

**Shi'itization of Piety, Farsization of Shi'ism and Regulation of the Body in
Early Modern Safavid Iran**

By

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Abstract

The Safavid household came to power in the context of the early modern millenarian movements as a Sufi order, but moved toward fashioning itself as a Shi'a empire and homogenizing the religious landscape of its territory by "Shi'itization." Although the Safavid religious structure and power dynamics have always been an important topic in Iranian studies, little attention has been paid to locating the Safavids in the context of the early modern empires. In this thesis, drawing on Sanjay Subrahmanyam's concept of "connected histories" and Derin Terzioğlu's reformulation of "Sunnitization," I study the "Shi'itization" of the Iranian society as a part of the early modern religious dynamics. The Safavid Shi'itization included a range of strategies from the prosecution of non-Muslims to modification of the Muslim subjects' behaviors with the percepts of the Shi'a Islam as it was *being* defined at the time.

I focus on the facilitated circulation of knowledge in the context of the growing centralization and growing urbanity in seventeenth-century Iran to explore the participation or intervention of the centralizing power in the transmission of knowledge. The Persian language became an important tool in addressing the growing urbanity in this context. The 17th century experienced an unprecedented attempt at the translation and composition of religious texts in Persian language. At the same time, *akhbārism* (traditionism) gained growing popularity in Iran. I explore the thematic focus of these Farsi religious texts, which emphasized the tradition of the Prophet and his Household. I argue that the growing popularity of *akhbārism* and the growing centrality of *akhbār* was partially a logical consequence of the Safavid politics of piety in the framework of imperial rivalry. The other reason behind the growing popularity of traditionism was its ability to utilize popular forms of piety like sainthood. Furthermore, I argue that the growing attention to the works on proper conduct under the titles of *a'māl* (deeds), *ādāb* (etiquette) and *akhlāq* (ethics) in the 17th century signals a homogenizing focus on the practice of faith.

To discuss the utilization of sainthood and the focus of Shi'itization on the practice of faith, I study the biography and oeuvre of Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1627-1699), I especially focus on *Hilyat al-Muttaqīn* (The Adornment of the Pious), Majlisī's composition on ethics and etiquette, as an attempt at social disciplining and community-building. I discuss Mjliśī's utilization of the Perso-Islamic concept of *adab* in writing fourteen chapters on the proper ways of clothing, eating, make-up, sleeping, marriage, etc. *The Adornment* especially focuses on the re-establishment of social and sexual order by making recommendations that can distinguish a Shi'a Muslim from the "Other," and reinforce the

gender binary and gender hierarchy. Given that these social disciplining attempts strongly and directly targeted the regulation of the body, I end this thesis by suggesting an early modern framework for a better understanding of historical evolution and formation of Perso-Islamic bodies/selves/genders and sexualities.

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Note on Transliteration

I have used IJEMS transliteration chart.¹ For plurals, I have used an anglicized version. For example, I have used “shaykhs” as the plural for “shaykh” and “madrasas” as the plural for “madrasa.” Furthermore, for the words existing in English, like “shaykh” and “madrasa,” I have used the existing version.

¹ <https://files.taylorandfrancis.com/transliteration-chart.pdf>

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Introduction

Historicizing Early Modern Iran in an Inter-Imperial Framework

The Safavid Empire (1501-1736) was rooted in a Sufi order with growing political aspirations in the late 15th century, which saw its full realization when Ismail I (1487-1524) pronounced himself the Shah of Iran after occupying Tabriz at the turn of the 16th century. At the same time, Ismail took the far-reaching decision of announcing “Shi’ism” as the religion of his newly established state. When he was warned that two-thirds of the population of Tabriz adhere to the “Sunni” creed and might not have a favorable reaction to this announcement, he replied: “if the people utter one word of protest, I will draw the sword and leave not one of them alive.”² He was assured about his steadfastness by Ali Ibn Abi Talib in a dream, who consoled him and advised him to make the Qizilbāsh³ surround the people in the mosque and kills them if anyone made an objection.⁴ Thus, this early modern millenarian movement with its “extremist” Sufi background, ironically, ended up fashioning itself as a Shi’a empire and striving towards the homogenization of the religious landscape within its territory.

However, the linguistically, ethnically and religiously diverse territory the Safavids came to rule continued resisting homogenization. The attempts at homogenization, which in this case manifested as “Shi’itization,” led to a boom in religious scholarship and intensified some still ongoing debates and conflicts in several domains of the “Persianate/Islamicate” world, namely that of Sunnism vs. Shi’ism, Persians vs. Arabs, and different versions of “heterodoxy” vs. “true Islam.” In this sense, the Safavid period can be studied as a formative period that gave new shapes to these still ongoing conflicts.⁵ More importantly, the process of conversion required social disciplining and ritualistic public manifestation of faith. Therefore, the conversion put its mark on the Perso-Islamic body, both social

² Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 29.

³ The Turkophone nomadic tribes mainly from Anatolia, Greater Syria and Iraq, who helped the Safavids come to power came to be known as the qizilbāsh (the red head) because of their headwear. This headwear was invented in the second half of the 15th century by Ismail’s father, Shaykh Haydar, who was instructed by Imam Ali in a dream to devise for “his followers the distinctive scarlet headgear, with twelve gores commemorating the twelve Shi’ite Imams,” which became a mark of the supporters of the Safavid house. However, the term qizilbāsh held implications beyond that, especially in the Ottoman Empire. Savory, 19-20. For more see Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer, “One Word, Many Implications: The Term ‘Kızılbaş’ in the Early Modern Ottoman Context,” in Vefa Erginbaş (ed.), *Ottoman Sunnism: New Perspectives* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2021).

⁴ Quoted in Savory, 29.

⁵ I call them ongoing because there are many instances of these debates in the Iranian society today. To bring just one example, there have been many attempts by the Islamic regime to define the “Iranian” identity as a Shi’a identity. On the other hand, some groups among the opposition keep resurrecting a “glorious ancient Persian past” that fell into decline by Arab/Islamic invasion to define “Persianness” in opposition to Islam and the “Arabs”.

and individual. This thesis is an attempt to trace this mark in the Isfahan phase of the Safavid reign (1590-1736) in clerical religious compositions in the Persian language.

Shi'itization

The period between 1400 and 1650, according to Joseph Fletcher, saw global population growth, acceleration in the pace of historical change, increase in the number, size and importance of cities at a regional scale, growth of trade and exchange as well as of the economic power of urban merchant classes, religious revival and reform movements, rural unrest and the decline of nomadic power.⁶ Adding to these global early modern changes, Sanjay Subrahmanyam highlights the complex changes in political theology and the global appearance of religious millenarianism as an ideological, instead of technical, tool of empire-building.⁷ Subrahmanyam's main concern is a Eurasian definition of "early modern" epoch (mid fourteenth to eighteenth centuries) in the geographical extent of West Asia, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, North India and Central Asia. He proposes that "reformulation of Eurasian politics in the context of the great enterprise of Amir Timur Gurgan (d. 1405) could serve a notion of 'modernity' that departed from a particular European trajectory."⁸ Subrahmanyam identifies significant commonalities between the sixteenth-century Ottoman version of millenarianism with those in Iran, India and the Christian Mediterranean.

The growing emphasis on early modernity indicating the period between 1500 and 1800 has brought to the fore the early modern empires of the Safavids, Ottomans and Mughals. Recently, Tijana Krstic proposed that "the continued expectation of spiritual renewal as well as continued inter-imperial competition [with the Habsburgs and Safavids] gave rise to the phenomena of confessional polarization and Sunnitization in the Ottoman Empire."⁹ The inter-imperial competition, along with a series of "millenarian revolts in Anatolia in the period between 1511 and 1538" that challenged Ottoman legitimacy, necessitated more systematic attempts to rearticulate Sunni "orthodoxy" and prosecute the deniers in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ Arguing that these changes and challenges were

⁶ Joseph Fletcher, "Integrative Histories: Parallels and Interconnections in the Early Modern Period," in Joseph Fletcher, *Studies on Chinese and Islamic Inner Asia* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1995), 1-35.

⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735-62. He finds millenarianism the outcome of expectation of a messianic figure making true the dream of a Universal Empire, as the underlying motif in building, transforming and expanding states in the region.

⁸ Subrahmanyam, 736.

⁹ Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 12.

¹⁰ Idem.

similar to those of the European empires, Krstic suggested that it is possible to speak of an ‘age of confessionalization.’¹¹ She justifies the adoption of the terms “early modern” (denoting the period between 1500 and 1800) and “confessionalization” by emphasizing “the common economic, political, and cultural trends that tied the continents together” in new ways and dimensions.¹² Furthermore, drawing on Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s concept of “connected histories,” she emphasizes that these changes should not be interpreted as following a Western example. Instead, as the term “connected histories” suggests, these changes should be explored in the contexts of interconnectedness of the regional and local developments through new frameworks, like religious dynamics.¹³

More recently, Krstic has opted for a more limited definition of confessionalization as “a new sensitivity to the notion of correct belief” as a basis for differentiating communities.¹⁴ Also, to do away with the Christian burden of the term “confessionalization,” she has borrowed the term “normative centering” from Berndt Hamm to refer to the “alignment of both religion and society towards a standardizing, authoritative, regulating and legitimizing focal point.”¹⁵ Rivalling normative projects created consensus about “the necessary knowledge (of practice or belief) that defines one’s own community” involving specific knowledge about the Other.¹⁶ Furthermore, normative centering can avoid the connotation of a top-down process embedded in the term “confessionalization” and “capture different initiatives of re-ordering and definition of norms, whether legal, ritual, or creedal, rather than only the latter.”¹⁷ The same methodological concern is expressed by Derin Terzioğlu in “How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization,” where she argues that the process of “Sunnitization” should be interpreted beyond the prosecution of non-Muslims and a series of coercive policies from above.¹⁸ It should also not be interpreted as “the adoption/imposition by the Ottoman ruling elites of an already crystallized Sunni

¹¹ The term “confessionalization” was first introduced by historians of early modern Germany to capture the “interconnectedness of religious and political change in the sixteenth century” and the delineation of confessional boundaries and social disciplining that followed these changes for the purpose of state building. Krstic, *Contested Conversions*, 13.

¹² Krstic, *Contested Conversions*, 15.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Tijana Krstic, “Can We Speak of Confessionalization Beyond Reformation? Ottoman Communities, Politics of Piety and Empire-Building in an Early Modern Eurasian Perspective,” in Tijana Krstic and Derin Terzioğlu (eds.), *Entangled Confessions? Dialogic Perspectives on the Politics of Piety and Community-Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th–18th Centuries* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2022), 84–86.

¹⁵ Krstic, “Confessionalization,” 85.

¹⁶ Krstic, “Confessionalization,” 86.

¹⁷ Idem.

¹⁸ Derin Terzioğlu, “How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization: A Historiographical Discussion,” *Turcica* 44 (2012), 320.

identity”, but the “confessionalization” of Sunnism itself should be considered.¹⁹ She highlights Sunnitization as “adoption by the Ottoman religious and political authorities of a series of policies to modify the behavior (and to a lesser extent, the beliefs) of all their Muslim subjects in line with the precepts of Sunni Islam, as they were understood at the time.”²⁰ The politico-religious changes in the context of Safavid society, i.e. “Shi’itization,” have been explored or touched upon by many scholars.²¹ However, they have not been conceptualized in the bigger frame of “connected histories” and “confession-building.”

I will use the terms “Shi’itization” to refer to the politico-religious changes that were taking place in early modern Safavid Iran as a part of the early modern imperial transformations. Similar to Sunnitization in the Ottoman Empire, Shi’itization in the Safavid Empire included a range of strategies from prosecution of non-Muslims to modification of the Muslim subjects’ behaviors with the precepts of the Shi’a Islam as it was *being* defined at the time. This framework will serve the purpose of bringing Safavid Iran into dialogue with other early modern empires in Eurasia. The Safavid Empire, as Assef Ashraf criticizes, is often omitted from the studies of early modern empires. One of the reasons the Safavid Empire and, more generally, Iran is left out of comparative studies is because of a traditional over-emphasis in the Iranian studies on its difference.²² The other purpose that this framework serves is dissociating the idea of early modernity from Europe by discussing the role of regional dynamics in state and identity building, instead of confrontation with the “West.” This, as will be discussed in the third chapter, can provide us with new possibilities for studying important concepts like “sexuality” in the formation of Perso-Islamic identity(es). This study will also focus on the utilization of the notions of sainthood and *adab* (etiquette) in Shi’itization in Safavid Iran.

Sainthood and the Crisis of Authority

¹⁹ Derin Terzioğlu, “How to Conceptualize,” 305.

²⁰ Derin Terzioğlu, “How to Conceptualize,” 313.

²¹ See, for example, Mansur Sefatgul, *Sāktār-i Nabād va Andishi-yi Dinī dar Irān-i ‘Asr-i Safavi* (Tehran: Rasā, 2010); Rula J. Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion Political Order and Societal Change in Shi’ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

²² “According to this model, Iran was defined by how it was and continues to be different from the countries and regions in its geographic neighborhood: Persian is the primary language (not Arabic), Shi’a Islam is the dominant religious creed (not Sunni Islam), and Iran has existed as an idea and a civilization for thousands of years (it is not a product of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial projects”. See Assef Ashraf, “Pathways to the Persianate”, in Abbas Amanat & Assef Ashraf, *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Space* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 5-6.

As it was apparent in Ismail's strategy of announcing Shi'ism as the religion of his state among the "Sunni" majority of Tabriz in northern Iran, bloodshed was a constituent of the Safavid Shi'itization from the beginning. However, it was impossible to convert a society by sheer force. The Safavids were in need of constant legitimization of their rule. This legitimacy was built on the interplay of three main pillars of sainthood, guardianship and monarchy.²³ The Safavids held the position of the perfect, saintly spiritual leader [*murshid-i kāmīl*] rooted in their Sufi origins as one of the main pillars of their power. Another pillar was constructed when they fashioned themselves as a Shi'a Empire and made the claim of being the descendants of the seventh Shi'a Imam, Musā al-Kāzīm and being the guardians of the "true faith." The third pillar was built on Persianate ideals of kingship by making claims like that the third Shi'a Imam, Husain, married the daughter of Yazdigird III, the last Sassanid king, which linked the family of Ali and by extension the Safavids, with the ancient Iranian monarchical tradition.²⁴ Sainthood was the most controversial of these three pillars of authority and it became difficult to claim as the Safavids moved away from their millenarian past. Consequently, it became available as a claim for other groups, like other millenarian movements or even the 'ulama.²⁵

The Sufi discourses of legitimacy became prevalent and the enshrined saints, already popularized and venerated since the tenth century, became the real sovereigns of the "Persianate" world following the crisis of authority and legitimacy that rose in "Islamdom" after the execution of the last Abbasid caliph and the fall of the caliphate in 1258.²⁶ The controversies over the idea of sainthood and legitimacy culminated between the 14th and 16th centuries with the appearance of the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires.²⁷ Ismail I especially fashioned himself as the promised Messiah following the common patterns of monarchy based on Sufi and millennial motifs. Sainthood (*vilāya*) marked the close relation to the divine in Sufi discourses of legitimacy. At the center of the discourse of sainthood was Ali Ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), venerated as the perfect spiritual guide among different groups of Muslims.

²³ Savory, 27.

²⁴ *Idem*.

²⁵ The messianic *Nuqtavi* uprising (1593) was an example of these groups. For more on this event see Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies* 27, No. 1-4 (1994): 135-161. The case of the 'ulama will be discussed in the third chapter.

²⁶ A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); A. Azfar Moin, "The Politics of Saint Shrines in the Persianate Empires," in Abbas Amanat & Assef Ashraf (eds.), *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Space* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019). Islamdom was coined by Marshall Hodgson to refer to the society in which Muslims were dominant. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol.1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 57-59.

²⁷ Krstic, "Confessionalization," 27.

The “non-sectarian veneration of Ali and his descendants” before 1500 is referred to as “Alid loyalty” by Marshal Hodgson.²⁸ John E. Woods has referred to these “intensive forms of philo-Alidism” between 1200 and 1500 as “confessional ambiguity.”²⁹ More recently, Derin Terzioğlu has studied “philo-Alid Sufism” as a source of “confessional ambiguity” that continued into the 15th to 18th centuries in Islamdom.³⁰ She shows how acceptable forms of devotion towards Ali and his descendants were a matter of debate in this period, and affected the formation of Shi’a and Sunni “orthodoxy” because Alid loyalty was deeply rooted in popular religious practices in Islamdom.³¹ These discourses of Sunni and Shii orthodoxy reproached “extremist practices” in Sufism and Alid loyalty as *ghulw*.³² By putting this ambiguity at the heart of the Sunnitization process, Terzioğlu provides a more layered representation of the imperial politics of piety.

In the context of Safavid Iran, sainthood and Alid loyalty played an important role both in Ismail’s ascent to power and in his choice of Shi’ism as the official religion for the Empire. In this thesis, I will extend the central role of Alid loyalty in religious ambiguity to other features of sainthood including the extraordinary powers bestowed upon the saint in his relation to the divine. Since the condemnations of *ghulw* problematized the borders of sainthood, legitimate limits of extraordinary abilities had to be developed. As a result, for example, dreams became a safe medium of connection with the divine. Furthermore, as will be discussed in the third chapter, the ‘ulama of the Safavid domain, unable or unwilling to deny all the popular forms of piety, modified some of these forms and mediums to gain legitimacy and popularity in competition with the Sufis or other ‘ulama.

***Adab* as a Perso-Islamic Tool of Social Disciplining**

²⁸ Derin Terzioğlu, “Confessional-Ambiguity in the Age of Confession-Building: Philo-Alidism, Sufism, and Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, 1400-1700,” in Tijana Krstic & Derin Terzioğlu (ed.). *Entangled Confessions? Dialogic Perspectives on the Politics of Piety and Community-Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th–18th Centuries* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2022), 567.

²⁹ Terzioğlu, “Confessional-Ambiguity,” 569.

³⁰ Terzioğlu, “Confessional-Ambiguity,” 609.

³¹ Terzioğlu, “Confessional-Ambiguity,” 567.

³² “The *ghulāt* envisaged divinity as incarnated (*bulūt*) in humans, with each believer an earthly god who is able to connect with the holy personally through prophetic inspiration, illumination, or permeation. They believed in the dual yet integrated of spirit and matter, and the human potential to transcend the matter and access the divine while on earth.” Therefore, a cyclical understanding of time is central to the practice of *ghulāt* or *ghulw* which is born out of “Mazdean, Jewish, Christian, or pagan communities” and is opposed to the monotheistic understanding of the end of the time. See Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), xvi-xvii.

The terms “Islamicate” and “Persianate” were first coined by the world historian Marshall Hodgson in his groundbreaking three-volume work entitled *The Venture of Islam* (1974). There, Hodgson explained that the Arabic and Persian languages found different functions during the early middle period (1111-1274). While Arabic was “the primary language of the religious disciplines and even, largely, of natural science and philosophy,” Persian became “the language of polite culture” circulating in an increasingly large part of “Islamdom.”³³ Hodgson coined the term “Persianate” to denote this circulating knowledge of Persian language and, by extension, culture that was affecting all other local languages and traditions. To dissociate ‘Persianate’ from a single geographical center (often related to a nationalistic definition of Iran), which is in a hierarchical relationship with its peripheries, Abbas Amanat finds three historical epochs corresponding to different geographical borders. The first one dates ‘Persianate’ as a rich cultural legacy back to the late antiquity, with West and Central Asia as its geographical focus; the second one is the evolution of the Persianate (Hodgson’s zenith of the Persianate) in the formative Islamic period in Central Asia and greater Khorasan to central Iran; and the last historical epoch of the ‘Persianate,’ which this study falls under, is the age of the three early modern empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals.³⁴ Therefore, thinking with ‘Persianate’ has opened up new methodological possibilities for comparison.

In a similar fashion, Hodgson used Islamicate to distinguish “Islamic,” as pertaining to religion, from “the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion.”³⁵ To be precise, Islamicate denotes “a culture centered on a lettered tradition, that has been historically distinctive of Islamdom, the society, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom.”³⁶ The main criticism of this usage, most famously by Shahab Ahmad, is that it separates the realm of religion from that of culture.³⁷ He objects to Hodgson’s taking things other than “the core of religion/personal piety,” like art forms and social structures, as less Islamic.³⁸ Making any judgments on this discussion necessitates engagement with the question that Ahmad writes his book to answer, i.e. what is Islam. I am not trying to engage with this difficult question in this thesis but I still find Hodgson’s distinction useful because considering

³³ Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol.2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 293.

³⁴ Abbas Amanat, “Remembering the Persianate”, in Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf (eds.), *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Space* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 24.

³⁵ Hodgson, vol.1, 58.

³⁶ Hodgson, vol.1, 59.

³⁷ Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 157.

³⁸ Ahmad, 162.

these domains “Islamic” in the same way as “personal piety” can rob them of their pre-Islamic background and infinitely extend the domain of the “Islamic.” This, for example, holds true about the concept of *adab*.

