



Nūrollāh Šūštārī on Shi'i Notables

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ABSTRACT Nūrollāh Šūštārī's (d. 1019/1610) *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* (*Assemblies of the Believers*) is an extensive work on distinguished Shi'i figures throughout history. The author, trained in Safavid lands, composed this work while residing in the Mughal empire. There, he was associated with the court of Akbar (r. 963–1014/[1556]–1605). The present article introduces various aspects of Šūštārī's project and examines what might have motivated him to undertake such a significant task. It also touches on the internal challenges found in the circles of the Shi'i scholars, with which the author was intellectually engaged, and discusses later critics of the work, who blamed its author for including in it many Sufi figures of the classical and post-classical period. Furthermore, the possibility that the composition of the *Mağāles* caused its author's death will be discussed. With his authorship of this work, Šūštārī was pioneering a trend of writing Shi'i bio-bibliographical works, to which many scholars contributed up until the twentieth century.

KEYWORDS Nūrollāh Šūštārī, Sunni-Shi'i controversy, Safavid Shi'ism, *Mağāles al-mo'menīn*, Shi'i bio-bibliographical works, Shi'ism, Sufism, Shi'ism in the Mughal court, Safavids and Naqšbandīya

Introduction

Nūrollāh Šūštārī's (d. 1019/1610) *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* (*Assemblies of the Believers*) can be considered the first comprehensive Shi'i bio-bibliographical work.¹ Earlier works of this kind included only Shi'i scholars who transmitted Shi'i *ḥadīṣ*. *Mağāles al-mo'menīn*'s scope was much wider, mapping out the entire Shi'i communities of previous centuries. It introduces Shi'i personalities in different spheres of life, including rulers, viziers and officials as well as scholars, thinkers, Sufis and poets. Moreover, the work is significant for presenting the Shi'a as an intellectual perspective within Islam instead of a sect like many others. [1]

Born in or around 956/1549 in Shushtar in the south-west of Iran, in 979/1571, Nūrollāh [2]

1 The author would like to thank Annabel Keeler, Arham Moradi, Kianoosh Rezaia, Shahrād Shahvand and Christoph Werner for their comments on the draft of this paper.

Šūštārī moved to Mashhad to study among Safavid scholars there (Šūštārī [1378] 1999, 24–25). In 992/1584, he went to Mecca via India. Following his pilgrimage, Šūštārī did not return to the Safavid territory and spent the rest of his life in the Mughal empire (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 6:535). Shortly after he arrived in Fatehpur Sikri in 993/1585, he went to the residence of the Mughal emperor, Ġalāl al-Dīn Akbar (r. 963–1014/1556–1605). The Mughal court physician, Abo-l-Faḥ Gilānī (d. 997/1589), who probably knew Šūštārī from the time he spent in Mashhad (Şafā [1363–1370] 1984–1991, 5(2): 825), introduced him to Akbar (Badāʿūnī [1379] 2000–2001, 3:93). Šūštārī was in contact with the emperor even before moving to India. He completed a work, titled *al-Risāla al-Ġalālīya* (The *Ġalālīan Treatise*), which he dedicated to Akbar while he was still in Mashhad in Ramaẓān 992/September 1584, which was shortly before his departure to India (Šūštārī [1377] 1584; Neyşābūrī Kentūrī [1409] 1988, 157).² This work consists of nine questions on Qurʾānic exegesis (*al-tafsīr*), tradition (*al-ḥadīs*), morphology (*mabādiʿ al-luġa*), syntax (*al-naḥw*), semantics (*al-maʿānī*), the theory of figurative speech proper (*al-bayān*), legal methodology (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), rational theology (*kalām*) and logic (*al-manṭiq*). By showing his engagement in various sciences, Šūštārī tried to impress the emperor with his competence in these sciences in advance. Sometime after he arrived in India, Akbar appointed him the chief judge of Lahore (Badāʿūnī [1379] 2000–2001, 3:93; Šūštārī [1378] 1999, 25), a post which Šūštārī held for more than a decade.

Šūštārī was not the only Shiʿi scholar associated with the Mughal court.³ However, he was the one most rigorous in defending Shiʿi doctrines. During the years he was associated with the Mughal court, he engaged in several Sunni–Shiʿi debates.⁴ He also wrote several polemical works in response to Sunni refutations of Shiʿism. The subjects of most of his works are, in one way or another, related to Shiʿism. Among his works, *Maġāles al-moʿmenīn*, which is the focus of the present study, arguably is the most revealing work of Šūštārī in terms of his view of Shiʿi intellectual heritage. Fortunately, a group of scholars in Mashhad has recently prepared a critical edition of this work, which is far more reliable than earlier editions.⁵ Moreover, the editors’ extensive introduction to this book and their footnotes throughout the text were beneficial for the present study.

[3]

2 The holograph, and probably the unique extant copy of this work, is preserved in the Habibganj Collection of Maulana Azad Library in Aligarh (MS Habibganj 1043). I want to thank Shahrad Shahvand, who generously shared the images of this manuscript with me.

In 995/1587, a few years after the composition of *Ġalālīya*, Šūštārī completed another work with a similar structure, titled *al-ʿAšara al-kāmila*. This work consists of ten chapters on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīs*, syntax, dialectics, legal methodology (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy and mathematics (Šūštārī [1071] 1661, fols. 34b–49a). Šūštārī followed Ġalāl al-Dīn Davānī’s (d. 908/1502) *Unmūzaġ al-ʿulūm* in the structure of both his *Ġalālīya* and *al-ʿAšara al-kāmila*. Nevertheless, *Ġalālīya* is closer to Davānī’s work, in terms of having a similar purpose of securing patronage. On the structure of Davānī’s *Unmūzaġ al-ʿulūm* and some other works written in this genre, see Pourjavady (2014, 300–301).

3 In addition to Twelver Shiʿi scholars, a few Zaidī scholars were also active at the Mughal court. See N. Šūštārī ([1392] 2013, 1:132–149); Bandy (2019, 249–74, 423).

4 An account of one of these debates was presented by Badāʿūnī ([1379] 2000–2001, 3:93).

5 Nūrollāh Šūštārī, *Maġāles al-moʿmenīn*, edited by Ebrāhīm ʿArabpūr, Maṣṣūr Setāyeş, Moḥammad Reẓā Moḥammadēyān, Moḥammad Ḥasan Khazāʿī and Moḥammad ʿAlī ʿAlidūst. 6 vols. Mashhad: Bonyād-e Paẓūheşhā-ye Eslāmī-e Āstān-e Qods-e Raẓavī, ([1392] 2013). The work was published at least five times earlier; (1) Lithography edition in Tehran in 1268/1851–52 by Saiyed Ḥosain Ṭehrānī; (2) lithography edition in Tehran in 1299/1881–89 by Mollā Amin Vāʿeẓ Ṭehrānī; (3) lithography edition in Tehran in 1326/1908–9; (4) lithography edition in Tabriz, n.d.; (5) printed edition in Tehran: Enteşārāt-e Eslāmīya, 1335 Ş/1956–57, rpt. 1365 Ş/1986–87. See N. Šūštārī ([1392] 2013, 1:396).

The Structure of the Work

Mağāles al-mo'menīn consists of a preface (*dībāčā*), a prologue (*fāteḥa*), twelve chapters which the author called 'assemblies' (*mağāles*, sing. *mağles*) and an epilogue (*ḥātema*). The subjects of the chapters are as follows: [4]

1. On the places and regions associated with the Imams and the Shi'a; [5]
2. On the Shi'i clans (*tavā'ef*; sing. *ṭā'efa*);
3. On the distinguished Shi'i companions of the Prophet;
4. On the notable Shi'i contemporaries of the companions (*tābe'īn*);
5. On the Shi'i theologians, Qur'ān exegetes, jurists, reciters of the Qur'ān (*qorrā'*), grammarians and philologists among the generations following the companions;
6. On the Shi'i Sufis;
7. On the Shi'i philosophers and theologians;
8. On the notable Shi'i kings and sultans;
9. On the notable Shi'i provincial rulers (*omarā'*, sing. *amīr*) and army commanders;
10. On the Shi'i viziers and officials;
11. On the Shi'i Arab poets;
12. On the Shi'i Persian poets (*sho'arā'-e 'ağam*).

