



ḤĀ'ERI, 'ABD-AL-KARIM YAZDI

ḤĀ'ERI, Shaikh 'ABD-AL-KARIM YAZDI (b. 1276/1859, d. 17 Du'l-qa'da 1355/30 January 1937; [Figure 1](#)), an influential “source of emulation” (*marja'-e taqlid*) as well as founder of the institution of religious teaching and guidance (Ḥawza-ye 'elmiya) in Qom, an achievement qualifying him as a major figure in the 20th-century history of Iran. Despite his close, indeed defining, relationship with Qom, Shaikh 'Abd-al-Karim chose always to designate himself as Ḥā'eri in order to reflect his devotion to Karbalā' and Imam Ḥosayn (*al-ḥā'er*, “the place of safety” or “the orchard,” being an epithet of Karbalā'). In addition, honorific reference is sometimes made to him as Āyat-Allāh al-Mo'asses (the founding Ayatollah), with reference to his achievements in Qom.

He was born to a certain Moḥammad-Ja'far, a pious farmer in the village of Mehrjard (or Mayjard) in the Meybod district of Yazd province. After preliminary studies in Mehrjard, his father sent him to Ardakān to study with Majd-al-'Olamā' Ardakāni. He then proceeded to the city of Yazd, where he completed the *moqaddemāt* and *soṭuḥ* stages of the traditional *madrasa* curriculum (see [EDUCATION v](#)) under the supervision of scholars such as Ḥājj Sayyed Yaḥyā Bozorg and Ḥājj Mirzā Sayyed Vāmeq. Next, in accordance with the conventional trajectory of a scholarly career, he travelled to the shrine cities of Iraq for advanced study. He first studied in Sāmarrā', then a major center of Shi'ite learning because of Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi's choice of the city as place of residence. All of Ḥā'eri's principal teachers—Mirzā Ebrāhim Maḥallāti, Shaikh Fażl-Allāh Nuri, Mirzā Moḥammad-Taqi Širāzi, and Sayyed Moḥammad Fešāraki—were associates of Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi. Among them



Fešāraki seems to have had the greatest influence on ḤĀ'eri. It is said that when he began teaching in later years, he based his instruction in *feqh* largely on the views of this scholar (Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, p. 59). The death of Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi in 1312/1895 signalled the eclipse of Sāmarrā' as an important center of learning. ḤĀ'eri therefore accompanied Fešāraki to Najaf and, on the death of this mentor in 1316/1898, continued his studies there under the celebrated Āḳund Ḳorāsāni (q.v.). Some time before the death of Ḳorāsāni in 1911, he completed his circuit of the centers of learning in the 'atabāt by moving to Karbalā', where he began to teach independently and gained the esteem of Mirzā Moḥammad-Taḳī Širāzi to such an extent that the latter entrusted him with the delivery of rulings on matters calling for judicial caution (*eḥtiāṭāt*).

According to 'Abd-al-Hādi ḤĀ'eri, one of Shaikh 'Abd-al-Karim's grandsons, he left the 'atabāt and provisionally established himself in Arāk (then known as Solṭānābād) as early as 1900. Some five years later, in keeping with a lifelong distaste for political involvement, he left for Najaf in order to escape the controversies surrounding the Constitutional Revolution, and when the same controversies erupted in Najaf, he moved yet again, this time to Karbalā', not returning to Arāk until 1913 (Hairi, 1977, p. 136). This cycle of wanderings is not mentioned by other sources, all of which place ḤĀ'eri continually in Karbalā' until his arrival in Arāk in either 1332/1913-14 or 1333/1914-15 (Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, p. 15; idem, 1352 Š./1973, I, p. 285; Ṭehrāni, 1381 Š./1962, I:3, p. 1159; Kāẓemi's statement [1347 Š./1928, p. 268] that ḤĀ'eri did not leave Karbalā' for Arāk until the beginning of the British occupation of Iraq—i.e., in 1919—is not plausible). Around that time, all sources except 'Abd-al-Hādi ḤĀ'eri report that Shaikh 'Abd-al-Karim went on pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reżā in Mašhad, where he encountered Ḥājj Āqā Esmā'il of Arāk and was invited by him to settle and begin teaching in that city. He accepted the invitation. The Ḥawza-ye 'Elmiya existing there was quite modest, but it expanded under ḤĀ'eri's auspices, so that before long some 300 students were attending his lectures at the Madrasa-ye Sepahdār. In addition, thanks in part to the promotion of his candidacy by Mirzā Moḥammad-Taḳī Širāzi, he began to emerge as a leading *marja'-e taqlid* and inherited followers of scholars such as Sayyed Moḥammad-Kāẓem Yazdi (d. 1337/1919) and Šayk-al-Šari'a Ešfahāni (d. 1339/1920). ḤĀ'eri remained in Arāk for some eight years, resisting appeals to settle in Mašhad when he revisited the city in 1337/1919 and, in the same year, a call from Mirzā Taḳī Širāzi to return to Najaf.