Adab derives from the plural *ādab* of *daʿb*, which means “manner, habit, condition, state, or behavior, but originally conveyed the sense of way, path, or track,” similar to Sunna.³⁹ Charles Pellat proposes that in a similar fashion to Sunna, which was used for religious purposes, *adab* applied to secular context, indicating “a set of rules inherited from the ancestors which comprised practical ethics, separated from all Quranic and traditional teachings, and also the sum of educational elements needed by a man who wanted to behave appropriately in all circumstances of life.”⁴⁰ *Adab* literature, mainly as a prose genre, usually shared the following features: use of Arabic simple prose in an artistic and literary fashion, derivation of substance mainly from Persia, lack of emphasis on Islamic elements.⁴¹ In the Persian tradition, *adab* is equivalent of the Middle Persian *frabang* and New Persian *farhang*, and somewhat similar to Pahlavi *ēwēn*. The scope of *adab* in the Sassanid period was wide and included “the things a well-bred young man ought to know after completing his education.”⁴² According to Khaleghi-Motlagh, “a careful examination of the *Shah-nāma*’s Persian terminology of *adab*, which reproduces the Pahlavi terminology, proves both that Sasanian *adab* had been well developed and that Islamic *adab* was directly connected to it.”⁴³ On the fusion of Islamic and Persian traditions, he finds Saʿdī’s *Būstān* an outstanding example of *adab* literature that represents a worldview which is rooted in “Iranian moral concepts, Islamic doctrine, and mystical teachings.”⁴⁴ The history of the relationship between Persianate, Islamicate and *adab* is a long and contested one. It is a history of mutual exclusivity and commonality, or, as Mana Kia formulates it, aporia.⁴⁵ *Adab* can be considered the cultural locus that Persianate and Islamicate share. *Adab* is roughly defined as etiquette. Kia defines *adab* as a “Perso-Islamicate cultural-social system of education, behavior, and good manners” born through reading the same “corpus of well-known ethical, literary, and commemorative

³⁹ Charles Pellat, “ADAB ii. Adab in Arabic Literature,” *Encyclopædia Iranica* (updated 22 June 2011), via <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/adab-ii-arabic-lit>.

⁴⁰ Idem.

⁴¹ Idem.

⁴² Jalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, “ADAB i. Adab in Iran,” *Encyclopædia Iranica* (updated 22 June 2011), via <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/adab-i-iran>.

⁴³ Idem.

⁴⁴ Idem.

⁴⁵ Kia uses “Jacques Derrida’s formulation of aporia as a distinction that has no limit. There is not yet or there is no longer a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too porous, permeable and indeterminate.” Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 11.

texts” that were “disseminated through oral recitation.”⁴⁶ However, in the 17th-century Iran, the disciplining religious texts sponsored by the Safavid state become an important part of this corpus.

In the context of the Safavid society, Kathryn Babayan studied *adab* as the cultural element that guided the denizens of Isfahan “to act and to relate to other residents of a diverse and ever-growing capital city” and learn “social etiquette and sexual conduct.”⁴⁷ Therefore, to be a part of the social circles, residents had to be versed in the culture of *adab*, which was promoted and conducted by the Safavi court and the Shi’a clerical establishment who were trying to Shi’itize Isfahan. Therefore, the project of conversion draws on the medium of *adab* in this context, which can be traced on the drawings and calligraphies on the city walls as well as religious manuals. Babayan suggests that these manuals also fashioned “urban sensibilities” or the “*adab* of urbanity.”⁴⁸ The formation of “*adab* of urbanity” through the anthologies collected by the denizens of Isfahan is what the author takes as her main point of focus for the rest of the book. However, this thesis will highlight the disciplining function of *adab* based on its usage in Farsi religious manuals (i.e., manuals written in Persian language) and their thematic choice. I will mainly focus on *adab* as a Perso-Islamicate tool of social disciplining, especially as it was used by the Safavid chief jurist, Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1627-1699).

The Religio-Political Dynamics in the Safavid Context

The political and religious structures of Safavid Iran have always been at the center of the attention in the Iranian studies. For instance, Mansur Sefatgul in *Sākhtār-i Nahād va Andīshī-yi Dīnī dar Irān-i ‘Asr-i Safavī* (The Structure of the Religious Institution and Thought in the Safavid Iran), has discussed different aspects of the religious structure including economic, political, and ideological.⁴⁹ Rasoul Ja’fariyan also has written extensively on the political and religious structures of the Safavid period.⁵⁰ Ja’fariyan has touched upon several cultural, economic, and ideological aspects of the religious institution, including the polemics against Sufism. The Sufi-Shia polemics are also researched by Atta Anzali in an attempt to study “the transformation from Sufism to *Irfan*” (literally translated as

⁴⁶ Kia, 9.

⁴⁷ Kathryn Babayan, *The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 2-3.

⁴⁸ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 11-12.

⁴⁹ Mansur Sefatgul, *Sākhtār-i Nahād va Andīshī-yi Dīnī dar Irān-i ‘Asr-i Safavī* (Tehran: Rasā, 2010).

⁵⁰ See e.g., Rasoul Ja’fariyan, *Safaviyab Dar ‘Arsi-yi Dīn, Farhang, va Sīyāsāt* (Qum: Pazhūheshgāh-i Farhang va Andīshī-yi Islāmī, 2010); Rasoul Ja’fariyan, *Dīn va Sīyāsāt dar Duri-yi Safavī* (Qum: Pazhūheshgāh-i Farhang va Andīshī-yi Islāmī, 1991).

“knowledge,” but denoting “mysticism” more broadly).⁵¹ He traces the formation of a tolerated institutional idea of Sufism through these polemics and especially in the way Sufis fashioned themselves in response to accusations from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. I will build on these studies to discuss the dynamics of power in the Safavid society.

Concerning conversion, Rula Abisaab has elaborately discussed “the internal sociopolitical transformations that shaped the juridical concepts” in the early sixteenth century Safavid Iran. She suggested that the evolution of Shiism was not only from within the clerical establishment but depended on the sociopolitical context of the time.⁵² She has also addressed the disciplining dynamics of conversion to Shiism by pointing out that the clerics “mediated their views effectively through a network of students and followers who translated their juridical rulings into Persian and state officials who turned them into decrees.”⁵³ I will draw on her study to better contextualize my discussion of social disciplining in the state/clerical Shi’itization. This contextualization will be complemented by Kathryn Babayan’s study of the conversion of the Sunni-majority city of Isfahan to Shiism during the 17th century in *The City as Anthology*. Although we already learn from Krstic, Terzioğlu and Abisaab that conversion was not a teleological and coherent process, Babayan’s close observation of the conversion of Isfahan’s denizens further clarifies the fragmented nature of the religious ideology and disciplining strategies in the Safavid contexts. She also highlights the far reach of the Shi’a disciplining attempts (and the resistance against it) in the seventeenth-century practice of anthologizing based on an urban understanding of *adab* that “had to be learned and performed in the elite, artisan, and merchant sectors.”⁵⁴

There is a consensus in the above-mentioned literature that the conversion to Shiism took place in negotiation with different forms of lay/popular piety and Sufism. For understanding lay piety in the Safavid context, I will mainly rely on Kathryn Babayan’s *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran*. In this study, she sheds light on pre-modern “Alid loyalty” by tracing the Persianate modes in Alid and *ghulāt* practices and their manifestation in the cultural sites of

⁵¹ Ata Anzali, “Mysticism” in *Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 8-9.

⁵² Rula J. Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 2.

⁵³ Abisaab, 2, 4.

⁵⁴ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 12.

futuwva,⁵⁵ *Abū Muslimnāmah*, *Shāhnāmāh*, solar calendar, and Persian language.⁵⁶ In the third chapter, we will see the reflection of these ideals in the mainstream Islamic ethical texts.

The question of education and social discipline has also been discussed through the *madrasa* system and the *waqf* (endowment) institution. Maryam Moazzen has studied the higher education structure through the *waqf* documents in *Formation of a Religious Landscape: Shi'i Higher Learning in Safavid Iran* (2018). Moazzen has addressed the question of Islamic disciplining by asking if the Safavids significantly changed the structure of *madrasa* and its curricula. However, she does not discuss religious education beyond *madrasa*. It could be, for example, very interesting to know more about the *maktab* (primary school) curricula but there is not much information available about the content of the education in *maktab* during the Safavid period and the available documents are usually related to prior or later periods. Muhammad Derakhshani, for example, in *Ta'lim va Tarbiyyat dar Asr-i Safaviyān* (Education and Discipline in the Safavid Period), gives valuable information about the topic, but he sometimes becomes historically imprecise in referring to the content of *maktab* education. In this study, other than highlighting the importance of education in the Perso-Islamic culture, I will build on the available information about *madrasa* and *maktab* in the secondary sources, along with the given accounts in the European travelogues to discuss the impact of Shi'itization in the circulation of knowledge. To complete this picture, the popular or lay forms of circulation of knowledge like storytelling in the public places like bazaar and coffeehouses will be also discussed relying on the same travelogues and some recent scholarship.

Thesis Outline

In the first chapter, I will highlight the central status of learning in the Perso-Islamic culture. I will discuss the forms (e.g. written, oral and visual), the spaces (e.g. *masjids*, *madrasas*, *maktab*s and coffeehouses) and the languages (e.g. Persian, Turki and Arabic) of the circulation of knowledge in the context of the growing urbanity, especially in Isfahan. I will try to find the reach of the Safavid project of Shi'itization by studying the state, the elite and clerics' power of participation and intervention in this heterogeneous space of learning. This chapter will show that the high-rank clerics, the state and the elite (who are mainly an extension of the court in this case) had a relative power of

⁵⁵ *Futuwva* refers to masculine virtues like generosity and bravery, as well as confraternities that young men, mostly in urban contexts, joined.

⁵⁶ Babayan, *Mystics*, 18-19.

intervention in this space. They employed different strategies of banning, participating and utilizing the popular forms of piety and cultural expression to enforce a homogenized whole, which served the purposes of social disciplining and state and community building. The use of *waqf* and patronage as tools of homogenization will also be discussed in this chapter. The access of the new urban class and their participation in the production and circulation of knowledge will also be touched upon in this chapter.

In the second chapter, I will focus on Persian language as a tool of Shi'itization. I will argue that there is a systematic attempt at the composition and translation of religious texts in seventeenth-century Safavid Iran. These texts are produced in different religious genres including *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *akhlāq* and *adab* (ethics and etiquette) with a focus on the latter, serving the purpose of community-building with their over-emphasis on tradition. Therefore, I will argue that this “Farsization” attempt coincided with the growing popularity of traditionism (emphases on the tradition of the Prophet and his Household). Interpreting this movement in the frame of inter-imperial rivalry, I argue for the growth of traditionism as being a logical consequence of the policies of community-building that sought to distinguish the Safavids from the Sunni Ottoman rival.

In the third chapter, I will focus on the biography and writings of one of the most influential and popular Safavid shaykh al-Islams, Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1627-1699). Since Majlisī's teachings received wide public attention both during his lifetime and after his death, I will explore his role in social disciplining and community building. To find a reason behind Majlisī's popularity, I will study the utilization of sainthood by the 'ulama, especially by Majlisī and his father, concluding that the strict traditionists shared the discourse of sainthood with the Sufis, despite their anti-Sufi reputation. After giving a generic overview of Majlisī's compositions, I will study Majlisī's use of *adab* as a perso-Islamic tool of disciplining in his *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* (The Adornment of the Pious), which was a popular text written in simple Farsi. I will closely read *The Adornment* to show its function in the re-establishment of sexual and social order in the seventeenth-century Isfahan. I will propose that Majlisī's *Adornment*, especially in its re-establishment of social order, follows the imperial logic of community-building through distinguishing the self from the Other (in this case, from Sunnis, Sufis, Armenians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Europeans).

Chapter One:

Learning and Circulation of Knowledge in Safavid Iran

اطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنَ الْمَهْدِ إِلَى اللَّحْدِ.⁵⁷

Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.

The seventeenth century is generally known as a period of political, economic, and cultural centralization and economic and urban growth in Safavid Iran. This is especially linked to the reforms carried out during Abbas I's reign (1588-1629). By choosing Isfahan as his capital, Abbas I moved further away from the nomadic background of the Safavids in the north to the Iranian heartlands of the territory. This move away from the tribal past is also manifested in his introduction of a new military and bureaucratic elite to the political system, which restricted the power of the Qizilbash. In the mid-seventeenth century, a few hundred thousand people lived in Isfahan, and the entire oasis may well have been home to the 600,000.⁵⁸ Merchants from all over Eurasia frequented this wonderful city, which was at the zenith of its economic and cultural growth during the seventeenth century.⁵⁹ Abbas I had a major role in Isfahan's prosperity. He built architectural wonders like *Miydān-i Shāh* (the King's Square) in the capital. This big square was a symbol of the Safavid centralizing policies on the small scale. It included the palace, the main mosque and the grand bazaar, as well as the coffeehouses and brothels, bringing trade, piety, and pleasure together in the same space under the close inspection of the Shah. This chapter is concerned with the circulation of knowledge in these growing urban spaces and the state's influence on it. I will explore the places, languages and forms in which the knowledge was circulating in the Safavid period, especially the Isfahan phase, and try to answer if the Safavid centralizing policies influenced them.

Education and learning in Safavid Iran was taking place as a part of this circulation of information. The European travelers who visited Iran during the Safavid reign expressed their amazement about Iranians' commitment to learning. Raphael du Mans, a French Capuchin priest who

⁵⁷ In today's Shi'a scholarship this hadith is considered unreliable but it was used in a popular story in the literature book of the secondary school until several years ago! Also, there appears many other similar examples of hadith about learning in the major Shi'a hadith books in the Safavid period. Muhammad Muhsin Faiḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Wafī* (Isfahan: Imam Ali library, 1406 AH), 126; Muḥamad Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī, *Āḍāb al-Muṭī' al-ilm* (Shiraz: Madrasah Ilmīyya Imam-i Asr, 1416 AH), 112.

⁵⁸ Rudolph Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London: I.B.Tauris 2012), 23.

⁵⁹ Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, xxiii.

spent the whole second half of the 17th century in Iran, wrote that Iranians have a genuine love for learning and study from childhood until they get old, unlike the French who study reluctantly until the age of 18 or 20.⁶⁰ Jean Chardin, another French traveler who visited Iran in 1666, also praised Iranians for their love of learning, which is shared among different social classes at different ages, and even in rural areas.⁶¹ The importance of learning is also stated all over the classic works of Persian literature and in the Islamic recommendation. Many influential figures before and during the Safavid period have written about the importance and etiquette of learning, including Sa'dī Shīrāzī (d. 1291/2), Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī (d.1274), Imām Muhammad Ghazālī (d. 1111), Hurr al-'Amilī (d. 1693), and Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1698).⁶² Therefore, education and learning held a central place in the Perso-Islamic culture.

Places of Transmission: Public Spaces

The transmission of knowledge in the Safavid Iran, similar to the other Islamic traditions, took place in both oral and written forms in different places, namely palaces, madrasas, libraries, mosques, hospitals, coffeehouses [*qahvah khānah*], *ribāt*, *khānqāh* and *zāviyah*.⁶³ Coffeehouses, and in general public places like bazaars and main squares, were important places of oral circulation of knowledge in the Safavid Iran.⁶⁴ Urban coffeehouses were introduced in the Safavid Iran in the turn of the seventeen century.⁶⁵ In the Safavid Isfahan, different classes of people including the elite and the courtiers, the Qizilbash, the poets, the clerics, the painters, the traders and the storytellers frequented these coffeehouses.⁶⁶ They would meet, play games, get into debates, recite poetry and popular stories, and spend hours listening to the amazing stories.⁶⁷ The clerics, dervishes, and poets preached and told stories in prose and poetry in the coffeehouses and the audience would pay the performers if they liked to.⁶⁸ Chardin has reported that before the reign of Abbas II (r. 1642-1666), the coffeehouses

⁶⁰ Quoted in Muhammad Derakhshani, *Ta'lim va Tarbiyyat dar Asr-i Safaviyān* [Education and Discipline in the Safavid Period] (Tehran: Andīshah Ihsān, 2020), 525.

⁶¹ Jean Chardin, *Siyāhat-namāh* [The Travelogue], vol. 5 (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1959), 12-14.

⁶² Derakhshani finds these figures at the core of ideological thinking of the time about education. Derakhshani, 245-301.

⁶³ The last three are all Sufi places of gathering. Derakhshani, 503-524.

⁶⁴ Derakhshani, 521-522.

⁶⁵ Rudolph Mathee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 7.

⁶⁶ Derakhshani, 522.

⁶⁷ Mathee, *Pursuit of Pleasure*, 166; Maryam Moazzen, *Formation of a Religious Landscape: Shi'i Higher Learning in Safavid Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 120; There were similar places like *chāykhānah* (teahouse) and *kūknārkhānah* (where people used opium) where people gathered for entertainment. See Derakhshani, 522; Mathee, *Pursuit of Pleasure*, 107-109.

⁶⁸ Chardin, vol. 4, 277; Mathee, *Pursuit of Pleasure*, 167.

were places of moral corruption because they forced young beautiful Georgian boys to dress improperly and dance and sing improper stories. The coffeehouse with the most beautiful youth would attract the most customers. However, Khalifah Sultān, the grand head of the religious endowments [*ṣadr-i a'ẓam*] of Abbas II, put an end to this habit.⁶⁹ It was also reported in different travelogues that Shah Abbas I frequently visited coffeehouses and sometimes sent clerics there to preach to people.⁷⁰ This shows that the state intervened in the circulation of knowledge and daily life in the urban public spaces like coffeehouses.

Traveling dervishes and storytellers were probably the most important transmitters of knowledge in public spaces.⁷¹ There was a boom in storytelling from the early 16th to the 18th century probably due to its popularity among the elite and in the new coffeehouses, as well as due to the patronage of the Mughal Empire.⁷² These stories were produced in both oral and written forms. Although it is not possible to comment on the oral traditions, what is handed down to us in writing is mainly in the Persian language.⁷³ These stories were produced in different genres like tragedy, romance, epic, allegory, fable, satire and love, historical and Quranic stories.⁷⁴ Storytellers performed these stories, which shaped a major component of the Perso-Islamic identity, in prose and poetry. Rasoul Ja'fariyan divides storytelling in Iran into two traditions: pre-Islamic and Islamic.⁷⁵ The Muslim storytellers, influenced by the Christian and Jewish traditions, appeared among the early Sufis in Madinah.⁷⁶ The new tradition slowly scattered all around the Islamicate world including Iran.⁷⁷ The Islamicate storytelling tradition developed in negotiation with the pre-existing local traditions in each region, and more generally with Persian and Zoroastrian traditions in Iran.⁷⁸ This Perso-Islamic interplay is evident in many examples of popular literature that have transformed through centuries. For example, half a century after Firdowsi's (d. 1020) famous *Shāh-nāmāh*, someone wrote the epic of

⁶⁹ Chardin, vol. 4, 288.

⁷⁰ Matthee, *Pursuit of Pleasure*, 161, 167.

⁷¹ Interestingly, Abū Eshāq Ḥoṣrī (d. 453/1061), the compiler of the Arabic anthology *Ketāb ẓahr al-adab*, quotes a saying of the vizier Ḥasan b. Sahl (d. 236/850) about the categories of *adab* which counts "the recitation of pieces of story and fable at social gatherings" the category superior to all others. see Khaleghi-Motlagh, "ADAB i. Adab in Iran."

⁷² Muhammad Hanif, *Huwiyyat-i Milli dar Qissab-hā-yi 'āmmah-yi Durān-i Safavi* [The National Identity in the Popular Stories of the Safavid Period] (Tehran: 'Ilmī Farhangī, 2015), 29.

⁷³ Hanif, 47.

⁷⁴ Hanif, 25-26.

⁷⁵ Rasoul Ja'fariyan, *Qissab-khānān dar tarikh-i Islam va Iran* [Storytellers in the History of Iran and Islam] (Tehran: 'Ilm, 2021), 175-176. Unfortunately, Ja'fariyan's approach and his judgment are far from neutral and ironically rooted in the ideology of "true Shi'ism," the construct of the historical period that is the subject of his study.

⁷⁶ Ja'fariyan, *Qissab-khānān*, 176.

⁷⁷ Idem.

⁷⁸ Idem.

Ali-namah which drew on the same form but told the “true” stories of Ali Ibn Abī Tālib instead of the beautiful Persian and Zoroastrian “lies,” as its author stated in his preface.⁷⁹ Other similar examples are *Abu Muslim-nāmāh* and *Hamzah-nāmāh*.⁸⁰ However, as these examples suggest the Islamization of the pre-existing stories did not necessarily meet the standards of the clerical Shi’ism.

Storytelling played such a major role in the circulation of knowledge that the Safavid state and clerics had to address it. Both the state and the clerics employed the strategies of banning storytelling and using it as a strategic tool. Since storytelling was engaged with Sufi traditions, the bans against storytelling coincided with the polemics against Sufism, starting with al-Muhaqiq al-Karakī’s (d. 1534) *fatwa* (legal ruling) against storytelling, especially *Abu Muslim-nāmāh*, and continuing to the end of the Safavid period.⁸¹ In fact, the opposition to storytelling was a fight over authority because storytellers belonged to the popular domain of folk and Sufi practices in religion and especially had influence over the trade and artisan guilds in the lower levels of the Safavid society, where the storytellers and Sufi masters could act as legal authority.⁸² Despite their frequent attempts, the ‘ulama were not always successful in their opposition to storytelling as Ni’mat Allāh al-Jazayirī (d. 1701) expressed his dissatisfaction with the popularity of *Hamzah* and *Rustam* stories in the coffeehouses, which he called “the schools of the devil” around the end of the Safavid period.⁸³ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1698), the influential Safavid *Shaykh al-Islam* who will be discussed in the next chapters, in his Farsi compositions, quotes several hadiths from the Prophet and Imams in which they forbid “listening to baseless tales and Zoroastrian myths” and recommend remembering Ali and listening to his virtues.⁸⁴ This recommendation shows that clerics like Majlisī also drew on these popular forms and “styled their teachings and writings in the vernacular of the common believer and produced popular religious manuals in Persian” to reach a broader audience.⁸⁵ Another example of such support of popular practices by the state and the clerics were the eulogies for the martyrdom of the third Shi’a Imam, which Rula Abisaab sees as a continuation of storytelling and Sufi traditions.⁸⁶ As for the state, Shah

⁷⁹ Ja’fariyan, *Qissab-khānān*, 177, 183.

⁸⁰ Ja’fariyan, *Qissab-khānān*, 184-186.

⁸¹ Abisaab, 24-26; Ja’fariyan, *Qissab-khānān*, 199, 210.

⁸² Abisaab, 24, 26.

⁸³ Ja’fariyan, *Qissab-khānān*, 226.

⁸⁴ Majlisī counts stories of the *Shah-nāmāh*, Zoroastrian myths, the tale of *Hamzah* and Sufi miracles among these. Moazzen, 114; Ja’fariyan, *Qissab-khānān*, 225.

