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ḤASAN ŠIRĀZI

ḤASAN ŠIRĀZI, MIRZĀ MOḤAMMAD, often referred to as Mirzā-ye Širāzi, leading Shiʿite cleric chiefly renowned for the role he played in the celebrated Tobacco Boycott of 1892 (b. Shiraz, 1230/1814, d. Sāmar-rāʾ 1312/1895). He is occasionally designated as the "renewer of the religion" (*mojadded*) of the 13th century of the Islamic era, with reference to the Hadith that promises the appearance once every hundred years of a scholar who will revivify Islam, even though this is generally rejected by Shiʿites as inauthentic.

Born on 15 Jomādā II 1230/25 April 1814 in Shiraz, Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi lost his father, Sayyed Maḥmud, at an early age, and he grew up in the care of a maternal uncle, Sayyed Ḥosayn Majd-al-Ašrāf, who hired a tutor to teach him calligraphy and the basics of Persian when he was no more than four years old. Two and a half years later, he was ready to embark on the study of Arabic, and, by the time he was eight, he had completed his elementary education. Planning a career as a preacher for Mirzā Ḥasan, Majd-al-Ašrāf now entrusted him to Mirzā Ebrāhim, a celebrated preacher who officiated in the Masjed-e Wakil. He set Mirzā Ḥasan to memorizing a page a day from Qazvini's *Abwāb al-jenān*, a collection of readymade sermons; he proved able, however, to memorize each page perfectly after reading it only twice. Mirzā Ḥasan soon moved on to studying the principles of jurisprudence and mastered basic texts such as the *Šarḥ al-lomʿa* (also known as *al-Rawżaal-bahiya*) so thoroughly that he began offering instruction in them himself at the age of fifteen. His teachers in jurisprudence (*feqh*, q.v.) accordingly advised him to leave Shiraz in order to benefit from the ampler resources then available in Isfahan. Arriving there

in 1248/1832, he took up residence in the Ṣadr seminary (*madrasa*), and began studying with Shaikh Moḥammad-Taqi, who passed away soon after his arrival; Mir Sayyed Ḥasan Bidābādi, who granted him a license to practice juristic reasoning for new legal questions (*ejtehād*) when he was roughly twenty years old; and Ebrāhim Kalbāsi. Eleven years later, following the conventional trajectory of an ambitious scholar, Mirzā Ḥasan left Isfahan for the shrine cities of Iraq.

He first spent a number of years in Najaf as a privileged member of the circle of Shaikh Moḥammad-Ḥasan Najafi, author of an exhaustive and authoritative commentary on the *Šarāʾeʿ al-Eslām*, while studying also with Shaikh Ḥasan Āl Kāšef-al-Ḡeṭā. It seems that at one point Mirzā Ḥasan contemplated returning to Persia, for Moḥammad-Ḥasan Najafi equipped him not only with another certificate of *ejtehād* but also a letter of recommendation to Ḥosayn Khan, the governor of Fārs. However, just as Mirzā Ḥasan was about to depart from Najaf, he followed a friend's recommendation to visit the teaching-circle of Shaikh Mortażā Anṣāri, and was so impressed by Anṣāri's erudition that he soon abandoned all thought of leaving Iraq. The admiration proved mutual, and Anṣāri remarked of Mirzā Ḥasan that it was primarily for him, as well as two other exceptional students, that he delivered his lectures. On the death of Anṣāri in 1281/1864, his foremost pupils gathered in the home of Mirzā Ḥabib-Allāh Rašti and agreed that Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi was the best qualified among them to succeed Anṣāri both as a teacher in Najaf and as a "source of emulation" (*marjaʿ-e taqlid*), the dispenser of authoritative guidance to the Shiʿa community at large. Reluctant to assume these responsibilities, Mirzā Ḥasan suggested that Ḥasan Najmābādi might be better qualified, but in the end he consented. His status as a *marjaʿ* soon became firmly established, especially among Persian-speakers, although Rašti continued to enjoy a degree of authority until his death in 1312/1894. Azeris tended to follow Say-yed Ḥosayn Kuhkamari, and Arabs, Sayyed Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Kāẓemi.

