



IRAN IX. RELIGIONS IN IRAN (2) ISLAM IN IRAN (2.1) THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

IRAN ix, continued

(2.1) The Advent of Islam in Iran

Persian acquaintance with Islam began already in the time of the Prophet. Well known is the case of Salmān-e Fārsī, the Persian companion of the Prophet around whom many legends have been spun. In addition, the Persian colony in the Yemen sent a delegation to the Prophet in Medina, and some of its members embraced Islam (Moḥammadi, pp. 430-33). Widespread conversion began, however, after his demise, with the Muslim military campaigns that resulted in the destruction of the Sasanian empire. In some cases the acceptance of Islam by Persian soldiers followed immediately on their defeat in battle, and cannot therefore have involved any substantial interiorization of the faith. A degree of worldly motivation may also be discerned in the switch to Islam made by the agrarian aristocracy, anxious to preserve their social status under the new Islamic dispensation. The Prophet had already ordered the Muslim conquerors of Bahrayn to treat the Zoroastrians they encountered there as *ahl al-Ketāb* (the people of the Book), and the same protected status was now extended to the Zoroastrians of Persia itself (Ḥamidullah, pp. 1059-60). Coerced conversion was accordingly rare, the



only significant exception being Qoṭayba b. Moslem's campaign in Transoxania towards the end of the first Islamic century. Arabs settled in some regions of Persia, notably Khorasan, and interaction with them must have played a role in securing the acceptance of Islam. Together with the intrinsic qualities of Islam itself, the increasing domination of the Persian milieu by the mores and institutions of Islam must have been decisive in assuring its acceptance by a clear majority of the population. It has been plausibly suggested that by the middle of the 4th/10th century, the time when regional dynasties, all professing Islam, were being established in the east, at least 80 percent of Iranians were Muslim (see [CONVERSION ii](#); see also Bulliet, pp. 68-70). The conjunction of these two phenomena points to a full assimilation of Islam having taken place.

As the process of conversion was underway, during the first three centuries of the Islamic era, most of the currents of legal and theological opinion and sectarian divisions present, or in the course of formation, in the Arab lands also found expression in Persia and Transoxania, albeit to varying degrees in different cities and regions. From the outset, there was no uniformity across the entirety of this vast area, and it would be entirely inaccurate to speak of a distinctively "Iranian Islam" at any time before the quasi-national assimilation of Shi'ism in the Safavid period. Apart from some of the Sufi orders, it was only Nezāri Isma'ilism (q.v.) and a few marginal groups such as the Ḥorufis (see [HORUFISM](#)) that originated in Persia. This points to a thoroughgoing assimilation of Islam and largely invalidates the assertion of Henry Corbin that "the Iranian spiritual universe, before and Islam, forms a single whole" (I, p. xxvii).

Topography, moreover, played only a minor and occasional role in the distribution of religious factions and groups; thus the relatively inaccessible Caspian region often provided a refuge or foothold for beleaguered or marginal groups such as the Zaydi and Isma'ili Shi'ites and, in the Safavid and post-Safavid periods, for the Sunnis of Tāleš (on the general predilection of minority sects for remote locations, see Planhol, pp. 57 ff.). The precise affiliations of villages might also differ from those of the cities to which they were administratively and economically attached. Dynastic policies and preferences were generally more important than geographical factors in determining the precise religious loyalties of the population, but the adage *al-nās 'alā dine molukehem* (the approximate equivalent of the European principle *cuius regio eius religio*) finds only partial confirmation in the



religious configuration of pre-Safavid Islamic Persia. Samanids, Ghaznavids, Saljuqids, and Buyids, all sometimes sought to promote their own choices in matters of religion, the first three espousing Sunnism and the Hanafite school and the fourth, first Zaydi and then Imami Shi'ism, employing to this end both patronage and royal command. Their policies were, however, often tempered by pragmatism and inconsistency; the coercive propagation of Shi'ism by the Safavids counts, in this respect, as a radical departure. Networks among different centers of learning established by prestigious scholars were at least as important a factor in assuring the currency or primacy of a given school of law in a particular city; these often gave rise to what might be called scholarly dynasties, endowed with more stability than their monarchical counterparts, but like them, frequently at odds with each other. Few areas or even cities were uniform or stable in their precise sectarian configuration; Qom, where Shi'ism reigned supreme, and Isfahan, a bastion of Sunnism, were exceptions. Sunnism was internally divided, and intra-Sunni rivalries were for several centuries more frequent and bitter than those opposing Sunnis and Shi'is; they found expression in urban factionalism and even warfare. In short, the religious landscape of pre-Safavid Islamic Persia was fragmented and complex.