⁸⁵ Abisaab, 57; Moazzen, 120.

⁸⁶ Abisaab, 25.

Abbas I became a major hero of many popular stories.⁸⁷ Therefore, the approach of the state and the clerics toward storytelling was inconsistent. It ranged from total rejection to control and regulation.

Places of Transmission: *Maktab*

There are many reports available from the Safavid Iran suggesting that the literacy rate was very high in the urban centers.⁸⁸ For example, Adam Olearius, Frederic III's ambassador who travelled to Iran from 1636 to 1637, attested that it was hard to find an Iranian who did not know how to read and write in urban centers because they are educated and go to *maktab* from a young age.⁸⁹ *Maktab*s in the Safavid Iran provided wide access to basic education. They were small classes held at homes, in mosques or separate buildings for basic education of children, and they existed in both rural and urban centers.⁹⁰ Chardin observed that there were many *maktab*s all around the urban centers in Iran.⁹¹ He reported that the education of children was very strict and good.⁹² Adam Olearius also reported that Iranians do not teach their children riding and archery as they used to do in the past, but they put them to work as soon as they learn to read and write or let them continue their education.⁹³ He wrote that there is a mosque or school in each alley, where an instructor is responsible for teaching the children.⁹⁴ There were both male (*mullā*) and female (*bāji*) teachers in the *maktab*. Olearius writes that teacher stood in the middle of the room and the children sat around the room with their backs to the wall. They learned the alphabet, the Quran, the prose and poetry of Sa'dī and the poetry of Hafiz. The children read aloud and practiced writing on papers made of cloth. The disobedient children were punished by whipping on the sole of their feet (*falak*).⁹⁵

Unlike the less affluent people who sent their children to *maktab* two times a day, the elite employed a private teacher who taught their children at home so that they would not learn bad manners from other kids.⁹⁶ Children attended *maktab* based on their financial situation, but almost

⁸⁷ Hanif, 39-42; Ja'fariyan, *Qissah-khanān*, 201. Hanif also publishes a valuable collection of oral stories about Abbas I. These stories have been sent by people over the period of 50 years to the culture unit of the national TV. See Hanif, 153-301.

⁸⁸ Derakhshani, 423.

⁸⁹ Adam Olearius, *Safar-Nāmah* [The Travelogue] (Kitāb barāy-i hamah, 1990), 674.

⁹⁰ Derakhshani, 644.

⁹¹ Chardin, vol. 5, 37.

⁹² Chardin, vol. 4, 154.

⁹³ Olearius, 674.

⁹⁴ Olearius, 675.

⁹⁵ Olearius, 675-676.

⁹⁶ Chardin, vol. 4, 154, 156. Chardin also gives an interesting account of the Iranian's obsession with keeping their children isolated so that they would not get contaminated by any bad words or bad manners. This obsessive disciplining of the

everyone could afford it because they did not need to pay tuition but would usually give gifts to the instructor after learning important lessons, like a surah.⁹⁷ Derakhshani explains that at the core of the education in the Safavid Iran was the love of the Imams, the Quran, the Persian language, and the basics of Arabic language.⁹⁸ The most basic education included the Quran and basic religious knowledge like prayers and ritual purity, and further knowledge of reading, writing and basic math would come after them.⁹⁹ For examples, teaching writing to women was sometimes forbidden by the clerics.¹⁰⁰ In the next chapter, we will find a similar focus at the core of Farsi translation and composition of the religious works.

Some *maktabs* relied on donations [*waqf*] and were completely free.¹⁰¹ For example, an orphan's *maktab* was built by donations from Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576) in the area around the shrine of the eighth Shi'a Imam.¹⁰² According to the *waqf-nāmah* (the endowment deed) of this school, forty orphan boys and forty orphan girls should learn "the religious knowledge, prayers and ritual purity" from "pious and Shi'a" teachers.¹⁰³ They were provided with education, food and clothes, and married each other and left the school at the age of maturity.¹⁰⁴ According to Derakhshani, among the works that had been taught in this *maktab* were Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī's *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* (The Adornment of the Pious), *Zād al-Ma'ād* (Provisions of the After Life) and *Jalā' al-Uyūn* (The Brightness of the Eyes).¹⁰⁵ As will be discussed in the following chapters, these were among Majlisī's Farsi compositions, which served the purpose of conversion to Shi'ism through highlighting the tradition of the Prophet and his Household. They are, in order, about the proper *adab* (etiquette) and *akhlāq* (ethics) in daily activities, birth, martyrdom, miracles and lives of the innocent Imams and the proper deeds of each month. Other than Majlisī's works, Derakhshani finds the following among the popular *maktab* books: *Nān*

children is also reflected in the recommendations of important Perso-Islamic figures, which highlights the importance of ethic and etiquette (*akhlāq va adab*) in the Perso-Islamic culture. Cf. Derakhshani, 246-249.

⁹⁷ Chardin, vo. 5, 39-40.

⁹⁸ Derakhshani, 301.

⁹⁹ Mustafa Karim-khan-zand, *Piydayish-i Madrisa-yi Jadid dar Iran* [The emergence of the New School in Iran] (Tehran University 2012), 25-26.

¹⁰⁰ Karim-khan-zand, 26. In the third chapter, I discuss that Majlisī forbid teaching the Yūsuf surah and writing to women.

¹⁰¹ Derakhshani, 648.

¹⁰² In the same pages, Derakhshani provides more information about this *maktab*, which continued working until the end of the Qajar period (1925), like the lists of expenses and the names of the students and teachers. Derakhshani, 659-680.

¹⁰³ Derakhshani, 659.

¹⁰⁴ Idem.

¹⁰⁵ Among the works that were in the curriculum of this *maktab* are a number of books on basic Arabic, the life of the household, popular literature like *Rustam-nāmah* and *Khāvar-nāmah*, classic works of literature like those of Sa'di, and Farsi works of Safavid *shaykhs al-Islam* like Majlisī's *Hilyat al-Muttaqin*, *Zād al-Ma'ād* and *Jalā' al-Uyūn*; People could also give books to *maktabs* through *waqf*. For example, a woman named Tāj Māh Baygum gave 72 books to this *maktab* in 1847/8. Derakhshani, 671-673.

va Halvā of Baha al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī (d. 1621), another Safavid chief jurist, *Mūsh va Gūrbah* of ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Zākānī (d. 1370), *Pandnāmāh* of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār (d. 1221), *Gulistān* of Sa’dī Shīrāzī (d. 1210), *Dīvan* of Hāfiz Shīrāzī (1390) and some works of popular literature like the stories of *Husain Kurd Shabistari* and basic Arabic language.¹⁰⁶

Many of the abovementioned works include advice on proper conduct that is given through witty, allegorical or satirical stories in beautiful prose or poetry. These recommendations are sometimes rooted in religion and sometimes in a Persianate understanding of proper conduct.¹⁰⁷ Although the Safavid state did not have full control over the maktab education and did not introduce a centralized maktab curricula, the growing use of the state-sponsored clerics’ works in the *maktab* curricula, and its continuation after the Safavids’ decline, shows that these works found their way to the basic levels of learning in the Iranian society. The establishment of *maktab*s and donation of books through *waqf* could give the state and the elite¹⁰⁸ the power to influence the direction that basic education would take. Therefore, it can be concluded that, similar to public spaces, the state could influence the circulation of knowledge in the *maktab*s that were scattered all around the territory. Clearly, this influence decreased in the borderlands, which were far from the reach of the centralizing power. An estimated one-third of Safavid subjects still adhered to the Sunni creed in the eighteenth century, most of which happened to live in the peripheral areas like the frontier zone bordering on the Ottoman, Uzbek, and Mughal states.¹⁰⁹

Places of Transmission: Madrasa and Mosque

Higher education in the Safavid society could be pursued in madrasas. The madrasas attracted students of all ages by providing them with education, accommodation and stipend, which made Chardin suspect that some students living in madrasas were only there for the sake of this small stipend.¹¹⁰ The madrasas were shaped by and could influence the religious ideology of the time. In addition to making use of the offices of *ṣadr* and *shaykh al-Islam* to establish a new order, the Safavids renovated the

¹⁰⁶ Derakhshani, 498.

¹⁰⁷ It might be interesting to note that there are many contradictions in this “understanding of the proper conduct” and it seems that what makes a mode of being proper is the right manner of its expression in language. Therefore, language and wittiness had a significant role in defining the appropriate.

¹⁰⁸ The elite who could afford these kinds of donation during this time were among the courtiers, high-rank clerics or related to the royal family. Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next chapter, all donations were managed by the *ṣadr* who was appointed by the Shah.

¹⁰⁹ Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 174.

¹¹⁰ Chardin, vol. 5, 43.

existing mosques and madrasas or built new ones all over the Empire, and financially supported them through *waqf*.¹¹¹ Although the most famous Safavid madrasas were in the urban centers like Shiraz, Isfahan, Qum and Kirman, they were not limited to these centers and were scattered all around the Safavid territory.¹¹² In this way, they could incorporate the peripheral domains into the process of conversion. Madrasa was a place of community-building through both ideological and performative means. Ideologically, it influenced what could be included in the religious education. For example, the curriculum could support the study of the tradition and marginalize philosophy. As for the performative aspect, madrasas participated in the definition and commemoration of important religious events like the birth or martyrdom of the Shi'a Imams.

Although early Safavid rulers were also renovating the existing madrasas and mosques, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, madrasas became larger in both number and size.¹¹³ Jean Chardin wrote that Isfahan had 162 mosques and 57 madrasas.¹¹⁴ Kaemfer reported the existence of more than a hundred mosques and madrasas in Isfahan.¹¹⁵ Elsewhere, 30 madrasas and 180 mosques of Isfahan are documented.¹¹⁶ Similar to *maktabs*, and even more so, the *waqf* institution had a major role in the growing number of madrasas. Establishing a school through *waqf* usually served the purpose of worldly reputation and otherworldly salvation. The ruling elites could build a pious image in the eyes of their subjects by supporting the religious class.¹¹⁷ Also, the ruling elite could influence the intellectual discourse and the orientation of the madrasa curriculum by specifying the *waqf* conditions.¹¹⁸ They could appoint the trustee and the instructors or impose their wishes on the curriculum.

The curriculum of Safavid madrasas underwent significant changes during the 220 years of the Safavid rule.¹¹⁹ The endowments would usually follow the recommendations of Shi'i scholars such as 'Allāma al-Ḥillī.¹²⁰ Among the wishes of the donors were usually that the instructor should be Shi'a or topics like philosophy should be avoided. For example, Shah Sultān Husain (r. 1694-1722) stipulated that in *Madrasa-yi Sultānī*, the teacher must teach only religious sciences, transmit prophetic hadith and

¹¹¹ Moazzen, 15.

¹¹² Derakhshani, 561-610, 689.

¹¹³ Moazzen, 18; Derakhshani, 686.

¹¹⁴ Chardin, 46.

¹¹⁵ Engelbert Kaemfer, *Safarnāmah* [The Travelogue] (Tehran: Kharazmi, 2021), 191.

¹¹⁶ Moazzen, 30.

¹¹⁷ Moazzen, 18.

¹¹⁸ Moazzen, 26, 95; Derakhshani, 92-95.

¹¹⁹ Moazzen, 126.

¹²⁰ Moazzen, 29.

avoid rational sciences and *ḥikmat* (philosophy).¹²¹ This reflects the state's support of the traditionism (*akhbār*) in the context of the *akhbārī* (traditionist)/*usulī* (rationalist) debates that will be discussed in the next chapter. Along with the growth of traditionism, the major books of Shi'a hadith found a central place in the madrasa curricula.¹²² Therefore, the madrasas became more and more places of the transmission of the traditionist knowledge. However, this does not mean that the Safavid state succeeded in homogenizing religious education altogether because similar to other Islamic societies, the education in the Safavid society was "tied to individual scholars who transmitted texts to students in a variety of places" and established their own teaching circles like Muḥsin Faīḍ's (d.1680) circle in Kashan.¹²³

The Safavid madrasas also had a performative function in the process of conversion to Shi'ism. The Safavid elite usually dedicated a considerable amount of their donations to the commemoration of important Shi'a historical events. For example, Shāh 'Abbās I stipulated that a sum of his donations to madrasa-mosque complex of the *Shāh* should be dedicated to the cost of soup [*ḥalīm*] that was to be distributed among the public on the day of 'Āshūrā.¹²⁴ 'Āshūrā, holding a significant place in the Shi'a sense of community to this very day, is centered around the commemoration of and mourning over the martyrdom of the third Shi'a Imam. The commemoration of the violent death of Imam Husain, his family, and his followers usually draws on popular forms (like storytelling and theatrical and extravagant visual performances) and raises strong religious sentiments motivating knowing the Imams and following their lifestyle, cursing their enemies, and sometimes seeking retaliation. Engelbert Kaemfer, who spent the years between 1683 to 1685 in Iran, reported that Iranians spent the first ten days of the month of *Muharram* remembering that sad event by going into the squares and streets listening to *mullās* talking about it.¹²⁵ To him, people's "dancing" to the melody of *nuha kḥān* (elegy singers?) around the fire resembled the dance of the witches.¹²⁶ He also recounted some extremist rituals like hitting oneself with blades in the head to resemble Husain's murder.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Moazzen, 130; *Madrasa-yi Sultānī* was a big mosque-madrasa complex that was built in over ten years (1704 to 1714). Shah Sultān Husain "donated vast agricultural lands and urban properties to support the madrasa's teachers and students and to pay for the upkeep of the buildings and the religious activities stipulated by the terms of the *waqf*". See Moazzen, 59.

¹²² Derakhshani, 301.

¹²³ Moazzen, 131.

¹²⁴ Moazzen, 101.

¹²⁵ Kaemfer, 180.

¹²⁶ Idem.

¹²⁷ Kaemfer, 181.

Maryam Moazzen argues that in madrasas “intellectual Shi‘i heritage, traditions and representations were put on permanent display and their occupants and visitors were given a sense of participation through the presentation,” which made a people separated by ethnicity, language, religion, and class believe they have a shared past.¹²⁸ On this level, the madrasa closely connected the religious institution to the society. On another level, madrasas could bring religion and politics together. Through the *waqf* institution, the elite could intervene in the management of the madrasa and make a pious image of themselves. They could appoint the trustees and the instructors and specify the curriculum and the process of instruction. In return, this would give the clerics the financial means to do their research and promote their ideology. Madrasas also provided the clerics with the necessary credit and prestige to get political positions. The Safavid political and religious structure will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Languages of Transmission of Knowledge

The Safavid state had a relative power of intervention in different spaces of learning. However, they could never fully control their ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse territory. Iran had an estimated population of eight million in the mid-seventeenth century, about one-third of which were pastoralists, who kept as much distance as possible from the central government.¹²⁹ The control of the tribal power also remained a major impediment on the way to centralization.¹³⁰ The other obstacle for centralization was the language diversity. The Safavid territory was vast and fragmented and different languages were used in different parts of it for different purposes. For example, it is reported that Armenian was used more than Turkish or Persian in Nakhjivan in the second half of the 17th century, people in Kurdistan only spoke Kurdish and people in Gilan only spoke Gilaki in the early 17th.¹³¹ Despite this diversity, the concentration of big segments of the population in the urban centers, especially in the capital, which inhabited more than one-sixteenth of the population of the whole territory according to the estimates, made some extent of centralization possible.

When it comes to the urban centers and, especially to the court and the elite, the three major languages of Persian (language of the literate, government and bureaucracy), Arabic (the language of

¹²⁸ Moazzen, 68.

¹²⁹ Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 6.

¹³⁰ Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 9.

¹³¹ Willem Floor & Hassan Javadi, “The Role of Azerbaijani Turkish in Safavid Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 4 (2013), 571-572.

religion and scholarship) and Turki or Azeri¹³² (the language of the court) were the most prevalent.¹³³ In 1607, the Carmelites reported that the language of the court was Turkish but the common people spoke Persian.¹³⁴ This is followed by a similar observation from Raphael du Mans in 1660.¹³⁵ Adam Olearius similarly reported that Persian was seldom heard in the court, but in Shiraz and Fars everyone spoke Persian.¹³⁶ Persian was the language of high culture, above all of poetry and diplomacy as well as that of most urbanites on the plateau.¹³⁷ As I mentioned before, the popular literature was also mainly written in Persian. Rudolph Matthee proposes that Persian “linked the past, including the pre-Islamic past, to the present and served as a shared cultural repertoire, not just for the elite but for the common people, at least in urban areas.”¹³⁸

Shedding light on the importance of Turki as a language used in the court and in poetry, Ferenc Peter Csirkes writes that despite having the political power, Turki lost the battle to Farsi and Arabic because no distinct role was assigned to it.¹³⁹ It remained only “the language used for communicating with the large Turkophone segment of society, be they nomadic tribesmen or members of the elite at court,” while diplomacy and religion were reserved for Persian and Arabic.¹⁴⁰ Drawing on Bert Fragner’s term, Persophony, Csirkes writes that in the larger medieval Iranian world stretching from China to the Adriatic in Europe, Persian was an intellectual and cultural lingua franca.¹⁴¹ This centrality of a Persianate tradition and the appearance of a new urban class that was developing mainly in relation to this Persianate tradition in the growing urban centers like Isfahan are probably the main motivations behind what Ja’fariyan calls Farsi movement in religion, that is the translation and composition of religious texts in Farsi. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, this movement was not limited to language as the pre-existing, mainly Persianate, forms were adopted in it. Rudolph Matthee compares this shift to “the contemporary Protestant Europe, where vernacular languages began to supplant Church Latin” and proposes that in this process, “the status of Persian as a unifying idiom increased, further enhancing the role of the ulama as spokesmen for a nascent national-religious identity.”¹⁴² I will discuss

¹³² Different dialects of Turkish were used in Iran. The Turkish used by the Qizilbash was closest to what is known as Azeri or Azerbaijani today.

¹³³ Hodgson, 293.

¹³⁴ Floor, 573.

¹³⁵ Floor, 574.

¹³⁶ Floor, 573.

¹³⁷ Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 10.

¹³⁸ Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 14.

¹³⁹ Ferenc Peter Csirkes, *Chaghatay Orator, Ottoman Eloquence, Qizilbash Rhetoric: Turkic Literature in Safavid Persia* (University of Chicago, 2016), 414.

¹⁴⁰ Idem.

¹⁴¹ Csirkes, 7.

¹⁴² Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 15.

the centrality of Persian language and the growing power of the ‘ulama in the state/clerical project of conversion to Shi’ism in the next chapter.

Forms of Transmission: Oral, Written, Visual

Oral and written transmission of knowledge was central to both formal (madrasa, *maktab*, hospital, library, etc.) and informal (coffeehouses, bazaars, main squares, households etc.) spaces of learning. As for the written knowledge, the access to books was limited. The books were mainly kept in the royal library or those of the courtiers. Some examples of these libraries throughout the Safavid period are the libraries of Ebrāhīm Mīrzā Safavī, Sām Mīrzā and Zahīr al-Dīn Bahrām.¹⁴³ However, books were also kept in the private libraries, libraries of the clerics, and libraries of madrasas like the library of the *Chāhārbāgh* madrasa (1116-1126 AH/1704-1714 CE).¹⁴⁴ *Chāhārbāgh* library was established through *waqf*. Another example of a *waqf* library was Shaykh Safī’s library in Ardabil, which was established by Abbas I.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, some of the books that children were reading in *maktabs* were also probably given through *waqf*.¹⁴⁶ The madrasa libraries were not exclusive to the teachers and students. The endowment deed of the *Chāhārbāgh* library stipulated that the “Shi’a believers who wanted to read codices but were not seminary students could obtain permission from one of the seminary teachers. After receiving the seals of a teacher and head librarian, nonstudents could borrow manuscripts and even leave the city of Isfahan with them, so long as they were borrowing appropriate manuscripts to take to pilgrimage sites or for the purpose of prayer.”¹⁴⁷

There were also many private libraries and collections in Isfahan, which were damaged during the Afghan invasion of the city in 1722. However, seals of owners and names of scribes or patrons transmitted in prefaces and colophons of some copies help to identify some family library collections.¹⁴⁸ Nineteen private household libraries from the seventeenth-century Isfahan are documented, eight of which were owned by bureaucrats, generals, and merchants and eleven belonged to members of the religious establishment. For example, a copy of Sa’dī’s *Būstān* (1257) indicates that it belonged to the “library of the merchant ‘Itiqad Khan, who had commissioned the famous

¹⁴³ Derakhshani, 524.

¹⁴⁴ Ja’fariyan, *Dar ‘Arsī-yi*, vol. 2, 744-746; Moazzen, 78-79; Derakhshani, 524.

¹⁴⁵ Derakhshani, 526.

¹⁴⁶ Although this document is from 1847, it is not surprising that this form of *waqf* was practiced earlier as well. Derakhshani 673, 684.

¹⁴⁷ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 73.

¹⁴⁸ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 76.

calligrapher Mir ‘Imad [d. 1615] to execute this versified work on ethics.”¹⁴⁹ As for the members of religious institution, Shaykh Bahā’ī’s library included more than 4,000 volumes purchased in India alone.¹⁵⁰ The scholar Mīrzā Abdullāh Afandī, the seventeenth-century biographer who sent his students throughout the Iranian plateau to help build his library of Shi’a scholarship, had his own notable library. Shaykh Hazin Lahījī, another seventeenth-century historian and scholar reported that to survive the siege of the Isfahan (1722), “he sold everything of value save for his 2,000 manuscripts, which he refused to part with.”¹⁵¹ The Majlisī and Khānsārī families also owned their own libraries.¹⁵² Similar to Bahā’ī and Afandī, Majlisī sent his students across the Persianate world to collect the books he needed.

