī’a XLIV, pp. 96-101.

‘A. Šarī’atī, *Tašayyo‘-e ‘alawī wa tašayyo‘-e šafawī*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971, pp. 189-203 (includes an attack on Majlesī for incorporating in the *Beĥār* traditions which ostensibly portray the imams as acquiescing in the rule of the Omayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphs), Mošleḥ-al-Dīn Mahdawī, *Zendagī-nāma-ye ‘Allāma Majlesī* II, Isfahan 1401/1980-81, pp. 246-316, 428-30.

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Abdul-Hadi Hairi “Madjlisī,” *EI*².

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