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The Development of Shaykhī Thought in
Shī'ī Islam

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by

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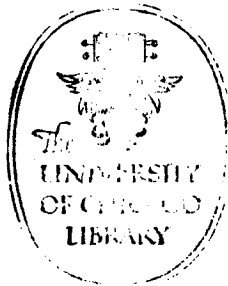
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter	
I. The Religious, Intellectual Climate of Iran During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century	12
II. Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī: His Life and Works	36
III. The Basic Shaykhī Ontological Doctrines	69
IV. The Basic Shaykhī Eschatological Doctrines	102
V. Developments in the Shaykhī School After the Death of Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī	102
VI. Shaykhī Teachings that Paved the Way for the Bāb	167
VII. The Relationship of Shaykhī Doctrines to the Religious Thought of the Bāb	191
Conclusion	213
Appendices	218
Bibliography	221

To My Parents

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND QURANIC REFERENCES

The transliteration system employed in this work for Arabic romanization is that of the Library of Congress. Persian personal names, words in book titles, and geographical names, however, are transliterated according to the standard Persian pronunciation. Titles of certain well-known figures are given in the form by which they are usually reproduced in English (e.g., Bahā'u'llāh).

For the noun, "Shī'a" is used; for the adjective, "Shī'i."

All Quranic references are to the English translation of the Qur'ān by Maulvi Muhammad Ali (London, 1917).

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 - 2- Seven articles, "Mutamimāt-i Umm al-Kitāb" (The Supplements to the Kitāb-i Aqdas) published in Āhang-i Badī', (1976- --). The series is continuing.
 - 3- "Hadaf va Ravesh dar Taḥqīq-i Ma'ārif-i Bahā'ī", (Purpose and Method in Studying the Bahā'ī Writings), Āhang-i Badī', 1977.
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, Shi'ī Islam has witnessed numerous sectarian developments and extremes of ideological diversity. One of the most important and influential developments occurred during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī (d. 1241/1825) founded a new school of thought which, although still within the Shi'ī fold, became the focus of sectarian polemics. Shaykh Ahmad maintained that the religious leaders no longer taught the truth, and that truth should be received directly from divine sources. His school was the direct result of the religious and social struggles of the period, and it, in turn, later contributed to social and religious change.

To place the Shaykhī¹ school in the context of Islamic schism, it is useful to sketch the definition of and approach toward religious sects in general as formulated by Western scholars on the basis of study of Christian sects, and then to provide an Islamic perspective on the subject.

The term "sect" refers to a body of believers which has become separated from the main body of the religious community. While one sect of a religious body differs in nature, ideology, and purpose from other sects of the same religion, sociological studies show that sects share certain common social features: they originate out of protest, whether aggressive or nonaggressive, against the parent organization's beliefs, doctrines, or rituals; they usually consist

of people who belong to a lower class than the members of the parent church and are sometimes geographically isolated; they almost always begin functioning under a charismatic leader; and they come into being as a result of the church's inability to meet the social and psychological needs of some of its members.

B. R. Wilson, a leading authority on sectarianism, has distinguished six types of sects on the basis of the sect's response to the world: (1) conversionist sects, whose "reaction towards the outside world is to suggest that the latter is corrupted because man is corrupted";² (2) revolutionary sects, whose "attitude towards the outside world is summed up in a desire to be rid of the present social order when the time is ripe--if necessary, by force and violence";³ (3) introversionist sects, "whose response to the world is neither to convert the population nor to expect the world's overturn, but simply in retiring from it to enjoy the security gained by personal holiness. This type is completely indifferent to social reforms, to individual conversion and to social revolutions";⁴ (4) manipulationist sects, which, "previously called gnostic, are those which insist especially on a particular and distinctive knowledge. They define themselves vis-à-vis the outside world essentially by accepting its goals";⁵ (5) thaumaturgical sects, or "movements which insist that it is possible for men to experience the extraordinary effect of the supernatural on their lives";⁶ and (6) reformist sects, which "seem to

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam

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In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (d. 1241/1825), a native of Aḥsā, founded a new school of thought within the Imāmī Shī'a. The heterodox doctrines of Shaykh Aḥmad laid the foundations for a new approach to Shī'ī theology and caused the traditional Shī'ī theologians to denounce him as an innovator in their polemical works.

Shaykh Aḥmad's doctrines were a synthesis of the views of the Akhbārī and the Uṣūlī schools. He emphasized the importance of the imāms and prepared his students for the advent of the Twelfth Imām or Mahdī, whose appearance had been expected for centuries.

Shaykh Aḥmad wrote extensively, traveled widely and, with his erudition and personal magnetism, won over adherents from different parts of the country and from different social and intellectual backgrounds including many members

of the royal family.

After Shaykh Aḥmad's death, the leadership of his school fell to Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, his close student, who continued Shaykh Aḥmad's approach and, in numerous works, elaborated his thoughts. The death of Sayyid Kāẓim was followed by a series of crises, aggravated by the fact that he did not designate a successor.

The teachings, particularly the predictions, of both Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim prepared their followers for the acceptance of the expected Mahdī. When the Bāb, the founder of the Bābī religious movement, claimed (in 1260/1844) that he was the expected one, many Shaykhīs accepted his claim.

The Shaykhī school was the latter branch of the Imāmī Shī'a, an intellectual link between Islam and the Bābī movement, and a point of departure for a series of religious and social developments in later periods which had a great impact upon the intellectual life of the Persians.

constitute a case apart. But the dynamic analytic approach to religious movements demands a category corresponding to those groups which, though sectarian in more than one respect, have affected transformations in their early response towards the outside world."⁷

In the Western literature on Islamic schism, essential terms such as "sect," "theological school," "group," and "school of law" are used inconsistently and often interchangeably. For example, the writers of articles in the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam have used the various terms listed above to define or describe schisms with common elements and similar natures. There one finds under "al-Mur^ḍji'a," "name of one of the early sects of Islam,"⁸ and under "al-Mu'tazila" one reads, "the name of the great theological school which created the speculative dogmatics of Islam."⁹ The "Khāridjites" are called "the earliest of the religious sects,"¹⁰ and "al-Zaidiyya" are described as "the practical groups of the Shī'a."¹¹ Furthermore, "Mālikīs" are called "the school of law,"¹² and for the "Ḥanafites" the Arabic term "madhhab"--without even its equivalent in English (which could be "school")--is used.¹³

In contrast to the undifferentiated approach illustrated above, the introduction to al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq, a well-known book by one of the most eminent Muslim heresiographers, Abū Maṣṣūr 'Abd al-Qādir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), is a good example of a Muslim scholar's approach toward and evaluation of sects in an Islamic

context.

According to al-Baghdādī, a Tradition on the authority of the Prophet Muḥammad reads, "My people will be divided into seventy-three firga [sections, groups] of which only one will be saved."¹⁴ Al-Baghdādī categorizes the Islamic sects into seventy-three, of which the only one to be "saved" is the Sunnī. He differentiates the groups into two main categories. The first category deals with theological questions such as the understanding of God, His unity, justice, and other attributes; free will versus predestination; the possibility of seeing God on the Day of Judgement; and the qualities of the Prophet Muḥammad. Each sect maintains its own attitude toward these questions, and each group, considering itself right and justified, accuses the others of being infidels. The second category comprises jurisprudential questions defined by an understanding of Quranic teachings. The jurisprudential attitudes of a sect are not considered grounds for accusing its members of being infidels.

To decide who belonged to the saved sect and who did not, al-Baghdādī had to provide a definition for the term "Muslim." He enumerates various definitions according to different sects, and then he states the definition which, apparently, is accepted by the saved sect, namely the Sunnīs.

According to the Karāmīya sect, a Muslim is one who believes in the oneness of God and in His Prophet Muḥammad.

According to another sect, a Muslim is one who believes that (1) the universe is accidental (hādīth), (2) God and His attributes are eternal, (3) Muḥammad is the messenger of God for the entire human world, (4) Muḥammad's religion will last forever, (5) the Qur'ān is the main source for religious order, and (6) the Ka'ba is the direction of obligatory prayer. Al-Baghdādī then asserts, as the last condition of belief, that a true Muslim does not set up or adhere to heretical doctrine (bid'ā), of which he identifies two categories. The first category of heretical doctrine causes a believer (Muslim) to become a nonbeliever. For example, the members of Bayānīya or Mughayrīya sects would not be considered Muslims because they maintain the divinity of the imāms. Belief in incarnation, or belief in the acceptability of marriage between a man and his daughter's daughter, which was practiced by the Maymūnīya, made them cease to be Muslims, according to al-Baghdādī. Similarly, the belief that Islam would be abrogated on the Last Day was a heretical doctrine which caused the Abāqīya to become non-Muslims in his view.

