



BEHBAHĀNĪ, MOḤAMMAD-BĀQER

BEHBAHĀNĪ, ĀQĀ SAYYED **MOḤAMMAD-BĀQER**, Shi'ite *mojtahed* and champion of the Oṣūlī school in Shi'ite law (*feqh*). Often designated as Waḥīd-e Behbahānī (Behbahānī the unique) or Moḥaqqueq-e Behbahānī (Behbahānī the investigator), he is commonly regarded as the “renewer” (*mojadded*) of the twelfth Islamic century (see opinion of Fāẓel-e Darbandī quoted by Moḥammad Ḥerz-al-Dīn in *Ma'āref al-rejāl*, Najaf, 1384/1964, I, p. 121). He was born in Isfahan either in 1116/1704-05 or in 1118/1706-07. His father and first teacher, Mollā Moḥammad Akmal, took him first to Behbahān and then to Karbalā', which was destined to be his home for the rest of his life. There the young Behbahānī became his father's principal student, while studying also under Sayyed Ṣadr-al-Dīn Qomī. Mollā Moḥammad Akmal was a pupil of Mollā Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī, the great divine who had dominated Iranian Shi'ism in the late Safavid period, and had in addition married his niece; Āqā Sayyed Moḥammad-Bāqer, who came to exercise a similar dominant role at the close of the twelfth/eighteenth century, was thus both spiritually and genealogically a descendant of Majlesī. It is said that after completing his studies in Karbalā', Behbahānī intended to go elsewhere and teach, but a dream in which he saw Imam Ḥosayn instructing him to stay dissuaded him (Moḥammad-Bāqer Kṯānsārī, *Rawżāt al-jannāt fī aḥwāl al-'olamā' wa'l-sādāt*, Tehran, 1304/1887, p. 122). Remaining in Karbalā', he began to do battle with adherents of the Akbārī school of *feqh*, which predominated at the time both in Karbalā', and in the other shrine cities of Iraq. The controversy between the



Aḳbārīs and the Oṣūlīs, centering on various questions of *oṣūlal-feqh* and especially the problem of *ejtehād*, was an ancient one, but it had become particularly intense in the late Safavid Period. Before Behbahānī's appearance on the scene, the Aḳbārīs were so assured in their dominance of Karbalā' that no one dared openly to carry books of Oṣūlī *feqh*, but by the end of his life he had almost completely uprooted Aḳbārī influence from the 'atabāt. This achievement, combined with similar developments that were taking place in the Shi'ite centers of Jabal 'Āmal, established the Oṣūlī position as normative for the whole Twelver Shi'ite community. He was vigorous in debate and polemic, and also wrote a number of refutations of the Aḳbārī position: *al-Fawā'id al-oṣūliya*, a response to *al-Fawā'id al-madanīya* of Mīrzā Moḥammad-Amīn Astarābādī, one of the main Aḳbārī texts; *Ketābal-ejtehād wa'l-aḳbār*; and *Ebṭāl al-qīās*. In all, he is credited with more than sixty works (for a partial list see Moḥammad-'Alī Modarres, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, Tabrīz, n.d., I, p. 52), some of which were preserved in autograph in the library of his descendants in Kermānšāh (see *A'yān al-šī'a* XLIV, p. 96). His writings on *oṣūlal-feqh* are said to have been compiled into a single work by a pupil, Sayyed Mahdī Qazvīnī. He died in 1206/1791-92 or, according to certain accounts, in 1208/1793-94, and was buried close to the tomb of Imam Ḥosayn, which he had diligently and reverently visited every day of his life in Karbalā'. He left behind a large number of influential pupils: his sons, Āqā Moḥammad-'Alī Behbahānī, Āqā 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn; Mollā Mahdī Narāqī, Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem Qomī, Shaikh Ja'far Najafī; Ḥājj Moḥammad-Ebrāhīm Kalbāsī; and Sayyed Moḥammad-Bāqer Šaftī. These exercised a determining influence on religious life in early Qajar Iran, but Āqā Moḥammad-Bāqer Behbahānī accomplished far more than the training of a generation of *mojtaheds*. Through his vindication of the Oṣūlī position and emphasis on the function of *mojtahed*, he was in effect the forerunner of those numerous 'olamā' who since his time have sought to play a directive role in Iranian society.

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