

Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered

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It has long been held that the eighteenth century was a pivotal one in the history of Imami Shi'i thought and jurisprudence in Iraq and Iran. At the beginning of this era, it is said, the previously dominant Usuli school declined, and the conservative Akhbari school came to the fore. This intellectual revolution coincided with the fall of the Safavid dynasty in Iran and the disestablishment of Shi'ism under the Afghans and then Nadir Shah. Standard accounts would have us believe that Akhbarism became dominant. Then late in the century, as the Qajars came to power, the Usuli school staged a comeback in the shrine cities of Iraq and subsequently in Iran.¹

This version of events, deriving from published nineteenth-century Usuli works, contains elements of truth. But an examination of manuscript sources from the period and of later biographical dictionaries suggests that the standard view needs revision. In particular, the periodization needs to be made more precise and the biographies of the major intellectual leaders need to be rewritten with more detail and greater accuracy.

Moreover, most treatments of the period adopt an approach depicting the struggle between conflicting schools of thought in terms of great men and of abstract ideas. A more fruitful approach would treat the corps of religious

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scholars, or ulama, as a group in society, influenced by social and economic developments as well as political ones. Schools of thought should be seen as ideologies supporting the position or aspirations of differing groups of ulama. Family histories written in the eighteenth century are an essential but as yet unused resource in this endeavor of revision.

Several critical questions need to be asked about the period: Is there good evidence that Akhbari religious and legal doctrines dominated the religious establishment in Iran during the eighteenth century? What do we really know about intellectual currents in Iran's major cities at that time, or for that matter about the less populous but still important small towns (*gasabahs*)? Did Akhbarism really only come to the fore in the Iraqi shrine cities in the eighteenth century, or had it been dominant there earlier? When exactly did the Usuli revival take place in Iraq? Was it as late as the Qajar period? The following examination of manuscript sources and re-examination of some printed ones seek to clarify the history of Shi'ism in this crucial century.

During the eighteenth century in Iran and Iraq the established central political institutions of the preceding two centuries were weakened or destroyed, with major demographic and cultural shifts taking place. It began with nearly a quarter century of Shah Sultan Husayn Safavi's weak rule (1694-1722) in Iran and Ottoman Governor Hasan Pasha's firmer administration (1702-1724) in Iraq. There followed in Iran 25 years of more or less Sunni rule, beginning with the conquest of Isfahan by Ghalzai Afghans, followed by the Islamic ecumenist Nadir Shah (1736-47), who employed the Sunni Afghan tribes as allies in his bid to create an empire.

After a long interregnum in which political chaos dominated the center, the Shiraz-based Shi'i ruler Karim Khan Zand (1763-79) consolidated his position, emerging as the major force in Iran west of Khurasan. Upon his death, the Qajar tribe gained political pre-eminence, creating a new Shi'i state that ruled throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. In Ottoman Iraq, which suffered Iranian incursions under Nadir Shah during Ahmad Pasha's governorship, Sulayman Abu Laylah Pasha (1750-62)

created a new, regionally-based Mamluk state that continued under his slave-ruler successors until the reassertion of direct Ottoman rule in 1831.²

These political trends made a major impact upon the Shi'i ulama.³ Under Shah Sultan Husayn and his predecessor, Shah Sulayman, the high ulama in Iran won great influence, position, and wealth. Arjomand has shown that in so doing the foreign religious scholars from Syria, Bahrain, and Iraq displaced, to some extent, the indigenous "clerical estate" of landed notables who had held official religious office.⁴ The Safavid capital, Isfahan, became the cynosure of the Shi'i clerisy, a center of learning with 48 colleges and 162 mosques, and a place where important career contacts could be made.⁵ The clergy waxed so powerful that some openly preached the necessity for the ruler to be, not only a Sayyid, but a mujtahid or senior jurisprudent trained in Ja'fari law. This disputed the claim of the Safavis, who, though they asserted their descent from the Prophet, were laymen given often to loose morals. The dominant view supported the legitimacy of Safavid rule against clerical pretenders.⁶ Not everyone trusted the ulama, as a seventeenth-century folk saying from Isfahan testifies: "Keep a wary eye in front of you for a woman, behind you for a mule, and from every direction for a mulla."⁷ Most of the clergy were neither independently wealthy nor too proud to associate with the government, as they held this was permissible whenever they would otherwise fear for their lives or whenever they felt they could thereby help the Shi'i community.⁸

The Afghan conquest of Isfahan in 1722 displaced hundreds of scholarly families and delivered a mortal blow to the dynasty that had assured their fortunes. The Sunni Ghalzais and Nadir Shah expropriated the endowments supporting the clergy, leading to a relative impoverishment and a decline in the influence of this group. During the second quarter of the eighteenth century great numbers of Shi'i clergymen and merchants fled Iran for the shrine cities of Ottoman Iraq, adding a new ethnic component to the Arab quarters of these cities. Under the Safavids the high ulama establishment in the center had favored the Usuli school of jurisprudence, which legitimated an activist role for the clergy as legal scholars in society. The Iraqi shrine cities, laboring under Sunni Ottoman rule, had remained centers of the more conservative Akhbari

school. With the collapse of Shi'i rule in Iran and the anticlericalism of the new rulers, the ulama in any case lost much of their previous opportunity for an active social role. The congregation of hundreds of Iranian clerical families in the Akhbari strongholds brought them under the conservative influence of that school. Isfahan itself, while weakened, remained a center of rationalism, mysticism, and Usulism throughout this period, exercising a countervailing influence in those areas. Other Iranian centers of Usulism also remained. The rise of Akhbarism in the eighteenth century largely occurred in the consciousness of Isfahani immigrants to Iraq.

The Majlisi Family

One way to determine the import of the eighteenth century for the Imami clergy is to examine the fate of prominent families. We are fortunate in having a family history from the pen of Aqa Ahmad Bihbahani, scion of two ulama dynasties, the Majlisis of Isfahan and the Bihbahanis of Karbala.⁹ Mulla Muhammad Taqi Majlisi (d. 1656), from a Syrian family that emigrated to Iran during early Safavid rule, led Friday congregational prayers in Isfahan, the capital. An extremely significant figure with Sufi and Akhbari leanings, his works wielded great influence for centuries, while his position in Isfahan lent him religious and political power.¹⁰

Mulla Muhammad Taqi had three sons and four daughters. All three sons became ulama and the daughters married clergymen as well. One son, Mulla 'Azizu'llah, renowned as an author on religious sciences and belles-lettres composition, grew so wealthy that he rivaled the very rich merchant Mirza Muhammad Taqi 'Abbasabadi. The second son, Mulla 'Abdu'llah, emigrated to India. A network of Iranian and Indian long-distance merchants carried information on the overseas job market to Isfahan, whose intellectuals were prized at the Mughal court.¹¹

The youngest brother, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1699), had no reason to emigrate. He succeeded his father as prayer leader (*Imam-Jum'ah*) for the capital, and under Shah Sultan Husayn rose to the rank of Shaykhu'l-Islam. As a representative of the increasingly influential ulama class, Mulla

Muhammad Baqir waged a deadly campaign against its competitors for state patronage, such as the Sufis. He further initiated a short-sighted persecution of Sunnis, as well as of the 20,000 Hindu merchants and money-lenders in Isfahan who competed successfully with local concerns.¹² He adopted a strong commitment to the practice of independent legal reasoning (*ijtihad*), in contrast to his father.¹³ His high social position allowed him to marry into the notable class, one of his three wives being the sister of Abu Talib Khan Nihavandi.

Of Mulla Muhammad Taqi Majlisi's four sons-in-law, two were from Mazandaran, one from Shirvan north of Azerbaijan, and one was a Fasa'i from Fars province in the south. Of the last, Aqa Ahmad Bihbahani knew nothing. Mulla Muhammad Salih Mazandarani (d. 1670) came to Isfahan as a youth to escape poverty in his home province, eking out a living as a student on a stipend in the capital. His brilliance so impressed Majlisi I that he gave him his daughter Aminah Begam in marriage. The girl, highly literate and trained in the religious sciences, gained a reputation as a *mujtahidah*, or legal scholar, in her own right.¹⁴ In spite of having married well, Mazandarani never became wealthy, living out his days in Isfahan as a *mujtahid*.