The second category of heretical doctrine does not cause the believer to become a nonbeliever, but it does deprive him of some social rights. For example, he can neither lead the group prayer nor marry a woman from among the saved sect, the Sunnīs.

Al-Baghdādī's approach to Islamic sects appears to imply that only heretical doctrines concerning religious

matters played a role in generating new sects in Islam. To support his claim that social and economic factors did not play any part, he contends that the controversial issues raised immediately after the death of the Prophet were also of theological or religious nature, and that Abū Bakr, who became the first successor (caliph) of the Prophet, solved them all by quoting the Prophet's statements (hadīth); thus, none of the issues caused schism in Islam at that time. Such controversial issues included the question of whether the Prophet was dead or had ascended to heaven like Jesus; whether the Prophet should be buried in Mecca, his birthplace, or in Medina, the city of Emigration where he established his religion; whether the Prophet's successor (imām) could be a man from outside the Prophet's clan (Quraysh) or had to be a member of the Quraysh. Although every one of these issues had immediate socio-political implications, it is significant that traditional Muslim perspective assigns merely theological value to them. In fact, two jurisprudential issues had been raised: (1) could anyone inherit from the Prophet, or did his property belong to the community? and (2) was a non-zakāt (alms) payer still a Muslim? Even the imamate, the question of who would succeed the Prophet, which split Islam, was originally perceived as a religious issue and only later developed into a social and political dispute.

In actuality, the "religious" problems that caused schism in Islam, like the issue of the imamate, could also

fall into the categories of jurisprudential, theological, and philosophical differences in the interpretation of the Qur'ān and hadīth, the validity and authenticity of hadīth, daily worship practices, and theological discussions about God, the prophets, the angels, and man's predestination or free will.

The applicability of the terms "sect," "movement," "school," and so on, to these doctrines depends upon the definition of these terms within the framework of Islamic history, the social function of the group, its sense of group solidarity, and the relationship of the schismatic group to the parent group. It must be borne in mind, however, that it is nearly impossible to draw a line between "sects" and "schools" in Islam, or to affix a certain term to a certain group and expect the term to be applicable in all the historical phases of that group.

The Shaykhī school has been referred to in Persian works as "firqa" (division, section) or "madhhab" (school, religious creed), but more often as "Shaykhīya," a term consisting of "Shaykh" and the suffix "īya" which denotes either a group of people who follow a certain person, for example, "Zaydīya," or a group with a certain ideological system, such as "Qadārīya."

In this work the term "Shaykhī school" is used, being the preferred term of the Shaykhīs themselves and appropriate to a theological study of the Shaykhī ideology, which is intended as a primary attempt at clarification of the

intellectual parameters of the Shaykhī school, as well as examining the issue in its wider historical context.

The Shaykhī school, although primarily a theological school, had definite practical and sociological implications, promoted group cohesion, strengthened the moral order, and offered new approaches toward dogmatic, traditional principles of Shī'ī thought. Although the school's theoretical approaches were a revolution in the Shī'a, they were strongly rooted in Shī'ī Traditions and the utterances of the Shī'ī imāns. The school reevaluated Shī'ī dogmas, redefined the religious norms, reconsidered the traditional understanding of Shī'ī beliefs, and introduced a series of new doctrines, not in the name of a new independent value-oriented movement or religious revolution, but as a system which claimed to be the very essence of Shī'ī thought. Many Shī'ī authorities did not accept this claim, however, and considered the Shaykhī school to be heresy.

The doctrines of the Shaykhī school were a syncretism of indigenous religious Shī'ī beliefs, and were not imported from foreign cultural or religious ideologies. Of the theological, sociological, and ritual aspects that characterize the school, this study is concerned mainly with the theological aspects, for it is the theological doctrines of the school that form its strongest connection to the mainstream of Shī'ī thought, and also constitute the most significant links between the school and the Bābī religious movement. In studying the theology of the school, only the

basic ideas of Shaykhī ontology and eschatology will be discussed. A detailed discussion of the sources which influenced the Shaykhī school, and of nature of the similarities between the ideology of the Shaykhī school and other theological and philosophical trends of thought, is beyond the scope of this work.

In spite of the fact that numerous significant social and political events took place during this era, few scholarly works about the period have been written. The religious and intellectual climate has received even less scholarly attention. The abundance of historical sources,¹⁵ travelers' narratives, biographical works, political documents, and religious treatises produced in this era requires careful study and presents a challenge to the scholar.

This study employs an analytical approach based on primary sources written by Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, his successor. In discussing points of controversy between the Shaykhī school and other trends of thought, reference is made to scholarly works by specialists in the field.

Shaykh Ahmad's contribution in reconciling conflicting beliefs unified a group of people from different social backgrounds and geographical regions and prepared them intellectually to accept the Bāb, who in the middle of the nineteenth century claimed to be the fulfillment of the Islamic expectation of the Mahdī and ultimately proclaimed

that his was a religious system independent of Islam, with a new revealed Holy Book.

While the Shaykhī school was not a value-oriented, religious revolutionary, messianic, and charismatic movement, it contained the seeds of all these features, which were later to germinate and develop to fruition in the Bābī movement, a movement which proved to be broader in scope and more comprehensive in ideology than the Shaykhī school which had preceded it.

1. The term "Shaykhī," the adjective from the word "Shaykh," is derived from the title of Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī.
2. B. R. Wilson, "A Typology of Sects," Sociology of Religion, ed. Roland Robertson (Great Britain: Penguin Education, 1969), p. 364.
3. Ibid., p. 365.
4. Ibid., p. 366.
5. Ibid., p. 367.
6. Ibid., p. 368.
7. Ibid., p. 369.
8. Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1953 ed., s.v. "al-Murdjī'a," by A. J. Wensinck.
9. Ibid., s.v. "al-Mu'tazila," by H. S. Nyberg.
10. Ibid., s.v. "Khāridjites," by G. levi della Vida.
11. Ibid., s.v. "al-Zaidīya," by R. Strothmann.
12. Ibid., s.v. "Mālikīs," by W. Heffening.
13. Ibid., s.v. "Ḥanafites," by W. Heffening.
14. Abū Maṣū'ir 'Abd al-Qādir al-Baḡhdādī, al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq (Tehrān: Amīr Kabīr, 1344), p. 3.
15. Hafez Farmayan remarks that, "No period in Persian History is so rich in source materials as that of the recent Qājār (1794-1925)." "Observations on Sources for the Study of Nineteenth- and Twentieth Century Iranian History," International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 5 (Jan. 1974), No. 1, p. 41.

The Religious, Intellectual Climate of Iran During
the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

The Qājār period (1193/1779-1342/1924) was characterized by the transformation of long-established institutions and the emergence of new approaches to social and religious life in Iran. It was a period of despair, of decline in intellectual creativity, and of spiritual and material deprivation. It was a period of European imperialistic designs, during which Eastern and Western cultures met and clashed. The transformation of institutions gave rise to several major political and religious reforms which, in depth, scope, and creativity, differed from many other reforms in Persian history.

Shī'ī Islam, as the fundamental element in the life, manners, and attitudes of the Persians, has had a great influence upon the mentality, character, and attitudes of the Persians in their social and private life. Islam has also played a peculiar and influential role in all aspects of the intellectual and moral climate of the nation. Therefore, no study of the socio-political history of the Persians could be attempted without a close consideration of religious attitudes.

A comprehensive study of the religious climate of the period is still to be undertaken. In such a study, the activities of the religious circles, the life and the

contributions of the individual 'ulamā, and relations among the 'ulamā themselves and with the people, rulers, and religious minorities are important elements which must be considered in order to comprehend the roots of the religious reforms.

The intent of the present chapter is to sketch the basic facts in the religious life of the Persians in order to provide a foundation for the discussion of the main Shaykhī doctrines.

Shī'ī Islam has been a factor in the religious life of Iran from the early period of the Islamic era. From the Safavīd period (907/1501-1145/1732), to the present, except for a short time during the Afshār Dynasty (1148/1736-1210/1795), Shī'a has been the official religious system of Iran. The strong intellectual connection of the Persian Shī'a with the Shī'ī centers of 'Atabāt¹ must be emphasized. The holy shrines of the Shī'ī imāms and the Shī'ī circles of 'Atabāt have always attracted the Persian Shī'a and have been the most respected places for Shī'ī studies in the Islamic world. Although Iran has several well-known centers for these studies, such as Mashhad, Qom, Iṣfahān, and Tehrān, it is generally believed that the best schools and the most qualified teachers for advanced studies in Shī'ī doctrines are located in 'Atabāt. Attendance at the lectures of the Shī'ī 'ulamā in 'Atabāt and study in their circles is the utmost desire of the Shī'ī knowledge seeker.

