



ḤOJJAT-AL-ESLĀM

ḤOJJAT-AL-ESLĀM (lit. Proof of Islam), a title awarded to Shiʿite scholars, originally as an honorific but later as a means of indicating their status in the hierarchy of the learned.

Its first recorded use came in a Sunni context, when it was applied to Abu Ḥāmed Moḥammad Ġazālī (d. 1111, q.v.), presumably in celebration of his polemical skills in refuting such adversaries as the Hellenizing philosophers and the Ismaʿilis. It was later used occasionally as a formula of respect with which to address judges (Naḵjavāni, I/1, p. 35). The term cannot then be regarded in its origin as a diluted echo of one of the epithets of the Twelve Imams of Shiʿite belief, *ḥojjat-Allāh*, with the meaning of “cosmic proof of the divine reality.” The hypothesis that *ḥojjat-al-Eslām* originated as a variant on *ḥojjat-Allāh al-bāleḡa* (God’s decisive proof; see Qurʾān, 6:149), used by Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Shah as a title of honor when once addressing Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsāʾī (q.v.), is also unlikely (Moussavi, p. 212).

The entry of the title into Shiʿite usage, at a fairly advanced time, may be tied, most reasonably and simply, to the growing prestige of the Oṣuli scholars in the early Qajar period. The first Shiʿite personage known as *ḥojjat-al-Eslām* was Moḥammad-Bāqer Šafti (d. 1843), clearly with the intimation that the power (economic, judicial, and political) he wielded in Isfahan constituted in itself a palpable “proof of Islam.” The title seems to have become an integral part of his name, for it was inherited by his far less influential son Ḥājj Sayyed Asad-Allāh (d. 1873; Modarres, II, pp. 26-28). Another scholar of the early Qajar period to be named *ḥojjat-al-Eslām* was Mollā Moḥammad Narāqi (d. 1880), in



a decree by Moḥammad Shah Qājār, granting a tax reduction, at his request, to the tanners and dyers of Kāšān (Matini, p. 576). Why Mirzā Moḥammad-Taqi Māmaqāni (d. 1894) should have become known as *hojjat-al-Eslām* is not entirely clear; it was due perhaps to his mastery of poetry and mysticism as well as the formal sciences (Modarres, II, pp. 28-29). The title became firmly linked to clerical prominence during the reign of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, when it was prefixed to the names of influential scholars such as Mirzā Ḥasan Širāzi and Mollā ‘Ali Kani. This tendency was confirmed with the onset of the Constitutional Revolution (q.v.), when the title was given to all the senior supporters of the cause in the ‘*atabāt* (q.v.; Kāzem Kōrāsāni, ‘Abd-Allāh Māzandarāni, and Ḥosayn Tehrāni) and Tehran (Moḥammad Behbahāni and Moḥammad Ṭabātabā‘i, who were sometimes referred to jointly as *hojjatayn* “the two *hojjats*”). Prominent opponents of the constitution such as Shaikh Faḏl-Allāh Nuri were also referred to as *hojjat-al-Eslām* by their adherents. The term was incorporated in article two of the supplementary fundamental law (*qānun-e asāsi*; see [CONSTITUTION](#)) of 7 October 1907 to describe the senior clerics who were to select the five *mojtaheds* (see [EJTEHĀD](#)) charged with reviewing legislation for compatibility with the *šari‘a* (Browne, p. 373).

From the mid-1920s onwards, its luster was, however, dulled with the rise of the title *āyat-Allāh*, which was applied to scholars who had attained the rank of *ejtehād* and, more particularly, to those among them who functioned as *marāje‘-e taqlid* (sources of emulation). Sometimes used in appositional and rhyming tandem with a modified form of the new title (*hojjaj-e Eslām wa āyāt-e ‘eẓām*), *hojjat-al-Eslām* was gradually superseded by *āyat-Allāh* as an indicator of scholarly prominence. It is now used distinctively for scholars of the religious sciences who have not qualified for *ejtehād*, and even for students. (In theory, the title *teqat-al-Eslām* is available for such novices, but in practice it is rarely used.) This being the case, the use of one title rather than another can sometimes serve polemical purposes. Thus, when Abu’l-Qāsem Kō‘i responded to a letter written to him in 1978 by Ayatollah Khomeini, he attempted to assert his claim to supreme authority in Najaf by addressing Khomeini as *hojjat-al-Eslām*. The fuller version of the title sometimes encountered in ceremonial contexts, *hojjat-al-Eslām wa’l-moslemin* (Proof of Islam and the Muslims), does not involve an expansion of its meaning; it serves simply to make it more sonorous.

Finally, it may be noted that some imitative use of the title is to be encountered in Sunni populations familiar with Persian Shi‘ite usage; thus the



Kurdish scholar Shaikh Najm-al-Din Marduḳi (d. 1923) was known to his contemporaries as *ḥojjat-al-Eslām* (Bābā Marduḳ Ruḥāni, II, pp. 163-64).

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