Among the second generation of Majlisi's descendants one can count at least nine who became or married mullas, links being established with prestigious Sayyid families. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi's daughters married mullas, some cousins. One of his sons married into the Sayyids of Ardistan. A daughter wedded a Sayyid clergyman, Amir Muhammad Salih Khatunabadi.¹⁵ He succeeded his father-in-law as official prayer leader in Isfahan at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the post eventually becoming hereditary in his line. That this branch of the family remained in Isfahan throughout the period of that city's tribulations, retaining an important clerical post, further suggests that even after 1722 it did not entirely decline as a center for the ulama. It indicates, moreover, that clerical elites maintained continuity in spite of turbulence at the center, just as central and provincial administrators often retained posts even when the regime changed.¹⁶

Of Muhammad Salih Mazandarani's sons, two emigrated to Awrangzib's India. Aqa Muhammad Sa'id Mazandarani emerged as a favored court poet in Delhi, with the pen name "Ashraf."¹⁷ His brother, Aqa Hasan 'Ali, followed in his footsteps. For sons of Shi'i ulama to succeed socially in the strongly Sunni atmosphere of the Mughal court it was necessary for them to concentrate on literary or medical pursuits, which they did with some success. In Iran, Muhammad Salih's daughter married into a clerical Sayyid family, wedding the Shaykhu'l-Islam Mir Abu'l-Ma'ali, a union that produced several leading ulama based in the shrine cities in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Many members of the third generation lived through the terrible siege and sack of Isfahan, some of them scattering elsewhere. Among those who remained, two important ulama emerged at this point. In 1714 Mir Muhammad Salih Khatunabadi, the prayer leader, passed away and was succeeded by his son, Mir Muhammad Husayn. He held the post through the Afghan period and until his death in 1738 in Nadir Shah's base of operations, Mashhad. During the Nadir Shah era the position of Imam-Jum'ah was held by Mir Muhammad Husayn's distant cousin and aunt's husband, Muhammad Taqi Almasi (d. 1746).¹⁸ He was forced to adopt the shah's Sunni-Shi'i ecumenism. After one successor from outside the family, the post of Imam-Jum'ah thereafter reverted to the Khatunabadis on a permanent basis early in the Qajar period.

The third generation intermarried with other clerical elites in Najafabad (near Isfahan), Mashhad, and Isfahan itself. There was some settlement in Najaf and Karbala. Although Bihbahani appears deliberately to have included in his family history only those lines that remained ulama, even some of their daughters began marrying artisans. This may have been simply a natural effect, downward mobility being the fate of most descendants of any wealthy family. But given the prior exclusion of so many from the genealogy, it might reflect the impoverishment even of the ulama.

A grandson of Muhammad Salih Mazandarani continued a family tradition in following his father to India. Unlike Muhammad Ashraf, however, Muhammad 'Ali "Daman" settled in Murshidabad, Bengal, rather than in Delhi. In the first half of the eighteenth century the Mughal court underwent serious decline, leading poets to seek patronage elsewhere.

The two rising Shi'i-ruled provinces of Bengal and Awadh might have offered particularly congenial settings for Shi'i scholars from Iran. But it was only in the last quarter of the century that the nawabs of Awadh settled down to a provincial court of their own, being until then based largely in declining Delhi. Thus, Shi'i-ruled Bengal began to attract the Majlisis who wanted to peddle their literary talents in India. As the nawab's capital after 1704, flourishing Murshidabad, a major commercial center and producer of silk goods, offered immigrants great opportunities.¹⁹ Moreover, in the late seventeenth- and early-eighteenth centuries the Bengal port of Hughli had become an important trading center for Iranian long-distance merchants. Indeed, they amassed more capital than any other group in the city. Such a congregation of Iranians ensured the growth of Shi'i institutions and patronage for Shi'i scholars.²⁰ The existence of a convenient transportation network based on trade between the ports of Iran and Hughli also may have encouraged scholars to land there rather than risk the increasingly insecure land route through Afghanistan and the Punjab to Delhi.

The fourth generation continued to produce scholars in Isfahan such as Taqi Almasi's son Mirza 'Azizu'llah (d. 1750/1163), a historian as well as a theologian. The turbulence of the times is indicated in the death of some while traveling to Mashhad, and the passing away of others far from home in Najaf. Of those who stayed in Isfahan several deserted the pulpit for the bazaar, producing a dyer (*sabbagh*), a fuller (*gadhar*), and daughters that married a hat maker (*kulah-duz*) and a copper smelter (*rikhtah-gar*).

In the Mazandarani line one sees ulama tying themselves to the richer classes of the bazaar, seeking new forms of economic security when their links to the courts were so disrupted from 1722 to the rise of the Zands. Their bazaar links and the relative political independence this fostered were to prove crucial to the growth of ulama power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²¹ Of Mulla Muhammad Akmal's two wives, one was a granddaughter of Muhammad Salih Mazandarani. The children of the other wife did not become mullas, working in Isfahan and Tehran as money changers (*sarraf*) or in Zand Shiraz as money coiners (*zarrabi*). The children of the Majlisi wife, however, did become mullas, among them Aqa Muhammad Baqir Bihbahani.

Aqa Muhammad Baqir first married the daughter of Aqa S. Muhammad Tabataba'i, congregational prayer leader for the small town of Burujird in Luristan, whom he met in Karbala after the Afghan invasion. Aqa Muhammad Baqir later settled in the small Iranian town of Bihbahan, which in this period served as the stronghold of the Kuhgilu tribe. There he married the daughter of a merchant, Hajji Sharafa. Bihbahan was increasingly integrated into Fars province, serving as a hinterland town to the Persian Gulf port of Bandar Rig, which in 1750 was so prosperous as to rival Bushehr.²² Like his father, then, Bihbahani developed marital links both with high status ulama families and with wealthy bazaaris, a step even more necessary for him as he had the tragedy to come of age just as the Safavid dynasty fell and Iran was thrown into political turmoil. Likewise, a female cousin in Najafabad married a jeweler whose relatives monopolized high religious posts in their town.

Another Mazandarani line in the fourth generation did not take up religious occupations at all. Mulla Muhammad Salih (named for his grandfather) had a daughter who married a merchant, Mirza Amin Tajir, and a son who emigrated to Bengal as a civil servant for Viceroy 'Ali-Vardi Khan Mahabat Jang (1740-56).²³ 'Ali-Vardi Khan's brother had come to Iraq and Iran as part of his visitation of the Imams in Najaf and Karbala. In Isfahan he struck up a friendship with Mulla Muhammad Salih, then returned to the court in Delhi. When, in 1740, his brother was appointed viceroy of Bengal, he wrote to Mulla Muhammad Salih informing him that he needed good men to staff his upper bureaucracy. The latter dispatched his son, 'Ala'u'd-Din Muhammad, from Isfahan forthwith. As this ruling family was Shi'i and Iranian, they favored the importation of other Iranians for such posts. The networks of pilgrimage and visitation in which the ulama were involved enabled them to make contacts crucial for career changes, and at that point steamy but rich Bengal might have looked more appealing than Isfahan, with its decaying mosques. Sometimes the change of career and life style was very great. The descendants of the Majlisi court poets Ashraf and Daman in Murshidabad were so debauched that Aqa Ahmad Bihbahani refused to include their names in his genealogy.

On the other hand, the Sayyid descendants of Mazandarani through Mir Abu'l-Ma'ali, a Shaykhu'l-Islam, deter-

minedly remained mullas. They established links with high-status Sayyid families in small centers like Burujird, and Aqa Muhammad Baqir was able to take advantage of these bonds. The descendants of daughters who had married into a mujtahid family in Mashhad became notables (addressed as nawabs) in Yazd, where they lived in palaces. Their children in turn attained the high religious offices of Sadr and Shaykhu'l-Islam in Yazd.