The curriculum of the circles consists of the study of

the Qur'ān, Shī'ī tafsīr (interpretation), hadīth (Tradition), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and Arabic grammar. The students begin their career by memorizing the Qur'ān and by studying the Arabic language through memorization of the Niṣāb al-Ṣibyān of Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Abī Bakr Farāhī (d. 1208/1793). Alongside the Niṣāb, or a little later in their studies, the Amthila and Ṣarf Mīr of Mīr Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī (816/1413) are studied as basic texts for Arabic grammar. In the literary sciences (e.g., Ma'ānī, Bayān, and Badī'), the Muṭawwal of Mas'ūd b. 'Umar Sa'd Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390) is the basic text. In principles of jurisprudence the Ma'ālim al-Uṣūl of Shaykh Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn al-Shahīd al-Thānī, or the Qawānīn al-Muḥkama fi al-Uṣūl of Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad Ḥasan, known as Mīrzā-i Qomī (d. 1231/1815), is taught. Although the basic courses offered in each circle are almost identical, the material covered in each course and the duration of the course depends on the interest of the teacher.²

Fields of specialization do not exist, and each learned man can teach whatever he wishes. The teachers of higher rank are expected to answer any questions and discuss any religious issue. In spite of the lack of specialization in religious studies, some of the 'ulamā are better known for their knowledge and authority in certain fields. The most respected teachers are those who can teach different courses to many students.

The term of study in 'Atabāt is not fixed. Students

may stay in 'Atabāt anywhere from a few months to five, or even seven, years. They usually complete a course by writing a treatise on a religious subject. If the treatise is approved by the teacher, the writer is awarded an ijāza (authorization, license).³ An ijāza is a great honor for a student and the official recognition of his academic, moral, and religious qualifications. The fame and the esteem of the issuer of an ijāza is significant for the later religious and academic life of the receiver: biographical books always provide the names of the 'ulamā from whom the 'ālim has received his ijāzas.⁴

In spite of the fact that the religious circles of 'Atabāt and Iran provided religious education for hundreds of Shī'a, the general public, which was illiterate, lacked any formal religious education, and the general knowledge of the Shī'i community rarely went beyond the details of daily rituals. In such a society, the religious understanding of the individuals is based on obedience to religious leaders. The fact that in Persian society only a certain group of people receive a religious education is partly due to the fact that a person traditionally follows the occupation of his father, and, as a result, several members of one family often receive a good education, and even reach the highest ranks of religious leadership.⁵

During this period, a great number of books and treatises were written in various fields of Islamic sciences.⁶ It is reported, for example, that Mullā Muḥammad

Ja'far Astarābādī (d. 1263/1846) wrote 70 books,⁷ and Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1259/1843) wrote 150.⁸ Although, on the basis of these reports, the number of religious works of the period approaches several thousand volumes, the majority of them are in the nature of marginal notes to the well-known works of the earlier Shī'i writers. Rather than encouraging originality and creativity, Shī'i scholarship has pursued various forms of tagrīz (eulogy), tahshīya (insertion), and talkhīz (abridgment) on the important works of the past.⁹ For example, among the works written by Astarābādī, fourteen are in the form of tahshīya and sharḥ (exegesis).¹⁰

Very rarely did an 'ālim concentrate his works in one field. Fame and popularity among the 'ulamā also depended on their versatility. The result was a multitude of authors who contributed very little to the critical study of Shī'i scholarship.

The language of the scholarly texts in Islam has always been Arabic. Although during this period the tendency toward writing religious texts in Persian was beginning to increase among some of the 'ulamā, the main works of all the distinguished 'ulamā were still being written in Arabic.

An examination of the religious works of the period reveals that aside from a few influential and well-respected works on fiqh, such as Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī's (d. 1281/1864) works, greatest attention was given primarily to the minor questions of fiqh, while much less attention was given other religious fields. This is understandable, for each mujtahid

tried to consolidate his authority as the "marja'-i taqlid" by providing an immediate and personal framework of legal sanctions relating to a plethora of daily dilemmas in the lives of his followers. Works on fiqh were so common that it is hard to find an 'ālim who did not write a few works on this subject. It is not surprising, then, that only a small number of them have been accepted and widely used by the entire Shī'ī community.

In the field of tafsīr nothing was written that is comparable, either in length or in quality, to the earlier Shī'ī tafsīrs, such as the Majma' al-Bayān by Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153).¹¹ The well-known books of tafsīr written in this period are commentaries on a few verses or chapters of the Qur'ān. A full, comprehensive commentary was not attempted.¹²

The 'ulamā, collectively known in Persian society as the Jāmi'a-i Rūhānīyat (the spiritual concourse), were in charge of religious rituals.¹³ The members of this group, although differing from one another in rank, all functioned as commentators on the Qur'ān and Islamic law, religious leaders, judges, teachers, arbitrators, managers of the holy shrines, and recipients of the income of the religious endowments (auqāf). They were also entitled to receive the khums¹⁴ on behalf of the imāms.

The 'ulamā were in charge of various socio-religious affairs of the community. They were trusted by the people as representatives of the holy imāms among the Shī'ā. They

were also considered the true leaders, decision makers, reliable sources, and leading authorities in religious doctrine, and were thought to be the arbiters of the common good of the community. Such an attitude gave the 'ulamā power and influence and enabled them to assume leading roles in social conflicts. The 'ulamā were also a refuge for people who were treated unjustly. In this respect they were the main link between the ruling class and the masses.

The involvement of the 'ulamā in various socio-religious affairs produced a noticeable competition among them for students, attendance at daily prayers, and income from auqāf. In most cases, it was accompanied by ideological disputes. The most common device used against one's rivals was takfīr (accusing someone of being an infidel), which could cause the accused person to lose his following and even be put to death by the followers of the issuer of the takfīr. Takfīr was always pronounced in the name of defending and protecting Islamic interests.

The relationship between the 'ulamā and the ruling class was not fixed and determined. It varied on an individual as well as temporal basis. As the nature of the relationship was affected by many factors, any generalization on this subject must be made with care. Since religion was the most influential factor in the private and social life of the Islamic community, naturally the 'ulamā were the most respected and influential group. They ascribed to themselves the roles of interpreters of the Word of God and

protectors of Islam on earth. As a result of such functions, the rulers of Islamic societies needed the support of the 'ulamā to consolidate their political positions. They would obtain wider support and popularity if they could establish friendly relations with the 'ulamā. Politically or militarily weak rulers particularly required their support. It is generally true that, as the power and stability of a ruler increased, his appeal for 'ulamā's support decreased, but it must immediately be added that the personal tendencies of the ruler played a fundamental role in defining his relations with the 'ulamā. A ruler with a religious interest was more attached to the 'ulamā than a ruler lacking such an interest. From the standpoint of the 'ulamā, the personal tendencies of the 'ālim were significant in defining his relations with the rulers. While some of the 'ulamā were so detached from material involvement that they paid no heed to the rulers, others were active in political affairs. This group, which did not object to being paid by the court, carried out its commands and tended to forget their roles as spiritual leaders. It is true, however, that an 'ālim was better able to fulfill his function if he had a satisfactory relationship with the rulers. Mutual support was, therefore, of benefit to both sides.

Fath 'Alī Shāh (d. 1250/1834), who was a man with a strong religious sense,¹⁵ respected, financially supported, and paid visits to the 'ulamā. The Shāh invited Mullā Ja'far of Astarābād (d. 1263/1846) to Tehrān and housed him

near the royal palace, visiting him at least once a month.¹⁶ It is also reported that Fath 'Alī Shāh visited Mullā 'Abd Allāh Zomozi (d. 1257/1841) and presented gifts to him and to his students.¹⁷ Mulla 'Abd al-Razzaq Donbolī (d. 1242/1820) states that Nāyib al-Salṭana 'Abbās Mīrzā (d. 1249/1833) and Qā'im Maqām (d. 1251/1835) expressed the utmost respect for the 'ulamā. Nāyib al-Salṭana was said to attend the congregational prayer every Friday, and Qā'im Maqām would host a reception for the 'ulamā every Thursday and Friday.¹⁸ It is also reported that Muḥammad 'Alī Mīrzā (d. 1237/1821), son of Fath 'Alī Shāh and the governor of Kermānshāh, invited Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (d. 1241/1825) to Kermānshāh and paid him one thousand tomāns¹⁹ for his travel expenses. Shaykh Aḥmad was also paid a monthly salary of seven hundred tomāns.²⁰

In spite of such generosity and kindness, rulers did not tolerate any serious opposition from the 'ulamā: whenever the 'ulamā threatened the security of a ruler, he would act against them.²¹

Doctrinal conflict and crisis was at a high level during this period and affected the entire life and attitude of the Persian Shī'a. In the year 260/873 when, according to the Shī'ī belief, the Twelfth Imām disappeared in Sāmarrā and his occultation (ghaybat) began, the Shī'a were cut off from his direct religious and spiritual guidance. Prior to that time, religious problems had been solved by asking his advice or by emulating his conduct, deeds, and words.