Duration of the Composition of *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* and Its Dedication

While residing in India, Šūštārī devoted more than a decade of his life to writing *Mağāles al-mo'menīn*. According to the author's statement at the end of the *Mağāles*, he started writing the work on 1 Rağab 998/6 May 1590 and completed it on 23 Zo l-Qa'da 1010/15 May 1602 ([1401] 1981, 5: 269–70).⁶ However, Āqā Bozorg Ṭehrānī ([1403–1406] 1983–1986, 19:370) and the recent editors of *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 1:346–52), have moved the starting date of the composition to sometime before 982/1574–75. The reason is that at one point in the text, the author refers to the current date as 982/1574–75 (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 5:360).⁷ At another point in the prologue (*fāteḥa*), the date was given as 990/1582 (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 1:51–52). Nevertheless, it is not reasonable to doubt the author's statement about the time he started the composition simply because of the two earlier dates mentioned in the body of the text. Those dates may have been taken from sources which Šūštārī had drawn upon on certain occasions. In any case, the date given by the author as the beginning of the composition, i.e., 1 Rağab 998/6 May 1590, must be the date he made up his mind to compose the work. [6]

Šūštārī was able to produce his works of scholarship with remarkable speed. He wrote the [7]

6 The author's statements about the start and end dates of the composition are given in some copies of the text, such as MSS Tehran, Mağlis 7842 and Ma'ārif 1176. Mirzā 'Abdollah Afandi Ešfahānī's knowledge of the dates is based on a copy of the *Mağāles*, produced under the supervision of the author. See below the transcription of *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* under the author's supervision.

7 As noted by the recent editors of the *Mağāles*, that particular passage was taken from Qāzī Aḥmad Ġaffārī Qazvīnī's *Tārīḥ-e Ġahānārā* (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 1:350, editors' introduction). In the edition of *Tārīḥ-e Ġahānārā*, the date was given as 972/1564-65 (186). The recent editors of the *Mağāles* assumed that Šūštārī updated the date. In other words, the year 982/1574-75 was when he wrote this part of the work. However, it is also possible that Qāzī Aḥmad changed the date to ten years later when preparing a later recension of his work. This possibility needs to be investigated further.

draft of his extensive *Maṣāʾib al-nawāṣib* (Afflictions of ‘Alī’s Enemies) in seventeen days (Šūštārī [1426] 2005–2006, 2:21). He also wrote his *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq* (Establishing Justice), which is likewise extensive, in seven months (Šūštārī [1377] 1957–1958, 1:32). The fact that it took him twelve years to compose the *Mağāles* indicates that the composition was done with greater care and attention. Moreover, Šūštārī benefitted from a large number of sources in the *Mağāles*, some of which were not at his disposal at the very beginning of his project. He was gathering and accumulating the materials gradually, incorporating his notes in the text. This process even continued after the completion of the first draft. In the epilogue, Šūštārī indicates that after the completion of the draft, whenever he found some further information on a particular matter which could improve the text, he inserted a gloss (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 6:529). These glosses were later incorporated into the book (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 1:350, editors’ introduction). Therefore, the text has several recensions, depending on the extent to which additional materials have been incorporated in it.

Šūštārī dedicated the work to the “Imam of the time,” the Twelfth Shi’i Imam, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. Dedication of a work to the Twelfth Imam was not unprecedented by this time. The most well-known example preceding the *Mağāles* was ‘Abd al-Ġalīl Qazvīnī’s (fl. 560/1164–65) *Ba‘z masāleḥ al-navāṣeḥ fī naqṣ ba‘z faẓā’eḥ al-ravāfeẓ*, known as *Ketāb al-naqṣ*. Qazvīnī wrote this work in Persian in response to an anti-Shi’i polemical work, the *Ba‘z faẓā’eḥ al-ravāfeẓ*. Šūštārī was familiar with Qazvīnī’s *Ketāb al-naqṣ* as he used it and referred to it in various occasions in his *Mağāles* (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 3:373). Apart from the dedication to the Imam, the *Mağāles* and *Ketāb al-naqṣ* share some other features. They are both apologetics, they were both written in Persian, and the target readers for both works were not only specialists but also the general Shi’i reader. Nevertheless, the structure and the goal of the *Mağāles* were quite different from those of *Ketāb al-naqṣ*. [8]

The dedication of the work to the “Imam of the time” is also an indication that the author did not intend to show it to the Mughal emperor because it goes without saying that he would not have been pleased with the way its dedication was formulated. There are reasons to believe that at the end of Akbar’s reign Šūštārī was no longer receiving the support of the emperor (Rizvi 1986, 1:369–70; Rezavi 2017, 41). While the exact reason for the emperor’s change of attitude towards Šūštārī remains unknown, S. A. A. Rizvi (1986, 1:369–370) and Rezavi (2017, 41) relate it to the death of the Mughal vizier, Abo-l-Faẓl ‘Allāmī, who used to support Šūštārī in several occasions. They assume that Šūštārī lost the royal support after Abo-l-Faẓl’s death on 4 Rabī‘ I 1011/22 August 1602. However, there is no evidence supporting this assumption. Šūštārī might have lost the support a few months earlier than Abo-l-Faẓl’s death, sometime before 23 Zo l-Qa‘da 1010/15 May 1602, when the *Mağāles* was completed. Knowing that he could no longer secure patronage at the court might be one of the reasons that Šūštārī decided to dedicate the *Mağāles* to the Twelfth Imam. [9]

The Scope of the Work

In the preface to the *Mağāles*, Šūštārī explains that Shi’is in the period between the caliphate of ‘Alī b. Abī Tāleb and the rise of the Safavids were mostly practising dissimulation (*taqīya*), undertaking precautionary concealment of their beliefs. Sunni scholars had the opportunity to establish their principals and their positions on various religious matters, and ultimately it is these scholars who have been recognized and listed in the bio-bibliographical works (aka *Ṭabaqāt* works). In these works, Shi’i scholars who were practising *taqīya* were considered to [10]

be Šāfe‘ī or Ḥanafī. The Shi’is themselves, Šūštārī noted, did not compose a significant biobibliographical work. The only exceptions are the collections of names and brief biographies of the Shi’i transmitters of *ḥadīṣ*, the purpose of which was purely a matter of dogma. With the rise of the Safavid dynasty, Šūštārī argued, there remained no need for *taqīya*. Therefore, he intended to devote his time to writing a book, in the style of *Ṭabaqāt* works, on pre-Safavid Shi’i figures (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 1:8–9).

The above explanation makes several points clear. First, the scope of the work has been given. It starts with the period after the caliphate of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and ends with the rise of the Safavids. However, there are exceptions, so that he went beyond the limit he had set and included figures whose career was spent partially or entirely within the Safavid era; scholars such as Ġeyāṣ al-Dīn Daštakī (d. 949/1542), Šams al-Dīn Ḥafri (d. 942/1535–36), Šāh Ṭāher Dakanī (d. 952/1545–46), Aḥmad b. Naṣrollāh Daibalī Tattawī (d. ca. 996/1587–88), Saiyed Rāḡū Bokhārī Hendī (fl. 990/1582) and poets such as Ahli-ye Šīrāzī (d. 942/1535–36) and Lesānī (d. 940/1533–34). Šūštārī himself explains the reasons for the inclusion of these exceptions:

If occasionally a distinguished Safavid personality or someone contemporaneous to them was included in one of the chapters of the book, it is because either it is pretty hard to imagine that the Safavids imposed [Shi’i] belief on him, or there is another reason which can be understood from the context.⁸ (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 6:531)

Šūštārī’s sole criterion for inclusion of such pre-Šafavid individuals was that they should have been one of the famous figures of Shi’a (*mašāḥīr-e Šī’a*) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 1:10), and by the Shi’a, he had its broad sense in mind, namely anyone who believed ‘Alī to be the immediate successor of the Prophet. The details of Shi’i belief, which might differ from one person to another, were not taken into consideration. In other words, he included not only the Twelver Shi’i figures but also the Esmā‘īlīs and Zaidīs. The author appears to be consistent in applying this criterion throughout the work, even when he disliked an individual. For instance, he included the Abbasid Caliph, al-Manšūr (r. 136–158/754–775) because of his Shi’i beliefs, even though he was admittedly cruel to many Shi’i individuals (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 5:72).