Mirzā Ḥasan's status was visibly elevated by his conduct toward Nāṣer-al-Din Shah when the Qajar monarch came on pilgrimage to Najaf in 1870. He was the only member of the ulama who refused to go out and welcome the royal party as it approached the city, and he also rejected the gift of cash that Nāṣer-al-Din sent him. He consented, however, to meet the shah in the shrine of Imam ʿAli and to guide him in the rites of pilgrimage (Moḥsen al-Amin, XXIII, p. 269).

The following year, Mirzā Ḥasan performed the hajj. His prestige at this point

was already so high that ʿAbd-Allāh, the Sharif of Mecca, sought to receive him as his guest. Mirzā Ḥasan demurred, citing the well-known Hadith that condemns scholars who wait on rulers and praises rulers who wait on scholars. It seems that Mirzā Ḥasan had intended to settle permanently in Medina after completing the hajj, but finding this to be impossible he returned to Najaf. Still intent on leaving Najaf, he contemplated resettling in Mašhad, but this, too, proved impractical, and it was instead to Sāmarrāʾ that he moved.

It is not entirely clear why he was determined to leave Najaf. According to Sayyed Ḥasan Ṣadr, one of Širāzi's prominent students, he had so masterfully provided for the needs of the people of Najaf–religious scholars and townsfolk alike–during the prolonged famine of 1288/1871-72 that thereafter his help was sought on a broad range of other matters, such as securing exemptions from service in the Ottoman army. He allegedly perceived in this development a conspiracy of "hidden hands" and decided on leaving Najaf as the only solution to his predicament (*Takmelat amal al-āmel*, cited in Ṭehrāni, 1983, pp. 40-41). If the aim of the supposed conspiracy was to create tension between Mirzā Ḥasan and the Ottoman authorities, his choice of Sāmarrāʾ as place of residence becomes inexplicable, for Sāmarrāʾ was an almost exclusively Sunni city, and the creation there of a substantial Shiʿite presence was distinctly unwelcome to the Ottomans. In addition, Mirzā Ḥasan had already shown himself intent on leaving Najaf while peforming the hajj in 1287/1871, several months before the outbreak of famine in the city (although according to some accounts, 1870 was the year of the famine in Najaf; see Wardi, III, p. 87). It has also been suggested that Mirzā Ḥasan left Najaf in order to be free from the burdens of the leadership that had fallen to him after the death of Anṣāri, an explanation incompatible with the active role Mirzā Ḥasan found himself playing in Sāmarrāʾ (Ṭehrāni, 1954, I, p. 439); that he was tired of the factionalism prevailing in Najaf (Moḥsen al-Amin, XXIII, pp. 269-70); that he viewed Sāmarrāʾ as climatically preferable to Najaf; and that he wished to protect the Shiʿites–especially the Persians among them, who were often harassed by the local Sunni population when making pilgrimage to the tombs of the tenth and eleventh Imams in Sāmarrāʾ (Wardi, III, p. 89).

Whatever should have been the case, in Rajab 1291/August 1874 Mirzā Ḥasan left Najaf for Karbalāʾ, in order to perform the pilgrimage customarily made there on the anniversary of the birth of Imam Moḥammad-Bāqer, and perhaps also to conceal his ultimate intention of settling in Sāmarrāʾ. The next month, summoning his family from Najaf, he moved on to Sāmarrāʾ, arriving in time

for the celebrations that commemorated the birth there of the occulted Twelfth Imam on 15 Šaʿbān. Roughly a year later, Širāzi began offering classes in Sāmarrāʾ, and it was only then that his closest associates began to suspect that he intended to stay there indefinitely. Ḥājj Mirzā Ḥosayn Nuri and Shaikh Fażl-Allāh Nuri pressed him for a clear statement of his intentions, and he replied that he would not return to Najaf until he had first made a pilgrimage to Mašhad. Still unsatisfied, they insisted on an unambiguous answer, and a decision was taken to seek guidance by means of divination (q.v.; *esteḵāra*). The result was clear: Mirzā Ḥasan was meant to stay in Sā-marrāʾ. At last, he had all his belongings brought from Najaf, as well as those of his students, and those followers who had not yet joined him now did so.