Therefore, the Traditions were consulted as the main sources for Islamic law. This situation continued until the end of the Lesser Occultation (which began in 260/873 and ended in 329/940).²² By the beginning of the Greater Occultation (329/940), the Shī'ā could only refer to the Qur'ān and the Traditions on the authority of the Prophet and the imāms, since all material connection with the imāms had been severed in 329/940. In the early decades of the occultation period, the most important collections of Traditions, which are considered to be second in validity only to the Qur'ān, were compiled by Kolaynī (d. 329/940), Ṣadūq (Ibn Bābawayh) (d. 381/991), and Ṭosī (460/1067).

The occultation of the imām raised a fundamental question: who would be the center of authority and what would be the sources of legislation? Some Shī'ī scholars believed it was permissible to employ "reason" to solve problems for which the Qur'ān and the Traditions offered no clear solutions. Other Shī'ī scholars considered the Qur'ān and the Traditions to be sufficient sources for legislation and maintained that there was no need to use individual reasoning for new religious cases. In the early period, the dispute between the two groups, although important, did not create a serious rift in the Shī'ī community, but in the late fifteenth century, when confessional affiliation assumed major importance in the tribal struggles for power in northwestern Iran, the gap widened until two separate groups, the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs, emerged.

The Akhbārīs identify as the earliest Akhbārī scholars Kolaynī and Ṣadūq, who collected and classified the Traditions. The next great Shī'ī scholar was Muḥammad b. 'Alī known as Ibn Abī Jumhūr of Aḥsā (d. about 901/1495),²³ who appeared a full five centuries later. Akhbārī theology, with a distinct ideological system, begins with Mullā Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1026 or 1031 or 1036/1617, 1621 or 1626).

Mullā Muḥammad Amīn b. Muḥammad Sharīf Astarābādī was born in Astarābād and resided in Mecca and Medina. He was the first 'ālim to challenge the authenticity of the mujtahids' (Uṣūlīs') judgments,²⁴ and in many books, including the Fawā'id al-Madanīya, accused the mujtahids of being the cause of corruption in Islam.²⁵ Although the founding of the Akhbārī school by Astarābādī marks the division of the Shī'ī 'ulamā into two antagonistic groups, it was not until the eighteenth century that the Uṣūlī ideology was identified with a particular founder.

After Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī, the Akhbārī school included a number of scholars such as Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), who wrote the Safīnat al-Najāt and criticized the Uṣūlīs. Fayḍ states in the Safīnat al-Najāt that religious legislation can be based only on the Qur'ān and the Traditions, not on the other sources used by the Uṣūlīs.²⁶ After Fayḍ, the doctrines of the Akhbārī school were developed by 'ulamā such as Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir of Qom (d. 1098/1686), Mullā Khalīl b. Ghāzī of Qazvīn (d. 1098/

1686),²⁷ and Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Ḥurr 'Āmilī (d. 1033/1623). Among these, Shaykh 'Āmilī is the most important because of his work, Wasā'il al-Shī'a. He also wrote the Fawā'id al-Tosīya, a book on Akhbārī ideology which attacked the approach of the Uṣūlīs. In addition to the above works, 'Āmilī wrote the Hadīyat al-Abrār, devoted to the disputes between the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs. He also wrote the Hidāyat al-Umma ilā Ahkām al-A'imma. As a major voice of "learned orthodoxy," he was opposed to the "ecstatic heterodoxy" of the Ṣūfīs.²⁸

The views of Astarābādī, which were supported and enriched by the later Akhbārī 'ulamā, were accepted by the majority of the Shī'a in Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf provinces. Shaykh 'Alī b. Sulaymān Baḥraynī (d. 1062/1651) established the Akhbārī school in Baḥrayn²⁹ and was followed by Shaykh Sulaymān b. 'Abd Allāh Māhūzī (d. 1121/1709) and his students. The intellectual activities of the Akhbārīs in Baḥrayn made the province a major Akhbārī center. The most distinguished Akhbārī scholar of Baḥrayn was Shaykh 'Abd Allāh b. Ṣāliḥ Samāhījī (d. 1135/1722), who severely attacked Uṣūlī beliefs and went to extremes in his enmity toward the Uṣūlīs. Samāhījī has described the views of the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs in two of his works. The first, the Munyat al-Mumārīsīn fī Ajwabat Su'ālāt al-Shaykh Yāsīn (Yāsīn b. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn), was cited by the famous biographer Mīrzā Muḥammad Bāqir Khānsārī (d. 1313/1895) to describe the ideological differences between the two groups. The second,

al-Nūhiya, clearly states that the Shī'a are not obliged to obey the mujtahids because such an obligation is not established by God, the Prophet, or the imāms.³⁰

The later Akhbārī scholar, Shaykh Yūsuf b. Aḥmad Baḥraynī (d. 1186/1772), well-known for his books, the Hadā'iq al-Nāqira and the Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn, was a moderate. He criticized the extremist Akhbārīs in his work, al-Durr al-Najafīya fī Radd al-Akhbārīya.³¹ It was during the lifetime of this man that the founder of the Uṣūlī school, Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Akmal al-Dīn of Behbahān (d. 1205/1790), known as Waḥīd Behbahānī, rose against the Akhbārīs, and Shaykh Yūsuf Baḥraynī gave way to the new Uṣūlī ideology.

Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Nabī Akhbārī (d. 1232/1816), better known as Muḥaddith Nīshāborī, was the last distinguished Akhbārī scholar. He wrote the Qal' al-Asās fī Naqḍ Asās al-Uṣūl³² and the Maṣādir al-Anwār fī al-Ijtihād wa al-Akhbār to criticize the Uṣūlī mujtahids. Muḥaddith Nīshāborī was killed by the Uṣūlīs in 1232/1816 in Kaḏīmāyn at the age of 54.³³

The persecution of Muḥaddith Nīshāborī and the rise of Muḥammad Bāqir Behbahānī put an end to the Akhbārī school; Akhbārī ideology, which had for centuries dominated the religious and intellectual life of the Shī'a in the main Shī'ī scholastic centers, was replaced by the Uṣūlī ideology.

Although the historical roots of Uṣūlī thought go back

to the occultation period, and since then there have been numerous Uṣūlī 'ulamā among the Shī'ā, Muḥammad Bāqir Behbahānī is considered to be the founder of the Uṣūlī school.³⁴ The new jurisprudential system he formulated was subsequently adopted by the Shī'ā, and with some modifications was accepted by well-known scholars such as Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī and Mullā Muḥammad Kāzīm (d. 1329/1911), known as Ākhond Khorāsānī.

Because of his contribution to the formulation of Uṣūlī thought, Behbahānī became known among the Shī'ā as Mu'assis Behbahānī (Founder), Murawwij Behbahānī (Disseminator), Ostād-i Akbar (Great Teacher), and Ostād-i Kull (The Teacher of Everyone). He wrote a number of books, mostly in Persian, among which the Risāla dar Ijtihād va Akhbār is significant for its repudiation of Akhbārī views and for its support of the position of the mujtahid and his functions, namely, ijtihād (individual judgment).³⁵ He also wrote two other works on the same subject: Inḥiṣār-i Mardom bi Mujtahid va Muqallid,³⁶ on the theme that people are either legists or imitators, and the Fawā'id al-Uṣūlīya, a refutation of the Fawā'id al-Madaniya of Muḥammad Amīn b. Muḥammad Sharīf Astarābādī.