However, the criterion is not as straightforward as the author claimed it to be because he also included figures who had only a remote association with Shi’ism. For instance, he included Abū Naṣr Fārābī (d. 339/950) as a Shi’i philosopher because of enjoying the patronage of a Shi’i ruler. Moreover, on numerous occasions, the author seemingly aimed to convince the readers of the Shi’i affiliation of the persons in question without caring much about the truth of the matter.

Some later scholars criticized Šūštārī for having generous criteria for Shi’i belief by which some Sunni scholars and Sufis were considered Shi’is. Among later Shi’i scholars, the harshest critic was Muḥammad ‘Alī Behbahānī (d. 1216/1801), who first labelled Šūštārī the ‘Shi’a-fabricator’ (*Šī’a-tarāsh*) (Behbahānī [1370] 1991, 2:155).⁹ It seems that the primary concern of Behbahānī and other critics was the inclusion of the Sufi figures. Despite this criticism,

⁸ All translation by the author unless indicated otherwise.

⁹ Following Behbahānī, Mīrzā Abo-l-Qāsem Qomī (d. 1231/1815–16) in his *Resāla-ye eḡāza-ye zekr* ([1384] 2005–2006, 89) and Moḥammad Bāqir Ḥ‘ānsārī (d. 1313/1895–96) in his *Rawḍāt al-ḡannāt* (Ḥ‘ānsārī [1390] 1970, 3:142) applied this label to Šūštārī. Mainly because of the popularity of the latter work, this label became widespread and used by several scholars of the twentieth century; see N. Šūštārī ([1392] 2013, 1:183–84).

the imposition of Shi'i identity was overlooked by most readers, and *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* gained much popularity generally. Its wide circulation was mainly because of the work's broad scope, its encyclopaedic features and the author's use of a vast number of sources, including numerous bio-bibliographical works and chronicles. Thereby, the *Mağāles* was considered a highly significant work.

Notably, Šūštārī did not include women in his book. We might think that there were a few well-known Shi'i women. However, if the author wanted to include notable Shi'i women, at least as a subsection, it would have been possible. In it he could have provided biographies of the wives of the Imams or their sisters and perhaps some later Shi'i women. However, as explained below, Šūštārī intended to compose a book similar to Ḥanafī and Šāfe'ī bio-bibliographical compositions, and none of those works included female figures. Nevertheless, Šūštārī must have noticed that 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ğāmī's (d. 871/1492) *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, which was one of his primary sources, had a section on female Sufis. In any case, Šūštārī's exclusion of female figures was not exceptional. Among later authors of Shi'i bio-bibliographical works, Saiyed 'Alī Ḥān Ḥusainī Šīrāzī Madanī (d. ca. 1120/1708), author of *al-Darağāt al-rafi'a fī ṭabaqāt al-Imāmīya*, was the only one who devoted a chapter of his work to women and hence addressed a shortcoming of the *Mağāles* (Madanī [1397] 1976, 1:75). Unfortunately, the *Darağāt* is only partially extant, missing several chapters, including the chapter on women. [16]

The Target Audience

In his correspondence with Šūštārī, Yūsof-'Alī Astarābādī (fl. 1011/1602–3) criticized Šūštārī for applying legal judgments according to the Ḥanafī School (Šūštārī and Astarābādī [1388] 2009, 174). It suggests that Šūštārī was not given the freedom to apply legal judgments based on Shi'i jurisprudence during the time he held the position of a judge. In his *Mağāles al-mo'menīn*, Šūštārī revealed that before the completion of the *Mağāles* (i.e., before 1010/1602), he had been practising *taqīya* with non-Shi'is and tolerating Sunni positions without raising any objections to them. Šūštārī then announced that the practice of *taqīya* had ended with the authorship of the *Mağāles* (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 3:83), possibly because he intended to distribute the *Mağāles* among selected non-Shi'i individuals who were not hostile towards the Shi'is. Therefore, one can conclude that all the Shi'i works he composed in India before the completion of the *Mağāles*, i.e., 1010/1602, were only intended for Shi'i readers and that within the Mughal territory, they were circulated almost exclusively among Shi'i communities. In particular, his anti-Sunni polemical works, in which the author did not mind using harsh words or cursing the first three Rashidin Caliphs, were unlikely to have been written for a Sunni audience. [17]

Compared with his polemical works, the tone of Šūštārī in the *Mağāles* is less provocative for general non-Shi'i readers. Most probably, the decision to distribute the *Mağāles* among selected Sunni readers was not taken at the beginning of the composition. It might be that the author revised the text, removing any polemical discussions from it after he decided to open up the readership. Nevertheless, the text still contains elements that might irritate the general Sunni reader.¹⁰ In other words, even if the author aimed to make the text tolerable for Sunni readers, it is not likely that he would have had much success with them. [18]

10 For instance, on one occasion, he stated that all the Sunnis hate 'Alī (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 3:478). On another occasion, he indirectly offended Abū Ḥanīfa (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 3:487).

Obviously, Šūštārī wanted the book to be circulated in the Safavid empire. Nevertheless, the readers of the Indian subcontinent were of great significance for him too. In the work, Šūštārī provided a vivid account of the Shi‘ī community in Kashmir. In 999/1591 and 1000/1592, on the orders of Akbar, Šūštārī journeyed twice to Kashmir to inspect the state of the region in terms of its ongoing conflicts and the mismanagement and corruption of its rulers (Abo-l-Faẓl ‘Allāmī 1877–1886, 3:595). Besides the report, which must have been an official document, Šūštārī also gave accounts of what he had witnessed there in the *Mağāles*.¹¹ In the epilogue of the *Mağāles*, Šūštārī reveals his anxiety about including them. He states:

Furthermore, they [= the readers] may hide the book from those opponents or those who have an unfriendly attitude towards Shi‘is (*moḥālefan o sā‘er-e nā-ahlān*). Because if those people were to know about the Shi‘i regions and their community, they might persecute individuals of this rightful sect who live in foreign regions. They might also attack the graves of their ancestors. (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 3:531) [20]

Šūštārī was worried that this account might put the Shi‘is of the region into trouble. For this reason, he begged his readers not to make the book available to those who treated Shi‘is harshly. [21]

The Author’s Motives

Šūštārī’s implicit reference to Šāfe‘ī and Ḥanafī *Ṭabaqāt* works in the preface suggests that his work was planned to be a work of the same type, dedicated to the Shi‘is. He must have been familiar with several *Ṭabaqāt* works of Ḥanafī and Šāfe‘ī scholars composed in the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries. As was the case for the authors of Ḥanafī and Šāfe‘ī *Ṭabaqāts*, broad inclusiveness held particular importance for Šūštārī. [22]

To undertake such a demanding task, Šūštārī must have had a specific motive. In the epilogue of the work, he clarifies his reason to some extent. He indicates that the work is an indirect response to arguments presented by hostile individuals (*mo‘ānedān*) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 6:530). The argument he tries to tackle can be reconstructed as follows: Throughout history, there had not been many notable Shi‘is. The Safavid rulers, with the assistance of the Qizilbāš, forcefully implemented the conversion of people to Shi‘ism. Moreover, the Safavids have been trying to get the idea across that the Shi‘is were always highly significant throughout Islamic history (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 6:530–531). [23]

Šūštārī did not explicitly name the person(s) whose anti-Shi‘i argument(s) motivated him to write the *Mağāles*. However, we do know that he was aware of two anti-Safavid polemical works written in the Ottoman territory within the last few decades. These were Ḥosain b. ‘Abdollah Šervānī’s *al-Aḥkām al-dīniya fī takfīr al-Qizilbāš*, completed after 950/1543 and Mīrzā Maḥdūm Šarīfī’s (d. 995/1587) *al-Nawāqīd li-bunyān al-rawāfīd*. While he possibly knew the former only indirectly, he was thoroughly familiar with the latter.¹² [24]

In his *al-Aḥkām al-dīniya fī takfīr al-Qizilbāš*, Šervānī treated the Safavid religion as the religion of the Qizilbāš. He consciously avoided the term Shi‘ism. According to him, “the [25]

11 For example, see N. Šūštārī ([1392] 2013, 1:330–332).

12 Another sixteenth-century anti-Twelve Shi‘i polemics was Ibn Ḥağar al-Haytamī’s (d. 973/1566) *al-Šawā‘iq al-muḥriqa fī l-radd ‘alā ahl al-bid‘ wa-l-zandaqa*. Šūštārī was undoubtedly familiar with this work, as he wrote a response to it (Šūštārī [1327] 1948). However, the author of *al-Šawā‘iq al-muḥriqa* attacked Shi‘ism in its historical form, and he did not refer to the Safavids at all. For this reason, this work was not relevant to the present discussion.