Mirzā Ḥasan immediately purchased from a certain ʿAbd-al-Karim Bāḡdādi a hostel that had been used to house pilgrims coming to Sāmarrāʾ, a modest building that had only seventeen rooms, and set about transforming it into a madrasa. The new structure had no fewer than 75 rooms, and an adjacent building, acquired at the same time, contained fifteen more. The madrasa was thus able to accommodate more than two hundred students, making it the largest institution of its kind in Iraq. Additional properties adjoining the madrasa were acquired and annexed to it in 1297/1880 (Sāmarrāʾi, 1968, II, p. 174). Mirzā Ḥasan also presided over the construction of a Ḥosayniya (q.v.), two bathhouses, a large covered market, and numerous dwellings, as well as a bridge over the Tigris to spare pilgrims the extortionate fees charged by the boatmen who used to ferry them across the river (Wardi, III, p. 90). These measures resulted in a general expansion of the city, as well as the emergence within it of a Shiʿite community.

On the death of Sayyed Ḥosayn Kuhkamari in 1290/1873 Širāzi effectively became the sole *marjaʿ-e taqlid* of all Persian Shiʿites. This was a position of great potential influence, given the requirement of obedience to the incumbent. This became evident above all during the campaign against the tobacco concession that was granted by the Persian government to a British corporation in 1889. Opposition to the concession began as soon as the corporation began operating in the spring of 1891, much of it led by the ulama. Of particular importance was Sayyed ʿAli Fālasiri, who had been expelled from Shiraz because of his forthright opposition to the concession. He traveled by way of Basra to Sāmarrāʾ, where he informed Mirzā Ḥasan of what was afoot in Persia, and encouraged him to speak out against the concession. Similar appeals were made by Āqā Najafi, foremost among the ulamaof Isfahan, who

also sent a certain Āqā Monir-al-Din Borujerdi to Sāmarrāʾ to explain matters to Mirzā Ḥasan in person. A lengthy letter was also sent by Sayyed Jamāl-al-Din Asadābādi, although it is doubtful that it carried much weight, given the writer's lack of standing in the religious hierarchy (Keddie, pp. 342-47). Mirzā Ḥasan's intervention in the matter began with a telegram to Nāṣer-al-Din Shah dated 19 Ḏu'l-Ḥejja 1308/26 July 1891, protesting against both the banishing of Fālasiri and the granting of the tobacco monopoly. No answer was received; instead, Maḥmud Khan Mošir-al-Wezāra, the Persian chargé d'affaires in Baghdad, went to Sāmarrāʾ in a vain attempt to persuade Mirzā Ḥasan of the benefits allegedly secured for Persia by the monopoly. Two months later, Mirzā Ḥasan sent another telegram to the shah. This, too, was never answered, with the result that he now wrote to Mirzā Ḥasan Āštiāni, one of the leading ulamaof Tehran and, like himself, a pupil of Shaikh Mortażā Anṣāri, empowering him to act on his behalf in combating the monopoly.

