



BORŪJERDĪ, ḤOSAYN ṬABĀṬABĀ'Ī

BORŪJERDĪ, AYATOLLAH ḤĀJJ ĀQĀ **ḤOSAYN ṬABĀṬABĀ'Ī** (1292-1380/1875-1961), director (*za'īm*) of the religious teaching institution (*ḥawza*) at Qom for seventeen years and sole *marja'-e taqlīd* of the Shi'ite world for fifteen years. He was born in Šafar, 1292/March-April, 1875, in the western Iranian city of Borūjerd to a family of scholars that traced its descent back by thirty intermediaries to Imam Ḥasan. Among his celebrated ancestors in more recent times were [Sayyed Moḥammad-Mahdī Baḥr-al-'Olūm](#), the paternal uncle of his grandfather, and Mīrzā Maḥmūd Borūjerdī, a great-uncle who clashed frequently with Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah. At the age of twelve Borūjerdī began his formal education at the local *madrassa* in Borūjerd, where he studied with his father, Sayyed 'Alī, and other scholars. In 1310/1892-93 he went to Isfahan, which was then still the major center of religious learning in Iran, and he swiftly acquired the main elements of his erudition. His teachers in the religious sciences were Abu'l-Ma'ālī Kalbāsī, Moḥammad-Taqī Modarresī, and Sayyed Moḥammad-Bāqer Darčā'ī. He also studied philosophy with Āḳūnd Mollā Moḥammad Kāšī and the famous Jahāngīr Khan Qašqā'ī and *'erfān* with Moḥammad Moqaddas Ešfahānī. Such was the prowess he displayed during his roughly ten years in Isfahan that he not only completed there the *soṭūḥ* stage of the traditional curriculum but also attained the degree of *ejteḥād* and began teaching *oṣūl* himself.

In keeping with the conventional pattern of an *'ālem* career, Borūjerdī then



went to Najaf, in either 1318/1900-01, 1320/1902-03, or 1323/1905-06. There Borūjerdī joined the circle of the great *oṣūlī* scholar **Ākūnd Mollā Moḥammad-Kāzem Ḳorāsānī**. The notes that Borūjerdī wrote on Ḳorāsānī's *Kefāyat al-oṣūl* seem to have been his earliest piece of important writing. While in Najaf, Borūjerdī also associated with the other chief authority of the age on *oṣūl*, **Ākūnd Moḥammad-Kāzem Yazdī**, and studied *'elm al-rejāl* with **Šayḵ-al-Šarī'a Eṣfahānī**.

In 1328/1910 Borūjerdī returned to his native town, staying there for almost thirty-five years, during which he devoted himself to the training of students and to writing (chiefly on *ḥadīth* and *'elm al-rejāl*). This long residence in Borūjerd was interrupted only three times: twice to visit Mašhad, and once to perform the *ḥajj* and pay a return visit to Najaf. But despite the relative remoteness of Borūjerd his renown for piety and erudition continuously spread so that in time he became the chief *marja'-e taqlīd* of western and southern Iran, as well as parts of Khorasan and Iraq.

In 1363/1944 he traveled by way of Qom to Tehran to be treated for a hernia at the **Fīrūzābādī** hospital. While still in the hospital he received an urgent invitation from the *'olamā'* of Qom to settle there and assume the leadership of the *ḥawza*, which since the death of 'Abd-al-Karīm Ḥā'erī in 1355/1937 had been under the temporary administration of Ayatollahs Ṣadr, Ḥojjat, and **Ḳvānsārī**. Ḥā'erī himself had once pressed Borūjerdī to take up residence in Qom, when he passed through the city en route to Mašhad in 1347/1928, but he had refused. This time, after some hesitation, he decided to make the move, and on 14 Moḥarram 1364/27 December 1944 he left Tehran for Qom, accompanied by a group of scholars from Qom that came to escort him. His welcome there was effusive. Ayatollah Ṣadr deferentially turned over to him the leadership of the congregational prayer in the shrine, and Ayatollah Ḥojjat gave him the time and place for teaching *feqh* he had inherited from 'Abd-al-Karīm Ḥā'erī. In the fall of 1325 Š./1946 Ayatollah Abu'l-Ḥasan Eṣfahānī, the chief *marja'-e taqlīd* of the day, died, and within roughly a year Borūjerdī emerged as successor to his position. He thus came to combine the positions of *za'īm* and supreme *marja'*, and all the functions of religious leadership were concentrated in his hands.