MAJOR SCHOOLS OF JURISPRUDENCE

Although the term "Sunni" is encountered as early as the first century of Islam, it was not until the 4th/10th century that it entered general currency as a designation for the majoritarian mode of Islamic belief and practice, in Persia and elsewhere. The term, in its full form, was *Ahl al-Sonna wa'l-Jamā'a*, *sonna* (custom, norm) being equated with the practice of the Companions of the Prophet and *jamā'a* (community) understood as the great mass of Muslims; by implication, it excludes all groups of the Shi'ites and the Kharejites. It has been plausibly suggested that the addendum *jamā'a* was intended to accommodate secondary differences of teaching and practice within a common framework (Watt, p. 267). The main form of differentiation among the majority Sunnite population of Persia, down to Safavid times, consisted in the choice made of school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*). The schools all originated outside of Persia, although several of them were significantly elaborated by Persian scholars. Two schools of Sunnite jurisprudence, the Hanafite (q.v.) and the Shafe'ite, effectively dominated most of the pre-Safavid Persian-speaking world. They became known as *al-fariqān* (the two factions), appropriately so, given the profound hostility that for long marked their mutual dealings. Although



significant, the methodological differences separating Hanafites and Shafē'ites do not suffice to explain the intensity of their competition; the control of lucrative endowments (*awqāf*) and judgeships was clearly also at issue, not to mention a factionalism apparently endemic in Persian urban life for many centuries.

Of the two, it is only the Šāfē'iya the dissemination of which, in Persia and elsewhere, has been examined in some detail (Halm); a similar study is lacking for the Hanafite school which preceded it to Persia. It seems, however, that this school gained a foothold in Persia and Transoxania already in the lifetime of its eponym, Abu Ḥanifa (d. 150/767), whose following numbered several men of Persian or Transoxanian ancestry. This swift acceptance of Hanafism seems to have been due in large part to the confluence between Hanafism and the *morje'a*, a doctrinal school that asserted the primacy of faith over actions and exerted itself on behalf of the *mawāli*, the early Persian converts to Islam. The first Hanafite judge (*qāẓi*) of Balkh was appointed in 142/759; after an interval he was succeeded by Abu Moṭī' Balkī (q.v.), a direct pupil of Abu Ḥanifa (Madelung, pp. 18-19). By the 3rd/9th century, Tokārestān and Transoxania had been won definitively for his school, and Hanafites were also well represented in Khuzestan, Rayy, Qazvin, and Gorgān. Their school gained state patronage in Khorasan and Transoxania with the rise to power of the Samanids, a patronage that was intensified and carried westwards into Persia proper by the Saljuqs from the 5th/11th century onwards.

Hanafite prominence was challenged in the latter part of the 3rd/9th century by a wave of Shafē'ite expansion bringing the school from its established centers in Iraq and Egypt. Among those influential in this process were Abu'l-'Abbās b. Sorayj (d. 306/918) in Shiraz, and Moḥammad b. Eshāq Kozayma, who made Nishapur the main stronghold of the Shafē'ite school in Khorasan. Mohammad b. Naṣr Marvazi introduced the Shafē'ite school to Samarqand, where it remained overshadowed by the Hanafites. By contrast, Čāč (Ar. Šāš, present-day Tashkent) functioned for a while as a Shafē'ite enclave in the predominantly Hanafite territory of Transoxania, thanks to the efforts of the eminent jurist, Abu Bakr Qaffāl. Somewhat later, the Shafē'ites had established large communities in Isfahan, Rayy, and Gorgān, and by the beginning of the 5th/11th century they were more numerous than Hanafites in much of western Persia, while Khorasan remained an object of contest between the two factions (Halm, pp. 4350).

The hostility thus antedated the rise of the Saljuqids, but it was substantially



increased by the policies of the dynasty, beginning with the appointment by Tōgrel Beg (r. 1038-63) of Hanafite *qāzis*, often brought from Transoxania, to cities with largely or exclusively Shafe'ite populations and his awarding the control of congregational mosques to Hanafites. This promotion of the Hanafite school declined somewhat under Tōgrel Beg's successor, Alp Arslān (r. 1063-72), in part because of the influence of his Shafe'ite vizier, Neẓām-al-Molk, who records that his master nonetheless frequently expressed displeasure at the school he followed. Somewhat plaintively, he attempted to establish equality between the two schools by proclaiming: "There are only two good schools in the whole world, one that of Abu Ḥanifa and the other, that of al-Šāfe'i" (*Siāsat-nāma*, p. 102). No permanent reconciliation was, however, to be had, and as the ability of the Saljuq sultans to control the rivalries they had fostered declined, matters deteriorated to the point that the two factions would assault each other's mosques, *madrasas*, and residential areas. Such was the case in Nishapur in 553/1158; Isfahan in 552/1157 and 560/1165; and Marv in 596/1200 (Madelung, pp. 3537; Halm, p. 134). It was however Rayy that was more thoroughly devastated by sectarian rivalries than any other Persian city. Yāqut Ḥamawī, who visited Rayy in 617/1220, describes the ruin to which it had been reduced, even before the Mongol invasion that came soon after, by two sets of hostilities: Sunnite vs. Shi'ite and Hanafite vs. Shafe'ite. Once the Sunnites had, at least within the city itself, trounced the Shi'ites, the Hanafites and Shafe'ites fell on each other (Yāqut, III, p. 117)