Early in December 1891, a reasoned legal response (*fatwā*; q.v.)began circulating in the capital proclaiming that "from this day forward, the use of tobacco for water pipes (*tonbāku*) and pipe tobacco (*tutun*), in whatever form it may be, is tantamount to warfare against the Imam of the Age [the Twelfth Imam], may God hasten his reappearance" **(**Kermāni,p. 12. **)**.Although this powerful decree of prohibition bore the signature of Mirzā Ḥasan, doubts were cast on its attribution to him, in the first place by the Persian government, which was anxious to subvert the almost universal effect of the fatwā. However, rumors that Āštiāni had received a letter from Mirzā Ḥasan confirming his authorship of the decree began circulating in Tehran, and thousands of copies of the fatwāwere distributed. It can hardly have been a case of outright forgery. Mirzā Ḥasan had already made plain his opposition to the tobacco concession in his telegrams to Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, and once the fatwāwas in circulation at no time did he repudiate it. A possible explanation is that among the powers Mirzā Ḥasan had delegated to Āštiāni was precisely the issuance of a fatwāin his name at a suitable time. Once Nāṣer-al-Din Shah had decided to yield to the overwhelming popular pressure and cancel the concession, it was, in any event, a new fatwā from Mirzā Ḥasan and a telegram in confirmation sent to Āštiāni on 25 Jomādā II 1309/26 January 1892 that brought the whole episode to a close.

The successful agitation against the tobacco monopoly can be regarded as the first instance of mass politics in Persia, and it was no accident that Mirzā Ḥasan, as the supreme if not sole marjaʿ of the day, stood at the center of the

episode. His preeminent role earned him at least a show of respect from Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, who henceforth addressed him with the honorific “Ḥojjat-al-Eslām” (Taymuri, p. 18). Various oppositional elements began seeking to enrol Mirzā Ḥasan in their broader campaign against Qājār rule. A group of Persians resident in Ottoman Turkey reportedly asked Mirzā Ḥasan to declare obedience to the state as no longer incumbent, given its tyrannical practices (*Qānun*, no. 20 [n.d.], pp. 1-2), and Mirzā Malkom Khan suggested that he issue a fatwā forbidding the payment of taxes (*Qānun*, no. 29 (n.d.), p. 3). A letter sent by Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni in Istanbul to Mirzā Malkom Khan in London suggests that certain individuals were ready to take matters into their own hands: “Some people here have had the idea of requesting from Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi a fatwā on some other matter, and then transferring his seal photographically to a piece of paper declaring that the payment of taxes to these oppressive tyrants is forbidden and a great sin” (collection of letters received by Malkom Khan, Bibliothežque Nationale, supplément persan 1996, fols. 110-11). Amin-al-Solṭān, Nāṣer-al-Din’s chief minister, therefore found it advisable to warn Mirzā Ḥasan against Malkom Khan as a “heretic” (*zendiq*) and Jamāl-al-Din Asad-ābādi as a onetime propagator of Babism in Afghanistan (letter dated Rajab 1309/February 1892, in Ṣafāʾi, pp. 316-18). There is no sign that Mirzā Ḥasan responded favorably to any of these overtures, whether from the Persian government or its opponents. His only other recorded interventions in public affairs concerned anti-Jewish riots in Hamadan; tribal disturbances in the Čahār-Maḥāll region; the purchase of land near Mašhad by the Russian government; and the persecution of Shiʿites in Afghanistan by Amir ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Khan (see HAZĀRA ii.), on whose behalf he appealed to Queen Victoria (Baḵšāyeši, 1985, pp. 361, 374-76). Mirzā Ḥasan’s letter to the British monarch is one indication among others that he had caught the eye of European political leaders, who became aware suddenly of the influence he wielded, though they were far from understanding its nature—they tended to regard him as “a Persian Pope” and Sāmarrāʾ as a potential Vatican (Algar, 1969, p. 217).

It was against this backdrop that a severe crisis erupted between Sunnis in Sāmarrāʾ and the Shiʿites (mostly Persian) who had established themselves in their midst. Mirzā Ḥasan’s initiatives had succeeded, not only in expanding and protecting the Shiʿite presence, but also in gaining influence among the population at large. His largesse extended to Sunnis as well as Shiʿites, and many of them began to participate in the mourning ceremonies of Moḥarram together with their Shiʿite neighbors. Fears arose that Shiʿism would come to