The fifth generation, many of whom were born under Nadir's rule and lived to see the advent of the Qajars, continued to establish bazaar ties. Imam-Jum'ah Muhammad Taqi Almasi's grandson, Callamah Mirza Haydar Cali, became a mulla. But his sister married a polisher of precious stones (*hakkak*) whose grandsons congregated in the Qajar capital of Tehran. The family produced other mullas and married into the Khatunabadis. Almasi's grand-niece married twice, first Mirza Muhammad Mihdi Tajir-i Abbasabadi, of a prominent Isfahani commercial dynasty, and then a Sayyid whose descendants became mullas and merchants. This generation produced more skilled artisans in Isfahan, a silk weaver (*tikmah-duz*) and a confectioner (*qannad*), and a good number of extended family members lived in the shrine cities of Iraq, not all of them as mullas (they included a copper smelter).

Among the heirs of Muhammad Salih Mazandarani one finds a weaver of fine cloth (*nassaj*), and a druggist in Kazimayn. But most members of the family were either mullas or Bengali civil servants. Some, like Hajji Muhammad Isma'il, had one wife in Murshidabad and another in Karbala, where he retired. A sister of the wealthy Bengali branch of the family married into the Bihbihani mujtahid dynasty in Karbala. Among the family's mullas, especially in the Bihbahani and Tabataba'i lines, one notes in this period a resurgence of power and patronage. The Zands, while not as generous to the ulama as the Safavids had been, did provide some sinecures. In the shrine cities themselves huge amounts of money were placed in the hands of the leading ulama by Nawab Asafu'd-Dawlah of Awadh and other patrons in India and Iran. The Mamluk government in Iraq continued to allow Karbala and Najaf a good deal of autonomy.

Aqa Ahmad provides little information on the sixth generation, many of whom lived into the nineteenth century.

Numbers perished in the Iraqi plague of 1773-74 or the Wahabi invasion of Karbala in 1801, the devastation wrought by these events encouraging many survivors to emigrate. In 1801, for instance, a man moved to Murshidabad and two brothers in the Mazandarani line to Faizabad in Awadh. A new wave of Iranian emigration to India from 1790 also coincided with a significant expansion of trade, particularly the Iranian import of Indian cotton goods.²⁴

From 1764 Bengal was decisively under British control, while Awadh continued to flourish under Shi'i rule in the north. Murshidabad was no longer an administrative center, and its silk and other industries were dealt a blow by the famine of 1769-70, from which the city never recovered. In the early 1800s Aqa Ahmad found the area's Muslim notables and learned tradition impoverished, the British in control, and whatever wealth still existed in the hands of Hindus.²⁵ In addition, the Iranian-dominated port of Hughli rapidly declined in favor of British Calcutta. In the latter part of the eighteenth century scholarly families emigrating from Iran and the shrine cities began to settle in the flourishing cities of Awadh. One Murshidabadi branch of the Majlisi clan moved to Lucknow and intermarried with the family of Asafu'd-Dawlah's chief minister in the 1790s, Raja Jhao Lal, a convert to Shi'i Islam.²⁶ Aqa Ahmad Bihbahani himself left Kermanshah for India because of financial difficulties, settling in Patna as the congregational prayer leader after failing to find patronage in Awadh.

The prestigious clerical dynasty of the Majlisis adopted varying strategies to deal with the problems they faced in the eighteenth century. These included emigration to the Iraqi shrine cities where a constant stream of pilgrims and long-distance merchants provided them with a livelihood as legal advisers and supervisors of charitable contributions and pious endowments. Some managed to retain religious office in a declining Isfahan, while others intermarried with rich merchants or well-off artisans, when possible. With the decline of court patronage for scholars and the expropriation of endowments, more were probably forced into low-status trades--cotton or silk weavers, smiths, dyers, bleachers, and hat makers--than would normally have been the case. Many settled in Iran's small towns and large villages, where local tribal leaders came into prominence with the decline of central government. The smaller centers

were less likely to attract marauding invaders, prospering as local trade depots, even as some large cities declined. Members of the Majlisi family colonized high religious office in Najafabad, Ardistan, Kazirun, Bihbahan, and Yazd. Finally, numbers sought employment in India as literary men, civil servants, and physicians.

Neo-Akhbari Dominance 1722-1763 in Iraq

Against this backdrop of geographical and class dislocation, the ulama of the eighteenth century fought out a decisive battle on the interpretation of Shi'ism.²⁷ The conflict between strict constructionist Akhbari and rationalist Usuli jurisprudents centered on two sets of issues. The first concerned the sources of law, with the Akhbaris restricting them to the Qur'an and the oral reports of the Prophet and the Imams. The rationalists insisted that the consensus of the jurisprudents could also serve as a source of legal judgment, as could the independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) of the jurist. The Usulis divided all Shi'is into formally trained jurisprudents (*mujtahids*) and laymen, stipulating that the ordinary believers must emulate the *mujtahids* in matters of subsidiary religious laws.

The rationalists asserted that the *mujtahids*, as general representatives of the Hidden Imam, could substitute for him in performing such tasks as rendering legal judgments, implementing rulings, collecting and distributing alms (*zakat* and *khums*), mandating defensive holy war and leading Friday congregational prayers. While Akhbaris accepted that the relater (*muhaddith*) of oral reports from the Imams could perform the functions of judges, they often disallowed some or all of the others in the absence of an infallible Imam. Akhbaris further rejected any division of believers into laymen and *mujtahid-exemplars*, holding that all Shi'is must emulate the Twelve Imams. In practice, Akhbaris also made interpretations.

During the Safavid period the Usuli school, associated with the ruling establishment, gained in influence. From the time of Shaykh Abdul-Ali al-Karaki (d. 1533), Isfahan's Imam-JumCahs were for the most part Usulis. Late in the period, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi exemplified the Usuli ethos. The situation outside Isfahan in the late seventeenth cen-

tury is harder to gauge. In some provincial centers Akhbaris remained influential. The Imam-Jum'ah and Shaykhu'l-Islam of Qom under Sulayman Shah (1667-94), Muhammad Tahir, a bigoted Akhbari brought up in Najaf, caused a row with the court by censuring the monarch's morals.²⁸ Al-Hurr al-'Amili (d. 1708-09) immigrated to Mashhad from Syria, becoming Shaykhu'l-Islam. A staunch Akhbari, he disallowed the use of reason and wrote against rationalist theology.²⁹ The family of the Akhbari Ni'matu'llah Jaza'iri (d. 1701) settled in the small Iranian town of Shushtar, in Khuzistan, as Akhbari prayer leaders.³⁰ As noted, the Akhbari school had found favor with the ulama in the shrine cities of Iraq, as well.

Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani (1695-1772), a key figure in the intellectual development of Shi'ism in Karbala, grew up in the village of Diraz on the isle of Bahrain.³¹ His grandfather, a pearl merchant, helped bring him up. His father, Shaykh Ahmad, a student of Shaykh Sulayman al-Mahuzi in Bahrain, adhered to the Usuli school; detesting Akhbaris. Usuli jurisprudence was an important current in Safavid-ruled Bahrain. In 1717 al-Bahrani's family fled an invasion from Masqat, settling on the mainland at Qatif for a while.³² After his father's death Yusuf commuted to Bahrain to keep up the family pearl business, pursuing his studies in his spare time. Financial difficulties, partly owing to the high taxes charged by the invaders, led him to emigrate to Iran soon after the Afghan conquest of 1722. He lived in Kerman, then moved to Shiraz where he gained the patronage of the governor. Investing in agriculture, which his patron allowed him to pursue tax-free, he began his famed work on law, *al-Hada'iq al-nadira*. He fled the city after the Afghan army had reduced it in 1724 by mass slaughter and looting, and settled in Karbala in Iraq. There his financial situation improved, perhaps through trade.