The move to Qom took place in 1301 Š./1922. It is said that ḤĀ'eri's initial intention was simply to make the pilgrimage to the shrine of Fāṭema Ma'ṣuma and to observe the beginning of the new solar year of 1301 at that auspicious location. His arrival was, however, treated as a major event by the scholars and people of Qom. A group headed by Shaikh Moḥammad-Taḳī Bāfqi went out to greet ḤĀ'eri's party at Emānzāda Shah Jamāl, some four km outside the city, and efforts began almost immediately to persuade him to stay. Townsfolk and pilgrims alike pressed him to do so, and preachers voiced the demand insistently from the pulpit. Among the prominent scholars urging him to remain were Ḥājj Mirzā Moḥammad Arbāb and Ḥājj Shaikh Moḥammad-Rezā Šari'atmadār Sāvaji. Decisive, however, were the tireless efforts of Bāfqi. He assured ḤĀ'eri that provision could be made for the expenses involved in relocating to Qom, and more importantly he reminded him of traditions narrated from Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq that foresaw a central role for Qom at the end of time: knowledge would disappear like a snake in a hole beneath the ground at Najaf and resurface at Qom, whence it would be disseminated across the globe. After seeking an omen in the Qur'ān, ḤĀ'eri finally announced his intention to stay in Qom at a meeting held in the house of Ḥājj Sayyed 'Alī Moṣṭafā Bolurforuṣ, and he sent Ḥājj Mirzā Hedāyat-Allāh Golpāyagāni to Arāk to organize the exodus of his family and followers.

Qom was one of the most ancient strongholds of Shi'ism in Persia, a status it owed to the early settlement there of refugees from Abbasid persecution and above all to the burial there of Fāṭema Ma'ṣuma. It had been the center of a major school of Shi'ite Hadith scholarship in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, but as a center of learning it had been overshadowed in the Safavid period by Isfahan, and the brief period of renewed eminence it had enjoyed in the time of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah Qajar was long since over. When ḤĀ'eri first arrived in Qom, its main significance was as a center of pilgrimage, for its principal *madrāsas*, the Dār al-Šefā' and the Fayziya, had become the haunts of "beggars, the indigent, the insane, and the sick," as he had seen for himself during a brief visit while returning from Mašhad to Arāk in 1337/1919 (Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, p. 16). It is true that a partial revival of its scholarly traditions had already begun with the arrival in the immediately preceding years of scholars such as Mirzā Jawād Maleki in 1329/1911, Bāfqi in 1337/1919, and Shaikh Abu'l-Qāsem Kabir, whom some are said to have regarded as more learned in jurisprudence than ḤĀ'eri himself (Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, p. 39). However, it was indisputably ḤĀ'eri who with matchless organizational skills elevated Qom to a position of centrality in the religious life of Persia, almost if not fully



competitive with the shrine cities of Iraq. He was followed to Qom by most of his students from Arāk, including Ruḥ-Allāh Ḳomeyni, then twenty years of age, and numerous others from different parts of the country began to congregate there, so that by the time of his death in 1356/1937 the Ḥawza-ye 'Elmiyanumbered roughly 1000 students, a remarkable figure considering the inauspicious political circumstances of the time (Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, p. 23; Tīehrāni, 1381 Š./1962, I/3, p. 1159; however, Kāžemi[p. 268] puts the total at only 500).

Politics began impinging on Ḥā'eri's attention soon after his arrival in Qom. In 1341/1923, many of the leading Shi'ite scholars of Iraq were expelled from the country because of their resistance to plans for the imposition of a British mandate. Among those who found their way to Qom were two of the senior *marja's* of the day, Mirzā Ḥosayn Nā'ini and Sayyed Abu'l-Ḥasan Eṣfahāni (q.v.). Ḥā'eri received them warmly, and deferentially had them teach in his place during the eight months it took for permission to be obtained for their return to Iraq. Not only did his visible association with these prominent exiles enhance his own prestige, but his temporary freedom from teaching obligations also gave him the opportunity to concentrate on organizational matters during these early months in the revival of the Ḥawza. In addition, Aḥmad Shah, now in the last year both of his own reign and of the Qajar dynasty, came to Qom first to meet with Nā'ini and Eṣfahāni, and then to congratulate Ḥā'eri on his activities.

