



MAJLESI, MOḤAMMAD-TAQI

MAJLESI, MOḤAMMAD-TAQI b. Maqṣud-ʿAli Eṣfahāni, commonly referred to as Majlesi-ye Awwal, an important Twelver Shiʿite jurist and Hadith scholar of the *Aḵbāri* school (see [AḴBĀRIYA](#)) in Safavid Iran (b. 1003/1594-95, d. 1070/1659-60). He is generally considered to be the first eminent member of what was later to become one of the most influential families of scholars in Shiʿite Islam, the most outstanding representative of which was without doubt his son Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi, subsequently known as [Majlesi-ye Ṭāni](#). The genealogy of the family is sometimes traced back to Abu Noʿaym Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh Eṣfahāni (d. 430/1038; cf. also Ḵvānsāri, *Rawżāt*, I, pp. 282-85; Pampus, *Enzyklopädie*, pp. 54-55), the author, *inter alia*, of a *History of Isfahan*, entitled *Ḍekr-e aḵbār-e Eṣfahān* (Tehran, 1377/1998). The first historically reliable ancestor, however, seems to be his maternal grandfather Kamāl al-Din Darwiš Moḥammad b. Ḥasan ʿAmeli (*Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, VI, pp. 395-96; Nuri, *al-Fayż*, pp. 106-08), a disciple of the Šahid Ṭāni, who is credited with having been the first scholar to propagate the science of (Shiʿite) Hadith in Isfahan after the advent of the Safavids (Ḵvānsāri, *Rawżāt*, II, p. 114). Originally of Lebanese descent, he later assumed the *nisbas* Naṭanzi, from a village north of Isfahan, and Eṣfahāni. Majlesi also used these names and signed some of his *ejāzāt* as “al-Eṣfahāni al-Naṭanzi al-ʿĀmeli” (cf., e.g., Majlesi, *Behār al-anwār*, CX, p. 73; Tonokāboni, *Qeṣaṣ*, 230). His father ʿAli (mostly Maqṣud-ʿAli), finally, was the first who bore the honorific epithet “Majlesi” that he had been given in appreciation of his renowned lectures and assemblies (*majāles*; cf. Nuri, *al-Fayż*, p. 105; Dawwāni, *Mafāḵer*, pp. 41-42). Moḥammad-Taḳi Majlesi had three sons (Moḥammad-Bāqer, ʿAbdallāh and ʿAzizallāh) and four daughters who



were married to Shi'ite scholars (on the many branches of the Majlesi family cf. Pampus, *Enzyklopädie*, pp. 51-92).

In contrast to the number of the entries on Majlesi in biographical dictionaries and their sometimes flowery style, the bare facts of his life remain disappointingly few and vague. Even a usually well informed author such as his contemporary 'Abd al-Ḥosayn Kātunābādi mentions only the year of Majlesi's death, adding that the deceased was between 67 and 68 years of age (*Waqā'e*, p. 521). Majlesi had obviously been taught the religious sciences very early in his life, because, according to his own testimony, already at the age of four he knew enough about God, the ritual prayer, paradise and hell to teach other children (Qommi, *Fawā'ed*, p. 440). Among his later teachers, two stand out as particularly important: 'Abdallāh Tostari (or Šuštari; d. 1021/1612; cf. Kḡvānsāri, *Rawzāt*, IV, pp. 228-37) and Bahā' al-Din 'Āmeli (d. 1032/1623). Later in life, Majlesi was also to become one of the latter's successors in his capacity as leader of the Friday prayer in Isfahan, at that time a still informal office that remained in the Majlesi family for several generations after him (Kḡvānsāri, *Rawzāt*, II, pp. 118-19; see also [EMĀM-E JOM'A](#)).

This office is not the only instance suggesting that Majlesi enjoyed close ties to the Safavid court and the kings of his time. Majlesi himself relates how – during a winter he spent in Najaf – the Imam 'Ali b. Ṭāleb appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to return immediately to Isfahan. The Imam wanted him back in the capital in order to guide the people there, because in the same year, i.e. 1629, [Shah 'Abbās I](#) was going to die, and severe unrest would follow the ascension to the throne of Shah Ṣafi. After his return, Majlesi revealed this dream to a friend who in turn communicated it to the heir to the throne, Ṣafi. The latter indeed became Shah shortly afterwards, following the death of Shah 'Abbās during a journey to Māzandarān (Kḡvānsāri, *Rawzāt*, II, pp. 117-18; Qommi, *Fawā'ed*, p. 440). Finally, Majlesi composed the Persian translation of his commentary on *Man lā yaḥḏūruhu'l-faqih*, one of the four canonical Shi'ite Hadith compilations by [Ebn-e Bābuye Qommi](#) (d. 381/991), explicitly at the request of Ṣafi's successor, [Shah 'Abbās II](#), and even changed the title of his translation from the Arabic *Rawzat al-mottaqin* to the decidedly royalist *Lawāme'e šāḥeb-qerāni* (Majlesi, *Lawāme'*, pp. 4-5; Arjomand, *Shadow*, p. 148).