One of the factors that helped him attain this position of authority was, no doubt, the freshness and originality he had brought to the cultivation of *feqh*. It has been said (Moṭahharī, p. 235), indeed, that he created in Qom a distinctive school of *feqh*, one that combined the best features of the schools of Isfahan



and Najaf. For the better part of a century the study of *feqh* had been virtually restricted to a few standard compendia, mostly of recent origin, supplemented only by the discussion of dubious or hypothetical cases as a means of intellectual diversion. Koranic exegesis and the science of tradition were largely neglected on the assumption that aspects of those sciences relevant to *feqh* had already been studied exhaustively by past scholars. Borūjerdī, however, was acquainted with the whole legacy of Islamic *feqh*—Sunnite and Zaydī as well as Twelver Shiʿite, and in his teaching he insisted on going back beyond the well-known *oṣūlī* manuals of the past century to re-examine the classic works of Shaikh Moḥammad Mofīd and Shaikh Abū Jaʿfar Moḥammad Ṭūsī. In addition he would relate questions of *feqh* directly to the appropriate texts in the Qurʾān and tradition. It is no accident that some of Borūjerdī's most important writings—atypically for a *marjaʿ*—dealt with *ḥadīth* and *ʿelm al-rejāl*. Chief among them were *Tajrīd asānīd al-Kāfi* and *Tahdīb wasāʾel al-šīʿa*, the latter being the collective work of his students, accomplished under his supervision but published after his death.

More immediately evident than these scholarly accomplishments were the strengthening and expansion of the *ḥawza* that took place during Borūjerdī's administration. After the death of Ḥāʾerī, Iranian students had begun to gravitate to Najaf instead of Qom, but this trend ceased soon after Borūjerdī's arrival. It is said (Wāʿezzāda, 1340, p. 64) that in 1323 Š./1944, there were only 2,500 students at all the *madrāsas* in Qom; the number had grown to 4,000 by 1334 Š./1955 and to 6,000 by the time of Borūjerdī's death in 1340 Š./1961. The support of these *ṭollāb* (as well as 500 others in Najaf, Karbalāʾ, and Sāmarrā, who counted on subventions from Borūjerdī) called for considerable sums of money. It is said that by 1340 Š./1961 5 million rials a month were being channeled to Qom, as well as more than 200,000 rupees from Shiʿite communities in India and Pakistan (see *Donyā*, 12 Farvardīn 1340 Š./1 April, 1961).

The gathering of this revenue was in large part made possible by the more orderly way in which Borūjerdī ran the affairs of the *ḥawza*. It had been the case previously that individuals would volunteer to act as agents (*wokalāʾ*) in different parts of the country for collecting and forwarding to Qom the religious taxes (*wojūh-e šarʿī*) paid by believers. Each would be supplied with a letter of authorization (*wekālat-nāma*), but no record was kept of the agents, so that some areas might have more than one agent and others none at all. Borūjerdī had a register drawn up of all *wokalāʾ* in the country, with a precise



delineation of their districts of responsibility and the terms of their appointment (Moṭahhari, p. 247). Apart from its primary, financial, purpose the orderly network thus established was of general utility in enhancing the role of Qom as spiritual center of the country. Another administrative innovation of Borūjerdī that contributed to reinforcing the centrality of Qom was his institution of a register of correspondence, permitting the 'olamā' at the ḥawza to build up a further network of contacts throughout the country (Moṭahhari, p. 248).