dominate the city, at precisely the same time that conversion to Shiʿism among the tribes of southern Iraq was gradually making the Shiʿites a majority of the Arab population of Iraq. Despite the policy of Pan-Islam with which he was associated, Sultan ʿAbd-al-Ḥamid viewed the situation in Sāmarrāʾ with disquiet; the Persian identity of most leading Shiʿite scholars in Iraq already provided the Persian authorities with a standing pretext for intervention in the affairs of the Shiʿite shrine cities in Iraq (ʿAtabāt, q.v.), and the pattern now threatened to repeat itself in Sāmarrāʾ. The sultan accordingly instructed the governor of Baghdad to curb Mirzā Ḥasan's influence in the city by establishing a Sunni madrasathere, under the direction of Shaikh Moḥammad-Saʿid Naqšbandi, a ferocious adversary of Shiʿism. All the Sunni notables were required to enrol their children, with the result that—in the words of a local Sunni historian—"they were protected from the tricks of the heretics (*al-mobtadeʿa*; Sāmarrāʾi, 1966, p. 24).

Sectarian tensions broke into the open in 1311/1893. The precise circumstances are unclear. According to one account, some gendarmes came from Baghdad to Sā-marrāʾ to collect taxes, and while one of them, a certain Ḥosayn b. Doğayr, himself originally from Sāmarrāʾ, was resting in a café, a Persian Shiʿite suddenly attacked him with a knife. This provoked a free-for-all among Sunnis and Shiʿites, in the course of which one of the Persians started firing into the melée from a minaret overlooking the shrine. A nephew of Mirzā Ḥasan was among those killed before order was restored (Sāmarrāʾi, 1968, pp. 177-78). Another account has it that without provocation a Sunni murdered Mirzā Ḥasan's eldest son, but that Mirzā Ḥasan wisely refrained from giving the crime a sectarian aspect (Ṭehrāni, 1954, I, p. 440). Finally, it is said that in the year in question, hostile pressure on the Shiʿite scholars and students of Sāmarrāʾ became so intense that they took their complaints to the governor of Baghdad; he refused to listen to them or even to allow them to send a telegram to the sultan. They therefore went to Tehran, where they placed their grievances before Nāṣer-al-Din Shah and were finally able to send their telegram to ʿAbd-al-Ḥamid, who "moved heaven and earth" to extinguish the fire of sectarian conflict (Ḥerz-al-Din, II, pp. 235-36). Common to all three accounts is an opportunistic intervention by the British envoy in Baghdad, who is related to have come to Sā-marrāʾ in order to offer Mirzā Ḥasan his official support and thereby perpetuate and deepen the conflict. Mirzā Ḥasan sagaciously rebuffed him, saying that it was "a simple dispute among brothers," of no concern to foreign powers.

Taxed by the strains of this episode, and already eighty years old, Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi died on 24 Šaʿbān 1312/20 February 1895. His body was taken to Najaf for burial, an event that presaged, perhaps, the return there of clerical preeminence from Sāmarrāʾ. Mirzā Moḥammad-Taqi Širāzi, the foremost disciple of Mirzā Ḥasan, found himself progressively abandoned by students who preferred to study in the ʿAtabāt or in Persia, and he quit Sāmarrāʾ himself when the British occupied the city in 1917. The madrasaMirzā Ḥasan had founded lay empty thereafter for almost a decade.

Mirzā Ḥasan's principal legacy consisted of his numerous students, who included virtually all the great Shiʿite scholars of the age; particular mention may be made of Mollā Kāẓem Ḵorāsāni, Shaikh Fażl-Allāh Nuri, and Sayyed Esmāʿil Ṣadr (for lists of his students, see Ḥerz-al-Din, II, pp. 236-37, and Ṭehrāni, 1983, pp. 93-212). His duties as marjaʿ did not leave him much time for scholarly composition, and his writings amount to little more than notes on the works of his own teacher, Mortażā Anṣāri (for a list, see Ṭehrāni, 1983, pp. 217-18). His place in the general historical memory of Persia was secured by the role he played in the tobacco boycott, for it was seen to herald the increasingly frequent intervention by the ulama in the political sphere that was one of the leading features of twentieth century Persian history.

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