There are several reports on the circulation of copies of popular books in Isfahan. Kaemfer reported that he found everyone in Isfahan reading Shaykh Bahā’ī’s *Jāmi’ ‘Abbāsī*, which was commissioned by the Shah [Abbas I] to make it easy for the masses to act according to the religion.¹⁵³ There are other reports of texts circulating widely through Isfahan like *Tanẓīh al-mashrabayn wa tanqīh al-Madhbhabayn*, a debate between Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī and Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, a thousand copies of which were said to have been in circulation.¹⁵⁴ These reports sound surprising given that the printing technology did not effectively work in Iran until the end of the Safavid period.¹⁵⁵ Chardin was among the people who strove for the import of printing machines to Iran. He reported that Iranians argued that the weather was too dry or that the paper produced in Isfahan would break under the pressure of the press but these were excuses against the printing press because residents of Isfahan loved their hand-copied manuscripts.¹⁵⁶ He explained that the Iranian calligraphy was unique in the whole world and counted as fine arts, and even though the price of manuscripts was high in

¹⁴⁹ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 77.

¹⁵⁰ Idem.

¹⁵¹ Idem.

¹⁵² Moazzen, 78; Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 77.

¹⁵³ Kaemfer, 179; For more on *Jāmi’ ‘Abbāsī* in an inter-imperial framework see Narine Gevorgyan, *Jāmi’ ‘Abbāsī: Bahā’ al-Dīn al-‘Amilī’s Manual of Religious Instruction in the Context of State and Confession-Building in Seventeenth-Century Safavid Iran and Beyond* (Central European University, 2013).

¹⁵⁴ Moazzen, 144.

¹⁵⁵ It should be noted that there was a failed attempt by the Carmelites who imported the printing press from Rome around 1628, but the fate of this printing press remains unknown and there are no reports of it having been used. See Willem Floor, “The First Printing-Press in Iran,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 130, no. 2 (1980): 369-371; Also, the Armenian print remains an exception to this rule as the printing press was widely used among the Armenian diaspora in the 17th century (in Armenian script), including in New Jolfa in Isfahan in 1636. See Sebouh David Aslanian, *Early Modernity and Mobility: Port Cities and Printers across the Armenian Diaspora, 1512-1800* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2023), 116.

¹⁵⁶ Chardin, vol. 5, 80-84; Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 71.

comparison with printed books, there were sufficient books around.¹⁵⁷ Kathryn Babayan suggests that in the seventeenth-century Isfahan hundreds of scribes must have been occupied with copying manuscripts for the court, seminaries, and private and commercial use.¹⁵⁸ However, the resistance against the print should not be only understood as a love for manuscripts. For example, the guilds of these hundreds of scribes should have been against the printing technology that could make them jobless.¹⁵⁹ Some scholars have discussed the technical, geographic, economic and logistic obstacles in the way of the print in Arabic script before the industrial Revolution.¹⁶⁰

To explain more about the circulation of books in Isfahan and their availability to the people beyond the court, it should be noted that other than borrowing from the libraries, people could borrow books from booksellers in Isfahan. A 1722 document belonging to an anonymous bookseller in Isfahan lists 179 manuscripts in his inventory along with the accounting record of the sales and rentals.¹⁶¹ As Kathryn Babayan reports from this document, from the 179 manuscripts, 34 were on the subject of the religious sciences, including a children's version of the Quran, religious manuals on proper Shi'a rituals and behavior, hadith collections, and commentaries on medieval works by Twelver Shi'a scholars. Other works on medicine and basic manuals of prayer, purity, ethics, conduct, and inheritance laws were mixed in with dictionaries and historical chronicles. She also points out the existence of twenty volumes of anthologies of poetry in this collection.¹⁶² According to her, among the customer of this bookseller, the brother of Hajji Faḍl Allāh Beg (a merchant) and Aqā Qanbar Alī Khājah (probably a former slave) are noted.¹⁶³ The practice of collection and the *majmu'a* (anthologies) can shed more light on the circulation of the written knowledge.

As discussed, 'Abbās I's (r. 1587-1629) centralizing attempts turned out to be a move toward the Iranian heartlands and created a new type of elite who posed further challenges to the Turkophone tribal past.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, the urban growth and the increasing literacy rates created an urban class both as audience and as practitioners of literary and artistic pursuits that went beyond the court walls. Poetry was so popular in the urban centers that, as reported by Adam Olearius, you could buy a written

¹⁵⁷ Chardin, vol. 5, 82-86.

¹⁵⁸ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 71.

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 222-223.

¹⁶⁰ See Nile Green, "Persian Print and the Stanhope Revolution: Industrialization, Evangelicalism, and the Birth of Print in Early Qajar Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010): 473-490.

¹⁶¹ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 71.

¹⁶² Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 72.

¹⁶³ Idem.

¹⁶⁴ The emphasis here is on the Georgian and Armenian slaves who elevated to high political positions in different sections of the court including the army and the haram.

piece of poetry from a poet in streets and coffeehouses.¹⁶⁵ The other function of the elite and the affluent urban class was providing new patronage for art. For example, “calligraphy and paintings ascribed to Alī Riḍā Abbasi and Riḍā Abbasi appear in hundreds of single sheets and illuminated manuscripts commissioned by royal and private patrons.”¹⁶⁶ Although these artists had the court’s patronage, they had clients beyond the court and worked in the bazaar and in homes, as well. The pieces of calligraphy, including fragments or extracts of different texts along with personal notes, contracts, portraits and talismans, were collected in private *majmu’as*. Kathryn Babayan finds at least 5,000 *majmu’as* from the seventeenth-century Isfahan cataloged in major libraries in Tehran alone.¹⁶⁷ The *majmu’a* could be a collection of images drawn on single sheet papers (*muraqqa’*) or texts bringing together different genres “to learn and take pleasure from within the domestic realm of their [male anthologizers] households.”¹⁶⁸ In this sense anthologies connected the public and the private spheres, the regulative and the normative, the disciplining and the self-fashioning. In the third chapter, I will point to some examples of the extracts from the clerical disciplining texts in these anthologies.

For the final point, I want to recall the importance of the oral tradition of the transmission of knowledge once more. We learned that there was resistance toward the printing press in Safavid Iran because of their love of calligraphy and probably the existence of hundreds of scribes who could lose their jobs. A more important hypothesis is the primacy of oral transmission as some scholars maintain that “print threatened to undermine the person-to-person transmission of knowledge and conceptions of authoritative transmission associated with those styles.”¹⁶⁹ Most of the clerics believed the authoritative character of Islamic learning was maintained through oral transmission controlled by the ‘ulamā and the students were frequently advised to learn from the scholars and not from the books.¹⁷⁰ One can imagine that this student-teacher link must have been even stronger in Sufi master/disciple relationships that were still prevalent around the Persianate world. In addition to that, there has always been an element of secrecy and embodiment in Sufism (emphasizing conversation [*subhab*] and

¹⁶⁵ Olearius, 573.

¹⁶⁶ Babayan gives some accounts of the merchants commissioning or collecting works of famous artists in the same place. Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 66.

¹⁶⁷ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 7.

¹⁶⁸ The paintings and drawings on the city walls and palaces can also be discussed as important visual forms of transmission of knowledge. Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 2, 14.

¹⁶⁹ Moazzen, 170. The appearance of the printed version of the Bible in Arabic, printed in the late sixteenth century by the Medici Oriental Press in Rome in the late sixteenth century, which resulted in the raise of anti-Christian polemic, probably raised different reactions to the printing technology itself. For more on the printed Arabic translation of bible see Dennis Halft, *The Arabic Vulgate in Safavid Persia: Arabic Printing of the Gospels, Catholic Missionaries, and the Rise of Shi’a Anti-Christian Polemics*, (Freien Universität Berlin 2016).

¹⁷⁰ Moazzen, 169.

experience), which made written transmission of knowledge almost impossible. The oral transmission was not limited to teacher student relationships. The clerics also preached to the public on different occasions.¹⁷¹ More important than that were the *va'z* (sermon) sessions after the Friday prayers, where the leader of the prayer could preach to a big audience.¹⁷² The other examples of the oral circulation of knowledge including storytelling, which took place with attractive theatrical performance of the popular storytellers in the courts and public spaces like coffeehouses, were also discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Oral transmission of knowledge remained the most popular form of transmission and the most accessible to the less affluent sections of the society for a long time.

Conclusion

The circulation of knowledge in the growing urban centers of the 17th-century Iran was taking place in different spaces, forms and languages. As the Shah Square in Isfahan demonstrated, the new urbanity was supposed to grow in a way that brought the trade, piety and pleasure under Shah's observation and enhance centralization. Following this centralizing policy, the state sought the power of intervention or control over the circulation of knowledge and information through the forms, places and languages that it was circulating in. The state and by extension the elite gained significant influence on madrasa through the *waqf* institution. The religious homogenizing attempts were also pursued by the celebration of important Shi'a event in madrasa and public spaces. The *waqf* influence was similarly exerted on *maktab* but to a much lesser degree. The clerical disciplining texts (e.g. *Hilyat al-Muttaqin*) along with the popular literature that clerics admonished (e.g. *Husain Kurd Shabistari*) and the classic works of Persian literature (e.g. *Gulistan*) remained popular in the *maktab* education, which shows that these attempts reached the *maktab*s but did not homogenize the curriculum.¹⁷³ The state/clerical coalition also sought control over the places of transmission of knowledge like the coffeehouses and the bazaar by banning the coffeehouses or the popular preaching and storytelling taking place there.¹⁷⁴ Their other strategy toward these popular forms was using them for their own purposes. Therefore, some kings like the Abbas I became the hero of some of the popular stories and

¹⁷¹ We already discussed this in Chardin's reports of the coffeehouses.

¹⁷² As will be discussed in the next chapter, the leader of the Friday prayers was usually the shaykh al-Islam who was appointed by the Shah.

¹⁷³ The disciplining function of clerical texts like *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* (The Adornment of the Pious) will be discussed further in the third chapter.

¹⁷⁴ The state was not always in agreement with the clerical institution. Some of these prosecutions took place under the pressure of the strict clerical institution and as strategic moves to show a pious image of the king.

some clerics styled their writings in the popular form or recommended listening to “true” stories instead of the “false” ones. The popular forms of piety and culture continued resisting homogeneity until the end of the Safavid period, but became marginalized (marginalization becomes possible when a center is growing).

More importantly, the new urban class provided patronage for art (drawing and calligraphy), which enhanced the circulation of written knowledge. Although the printing technology did not effectively work in Iran until the end of the Safavid period, hundreds of scribes were working in Isfahan. The new urban class could borrow books from the libraries and collect anthologies. These anthologies can shed light on the making of the new class through a mixed process of disciplining and self-fashioning. As for the language, the three languages of Persian, Arabic and Turki, with their different functions, were the most common in the urban centers. The status of Persian as the language of urban literacy and culture became stronger as the new urban class related to the Persianate culture grew. Most of the written popular literature of the time was also written in Persian. The state/clerical institution used Persian language as a tool to reach a broader audience, probably especially among the growing new urban class. As will be discussed more in the next chapters, the Safavid politics of piety relied on territory and community building through re-definition of the “true faith” and the establishment of the state as the defender of the “true faith” against the Enemy. Therefore, there is no wonder that these interventions in the circulation of knowledge targeted religious homogeneity. It also comes as no surprise that the Shi’itization reached a new level in the seventeenth century, which is manifested in the composition and translation of the religious texts in Farsi. The next chapter will be concerned with this increasing homogenization by explaining the Safavid religious structure, the rationalist/traditionist debates and the Farsi movement in the state/clerical project of conversion.

Chapter Two:

The Persian Language as a Tool in Shi'itization

With the rise of the Safavid empire in the beginning of the 16th century in Iran, multiple dynastic claims were replaced by a centralizing empire pursuing religious cohesion negotiated through state-building. The Safavids came to power as a Sufi order but moved toward clerical Shi'ism because the establishment of a centralized state turned out to be incompatible with their heterodox Sufi background. Moving toward Shi'ism, the Safavids invited Shi'a clerics from Jabal 'Āmil and appointed them to the position of *shaykh al-Islam*,¹⁷⁵ a political office that found a major role in the project of Shi'itization. This project faced the challenge of legitimizing the existence of a Shi'a state and converting an ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse territory to the Shi'ism in-the-making. Therefore, there were at least two aspects of this project: the definition of Shi'ism and conversion to Shi'ism. Concerning linguistic diversity, I discussed in the previous chapter that the three major languages of Persian, Arabic and Turki or Azeri were the most prevalent in the Safavid Iran. Turki was mainly the language of the court and communication with the Turkophone segments of the society, Persian was the language of literacy, high culture, diplomacy and the growing urbanity, and Arabic was the language of religion and scholarship. However, the conversion of the Persian literate and urban the new class required the extension of Persian language further into the domain of religion, i.e. the religious composition in and translation to Farsi.

This realization by the Safavid state and the clerics resulted in a proliferation of Farsi religious compositions and translations in the 17th century. Before the Safavid period, the Shi'a literature was mainly in Arabic with the exception of some texts from the 12th century.¹⁷⁶ Muhammad Taqi Bahar especially finds the simple style of these Farsi religious text unique to the 17th century and writes that before this time, it was considered disrespectful to 'ulama to put their teachings in such a simple language.¹⁷⁷ To reach a broader audience, the Safavid court and the Shi'a clerics started a systematic

¹⁷⁵ Rula Abisaab finds two main reasons behind this choice: 1) The 'Āmilī's were considered an 'authentic' Islamic base and an established school of law, and had a good knowledge of Sunnism, which enabled the Safavids to be recognized by their subjects and the Ottomans alike as avowedly Muslim. 2) The 'Āmilī's use of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) enabled new interpretations of Tradition and new approaches toward secular government and Shi'ite political authority. Abisaab, 12.

¹⁷⁶ Ja'fariyan, *Dar 'Arsi-yi*, 1097.

¹⁷⁷ He especially praises Majlisī for his modesty in composing the ethical and religious Shi'a books in simple Farsi, and praises both Majlisī the father and the son for serving the formation of Iranian national identity through homogenizing the creeds and the ethical, disciplining and cultural teachings. Muhammad Taqi Bahar, *Sabk Shināsi* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1976), 304-305.

production of religious texts in Farsi,¹⁷⁸ both through translation and composition. It is important to note that the fact that a Turkish-speaking court and an Arabic-based religious institution founded by the 'Amili clerics found the need to express themselves in the Farsi language shows the extent of the Persianate¹⁷⁹ influence among the Safavids. Although this influence, as the term Persianate suggests, was not restricted to language, translation and composition of religious texts in Farsi will be the focus of my study in this chapter. I will explore which genres of texts were translated more frequently, which topics they addressed, and what possible role they played in the project of conversion to Shi'ism.

Safavid Religious Structure and the Office of *Shaykh al-Islam*

The appointment of the Shi'a clerics to religiopolitical positions by the Safavid shahs brought the religious and political structures even closer together and accelerated the move toward Shi'itization. The increasing proximity of the Shi'a religious institution and the state was received differently by the Shi'a clerics, ranging from avoiding the political structure to being at the top of it.¹⁸⁰ The Shi'a scholars in the Safavid court, served as custodians of religious practice (*vakil-e halaliyyat*), the prayer leaders (*pish-namāz*), judges (*qāḍi*), expounders of Islamic law (*mufti*), ministers (*viziers*), professors of theology (*mudarris*), chief jurists (*shaykh al-Islam*) and the head of religious endowments (*ṣadr*).¹⁸¹ The offices of *ṣadr* and *shaykh al-Islam* were the highest positions in the Safavid political and religious structure from the early years of their reign to its last years.

The office of *ṣadr* had existed in the Timurid and Turcoman states mainly as the head of the religious classes.¹⁸² In general, the Safavids inherited the Timurid traditions relating qāḍiship, mosque, madrasa and endowments, which were controlled by the office of *ṣadr*.¹⁸³ Given Isma'il's militarized conquest-oriented state, the *ṣadr* also held the rank of an *amir* (general) in the first years of his reign.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ I am using Farsi synonymous with the Persian language.

¹⁷⁹ The term "Persianate" was first coined by the world historian Marshall Hodgson in his groundbreaking three-volume work entitled *The Venture of Islam* (1974). There, Hodgson explained that the Arabic and Persian languages found different functions during the early middle period (1111-1274); while Arabic was "the primary language of the religious disciplines and even, largely, of natural science and philosophy", Persian became "the language of polite culture" circulating in an increasingly large part of "Islamdom." Hodgson coined the term "Persianate" to denote this circulating knowledge of Persian language and, by extension, culture that was affecting all other local languages and traditions. See Hodgson, 293.

¹⁸⁰ Sefatgul, 185.

¹⁸¹ Abisaab, 9,95.

¹⁸² Savory, 30.

¹⁸³ Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion Political Order and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 123.

¹⁸⁴ Idem.

Arjomand shows that because of its financial control over the endowments and the religious activities, the office of *ṣadr* remained almost exclusive to the same families and notables among the Persian aristocracy both in Timurid and Safavid states.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, the office of *ṣadr* was employed by Ismail I in his attempt to restrict the power of the Qizilbash and build a bridge between Turcoman Qizilbash warriors and the Persian notables.¹⁸⁶ The main tasks of *ṣadr* was to supervise the propagation of the Shi'a faith and the establishment of the doctrinal uniformity. In the second half of the 17th century, *ṣadr* was also responsible for appointing qāḍīs.¹⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that the Safavids also introduced the division of *ṣadr-i Khāssab* and *ṣadr-i Āmmab*, who in order were responsible for the endowment of the royal family and the other endowments.¹⁸⁸ The introduction of the office of *shaykh al-Islam* by Shah Tahmasp caused some rivalry and disagreement over the responsibilities of these offices. Said Amir Arjomand finds this rivalry an ethnic rivalry between the émigré clerics at the office of *shaykh al-Islam* and the Persian notables at the office of *ṣadr*.¹⁸⁹ A better understanding of Shi'itization requires a more comprehensive study of the power dynamics between the state and these offices. However, the focus of this study remains mainly limited to the role of the *shaykh al-Islam* in Shi'itization.

The title of *shaykh al-Islam* was not a Safavid invention but the position of *shaykh al-Islam* in the Safavid court was unique. From the end of the fifteenth century, Persian scholars served as *shaykh al-Islam* but they “worked within the rubric of provincial governorships in a decentralized political world.”¹⁹⁰ According to Sefatgul, appointing a single person from the religious structure to the position of *shaykh al-Islam* was probably done by Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-1576) for the first time.¹⁹¹ *Shaykh al-Islam* was “the highest religious dignitary of the important cities” and “the prayer leader[s] for the royal court and the great city mosques.”¹⁹² Therefore, *shaykh al-Islam* enjoyed giving the sermon (*naʿẓ*) after the Friday prayer. The judicial and legal functions of *shaykh al-Islam*, as reported in *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* (18th) and *Dastūr al-Mulūk* (18th), included settling financial disputes, carrying out divorce and sealing

¹⁸⁵ Idem. These notable families were usually related to the royal family by marriages. In the second half of the 17th century, this hereditary feature became more pronounced. For example, Shah Sultan Husain had his maternal uncle as *ṣadr* all during his reign. Arjomand, 124.

¹⁸⁶ Savory, 33; After the Chaldiran defeat (1514), the office of *ṣadr* lost its military function. Arjomand, 123.

¹⁸⁷ We do not have information about before this time. Arjomand, 124.

¹⁸⁸ Idem.

¹⁸⁹ See Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*.

¹⁹⁰ Abisaab, 10.

¹⁹¹ Sefatgul, 450-451.

¹⁹² Abisaab, 8. Performing the Friday prayer in the absence of the Imam in occultation was among the most contested issues in the early Safavid discussions. Al-Karaki, the biggest proponent of the Friday prayers believed in the exclusive right of the *mujtahid* in performing Friday prayer, which angered the *ṣadr*s who were frightened that it will strengthen the ‘Amilī clerics’ ties to the monarch and the public. Abisaab, 21.

different kinds of documents and contracts.¹⁹³ Furthermore, as religious scholars, *shaykhs al-Islams* were teachers (*mudarris*) and could hold classes in madrasa or at home. In some of the European travelogues, from the 17th century, *shaykh al-islam* is introduced as “the third most powerful position,” “the highest power in religious structure” and “the next to the *ṣadr*.”¹⁹⁴

The Safavid *shaykhs al-Islam* turned out to have a major role in the re-definition of Shi’ism and conversion to it. The first cleric appointed to this position in the Safavid court, in 1555, was Shaykh Husain ibn ‘Abd al-Samad al-‘Amilī (d. 1576), the father of the famous Bahā’ al-Dīn ‘Amilī (1629).¹⁹⁵ However, the way to the position of *shaykh al-Islam* was paved before by another ‘Amilī cleric, Nūr al-Dīn Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī b. al-Husann b. ‘Abd al-‘Ali al-Karaki (d. 1533), also known as al-Muhaqqiq al-Thani. Shah Tahmasp issued a decree [*farmān*] in 1532 that recognized al-Karaki as the deputy of the Imam in occultation [*nā’ib al-Imām*] and the seal of jurisconsults [*khātam al-mujtahidīn*].¹⁹⁶ As a “pious jurists” who can assume the “functions of the ‘just’ ruler during the period of awaiting the Mahdī,” “al-Karaki provided the governors with a manual (*dustūr al-‘amal*) instructing them on various socioeconomic matters, particularly the collection and administration of land tax” and “set the legal punishments (*hudud*) and encouraged the performance of Friday prayer.”¹⁹⁷ He also called for the appointment of prayer leaders, who were given clear instructions, in every village and city.¹⁹⁸ These were the first attempts toward Shi’itization through wedding the religious structure to the state.

Shi’itization reached a new level in the first half of the seventeenth century when Abbas I, concerned with “the insufficient level of ‘Shi’itization’ of Safavid society,” asked his *shaykh al-Islam*, Bahā al-Dīn al-‘Amilī (1621) to write a short religious compendium in simple and clear language that can be used all over his territory by both the learned and the lay.¹⁹⁹ The result was *Jāmi’-i Abbāsī*, the popular religious compendium that was reported to be read by everyone around Isfahan.²⁰⁰ *Jāmi’-i Abbāsī*, according to Arjomand, was a “serious effort to embrace the world and bring it under the normative governance of the sacred law” and became the official legal manual of the 17th century

¹⁹³ Sefatgul, 452-453.