Qizilbāš religion” was initiated by Šāh Esmā‘īl I’s (r. 907–930/1501–1524) grandfather, Ğonaid (d. 864/1460), in the ninth/fifteenth century and developed further when Esmā‘īl I gained power. He pinpointed those beliefs and practices of the Qizilbāš which were not only in conflict with Sunni Islam but also at odds with the well-established form of Shi‘i Islam, such as believing in the divinity of Šāh Esmā‘īl I. The divinity was explained in various ways; for example, some argued that the soul of ‘Alī, who was the true God, transmigrated to the body of Šāh Esmā‘īl I (Šervānī et al. [1376] 1997–1998, 735–36). According to Šervānī, after Šāh Esmā‘īl I’s death, some Qizilbāš spoke about the transference of this divinity to his son, Šāh Tahmāsp I (r. 930–84/1524–76) (Šervānī et al. [1376] 1997–1998, 729). Moreover, the Qizilbāš argued that they were exempt from the obligation to perform various religious duties such as the daily prayers and the pilgrimage to Mecca and from some prohibitions, including drinking wine (Šervānī et al. [1376] 1997–1998, 733–34, 736). Besides, Šervānī pointed to the Qizilbāš practice of cursing of the Prophet’s wife, ‘Ā’eša, which he regarded as disrespectful to the Prophet (Šervānī et al. [1376] 1997–1998, 725).

For unclear reasons, in his *al-Nawāqid*, Mīrzā Maḥdūm Šarīfī rejected Šervānī’s account of the Safavid religion as an “unjust imputation” (*iftirā’*) (Šarīfī, fol. 30a). According to Mīrzā Maḥdūm, Šervānī was not sophisticated enough to comprehend the complexity of the Safavid religion. In his response to the *Nawāqid*, Šūštārī chose not to interfere, other than indicating agreement with Mīrzā Maḥdūm’s judgment (Šūštārī [1426] 2005–2006, 2:21). He was possibly aware that Šervānī’s account was partially correct. At the dawn of the Safavid era, some Qizilbāš did claim that Šāh Esmā‘īl I was divine. Šervānī’s was also correct in his argument that the Qizilbāš did not observe the *šarī‘a* fully and justified this. However, Mīrzā Maḥdūm’s rejection of Šervānī’s argument meant that Šūštārī did not have to respond to it. Šūštārī’s only comment was that Mīrzā Maḥdūm likewise had imputed the Shi‘is unjustly (Šūštārī [1426] 2005–2006, 2:22).

Šūštārī’s knowledge of Šervānī’s *al-Aḥkām al-dīniya* might have been only indirectly through the references to the work by Mīrzā Maḥdūm. In contrast, he had profound knowledge of Mīrzā Maḥdūm’s *Nawāqid*, of which he wrote a refutation. Šūštārī considered the *Nawāqid* a significant threat to Shi‘ism. In his correspondence with Mīr Yūsof-‘Alī Astarābādī, Šūštārī stated that Mīrzā Maḥdūm, either genuinely or to entertain the Ottomans, put forward some new and precisely-aimed ideas (*fekr-e daqiq-e tāza*) in his anti-Shi‘i arguments. Šūštārī also acknowledged the popularity of the *Nawāqid* by saying that the Ottoman scholars snatch the work from each another, and that about a hundred copies of it were brought back to India by Indian Sunnis who had gone on the pilgrimage to Mecca (Šūštārī and Astarābādī [1388] 2009, 143).

The significance of the *Nawāqid* as an anti-Shi‘i polemic lies in its author’s following qualifications: his education in the religious sciences and theology, and his familiarity with the Safavid religion, based on his direct experience of living in Safavid lands and being associated with the Safavid court at the highest possible level.

Coming from a family of learned and landed notables, Mīrzā Maḥdūm was the third member of his family to serve the Safavid monarchs. His grandfather, Sayyed Šarīf al-Dīn ‘Alī (d. 920/1514), acted as *šadr* (head of religious administration) during the reign of Šāh Esmā‘īl I and his father, Mīr Šarīf Širāzī, was the chief judge and *kalāntar* (local mayor) of Shiraz, then vizier of the province of ‘Erāq-e ‘Aḡam, and finally grand vizier of Šāh Ṭahmāsp I (Ghereghlou 2019, 157–58). Mīrzā Maḥdūm entered the political scene in the final years of Šāh Ṭahmāsp I’s reign when his father was the grand vizier. He spent most of his time in the

capital, Qazvin, and enjoyed the patronage of the influential daughter of the shah, Parihān Hānum (d. 985/1578) (Ghereghlou 2019, 158–59). When Šāh Esmā‘il II (r. 984–85/1576–77) ascended the throne, Mīrzā Maḥdūm was appointed as the *šadr*. Intending to weaken the prerogatives enjoyed by the Shi‘i religious authorities, Esmā‘il II sought to pursue a more moderate policy towards the Sunni population. Mīrzā Maḥdūm is said to have played a significant role in this change of policy (Ghereghlou 2019, 159–60). After Esmā‘il II died in 985/1577, Mīrzā Maḥdūm fled to the Ottoman empire. Shortly after, in 987/1580, he completed his *Nawāqīd* (Stanfield Johnson 1994, 125).

Although Mīrzā Maḥdūm’s *Nawāqīd* should be considered an anti-Twelve Shi‘i polemical work, the target of this work was not the core Shi‘i beliefs, such as their belief in ‘Alī as the true successor of the Prophet or the *emāma*. Instead, Mīrzā Maḥdūm in this work targeted some ideas and practices which he believed to have been developed by Twelver Shi‘i scholars, such as temporary marriage (*mut‘a*) and cursing the Sunni Caliphs, among others. Moreover, he argued time and again that before the rise of the Safavids, both in terms of numbers as well as social and intellectual weight, the Shi‘is were not considered significant. For instance, discussing the view of the majority of Shi‘i scholars that anyone other than Twelver Shi‘is will be held in Hell forever, Mīrzā Maḥdūm states: [30]

I say: As if He [= God] created Paradise, which is as wide as heaven and earth, for these minor and rare people, who are incredibly minor and rare, or better to say less than anything minor and rare, and as if He would keep most of the Muslims, even those pure and innocent, in Hell forever. Because it is well known that all the Companions and contemporaries of the Companions, the scholars firmly rooted in knowledge and the saints who reached perfection had liked Abū Bakr, the truthful, and had truly acknowledged his excellence. Hence, according to them [= Shi‘i scholars], they cannot be counted among believers and deserve to be burned forever in Hell [...]. They do not understand what they are implying [by what they say] about the generosity of God, the Generous and Affectionate, whose mercy precedes his wrath and who is Forgiving and Beneficent [...]. (Šarīfī, n.d., fol. 33a) [31]