Al-Bahrani adopted the Akhbari school, rejecting his early schooling in Bahrain. As a refugee from Iran in Karbala, he would at first have been dependent on the largesse of Akhbari religious dignitaries. Moreover, the same political instability that propelled him from his homeland and deposed the Safavids apparently made an establishment-oriented school of jurisprudence like Usulism less appealing. As time went on, al-Bahrani moved away from a strict Akhbarism to a neo-Akhbari position which had Usuli elements. Nevertheless, he rejected Usuli principles of legal reason-

ing, the syllogistic logic Usulis allowed in interpreting the law, and the legitimacy of holy war during the occultation of the Imam.³³

When the influx of Iranians came into Karbala from Isfahan and other Iranian cities, especially during the interregnums of 1722-36 and 1747-63, the Akhbari teachers in the shrine cities employed their prestige and patronage to convince them to adopt the Akhbari school. Thus, al-Bahrani's many students included not only other Arabs but in later years such Iranian scholars as Sayyid Muhammad Mihdi Tabataba'i of Burujird, Mirza Muhammad Mihdi Shahrستاني, and Mulla Muhammad Mihdi Niraqi.³⁴

The trend to Akhbarism after 1722 may be witnessed in another major eighteenth-century figure, Aqa Muhammad Baqir b. Muhammad Akmal (1705-90), born in Isfahan and descended on his mother's side from Muhammad Taqi Majlisi. As the chronology of his career has remained confused, a reinterpretation is offered here. Aqa Muhammad Baqir departed from his home town for Najaf after the death of his father and the 1722 Afghan invasion. In Iraq he studied the rational sciences with Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i of Burujird and the oral reports of the Imams with Sayyid Sadru'd-Din Qummi.³⁵ The latter had trained in Isfahan, returning to Qom as a teacher. He was forced to flee the Afghans, first to Hamadan and Kermanshah, and finally to Najaf. Under the influence of Qummi, an Akhbari, the young Aqa Muhammad Baqir likewise came to adhere to this school.³⁶ While in Najaf in the late 1720s Aqa Muhammad Baqir married the daughter of his teacher, Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i (other marriage alliances existed between the two families). In 1732 (1144) his first son, Muhammad cAli, was born in Karbala.

In 1732-33 Nadir invaded Iraq, his troops occupying the Shi'i holy places of Samarra, Hilla, Najaf, and Karbala, over which he appointed Iranian governors. Ottoman reinforcements soon arrived, forcing Nadir to make a peace treaty and withdraw after he visited the shrine cities.³⁷ These military engagements created insecurity even in the holy cities of Iraq, and there may at this time have been some exodus of anxious refugees to still more secure sites.

Whatever the reasons, Aqa Muhammad Baqir traveled early in the 1730s to Bihbahan on the border of the Iranian prov-

inces of Khuzistan and Fars. Many Isfahani scholarly families scattered to such small towns (*qasabah*) in southern Iran, which were relatively near to the shrine cities and offered greater security in this period than large cities; moreover, Aqa Muhammad Baqir had a cousin there teaching in the local seminary.³⁸ At that point the town served as a stronghold for the semiautonomous Kuhgilu tribe and the headquarters of its Beglarbegi. The latter had allied himself with Nadir Shah against Muhammad Khan Baluch in a bid to maintain his local control over the area.³⁹ In the 1730s the town, lying on a north-south trade route from the port of Daylam, was in decline.⁴⁰

Aqa Muhammad Baqir found the religious institutions dominated by Akhbaris from Bahrain.⁴¹ Although he may at first have gotten along with them, at some point he reverted to his Isfahani Usulism, engaging in bitter polemics with the Akhbaris. His son, Aqa Muhammad 'Ali, boasted that he never emulated any jurisprudent, being already a mujtahid when he came of age at 15 (in 1747).⁴² This indicates that his father was an Usuli again by the late 1730s. Aqa Muhammad Baqir established firm links to the elite in Bihbahan and its suburb of Qanavat, marrying the daughter of the headman in the latter and the daughter of Hajji Sharafa the merchant in Bihbahan.⁴³ He emerged as a popular prayer leader and teacher, remaining for 30 years.

Sunni-Shi'i Ecumenism in Iran 1736-1751

While Aqa Muhammad Baqir found refuge in Bihbahan, the ulama in most parts of Iran suffered the assaults of Nadir Afshar. In 1736 he gave up the fiction of being merely the agent of the young Safavid heir, having himself declared shah upon the plain of Mughan and abolishing the Safavid state altogether. He made it one of the cornerstones of his policy that Iranians should renounce the Shi'i practice of cursing the first two caliphs of Sunni Islam and tried to have Shi'ism incorporated into Sunnism as a fifth legal rite. Much of Shi'i law was based on the precepts of the sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq, whom Nadir proposed to place on par with the founders of Sunni legal rites such as Abu Hanifah and ash-Shafi'i. Nadir attempted to negotiate with the Sunni Ottomans an acceptance of this theological compromise, but never proved successful. More

important, the policy did allow him to keep the loyalty of both his Afghan troops and his Qizilbash cavalry, the former bigoted Sunnis and the latter extremist Shi'is. Nadir Shah forced the Shi'i ulama to agree to this compromise, executing one cleric for opposing him.⁴⁴ Wherever they felt it necessary they went along, but the assent of many surely represented no more than pious dissimulation (*taqiyyah*), as Nadir's proposal contradicted their most cherished dogmas.

Still, many clerical officials were incorporated into Nadir's state and had to represent his policies. For instance, Mirza Ibrahim, qadi of Isfahan, became Nadir's military judge (*qadi-caskar*).⁴⁵ The shah sent Abu'l-Qasim Kashani, the Shaykhu'l-Islam, and Mulla 'Ali Akbar, Mullahashi, to Istanbul to negotiate with the Ottoman ulama. In addition, Nadir sought to weaken the clergy, and to guard against any potential clerical opposition to his policies, he confiscated the rich endowments that had supported the seminaries and mosques of Isfahan.⁴⁶

On his return from India, Nadir Shah once again prepared for conflict with the Ottomans in Iraq. He coordinated a two-pronged attack, through Kirkuk and Shahrizur in the north and from Arabistan to Basra in the south, dispatching troops to occupy, once more, the Shi'i shrine cities in the summer of 1743. In November, 1743, Nadir Shah convened a congress of ulama from Iran, Afghanistan, and Transoxiana, as well as from the shrine cities, in order finally to resolve the differences between Sunni and Shi'i. He attempted to propitiate the Shi'i ulama of Najaf by ordering the gilding of Imam 'Ali's shrine.

The conference, after much debate and haggling, produced a document that rejected the past Shi'i practice of cursing the first two caliphs, stipulating that Shi'is should abandon it on pain of death; that recognized the legitimacy of the rule of the first three Sunni caliphs; and that granted the Iranians the right to follow the legal rite of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq and yet remain within the Muslim community. The list of participants reveals that most of the Iranian ulama were Imam-Jum'ahs and qadis of Iran's chief cities. No mention appears in the biographical dictionaries of the role the Akhbari establishment at the shrine cities played in these negotiations, nor did as-Suwaydi refer to them, but they were almost certainly in-

volved. The Iranians took the lead in the negotiations on the Shi'i side, particularly Nadir Shah's compliant Mulla-Bashi. The Ottomans rejected the document that emerged.⁴⁷ Some Shi'i officials genuinely committed themselves to Nadir's ecumenical stance. The Imam-Jum'ah of Isfahan from 1746 to 1787, Shaykh Zaynu'd-Din 'Ali, wrote a refutation of a treatise by Mulla Haydar 'Ali in 1751, who opposed the policy. Haydar 'Ali had insisted that all sects other than the Imami were ritually impure and outside Islam. Shaykh Zaynu'd-Din replied that Sunnis were also Muslims.⁴⁸

One longlasting effect of Nadir Shah's Iraq campaign of the 1740s was the provisions in the peace treaty he finally concluded with the Ottomans that concerned Iranian pilgrims to the Iraqi shrine cities. While the shah ceded these cities once more to the Turks in September 1746, he stipulated that Iranian pilgrims be able to visit the shrines and that "so long as these pilgrims carried no merchandise, the Governor and officials of Bagdad were not to levy any tax upon them."⁴⁹ The unimpeded access for Iranians to Karbala and Najaf guaranteed by the Treaty of Kurdan meant prosperity for merchants, shopkeepers, and clerics who lived off the pilgrim trade. Moreover, in the eighteenth century the shrine cities paid no tribute to the Mamluk government in Bagdad.⁵⁰

*The Usuli Revival in the Zand Period:
1763-1779*

In Bihbahan, Aqa Muhammad Baqir escaped from what the communalist Imami ulama perceived to be the indignities of Nadir's ecumenism, and for some time remained unaffected by the turbulent twelve-year interregnum in central government that Iran experienced in the wake of the Afsharid's bloody demise. But the growing power of the Zands disturbed the tranquility of Bihbahan in 1757-58, when Karim Khan first attempted to subdue the tribespeople in its vicinity. In July of 1757 the Zands took Bihbahan, imprisoning the old beglarbegi and replacing him with one of their supporters, and levied an annual tribute of 7,000 tomans. The Zands decisively pacified the area in 1765.⁵¹ It may have been these military campaigns and the disruptions they brought to local power and patronage structures that encouraged Aqa

Muhammad Baqir to return to Iraq sometime in the early 1760s.