Before Nā'ini and Eṣfahāni returned to Iraq, premier Reżā Khan (later Reżā Shah) also made his way to Qom to meet with them and their host. His plans to replace the Qajar dynasty with a republic had met with widespread hostility, and he found it politic to present his renunciation of the project as a concession to the religious sentiment embodied by the three sources of emulation. Receiving Reżā Shah at Ḥā'eri's residence in March, 1924, they declared their readiness to accept him as shah on condition that he reign, not rule, that he be like "a pattern on the wall" (*naqš-e divār*), as Nā'ini put it with particular insistence (Ḥā'eri Yazdi, 1380 Š./2001, pp. 12-15). On his return to Tehran, Reżā Khan issued a proclamation declaring that he had had no part in floating the idea of a republic; that in any event he was now forbidding further discussion of the topic, in deference to the views of the scholars of Qom, and that his only concern was the preservation of Persia and the strengthening of Islam. Nā'ini, Eṣfahāni and Ḥā'eri responded with a telegram addressed to the nation in which they accepted credit for the proclamation



and thanked Reżā Khan for it. (For texts of the proclamation and the telegram see Makki, III, pp. 14-15.) The chronology is not entirely clear; Makki gives 11 Ḥamal (= Farvardin) 1303/3 April 1924 and 4 Ḥamal/26 March as dates for the proclamation and the response respectively, obviously in error).

Despite this apparently auspicious beginning to his relations with the nascent Pahlavi dynasty, Ḥā'eri's views of Reżā Shah changed as his policies took on an increasingly anti-religious aspect. However, whether from inborn aversion to political involvement or the pragmatic insight that he lacked the resources to challenge the ruler, Ḥā'eri refrained from associating himself with the movement of protest led by Āqā Nur-Allāh Eşfahāni in 1924, even though it was based in Qom, and he did not publicly react even to the arrest and banishment in March 1928 of one of his closest collaborators, Mirzā Moḥammad-Taḳī Bāfḳi. He is also not known to have condemned the detention in Tehran of Ḥāḳ Āqā Ḥosayn Qomi in July 1935 or the subsequent massacre of protesters at the Masjed-e Gowharşād in Maşhad. It was not until the forced removal of the veil from women (*kaşf-e hejāb*) was decreed early in 1936 that Ḥā'eri found himself compelled to break his silence. Informed of the matter by a prominent Tehrani who was seeking guidance on how to confront the decree, he answered that it should be resisted, and sent the following concise telegram to Reżā Shah: "Until now, I have not intervened in anything. But now I hear that steps are being undertaken which are flagrantly opposed to the Ja'fari school of thought and the law of Islam. Henceforth restraint and forbearance will be difficult for me" (text in Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, p. 51). The only reply he received was a message from prime minister Moḥammad-'Ali Forūḡi (q.v.) to the effect that whatever Reżā Shah decreed was an expression of the "luminous royal will" (*erāda-ye saniya-ye molukāna*), and that nothing could be done to deflect him from his goals, particularly after his exposure to the views of Atatürk during a recent visit to Ankara (Ḥā'eri-Yazdi, pp. 73-74). According to Ayatollah Komeyni's memory of the episode, Forūḡi also conveyed to Ḥā'eri the command to busy himself with his own affairs (Komeyni, p. 137). After this oblique confrontation with the ruler, Ḥā'eri remained under surveillance until his death the following year.

That Ḥā'eri's intervention in the political sphere was occasioned by the particular issue of *kaşf-e hejāb* was due in large part, no doubt, to the invasive nature of the measure. It came, moreover, in a context of increased state encroachment on the Ḥawza itself: agents infiltrated the student body, those who ventured outside their *madrāsas* wearing cloak and turban were



harassed and often arrested, and gatherings for *rawza-kvāni* (the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn, a practice beloved of ḤĀ'eri throughout his life) were prohibited, even within the confines of the shrine of Ma'şuma (Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, pp. 46-50).