In 995/1586, a few years before the beginning of the composition of the *Maḡāles*, Šūštārī completed his response to the *Nawāqīd*, titled *Mašā‘ib al-nawāšib fī radd ‘alā Nawāqīd al-rawāfīd* (Šūštārī [1426] 2005–2006, 2:275; Afandī Ešfahānī [1401] 1981, 5:268). Although Šūštārī devoted a work specifically to responding to the *Nawāqīd*, he must have been fully aware that Mīrzā Maḥdūm’s criticisms cannot be profoundly responded to within a dialectical framework. More specifically, Mīrzā Maḥdūm’s humiliation of the Shi‘is deserved a more demonstrative response, in which a survey of Shi‘i notables throughout history was provided. Writing such a response was the task which Šūštārī undertook in his *Maḡāles al-mo‘menīn*. Unlike his direct response to Mīrzā Maḥdūm’s *Nawāqīd*, which was written in Arabic, he chose to write *Maḡāles al-mo‘menīn* in Persian, probably because he meant this work to have a broader readership in the Safavid and Mughal empires. [32]

At the same time, it is simplistic to assume that Šūštārī composed *Maḡāles al-mo‘menīn* merely as a response to the *Nawāqīd*. Instead, it is more likely that a set of antecedent causal conditions was responsible for the composition of this work, and the *Nawāqīd* was just one of them. [33]

Šūštari on Shi'i Ulama

The chapter on the Shi'i ulama in the *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* is unprecedented, in the sense that no one before Šūštari had devoted a piece of writing to Shi'i scholars in its broader sense. To accomplish his task, Šūštari used Shi'i *reğāl* works, whose primary task was to determine whether the persons featuring in the chain of support (*esnād*) of Shi'i traditions (*aḥbār*) are trustworthy or not. These include such works as Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Nağāšī's (d. 455/1063) *Asmā' al-riğāl*, Šaiḥ Abū Ğa'far Ṭūsī's (d. 459/1067) *al-Fihrist* and his *Iḥtiyār ma'rifat al-riğāl*, Ibn Šahrāšūb's (d. 588/1192) *Ma'ālim al-'ulamā'* and Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli's (d. 725/1325) *Ḥolāṣat al-aqwāl fī ma'rifat al-riğāl*. [34]

Some of the people that the author included in this chapter were merely narrators of *ḥadīṣ*. However, he also included some significant *ḥadīṣ* scholars like Ebn Bābūya (or Ebn Bābawayh, d. 381/991), Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb Kolaynī (d. 329/941) and Abū 'Alī Ṭabresī (fl. sixth/twelfth c.), Qur'ānic exegetes like Abo-l-Fotūḥ Rāzī (d. 525/1131), and theologians like Abū 'Abdullāh al-Mufid (d. 413/1032) (Šūštari [1392] 2013, 3:302–7, 385–87, 329–65). In addition to *Reğāl* works, Šūštari used several other sources for the composition of this chapter which were not Shi'i, including bio-bibliographical works such as *al-Ansāb* by Abo-l-Qāsem Sam'ānī (d. 534/1140) and *Buğyat al-wu'āh* by Ğalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). He also made use of several chronicles, such as those by Ibn Ḥallikān (d. 681/1282), Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 774/1373), 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Yāfi'ī (d. 768/1367) and Ğeyāṣ al-Dīn Ḥ'āndamīr (d. 942/1535–6). [35]

The author seems to have experienced some difficulty covering the decades immediately preceding the Safavid period since there were not many sources he could have consulted. Nevertheless, he endeavoured to show the continuity of Shi'i scholasticism, not only in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain but also in the Indian subcontinent (Šūštari [1392] 2013, 3:453ff.). [36]

Šūštari on the Sufis

In the introduction to his chapter on Sufis, Šūštari describes them as “the purpose of the creation and the formation of the human being” after the Prophets and the Imams (Šūštari [1392] 2013, 4:9). He explicitly states that he considers all Sufi orders to be Shi'i except for Naqšbandīya (Šūštari [1392] 2013, 4:15). Notwithstanding, he excludes two distinguished Sufi masters, whose names usually appear in the Sufi chains of lineage, namely Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) and Aḥmad Ğazālī (d. 520/1126). Concerning Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, he was uncertain about his Shi'i faith. As for Aḥmad Ğazālī, he expresses less uncertainty and refuted him, because based on the general opinion of Shi'i scholars: *ḥāl-e ū saqīm bāšad* (his spiritual awareness was puny, feeble or infirm). No more clarification is provided in this regard. What is more, Šūštari explains how to avoid these two figures in the Sufi chains of lineage (Šūštari [1392] 2013, 4:19–21). At the end of the introduction, Šūštari adds two notes. The first one is about anti-Shi'i occultists who pretend to be true Sufis. These people, Šūštari states, though they might be able to implement supernatural powers by bringing *ğenn* into their service, or as a result of jugglery (*'amal-e ša'važa*) or by using the science of illusion (*sīmīyā'*), are veiled from the truth (Šūštari [1392] 2013, 4:21–22). The second note addresses the wayfarers on the Sufi in their initial stage. The author alerts them to the concern that choosing an inappropriate master might have long-term consequences for them. Again, Šūštari indicated that he has some Naqšbandī Sufi masters in mind. If the master is a liar (*mobṭel*), disbeliever (*molḥed*), or [37]

heretic (*zandīq*), he might cause his disciples to deviate from the right path. Even if a master observes the *šariʿa*, yet is immature, he could harm the wayfarers. The disciple might think after a while that he reached the level of the Sufi masters. It is also possible that he could come to fundamentally doubt the achievements of the great Sufi masters of the past (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:22–28).

Although Šūštārī generally spoke about the immature masters, he referred at the beginning of this note to the Naqšbandī Sufi masters (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:23). He might have had, in particular, the Naqšbandī Šaiḥ Aḥmad Sirhindī (d.1034/1624) in mind, whose number of followers was rapidly increasing in North India. Sirhindī, who considered himself the ‘Renewer of the Second Millennium of Islam’ (*Muğadded-e alf-e sâni*), was at the time an ambitious young Sufi šaiḥ with rigid orthodox Sunnī positions. At the same time, he was a critic of the great Sufi master of the past, Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240).¹³ Although the description fits Sirhindī well, since Šūštārī did not identify the Sufi šaiḥ, the assumption remains speculative. [38]

In the body of the chapter, Šūštārī included those Sufis who, in his opinion, had an affinity with the Shiʿi Imāms. The chapter starts with Kumayl b. Ziyād al-Naḥaʿī (fl. 40/661), loyal to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, who is well-known among the Shiʿis for recording one of ʿAlī’s supplications (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:28–31). Clearly, by considering Kumayl a Sufi and putting his entry at the beginning of the chapter, the author aimed to emphasise the connection between Sufism and Shiʿism. The chapter contains several major early Sufis including Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 261/874–5 or 234/848–9), Sahl Tostarī (or as the author referred to him Šūštārī, d. 283/896), Ğonaid Baġdādī (d. 298/910), and Ḥosain b. Maṣṣūr Ḥallāġ (exe. 309/922) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:49–90). Šūštārī then moves on to the post-classical Sufis such as Aḥmad Ğām (d. 536/1141), Sheḥāb al-Dīn ʿOmar Sohrawardī (d. 632/1234), Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), Ibn ʿArabī, and Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnavī (d. 673/1274) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:91–229), and then he adds some Persian Sufi poets namely Sanāʿī (d. 525/1131), ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221), Rūmī (d. 672/1273), Saʿdī (d. 691/1292) and Ḥāfeẓ (d. 792/1390) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:230–323). By including significant Sufi figures of the classical and post-classical periods, the author intended to establish the idea that the foundation of Sufism is Shiʿi. [39]

As mentioned above, most of the Shiʿi criticisms of *Mağāles al-moʾmenīn* were due to its inclusion of distinguished Sufis. Behbahānī suggested that Šūštārī’s treatment of the Sufis might be a reaction to the position of Mīrzā Maḥdūm in his *Nawāqiḍ al-rawāfiḍ*: [40]