Bihbahani, as he was now known, found the shrine cities an extremely hostile environment for an Usuli. Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani, in his late 60s and ten years senior to the newcomer, presided over the religious establishment in Karbala as the prestigious dean of Shi'i scholarship. Al-Bahrani's neo-Akhbaris considered Usulis to be ritually impure, touching Usuli works with handkerchiefs to shield their fingers from any polluting effects.⁵² More serious, anyone walking in the street with Usuli literature beneath his arm risked violent assault.⁵³ The power structure in the shrine cities consisted of an Arab landholding elite, a number of mafia-type gangs, and the leading clerics. Any important figure among the ulama would have to make alliances with the Sayyid landholders and with the chief gangsters who ran protection rackets in the bazaars. At this point, the Akhbaris had the important gangster or *luti* contacts, and could employ these to intimidate Usuli rivals.

Bihbahani at first faced so many difficulties in Karbala that he seriously considered returning to Iran. His eldest son, Aqa Muhammad ^{ca}Ali, had even greater difficulties adjusting to the new intellectual milieu. He joined Yusuf al-Bahrani's classes, receiving a diploma (*ijazah*) from him. But he did not pursue further studies with him because he kept wishing to contradict the old man's neo-Akhbari teachings, which would have been highly improper (and perhaps even dangerous). Aqa Muhammad ^{ca}Ali therefore went on pilgrimage to Mecca, settling in Kazimayn until 1772.⁵⁴

Aqa Muhammad Baqir began teaching Usuli texts secretly in his basement to a select and trusted number of students, many of them former pupils of al-Bahrani. These included his young grand-nephew on his first wife's side of the family, Sayyid Muhammad Mihdi Tabataba'i (1742-96), who had settled in Najaf in 1755 but now returned to study with his great-uncle.⁵⁵ Also involved was Bihbahani's sister's son, Sayyid ^{ca}Ali Tabataba'i (1748-1801), a mere teenager at the time. When the Iranians had originally come to the shrine cities in the 1720s, many of them penniless refugees, they had been integrated into the Akhbari

ideology of their Arab hosts and benefactors. Forty years later the founding of an Usuli cell in Karbala led by members of the Majlisi aristocracy signaled the increasing financial and social independence of the ethnically Iranian quarters in the shrine cities.⁵⁶ While the Iranian scholarly families originally depended heavily on government land grants and emoluments in Iran, which many of them lost after 1722, the history of the Majlisi family sketched above suggests that they increasingly forged links with merchants and skilled artisans in the bazaars, giving them a new financial base. Though fallen from their semifeudal notable status and dispossessed of their lands around Isfahan, many Iranian expatriates could increasingly compete with the wealth of merchant-ulama, like al-Bahrani, on his own terms, moving into the bourgeoisie themselves. The partial upturn in ulama fortunes in the Zand period, moreover, coincided with the economic rebound of the artisan and merchant classes with whom they had become increasingly bound up.⁵⁷

Aqa Muhammad Baqir had strong merchant contacts through his in-laws in Bihbahan and his half-brothers in Isfahan and Shiraz, important insofar as they might encourage merchant capitalists who came through Karbala to put charitable contributions in his hands and seek his rulings on commercial disputes. It is also possible that his sister-in-law's brothers in Bengal might have channeled charitable contributions from Indian notables to the shrine cities through him. Wealth was essential to the success of a great teacher, as he attracted students by providing them with stipends to live on. It was also indispensable in insuring that the gangster bosses were on his side.

At some point Bihbahani began to feel that he had enough students, monetary support, and security to challenge al-Bahrani openly, an event that led to the polarization of the scholarly community in Karbala during the 1760s. Fortunately for the Usulis, around this time the older and more prestigious Akhbari scholars began to die off. Muhammad Mihdi al-Fatuni of Najaf, for instance, passed away in 1769.⁵⁸

In 1772, when al-Bahrani expired, Bihbahani had attained such a prestigious position that he read the funeral prayers for his late nemesis. Shaykh Yusuf's demise removed the most vigorous Akhbari leader from the field, al-

lowing Aqa Muhammad Baqir, then 67, to spend his last clear-minded decade in consolidating his position. In this he was aided not only by his nephews, the young Tabataba'is, but by a number of other former students of al-Bahrani who now forsook neo-Akhbarism for the Usuli school, including the Iranians Muhammad Mihdi Niraqi and Mirza Muhammad Mihdi Shahrستاني and the Arabs Shaykh Ja'far an-Najafi and Sayyid Muhsin Baghdadi.⁵⁹ These in turn helped their aging mentor to train a whole new generation of youthful mujtahids who came from Iran to the shrine cities in the last years of Zand dominance and the opening years of Qajar rule.

The Usuli revival in Iraq began to exert influence on Iran, where Usuli currents had always run strong, with a wave of ulama reimmigration from the shrine cities in the 1770s. Political tensions between Iraq and Iran arose in the early 1770s, the Mamluk ruler 'Umar Pasha levying a frontier toll on Iranian pilgrims in contravention of the 1746 Treaty of Kurdan.⁶⁰ The new policy adversely affected the economy of the pilgrim-dependent shrine towns. In 1772, the same year that Shaykh Yusuf passed away, a catastrophic plague epidemic raced through Iraq, claiming hundreds of thousands of lives, perhaps a quarter of a million in Bagdad alone.⁶¹ The existence of the shrines of the Imams as pilgrimage sites contributed to frequent epidemics in Iraq, especially as Shi'is often transported corpses to them for reburial.⁶² Towns that became depopulated immediately attracted Bedouin raids and further destruction. The Mamluk ruler 'Umar Pasha therefore attempted to keep people in the cities during the plague, which lasted for some eighteen months.⁶³

How to respond to the epidemic became an issue among the Shi'i clergy as well, since many of them were morally and financially attached to their shrines and convinced of the divine protection they offered. Bihbahani and his chief disciples did their utmost to clear people from the festering urban centers, in defiance of 'Umar Pasha. Aqa Muhammad Baqir strictly enjoined his son Aqa Muhammad 'Ali to flee Kazimayn for Iran. The latter only reluctantly complied, settling for the rest of his life in Kermanshah, near the Iraqi border.⁶⁴ Sayyid 'Ali Tabataba'i supported his mentor's stance with the hadith report, "Greet not oblivion with your own hands."⁶⁵ Sayyid Muhammad Mihdi Tabataba'i took his family out of Najaf through Isfahan to

Mashhad during the plague, teaching and giving diplomas in Isfahan and Khurasan until his return in 1779.⁶⁶

This firm commitment to fleeing the plague preserved the lives of many in Bihbahani's circle, spreading his ideas to urban centers in Iran as his relatives and students scattered there. The loss of life in Iraq in 1772-73 was monumental. The Sunni cleric as-Suwaydi taught a class of a thousand students at a mosque in Basra before the plague reached there, then fled to Kuwait. On his return a few months later, when the epidemic had subsided, he found that everyone who had attended his class was dead. The toll in the shrine cities was equally high.⁶⁷ The Akhbari Arab natives of Karbala and Najaf may have found it less easy to leave suddenly than the Iranian Usulis with their international contacts, exposing them to heavier casualties from the disease. Moreover, the former social order of the shrine cities could not help but be disrupted by so immense a catastrophe, allowing Bihbahani's young Usuli cadres to move into the power and culture vacuum upon their return.