While the Shafe'ites were unable to dislodge the Hanafites from Persia, they did succeed in absorbing minor schools of law, now everywhere extinct, that also gave primary importance to tradition in their legal methodology. These included the *Žāheriya*, also known as the *Dā'udiya*, established by Dā'ud b. Ẹālaf Eṣfahānī (d. 270/883), present in Shiraz, and the *Ṭawriya*, named after Abu Ṭawr Ebrāhīm b. Ẹāled Kalbī (d. 240/854), which had gained a foothold in Isfahan, Dinavar, Hamadān, and Herat, and survived in Azarbaijan until the second half of the 4th/10th century. Also close to the *Šāfe'iya* was the *Jaririya*, a short-lived school established by Moḥammad b. Jarir Ṭabari (d. 309/921), better known as a historian and exegete; his point of reference was, indeed, the Shafe'ite school, although he chose to distance himself from it on certain issues (Halm, p. 130).

The Hanbalite school was third in importance among the schools of Sunnite jurisprudence represented in Persia. From the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābela* of Abu



Yalā, a work listing Hanbalite scholars down to 513/1119, it is apparent that there was a scattered presence of Hanbalites in Nishapur and other Khorasanian cities. Later in the same century, Hanbalites could also be found in Gorgan, Rayy, Qazvin, Hamadan, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Samarqand. In all of these locations, the Hanbalites were ultimately displaced by the Shafe'ites, and in none of them had the Hanbalite school predominated; it seems mostly to have been a question of individual scholars and their immediate followers, not whole communities. This is well illustrated by the case of K̲wāja 'Abd-Allāh Ansāri (d. 481/1089) whose passionate adherence to the Hanbalite school ("I will be a Hanbalite as long as I live; this is the testament I leave to my brethren;" cited in Serge Laugier de Beaurecueil, p. 305), imbibed from his teacher Tāqī Sejestāni, put him severely at odds in Herat with both Hanafites and Shafe'ites. The only area where Hanbalism seems to have enjoyed more or less complete sway was western Gilan, where the people owed their embrace of Islam to Abu Ja'far al-Ṭūmī, a Hanbalite from Āmol in Ṭabarestān. The principal center of Hanbalism in Gilan was the city of Šaft, the birthplace of 'Abd-al-Qāder Gilāni, eponym of the Qāderi Sufi order. But even in Gilan, the Hanbalite school was supplanted not later than the 8th/14th century by its Shafe'ite rival, presumably as a result of influences emanating from Azarbaijan (Rabino, p. 35; Madelung, p. 27).

Although extremely shortlived in Persia, the fourth of the canonical schools of Sunnite Islam, the Malekite, had some presence in Ahvāz, Qazvin, Abhar, and Nishapur, where its last representative was a certain Abu Eshāq b. al-Kattān. It is said to have had but one representative in Rayy; he professed the school out of embarrassment that a scholar of Imam Mālek's eminence should be so entirely disregarded in his city (Nasr and Mutahhari, p. 476).

Kalām, speculative or rational theology, was too technical a discipline to arouse widespread interest beyond the ranks of the ulema ('*olamā*'), and unlike *feqh* (q.v.) it had no practical implications for everyday life; one explanation for its designation is indeed that its concerns are purely verbal. Nonetheless, it was in its very nature a disputatious and polemical discipline, and once adherence to a certain school of *kalām* became conjoined with loyalty to a given school, the effect was to intensify religious strife. Such conjunction was often the result of shared methodological emphases. Thus many Shafe'ites, emphasizing the centrality of tradition as a source of law, tended to adopt the Ash'arite school of *kalām*, devoted as it was to the vindication of traditionalist doctrines such as the non-createdness of the



Qur'an and the unqualified omnipotence of God, albeit by rational methods. Ash'arite *kalām*, first introduced to Nishapur by Abu Bakr b. Furak (d. 406/1015) and Abu Eshāq Esfarā'eni (d. 418/1027), was quickly adopted by the Shafe'ite scholars of the city, who then assured its diffusion elsewhere in Khorasan. The competing Hanafite school had itself a theological dimension, in that Abu Ḥanifa had authored a creed, but many Hanafites, espousing the principle of *ra'y* (personal opinion) in jurisprudence, were attracted to the Mo'tazelite school of *kalām*, a markedly rationalist current. Originating in Iraq, it was soon adopted by the Hanafite communities of Kuzestān, Fārs, and Rayy; in the last-named, it came under severe attack by Sultan Maḥmud of Ghazna in 420/1029. A signal clash between the two tendencies came in Nishapur in 446/1054. 'Amid-al-Molk Kondori, vizier to Tōgrel Beg the Saljuq, was Hanafite and probably Mo'tazelite by persuasion, and he gained permission from his master to launch a campaign against a variety of groups he perceived as deviant. One result was that the Hanafites were able to seize control of the main mosque in Nishapur and there denounce as an unbeliever Abu'l-Ḥasan Aš'ari (d. 324/935), founder of the school named after him. The great theologian Emām-al-Ḥaramayn Jowayni (d. 478/1085) fled the city for Mecca, and Abu'l-Qāsem Qoṣayri (d. 465/1072), best known as a Sufi but also a proponent of the Shafe'ite-Ash'arite synthesis, left for a period of exile in Baghdad. This discomfiting of the Shafe'ite-Ash'arites of Nishapur was shortlived, but the Mo'tazelite presence elsewhere in Khorasan continued for at least another century (Madelung, p. 38). Its last great exponent was the exegete Zamaḵṣari (d. 538/1143), thanks to whose influence his native city of K̲v̲ārazm for long remained a stronghold of Mo'tazelite *kalām*.