Behbahānī's views on the legislative authority of the 'ulamā won universal acceptance in Shī'ī circles through the work and efforts of some distinguished students of the Behbahānī circle who wrote, preached, and popularized the viewpoints of the Uṣūlīs. One of these was Shaykh Ja'far

Najafī (d. 1227/1812), the author of the well-known work, Kashf al-Ghiṭā. The beginning of this book is devoted to a description of the Uṣūlī approach to legislative problems. Najafī also wrote two other works on the same subject: the first, al-Haqq al-Mubīn fi al-Radd 'ala al-Akhhārīyīn,³⁷ to discuss the views of two parties and to reject the extremist Akhbārīs, and the second, another Kashf al-Ghiṭā, to refute the views of Muḥaddith Nīshāborī. Najafī sent a copy of this book to Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh to prove to him the falsity of the beliefs of the Akhbārīs and of their leading authority, Muḥaddith Nīshāborī.³⁸

Behbahānī's views were elaborated in the works of the later Uṣūlīs, and the repudiation of the Akhbārīs continued in the works of other Uṣūlī 'ulamā such as Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1242/1826).³⁹ The dispute between the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs did not remain on an intellectual level. It became so intense that the Uṣūlīs killed Muḥaddith Nīshāborī for his Akhbārī views and fed his body to the dogs.⁴⁰

The polemical works⁴¹ of the Uṣūlīs and their violent measures against the Akhbārīs caused the Akhbārīs to lose their leadership of the Shī'ī community. The transfer of religious leadership from the Akhbārīs to the Uṣūlīs was a turning point in the history of Shī'ī doctrine. It gave the 'ulamā an active role in the political and social development of the nation. The leadership of the Uṣūlī 'ulamā, such as that of Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī,

known as Mujāhid,⁴² against the Russians (in 1241/1825) during the reign of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh, is a clear example of the part the Uṣūlīs played in shaping the destiny of the Persian nation.⁴³

The crucial doctrine of the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs rests on the question of the authority of the religious leader.⁴⁴ The Uṣūlīs believe that a Shī'ā can reach the position of ijtihād through his personal study of Islamic sciences. A man who is well educated and known for his piety, nobility, and moral standing may become a mujtahid. Whoever reaches these required qualifications⁴⁵ is able to interpret Islamic law and legislate regulations which do not already exist in the Qur'ān and the Traditions. In addition, the Uṣūlīs believe that a mujtahid is the representative of the imām among the Shī'ā and that obedience to the mujtahid is obligatory in the Shī'ī community. Therefore, the personal understanding and judgment of a mujtahid, which is based on the Qur'ān and the Traditions, must be accepted and followed by the Shī'ā who are the imitators (muqallid) of the mujtahid. Thus, the Uṣūlīs believe that the "gate" (bāb) of ijtihād is open for the Shī'ā.

For the Akhbārīs, on the other hand, the personal understanding of the mujtahid is not acceptable. While the Akhbārīs hold that only the text of the Qur'ān and the Traditions are legitimate sources for legislation, the Uṣūlīs maintain that the principles (uṣūl) from which solutions to religious problems can be derived are four:

(1) the Kitāb (Qur'ān), (2) the sunna (the deeds, conduct, and sayings of the Prophet and the imāms, i.e., Traditions), (3) ijmā' (consensus of the authorities in a legal question the precedent for which does not exist in the first and second sources), and (4) 'aql (reason).

Since the Traditions are substantially significant for the Akhbārīs, they give full validity to all of the Traditions collected in the Four Books of the Shī'ī Traditions, namely, Kāfī, Tahdhīb, Istibṣār, and Man lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh. For the Uṣūlīs, on the contrary, the contents of the Four Books do not have the same validity.

The Uṣūlīs allow action on the basis of "opinion" (ẓann) when they cannot reach "knowledge" ('ilm), whereas the Akhbārīs do not trust opinion. They contend that knowledge is always attainable from the Traditions and is trustworthy.

Uṣūlī doctrine maintains that there are two groups in Shī'ī society: (1) mujtahids (legalists formulating independent decisions in legal or theological matters, based on the interpretation and application of the four uṣūl), and (2) muqallids (imitators, who imitate the mujtahids as their religious guides). The Akhbārīs believe that the Shī'ā must only imitate the infallible figures, that is, the imāms, and not the mujtahids, who are not infallible.

Concerning ijtihād, the Uṣūlīs assert that it is possible for anyone to reach the position of ijtihād through his personal endeavors during the occultation period (which

lasts until the appearance of the Mahdī), and whenever he has reached that position he is qualified to legislate religious regulations. The Akhbārīs, on the other hand, believe that perfect religious knowledge cannot be obtained during the period of occultation because knowledge must be obtained from infallible sources, i.e., the imāms: thus knowledge is obtainable only from the Traditions. Therefore, they deny that the mujtahids possess perfect knowledge and understanding on religious questions.

The 'Ilm al-Uṣūl'⁴⁶ is a significant field of study for the Uṣūlīs and a mujtahid must be a master in this field. The Akhbārīs disregard the 'Ilm al-Uṣūl' and believe that sound knowledge of the terminologies employed in the Traditions is sufficient to understand the law.

Another fundamental point of dispute between the two schools deals with the imitation of a deceased mujtahid. While the Uṣūlīs do not regard it lawful to imitate a deceased mujtahid, the Akhbārīs do.

Regarding the use of the Qur'ān and the Traditions, the Uṣūlīs prefer to use the esoteric meaning of these works, whereas the Akhbārīs are inclined to use the interpretations of the Qur'ān and the Traditions offered by the imāms, if they are available. In regard to the "chain of Traditions," while the Uṣūlīs do not allow reference to Traditions related by an authority who is not infallible, the Akhbārīs recognize as authentic Traditions related by ordinary people.

A comparison of the two schools shows that the Uṣūlī

school believes in the individual authority of the mujtahids. The school also admits the freedom of personal understanding and, as a result, keeps the "gate" of ijtihād open. The flexibility of the Uṣūlī approach toward law may have been the major reason for its appeal to the majority of the Shī'a. This flexibility and the individualistic nature of the Uṣūlīs may also have aided the Shī'ī law to be more adaptable to the new needs of the society.

While the social and geographical background of the leading Akhbārī authorities show that they were mainly the residents of Mecca, Medina, and the Arabic provinces of the Gulf area, the Uṣūlīs were mainly Iranian, either residents of Iran or 'Atabāt'. In addition, because Muḥammad Bāqir Behbahānī, the founder of the Uṣūlī school, wrote mostly in Persian, and also because the Uṣūlī 'ulamā' participated in nationalistic movements during the Qājār period, the Uṣūlīs may be considered as forerunners of the nationalistic movement which, in its early days, appeared in religious form. As such, the Uṣūlīs may perhaps be regarded as the Persian element against the Arabs, or at least against the Arabic element, which predominated in the intellectual and social background of the Akhbārī leaders. The Persian nature of the Uṣūlī school was probably a reason for its popularity among the Iranians. From the intellectual point of view, it is evident that the rise of the Uṣūlīs represents the return of "rationalism" to the religious attitude of the Persians after being dominated by the fundamentalist

approach of the Akhbārīs.

NOTES

1. 'Atabāt, literally, "thresholds," refers to the Shī'ī cities in Iraq, namely, Karbalā, Kāzīmāyn, Najaf, and Sāmarrā.
2. For further information about the curriculum and the life of the religious circles see 'Abbās 'Alī Kayvān, Hajj Nāma (Tehrān: Bosfor, 1308/1929), pp. 98-100; Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān Ṣanī' al-Dawla, Maṭla' al-Shams (Tehrān: np, 1302/1884), vol. 2, pp. 31-32; Comte Arthur de Gobineau, Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie Central (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1900), p. 105.
3. Muḥammad 'Alī Mu'allim Ḥabībābādī, Makārim al-Āthār (Iṣfahān: Muḥammadī, 1377/1957), vol. 1, p. 84.
4. For a typical ijāza, see that of Mullā 'Alī Wā'iz-i Khīyābānī in the Kitāb-i 'Ulamā-i Mu'āṣirīn (Tehrān: Islāmīya, 1366/1946), pp. 408-409.
5. For example, in the families of Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Behbahānī, and Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, a few individuals reached the highest rank of leadership.
6. E. G. Browne states that, "The literature produced by this large and industrious body of men ('ulamā), both in Arabic and Persian, is naturally enormous, but the bulk of it is so dull or so technical that no one but a very leisured and very pious Shī'a scholar would dream of reading it. The author of the Qiṣaṣu'l-'Ulamā remarks that the 'ulamā often live to a very advanced age, and as their habits are, as a rule, sedentary and studious, and they devote a large portion of their time to writing, it is not unusual to find a single author credited with one or two hundred books and pamphlets." (A Literary History of Persia [Cambridge: The University Press, 1959], vol. 4, pp. 376-377.
7. Mu'allim Ḥabībābādī, Makārim al-Āthār, p. 86.
8. Ibid., p. 213.
9. E. G. Browne states that, "Many of these writings are utterly valueless, consisting of notes or glosses on super commentaries or commentaries on texts, grammatical, logical, juristic or otherwise, which texts are completely buried and obscured by all this misdirected ingenuity and toil." A Literary History of Persia, p. 377.
10. Mu'allim Ḥabībābādī, Makārim al-Āthār, pp. 87-90.