¹⁹⁴ It should be noted that the position and power of *shaykh al-Islam* in the political structure was, among other factors, affected by the political rivalry between the ‘Amilī ‘ulamā, the Qizilbash, and the Persian elite. Furthermore, considering *ṣadr* superior to shaykh al-Islam is not necessarily correct. Al-Karaki, the first Safavid shaykh al-Islam, was responsible for the dismissal and appointments of several *ṣadrs* by Shah Tahmasp. Sefatgul, 453.

¹⁹⁵ Devin J. Stewart, “The First Shaykh al-Islam of the Safavid Capital Qazvin,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 3 (1996), 387.

¹⁹⁶ Arjomand 133-134.

¹⁹⁷ Abisaab 16, 28.

¹⁹⁸ Abisaab, 28.

¹⁹⁹ Abisaab, 57-58.

²⁰⁰ Kaempfer, 179.

Safavid Iran.²⁰¹ The book was connected to the project of and invited the Sunni majority denizens of Isfahan to enter the Shah's mosque [*Masjid-i Shah*], where Kathryn Babayan finds as communal space of worship with an architecture of conversion.²⁰² However, the most concerted attempts at Shi'itization took place in the second half of the seventeenth century. In the Safavid state, the capital and each city had one *shaykh al-Islam*. In the second half of the seventeenth century, three *shaykh al-Islams* in the three major religious cities of Isfahan, Qazvin, and Mashhad gained exceptional power. Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1699) was the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan during this time. The other two were Mullā Muhammad Tāhīr Qumī (d.1686), and Muhammad Hurr 'Āmilī (d.1693). The three are also known as the most prominent and outspoken anti-Sufi clerics.²⁰³ Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, who performed Shah Sultan Husain's (r. 1694-1722) coronation ceremony, gained unprecedented power and had a major role in the Shi'itization of the Iranian society. It is noteworthy that by the last years of the Safavid period, after the death of Bāqir al-Majlisī, the religious institution had become so powerful that it took control over all the ruling affairs through the newly invented office of *mullā bāshī* (the head of the *mullās*).²⁰⁴

The Revival of Tradition (*Akhhbār*) and the Popularity of the Traditionist (*Akhhbārī*)

Before analyzing the Farsi religious texts, it is necessary to note that the increase in Farsi translations and compositions coincides with what is known as the growing influence and popularity of *akhhbārism* (traditionism). The main difference between *akhhbārī* (traditionist) and *usūlī* (rationalist) schools is their approach to reason. To make a rough distinction, the former prioritizes following the tradition (what is handed down as the words and life style of the Prophet and his Household) over the use of reason in religious affairs. In extreme cases, the newly emerging *akhhbārī* tendencies in the 17th century rejected the use of reason altogether and insisted on the sufficiency of tradition. The sharp politico-legal boundaries between the two schools did not exist before the Safavid period. It was only during the mid-seventeenth century that scholars who mainly relied on independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) for interpretation of religious law came to be known as *usūlī*.²⁰⁵ The new interpretation of tradition in the

²⁰¹ Arjomand, 207.

²⁰² Babayan, 41-45.

²⁰³ Anzali, 89.

²⁰⁴ For more on *mullā bāshī* see Sefatgul, 408, 430.

²⁰⁵ Abisaab, 106; *ijtihād* is often translated as independent reasoning and I use the established translation to avoid confusion. However, this translation is problematic because *ijtihād* is not independent and relies on "the drawing of valid conclusions from the Quran, the Sunna of the Prophet, and the consensus, by analogy (*kiyas*) or systematic reasoning." As cited in Jonatan P. Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 90.

period is usually traced back to Muhammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1626) who wrote, according to Rula Abisaab, the first comprehensive denunciation of *ijtihād* in Shi'ism.²⁰⁶ Astarābādī accused *usulī* 'ulama of disregarding the tradition of Imams because of being affected by Sunnism in their *ijtihād*.²⁰⁷

Ironically, Astarābādī was also accused of “drawing upon Sunnite legal concepts inspired by al-Ghazali's *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error) because of his emphasis on *kashf* (intuition).²⁰⁸ Astarābādī and some other *akhbārī* scholars are also accused of being at the service of the state at the expense of religion because, for example, Astarābādī wrote an article to justify the use of wine at the request of Shah Abbas I (r. 1588-1629). However, it remains problematic to draw a sharp distinction between the traditionist and the rationalist school and to introduce them as irreconcilable movements. After all, many religious scholars in the Safavid period had moderate and diverse views towards the use of reason. Even the idea that Astarābādī rejected *ijtihād* altogether is contested by some scholars. For example, Kusha Vatankhah suggests that Astarābādī was critical of a certain way of *ijtihād* and did not fundamentally oppose reason and philosophy.²⁰⁹

The social and economic reasons behind what is known as the growth of the *akhbārī* school are not very clear. As for the political reasons, Arjomand proposes that the emerging distinction between the two schools was the result of an ethnic conflict between the 'Amili and Persian clerics in the office of the *ṣadr* or, as he calls them, the Seyyed notables.²¹⁰ He argues that the Persian notables moved toward traditionist tenets in opposition to the Arab clerical leadership. However, this argument is contested by Rula Abisaab who reminds that the tradition was embraced by the Arab clerics as well.²¹¹ Abisaab proposes that the political reason behind the growth of *akhbārism* might be that the Safavid state found *akhbārism* more useful because it, theoretically, restricted the power of the *mujtahid*, and promoted “a literal, ‘homogenous’ and somewhat blind following on the part of the common person.”²¹² In other words, the movement toward tradition could better serve the purpose of legitimization and disciplining. I will, therefore, focus on the centrality of tradition and the promotion of its acceptance through the production of texts in Farsi.

²⁰⁶ Abisaab, 106.

²⁰⁷ Arjomand, 145.

²⁰⁸ Abisaab, 110.

²⁰⁹ Mahdi Hoseinzadeh Yazdi & Kusha Vatankhah, “Arzyābī-yi intiqādī az Khānīsh-i ‘Aql-sitūzānah az Akhbārīyān” [A Critical Assessment of the Anti-rationalist Interpretation of the Akhbārīs], *Fashnāmi-yi ‘Ilmī-yi tarikh-i Islām va Iran* 53 (2022): 79-100.

²¹⁰ Arjomand, 144-159.

²¹¹ Abisaab, 112.

²¹² Abisaab, 111.

Some scholars propose that the Safavid rulers supported traditionism because they were frightened by the growing power of clerics, who prior to the 17th century did not have a popular base in the Persian society.²¹³ The émigré clerics, like al-Muhaqqiq al-Karakī (d.1534), believed that the temporal authority during the Occultation belongs to the *mujtahid*. This verdict justified a more political function for Shi'ism, gave the *mujtahid* the power to legitimize the state and the state to build institutional legitimacy, and obliged the Muslim population to imitate (*taqlid*) the *mujtahid*. Although this strategy gave a lot of power to the clerics, it was not considered a serious threat to the ruler's authority because the 'Amili scholars did not have a strong base within the Persian society. Therefore, they completely depended on the patronage of the state for the development of their jurisprudential system and conversion of the population. However, with the waning of the Qizilbash and the increasing power and popularity of some of the clerics in the early 17th century, the authority of the *mujtahid* turned into a threat for the ruler who could not claim sainthood—and the authority emanating from it—as before. By the 17th century, the discourses of legitimacy in the Safavid state had moved from the saintly and messianic claims of its founder, Ismail I, toward more moderate claims of the defender of true faith and descendant of the Prophet's household (*Ahl al-Bayt*). For example, Abbas I signed his letters as “the dog at the gate of Ali” (*kalb-i āstān-i Ali*).²¹⁴ In this sociopolitical situation, the support of traditionism could serve the purpose of strengthening an internal conflict between the clerics and restricting the power of the *mujtahid*. In general, in Rudolph Mathee's words, “in Iran's fractious political environment, nothing was more important than balancing competing interests” and “[t]he more skilled he [Shah] was at this task, the greater his actual influence.”²¹⁵

It was expected that the *akhbārī* belief that everyone should imitate the Imam in occultation through following the hadith, not the *mujtahid*, could limit the power of the *mujtahid* and therefore, the religious institution.²¹⁶ However, as the growing influence of the *akhbārī*-inclined clerics by the end of the Safavid time showed, traditionists did not hold much of a different view toward the authority of the cleric. Ironically, as Said Amir Arjomand has discussed, *akhbārīs*' short-lived domination led to a form of independence of the religious institution from the state which gave the clerics further

²¹³ See Arjomand; Abisaab; Sefatgul; Ja'fariyan, *Dar 'Arsi-yi*.

²¹⁴ Arjomand, 172.

²¹⁵ Mathee, *Persia in Crisis*, 18.

²¹⁶ This view is also contested by Kusha Vatankeh. He argues that those 'ulama like Astarābādī did not reject the *mujtahid* as the representative of the Imam in occultation, but emphasized the fact that the real authority belongs to the Imam in occultation. Therefore, they did not hold much of a different view toward the authority of the clerics. See Mahdi Hoseinzadeh Yazdi & Kusha Vatankeh, “Sociological Insights into Secularist Reading of Akhbārism: A Critical Consideration,” *Quarterly of Social Studies Research in Iran* 10, No. 4 (2022): 1237-1260.

influence. By moving away from a developing state-dependent jurisprudence, and addressing the lower strata of the society directly with a more individualistic view of religion and through accessible Farsi compositions and translations, *akhbārīs* became relatively independent of the state's intervention while putting into practice their religious views.²¹⁷ Therefore, although traditionism could solve the crisis of authority by promoting the blind obedience of the tradition, it could not necessarily restore the power of the king.

I propose that the growth of traditionist tendencies (the growing centrality of the household of the Prophet) in the second half of the 17th century was connected to the normative project of Shi'itization involving community and identity building. Since coming to a normative consensus over the definition of one's own community involved setting boundaries with the other, the revival of tradition could help the construction of sharper boundaries with the Sunni rival.²¹⁸ In other words, the "true" and distinguished Sh'ia community was one that has moved away from the Sunni-tainted *ijtihād*. Furthermore, although the traditionist/rationalist stance should be understood as a spectrum, the restriction of the use of reason on the more traditionist side of the spectrum could serve the purpose of unquestioning obedience and hence, the establishment of social order in the times of economic hardship and dissent.²¹⁹ In the following section, I will give an extensive introduction to some important Farsi religious translations and compositions. I will show that the revival of tradition with traditionist tendencies is reflected in the Farsization movement as a continuation of Safavid politics of piety.

The First Instances of Translations

The translation of religious texts started during the reign of the second Safavid ruler, Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-1576) and reached its peak during the time of Shah Sultan Hussain (r.1694-1722), at the very end of the Safavid reign. During the reign of Shah Tahmasp some clerics became professional translators and were given the title of *mutarjim* (translator).²²⁰ Rasoul Ja'fariyan finds this attention to Farsi language significant enough to call it a "movement," and provides a list of the Farsi translations

²¹⁷ Arjomand, 263.

²¹⁸ It is also possible to argue that it was the closeness to the popular practices of religion that the traditionism owed its growing popularity and influence to. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the emphasis on the more intuitive aspects of religion (like *kashf*, sainthood and miracles) in the revival of tradition, made traditionist figures like Muhammad Taqi majlisī very popular and made traditionism more apt for public acceptance.

²¹⁹ Abisaab, 111.

²²⁰ Ja'fariyan, *Dar 'Arvi-yi*, 1102.

in the Safavid period.²²¹ However, little attention has been given to these texts in the scholarship because they are not considered valuable either in content or in style in comparison to “serious” religious treatises in Arabic or the classic Persian literature.²²² These Farsi texts targeted common people and aimed to educate them in the matters of faith and practice. They appeared in different genres and addressed various religious and social issues. Mainly relying on the list of translations provided by Ja’fariyan and adding a couple of other influential translations and compositions that have appeared in other studies, I will provide a more extensive introduction to these sources, aiming to locate them in the context of the Safavid politics of piety.²²³ A more comprehensive study requires further research in identifying the Farsi translations and compositions of the period, which falls out of the scope of this thesis.

That Farsi movement was a systematic endeavor is suggested by the fact that many of the Farsi translations and compositions were either directly commissioned by the Safavid rulers and the royal family or dedicated to them. Therefore, “Farsization” should be understood as a part of the state-clerical attempt in the project of conversion. The first instances of these attempts are from the time of Shah Tahmasp. For example, Tahmasp commissioned the translation of *Kashf al-Ghumma fi Ma’rifat al-A’imma* (Lifting Unclearities in Knowing the Imams), originally written in the 13th century by Ali ibn Isā al-Irbīlī (d. 1293) about the Household of the Prophet. This work was translated at least three times during Tahmasp’s reign.²²⁴ In the introduction to the first translation, it is emphasized that this translation is to make evident the practice of *tavallā va tabarrā* (love and hatred), which requires a better knowledge of the life of the Prophet’s household among the masses.²²⁵ *Tabarra*, one of the main tools in the public manifestation of conversion and identity and community building, was practiced as public cursing of the enemies of God and the Household of the Prophet, including the first three Sunni caliphs, to set sharper boundaries between Sunnis and Shi’is.²²⁶ In 1511, al-Muhaqqiq al-Karakī wrote

²²¹ Ja’fariyan, *Dar ‘Arsi-yi*, 1097-1140.

²²² For example, Zabih Allah Safa considers these translations devoid of literary value. See Jafariyan, *Dar ‘Arsi-yi*, 1099. Muhammad Taqi Bahar, in a section titled the “Defect in prose and simple writings,” writes that the complex expressions were used superficially in the Safavid court, and some ‘ulamā wrote their books in such a simple prose to communicate with the laity that their prose has no use other than that. Bahar, 300.

²²³ The religious structure of the Safavid society and its influence on the spaces of education and learning like madrasa, *maktab*, and coffee house is already discussed in the first chapter.

²²⁴ Ja’fariyan, *Dar ‘Arsi-yi*, 1106-1107.

²²⁵ Ja’fariyan, *Dar ‘Arsi-yi*, 1105.

²²⁶ See Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson, “The Tabarra’iyan and the Early Safavids,” *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004): 47-71; Abisaab 26-27, 35. It is also interesting to look at the Ottoman’s take of it in a letter sent to Selim I (r. 1512-1520): “Since it has been proven to the Sunni religious scholars that this sect is in opposition to the Quran, prophetic tradition and Muslims’ consensus, it is therefore false and not accepted by Islam. Whoever accepts and follows this sect is an infidel. It is the duty of the caliph of Islam to punish the infidels [...] because these people consider the eternal Quran as created

in the *Nafahāt al-Lābūt fī La'n al-Jibt va'l-Tāghūt* (Breath of Divinity in Cursing Magic and Idolatry) that cursing the enemies of God is not only permitted but recommended.²²⁷ The full application of this practice required a better knowledge of the Household of the Prophet and their life story. Therefore, the revival of the tradition of the Imams was a logical consequence of the politics of community and identity building. It should be noted that al-Karakī's *Breath of Divinity* was also translated by his student, Amir Muhammad b. Abi Talib Mūsavī Astarābādī, which attests to the centrality of the Household of the Prophet in boundary-making and conversion through Farsization. Also, instructions on cursing the Sunnis and their leaders were given in Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī's *Bihār al-anwār*.²²⁸

Among other important translations during Tahmasp's reign is *'Uddat al-Dā'ī va Najāḥ al-Sā'ī* (The Number of Supplicants and the Triumph of the Seeker). *'Uddat al-Dā'ī* is written by the prolific Shi'a scholar, Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Fahd al-Hillī or Allamah al-Hillī (d. 1437-8), and is concerned with supplications and ethics. In his preface, Allamah Hillī claims that if someone acts according to a hadith, they will be rewarded regardless of whether the hadith is really coming from the Prophet or not. This argument could give increasing authority to the hadith literature and the hadith scholars by introducing the blind obedience of hadith as a source of salvation. The rest of *'Uddat al-Dā'ī* is concerned with the importance of *du'ā* (supplication), its proper rituals like ablution, and its proper time and place. It also includes parts on *dhikr*, recitation of the Quran and divine names (different names/attributes of God). As will be discussed, supplications remained a recurrent genre translated into Farsi.

A work of Shi'a creed called *I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyya* (Creeds of the Imamīs [i.e. Twelver Shi'a]) written by Muhammad b. 'Alī b. Husain b. Mūsā b. Bābūyah al-Qumī or al-Shaykh al-Sadūq (d. 991) was also translated during Tahmasp's reign. *I'tiqādāt* presents a summary of all of the core tenets of the Shi'a creed, including monotheism, attributes of God, the questions of will and destiny, human nature, resurrection and hell and heaven, enjoining and forbidding, the ranking of the prophets, messengers of God, Imams and angels, etc. In general, many of Shaykh al-Sadūq's writings, who was a major Shi'a scholar of *hadith*, were translated into Farsi around the second half of the 17th century.

and interpret figuratively (ta'wīl) its meanings. Moreover, they do not accept analogy [...]. They do so to oppose Sunnis and consider this opposition and objection necessary. They do not consider consensus of the Muslims valid and view the two shaykhs, i.e. Abū Bakr and 'Umar as well as 'Uthmān, as usurpers of the caliphate and as infidels. They curse them and accuse the mother of believers, 'Āyisha, of various kinds of immoralities [...]. They also curse and condemn the leading companions of prophet Muhammad and consider Sunni Muslims worse than combating non-Muslim infidels [...].” Moazzen, 6-7.

²²⁷ Abisaab, 26-27.

²²⁸ Moazzen, 34.

Shaykh al-Sadūq's *Man lā Yabḍurubu al-Faqīh* (He Who Has No Jurist with Him) was especially translated many times. The book contains around six thousand hadiths used in jurisprudence, including on ritual purification, prayers, ablution, death, marriage etc.²²⁹ It is one of the Four Books of Shi'a *hadith*, which are the most reliable sources of *hadith*. The other three are al-Kulayni's (d. 941) *Kitāb al-Kāfī* and Shaykh al-Tūsī's (d. 1067) *Tahdhīb al-Ahkām* and *al-Istibṣār*. According to Rula Abisaab, several smaller collections and manuals of hadith with commentaries, especially from these four books, were produced until the end of the seventeenth century.²³⁰ These small manuals were easier to copy, collect, and memorize.²³¹ The popularity of these texts shows the growing centrality of hadith literature in different religious domains including jurisprudence.

Further Attempts at Farsization

The first instances of translations served the purpose of a better knowledge of the Household of the Prophet and promoted their sayings and life style. Therefore, the Household of the Prophet held a central place in conversion through Farsization. The later translations followed a similar trend. Shaykh al-Sadūq's *I'tiqādāt* was also translated during the reign of Shah Abbas I, which shows that the creeds or *I'tiqādāt* remained an important topic. Among the other translated works on the creeds in the first half of the 17th century were Shaykh al-Mufid's (d.1022) *al-Fusūl al-Mukhtārah* (The Selected Chapters) and Allamah Hillī's *al-Bāb al-Hādī 'ashar* (The Eleventh Chapter). The creeds were also usually a short part of comprehensive religious compendiums like Shaykh Baha'ī's *Jāmi-i 'Abbāsī*. However, the works on rituals under the titles of *a'māl* (deeds), *ādāb* (etiquettes) and *akhlāq* (ethics) and the works on supplications seem to have had a more central place in Farsization. The centrality of deeds, etiquette, and ethics shows the deep disciplining function of the works in Farsi in the believers' daily lives.

On deeds, Shaykh al-Sadūq's *Thawāb al-A'māl va 'Iqāb al-A'māl* (The Reward of Deeds and the Punishment of Deeds) was translated into Persian by various translators and printed in lithograph many times. It describes right and wrong deeds and their spiritual consequences in two sections. The first section includes the reward of going to the mosque, brushing teeth, *jihād*, making another believer happy, etc. The second section includes the punishments for disobeying God's words, upsetting the

²²⁹ While *Man lā Yabḍurubu al-Faqīh* focuses on fiqh hadith, *Usūl al-Kāfī* is more comprehensive and includes hadith on *I'tiqādāt* (creeds) and *akhlāq* (ethics). Both works were translated in the 17th century.

²³⁰ Abisaab, 58.

²³¹ Memorization was one of the main teaching and learning methods during the Safavid period because writing was expensive. See Derakhshani, 429.

Prophet and his household, abandoning the practice of enjoining good and forbidding wrong, breaking the heart of a believer, etc. *The Reward of Deeds* was a comprehensive disciplining manual that could guide the believer in acting and living faithfully.

On ethics and etiquette, a frequently translated work was *Makārim al-Akhlāq* (The Noble Ethics) originally written by al-Hasan b. al-Fadl al-Tabrisī, a 12th c. CE hadith scholar. In twelve chapters, the book addresses ethics, hygiene (*bihdāsh*), makeup (*ārāyish*), clothing, marriage, etc. A very similar work on ethics and etiquette was Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī's (d.1699) *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* (The Adornment of the Pious). It was a translated extract from Majlisī's massive twenty-five-volume compendium on *hadith* titled *Bihar al-Anwār* (Seas of Light) (1666-1692). *Bihār* is one of the major sources of *hadith* scholarship after the Four Books. Similar to *Makārim al-Akhlāq*, *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* addressed the etiquette of clothing, eating, makeup, sleeping, marriage, prayer, fasting, etc. in fourteen chapters.