The impact Bihbahani's movement had in Iran in the Zand period may be witnessed in the careers of such clerics as Mulla Muhammad Mihdi Niraqi and Mulla Muhammad Riza Tabrizi. Niraqi (d. 1794) was born near Kashan and studied in Isfahan with the theologian Isma'il Khaju'i (d. 1759). He then went to Karbala, probably during the governmental interregnum of the 1750s, studying with Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani. When Bihbahani returned to Karbala Niraqi changed his allegiance to the Usuli teacher. He then settled in Kashan, where he was writing on commercial law for merchants and in defense of Usuli jurisprudence in the years 1766-72.⁶⁸

Tabrizi (d. 1793) also stayed for a long while in Iraq, studying with Muhammad Mihdi al-Fatuni and Aqa Muhammad Baqir Hizarjaribi. He, like so many others, went over to Bihbahani in the 1760s. He thereafter returned to Tabriz, where he led prayers and gave sermons. After a visitation to the shrine at Mashhad, he made his way to the Zand capital of Shiraz in the south. He became close to Karim Khan Zand, who appointed him military judge (*qadi-caskar*). The Zands, though ungenerous to the lower ranks of clerics and religious mendicants, were open-handed with the high ulama, building mosques and living quarters for them in Shiraz.⁶⁹ When the Zand state declined after 1779 Tabrizi returned to

Iraq.⁷⁰ In Kermanshah during the Zand period Bihbahani's son Aqa Muhammad ^CAli--another product of the Usuli revival--became extremely influential, intermarrying with the notable class there.⁷¹

The new mood in the shrine cities was epitomized by Bihbahani's student Shaykh Ja^cfar b. Khidr an-Najafi (d. 1812), who later authored the *Kashf al-ghita'* in refutation of Akhbarism:

The hair of his head and beard was already white in his youth. He was a big man of high aspirations and sublime courage, with great strength of intellect and insight. He had a strong appetite for licit sex (*al-ankihah*) and food, and for establishing links with kings and rulers for the sake of the religious benefits he believed to lie therein.⁷²

The Usuli revival was, in Iranian terms, a largely Zand-period phenomenon which the Qajars came to support later on. In the shrine cities themselves the Usuli victory coincided with the rise of local Shi'i power and the decline of central Ottoman control, such that Usuli principles like the holding of Shi'i congregational prayers could be implemented, something the Ottomans had not tolerated when their hand in Iraq was firmer.

The First North Indian Usuli Disciples

The degree to which the Usuli school dominated the shrine cities of Iraq at the end of the 1770s is demonstrated by the memoirs of an Indian student and pilgrim, Sayyid Dildar ^CAli Nasirabadi (1753-1820). Nasirabadi brought with him from the Shi'i-ruled nawabate of Awadh (Oudh) a copy of Muhammad Amin Astarabadi's *al-Fawa'id al-madaniyyah*, a work hugely popular among Shi'i thinkers in North India. Written nearly two centuries earlier, this major statement of the Akhbari creed attacked such classical Usuli writers as Hasan ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli.

Sayyid Dildar ^CAli and his companion landed at plague- and war-devastated Basra, proceeding up the Euphrates by boat.⁷³ During this long boat journey Nasirabadi made friends with an Arab Shi'i, also en route to Najaf, where

he had just begun his studies with Shaykh Ja'far an-Najafi. Their discussions came around to the principles of jurisprudence. Nasirabadi supported the Akhbari position, while his Arab friend took the side of the Usulis. The Indian criticized Usuli acceptance of consensus among scholars as an independent source of Shi'i law, asking why something should be true simply because large numbers of persons believed it. He also attacked Usulis for believing in *ra'y*, or the exercise of independent judgment by the jurist. In this discussion Sayyid Dildar 'Ali first encountered the now largely Usuli atmosphere of the shrine cities, finding it disturbing.⁷⁴

After performing visitation to the shrine of Imam 'Ali, Sayyid Dildar 'Ali met with the scholar Sayyid Muhsin Baghdadi (d. 1810s/1230s), who wrote on the principles of jurisprudence and became the prayer leader in Kazimayn.⁷⁵ Nasirabadi remarked on the fact that most North Indian Shi'i ulama, including himself, were Akhbaris. The Iraqi replied that this was owing to their unfamiliarity with Usuli works. He then gave him a refutation of Astarabadi's opus. Sayyid Dildar 'Ali read it, but the book left his doubts unresolved. He next met with Shaykh Ja'far an-Najafi, discussing whether scholarly consensus can constitute a proof in jurisprudence. Nasirabadi left dissatisfied. Later, he again brought up this matter with Baghdadi, who upheld the Usuli view that consensus does indeed constitute a source of law. Sayyid Dildar 'Ali listened and grew quiet, deciding that if he insisted on arguing these points with his teachers it would be impossible to learn anything. The important scholars in Iraq at that time were apparently Usulis, and he had little choice but to attempt to benefit from them.

Nasirabadi shifted north to Karbala, studying the oral reports from the Imams with Aqa Muhammad Baqir Bihbahani, then 75, and law with Sayyid 'Ali Tabataba'i and Mirza Mihdi Shahrastani (the latter having himself been to India). In spite of his silence on the issue, his reputation as an Akhbari followed him to Karbala, where Sayyid 'Ali once embarrassed him in front of an Indian nobleman by stressing his debt to the mujtahids. Sayyid Dildar 'Ali determined to throw himself into an intensive study of Usuli works, as they were the ones difficult to find in India. He began survey reading on the issue of the validity of those oral reports that were related by only a single transmitter in

each early generation (*khabar al-ahad*).⁷⁶ After much study of the classical writers Sayyid Dildar cAli began to feel that Astarabadi's position on this issue was indefensible. Within a few months of his arrival in Iraq, he adopted the Usuli school, one factor surely being that this ideology was in vogue at the prestigious centers of Shi'i scholarship. He later attributed his change of views to his proximity at that point to the holy tombs of the Imams.⁷⁷

When Sayyid Muhammad Mihdi Tabataba'i returned to Iraq, Nasirabadi, who had heard him praised as virtually sinless (*ma^csum*), sought him out and studied with him briefly. He pointed out to his teacher that in the Usuli system a believer must either be a mujtahid himself, or he must emulate a living mujtahid. But, he continued, the Shi'is of India were deprived of any opportunity for either, so that they might land in perdition. Tabataba'i replied that this was not at all the case. The Shi'is in India, he maintained, must simply practice caution (*ihtiyat*), following the strictest of the major positions on any matter of law. Nasirabadi riposted that Majlisi I once said that the most cautious position was not always the correct one. Sayyid Muhammad Mihdi answered that such instances were rare.⁷⁸ Sayyid Dildar cAli's dissatisfaction with the practice of caution as a solution to the dilemma of Indian Usulis suggests that even then he saw the need for religious leadership that would result from the spread of Usulism in Awadh.

Nasirabadi had great difficulty being taken seriously as a scholar because of his Indian background, some Iranian students insisting that there simply were no ulama in India. They found the very thought of an Indian mujtahid absurd, given that only three scholars at the shrine cities were recognized exemplars.

After about a year and a half, Sayyid Dildar cAli returned to India overland via Kazimayn, Tehran, and Mashhad, wintering in Khurasan and studying with Mirza Muhammad Mihdi Mashhadi (who was later killed by an Afsharid scion of Nadir Shah). On arriving in Lucknow he met with Awadh First Minister Hasan Riza Khan and had an interview with Nawab Asafu'd-Dawlah. In 1781 he began teaching and writing in Lucknow, producing a wide-ranging attack on Akhbari ideas and beginning the task of training a new generation of Shi'i scholars in Usuli sciences.