The income that passed through Borūjerdī's hands enabled him to engage in considerable building activity as well as the support of *ṭollāb*. His main architectural monument is the Masjed-e A'zam in Qom, built next to the shrine of Hazrat-e Ma'ṣūma. He also enriched Qom with a hospital and a new *madrasa*. Elsewhere—in Tehran, Kermānšāh, Šāhrūd, Borūjerd, Irānšahr, Najaf, and Karbalā'—he provided for the building of both mosques and *madrasas*. Such activity was traditional, although the extent to which a *marja'* was able to engage in it was, perhaps, new. A complete innovation, by contrast, was the patronage Borūjerdī extended to schools of a modern type—both primary and secondary—where instruction was given in both religious and secular subjects. The purpose of these schools, many of which were run by the Jāme'a-ye Ta'limāt-e Eslāmī (Islamic Teaching Society), was to lessen the dichotomy prevailing in the Iranian educational system and demonstrate the compatibility of Islamic commitment with the acquisition of modern knowledge.

Also indicative of Borūjerdī's breadth of vision was his interest in promoting a Shi'ite-Sunni rapprochement. He gave his support to the Dār al-Taqrīb bayn al-Maḍāheb al-Eslāmīya (Institute for the Reconciliation of the Islamic Schools) established in Cairo in 1947 by an Iranian 'ālem, Shaikh Moḥammad-Taqī Qommī, and sent Ayatollah Ḳalīl Kamara'i to Cairo as his own representative. In addition, he conducted a friendly correspondence with two successive rectors of al-Azhar, 'Abd-al-Majīd Sālem and Maḥmūd Šaltūt, which contributed to the issuing of Šaltūt's celebrated *fatwā* of February, 1949, recognizing Shi'ite *feqh* as a valid school of Islamic law and to the foundation of a chair at al-Azhar for teaching it. Borūjerdī's interest in promoting a sympathetic understanding of Shi'ite Islam also caused him to send representatives to Lebanon (Mūsā Šadr), Kuwait (Ḥājj Sayyed Zayn-al-'Ābedīn Kāšānī), Sudan (Ḥājj Sayyed Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Šūštari), and Pakistan (Ḥojjat-al-Eslām Šarī'atzāda Ešfahānī). Further, the foundation of the Islamic



Center of Hamburg resulted from an initiative of Borūjerdī (Rāzī, 1332, II, p. 19).

During the fifteen years in which he was sole *marja'*, Borūjerdī maintained an almost unwaveringly quietist stance, remaining more or less neutral in the stormy political contests of the postwar period. He is said to have acquired an early abhorrence of political activity from Āḳūnd Ḳorāsānī in Najaf, who impressed upon him the bitter regret that he felt for having supported the Constitutional Revolution (Davānī, 1360, p. 339). It has also been claimed, however, that in 1323 Š./1944 Borūjerdī—then a student in Isfahan—participated in the protest movement led by Ḥājj Nūr-Allāh Eṣfahānī, and even that he was once briefly imprisoned by Reżā Shah, “on account of measures he had taken in collaboration with the *marāje'* of Najaf” (Wā'ezzāda Ḳorāsānī, 1360, p. 336). What is certain is that during the reign of Moḥammad-Reżā Shah Borūjerdī refrained from all oppositional activity. He accepted a visit from the shah while he was in the Fīrūzābādī hospital (for a photograph of the occasion, see Šarīf Rāzī, 1332, II, p. 8), and was later visited by him in Qom on several occasions. The Ministry of the Court had a special division for maintaining ties with Borūjerdī. The initiative for such contacts seems generally to have come from the court, and Borūjerdī's concern was probably not so much to cultivate closeness as to ensure a tranquil atmosphere in which the *ḥawza* might flourish and grow (Wā'ezzāda, 1340, p. 68). In February, 1949, he convened a conference of '*olamā'*' in Qom which sought to prohibit '*olamā'*' from engaging in open political activity and from joining political parties (Akhavi, pp. 63, 66). He was not averse to quiet pressure on the government for limited purposes (in March, 1949, for example, he sought and received assurances that proposed changes in the constitution would not touch on religious matters; see the text of his letter to six scholars of Qom, dated 22 Jomādā I 1368/22 March 1949, in *Majmū'a-ī az maktūbāt, soḳanrānīhā, payāmhā wa fatāwī-e Emām Ḳomeynī*, Tehran, 1360 Š./1981, pp. 7-8), but he was adamantly set against all revolutionary confrontation with the state. He opposed in particular the chief activist group of the day, the Fedā'īān-e Eslām, and despite the intercession of Mortazā Moṭahharī he compelled the group to move its Qom headquarters from the Madrasa-ye Fayżīya (Wā'ezzāda, 1360, p. 339). The Fedā'īān responded with open criticism of Borūjerdī, condemning him for—among other things—failing to support publicly the campaign for the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry (see *Nabard-e mellat*, 21 Bahman 1329 Š./10 February 1950).