SUFI ORDERS IN IRAN

Another mode of differentiation among the Sunnites of Persia was provided by the Sufi communities and orders that began to appear in the 4th/10th century in Fārs and Khorasan; earlier it had been a question only of groups gathered informally around an individual Sufi, liable in most cases to disperse after his death (this applies, for example, to the twelve sects listed by Hojviri, pp. 218-341). The first order to emerge was the Kāzaruniya, so named after its place of origin in Fārs, but alternatively known as the Eshāqiya, in allusion to the *konya* of its founder, or as the Moršediya, because of his title, Šayḳ-e Moršed (the guiding shaikh). Born in 352/963 to parents who had converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam some time before his birth, Abu Eshāq Kāzaruni was initiated into Sufism by Ḥosayn 'Akkār, a pupil of Ebn Kāfif, while



studying in Shiraz. On returning to Kāzarun, he established not only his own mosque, but also a *kānaqāh*, a place of gathering and residence for his followers, one of the earliest examples in Persia of this quintessential institution of organized Sufism. The emphasis of his teaching was on strict observance of the *šari'a*, asceticism, concern for the poor, and energetic proselytizing among the Zoroastrians and Jews of Fārs. He established sixty-five *kānaqāhs* outside Kāzarun, principally in other parts of Fārs, and the order he founded was never disseminated beyond this area, with two long-distance exceptions: the seaports of India and southern China that were frequented by merchants from Kāzarun, and Anatolia, whither the order was conveyed by followers who volunteered for seasonal warfare on the Byzantine frontier as a matter of religious duty. Like many early Sufis, Abu Eshāq was profoundly misogynistic, but unlike them, he took the logical step of refraining from marriage, so that after his death in 426/1035, it was in a close associate and his progeny that the leadership of the order came to be vested until its destruction by the Safavids in 909/1503 (Meier, 1948, pp. 1755, 6571).

Another organized group of Sufis that had the potential of becoming a long-lasting order was that centered first on the person and then on the memory and teachings of Abu Sa'id b. Abu'l-Kayr (q.v., 357/967-440/1049), a contemporary of Abu Eshāq. The *kānaqāh* he founded at Mayhana in Transoxania and for which he drew up formal rules of conduct, together with the shrine housing his tomb, was destroyed by the Gīlozz Turks in 549/1154, who also massacred surviving members of his family. This marked the end of Abu Sa'id's spiritual lineage, and it was only in the dual realms of poetry and hagiography that his name was preserved (Šafi'i-Kad Kani, pp. 820. Šehāb-al-Din Abu Ḥafṣ 'Omar Sohravardi (539/1145-632/1234) counts as the eponym of the Sohravardiya, but the order as such never took root in Persia, although his posthumous influence was marked in Shiraz. Various branches of his spiritual line did, however, crystallize as orders in the Mongol and post-Mongol periods, including the Kobrawiya, Kalwatiya (qq.v.), and Šafawiya.

Having certain emphases in common with the Sufis were two other movements, both centered on Nishapur: the Karrāmiya and the Malāmatiya. The eponym of the former, Ebn Karrām (d. 255/869 in Jerusalem), adumbrated a number of controversial theological teachings: the permissibility of understanding literally divine attributes in the Qur'an (such as "hand" and "face") that are susceptible, if taken in isolation, to anthropomorphic interpretation; and the subsisting of incidents (*ḥawādet*) in the divine essence.



He was primarily esteemed, however, for what has been described as “an activist and ostensive asceticism” (Madelung, p. 44) that involved a hyperbolic interpretation of trusting in God to provide sustenance (*tawakkol*). Despite the otherworldly implications of this attitude, the Karrāmis maintained a remarkable number of *madrāsas* and *kānaqāhs*, in Nishapur, Marv, Herat, Gorgān, Bayhaq, and as far east as Farḡāna, and throughout this broad area, somewhat like Abu Eshāq Kāzaruni in Fārs, they had much success in bringing Zoroastrians into the fold of Islam. The Karrāmiya was favored in the late 4th/10th century by the early Ghaznavids, but not long after, Ṭ̣ōgrel Beg, single-mindedly devoted to the Hanafites, ordained that the movement be officially execrated, together with the Shi‘ites and the Ash‘arites. It fell into irreversible decline in the 6th/12th century and became conventionally classified as a heresy (Madelung, pp. 3946).