Sayyid Dildar 'Ali's experiences demonstrate that in 1779 Usuli jurisprudence already dominated most intellectual circles in Iraq. His adoption of that school and his transmission of it to North India paralleled a similar process among other Shi'i pilgrim-students from Iran, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in Iraq. By virtue of their centrality to Shi'i pilgrimage and higher education, the shrine cities exercised extraordinary influence on intellectual currents elsewhere in the Shi'i world.

The questions asked at the beginning of this essay can now be answered, if not with complete satisfaction, then at least provisionally. The evidence does not support the belief that Akhbari religious and legal doctrines dominated the religious establishment in Iran during the eighteenth century; they certainly did not prevail in major centers like Isfahan. Akhbarism, or at least conservative jurisprudence based closely on the Imami oral reports, was popular in the Iraqi shrine cities long before the eighteenth century. Iranian immigrants to Iraq during the turbulent period 1722-1763, adhering to Usulism, may have come to resent this situation more than had previously been the case. But the real change was not a sudden Akhbari dominance in Iraq; rather, it was an influx of Usuli-inclined Iranians into the shrine cities. These Iranians temporarily adopted the Akhbarism of their Iraqi hosts, but reverted to Usulism in the 1760s. The Usuli dominance of the shrine cities came, not at the end of the century with the rise of the Qajars, but in the 1760s and 1770s during the Zand era in Iran.

Given Usuli dominance in Iran, the fall of the shrine cities of Iraq to this clerical ideology meant the elimination of one of Akhbarism's last strongholds. From the shrine cities, with their complex network of pilgrimage and study that linked them to the rest of the Shi'i world, Usuli ideas then spread to distant areas like North India.

Usulism emerged as the favored ideology of the shrine cities at a time when the central Ottoman empire had declined and even the Mamluk vassal state grew extremely weak and little able to control the Shi'i cities firmly. Local elites came to prominence in these city-states, composed of Arab landowners, Arab and Iranian ulama, and gangster bosses. Usulism, with its emphasis on the leading role of the re-

ligious scholars in generally representing the absent Imam and serving as exemplars for lay believers, resonated with the increasing local power possessed by the Imami ulama in the shrine cities.

These developments appear also to be related to state formation in Qajar Iran and in Nawabi Awadh: the ruling classes in both regimes favored Usulism. Usulism, with its doctrine that the ulama can legitimate Friday prayers (said, in fact, in the name of the secular ruler) and its position on state-related functions such as defensive holy war, proved more amenable to the needs of the rising rulers in Iran and North India. Conservative Akhbarism, in which most state-related functions of Islamic government were considered lapsed in the absence of the Imam, could not fulfill state needs for legitimation nearly as well. In the nineteenth century, Akhbarism virtually disappeared as a major school of Shi'ism, and only Usulis were left to write the history of what had happened.

NOTES

1. See Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 33-41.
2. These events have been studied in Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958); *idem.*, *Nadir Shah* (Lahore: al-Irfan, repr. 1976); John R. Perry, *Karim Khan Zand: A History of Iran, 1747-1779* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); A. K. S. Lambton, "The Tribal Resurgence and the Decline of the Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century," in T. Naff and R. Owen, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), pp. 109-29; Clement Huart, *Histoire de Bagdad dans les temps modernes* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1901); A. M. K. Nawras, *Hukm al-mamalik fi al-CIraq, 1750-1831* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-A'lam, 1975); S. Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1925); and Thomas M. Ricks, "Politics and Trade in Southern Iran and the

Gulf, 1745-1765" (Ph.D dissertation: Indiana University, 1974).

3. See Hamid Algar, "Shi'ism and Iran in the Eighteenth Century," in Naff and Owen, *Studies*, pp. 288-302.
4. Said Amir Arjomand, "The Office of *Mulla-Bashi* in Shi'ite Iran," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983), 135-146.
5. John Chardin, *Voyages de monsieur le chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'orient*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Jean Louis de Lorme, 1709), 3: 82.
6. *Ibid.*, 2: 206-08. See the discussion in A. K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), Chap. XV.
7. Chardin, *Voyages*, 3: 208.
8. Lambton, *State and Government*, p. 285.
9. The following analysis is based on Aqa Ahmad Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal-i jahan-nama," Persian MS add. 24,052, foll. 17b-43b, British Library, London.
10. Muhammad Baqir Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat fi ahwal al-Culama' wa's-sadat*, 8 vols. (Tehran: Maktabah-'i IsmaCiliyan, 1970), 2: 118-23; for his social context see Said Amir Arjomand, "Religious Extremism (*Ghuluww*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722," *Journal of Asian History* 15 (1981): 24-28.
11. Chardin, *Voyages*, 3: 82.
12. *Ibid.*, 3: 310.
13. Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 2: 78-93; Arjomand, "Religious Extremism," pp. 28-29.
14. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," foll. 33b-34a. For Mazandarani see Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 4: 118-20.
15. Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 2: 360-65.

16. Ricks, "Politics and Trade," pp. 55-60.
17. See Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami, *Ma'athir al-Kiram*, Vol. 2 (Lahore: Matba'at-i Dukhani-yi Rifah-i 'Amm, 1913): 116-19.
18. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," fol. 20b.
19. For Shi'ism in Awadh see Juan R. I. Cole, "Imami Shi'ism from Iran to North India, 1722-1856: State, Society and Clerical Ideology in Awadh" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984); for Murshidabad in Bengal see K. M. Mohsin, "Murshidabad in the Eighteenth Century," in K. Ballhatchet and J. Harrison, eds., *The City in South Asia, Pre-modern and Modern* (London: Curzon Press, 1980), pp. 71-84; G. Bhadra, "Social Groups and Relations in the Town of Murshidabad 1765-1793," *Indian Historical Review* 2 (1975): 312-338; Philip B. Calkins, "The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal 1700-1740," *Journal of Asian Studies* 29 (1970): 799-806.
20. Sushil Chaudhry, "The Rise and Decline of Hughli-a Port in Medieval Bengal," *Bengal Past and Present* 86, 1 (1967): 33-67; Holden Furber, "Glimpses of Life and Trade on the Hugli 1720-1770," *Bengal Past and Present* 86, 2 (1967): 13-23; Ashin Das Gupta, "Trade and Politics in 18th Century India," D. S. Richards, ed., *Islam and the Trade of Asia* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1970), p. 199. For Shi'i institutions in Hughli see Syud Haseein, "Haji Mahomed Muhsin and the Hughli Imambarah," *Bengal Past and Present* 2 (1908): 62-73 and S. M. Hasan, "The Hooghly Imambarah, Its Madrasah and the Library," *Bengal Past and Present* 87 (1968): 217-33.
21. Cf. Nikki R. Keddie, "The Roots of the Ulama's Power in Modern Iran," *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, *idem.*, ed., 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 211-229.
22. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," foll. 36a, 44a-45b; Ricks, "Politics and Trade," p. 316.

23. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," fol. 38; for this viceroy see K. Datta, "Alivardi Khan," in Jadunath Sarkar, ed., *The History of Bengal: Muslim Period 1200-1757* (Patna: Academia Asiatica, 1973).
24. Ricks, "Politics and Trade," pp. 388-405.
25. Mohsin, "Murshidabad," pp. 80-81; Bihbahani, 'Mir'at al-ahwal," fol. 137b.
26. Cf. Purnendu Basu, *Oudh and the East India Company, 1785-1801* (Lucknow: Maxwell Co., 1943), pp. 20ff.
27. The best account of the doctrines involved remains G. Scarcia, "Intorno alle controversie tra Aḥbari e Uṣūlī presso gli Imamiti di Persia," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 33 (1958): 211-250. The account of Algar, *Religion and State in Iran*, pp. 33-41 contains errors and is dated. Aqa Muhammad Baqir did not study with his father in Karbala, but in Isfahan; he lived thirty years in Bihbahan, rather than briefly passing through; he died in 1790, not 1803, and the Usuli revival he led was a feature of the Zand period rather than coinciding with the rise of the Qajars.
28. Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 4: 143-46. Andrew Newman, in a personal communication, first pointed out the continuing appeal of Akhbarism in the provinces.
29. Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 7: 96-105; Sayyid Iḥjaz Husayn Kinturi, *Kashf al-hujub wa'l-astar ʿan al-kutub wa'l-asfar*, ed. Muhammad Hidayat Husayn (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1330/1912), p. 289.
30. For Niʿmatu'llah see Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 8: 150-59; for his son ʿAbdu'llah see *ibid.*, 4: 257-61.
31. For a brief autobiography written in 1768 a few years before his death, see Yusuf al-Bahrani, *Lu'lu'at al-Bahrayn*, ed. S. Mahmud Sadiq (Najaf: Matbaʿat al-Nuʿman, n.d.), pp. 442-51; see also Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 8: 203-08.
32. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty*, pp. 115-16; J. G. Lorimer, *Gazeteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Oman*,

- and *Central Arabia*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1908-15, repr. 1970), 1: 836; Ricks, "Politics and Trade," pp. 77-78.
33. al-Bahrani, *Lu'lu'at al-Bahrayn*, pp. 442-43; Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 8: 205.
 34. For Tabataba'i, see *ibid.*, 7: 203-09; for Niraqi, 7: 200-03 and Muhammad ^CAli Mu^CCallim Habibabadi, *Makarim al-athar dar ahval-i rijal-i dawrah-'i Qajar*, 2 vols. (Isfahan: Matba^C-i Muhammadi, 1958), 2: 360-64.
 35. For Qummi see Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 4: 122-25.
 36. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," fol. 45a.
 37. Muhammad Shafi^C Varid Tihrani, *Tarikh-i Nadir-Shahi*, ed. Riza Sha'bani (Tehran: Chapkhanahha-yi Zar, 1349 s.), p. 31; Mirza Muhammad Mihdi Kawkab Astarabadi, *Tarikh-i Nadiri*, trans. William Jones as *The History of the Life of Nadir Shah* (London: J. Richardson, 1773), pp. 46-63; Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, pp. 67-77.
 38. ^CAli Davvani, *Ustad-i kull Aqa Muhammad Baqir b. Muhammad Akmal ma^Cruf bih Vahid-i Bihbahani* (Qumm: Chapkhanah-'i Dar al-^Cilm, 1958), p. 130.
 39. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, pp. 77-78.
 40. Ricks, "Politics and Trade," pp. 68-69.
 41. Davvani, *Ustad-i kull*, pp. 129-30.
 42. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," fol. 46b.
 43. *Ibid.*, fol. 45b, mentions only the marriage into the merchant family. See Mu^CCallim Habibabadi, *Makarim*, 1: 223-24 for the other alliance. Cf. Davvani, *Ustad-i kull*, pp. 140-42.
 44. Lockhart, *Nādir Shāh*, p. 99.
 45. Mu^CCallim Habibabadi, *Makarim*, 1: 235-37.

46. Astarabadi, *Tarikh-i Nadiri*, Jones trans., pp. 66-67; Sayyid 'Abdu'llah as-Suwaydi, *Mu'tamar an-Najaf* (Cairo: al-Matba'ah as-Salafiyah, 1393/1973), pp. 16-17; Algar, "Shi'ism and Iran," pp. 291ff.
47. 'Abdu'llah as-Suwaydi, *Mu'tamar an-Najaf*, pp. 39ff.; Astarabadi, *Tarikh-i Nadiri*, Jones trans., pp. 105-06; Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, pp. 99-102.
48. Mu'allim Habibabadi, *Makarim*, 1: 127-29.
49. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, p. 255; Astarabadi, *Tarikh-i Nadiri*, Jones trans., p. 111.
50. J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 35-36.
51. Muhammad Sadiq Musavi Nami Isfahani, *Tarikh-i gitigusha dar tarikh-i khandan-i Zand*, ed. Sa'id Nafisi (Tehran: Iqbal, 1317 s.), pp. 137-39; Perry, *Karim Khan Zand*, pp. 113-16; Ricks, "Politics and Trade," p. 266.
52. Mirza Muhammad Tunikabuni, *Qisas al-Culama'* (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-yi 'Ilmiyyah-'i Islamiyyah, n.d.), p. 201.
53. Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 2: 95.
54. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," fol. 47a.
55. Sayyid Muhammad Mihdi's father, Murtaza, had been the prayer leader in Yazdigird: Sayyid 'Abbas Ardistani, "al-Hisn al-matin fi ahwal al-wuzara' wa's-salatin," 2 vols., Arabic MSS 235a-b, 1: 17, National Archives of India, New Delhi.
56. The ethnic dimension of the Usuli-Akhbari struggle has been pointed out by 'Abbas Amanat, "The Early Years of the Babi Movement: Background and Development" (Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford, 1981), pp. 13ff.
57. See Ricks, "Politics and Trade," p. 268.
58. Mu'allim Habibabadi, *Makarim*, 2: 363.

59. For Niraqi see Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 7: 200-03 and for Shahrastani, Mu^callim Habibabadi, *Makarim*, 2: 611-14. The two Arab figures will be treated below.
60. Nami Isfahani, *Tarikh-i giti-gusha*, pp. 180-81; Perry, *Karim Khan*, p. 171.
61. ^cAbdu'r-Rahman as-Suwaydi, *Ta'rikh hawadith Baghdad wa'l-Basrah min 1186 ila 1192 H./1772-1778 M.*, ed. ^cImad A. Ra'uf (Baghdad: Wizarat ath-Thaqafah wa'l-Funun, 1978), pp. 41ff.; Perry, *Karim Khan*, p. 170.
62. Cf. William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1976), p. 232 for the similar effect of Hindu pilgrimage in India on the spread of disease.
63. ^cAbdu'r-Rahman as-Suwaydi, *Ta'rikh*, p. 43.
64. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," foll. 47b-48a.
65. "A'inah-'i haqq-nama," Rijal Shi^cah, Persian MS 1, fol. 25b, Nasiriyyah Library, Lucknow. This anonymous biography of Sayyid Dildar ^cAli Nasirabadi, written in Lucknow around 1815, represents an important and hitherto untapped source for the history of Shi'ism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
66. Mu^callim Habibabadi, *Makarim*, 2: 316; Khvansari, *Rawdat*, 2: 105-06.
67. ^cAbdu'r-Rahman as-Suwaydi, *Ta'rikh*, p. 48; Nami Isfahani, *Tarikh-i giti-gusha*, p. 181.
68. Mu^callim Habibabadi, *Makarim*, 2: 360-64.
69. William Francklin, *Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia in the Years 1786-7* (London: T. Cadell, 1790), pp. 62-63; Muhammad Hashim Asaf Rustamu'l-Hukama', *Rustam at-tawarikh*, ed. M. Mushiri (Tehran: n.p., 1969), pp. 404-405; and Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," fol. 49a. But cf. Perry, *Karim Khan*, pp. 220-21.
70. Mu^callim Habibabadi, *Makarim*, 2: 343-46.

71. Bihbahani, "Mir'at al-ahwal," foll. 48a-49b.
72. Khvansari, *Rawdat*, 2: 200.
73. For a similar journey a few years earlier see Carsten Niehbur, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und den umliegenden Ländern*, 2 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, repr. 1968), 2: 240-42.
74. This and succeeding paragraphs are based on "A'inah-'i haqq-nama," foll. 48a-49b and Sayyid ICjaz Husayn Kinturi, "Shudhur al-Ciqyan fi tarajim al-aCyan," 2 vols. Buhar Collection, Arabic MSS 278-279, 1: 136-37, National Library, Calcutta. For the issue of consensus (*ijma'*) see Harald Löschner, *Die dogmatischen Grundlagen des siCitischen Rechts* (Cologne: Karl Heymans Verlag, 1971), pp. 111-147.
75. Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannat*, 6: 104-05. Originally a student of the Akhbari Sayyid Sadru'd-Din Qummi, he went over to Bihbahani's Usulism.
76. For this issue see Löschner, *Grundlagen*, pp. 101-09.
77. "A'inah-'i haqq-nama," fol. 49b.
78. *Ibid.*, foll. 20b-24a.