Virtually all biographical entries on Majlesi contain more or less detailed accounts of his various dreams, leading Kḡvānsāri to conclude that “on the whole, his life was wondrous and marvelous” (*Rāwzāt*, II, p. 118). Obviously, these anecdotes (see [DREAMS AND DREAM INTERPRETATION](#)) served the



purpose of enhancing his position as a scholar and providing legitimacy for his writing. Majlesi knew about this function of the supernatural and consistently made use of it, e.g. when he ascribed his writing of the Arabic version of the commentary of Ebn-e Bābuye's *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu'l-faqih* to having been encouraged to do so in a dream by his teacher Bahā' al-Din (Širāzi, *Ṭarā'eq*, pp. 278-79; Qommi, *Fawā'id*, p. 445-46), or when he repeatedly stated in his *ejāzāt* that he had received the authorization to transmit the *Šaḥifa sajjādiya* (on which cf. Pampus, *Enzyklopädie*, p. 57 and *al-Dari'a*, XV, p. 18) directly from the Mahdi in a dream (Majlesi, *Beḥār*, CX, pp. 43, 45, 60, 63, 79). According to Père Rafaël Du Mans, superior of the Capuchin mission in Isfahan in the second half of the 17th century, Majlesi also derived the alleged duty to perform the Friday prayer from a vision of Mahdi (*Estat*, p. 58; this passage seems to be the only clear reference to Majlesi by a European observer. Jean Chardin, however, mentions a "Mahamed Mirza Taki" whom he identifies as "curé de la mosquée cathédrale de la ville," who may also be identical with Majlesi; cf. his *Voyages*, VIII, pp. 13-14).

Probably not least due to this aura of saintliness Majlesi was greatly revered by the common people. After his death, his coffin is reported to have been broken into pieces which were worn by the believers as amulets (Arjomand, *Shadow*, p. 186). In sharp contrast to this general admiration stands the outspoken critique by an otherwise largely unknown scholar, Moḥammad b. Moḥammad Ḥosayni Mir-Lawḥi, himself also a disciple of Bahā' al-Din. He accused Moḥammad-Taqi Majlesi of Šufi leanings and of having interpreted Shi'ite Hadith in a blameworthy fashion (A. Hairi, "Mir Lawḥi," *EI2*, VII, pp. 94-95). Most subsequent Shi'ite scholars have constantly refuted this allegation, citing as a principal witness Moḥammad-Taqi's son Moḥammad-Bāqer who insisted – somewhat vaguely – that his father had only pretended to endorse Šufi tendencies in order to refute them more effectively (Baḥrāni, *Lo'lo'at*, p. 60; Nuri, *al-Fayḏ*, pp. 117-18). Nevertheless, as late an author as Ma'šum-'Ali Širāzi (d. 1344/1926) declares that it is "brighter than the sun and clearer than yesterday" that Majlesi was indeed a Šufi, and in turn accuses Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi of having made contradictory statements on this issue (*Ṭarā'eq*, I, pp. 268, 280-81). Western scholarship also widely agrees on Moḥammad-Taqi's Šufi leanings (Arjomand, *Shadow*, pp. 114, 149; cf. Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia*, IV, pp. 403-404).

Moḥammad-Taqi Majlesi seems to have become a prolific writer only towards the end of his life, when he completed his main works within some four years



(for exact dates cf. the references in *al-Dari'ā*, given in the bibliography below; lists of his books of varying length are provided by Modarres, *Rayḥānat*, pp. 200-01 [10 titles]; Mahdawi, *Taḍkerat*, p. 220 [22 titles]; K̄vānsāri, *Rawzāt*, p. 116). Besides the two commentaries on Ebn-e Bābuye already mentioned, two commentaries (Arabic and Persian) on the *Ṣaḥīfa sajjādiya*, a commentary on Sheikh Ṭusi's *Tahḍīb al-aḥkām* entitled *Eḥyā' al-aḥādīṭ fi šarḥ tahḍīb al-ḥadīṭ*, and *Ḥadiqat al-mottaqīn fi ma'arafat aḥkām al-dīn li-erteqā' ma'ārej al-yaqīn* deserve special mention. From this it becomes clear that he concentrated his activity nearly exclusively on the transmission of Shi'ite Hadith. In his view, the traditions of the Imams were the noblest of the religious sciences and the only way to understand the Qor'an, especially its unclear passages, as well as to gain religious knowledge in general (cf. the remarks in some of his *ejāzāt*: Tonokāboni, *Qeşaş*, 230; Majlesi, *Behār*, CX, pp. 73, 74). In this, he perfectly followed the Aḳbāri current and may well have served as the most important model for his son Mo ḥammad-Bāqer, who was to embark on the monumental Hadith compilation *Behār al-anwār* after his father's death.

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