As for Dr. Moḥammad Moṣaddeq, Borūjerdī is said to have spoken positively of him in private and to have resisted attempts by the court to incite the Qom *ḥawza* against him. He did, however, force the withdrawal of a bill for female enfranchisement, in late 1331 Š./1952, and he expressed, in guarded terms, his opposition to Moṣaddeq's plans for a referendum in Mordād, 1332 Š./August, 1953 (see *Eṭṭelā'āt*, 10 Mordād 1332 Š./1 August 1953). Accusations that Borūjerdī supported the royalist coup that soon followed appear to be unfounded; when Prime Minister Fażl-Allāh Zāhedī sent him a message of good wishes soon after the event, he did not respond (Doroshenko, 1975, p. 100).

About two years after the coup Borūjerdī involved himself in the anti-Bahai campaign launched by the well-known preacher Abu'l-Qāsem Falsafī. A letter from Borūjerdī to Falsafī was published in *Eṭṭelā'āt* on 18 Ordibehešt 1334 Š./9 May 1955, in which he expressed appreciation for Falsafī's efforts leading to the destruction of the dome of the main Bahai gathering place (*ḥaẓīrat al-qods*) in Tehran. The same newspaper reported six days later that Borūjerdī was preparing to demand the complete dismantling of the Bahai community in Iran and the sequestration of its assets. However, Borūjerdī never pressed these demands, and the anti-Bahai campaign petered out in a few months.

In the years after the coup Borūjerdī also raised his voice sporadically on other issues, such as “the publication of immoral articles and stories that are contrary to Islam” (see *Kayhān*, 15 Mordād 1339 Š./6 August 1960). Most significant was his condemnation of the land reform bill that was put before the Majles in December, 1959. In a letter to [Ayatollah Moḥammad Behbahānī](#), dated 25 Ša'bān 1379/23 February 1960, Borūjerdī offered the opinion that the limitation of private agrarian holdings was contrary to Islamic law, and he asked Behbahānī to organize parliamentary opposition to the bill (for an English translation of the letter, see *Echo Reports*, no. 334, 17 February 1962). Borūjerdī's views on the matter had little long-term effect other than to give the shah's regime a pretext for claiming in later years that the oppositional movement led by Ayatollah Komeynī was motivated by opposition to land reform.

Borūjerdī's relations with Ayatollah Komeynī are difficult to assess. Komeynī was one of the group of Qom '*olamā'* that escorted Borūjerdī from Tehran to Qom in 1323 Š./1944, and he was also active in canvassing support for Borūjerdī as *marja'-e taqlīd*, traveling to Hamadān to persuade the senior '*olamā'* of that city of Borūjerdī's suitability (Rūḥānī, p. 98). Komeynī's support



for Borūjerdī is said (Rūḥānī, p. 99) to have been based on the hope that he would mobilize the *ḥawza* against the shah's regime, having given indications of his willingness to do so. Although this clearly did not happen, Borūjerdī is related to have consulted Ḳomeynī occasionally on political matters, including the threat perceived in government plans to amend the constitution. In general, however, apolitical or pro-shah elements in Borūjerdī's entourage were able to prevail, and in 1334 Š./1955, during the anti-Bahai agitation, Ḳomeynī confided to Dr. Moḥammad Mofatteḥ his suspicion that "hidden hands" were at work in Borūjerdī's household, hindering him from accepting the advice that Ḳomeynī proffered (interview with Mofatteḥ, Tehran, 16 December 1979).

Ayatollah Borūjerdī died on 13 Šawwāl 1380/10 Farvardīn 1340 Š./30 March 1961, and was buried next to a side entrance of the Masjed-e A'zam in Qom. The grief that was expressed on his death was genuine and universal and bore witness to the reassertion of Islamic sentiment that had taken place during Borūjerdī's *marja'iyat*.

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