A'māl, *ādāb* and *akhlāq* were also addressed in works on supplications and medicine and in more comprehensive religious compendiums. For example, Bahā al-Dīn al-Āmilī's (d.1621) *Miftāh al-Fallāh* (The Key to Salvation), written on the supplications and the proper *ādāb* and *a'māl* of the six different parts of the day, was translated at least three times. The book is in six chapters, each dedicated to one part of the day, and mostly relies on the hadith literature. One of the translations with the title of *Ādāb-i 'Abbāsī*, was done by Bahā's student, Sadr al-Dīn Muhammad Tabrīzī. Tabrīzī also wrote a summary of *Ādāb-i 'Abbāsī*, and translated Bahā's other writings at his own request. In *Ādāb-i 'Abbāsī*, he starts the translation with a poem praising Bahā as the head of the 'ulama and the Shah as the king of the kings who is victorious by God's will and thanks to whom the candle of religion stays lit, may his ancestor Ali the Wali [the friend of God] be happy with him. Another interesting translation of *Miftāh al-Fallāh* was put down during the reign of Shah Sulaiman al-Safavī al-Musavī (r. 1666-1694), as the translator Mullā Muhammad Sharīf Shi'ī Gīlānī addresses the king. In his introduction, Gīlānī praises *Miftāh al-Fallāh* by writing the story of a believer who had been told by the prophet that this book would be written. Although our first translator, Tabrīzī, leaves the parts on supplications in Arabic, Gīlānī translates them in the margins so that, as he says, the believers will know the meanings, and their prayer will not be a mere moving of the tongue.²³² The above argument can be found in other translations of supplications as well. For example, al-*Sahīfa al-Sajjādiyyah*, a prayer book attributed to the 4th Shia Imam al-Sajjad, was translated into Farsi with commentaries several times under the

²³² The third translation was done under Shah Sultan Hussain with the title of *Misbāh al-Fallāh*.

Safavids. In one of these translations, the translator, Qutb al-Dīn Muhammad b. Shaykh Ali Lahījī (d. 1664), finds it necessary for the believers to understand what they are reciting because the movement of the tongue cannot fix a problem that is rooted inside.²³³

The influence of Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1621), as well as the Farsization movement, was not exclusive to translations of religious text. Shaykh Baha'ī, the last 'Āmili cleric to be shaykh al-Islam of the capital with moderate views toward traditionism, wrote his works in both Farsi and Arabic. One of his most popular compositions was *Jāmi'-i 'Abbāsī*, written in Farsi and commissioned by Abbas I. *Jāmi'-i 'Abbāsī* invited the Sunni majority denizens of Isfahan to enter the Shah's Mosque, a communal space of worship with an architecture of conversion.²³⁴ It was written in twenty chapters and addressed issues like the prayers and ablution, the shrines of the Prophet and his Household, their dates of birth and the proper rituals on those days, the *ādāb* or etiquette of eating, clothing, etc. It also includes two chapters on marriage and divorce, and one chapter on punishments (*hudūd*) for murder, theft, *zīnā* (illegitimate sex), *livāt* (illegitimate male-male sexual relations) and *musābiqa* (illegitimate female-female sexual relations). As will be discussed in the next chapter, "sexuality" was a major disciplining concern in different religious genres including *fiqh* and medicine. As for *Jāmi'-i 'Abbāsī*, it is not only in the chapters on marriage and punishments that Baha'ī addressed "sexuality;" the issue is addressed in the entire work by distinguishing what is proper for men from what is proper for women.

Among similar translated works around the same time was the aforementioned *Man lā Yabdurūhu al-Faqīh*, which was translated with commentary by Muhammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d.1660), known as a popular Sufi-minded traditionist.²³⁵ In the introduction of the translation, Majlisi introduces himself as one of the first people who developed the hadith literature in the land of Iran. Several works of hadith under the title of *'Arba'in* (The Forty) were also translated in this period, including that of Shaykh Baha'ī.²³⁶ These works were collections of forty important hadith with commentaries written after the recommendation of the Prophet of Islam that the believers should keep (*hafīẓa*) 40 needed hadith.²³⁷ In general, the tradition of the *Ahl al-Bayt* was promoted by various translations of hadith. For example, *Tuhid al-Mufaḍḍal*, which is a long hadith attributed to the sixth Shi'a Imam known as al-Ja'far al-Sādiq, was translated several times, including by Muhammad Bāqir

²³³ Another translated work of supplications from the late Safavid period was *Khulāsat al-Akhkār* of Fayḍ al-Kashani. The words of Fayḍ were translated into Farsi and the translation of supplications came under the Arabic lines.

²³⁴ For the traces of conversion in the architecture of the mosque see Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 9, 41-45.

²³⁵ Another example is *Bid'at al-Hidāyat* of Hurr al-'Āmili.

²³⁶ Ja'fariyan, *Dar 'Arzi-yi*, 1115.

²³⁷ In Arabic: «مَنْ حَفِظَ مِنْ أَمْتِي أَرْبَعِينَ حَدِيثًا مِمَّا يَخْتِاجُونَ إِلَيْهِ فِي أَمْرِ دِينِهِمْ، بَعَثَهُ اللَّهُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَقَبِيحًا عَالِمًا».

al-Majlisī.²³⁸ Another frequently translated example is *Nahj al-Balāgha* (The Peak of Eloquence). It is a collection of sayings and writings of Imam 'Ali compiled by al-Sayyid al-Raḍi in the early 11th century CE.²³⁹ There are other various translated works about the life and the status of imams like Shaykh al-Mufid's *al-Irshād* (The Guidance), which is written in twelve chapters, each dedicated to one Imam. The longest chapters of *al-Irshād* are dedicated to the first and the third Shi'a Imams, who were the key figures in the practice of *Tabarrā*.

Among the other frequently translated religious genres was medicine. Several translated works of medicine were based on tradition. A popular example that was translated many times under the Safavids is *Tib al-Riḍā* or *al-Risālah al-Dhababīyah*, attributed to Ali ibn Musā al-Riḍa, the 8th Shi'a Imam. Mustafa Karim-khan Zand argues that the abundance of medical texts that were based on hadith recommendations instead of the Avicennian tradition was a shift caused by the influence of the traditionist movement.²⁴⁰ Several other treaties of hadith addressing *ādāb* and *akhlāq*, like *Hilyat al-Muttaqīn*, also included medical recommendations. Behzad Karimi in *Zanān dar Guftimān-i Pizīshkī-yi Irān* (Women in Medical Discourse in Iran), includes these works of *ādāb* and *akhlāq* with medical recommendations in his analysis and shows the central place of "sexuality" in these disciplinary treaties.²⁴¹

Conclusion

The Persian language became a strategic tool in Shi'itization of the growing urban class. The Safavid state in alliance with the Shi'a clerics attempted to produce the Shi'a knowledge in Farsi to reach a broader audience. The Farsification of religious texts contributed to the revival of tradition and coincided with the development of traditionist tendencies. Therefore, the tradition of the Prophet and his Household, as the distinguishing mark from the Sunni rival, held a central place in conversion. The development of traditionist tendencies can be interpreted as a rational consequence of the Safavid politics of piety. The translated religious works addressed various genres like *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *i'tiqādāt* (creeds), *do'ā* (supplication), *a'māl* (deeds/rituals), *akhlāq va ādāb* (ethics and etiquette) and *tib* (medicine). Sometimes, the Farsi religious texts were comprehensive compendiums and included

²³⁸ Ja'fariyan, *Dar 'Arsī-yi*, 1121.

²³⁹ Ja'fariyan, *Dar 'Arsī-yi*, 1127.

²⁴⁰ Karim-khan-zand, 65.

²⁴¹ See Behzad Karimi, *Zanān dar Guftimān-i Pizīshkī-yi Irān* [Women in the Medical Discourse in Iran in the Safavid Period] (Tehran: Pazhūhishkadi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām, 2016).

several of the abovementioned genres. What stands out about these texts is that they are based on tradition and promote its centrality. Some of these texts like *‘Uddat al-Dā’i* supported the unquestioning obedience of hadith as the key to salvation and took an anti-rationalist stance toward religious affairs, which could serve the purpose of disciplining and the establishment of social order and authority. This authority was not necessarily restored in the king, but the clerical institution gained relative independence from the state by addressing the masses directly. A better understanding of the role of works in Farsi in the process of conversion requires a more comprehensive study of Farsi religious compositions and translations. In the next chapter, I will focus on the role of one of the most popular and influential clerics in the Farsization movement. I will study the biography of Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī and his Farsi compositions/translations.

Chapter Three:

The Sainly Traditionist and the Establishment of Order

As discussed in the second chapter, the growth of *akhbārism* in the second half of the Safavid reign was the logical consequence of the emphasis on tradition at the core of the Safavid politics of piety. The centrality of tradition in Shi'ism, with its reliance on the Household of the Prophet, was an effective tool for the politics of community building and distinction vis-à-vis the Sunni rival. The Shi'a Safavid court strove to provide its subjects with proper Shi'a answers to their questions about their daily life. Therefore, as Atta Anzali proposes, *hadith* literature “supported a new religious framework that met the needs of everyday people.”²⁴² Furthermore, tradition was expected to solve the crisis of authority that has started with the move away from the Sufi background and millennial and saintly claims of the Safavid dynasty, and worsened after the death of the all-powerful Abbas I (r.1588-1629).²⁴³ Abbas I's successors could not continue his strategy in keeping the power balance, which ended up in the growing power of the religious institution. In this situation, it was expected that the movement toward the “anti-rationalist” *akhbārī* views would solve the crisis of authority by restricting the power of the *mujtahid* and promoting blind obedience among the masses. However, the crisis of authority was not necessarily solved by the restoration of the power of the shah. Both the traditionist and the Sufi-minded clerics, around the second half of the 17th century, gained increasing popularity and influence in Safavid Isfahan. In this chapter, I will locate one of the most powerful of these clerics, Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1627-1699), in the above context by exploring his biography and his Farsi compositions.

Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī and the Most Important of His Legacies

Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1627-1699), known as Allamah Majlisī was one of the most powerful, prolific, and well-known Safavid scholars. His students, ‘Abdullāh Afandī and Sayyid Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā’irī, reported that Majlisī had more than one thousand students who studied a wide range of

²⁴² Anzali, 111.

²⁴³ Shah Abbas had carried out several administrative reforms to limit the power of the ‘ulamā and the Qizilbash and the possibility of them plotting against him with the princes. The establishment of a new order in the court by Abbas I had already caused dissatisfaction and disobedience from some fractions of the Qizilbash, who joined a new millennial movement by embracing a new spiritual master of the Nuqtavī order. “Nuqtavi *ghulāt* imagined 4 circles of time, sixteen thousand each, believing that the final circle belonged to the Iranians and the religion of Muhamad will be abrogated.” See Babayan, *Mystics*, 34.

subjects with him, including Quranic commentary, *fiqh*, *kalām*, and *ḥadīth*.²⁴⁴ He was appointed to the position of *shaykh al-Islām*²⁴⁵ by Shah Sulaiman (r. 1666-1694) in 1687, as Abd al-Husain Khātunābādī (d. 1693) has reported in his history *Vaqāyī' al-Sanīn va'l-A'vām* (The Events of Years and Ages).²⁴⁶ After becoming *shaykh al-Islām*, Majlisī tutored the young Sultan Husain (r.1694-1722), one of the most religiously strict Safavid rulers.²⁴⁷ Majlisī remained in the position of *Shaykh al-Islām* during the reign of Shah Sultan Husain and held it for twelve years until his death in 1699. Today, among the Shi'ites, Majlisī is famous for being a major Shi'a *ḥadīth* scholar. Majlisī's compositions, especially *Bihār al-Anvār* (Seas of Lights), are among the most famous sources of Shi'a *ḥadīth* scholarship. However, he remains a controversial figure. Majlisī's exceptional political power and cultural influence, especially during the last years of his life, has made him a focus of scholarship.

Some scholars consider him a fanatic who was intolerant toward religious minorities.²⁴⁸ They consider the fall of the Safavid state a consequence of the dissatisfaction caused by Majlisī's fanaticism. On the other hand, some scholars argue that it was the death and therefore, the absence of the politically potent Majlisī that resulted in the fall of the Safavid state.²⁴⁹ There are many controversies over Majlisī's knowledge and validity as a *ḥadīth* scholar and his approach to tradition as well. While some scholars find him a superstitious traditionalist, others argue that he had a middle method (drawing on both '*usūlī* and '*akhbārī* approaches).²⁵⁰ Traditionalists were critical of the use of reason in legal interpretations because of the human mind's incapability to understand the higher truth, but Majlisī used "limited rationalist interpretations of the Shari'a."²⁵¹ What makes Majlisī well-known as a traditionalist is that he belonged to a movement that brought the study of *ḥadīth* from the margins to the center and emphasized on the centrality of *ḥadīth* in a "proper" Shi'a interpretation of Islam.²⁵² The main concern of this study is to locate Majlisī in the discussed context of state and community-building, conversion, the Farsization movement, and its disciplining function.

²⁴⁴ Moazzen, 155.

²⁴⁵ Chief jurist; refer to the section on religious structure in the second chapter.

²⁴⁶ Sefatgul, 219.

²⁴⁷ Abisaab, 126.

²⁴⁸ See E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953); Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavid Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

²⁴⁹ See Hasan Tarumi, *Allamah Majlisi* (Tehran: Tarh-i Nu, 1928).

²⁵⁰ For the discussion on superstition, see Ali Rahnama, *Superstition as Ideology in Iranian Politics: Majlesi to Ahmadinejad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For the arguments against Majlisī's anti-rationalist view see Andrew J. Newman, "Bāqir al-Majlisī and Islamicate Medicine: Safavid Medical Theory and Practice Re-examined," in Andrew Newman, *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Abisaab.

²⁵¹ Abisaab, 129.

²⁵² Anzali, 111.

Majlisī was an important figure in the Farsization movement. Sefatgul finds the Khānsārī and Majlisī families the most influential religious clerics with a Persian background in the capital.²⁵³ He especially finds Muhammad Bāqir influential in the development and “Persianization” of the Shi’a thought.²⁵⁴ In line with that, Abisaab finds Majlisī to be an important figure in the development of devotional literature, which was influenced by Persianization of Shi’ism.²⁵⁵ Yūsuf Ibn Ahmad al-Bahrānī (1695–1772), the influential *hadith* scholar and biographer, has described Majlisī as a person who promoted *hadith* literature among the *ajam* (probably meaning the Farsi-speakers here) and translated the Arabic *hadith* into Farsi for them.²⁵⁶ Another Shi’a scholar, Āghā Ahmad Bihbahānī (d. 1777), has stated that among all the ‘*ulamā*, there is no second to Majlisī in translation of the Arabic word.²⁵⁷ Majlisī produced around 50 Farsi works, many of which are translated extracts from his massive twenty-five-volume compendium of *hadith*, *Bihār al-Anvār*.

Majlisī’s *Bihār al-Anvār* is one of the major sources of Shi’i Hadith scholarship. The project of the composition of *Bihār*, funded by the empire, started in 1666 and was completed in 1692.²⁵⁸ Rasoul Ja’fariyan interprets *Bihār* as a religious encyclopedia.²⁵⁹ The encyclopedic approach seeks to provide all the current sciences in one writing unit.²⁶⁰ Ja’fariyan finds *Bihār* an encyclopedic attempt to provide all the sciences and knowledge from the divine source, i.e. the tradition, in one unit.²⁶¹ This is in-line with Anzali’s observation that *hadith* literature “supported a new religious framework that met the needs of everyday people.”²⁶² Therefore, *Bihār* sought to provide a Shi’i answer (distinguished from a Sunni Muslim community) to all the possible questions in the community, and the small translated extracts from *Bihār* were supposed to provide the solutions for specific needs.

Yūsuf al-Bahrānī, one of Majlisī’s students who became an important scholar himself, has witnessed that Majlisī spread the *hadith* literature around Iran and translated it from Arabic to Farsi

²⁵³ Sefatgul, 206-223.

²⁵⁴ Sefatgul, 213.

²⁵⁵ Abisaab, 129.

²⁵⁶ As cited in Ja’fariyan, *Dar ‘Arsi-yi*, 1098.

²⁵⁷ Ja’fariyan, *Dar ‘Arsi-yi*, 1098, 1099.

²⁵⁸ Shah Sulaiman personally sent a representative to Yemen to help secure research material for the *Bihar*. Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 192.

²⁵⁹ Providing the human sciences in a comparative style in one book while observing a certain *abjad* or topic-based order is counted as a type of encyclopedic work. See Rasoul Ja’fariyan, “*Bihār al-Anvār bi Masābi-yi Yik Dāyirat al-Ma’arīf-i Dini as Rūzīgār-i Safavi* [The Sea of Lights as a Religious Encyclopedia from the Safavid Time],” in Rasoul Ja’fariyan, *Kāvush-hāyi Tāzab dar Bab-i Rūzīgār-i Safavi* [Fresh Findings about the Safavid Era] (Qum: Nashr-i Adyān, 2014), 154.

²⁶⁰ Ja’fariyan, *Kāvush-hāyi*, 162.

²⁶¹ Ja’fariyan, *Kāvush-hāyi*, 164.

²⁶² Anzali, 111.

and insisted on *al-Amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-mūnkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong).²⁶³ Bahrānī's description indicates the broad reach of Majlisī's works, which were circulated in Iran. His insistence on enjoining good and forbidding wrong was an invitation for policing the society based on his prescriptions. Majlisī's influence was told to have been beyond the borders of the Safavid empire, as he wrote a *risālah* (treatise) called *Jawābāt-i Masā'il al-Hindīyāt* in answer to the questions sent to him from the Mughal Empire and it is said that his descendants immigrated to the Mughal Empire to educate the royal family.²⁶⁴ In the range of its circulation, Majlisī's compositions had a Shi'a disciplining function, which as will be discussed, among other purposes, could serve the re-establishment of social and sexual order. However, before discussing the disciplining function of Majlisī's Farsi works, it is helpful to look into the reason(s) behind his growing popularity and influence.

Saintly Majlisīs

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, after the fall of the caliphate in 1258, the Sufi discourses of legitimacy became prevalent in the "Persianate" world and culminated between the 14th and 16th centuries with the appearance of the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman empires.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, in the period between the 15th and 18th centuries, acceptable forms of devotion towards Ali and his descendants and "extremist practices" were a matter of debate.²⁶⁶ The emerging notions of "orthodoxy" problematized the borders of the Sufi discourses of legitimacy, especially on sainthood. Consequently, some claims of the relation to divine changed and, for example, dreams became a safe medium of connection with the divine. In this context, the move away from the Sufi background and millennial and saintly claims and the increasing power of the clerics had caused a crisis of authority for the Safavid rulers. Tradition was expected to help with this crisis. However, the authority, i.e. the saintly authority, became temporarily restored in the traditionist clerics as the protectors of the tradition. Therefore, instead of looking into the state's support of the traditionism as the reason behind the growing power of the traditionists, I would like to emphasize the role the discourse of sainthood played in fostering clerical authority.

Sufi-minded traditionist clerics like Muhammad Taqī Majlisī (d. 1660), known as Majlisī the First, especially gained popularity and authority over the discourse of sainthood. This very popular

²⁶³ Quoted in Sefatgul, 222.

²⁶⁴ Sefatgul, 223.

²⁶⁵ See Azfar Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*; Azfar Moin, "Saint Shrines"; Krstic, "Confessionalization," 27.

²⁶⁶ Terzioğlu, "Confessional-Ambiguity," 567.

religious cleric and Sufi-minded scholar was Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī's father. Through the maternal line, Muhammad Taqī was connected to the new generation of Persian scholars trained by the 'Amili clerics, while his father Mullā Ali was a venerated *ārif* (Sufi/Gnostic), who had an *ārifah* (female Gnostic) mother and could write poetry.²⁶⁷ He was a student of influential religious figures like Shaykh Baha'ī and Mir Dāmād (1561-1631).²⁶⁸ Muhammad Taqī was also an active figure in Farsization. As it is reported in *R̥yāḍ al-'Ulamā*, an 18th-century biographical work on the prominent Shi'a and Sunni scholars, Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī learned the rational sciences (*'ulūm-i 'aqlī*) from Aqā Husain Khānsārī and traditional sciences (*'ulūm-i naqlī*) from his father.²⁶⁹ Some scholars, like Ali Rahnama (2011) and Mansour Sefatgul (2002), find Muhammad-Bāqir's great influence partly a result of his father's reputation and saintly status they gained through exaggerated accounts about them. This appears rather controversial given Muhammad Bāqir's antagonism with Sufism and his reputation for being a strict Shi'a cleric.

Both Majlisīs, father and son, enjoyed a saintly aura, which was the result of the attributions of *karāmat* (miraculous deeds) to them. Ali Rahnama recounts some instances of these attributions to Muhammad Taqī in *Qisas al-'Ulamā* (Stories of the Scholars) (1873),²⁷⁰ concluding that both Majlisīs were presented "as unique, superhuman beings, blessed and privileged by God, the Prophet and the imams."²⁷¹ Muhammad Taqī was said to have written a book "on his own spiritual dreams and visions."²⁷² He claimed that "once God blessed him by allowing him to experience a visitation by Imam Ali" and it was through his grace that "he came to experience many explorations, discoveries and learnings that feeble minds would not be able to fathom or comprehend."²⁷³ The author of *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, a 19th-century biographical work, also recounts seven *karāmat* of Muhammad Bāqir.²⁷⁴ For example, he claims that Muhammad Bāqir has written in a note that once he was looking through supplications after a Friday night's prayer when he remembered a certain supplication and recited it. In seven days, he decided to recite it again but he heard from the "ceiling" (indicating the world above)

²⁶⁷ Sefatgul, 213-214.

²⁶⁸ These figures belong to a tradition that is known as the School of Isfahan, a term coined by Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr to describe a philosophical and mystical movement patronized by the court of Shah 'Abbās I. (<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/isfahan-school-of-philosophy>).

²⁶⁹ Sefatgul, 218.

²⁷⁰ This work is written in Farsi by Muhammad Bin Sulaimān Tunikābunī (d. 1885) about 153 Shi'a scholars from the 3rd to 13th Hijri centuries.

²⁷¹ Rahnama, 173.

²⁷² Idem.

²⁷³ Idem.