The Malāmatiya arose, at least in part, as a reaction to the effusive and public devotions of the Karrāmiya in Nishapur. The name of this movement derives not from a person but from a concept, *malāmat* (“blame”), or more precisely its occurrence in Qur’an 5:54: “They struggle in the path of God and fear not the blame of any blamer.” The Malāmatis interpreted “blame” in this context to mean a readiness to endure the disapproval of others as a necessary condition for gaining the pleasure of God. They also focused “blame” on themselves in the sense that the primary duty of the believer is to reproach his own self for its shortcomings, not to engage in ostentatious displays of piety. Insofar as any individual can be regarded as the originator of their movement, it is Abu Sāleḥ Ḥamdun Qaṣṣār (d. 270/884) of Nishapur; the early Malāmatis were indeed sometimes known as Ḥamdunis or Qaṣṣāris. Concerned as they were with inward, secretive devotion, the Malāmatis shunned certain aspects of Sufi practice evolving at the time in Khorasan, such as *samā‘* (musical sessions) and vocal—hence audible—*dekr* (q.v.), but it would be a mistake to see them as opposed to the Sufis in general. Ḥamdun Qaṣṣār was favorably regarded by Jonayd Bāgdādi, the prime exemplar of “sober Sufism,” and the line of demarcation between Sufi and Malāmati was not always clear; some individuals, notably Abu ‘Otmān Ḥiri, are varyingly depicted as the one or the other in the hagiographical literature. Although no prominent individuals are identified as Malāmati after the 4th/10th century, Sohravardi (d. 623/1234) had occasion to remark in his *‘Awāref al-ma‘āref* that “there is still a group of them [Malāmatis] in Khorasan; they have their elders who their fundamental principles and make known to them the conditions of their states.” The attitudes inculcated by the Malāmatis persisted considerably later, first in the



craft guilds and then in the teachings of the early Naqšbandi Sufis. As for their name, it was ultimately usurped by antinomians who actively sought the blame of others, instead of being simply ready to accept it; instead of hidden piety, flagrant libertinism was their hallmark (Sohravardi, p. 71).

SHI'ISM IN IRAN IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Although predominantly Sunnite until Safavid times, Persia also housed communities varying in size and significance that espoused the three main branches of Shi'ism: Imami, Zaydi, and Isma'ili. What has been called "political Shi'ism," that is, support for 'Alawi rebellions against the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs inspired purely by political considerations, appeared very early in Persia, in the form of the Hāšemi movement that arose in the aftermath of Moḳtār's unsuccessful revolt in Kufa (Madelung, p. 77; Ja'fariān, p. 146). "Religious Shi'ism," dedication to the cause of the Prophet's descendants as doctrinally obligatory and as varying interpreted by each branch of the Shi'ite movement, came somewhat later.

Imami Shi'ism. By the end of the 2nd/8th century, the city of Qom had become one of the staunchest and most dedicated centers of Imami Shi'ism, the school based on loyalty to a line of Imams that ultimately came to an end with the occultation of the Twelfth Imam; it has retained this status down to the present. There is broad unanimity that the population of Qom has been continuously and exclusively Imami since the end of the 2nd/8th century. The city may have had pre-Islamic origins, but it began to acquire historical importance only with the arrival of Arab migrants in the 1st/7th century. Significant among these arrivals were the Banu Sa'd b. Mālek Aš'ari, who turned definitively to "religious Shi'ism" soon after the establishment of the Abbasid dynasty. From their ranks emerged Imami devotees and scholars such as 'Isā and 'Emrān, who went from Qom to visit Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq in Medina; Abu 'Ali Moḥammad, the son of 'Isā, who communicated with Imams 'Ali al-Rezā and Moḥammad al-Taqi; and Abu Ja'far Aḥmad, the son of Abu 'Ali, who visited three of the Imams in succession (Ja'fariān, pp. 12729). Contacts such as these with the Imams and their deputies continued until the end of the Lesser Occultation (that period in which the occulted Imam had four named representatives in succession) in 329/941. The loyalty of the Qomis to the Imami line manifested itself also in the regular forwarding of *koms* (a one-fifth share) to the Imams and in their strict avoidance of dissident factions such as the Faṭḥi and the Wāqefi that divided the movement in Kufa and elsewhere; the hesitation and confusion that regularly accompanied the transition from



one Imam to the next was never witnessed in Qom. The special merit of Qom was acknowledged in pronouncements by Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq such as the following: "Kufa will be emptied of believers, and knowledge will vanish from it as a serpent vanishes into its hole. Knowledge will then reappear in a city called Qom, which will become a source of knowledge and learning, and they will spread thence to other cities" (cited by Razi, p. 27). The "other cities" that under the influence of Qom turned to Imami Shi'ism at an early period may be identified as Āva, Kāšān, Farāhān, and Tafreš. The definitive elevation of the city to prominence in the spiritual geography of Imami Shi'ism came with the death and burial there, in 202/817, of Fāṭema Ma'suma, sister of Imam 'Ali al-Rezā. In the 3rd/9th century Qom also shone as a center of learning, with an emphasis on the cultivation of Imami Hadith; fully 80 percent of the traditions included in Kolayni's *al-Kāfī*, one of the principal Shi'ite collections, were narrated from the scholars of Qom.