Moreover, Qāzī [= Šūštārī]’s definition of Sufism and his consideration of Sufis as being Shiʿa [...] might be because of his opposition to Mīrzā Maḥdūm Šarīfī, who in his *Nawāqiḍ al-rawāfiḍ* enumerated the nonsensical positions (*hafavāt*) of the Shiʿis. Among others, Mīrzā Maḥdūm referred to Shiʿi scholars’ forbidding inner purification (*taṣfeya-ye bāten*). That is the reason, he argues, that darkness and impurity covered their inner side and deprived them of perceiving divine emanations and mystical lights. Therefore, there is no way that a Sufi or a *valī* could emerge from among them. In order to rebuff Mīrzā Maḥdūm Šarīfī on the matter, the Shiʿa-fabricator Qāzī, states that most of the Sufis were Shiʿa, and only a small number of them were Sunni and false believers such as the immature Mollā Ğāmī and the Hypocrite Sunni and Šāfeʿī, ʿAbd al-Qāder Gīlānī. (Behbahānī [1370] 1991, 2:155) [41]

As Behbahānī noted, Mīrzā Maḥdūm in his *Nawāqiḍ al-rawāfiḍ* quoted from *al-Makāsib* by [42]

13 On Sirhindī and his connection to the Mughal court, see Moin (2012, 134–36).

Šams al-Dīn Makkī ‘Āmelī, known as Šahīd I (d. 786/1384), a statement in which it seems *taṣfiyat al-bāṭin* (the inner purification) was held prohibited. According to Mīrzā Maḥdūm, the Safavids’ attitude towards Sufism was aligned with that position. They did not hesitate to display their animosity to Sufism and to harass those who read their books. In particular, in the Safavid lands, the followers of the Naqšbandī order were at risk of death. Therefore, as long as one lived in the Safavid territory, Mīrzā Maḥdūm argues, one should keep oneself away from anything associated with the Naqšbandīs and any ritual resembling their practice (Šarīfī, n.d., fol. 35a).

In his response to *Nawāqid al-rawāfiḍ*, Šūštārī argued that Mīrzā Maḥdūm had misunderstood the intention of Šahīd I. However, he admitted that some notable Shi’i scholars were against the Sufis. As an example, Šūštārī referred to Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, who accused those Sufis who supported the idea of unification with God (*ittiḥād*), as well as the followers of Ibn ‘Arabī (whom al-Ḥillī referred to as *wuḡūdī* Sufis) of unbelief and blasphemy (*al-kufr wa-l-ilhād*). Šūštārī disagreed with al-Ḥillī on this matter. Moreover, he insisted that al-Ḥillī’s view did not represent the view of the mainstream Shi’is (Šūštārī [1426] 2005–2006, 2:161–164).¹⁴ [43]

It is indeed plausible that Šūštārī allotted a long chapter to the Sufis in response to the above-mentioned argument by Mīrzā Maḥdūm. At the same time, he was aware that the image of Shi’ism presented in the *Maḡāles* was not the one widely accepted among Shi’i scholars. Therefore, by embracing the main parts of the Sufi tradition, Šūštārī was consciously fighting on two fronts: one against anti-Shi’i scholars such as Mīrzā Maḥdūm Šarīfī who blamed the Shi’is for their animosity to the Sufis, and the other against those of his Shi’i colleagues who, following al-Ḥillī, believed that many distinguished Sufi masters deviated from the right path. [44]

In any case, the emphasis of the chapter is on the Nūrbahšīya order. Šūštārī lists Naḡm al-Dīn Kobrā (d. 617/1220), Sa’d al-Dīn Ḥammūya (d. 650/1252), Razī al-Dīn Lālā (d. 642/1244) and ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Semnānī (d. 736/1336) as the earlier masters of the order, and then he presents Mīr Saiyed ‘Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385) and finally Muḥammad Nūrbahš (d. 869/1464). Then, after Nūrbahš, he continues the chapter with the disciples of Nūrbahš, namely his son and his successor Šāh Qāsim (d. 927/1520–21) and the prominent figure, Šams al-Dīn Lāhīḡī (aka Ḡilānī, d. 912/1506–7) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:220–30, 352–404). In other words, he presents a list of the successors of Nūrbahš up to the early Safavid era. Altogether, he included eight figures in the Nūrbahšī cluster. The author’s strong affinity for the Nūrbahšīya is evident from the way he speaks about the masters of this order. Moreover, Šūštārī indicates that his grandfather, whose name was also Nūrollāh, was a Nūrbahšī Sufi and a direct disciple of Saiyed Moḥammad Nūrbahš (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:456). Furthermore, throughout the *Maḡāles*, Šūštārī frequently quotes from several of Moḥammad Nūrbahš’s works, and he uses any opportunity to praise him (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 1:196–97). Based on these signs, the editors of the *Maḡāles* suggested that Šūštārī had been a Nūrbahšī Sufi (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, editors’ introduction, 1:195).¹⁵ [45]

In his *Nafaḡāt al-uns*, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ğāmī, who was himself a Naqšbandī, dismissed the Ne‘matollāhiya and Nūrbahšīya orders altogether (Algar 2013, 106; Rizvi 2018, 249). Supposing that Šūštārī was a Nūrbakhshī Sufi, we might be meant to believe that he, likewise, did not have high regard for competing Sufi orders, namely the Šafaviya, Ne‘matollāhiya, Zahabiya and Naqšbandīya. Regarding the Šafaviya and Ne‘matollāhiya, specifically, there is [46]

14 For more detailed study of Šūštārī’s argument in support of Sufism, see S. A. A. Rizvi (1986, 373–75).

15 Shahzad Bashir, likewise, argued for Šūštārī being a Nūrbahšī Sufi. He assumed that Šūštārī was an indirect disciple of Šams al-Dīn Lāhīḡī (Bashir 2003, 55, 175, 180).

no evidence of such feelings of rivalry, as the founder of the two orders, namely Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (d. 735/1334) and Šāh Ne‘matollāh Kohbonānī (d. 827/1431), were both highly venerated by him (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:100–3, 110–17). As for the Zahabīya, a sense of rivalry might seem to be an explanation for some of Šūštārī’s attitudes. Undoubtedly, his emphasis on Moḥammad Nūrbahš as the true successor to Ešhāq Ḥottalānī (fl. 826/1423) ruled out the succession of Sayyed ‘Abdollāh Borzešābādī Mašhadī (d. ca. 856/1452), the founder of the order that later became known as the Zahabīya. Moreover, Šūštārī explicitly stated that Ḥottalānī considered Borzešābādī an apostate (*mortad*) for not recognising Nūrbahš as a Sufi master (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:378). Evidently, on the succession of Ḥottalānī, Šūštārī drew upon a Nūrbahšī source without any moderation. However, a sense of rivalry does not explain why Šūštārī included three Sufis whose lineage goes back to Borzešābādī, namely Ḥāḡī Moḥammad Ḥabūšānī (d. 938/1531–32), ‘Emād al-Dīn Fazlollāh Mašhadī (d. 914/1508–9) and Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥosayn Ḥ^wārazmī (d. after 914/1508–9) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:404–450).