²⁷⁴ Mirzā Muhammad Tunikābunī, *Qisas al-'Ulamā* (Shiraz: 'Ilmiyya Islāmī: date unknown), 204-208.

that the angels had still not finished writing down his rewards for reciting it the first time.²⁷⁵ Unfortunately, this note is not available to us. It is possible that the author of *Qisas al-'Ulamā* made up some of these stories or recounted the rumors that were circulating about these clerics nearly two centuries after their death. This does not prove that Majlisī enjoyed the same reputation during his lifetime but does not undermine it either. The traces of tendency toward exaggeration can also be found in numerous hagiographic accounts of the Shi'a Imams, who are reported to “have performed miracles such as curing the sick, helping regrow dismembered limbs, and causing infants to speak,” in Majlisī's works.²⁷⁶

Although Muhammad Bāqir was a part of the anti-Sufi campaign and Muhammad Taqī was a target of it, scholars agree that the commonalities between father and son far outweighed their differences.²⁷⁷ Both father and son are buried in the Shah's Mosque in Isfahan, where they held their teaching circles. Ata Anzali writes that both Majlisīs invested in “dreams and in mystical experiences that involved the imams, especially the Hidden Imam” and “Majlisī Jr. surpassed his father in gaining popular support and seizing the public imagination as a saint.”²⁷⁸ The notions of saintly persons invested with miraculous powers is deeply rooted in the pre-modern ideological grounds of the region.²⁷⁹ Ismail I's ascent to power was made possible through the same notion.²⁸⁰ The notion of a saintly person capable of extraordinary deeds was deeply rooted in the Safavids' *ghulāt* background. This feature, at the same time, was the most contested one by the 'Amili clerics. However, it gradually became consolidated in the Shi'a religious institutions. As Abisaab explains “by the end of Safavid rule, much of the archetypal austerity, miraculous (*karāmat*) powers and spiritual excellence known to the Sufis became the claimed grace of the guardians of the *shari'a*.”²⁸¹ Muhammad Bāqir and his father also gained popularity over the Sufi notions of “austerity, religious devotions, '*pirhood*' and spiritual guidance” consolidated in the Shi'a institutional structure.²⁸² Following these adoptions and other evidence in Majlisī's writings, some scholars question Majlisī's fame as a strict cleric who was

²⁷⁵ Tunikābunī, 208.

²⁷⁶ Moazzen, 121.

²⁷⁷ For more on the anti-Sufi campaign, see Anzali, 24-69. Muhammad Baqir Majlisī denied his father's Sufi affiliations. Ja' fariyan, *Dar 'Arsi-yi*, 530-31.

²⁷⁸ Anzali, 111.

²⁷⁹ See Azfar Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*.

²⁸⁰ See Babayan, *Mystics*.

²⁸¹ Abisaab, 5.

²⁸² Abisaab, 137; Sefatgul, 213; Anzali, 104.

completely opposed to Sufism.²⁸³ However, sainthood should not be interpreted as a controversy between the traditionism and Sufism, but as the point that connects them.

Majlisī's Farsi Compositions and *The Adornment of the Pious*

There is a disagreement on the total number of Majlisī's works. According to Amīr Muhammad Husain b. Muhammad Sālih b. Abdul Vāsī' Husainī Khātūnābādī (d. AH 1151), the number of Majlisī's Arabic compositions is ten, and his Farsi compositions are forty-nine.²⁸⁴ Although the number of his Farsi works is greater, Majlisī's Farsi compositions constitute one-sixth of his total writings. This is because his most voluminous work, *Bihār al-Anvār*, is in Arabic. Abisaab explains that the "Persian form of the traditions and their storytelling element gave *Seas of Light* distinct popularity," which means Majlisī was able to 'declass' the interest in traditions unlike philosophers and gnostics whose ideas remained largely inaccessible to the populace."²⁸⁵ Some of Majlisī's Farsi works are thematic extracts from *Bihār* translated to Farsi with his own commentary.

As it is shown in the table in the appendix, forty-nine Farsi works are attributed to Majlisī. Thirteen of these works are translations from Arabic. However, some of these compositions are translated extracts from *Bihār*, which makes them both original compositions and translations. The table is designed according to Khātūnābādī's report (name, length and topics). It is important to note that the categorization of the topics is rough and each work should be studied on its own to reach a better sense of the issues it addresses. Many of these works, like *Miqbās al-Masābih*, *Rabī' al-Asābi'*, *Risāli-yi Namāz-i Shab* and *Risāli-yi Ādāb-i Namāz*, are on prayers and supplications. Many of the translated texts are supplications like *Du'ā-yi Kumail*, *Du'ā-yi Mubāhilah* and *Du'ā-yi Jushan-i Saghīr*. Most of these supplications are attributed to the Household of the Prophet. Therefore, they possibly had a function in conversion. There are other works that exclusively provide a better knowledge of the Household of the Prophet, like *Jalā' al-Uyūn*, and translations of some long hadith. The proper etiquette, ethics and deeds are addressed in many different works. They are even addressed in the works on prayers and supplications. For the rest of this chapter, I would like to focus on the one work that is most concerned with etiquette and ethics in everyday life, i.e. *Hilyat al-Muttaqīm* (The Adornment of the Pious), and discuss the disciplining function of this text.

²⁸³ See Newman; Rula J. Abisaab, "Sufi Habitus and Shari'a Practitioners in Late Safavid Iran," in Rudolf Matthee, *The Safavid World* (London/New York: Routledge: 2022).

²⁸⁴ See Hussain Dargahi & Ali-Akbar Talafi, *Kitāb Shīnāsī-ye Allamah Majlisī* (Tehran: Shams al-Zoha, 2006).

²⁸⁵ Abisaab, "Sufi Habitus," 129.

The Adornment of the Pious was and remained one of the most popular writings of Majlisī. Faegheh Shirazi states that it was among the “well-known household item[s]” in Iran in the early years of the 1979 Revolution and was reprinted many times.²⁸⁶ Majlisī is among the frequently printed authors among the lithographs held in Qum library.²⁸⁷ *The Adornment of the Pious*, among Majlisī’s other works, exists in this collection along with multiple copies of the Quran and Sa’dī Shirāzī’s famous *Gulistān*. This copy of *The Adornment* that goes back to 1844 is probably one of the oldest printed versions of the book. Only a glance into the major libraries in Iran shows that *The Adornment* has been copied multiple times in *naskh* and *nasta’liq* during the 12th and 13th centuries Hijri. It was also copied and printed many times with other popular works like *al-Husniab* of Abu al-Fath al-Razī, which was translated to Farsi by the 16th-century scholar Ibrāhīm Astarābādī.²⁸⁸ *The Adornment* is also translated to Hindi, Arabic and Urdu (by Maqbool Ahmad Dehlavi, the 19th century translator of the Quran). As discussed in the first chapter, Majlisī, as the leader of the Friday prayers, had access to the public audience in *va’z* and some of his Farsi compositions, including *The Adornment* made their way into *maktab*, which is the basic level of education. It was also mentioned that some extracts of these disciplining religious texts made their way into anthologies from the 17th and 18th century. These anthologies, according to Babayan, were “collected, curated, and bound together material generated by the culture of *adab*, or etiquette and conduct, to learn how to act and relate to other residents of a diverse and ever-growing capital city.”²⁸⁹

I would like to bring a couple of examples of anthologies from Majlis Library that include *The Adornment* to show that it had made its way into these collections, which can provide us with a better understanding of the reception of *The Adornment*. However, I have very limited information on these manuscripts at the moment and cannot provide much analysis. The first example includes 16 pages of Quranic Surah for Istikharah followed by a short part of *Minhaj Al-Sadiqin*, Mullā Fath Allāh Kāshānī’s (d.1580) commentary on Quran, eight hadith in Farsi language, a short extract from the rights of dead on the living from *The Adornment*, some explanations on the *favā’id* (benefits) of the orphans, the creation of the world, Imam Ali, etc., and an explanation about *afāq* va *anfus* (the outer and the inner

²⁸⁶ Faegheh Shirazi, “Women’s Sexuality: The Safavid Legacy,” *Global Journal of Anthropology Research* 3, no.1 (2016), 2. I had access to one of the new editions of the book which was printed for the 14th time in 2022 in 2000 numbers!

²⁸⁷ Manouchehr Arasteh, “Barrisi-yi Avvalin-hāyi Chāp-i Sangī Mujūd dar Kitābkhānah-yi Markazī-yi Astan-i Quds-i Razavī,” *Nashriyeh ilikiiruniki-yi Sazman-i Kitabkhanah-hā, Muṣṣab-hā va Markaz-i Asnad-i Astān-i quds-i Razavi* 3, no. 10-11 (2011).

²⁸⁸ This book is about the successful debate of a slave woman, who used to belong to the sixth Shi’a Imam, with the Sunni ‘ulama in the court of the fifth Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid (d. 786) over the Household of the Prophet.

²⁸⁹ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 7.

worlds).²⁹⁰ The other example includes several of Majlisī's treaties including *The Adornment*, which are followed by personal notes on accounting and miscellaneous topics by different owners (some of them from the 19th century). This manuscript has several seals indicating several ownerships since early 18th century and is worn out by frequent readings, which makes it difficult to determine how it was collected.²⁹¹ In the following discussion, I use a 2022 edition of *The Adornment* because of its accessibility. I did not find any alteration in different editions of this texts.

In the introduction of *The Adornment*, Majlisī states his intention of writing to follow the Prophet's *ḥadīth* that the real purpose of his prophethood is to complement virtuous ethics [*makārim al-akhlāq*].²⁹² Therefore, Majlisī continues, all the proper etiquette [*ādāb-i pasandīdah*] and praised ethics [*akhlāq-i ḥamīdah*] have been clarified in his religion.²⁹³ Majlisī presents his other intention as responding to the requests of a number of seekers [*Ṣālik*] who wished to learn the merits of *adab* [*mahāsīn-i ādāb*] directly from the Household in a concise treaty in simple Farsi [*Fārsī-yi qarīb al-fahm*].²⁹⁴ The *ḥadīth* that Majlisī refers to is a famous one in both Sunni and Shī'a sources.²⁹⁵ He has quoted it from Shaykh Ahmad ibn Abī Tālib Tabrisī's (d. 1153) *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Quran* in the sixteenth volume of *Bihār*, which is on *akhlāq*. In an article emphasizing the relevance of *akhlāq* and prophethood, Asghar Hadi provides an analysis of the discussions over the meaning of *makārim al-akhlāq* among religious scholars. Referring to *Tāj al-'Arūs min Jawābir al-Qāmūs*,²⁹⁶ Hadi proposes that the meaning of *makārim* is close to *futūmwat* (chivalry), which, according to Hadi, means putting others first.²⁹⁷ Hadi also refers to a *ḥadīth* from Ali Ibn Abi Tālib that recommends learning *adab* to achieve *makārim al-akhlāq*, and another one that states that those who like *makārim*, prevent sin.²⁹⁸ Referring to another *ḥadīth* from

²⁹⁰ MS 18369 (Tehran: Majlis Library).

²⁹¹ MS 8898 (Tehran: Majlis Library).

²⁹² Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Hilyat al-Muttaqīn* (The Adornment of the Pious) (Tehran: Āstān-i Quds-i Razavī, 2022).

²⁹³ Idem. In Arabic: *إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ مَكَارِمَ الْأَخْلَاقِ*; Chales Pellat finds two directions in Arabic *adab* literature; one argues for closing the *adab* literature to foreign influence and rely on only Islamic and Arabic culture; the other one remained open to the foreign influence. A forerunner of the latter view was Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), holding that "true culture had to revolve around the holy book [Quran], the Arabic language and poetry", and a good Muslim should restrict inquisition and follow a set of rules based on the three above elements. In his 'Oyūn al-akbār (The Eyes of the Elders), he sought to enabling one to secure a happy life without jeopardizing salvation in the next world by answering all possible question. Pellat discusses that Ibn Qutayba was a turning point in Arabic *adab* literature, after who "the traditional ethics" became more and more "Islamicized and Arabicized." Majlisī's use of *adab* can be under the influence of this view. Pellat.

²⁹⁴ Majlisī, 13.

²⁹⁵ Asghar Hadi, "Makārim al-Akhlāq: Pazhūhishī Pīrāmūn-i Ravāyāt-i Tatmīm-i Makārim-i Akhlāq va Rivāyāt-i Hamānand," *Akhlāq*, no. 5-6 (2006): 230.

²⁹⁶ Written by Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī's (d. 1790), one of the foremost philologists of the Arab post-classical era.

²⁹⁷ Hadi, 239.

²⁹⁸ Hadi, 241. These are quoted from Diylamī's *A'lām al-Dīn*, which is among the main sources of *Bihār*, and Mufid's *al-Irshād*, which was among the translated sources mentioned in the previous chapter.

the sixth Shi'a Imam, quoted in *Bihār* and *Kāfi*, Hadi counts a number of elements in *makārim al-akhlāq* including contentment [*qinā'at*], patience [*sabr*], thankfulness [*shukr*], tolerance [*burdbārī*], virtuousness [*husn-i akhlāq*], forgiveness [*bakhshish*], zealotry [*ghiyrat*], valor [*shujā'at*], and manliness [*mardānigī*]. The discussion over the meaning of *akhlāq* and *adab* in the Islamic traditions and in the Safavid Iran is a very relevant but long one, which falls out of the scope of this chapter. Majlisī alone wrote the longest section of *Bihār* on *akhlāq* (which became two volumes, fifteenth and sixteenth, for that reason). What is clear is that *akhlāq* and *adab* had an important place in the re-definition of Shi'ism in this period and consequently, in disciplining the society. As a case study, I will analyze Majlisī's use of *akhlāq* in the *Adornment of the Pious*.

Majlisī's short definition of *makārim al-akhlāq* consists of *adab-i pasandidah va akhlāq-i hamidah* (proper etiquette and praised ethics). *The Adornment of the Pious* guides its readers how to put these high ethical values into practice in daily life in fourteen chapters. Each chapter is dedicated to a different topic like dressing, eating, sleeping, family life, social interaction, etc. In this sense, *The Adornment* can be interpreted as a short Farsi encyclopedia of *adab* and *akhlāq*. Also, this engagement with mundane daily rituals shows the deep disciplining reach of these religious texts and the mark they aspire to put on the individual body. It is also important to note that the disciplining discourse in *The Adornment* does not rely on the legal sanction but often relies on the promise of otherworldly salvation or damnation. In parts, it also draws on medical discourse or sounds like a treatise on astrology or magic.

The Adornment was written in the middle of the seventeenth century, when, according to Kathryn Babayan, the residents of Isfahan were acculturated in “the *adab* of urbanity” “under a new regime of public scrutiny.”²⁹⁹ She detects a shift in imperial and religious attitudes toward homoeroticism in which “the mystic language of romantic love,” which “recalled male homoerotic desire” as a disciplining tool and was reflected in the architecture of the city and the wall paintings faded away.³⁰⁰ Clerics like Majlisī attempted to “redraw the boundary between the sacred and the sexual by advocating marriage” as the locus where the “sacred was to cohabit with sexual activity in matrimony.”³⁰¹ Therefore, one of the main concerns of these disciplining treaties was sexuality, which included sexual identity and sexual act. As will be shown, the re-establishment of sexual hierarchy was one of the main motifs of *The Adornment*. The seventeenth-century Isfahan was also a place where different religious communities were sharing space, including Armenians, Zoroastrians, Christians,

²⁹⁹ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 62. “The culture of *adab*, or etiquette, had to be learned and embodied across elite, artisan, and merchant sectors of a society in the making.” Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 65.

³⁰⁰ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 62; The male homoerotic desire was a disciplining tool serving the master/disciple relation.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

and different communities of Muslims (Shi'as, Sunnis and Sufis). The other main motif in *The Adornment* was the re-establishment of social order, which included making sharper communal boundaries and promoting obedience. The following analysis will focus on these two discourses of social disciplining in *The Adornment*.

Sexual Order

The re-establishment of the sexual order might be the most highlighted function of *The Adornment*. Other than the fourth chapter, which is specifically on “the virtues of marriage and being in the company of women and raising children and being in their company,” other chapters frequently address the regulation of sexuality as well. Addressing sexuality in the text usually serves the purpose of the re-establishment of gender hierarchy. Since the establishment of binary precedes the establishment of hierarchy, these statements also promoted heteronormativity. For example, in the first chapter on “the etiquette of dressing,” men are forbidden from wearing silk and gold while women are recommended to *be dressed* in them.³⁰² In addition, wearing clothes that women, enemies and infidels wear is forbidden for Muslim men.³⁰³ Women are also forbidden from wearing men's clothing like hats [*kuḷāb*], long masculine garment [*qabā*] and turban [*ammāmāb*].³⁰⁴ In the second chapter on the “Etiquette of wearing jewellery, applying *Surma*, looking in the mirror and applying hair-dye,” it is quoted from the sixth Shi'a Imam that among the bad signs at the end of the time will be that the traces of women will appear in men and the descendants of Abbas.³⁰⁵ As this example shows, the prohibitive discourse of the text sometimes draws on apocalyptic discourse. These examples also illustrate that the man/woman binary is accentuated in the text.

Another noteworthy point is that Majlisī almost completely leaves the intersex groups out of his text. This is despite many reports of cross-dressing existing in the Safavid court and despite the addressing of the intersex groups being common in the pre-modern Islamic literature as well as legal treaties.³⁰⁶ The only instances where Majlisī mentions such a thing is where he introduces the state of becoming intersex [*mukhanath*] as a punishment for not observing certain rules. In the fourth chapter, Majlisī forbids Muslims from having intercourse on certain days or situations because if it

³⁰² Majlisī, 17.

³⁰³ Majlisī, 22.

³⁰⁴ Idem.

³⁰⁵ Majlisī, 45.

³⁰⁶ See Indira Falk Gesink, “Intersex Bodies in Premodern Islamic Discourse: Complicating the Binary,” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14, no. 2 (2018): 152–173.

leads to conception, the child will be *mukhanath* or mad.³⁰⁷ I find this exclusion of the intersex group a stronger strategy of binary-making. Following this strategy, the gender binary becomes so fixed that nothing can exist out of it. In the same chapter, Majlisī insists on the importance of marriage as half of one's religious duty according to *hadith* of the Prophet. He points out numerous *hadith* expressing the joy of having intercourse with women,³⁰⁸ which is clearly an attempt at heteronormative regulation of society.

The fourth chapter is also an attempt in building the gender hierarchy. It promotes obedience of women. Women are recommended to be kind to their husbands, fulfil their needs and follow their orders.³⁰⁹ For example, it is quoted from the fifth Shi'a Imam, that the Prophet told a woman once that women should obey their husbands and not leave the house without their permission and never reject them when they approach them with sexual needs.³¹⁰ It is also recommended in the sixth part of the fourth chapter that women should not be consulted with, should not learn to write, should not be taught the *Yūsuf surah* and should be taught the *Nūr surah*.³¹¹ *Yūsuf* is the twelfth surah of the Quran. It is interesting that Majlisī recommended censoring the Quran for women. It is probably because Zulaikhā, the woman in the story in the twelfth surah, appears as sexually active and tries to seduce Yūsuf. On the other hand, *Nūr*, the 24th surah of the Quran, promotes piety. The other recommendations in this chapter are at the service of building an illusion of some kind of detailed esoteric knowledge possessed by the scholar of *hadith* [*muhadith*] that should be meticulously followed in order to reach salvation. For example, it is quoted from the Prophet that if conception happens after the last daily prayers [*namaḡ-i khuftan*] on a Friday night, that child will be among the saintly people [*abdāl*].³¹²

Another chapter that is very much engaged with the re-establishment of sexual order is the concluding chapter titled “the epilogue [*khātimah*] (on miscellaneous etiquette and their benefit).” This chapter forbids same-sex acts using a stronger language. It forbids the sleeping of two women next to each other without having clothes on and looking at another woman's genitals.³¹³ It quotes the sixth Imam that the women who engage in female/female sexual acts [*musābiqah*] will be hung in clothes of fire and tortured. It warns against illegal sex [*zinā*] by claiming that it will open 300 doors to hell in

³⁰⁷ Majlisī, 96.

³⁰⁸ Majlisī, 88-89.

³⁰⁹ Majlisī, 101-102.

³¹⁰ Majlisī, 101.

³¹¹ Majlisī, 103.

³¹² Majlisī, 97.

³¹³ Majlisī, 386-387.

one's grave from which reptiles and fire will come until the Dooms Day when one is resurrected, and when people will know what this person has done from their bad smell.³¹⁴ Majlisī states that the first people who did this were the *Lūt* (Lot's people).³¹⁵ He concludes that male/male sexual act [*livāt*] is worse than *zinā* because God never abolished a people over *zinā*, but abolished towns over *livāt*.³¹⁶ It is also quoted from the eighth Shi'a Imam that those who do *livāt* should be punished by burning in fire or should be killed by sword or a wall should be toppled on their head.³¹⁷ The person who engages in this act will be punished for longer than anyone in hell and in all its levels. It is also quoted from the fifth Imam that God will never let the man who has been penetrated sit in paradise.³¹⁸

It is clear that the language against *livāt* is especially strong in the last chapter. Majlisī's definition of *livāt*, according to a hadith from the first Shi'a Imam, is "doing things to a boy other than penetration." He counts the crime of penetrating as heresy [*kufr*]. Majlisī strongly and anxiously condemns all kinds of same-sex act as *livāt* probably because of their prevalence in the popular Sufi practices in the society and previously, in the Safavid court.³¹⁹ Therefore, the very strong language against the same sex act in this chapter shows the anxiety over it. In the same chapter, it is quoted from the Prophet that the following ten in his ummah are infidels: those who kill unjustly, the magician, the pimp, those who penetrate women in the anus, those who penetrate animals, do incest, those engaged in revolt and corruption, those who sell arms to infidels, those who do not pay *zakāt*, and those who are capable of going to haj but do not go.³²⁰ The anxiety over same-sex act is also strongly reflected in the seventh chapter on "the etiquette of going to a bath." It starts with the sentence that it is said that the bath [*ḥammām*] is a bad place that reveals the genital parts [*ūra*] and tears up all covers [*pardab*] of shame.³²¹ In the first part of this chapter and according to several reliable *ḥadīth*, it is recommended not to enter the bath without covering your genital parts.³²² In the third part of the chapter, it is quoted from the Prophet that God will curse those who look at other people's genitals in the bath or do not cover their genital parts so that people can look at them.³²³ It is even

³¹⁴ Majlisī, 392.