The sectarian composition of Rayy was more complex. The entire population is said originally to have been strongly Sunnite, even Nāṣebi, a group that regarded as permissible the cursing of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb. Shi'ism was also present in Rayy from early times, however, in both its Imami and Isma'ili forms. Imam Moḥammad al-Bāqer, fifth of the Imams according to both traditions, had a number of Rāzis (natives of Rayy) among his followers, and some *emānzādas* (q.v.) of the region date from the late 2nd/8th century. The Imami community was evidently large enough to participate, together with the Hanafites and the Shafe'ites, in the triangular strife that continuously ravaged Rayy down to the Mongol invasion. According to an anti-Shi'ite polemic written in Saljuq times, the 'Rawāfeẓ' ("rejecters": a term of opprobrium used for Shi'ites) even formed a majority in the city (cited by 'Abd-al-Jalil Qazvini, p. 453, in the response to the polemic he composed in 560/1163). Yāqut Ḥamawī likewise reports that within the city the Shi'ites had once predominated, while of the two Sunnite communities, the Hanafites were the more numerous; as for the villages of the area, they were all Shi'ite (Yāqut, III, p. 117). Among the quarters of the city of Rayy, Moṣleḡgāh had a consistently Imāmi majority, and among its villages, Qaṣrān, on the site of which several centuries later Tehran came into being. Kolayn, some 30 km distant from Rayy, was another center of Imami Shi'ism. Varāmin, to the south of Rayy, described by Qazvini as a village but the equal of any city with respect to religion and learning, had a sectarian mix similar to that of Rayy, also with a Shi'ite majority; intercommunal relations were, however, more irenic than in Rayy, for feasts would be served every Ramaẓān at which everyone was welcome—Hanafite and Shafe'ite as



well as Shi'ite (Qazvini-Rāzi, p. 200). To the north of Rayy, Oram, a town near Sāri on the borders of Ṭabarestān, had an Imami population, which engaged in regular warfare with the Isma'ilis ensconced to their north (Qazvini-Razi, p. 200; Yāqut, I, p. 157).

In northwest Persia, Qazvin was the most solidly Sunnite city and the most hostile to Shi'ites of all types. The Imami minority was subject to intermittent pressure; it is said that on one occasion all its elders were humiliated by having a formula proclaiming love for Abu Bakr and 'Omar branded on their foreheads (Zakariā Qazvini, p. 402). Sunnites and Shi'ites nonetheless both made devotions at the shrine of Abu 'Abd-Allāh Ḥosayn, a son of Imam 'Ali al-Rezā known locally as Šāhzāda Ḥosayn (Qazvini-Rāzi, p. 589), and the city produced Imami scholars of some eminence. Isfahan was another militantly Sunnite city. Apparently lacking any Shi'ite population, it was in some sense the hostile counterpart of Qom with its integrally Shi'ite citizenry; this may help to explain a riot in Isfahan in 345/956 which resulted in the plundering of goods brought by some merchants from Qom (Ja'fariān, p. 164).

As for Khorasan, Nishapur from early times housed a Shi'ite community which was overshadowed, demographically and otherwise, by the Sunnites, but produced a number of significant scholars such as Faḏl b. Šāḏān (d. 260/874), a companion of the tenth Imam of the Twelver Line, al-Hādi. Matters were the reverse in Bayhaq (later and more commonly known as Sabzavār); the convergence on the city of a number of 'Alawi *sayyeds* from elsewhere in Khorasan, especially Nishapur, led gradually to the emergence of a Shi'ite majority. By the 8th/14th century, the city is reported as being entirely Imami, although some anecdotal evidence suggests the survival of a residual Sunnite community. There was a more modest Imami presence in Marv and Balkh. Imam 'Ali al-Rezā died and was buried near Ṭus in 203/818, firmly inscribing the region in the sacred geography of Imami Shi'ism, but the city of Mashad, which grew up around the shrine, displacing Ṭus as a major urban center, remained predominantly Sunnite until the Safavid period. Farther to the east, both Samarqand and Kaš (the present-day Šahr-e Sabz) had Imami communities in the 3rd and 4th centuries, evidently small, but notable for producing traditionists such as Moḥammad b. Mas'ud 'Ayyāši (d. early 4th/10th century) (Madelung, p. 84).

Zaydi Shi'ism. Zaydism—that variant of Shi'ism which believes the Imamate may rightfully be claimed by any learned descendant of either Imam Ḥasan or Imam Ḥosayn who rises up against illegitimate rule—reached Persia much