In any event, ḤĀ'eri's generally circumspect attitude to the state and his concentration on the preservation and development of the Ḥawza did help to ensure the survival of his accomplishments in Qom. (It is worth noting that in later years, when the circumstances of the Ḥawzahad changed in a number of ways, some '*olamā'*' attempted to justify their continued quietism by invoking the policy of ḤĀ'eri; see Komeyni, I, p. 213.) Among his initiatives were the introduction of order into the curriculum of the *madrasas* and the institution of annual examinations. He fixed the monthly stipend for unmarried students at three *tomāns* and for married students at fifteen. Although he delegated responsibility for the actual disbursal of funds to persons whom he trusted, he involved himself intimately in the welfare of the students, often visiting them in their rooms, praising the industrious and gently chiding the lazy. He is said to have been completely lacking in pretension, and fond of amending a well-known adage by remarking, "to become a mullah is difficult; to become a human being (*ādam*) is impossible" (Komeyni, XIII, p. 36, XIV, p. 12). Remarkable for the time was his proposal to introduce the teaching of European languages and modern sciences, with the purpose of enabling the graduates of the Ḥawzato present Islam more effectively to secularly educated Persians, and even to propagate it abroad. This initiative foundered on the opposition of the Tehran bazaar merchants, who threatened to withhold their donations to the Ḥawzaif ḤĀ'eri persisted (Moṭahhari, "Moşkel-e asāsi," pp. 187-88). Less controversial was his restoration of the Fayziya and the Dār al-şefā' *madrasas*, to both of which upper stories were added; in addition, a library was installed in the Fayziya. Other efforts were directed towards the general population of Qom. After the devastating flood that roared through the city in 1353/1934, he had housing for some of the displaced constructed on land at Mobārak-ābād, which belonged to the *awqāf* of the shrine, and gave cash grants to others. He established two hospitals, the Fāṭemi and the Sehāmi, and a new cemetery, known after him as the Qabrestān-e Ḥāj Şayk, complete with a mortuary.

ḤĀ'eri's death came on Du'l-qa'da 17, 1355/January 30, 1937, hastened reportedly by his increasing despondency at the spiritual climate of the country (Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, p. 64). The funeral prayers were led by Ḥāj Mirzā



Fakr-al-Din Qomi, and he was buried beneath the Qobbat-al-'Olamā' in the Masjed-e Bālāsar, close to where he had taught. Mourning was deep and widespread, both in Qom and beyond, but public expressions of it were suppressed, with the result that the traditional ceremonies of Qur'ān recitation in memory of the deceased were held in private homes rather than mosques. It was initially feared that the government would move to dis-band or further subvert the Ḥawza, now that the powerful personality of Ḥā'eri was gone. It survived, however, under the tripartite leadership of Ayatollahs Ḥojjat, Ṣadr, and K̄vānsāri until the arrival in 1946 of Ayatollah Boru-jerdi (q.v.), who both amplified and confirmed Ḥā'eri's efforts for the promotion of Qom and its status. The extent of Ḥā'eri's posthumous influence is best illustrated, perhaps, by the fact that virtually all the significant scholars active in the postwar period and beyond had been his students (for a list of them, see Rāzi, 1332 Š./1954, pp. 87-88).

Ḥā'eri's literary legacy was relatively meager, the result of his preoccupation with administering the Ḥawza and teaching. It consisted of *al-Dorar fi'l-oṣul*, also known as *Dorar al-fawā'ed*, a survey of all topics of the principles of jurisprudence except *ejtehād* and *taqlid* (printed five times in Tehran; see Modarressi, p. 11, and *al-Ḍari'a* VIII, p. 107); *al-Taqrirāt*, notes on Fešāraki's lectures on *Oṣul al-feqh* (*al-Ḍari'a* IV, p. 378); *Ketāb al-ṣalāt*, Tehran, 1353/1934 (Modarressi, p. 138; *al-Ḍari'a* XV, p. 57); a collection of treatises entitled *Montaqab al-rasā'el* (Najaf, 1345/1926); and writings on topics such as marriage, bequests, and suckling (see Modarressi, p. 186; Modarres, I, p. 67).

Ḥā'eri's two sons, Mortazā (d. 1986) and Mehdi (d. 1999), both distinguished themselves as religious scholars. The former remained in Qom, where he was for many years a close associate of Ayatollah K̄omeyni and a supporter of his political activities (see his obituary message dated 24 Jomādā II 1406/2 April 1986 in K̄omeyni XX, pp. 10-11). He was also connected to him by marriage, in that one of his daughters married Moṣ-ṭafā, K̄omeyni's eldest son. Mehdi followed a somewhat different path. After studying in Qom, he moved to Tehran, where he taught at the Faculty of Divinity. In 1959 he was sent to Washington by Ayatollah Borujerdi to cater for the religious needs of Persian students and, developing an interest in Western philosophy, he studied and then taught at a number of North American universities. He proclaimed himself hostile to the doctrine of *welāyat-e faqih* undergirding the constitutional structure of the Islamic Republic, and took no part in the revolution that led to its implementation (Ḥā'eri-Yazdi, *passim*). Ḥā'eri also had



three daughters, all of whom married religious scholars.

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