³¹⁵ For more on the interpretations of the *Lūt* story and homosexuality in Islam, see Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (London: One World Publications 2010); E. M. Bucar & F. Shirazi, "The 'Invention' of Lesbian Acts in Iran: Interpretive Moves, Hidden Assumptions, and Emerging Categories of Sexuality," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 16, no. 4 (2012): 416-434.

³¹⁶ Majlisī, 393.

³¹⁷ Idem.

³¹⁸ Idem.

³¹⁹ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 62.

³²⁰ Majlisī, 392.

³²¹ Majlisī, 148.

³²² Majlisī, 149.

³²³ Majlisī, 151.

forbidden, in the last chapter, to send women to a bath when there is no need for that.³²⁴ Drawing on the discourse of sexuality in *The Adornment*, I will suggest a new frame for studying the history of “gender and sexuality” in the Perso-Islamic context in the Conclusion chapter.

Social Order

Majlisi and his students, like Shaykh Ni`mat Allah al-Jaza'iri, continued targeting the non-Shi'a, particularly Sufis, in theory and practice.³²⁵ Under Majlisi's influence, Shah Sultan Husain “announced the closing of the *Tamhidkhanah*, a hang-out adjacent to the royal palace where Sufi shaykhs engaged in ecstatic rituals” and attempted at “expelling all Sufis from his realm, unleashing a wave of persecution.”³²⁶ As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, the Safavid politics of piety followed the normative logic of community-building based on the distinction from the Other, a policy that comes into open manifestation in *The Adornment*. In the re-establishment of social order, Majlisi mainly attempts to draw distinguishable borders between the Shi'a community and the Other. In addition, in a few instances, the text seeks to re-establish social order by promoting obedience to the ruler. For example, it is recommended in the tenth part of the tenth chapter on the “Etiquette of social interaction, rights of others and different rights,” according to the *hadith* from the sixth Shi'a Imam, to obey the ruler [*pādishāh*] under all circumstances.³²⁷ If he is just, pray to God for his health and safety. If he is cruel [*ẓālim va setamkār*], pray to God to correct him because your good and interest rely on his, and the just ruler is like a kind father. In another instance from the second part of the fourth chapter, Majlisi suggests Muslims marry with their kind [*mis*] and marry their daughters to their kind (probably referring to the same social status here).³²⁸ However, many recommendations for the re-establishment of social order are based on community building and target bodily appearance. Therefore, the regulation of the body had a central place in the politics of community building, and community had a central place in the establishment of order.

Who is the Other in *The Adornment*? In the sixth part of the first chapter, wearing clothes which women, enemies and infidels wear is forbidden, and the people who do so are said to be cursed by the Prophet. Examples of these clothes, according to Majlisi, are *ẓunnār* (a thick silk belt worn by

³²⁴ Majlisi, 386.

³²⁵ Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 192, 202.

³²⁶ Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 202.

³²⁷ Majlisi, 268-269.

³²⁸ Majlisi, 90.

Christians) and *kūlāb-i farangī* (European hat).³²⁹ In general, the reference to infidels usually includes Zoroastrians [*gabr*], Christians [*tarsā*], Armenians [*armanī*] and Jews [*yahūd*]. Other than these groups, Sufis were among the groups that the Muslim community had to make itself distinguishable from. For example, in the third part of the first chapter, it is quoted from the Prophet that at the end of the time, some people will wear wool in summer and winter and consider that it makes them more virtuous than other people while all the angels will curse these people.³³⁰ This is clearly referring to the practice of wearing wool among Sufis. In another example in the seventh part of the first chapter, Majlisī warns that whenever the gored [*tarakdar*] hats become prevalent among the Muslim community, *ẓinā* will spread among them, and the examples of these hats are those of *Bektāshī* and *qāvūq*.³³¹ This could also be a condemnation of the old Qizilbash twelve-gored hat.³³² It is also interesting that the accusation of *ẓinā* might have been based on a tradition of sexual accusation of Sufis, especially the Qizilbash, by their opponents.³³³ Therefore, the Other included the above-mentioned communities cohabiting in the 17th-century Isfahan with Muslims.

A main target of bodily regulation in *The Adornment* is facial hair. Kathryn Babayan argues that “the set of moral significations ascribed to beards and their removal became a prominent subject of discussion in manuals penned by clerics” by the end of the seventeenth century.³³⁴ In the fourth part of the fifth chapter on “the Etiquette of brushing teeth, combing, trimming nails and shaving the head,” Majlisī recommends that the mustache should be kept very short because, as quoted from the Prophet, the Satan will hide in long mustaches and cutting the mustache will cure sadness and obsession [*vasvās*].³³⁵ It is also quoted from Ali Ibn Abi Tālib, in the fifth part of the same chapter, that God has metamorphosized [*maskh*] the people who shaved their beard and turned their long mustache upwards.³³⁶ Although Majlisī condemn this as a Jewish appearance, one cannot help thinking that this condemnation also included the Qizilbash, who were known for their long mustache. Quoted from

³²⁹ Majlisī, 22.

³³⁰ Majlisī, 19.

³³¹ Majlisī, 23.

³³² The *Bektāshī* order took shape during the sixteenth century. Originally, they consisted of the many distinct groups of socially deviant dervishes operating within Ottoman borders. They cleanly shaved their heads and faces and wore “twelve-gored conical caps of white felt, two hands wide and two hands high. These caps were split in the front and in the back and ornamented with a button [...] at the top, with long woolen tassels reaching down to their shoulders.” See Karamustafa, Ahmad T. *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994) 83.

³³³ For more on this tradition, see Brett Wilson, “Putting Out the Candle: Sufism and the Orgy Libel in Late Ottoman and Modern Turkey,” *Culture and Religion* (forthcoming; 2024).

³³⁴ Babayan, *City as Anthology*, 60.

³³⁵ Majlisī, 130.

³³⁶ Majlisī, 131.

the Prophet in the fourth section of this chapter is also that Muslims should cut their mustache short and leave the beard long so that they will not resemble the *Zoroastrians* and the *Jews*.³³⁷ Other than the facial hair, in the eleventh part of the first chapter, Muslims are forbidden from wearing flat shoes because they resemble those worn by Jews.³³⁸ Muslims are also forbidden from wearing black shoes because it causes eye weakness and sexual impotency.³³⁹ Therefore, the prohibitive thrust of the text in some instances draws on quasi-medical discourse. It is notable that sexual impotency is among the frequently mentioned medical problems resulting from illicit practices, along with madness, leprosy [*khurab*] and *pīsī*.

The ninth chapter, on “the etiquette of cupping, purgation, different maladies and their cures and noting some supplications,” is dedicated to medicine. It is recommended to avoid the physicians as long as possible.³⁴⁰ Instead, the cure is sought mainly in the *hadith* recommending different deeds [*a'māl*], supplications [*du'ā*] and amulets [*ta'wīz*], or herbs and other techniques as the preventive measures for or cure to the maladies in a Muslim community. This seems to suggest a unique way of dealing with pain and approaching remedies for the Shi'a Muslim community. In the twelfth part of the ninth chapter, it is strictly forbidden to eat clay except the clay from the grave of the third Shi'a Imam, Husain Ibn Ali, which can cure all pains.³⁴¹ The traces of community building can also be found in recommendations like sending *salavāt* to Husain and cursing his enemies upon drinking water so that God will forgive your sins (the twelfth part of the third chapter), which embeds the Safavid practice of *Tabarrā* in the most mundane practices of daily life.³⁴² Alid-loyalty as a central marker of different Muslim communities also appears among Majlisī's concerns. In part eleven of the fourth chapter, drawing on sexual norms to re-establish social order, it is stated that if one could not teach the love of Ali to their children, their mothers should be blamed because not being able to let the love of Ali in one's heart is a sign of *ẓīnā*.³⁴³

³³⁷ Majlisī, 130.

³³⁸ Majlisī, 27.

³³⁹ Idem.

³⁴⁰ Majlisī, 192-195.

³⁴¹ Majlisī, 232-236.

³⁴² Majlisī, 85.

³⁴³ Majlisī, 118.

Conclusion

Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisi, the *Shaykh al-Islam* of the capital from 1687-1699, was an important figure in Farsi movement in Shi'itization. He drew on the popular notions of sainthood and *adab* to gain influence and popularity among the lay. He used the notion of sainthood as a shared point between traditionist and Sufi tendencies to gain authority. He wrote around forty-nine works in accessible Farsi, many of which were short extracts from his *Bihār*. This chapter mainly focused on one of these extracts, *The Adornment of the Pious*, which was written in fourteen chapters on proper conduct. I identified two main motifs of re-establishment of social order and sexual order in the text. In the re-establishment of social order, Majlisi constructed a Perso-Islamic understanding of proper conduct [*adab*] by differentiating the Shi'a self from the Other. Therefore, *The Adornment* forbids the Shi'a community from intermingling with and looking like the Jews, Armenian, Zoroastrians, European Christians, Sunnis and Sufis. The text attempts at regulating every small detail of a Shi'a daily life by using the notion of *adab* to help the Shi'a community's distinction from the Other. In the re-establishment of sexual order, the text reinforces gender binary and gender hierarchy by forbidding men and women from looking like each other (e.g. wearing similar clothes) and promoting the men's dominance over women. *The Adornment* also strongly condemns and warns against same sex act and desire.

Conclusion

The Formation of Early Modern Perso-Islamic Selves

The Safavid period is considered an important historical era for understanding the evolution of Iranian religious identity and the Shi'a political structure. Therefore, the Safavid religious structure and power dynamics have always been an important topic in Iranian studies. However, little attention has been paid to locating the Safavids in the picture of the early modern empires. The Safavid household came to power in the context of the early modern millenarian movements as a Sufi order, but ended up fashioning itself as a Shi'a empire and attempting to homogenize the religious landscape of its territory by converting the population to Shi'ism. In this thesis, drawing on Sanjay Subrahmanyam's concept of "connected histories" and Derin Terzioglu's reformulation of "Sunnitization," which reflects on the methodological concerns of the concept of "normative centering," I studied these homogenizing attempts as a part of the early modern notions of empire-building, inter-imperial rivalry and politics of piety. This framework enables us to think about early modernity (16th-19th centuries) beyond confrontation with the "West" by exploring the early modern changes in the contexts of the interconnectedness of regional and local developments.

The seventeenth-century Safavid Iran experienced political, economic, and cultural centralization and economic and urban growth. This facilitated the circulation of knowledge and the state's intervention in several ways. Both the European travelogues and the *waqf* documents attest to a significant growth in the number of mosques, madrasas and *maktabs*, sites of learning. Many of these places were established or managed through economic assistance that was often provided through *waqf* by the royal family, the Safavid court and clerics. The *waqf* institution could make a pious image of the donors and give them some power of intervention in the process of education because they could stipulate conditions for the instructors, students and the curriculum. However, masjid, madrasa and *maktab* were not the only places of transmission of knowledge in Safavid Iran. Bazaar, coffeehouses, teahouses and other public spaces were also important places of circulation of knowledge. In these places, the storytellers were important transmitters of knowledge who were very popular. The ulama employed different strategies to restrict the influence of storytellers as they were a serious obstacle to homogenization. The ulama sometimes banned storytelling altogether, sometimes recommended listening only to proper stories like that of Imam Ali and sometimes adopted the style in their own writings to attract the lay.

The growing literacy among the new urban class also facilitated the circulation of knowledge in urban centers. Although one-third of the estimated eight million population of Iran in the mid-seventeenth century were pastoralists, who were far from the reach of centralizing government, the concentration of big segments of the population in the urban centers, especially in the capital (inhabiting more than one-sixteenth of the population of the whole territory) made some extent of centralization possible. Despite the fact that the printing press did not start working effectively in Iran before the 19th century, the reports indicate that manuscripts were popular and rather accessible. Hundreds of scribes were copying manuscripts for the court, seminaries, and private and commercial use in Isfahan alone. The manuscripts could be also borrowed from the libraries and booksellers for those who could not commission a copy.

Another result of the growing urbanity was the growing influence of the Persianate tradition because the urban class related to it. Consequently, the importance of the Persian language as a medium to address a broader audience (probably the new elite at the court (Georgian and Armenian Slaves) and the growing literate urban class) caught the attention of the state/clerics. Shi'itization reached a new level in the 17th century when Abass I commissioned the composition of a religious compendium in simple Farsi that can be used all over his territory, i.e. *Jāmi 'Abbāsī*. In general, the number of Farsi religious compositions and translations grew significantly in the 17th century. Before this time, it was considered disrespectful to put religious scholarship in a simple language (by simple language I both mean Farsi and simple Farsi). These Farsi texts addressed different topics, like *'itiqādāt* (creeds), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *a'māl* (deeds), *akhlāq va adab* (ethics and etiquette), *tib* (medicine)) and addressed various religious and social issues. However, the works on proper conduct under the titles of *a'māl* (deeds), *ādāb* (etiquette) and *akhlāq* (ethics) and the works on supplications seem to have had a more central place among them. This signals a focus on the practice of faith.

The main element that these Farsi texts shared was a strong emphasis on *akhbār* (the tradition of the Prophet and his Household). In general, Farsization in religion coincided with the growth of *akhbārism* (traditionism), which could employ a more “Shi'a” approach to religion by centralizing the Household of the Prophet. This fact, in the frame of inter-imperial rivalry, indicates that the growth of traditionism was partially a logical consequence of the Safavid politics of piety, which sought to construct community borders by distinguishing the Shi'a Muslims from the Other. The other reasons behind the growth of traditionism was its ability to adopt popular forms of piety like sainthood. The Safavids mainly relied on the three pillars of sainthood (as the supreme human being), the guardianship of the “true faith” and the Persian traditions of kingship. However, the move away from their Sufi

background, made the borders of sainthood problematic and caused a new crisis of authority. In this context, the ulama found the opportunity to claim sainthood for themselves. Muhammad Taqī Majlisī and his son Muhammad Bāqir especially enjoyed popularity over the saintly image that they made of themselves or was made of them. This appears rather controversial given Muhammad Bāqir's antagonism with Sufism and his father's affinity with it. However, sainthood should not be interpreted as a controversy between traditionism and Sufism, but as the point that connects them.

Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī held the position of *shaykh al-Islam* in Isfahan from 1687 until his death in 1699. He was an important figure in Shi'itization of the Iranian society and in Farsization of religion. Some of his Farsi compositions like *Hilyat al-Muttaqīn* (The Adornment of the Pious), *Jalā' al-'Uyūn* (the Light of the Eyes) and *Zād al-Ma'ād* (Provisions of the Afterlife) found their way into *maktab* education and into the practice of anthologizing in Isfahan, and remained among the popular Shi'a sources until today. His *Hilyat al-Muttaqīn*, which is a work in ethics and etiquette, was an attempt at social disciplining following the politics of community-building. Majlisī utilized the Perso-Islamic concept of *adab* in writing fourteen chapters on proper ways of clothing, eating, make-up, sleeping, marriage, etc. The close reading of the text shows that it especially focuses on the re-establishment of social and sexual order. In the re-establishment of social order, Majlisī mainly makes recommendations in ways of clothing and make-up that can distinguish a Shi'a Muslim from the "Other" including the Sunnis, Armenians, Sufis, Jews, Zoroastrians and Europeans. In the re-establishment of sexual order, Majlisī reinforces the gender binary and gender hierarchy. He promotes restricting women and their obedience to their husbands. In the section on bathing, he shows anxiety over same-sex acts, which he condemns in the strongest language in the final chapter of his book. The other way in which he reinforces the gender binary is by leaving the intersex [*mukhanath*] groups out of his discussion.

It is noteworthy that Majlisī's attempt at social disciplining directly and strongly targeted the individual body. It is the individual body that is to be disciplined in its appearance and performance in a homogenizing context. This, I believe, especially calls for a new frame for studying the formation of Perso-Islamic bodies/selves/genders and sexualities, which goes beyond the confrontation with the "West." The nineteenth-century confrontation with the "West" is usually taken as the main point of departure from a "pre-modern" moment in the scholarship (e.g. hetero-normalization in Iran is considered a result of the anxiety over the "Western" gaze). For further studies, a better understanding of Perso-Islamic bodies/selves/genders and sexualities as well as a better understanding of the reception of Majlisī's *Hilyat al-Muttaqīn* and similar disciplining attempts can be attained by studying the early modern practice of anthologizing. These anthologies connected the public and the private

spheres, the regulative and the normative, the disciplining and the self-fashioning. Studying the manners in which these anthologies were collected (for example, how the state/clerical disciplining texts were collected with the other genres like poetry or excluded from them or contested by them) can shed more light on the formation of Perso-Islamic selves in this important early modern moment.

Appendix:

Name	Length (the number of sentences [<i>bair</i>])	Topic
<i>Ayn al-Hayāt</i>	21000	the words of the Prophet to Abī Zar.
<i>Mishkāt al-anvār</i>	3000	a summary of <i>Ayn al-Hayāt</i> .
<i>Hilyat al-Muttaqin</i>	12000	On the activities that are sometimes needed in life.
<i>Hayāt al-qulūb</i> (in 3 volumes)	26000+6000+3000	About the prophets and the rulers who were their progeny + about the Prophet of Islam + about <i>Nabuvvat</i> (prophethood) and <i>Imāmat</i>
<i>Tuhfat al-Zā'ir</i>	13000	the reward and etiquette of visiting the tombs of the Household of the Prophet
<i>Jalā' al-'Uyūn</i>	22000	Birth, martyrdom, miracles and lives of the infallible Imams
<i>Miqbās al-Masābīb</i>	5500	The supplications after the prayers and its <i>adab</i>
<i>Rabi' al-Asābi'</i>	3000	The deeds and supplications of the week
<i>Zād al-Ma'ād</i>	15000	The deeds of each month
<i>Risāli-yi Dīyāt</i>	3000	Atonement (<i>Dīyah</i>)
<i>Risāli-yi Shakkīyyāt-i Namāz</i>	750	prayers
<i>Risāli-yi ughāt-i Navāfil</i>	150	prayers
<i>Risāli-yi Raj'at</i>	2000	The return of the Imam in occultation and his followers
1. Translation of Imam Ali's <i>Mālik Ashtar</i>	1000	
<i>Risāli-yi Ikhtiyārāt</i>	500	The proper deeds of the days of the month and week and some other days
<i>Risāli-yi Bihisht va Dūzakab</i>	700	Paradise and hell
<i>Risāli-yi Janāyiz</i>	700	The treatment of the dead and their burial
<i>Risāli-yi Kabīri-yi Haj</i>	1000	Pilgrimage
<i>Risāli-yi Saghīri-yi Haj</i>	700	Summary of the <i>Pilgrimage</i> above
<i>Miftāh al-Ghayb</i>	1500	Different ways of consulting a book
<i>Risāli-yi Māl-i Navāsib</i>	50	The property of the enemies
<i>Risāli-yi Zakāt</i>	50	Alms as prescribed by Islam
<i>Risāli-yi Kaffārāt</i>	100	Atonement

<i>Risāli-yi Adāb-i Tirandāzī</i>	50	Etiquette of archery
<i>Risāli-yi Namāz-i Shab</i>	50	The night prayers
<i>Risāli-yi Adāb-i Namāz</i>	1000	The etiquette of the prayer
<i>Risāli-yi Tahqīq-i Ayah</i>	50	A study of the Quran 56: 10-14.
<i>Risāli-yi Sifāt-i Zātī va Sifāt-i fi'li-yi Hagh Ta'ālā</i>	200	God's attributes
<i>Risāli-yi Ta'qīb-i Mukhtasar-i Namāz-hāy-i Shabānah Rūzī</i>	100	Prayers and supplications
<i>Risāli-yi Tahqīq-i Bidā'</i>	100	<i>Bidā'</i> (a contested issue about destiny among Shi'a and Sunni)
<i>Risālah-yi Jabr va Tafvīz</i>	100	God's intervention into human's life
<i>Risālah-yi Nikāh</i>	50	Marriage
2. <i>Tarjumah-yi Risālah-yi Farbat al-Gharra</i>	4000	Ali Ibn Abi Tālib's tomb and the miracles that has taken place there
3. <i>Tarjumah-yi Tuhīd-i Muḥaddal</i>	2800	
4. <i>Tarjumah-yi Tuhīd-i Hazrat-i Imam Riḍā</i>	700	
5. <i>Tarjumah-yi Ziyārat-i Jāmi'a</i>	200	Includes important Shi'a practices in the form of supplications upon visiting the tombs of the members of the Prophet's household (<i>Ziyārah</i>)
6. <i>Tarjumah-yi Du'a-yi Kumayl</i>	200	Supplications
7. <i>Tarjumah-yi Du'a-yi Mubāhilah</i>	150	Supplications
8. <i>Tarjumah-yi Du'a-yi Samāt</i>	200	Supplications
9. <i>Tarjumah-yi Du'a-yi Jushan-i Saghīr</i>	100	Supplications
10. <i>Tarjumah-yi Hadith-i Abdullah Ibn-i Jundab</i>	200	
11. <i>Tarjumah-yi Hadith-i Rijā' Ibn-i Abī Zabāk</i>	300	<i>A'māl</i> va <i>adāb</i> attributed to Imam Riza

12. <i>Tarjumah-yi Qasidah dar Madh-i Imam Riṣa</i>	500	An ode in praise of Imam Riza, the eighth Shi'a Imam.
13. <i>Tarjumah-yi Hadith-i Sittat al-Ashya'</i>	100	
<i>Najaf and Karbalā</i>	300	On his return from these two places
<i>Munajāt</i>	100	
<i>Savā'iq al-Yabūd</i>	150	The taxes of the Jews
<i>Javāb-i So'al-hāyi Mutifarighah</i>	5000	The questions that people have asked him or those he found necessary to point out
<i>Haq al-Yaqīn</i>	21000	On creeds [<i>usūl al-dīn</i>]

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