11. Ḥusayn Karīmān shows that the term Ṭabrisī is the Arabized form of the Persian word Tafresh. Ṭabrisī, however, is commonly mispronounced Ṭabarsī. See Ḥusayn Karīmān, Ṭabrisī va Majma' al-Bayān, 2 vols. (Tehrān: Tehrān University, 1340 sh), vol. 1, pp. 156-187.
12. For an annotated bibliography of the books of tafsīr see Muḥammad Shafī'ī, Mufasssīrīn-i Shī'a (Tehrān: Pahlavī University, 1349/1970), pp. 159-182.
13. For a detailed description of the functions of the 'ulamā see Hamid Algar, Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 11-14.
14. Khums is a religious tax paid to the family of the Prophet and after him to his successors, i.e., the imāms. After the occultation of the Twelfth Imām the 'ulamā have been receiving the khums as the representatives of the imāms in the Shī'ī community.
15. For a description of the Fath 'Alī Shāh's religious attitudes see Riqā Qolī Khān Hidāyat, Rawḍat al-Ṣafā-i Nāṣirī, 10 vols. (Qom: Markazī, Khayyām, Pīroz, 1339sh/1960), vol. 10, p. 106; and Muḥammad Taqī Lisān al-Mulk-i Sepehr, Nāsikh al-Tawārīkh, Dawra-i Kāmil-i Tārikh-i Qājāriya, ed. Jahāngīr Qā'im Maqāmī (Tehrān: Amīr Kabīr, 1337sh/1958), pp. 188-189, 214-215.
16. Mu'allim Ḥabībābādī, Makārim al-Āthār, p. 85.
17. Gobineau, Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie Central, p. 96.
18. 'Abd al-Razzāq Maftūn-i Donbolī, M'āthir Sulṭāniya, ed. Ghulām Ḥusayn Ṣadrī Afshār (Tehrān: Ibn-i Sīnā, 1392/1972), p. 140.
19. According to Nāsikh al-Tawārīkh (p. 214) one dirham is equal to thirty-six nokhod of silver and one dīnār is equal to eighteen nokhod of gold. Nine dirham is equal to one dīnār and one dīnār plus one dirham is equal to one tomān.
20. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Kashmīrī, Nujūm al-Samā fī Tarājim al-'Ulamā (Qom: Raṣīratī, 1394/1974), p. 368.
21. Comte Arthur de Gobineau, Trois ans en Asie (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1922), p. 42.
22. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Iṣbahānī, Rawḍāt al-Jannāt fī Aḥwāl al-'Ulamā wa al-Sādāt, 8 vols. (Tehrān: Ismā'īliyyān, 1390/1970), vol. 1, p. 121.

23. 'Alī Davvānī, Ostād-i Kull, Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Akmal Ma'rūf bī Waḥīd Behbahānī (Qom: Dār al-'Ilm, 1378/1958), p. 96.
24. Mujtahid: "A legist formulating independent decisions in legal or theological matters, based on the interpretation and application of the four uṣūl (Qur'ān, Sunna, Qiyās "analogy" or 'Aql "reason" in the Shī'ī view, and ijmā' "consensus"), as opposed to muqallid (Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Writing Arabic, ed. Milton Cowan [New York: Spoken Language Services, 1976], p. 143.).
25. al-Kashmīrī, Nujūm al-Samā, p. 42.
26. Muḥammad 'Alī Mudarris, Rayḥānat al-Adab fī Tarājim al-Ma'rūfīn bi al-Kunyat wa al-Laḡab yā Kunna wa Alḡab, 8 vols. (Tehrān: Khayyām, 1346sh/1967), vol. 4, p. 377.
27. Mullā 'Alī Wā'iz-i Khiyābānī, Kitāb-i 'Ulama-i Mu'āṣirīn (Tehrān: Islāmīya, 1366/1946), p. 283.
28. al-Mūsawī al-Iṣbahānī, Rawḍāt al-Jannāt, vol. 7, pp. 96-106.
29. 'Alī Davvānī, Ostād-i Kull, p. 98.
30. al-Mūsawī al-Iṣbahānī, Rawḍāt al-Jannāt, vol. 4, p. 250.
31. The title of this work is given as al-Durar al-Najafīya fi al-Multaqīāt al-Yūsufīya in Muḥammad 'Alī Mudarris, Rayḥānat al-Adab, vol. 1, p. 360.
32. Muḥammad 'Alī Mudarris, Rayḥānat al-Adab, vol. 1, pp. 85-86.
33. Ibid.
34. Mu'allim Ḥabībābādī, Makārim al-Āthār, p. 222.
35. Ijtihād: "Independent judgment in a legal or theological question, based on the interpretation and application of the four uṣūl, as opposed to taqlīd." Wehr, Modern Writing Arabic, p. 143.
36. Mu'allim Ḥabībābādī, Makarim al-Athar, p. 234.
37. The title of the work is given as al-Haqq al-Mubīn fī Taṣwīb al-Mujtahidīn wa Takhtī'at Juhhāl al-Akhhāriyyīn in Muḥammad 'Alī Mudarris, Rayḥānat al-Adab, vol. 5, p. 24.
38. al-Mūsawī al-Iṣbahānī, Rawḍāt al-Jannāt, vol. 2, pp. 200-206.

39. Algar, Religion and State in Iran, pp. 35-36.
40. Kayvān, Hajj Nāma, p. 127.
41. For a list of the polemic works see Āqā Bozorg al-Ṭehrānī, al-Dharī'a ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī'a, 26 vols. (Tehrān: Majlis, 1375/1956), vol. 10, pp. 182-183.
42. al-Mūsawī al-Iṣbahānī, Rawḍāt al-Jannāt, vol. 7, p. 145.
43. Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī was the son of Sayyid 'Alī Ṭabāṭabā'ī and the son-in-law of Sayyid Muḥammad Maḥdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm. The son of Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Ḥusayn, married the daughter of Shaykh al-Mulk who was the son of Fath 'Alī Shāh. This shows the relation by marriage of the Uṣūlīs and the royal family. (See 'Alī Davvānī, Ostād-i Kull, pp. 345, 356.)
44. For a full discussion of points of disputes between the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs, see al-Mūsawī al-Iṣbahānī, Rawḍāt al-Jannāt, vol. 1, pp. 127-130.
45. A book written during this period about the qualifications of a mujtahid is the Jāmi' al-Funūn by Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Astarābādī.
46. "In the usual classification of Muslim sciences, the uṣūl al-fikh ('ilm al-uṣūl) are generally defined as the methodology of Muslim jurisprudence, as the science of the proofs which lead to the establishment of legal standards in general." (Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, 1953 ed., s.v. "Uṣūl," by J. Schacht.)

CHAPTER II

Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī.

His Life and Works

Sources on the Life of Shaykh Aḥmad

Information on the life and achievements of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, the founder of the Shaykhī school, is to be found in the main biographical works written on the life of the eminent figures of Iran in the Qājār period.¹ In addition to the biographical works, general histories of Qājār Persia as well as encyclopedias on Iran and Islam² contain information about the Shaykh and his movement.

The oldest and most authentic source on the life of Shaykh Aḥmad is a short treatise written by Shaykh Aḥmad himself at the request of his son, Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī. This work provides brief information about the childhood and education of Shaykh Aḥmad and some facts about the social and religious climate of his society. The work was published in the Fihrist³ and also separately by Ḥusayn 'Alī Maḥfūz.⁴ In addition to this autobiography, Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, another son of Shaykh Aḥmad, wrote a treatise in Arabic on the life of his father. This work was translated into Persian and published by Muḥammad Ṭāhir Khān.⁵ Another primary source on the life and achievements of Shaykh Aḥmad was Dalīl al-Mutahayyirīn⁶ written in 1258/1842 by Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (d. 1259/1843), the successor of Shaykh Aḥmad.