The author’s treatment of the Naqšbandīya deserves special attention, too. Šūštārī considered the Naqšbandīya a fake order (*selsela-ye moḥtara‘a*) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:23). He not only excluded distinguished Naqšbandī Sufis, but he also used every opportunity to criticise their current masters for being charlatans and for their false pretences (*šaiyādī va talbīs*) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:23). As one can see from Mīrzā Maḥdūm’s *Nawāqīd*, the Safavids were hostile to the Naqšbandīs decades before the authorship of the *Maḡāles*. In his *Maṣā‘ib al-nawāšib*, Šūštārī referred to hostility in the other direction, namely that of the Naqšbandīs towards Shi’i. He explained this by saying that many ordinary people in Transoxiana were Naqšbandī Sufis and their Uzbek rulers had been deliberately intensifying their anti-Shi’i sentiments (Šūštārī [1426] 2005–2006, 2:165). Therefore, one can safely assume that there was hostility on both sides, which was political as well as religious. However, the Naqšbandīs, whose false pretences were criticized by Šūštārī, are unlikely to be the Uzbek Sufis. Šūštārī must have referred, therefore, to a branch of the order with whom he had encountered in his day-to-day life. [47]

Šūštārī on Muslim Philosophers

A review of Šūštārī’s writings reveals that metaphysics was not his primary interest. However, he had some significant contributions to logic and rational theology.¹⁶ [48]

In the chapter on the philosophers, he included two highly significant figures, namely Fārābī and Ebn Sīnā. The main reason Šūštārī presents for them being Shi’i is their preference for having Shi’i patrons. Fārābī was associated with the court of Hamdanid Saif al-Daula (r. 333–356/945–967) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:455) and Ebn Sīnā, according to Šūštārī, was born into a Shi’i family, and he chose to work for Shi’i patrons, namely Qābūs b. Vošmgīr (r. 366–371/977–981 and 388–403/998–1012), the Buyid Maḡd al-Daula (r. 387–420/997–1029) and the Kakuyid ‘Alā’ al-Daula (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:466). Abū ‘Alī Moskūya (or Meskavayh, d. 421/1030) is another distinguished philosopher included in the chapter (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:476–78). [49]

Then, after citing some minor figures, Šūštārī included an entry on Abū Ḥāmed Ġazālī (d. 505/1111). According to Šūštārī, Ġazālī inwardly was Shi’i, and late in his life, he revealed his Shi’i affiliation in his *Sirr al-‘ālamayn* (otherwise known as *Sirr al-maknūn*), a Shi’i polemical work whose attribution to Ġazālī was taken for granted by Šūštārī (Šūštārī [1392] [50]

16 For a list of Šūštārī’s writings on logic and rational theology, see S. Rizvi, ??

2013, 4:492–96). Evidently, for Šūštārī, it was particularly important to include Ġazālī, as he discussed his hypothetical conversion extensively. Šūštārī continues the chapter again with some rather minor figures. His focus is then trained on philosophers who lived from the seventh/thirteenth century onwards, most notably Našīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and Qoṭb al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 766/1365) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:503–627). The only reason provided for the latter holding Shi'i beliefs is a license (*iğāza*) he received from Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:524). The chapter ends with a cluster of philosophers of Shiraz, starting with Mīr Saiyed Šarīf Ğorġānī (d. 816/1414), to whom he devotes a lengthy entry. However, no substantial evidence for his Shi'i affiliation is presented. In this final section, Šūštārī included most of the distinguished philosophers of Shiraz working in the late Aq Qoyunlu and the early Safavid period, namely Ġalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502), Šadr al-Dīn Daštakī (or Šīrāzī, d. 903/1498), Ğeyāṣ al-Dīn Daštakī, Šams al-Dīn Ḥafarī and Šāh Ṭāher Dakanī (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:541–576), even though the later ones were mainly active or, indeed, exclusively active, after the rise of the Safavids. Šāh Ṭāher Dakanī might have been included for his enormous impact on India. Notwithstanding, Šūštārī encouraged his Shi'i readers to embrace the intellectual endeavours of the philosophers of Shiraz as their own heritage.

Ġazālī, Ğorġānī and Davānī were three distinguished Aš'arī theologians who, Šūštārī held, were Shi'i. In the case of Ġazālī, Šūštārī argued that his thought was inwardly Shi'i, although his *kalām* works on the surface are Aš'arī (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:496). As for Ğorġānī, Šūštārī argued that his commentary on Azod al-Dīn Īġī's (d. 756/1355–56) *Mawāqif* did not truly represent his thought, because it was written merely to appeal to 'the noble patron of Shiraz', namely the Timurid prince, Eskandar Mirzā (r. 811–817/1408–1415). Šūštārī added that the commentary was mainly based on Saif al-Dīn Abharī's (d. after 778/1376–77) commentary on the same text and Ğorġānī's contribution was nothing other than rephrasing Abharī's arguments and lemmatizing the commentary with Īġī's text (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:538–539). On Ğorġānī's other significant theological work, namely his gloss on Šams al-Dīn Ešfahānī's (d. 749/1348) commentary on *Taġrīd al-i'tiqād*, Šūštārī's note was more positive. Nevertheless, he did not give Ğorġānī the full credit for his innovative thought in the work. He argued that before Ğorġānī, a Shi'i theologian and philosopher, Našīr al-Dīn Kāšī (d. 755/1354) wrote a gloss on Ešfahānī's commentary on the *Taġrīd* and Ğorġānī adopted the substance of that gloss in his own gloss on the same commentary (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:532).

Like Ğorġānī's commentary on the *Mawāqif*, Davānī's commentary on Īġī's *Aqā'id* was supposedly written to appeal its author's patron, who in this case was the anti-Shi'i ruler of Ğarūn, Salġor Šāh (r. 880–910/1475–1505) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:547). However, Šūštārī treated this work as exceptional within Davānī's oeuvre. Having a great admiration for Davānī, Šūštārī included a detailed bibliography of Davānī's works in this chapter. Although at first admitting that this kind of bibliography was inappropriate in the context of *Maġāles al-mo'menīn* (*bā ānke munāseb-e maqām nīst*), he justified it because it is unknown to most of the people of the time and cannot be found in the bibliographical works (*hošūšīyāt-e ān bar akšar-e ahl-e zamān zāher nīst va dar davāvin-e arbāb-e seyar az ān ašarī peydā na*) (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:551–558). Šūštārī's familiarity with the works of Davānī makes it unlikely that he was ignorant of Davānī's defence of Aš'arī theology in his other works. Nevertheless, he firmly argued that Davānī was inwardly Shi'i (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 4:549–51). As we discussed earlier, Šūštārī brought the same argument for Ġazālī. However, Šūštārī appeared to be more inclined to theological views of Davānī than those of Ġazālī. In his *Mūnis al-wahīd fī tafsīr āyat al-'adl wa-l-tawḥīd* (The Unique Companion to Interpreting the Verse on Divine Unity and Justice)

[51]

[52]

for example, Šūštārī conforms the view of Davānī on the question of determination and free will without any hesitation (Šūštārī [1385] 2006, 2:516–62). Hence, Šūštārī not only believed in the Ši‘ī foundation of Davānī’s thoughts but also personally found some of Davānī’s ideas appealing.

Šūštārī on Persian Poets

Being himself a poet, Šūštārī paid particular attention to Persian poets in his *Mağāles*. As mentioned above, the chapter on Sufism includes several Persian poets, such as Sanā‘ī, ‘Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa‘dī and Ḥāfez. Nevertheless, a further chapter of the *Mağāles* was exclusively devoted to Persian poets. That Šūštārī included the poets mentioned above in the chapter on Sufism and not in the chapter on Persian poets is significant. It seems that Šūštārī wanted to convey the idea that these poets were primarily distinguished Sufis, and their literary works should be considered within the context of their Sufi identity. [53]

The chapter on Persian poets was mainly based on Daulat-šāh Samarqandī’s (d. 900/1494 or 913/1507) *Tazkerat al-šo‘arā’*. Šūštārī starts the chapter with a long section on Ferdausī (d. 411/1020). Apparently, it was important for Šūštārī to have the composer of the *Šāhnāma* on board and argue for his Shi‘ī belief. The chapter includes some other well-known poets such as Asadī-e Tūsī (d. 465/1073), Ḥāqānī (d. after 580/1185), Anvarī (fl. 565/1170) and Salmān Sāvaḡī (d. 778/1376). Šūštārī ended the chapter with four poets who had been active on the cusp of the Safavid period. Some of them lived in the early Safavid period, namely Neẓām Astarābādī (d. 921/1515–16), Bābā Feḡānī (d. 925/1519), Ahli-ye Širāzī and Lesānī. These four poets had not been included in Daulat-šāh Samarqandī’s *Tazkera*, because they were still alive or only in the early stage of their poetic careers. By including them in this chapter, it could be argued that Šūštārī intended the chapter of the *Mağāles* to surpass the *Tazkera*. [54]