later than did its Imami counterpart. In the late 3rd/9th century, a certain Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd-Allāh, who had supported an unsuccessful Zaydi uprising launched in the Ḥejāz by the Hosaynid Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali, took refuge with the Jostanid rulers of Deylam, but there is no evidence he used the opportunity this provided for the propagation of Zaydism. It was in a somewhat more easterly region, the Ruyān, Kalār, and Čālus areas of Ṭabarestān, that Zaydism first took firm root. In 250/864, the local population rebelled against their Taherid overlords and invited al-Ḥasan b. Zayd to join them from Rayy and assume rule over them. This he did, taking the title al-Dā‘ī ala’l-Ḥaqq and implementing the legal ordinances of Zaydi Shi‘ism from his capital in Āmol. His brother and successor, Moḥammad b. Zayd, was killed in battle in 287/900 by a Samanid army, but Zaydi rule was restored some fourteen years later, when one of Moḥammad b. Zayd’s associates, Ḥasan b. ‘Ali al-Oṭruš al-Nāṣer le’l-Ḥaqq, arrived in Deylam with an invitation from the Jostanids (q.v.) to use their territory as a base for the reconquest of Ṭabarestān. Initially frustrated in his efforts, he devoted himself to converting the local populace, especially those living to the east of the Safidrud, to Zaydi Shi‘ism, before launching a decisive campaign for the control of Ṭabarestān. He died and was buried in Āmol in 304/917. The Zaydis of Deylam and Ṭabarestān were henceforth divided between the Nāṣeris, who regarded the teachings and lineage of Nāṣer le’l-Ḥaqq as authoritative, and the Qāsemis, whose point of reference was Qāsem b. Ebrāhīm Rassi (d. 246/86) and his descendants. Reinforced by ethnic distinctions between the Gilakis to the east of the Safidrud and the Deylamis to its west, this division was only partly resolved by an attempt to declare the two subsects as equally valid insofar as they were based on *ejteḥād* (q.v.) (Madelung, pp. 8689).

Outside the Caspian region, Zaydism was the original choice of the Buyid dynasty, the founding members of which had been in the service of the Zaydi Imams of Lāhijān, and although the Buyids later transferred their loyalties to Imami Shi‘ism, they continued to patronize and protect Zaydi Imams in the Caspian region and beyond. Zaydi scholars were active in Rayy as late as the first half of the 6th/12th century, but the sect ultimately disappeared everywhere in Persia, with the exception of Deylam, and even there it was challenged both by Sunni Islam and by Isma‘ilism.

Isma‘ilism. This variant of Shi‘ism may be described less as a unified movement than as a constantly evolving amalgam of disparate groups having in common little more than the belief that after the death of Imam Ja‘far al-



Şādeq the Imamate was vested not in Musā al-Kāẓem, as the Imamīs maintained, but in Moḥammad b. Esmā'il b. Ja'far, whose father had predeceased Imam Ja'far; in addition, they shared a tendency to relativize or abrogate the *šari'a* and to accord absolute primacy to the authoritative teaching of an infallible Imam (hence the designation *ta'limiya* sometimes applied to them). Isma'ilism has been continuously although marginally present in Persia since its first emergence. It is unlikely, however, that, with a few exceptions, the Isma'ilis ever formed a majority of the population in the areas that came under their control. Moḥammad b. Esmā'il himself spent the latter part of his life in Khuzestan, and when he died, not long after 179/795, it was initially from this corner of southwest Persia that his son, 'Abd-Allāh, launched a movement of Isma'ili propagation (*da'wa*) that gained converts on both sides of the Persian Gulf and in Fārs. The ostensible gist of his doctrine was that Moḥammad b. Esmā'il was the Mahdi who, rather than dying, had gone into occultation. By the close of the 3rd/9th century, an Isma'ili community had also appeared in the region of Rayy, which served in turn as a base for propagation in Qom, Kāšān, and Hamadan. Somewhat later, Isma'ilism gained a footing in parts of Khorasan and Transoxania, in large part thanks to the conversion of a local amir in the service of the Samanids.

In 286/899, 'Abd-Allāh al-Mahdi declared belief in the occultation of Moḥammad b. Esmā'il to have been an exercise in dissimulation that it was now time to abandon; it transpired that he, and all the links that connected him back to 'Abd-Allāh b. Moḥammad b. Esmā'il, had themselves been Imams, not simply the successive representatives of an occulted ancestor (Daftary, p. 177). 'Abd-Allāh al-Mahdi accordingly left his clandestine location in Syria to found the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt. Although he dispatched a *dā'i* (propagator) to Nishapur during the first decade of his rule, the Fatimid cause initially found little acceptance among the Isma'ili communities of Persia; loyal to the belief that Moḥammad b. Esmā'il was still lingering in occultation, they were henceforth designated as the Qarmaṭi sect, the name being derived from an early *dā'i* of the Isma'ili cause in southern Iraq. The Qarmaṭis had some success in the further propagation of their creed in Transoxania, thanks largely to their chief *dā'i* in Khorasan, Moḥammad Nasafi, who transferred their headquarters from Marv first to Bukhara, then to Nasaf, and finally back to Bukhara, whence he dispatched one of his subordinates to propagate the cause in Kerman. Isma'ili fortunes in Khorasan and Transoxania suffered a setback with the campaign launched against the sect in 332/943 by the Samanid ruler Nuḥ b. Naṣr (Daftary, p. 123). Under the auspices of Abu Ḥātem



Rāzi, the *dā'i* of Rayy, the Qarmaṭi cause had meanwhile advanced elsewhere in Persia, including some parts of Azarbaijan, and—more importantly and lastingly—Deylam and Ṭabarestān, where they either displaced or converted several local rulers who had previously adhered to Zaydi Shi'ism (Daftary, pp. 16567). The fortress at Alamut (q.v.) in the Rudbār region of Deylam, built by the Jostanid dynasty in the mid 3rd/9th century but destined to remain a principal Isma'ili stronghold until the Mongol invasion, passed into the hands of the sect in 307/919.