This work contains biographical information about the life of Shaykh Ahmad and the author himself. The author has included excerpts of the ijāzas of Shaykh Ahmad and a list of his works. According to the Fihrist,⁷ the work was translated into Persian by Muḥammad Raqī b. Muḥammad Riḍā, a follower of Sayyid Kāẓim. Another primary source on the life of Shaykh Ahmad, the Hidāyat al-Ṭālibīn,⁸ was written in 1261/1845 by Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī (d. 1288/1871), the second leader of the Shaykhīs. This book, basically a response to the ideological opponents of Shaykh Ahmad, includes a description of the Shaykh's personality and some of his doctrines.

In addition to the above-mentioned works, a few Persian and European scholars have written about Shaykh Ahmad and the Shaykhī school. Among the Persian authors, Murtaḍā Mudarrisī-i Chahārdehī is the leading author on the Shaykhī topics. In addition to a book entitled Shaykhīgarī, Bābīgarī az Naẓar-i Falsafa, Tārīkh va Ijtimā'⁹ on the life, personality, and principle doctrines of Shaykh Ahmad and the historical development of the movement, Mudarrisī has also published a series of articles on the subject in various Persian publications.¹⁰

Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Jamāl Zādeh published a series of historical articles on the lives of the first five leaders of the Shaykhī movement, i.e., Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī, Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī, Ḥājj Muḥammad Khān Kermānī (d. 1324/1908), and Ḥājj Zayn al-

'Abidīn Kermānī (d. 1360/1941).¹¹

Among the European scholars who became interested in the Shaykhī school, Louis Alphonse Daniel Nicolas and Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (d. 1882) are important. Nicolas' work, Essai Sur Le Chéikhisme,¹² deals with the life of Shaykh Ahmad and his successor, Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, and the main doctrines of the Shaykh. Comte de Gobineau, although he did not devote any specific work to the Shaykhīs, discussed some of their basic doctrines in the second chapter of his Les Religions et les Philosophies dans L'Asie Centrale.¹³

Edward Granville Browne (d. 1926) came across the Shaykhīs and their beliefs in the process of studying and writing about the Bāb.¹⁴ In the introduction to A Traveler's Narrative,¹⁵ he gives a short account of the life of Shaykh Ahmad, mentions his major works and doctrines, and very briefly discusses the development of the school after his death.

Henry Corbin, the contemporary scholar of Shī'ī theology, has written L'École Shaykhie en Théologie Shi'ite.¹⁶ This book provides a sketch of the life of Shaykh Ahmad and the succeeding Shaykhī leaders up to Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīmī (d. 1389/1969). It also contains a brief discussion of Shaykhī doctrines.

In spite of the studies which have already been made by scholars of the East and the West on the Shaykhī movement, the subject has yet to be critically studied. Such a

comprehensive study must be done on the basis of the socio-religious life and beliefs of the Persians during the Qājār period. The magnitude of Shaykh Aḥmad's achievements and his intellectual contributions are so vast, and his influence upon subsequent religious and social movements is so profound, that any mature judgment about him and his school must be made with utmost care and sound understanding of the period.

The Life of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī

Shaykh Aḥmad b. Zayn al-Dīn b. Ibrāhīm b. Ṣaqr b. Ibrāhīm b. Dāghir, known as Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, was born in Rajab 1166/1752¹⁷ in the village of Muṭayrafi in the region of Aḥsā,¹⁸ a hinterland of Baḥrayn. The clan of Shaykh Aḥmad belonged to the bedouin tribe of al-Maḥāshīr, which had settled in Aḥsā during the lifetime of Dāghir (five generations before Shaykh Aḥmad, around the middle of the seventeenth century). The tribe was Sunnī, but Dāghir and his clan, under unknown circumstances, became Shī'a. Although Shaykh Aḥmad was raised in a Shī'ī family, it is reported that the majority of his countrymen were Sunnī and that there were also Ṣūfī orders.¹⁹ Thus, from childhood Shaykh Aḥmad was familiar with different trends of thought in Islam, a familiarity that played an important role in his later career. In his autobiography, Shaykh Aḥmad complains that his people know nothing about their religious obliga-

tions and duties. They can hardly differentiate between forbidden (ḥarām) and lawful (ḥalāl).²⁰ This irreligiosity may have led Shaykh Aḥmad to call for a revitalization of religious life in his society.

Information about the childhood and early education of Shaykh Aḥmad is limited to his own statements and those of Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, his son. Both sources indicate that he possessed a prodigious memory reaching back into his early childhood. He is reported to have recalled a heavy rain in his home town when he was only two years of age.²¹

The early formal education of Shaykh Aḥmad, like that of most educated Muslims, began with reading the Qur'ān, which he could do at the age of five years.²² He then studied the Ajurrūmiya²³ and the 'Awāmil,²⁴ two Arabic grammar textbooks,²⁵ with Shaykh Muḥammad b. Shaykh Muḥsin,²⁶ who was his formal teacher. Shaykh Aḥmad is reported to have been acquainted in early life with Ibn Abī Jumhūr,²⁷ the author of al-Mujlī,²⁸ and to have received further instruction²⁹ from Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī Dhahabī, who subscribed to the doctrines of Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 637/1239), which he apparently was teaching in Baḥrayn. This seems to be the first intellectual acquaintance of Shaykh Aḥmad with the theosophy of Ibn al-'Arabī, which later became one of the main themes in his works.

Upon completing the elementary religious courses in his native land, Shaykh Aḥmad went to 'Atabāt to attend the academic circle of scholars such as Muḥammad Bāqir Behbahānī

(d. 1207/1792), Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Ṭabāṭabā'ī known as Baḥr al-'Ulūm (d. 1212/1797), Shaykh Ja'far Najafī known as Kāshif al-Ghiṭā (d. 1231/1815), and Mīr Sayyid 'Alī Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1231/1815).³⁰ He received ijāzas from the most distinguished scholars of his time, obtaining his first one in 1209/1794.³¹ Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm, who issued this ijāza, asked Shaykh Aḥmad if he had written a dissertation. Shaykh Aḥmad presented to him a portion of his Sharḥ-i Tabṣira.³² Baḥr al-'Ulūm studied it and replied, "You are the one who ought to give me an ijāza."³³ In addition to the ijāza of Baḥr al-'Ulūm,³⁴ six eminent scholars of his time issued ijāzas to Shaykh Aḥmad: Ḥusayn 'Alī 'Uṣfūr (d. 1216/1801),³⁵ Aḥmad Baḥrānī Damistānī,³⁶ Mīrzā Mahdī Shahrestānī (d. 1216/1801),³⁷ Sayyid 'Alī Ṭabāṭabā'ī,³⁸ Shaykh Ja'far Najafī,³⁹ and Ḥājj Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Kalbāsī (d. 1262/1846).⁴⁰

Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī as well as Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī have listed the branches of knowledge in which Shaykh Aḥmad was considered a master,⁴¹ including, in addition to various branches of Islamic sciences such as rijāl, fiqh, tafsīr, and literature; astronomy, medicine, geometry, mathematics, and even music. Although his literal mastery of all these sciences is not the issue, it is evident in his own writings that he was gifted with the power of memory and was able to comprehend even the most difficult theological and philosophical problems. His vast knowledge and originality is also attested to by his

biographers⁴² and the religious authorities who issued him ijāzas.

Although Shaykh Aḥmad received his education from the most learned men of his age, he was never fully satisfied with his formal education. Dissatisfaction with the social and religious atmosphere in which he grew up and his own contemplative temperament led Shaykh Aḥmad to piety and meditation.⁴³ As a consequence of lengthy meditations and recitation of the Qur'ān, he had recurrent dreams of the imāms. His own perception of his dream associations with the imāms constituted the spiritual cornerstone of his life, influencing his personality and creating in him an intense love for the imāms. For Shaykh Aḥmad, his dreams were the source of his knowledge and inspiration. Recalling his childhood, he states that early in his life the gate of dreams was opened to him by Imām Ḥasan b. 'Alī.⁴⁴ In his first dream, an extraordinary experience for him, he presented several questions to the imām and received answers. It was in this first dream that the imām put his mouth on Shaykh Aḥmad's mouth and that Shaykh Aḥmad drank the imām's saliva. Shaykh Aḥmad also related that he dreamed of the Prophet and drank of his saliva as well.⁴⁵

Shaykh 'Abd Allāh on the authority of his father relates that the effect of such experiences on Shaykh Aḥmad was so strong that he devoted more and more time to meditation, prayer, and recitation of the Qur'ān. It was now possible for him to meet with any imām he wished and to

present to him any questions of difficulties that he encountered in the understanding of the truth.⁴⁶