The Supplement to *Mağāles al-mo‘menīn*

One of the addenda to *Mağāles al-mo‘menīn* is an independent remark which can be considered as a separate work. It is called *Resāla-ye daf‘-e šobahāt-e Eblīs* (Removing Satan’s Sophistries). At the beginning of the treatise, Šūštārī explains that in the prologue (*fāteḥa*) of the *Mağāles*, an analogy was made between the sophistries of one of the members of the Umma and Satan’s sophistries. A highly ranked friend of Šūštārī and possibly a courtier (*ba‘ẓī az eḥvān-e ‘ālī-šān-e malek-nešān*) who read the introduction of the *Mağāles* requested that the author add a supplement to the work, clarifying that particular point by recounting Satan’s sophistries together with a response to them. Šūštārī aimed to do so by writing the treatise (Šūštārī and Heravī [1369] 1990, 40). [55]

Along with his analogy in the prologue of the *Mağāles*, this work implies an anti-Sunni polemical subtext against the second caliph, ‘Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb. However, the author refrained from directly referring to this subject in this treatise. Instead of naming ‘Umar explicitly, he referred to him vaguely and neutrally as one of the members of the Umma. Such a neutral reference to ‘Umar might indicate that the author was concerned about the non-Shi‘is among readers of the work. It is not unlikely that the very person who requested Šūštārī to write this piece was Sunni. [56]

The so-called “Satan’s sophistries” are about the nature of human action, its predestination [57]

and divine justice on this particular matter. The author's source for these sophistries is 'Abd al-Karīm Šahrastānī's (d. 548/1153) *al-Milal wa-niḥal*. However, Šūštārī blamed Šahrastānī for his Aš'arī resolution of the issue of the sophistries, a resolution which it should be said was approved by Faḥr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 606/1210).¹⁷ Instead, Šūštārī supported the Mo'tazeli and Emāmī view on God's justice (Šūštārī and Heravī [1369] 1990, 40–49).

Transcription of *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* under the Author's Supervision

At the end of *Mağāles al-mo'menīn*, Šūštārī states that he commissioned the production of seven clean copies of the work and that he collated them with his draft (*mosvadda*) before he started distributing it. None of these seven manuscripts has been identified so far. However, MS Tehran, Mağles 7842 and MS Tehran, Ma'āref 1176 must both have been based on a copy produced under the author's supervision. Moreover, the copy of the *Mağāles* owned by Mīrzā 'Abdollāh Afandī Eṣfahānī was also produced under the author's supervision. In his *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, Afandī Eṣfahānī indicated that he had a copy of the *Mağāles*, with a note by Šūštārī about the date of completion of the work in his hand (Afandī Eṣfahānī [1401] 1981, 5:269–70). [58]

Mağāles al-mo'menīn as a Possible Cause of the Author's Death

The closest report about Šūštārī's tragic death, which occurred on 26 Rabī' II 1019/18 July 1610, can be found in Taqī al-Dīn Auḥadī Balyānī's (d. 1030/1621 or after) *'Arafāt al-'āšeḡīn*. According to Auḥadī Balyānī, upon the emperor Ğahāngīr (r. 1014–1037/1605–1627) questioning him about his religious affiliation, Šūštārī claimed to be Šāfe'ī. Knowing Šūštārī was lying or more accurately speaking practising *taqīya*, the emperor became angry and had him flogged five times, which was the cause of his death (Auḥadī Balyānī [1389] 2009, 7:4496; Rizvi 2017, 64). [59]

Later, biographers narrated the event with some more details. Accordingly, Ğahāngīr was informed about Šūštārī's Shi'i affiliation by members of his court. They brought Šūštārī's *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* or/and *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq* to the emperor's attention (Rizvi 1986, 2:4). However, this additional information is not verifiable. Because in the account written close to Šūštārī's death, no book was mentioned being brought to the attention of the emperor on that occasion. [60]

Conclusion

For a long time, Muslim scholars, Sunni and Shi'i alike, have considered the Shi'is a small sect within the broader Muslim community. In his *Mağāles al-mo'menīn*, Šūštārī made an effort to establish the idea that the Shi'is throughout the history were not followers of a minor sect, but a significant portion of Islam with highly influential figures among them, worthy of respect. The Shi'is, according to Šūštārī, are the true Muslims. He divided the Muslims from the beginning of Islam into two groups: those who liked 'Alī and those who did not [61]

17 Šūštārī considered Šahrastānī to be an Aš'arī theologian rather than an Esmā'īli. For the same reason, he did not include him in the *Mağāles*.

like him. Šūštārī's decision to make the *Mağāles* accessible to friends of the Shi'a among the Sunnis could be an indication of the propagational nature of the work. The implication to Sunni readers was that, as Muslims, if they liked 'Alī and preferred his path to that of other Rashidun caliphs, they could regard themselves as Shi'i.

In some of his writings, Šūštārī did not hesitate to use expressions that would offend Sunni readers. He was the author of several refutations of anti-Shi'i polemics in which he applied the same aggressive attitude that his opponents had shown. In his *Mağāles*, however, he refrained from provoking Sunni sensitivities. His aim in this work was not confrontation but rather to gain credibility and respect for the Shi'a. Šūštārī's concern was particularly for Shi'i communities of the Indian subcontinent. On the one hand, he tried to give members of these communities a sense of pride, and on the other, he tried to gain the respect of the Mughal intellectuals for their tradition. [62]

Šūštārī depicted Shi'ism as a religion of high culture, an outlook open to Sufism and mysticism in general, a rational path taken by many significant philosophers, and finally, an aesthetic viewpoint held by distinguished poets. Clearly, Šūštārī not only tried to present an enhanced picture of the Shi'a for the outsiders but also internally tried to modify the cultural attitude of the Shi'is by rejecting the views of those Shi'i scholars whose definition of Shi'a would not allow practising mysticism, philosophy and poetry. Indeed, the composition of the *Mağāles* aimed, among other things, to establish Shi'ism as a religion open to cultural values. [63]

The significance of *Mağāles al-mo'menīn* in the development of Shi'i biographical literature cannot be overestimated. As the first comprehensive Shi'i bio-bibliographical work to be written, the *Mağāles* was used as a model and an instructional work for the composition of Shi'i bio-bibliographical works of later periods, such as *al-Darağāt al-rafi'a fī ṭabaqāt al-Imāmiya* by Saiyed 'Alī Ḥān Širāzī Madanī, *Riyāq al-'ulamā'* by Mīrzā 'Abdollāh Afandī Eṣfahānī (d. 1130/1718), *Rawḍāt al-ğannāt* by Saiyed Moḥammad Bāqer Ḥ'ānsārī (d. 1313/1895–96), *A'yān al-Ši'a* by Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn al-'Āmīlī (d. 1371/1952) and *Ṭabaqāt al-lām al-Ši'a* and *al-Ḍarī'a ilā taṣānīf al-Ši'a* by Āqā Bozorg Ṭehrānī (d. 1389/1970). The authors of these works might have disagreed with Šūštārī on the Shi'i beliefs of specific figures. Nevertheless, they knew that Šūštārī's hints to the relevant sources on each figure were indispensable. Among the bio-bibliographers mentioned above, Āqā Bozorg Ṭehrānī, with his overarching attitude towards the Shi'a, had perhaps the mindset closest to that of Šūštārī. We know that Āqā Bozorg had great respect for Šūštārī (Monzavī [1382] 2003, 122). There were some other Shi'i scholars with a similar attitude as well. In 1190/1776–77, Saiyed Moḥammad-Šafi' Ḥosaynī 'Āmelī (fl. 1190/1776) composed a supplement to *Mağāles al-mo'menīn*, titled *Maḥāfel al-mo'menīn*. This work consists of two parts: part one deals with Shi'i rulers of Iran and India, and part two deals with Shi'i sayeds, scholars and poets. This work covers the centuries from the beginning of the Safavid period up to the date of composition of the text. Nevertheless, it also includes some figures of earlier periods who cannot be found in the *Mağāles*. The author of *Maḥāfel al-mo'menīn* tried to be faithful to the criterion of Šūštārī. However, he could not help but include even the Naqšbandī poet 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ğāmī in his work (Šūštārī [1392] 2013, 391–94). [64]

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