Beginning with the reign of al-Mo'ezz, the fourth Fatimid caliph (r. 341-65/953-75), most Persian Isma'ilis rallied to the Fatimid cause, those of Deylam being the most important exception. Directed from Cairo, an intensified *da'wa* was now undertaken in Fārs, Rayy, Isfahan, and Khorasan. Among the Persian adherents of the cause who traveled to the Fatimid capital for training was the celebrated poet and author, Nāṣer-e Kōsrow (d. post 465/1072); on his return to Khorasan he established a secret headquarters at Balkh before being constrained to flee to Yomgān in Badakhshan, where he founded an Isma'ili community that has survived down to the present. On the death of al-Mostaṣer in 487/1084, the Isma'ili movement was split anew, with parties ranged behind his two sons, Nezār and al-Mosta'li; it was the latter who won the struggle to succeed. Led by Ḥasan-e Šabbāḥ, the Persians aligned themselves with Nezār, severed their links with Cairo, and established a principality based on Alamut that survived until the Mongol invasion. The authority of Alamut was recognized by the Isma'ilis of Qohestān, who brought under their control the towns of Tun, Ṭabas, Qā'en, and Zuzan, and fortress outposts at Gerdkuh near Dām'gān and on the border between Fārs and Khuzestan. The continuous hostilities that now took place between the Nezāri Isma'ilis and the Saljuqids were inconclusive. The relative stability of this archipelago of Isma'ili centers was reinforced by the *taqiya*-motivated (dissimulating) profession of Sunnite Islam made by Jalāl-al-Din Ḥasan, who ruled Alamut from 607/1210 to 618/1221.

Both Alamut and the Isma'ili communities of Qohestān were overrun and devastated by the Mongols in 654/1256, and the following year, Rokn-al-Din Kōršāh, the last ruler of Alamut, was put to death. The early centuries of post-Alamut Persian Isma'ilism are obscure, and have only recently begun to attract scholarly attention. According to Nezāri tradition, Šams-al-Din Moḥammad, the minor son of Rokn-al-Din, was taken to Tabriz, where he lived incognito as an embroiderer; the continuity of the Imamate was thus allegedly preserved



(Daftary, p. 159; for a questioning of the historicity of the post-Alamut tradition, see, however, Akbarally, pp. 117-30). On his death, however, yet another split occurred in the community, resulting in the emergence of the Moḥammad-šāhi and Qāsemšāhi branches. A leader of the former branch managed temporarily to establish himself at Alamut, and as before, a number of local rulers in Deylam aligned themselves with the Ismaʿilis; in this relatively remote area, they were able to remain active throughout the Il-khanid and Timurid periods. The Nezāri community of Qohestān also managed to survive, in villages around Birjand and Qāʿen, although it no longer enjoyed any political authority. The Birjand community did, however, produce a poet of some merit, Saʿd-al-Din Nezāri (d. 720/1320). It is in general difficult to be sure what became of the Nezāris after the fall of Alamut, for once again they engaged in prudential dissimulation of their beliefs. Their leaders in particular adopted the idiom and guise of the Sufis, thereby passing unnoticed in an age thoroughly dominated by adherents of the mystic path (Daftary, pp. 45254).

As for the Kharejites, radical egalitarians who dissented from both Sunnite and Shiʿite lines of authority and who comprise the third major religio-political current in early Islam, their relatively brief presence in Persia resulted primarily from the refuge sought there by the survivors of failed uprisings in adjacent Iraq. Thus after the Kharejite defeat at Nahrawān in 38/658, survivors of the battle were able to establish themselves in Ahvāz and Fārs, and following the death of Ebn Azraq, leader of the most extreme wing of the movement, in the battle of Dulāb in 65/684, other Kharejite fighters ranged freely across much of southern and central Persia; they succeeded in holding Kerman and Isfahan for a time, and undertook raids on Rayy that were welcomed by some inhabitants of the city. Azraqi Kharejites also went to Ṭabarestān where they unsuccessfully sought to propagate their doctrine. Farther to the east, Kharejites were to be found in the areas of Herat and Zarang, where traces of their presence lasted until the 3rd/10th century. More significant were the Kharejite communities of Sistān, numerous and strong enough to pose a threat to the armies of the Abbasid caliphate for many years despite incessant fragmentation and dispute over details of doctrine and law. It was in the end the Saffarids who in the 3rd/10th century eliminated the Kharejites of Sistān, partly through battle and partly through enlisting them in their own struggle against the caliphate. Although some Persians were active in the Kharejite movement, attracted presumably by its declaration of absolute equality among all believers, irrespective of ethnic origin, it never took broad



hold in Persia to any significant degree (Spuler, 1955, pp. 167-70; Madelung, pp. 54-76).

October 25, 2006

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