In his autobiography, Shaykh Aḥmad does not mention the name of any of the teachers who issued him an ijāza; rather, he states that through his dream he met with Imām 'Alī b. Muḥammad Hādī and received twelve ijāzas from each of the twelve imāms.⁴⁷

He made a number of pilgrimages to the shrines of the imāms in Iran, 'Atabāt, Mecca, and Medina. In fact, he spent the last fifty years of his life visiting these holy cities, preaching, and teaching the multitudes of students who attended his lectures. In the year 1186/1772, when Shaykh Aḥmad was in his twenties, he journeyed to 'Atabāt. The prestige of 'Atabāt as the center for higher Shī'ī education and the absence of any scholars in his native land led to this decision. This was the beginning of his direct connection with the center of the Shī'ī intellectual, cultural and academic world. His stay in 'Atabāt, although it lasted only one year, was very fruitful for him. He was able to obtain an ijāza from Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm which brought him fame and respect in 'Atabāt and his native land. Apparently the typhus epidemic of the year 1186/1772 caused him to return to his native land. Knowledge about the life of Shaykh Aḥmad between his return in 1186/1772 and his second departure for 'Atabāt in 1212/1797 is very limited. It is likely that during this period Shaykh Aḥmad devoted most of his time to studying,

meditating, and writing rather than to the intellectual challenges that would occupy him in the following decades of his life.

When Shaykh Aḥmad was forty-six years old, the Wahhābī attack on Aḥsā led him to emigrate to Baḥra in 1212/1797.⁴⁸ This emigration was a turning point in his life: he never returned to his homeland, but remained in Iran and 'Atabāt to the end of his life in 1241/1825. The period 1212/1797 to 1241/1825 was the period of his fame, popularity, and close association with the officials and religious leaders in Iran and 'Atabāt.

The following is a brief chronology of Shaykh Aḥmad's travels: After he emigrated to Baḥra in 1212/1797, he went to the small village of Dhuraq where he stayed for about three years. He returned to Baḥra and went to Ḥabarāt, a village near Baḥra, returning to Baḥra and proceeding to the village of Tanwīyḥ and then to Nashwah, where he stayed for eighteen months. In 1219/1804 he moved to Ṣafawah and stayed there for a year. He returned then to Baḥra, and in 1221/1806 he went to Najaf, Kāẓimayn, and then to Iran. The period between 1222/1807 and 1229/1813 was mostly spent in Yazd. During this time he paid three visits to the shrine of Imām Riḍā in Mashhad and made a trip to Tehrān to visit Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh. He left Yazd in 1229/1813 for Iṣfahān and then continued his journey to Kermānshāh, arriving there in Rajab 1229/1813. He departed from Kermānshāh for Mecca in 1232/1816 and after his pilgrimage returned to 'Atabāt,

where he stayed for about eight months; he then moved back to Kermānshāh in Muḥarram 1234/1818. This time he stayed in Kermānshāh for a few years until he left for another visit to the shrine of Imām Riḍā and went to Mashhad via Qazvīn, Qom, Tehrān, Shāhrood, and Nishābor. After twenty-two days in Mashhad he continued his journey to Yazd via Torbat and Ṭabas. Shaykh Aḥmad was in Yazd for only three months when he was ordered by Imām 'Alī, in one of his dreams, to go to 'Atabāt.⁴⁹ Consequently he left Yazd and went to Kermānshāh via Isfahān, where he stayed about forty days.⁵⁰ After staying in Kermānshāh for one year, he departed for 'Atabāt and Mecca. Shaykh Aḥmad died in Hadīya, about two stages from Medina, on 21 Dhī al-Qa'da 1241/1825⁵¹ at the age of seventy-five and was buried in the cemetery of Baqī' in Medina.

According to Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, Shaykh Aḥmad married eight women and had twenty-nine children: eighteen boys and eleven girls.⁵² Only seven of his children survived and reached maturity. Among his sons, three are themselves distinguished: Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, who wrote the treatise on the life of his father; Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī, for whom Shaykh Aḥmad wrote his autobiography; and Shaykh 'Alī or 'Alī Naqī, who was ideologically in disagreement with his father. From an intellectual point of view, Shaykh 'Alī was the most learned of Shaykh Aḥmad's sons.⁵³

After the death of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'i, his disciple, follower, and very close companion Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī

became the leader of the school. (The life and works of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī will be discussed in a separate chapter.) The spiritual and intellectual ties between Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim, and the Shaykh's trust and confidence in Sayyid Kāẓim, were so obvious to Shaykh Aḥmad's followers that, without any appointment, all of them regarded Sayyid Kāẓim as Shaykh Aḥmad's only possible successor and recognized him as the most authentic interpreter of Shaykh Aḥmad's doctrines. Consequently, for Shaykhī doctrines, the works of Sayyid Kāẓim are as fundamental as the works of Shaykh Aḥmad himself.

Shaykh Aḥmad's learning and piety brought him fame, respect, popularity, and influence. He was welcomed by governors, officials, religious leaders, and the masses wherever he traveled. In Yazd, he received letters of invitation from Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh, who had expressed his wish to visit with him personally.⁵⁴ Shaykh Aḥmad responded positively and went to Tehrān, where he was warmly received by the Shāh and his court. He was invited to make his residence in Tehrān, but Shaykh Aḥmad found the invitation incompatible with the piety and simplicity of his life, and soon left the capital.

It is reported that the governor of Kermānshāh, Muḥammad 'Alī Mīrzā, known as Rukn al-Dawla, felt so honored that he went four-farsakhs (about 13½ miles) out of the city to welcome Shaykh Aḥmad to Kermānshāh.⁵⁵ The same kind of respect and hospitality was also paid Shaykh Aḥmad by the

governors of Torbat and Ṭabas.⁵⁶ In Iṣfahān, Ṣadr al-Dawla is said to have presented the village of Kamāl Ābād to Shaykh Aḥmad.⁵⁷

Toward the end of his life, his widespread popularity and fame as well as his doctrinal stand, which some of the ʿulamā regarded as heresy, brought him the bitter experience of being denounced as a heretic--takfīr. During his stay in Qazvīn, about the year 1239 or 40/1824, Shaykh Aḥmad met with the ʿulamā of the city, including Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Baraghānī (d. 1264/1847), the famous and influential religious leader of the city. In one of their meetings, Baraghānī raised some theological questions and asked Shaykh Aḥmad to explain his views. After hearing Shaykh Aḥmad's views, Baraghānī stated that Shaykh Aḥmad's answers were not in accordance with the universally accepted beliefs of the Shīʿa and declared Shaykh Aḥmad a heretic.⁵⁸ Baraghānī's opposition was the first and most important opposition Shaykh Aḥmad encountered.

Baraghānī's opposition was the beginning of serious intellectual as well as physical conflicts which extended to ʿAtabāt during the time of Sayyid Kāẓim and resulted in a distinction between the followers of the Shaykhī school and the rest of the Shīʿī community. Although it is not clear when the appellation of "Shaykhī" was first applied to the followers of Shaykh Aḥmad, it seems that the takfīr of Qazvīn contributed to the distinct identity of the followers of Shaykh Aḥmad, and the Shīʿa gave them the title in order

to differentiate them from the Shīʿa. The term Shaykhī was used in contrast with the Mutasharriʿīn which, in this case stands for the Shīʿa.⁵⁹

The Shaykhīs were also given the title of "Posht-i Sarīs" (literally, "behind the head"). When he visited the shrine of an imām, it was Shaykh Aḥmad's custom, as a matter of respect and politeness, to stand at the foot of the grave and not circumambulate it. This practice was adopted by his followers and came to distinguish them from other Shīʿa who because they circumambulated the graves of the imāms were called "Bālā Sarīs" (literally, "above the head").⁶⁰

The Shaykhīs are also known as Kashfīya. Sayyid Kāẓim explains that they were given this name because God lifted (kashf) from their intellect and from their vision the veil of ignorance and lack of insight into the Religion, and removed the darkness of doubt and uncertainty from their minds and their hearts. They are the ones whose hearts God illumined with the light of guidance.⁶¹

Although the terms "Shaykhī," "Posht-i Sarī," and "Kashfīya" refer to a certain group of people, and were intended to distinguish them from the rest of Shīʿa, the group solidarity and identity of the Shaykhīs was in fact not so distinct as to sharply separate them from the rest of the Shīʿī community of Iran as an independent sect or even branch of Twelver Shīʿa. The Shaykhīs considered themselves true Shīʿa who thought and behaved in accordance with the teaching of the Shīʿī imāms; they did not consider them-