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***Authority and Political Culture in Shicism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand**

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rich comparative material in the discussion of sociability (“Gatherings”). The long section entitled “Challenges” reveals how these medieval individuals reacted to adversity, whether natural disaster, invasion, political crisis, plague, poverty, or illness. The treatment of “Death,” based mainly on deathbed dispositions from the Geniza, nicely complements recent general research on this subject (this material is provided mainly for Europe).

Social historians interested in the degree to which medieval man possessed a sense of self will find many important insights (“not individualism versus conformity but individuality constrained by integration,” Goitein observes), as well as rich primary material of comparative value, in the section “Awareness of Personality.” There is also a useful treatment of sex. Goitein finds, for instance, that Jews differed from Muslims in their sexual mores.

The last parts of the book deal with religion and scholarship. In the chapter, “The True Believer,” Goitein presents, for the first time in *A Mediterranean Society*, a glimpse of the religious belief system of the Jews of the Islamic High Middle Ages. From Geniza letters Goitein ekes out the pious sentiments and theological convictions of the average Jew. Further, he presents what must be one of the most refreshing portraits of the great thinker Saadya (d. 942) and of the Karaites, those opponents of Saadya’s rabbinic Judaism who injected religious and cultural stimulation into the Jewish–Arabic world of the early Islamic Middle Ages. Both Saadya and the Karaites appeared with regularity in earlier volumes. Now Goitein has finally told their story in one place and with much new insight.

The last section of the book contains portraits of seven individuals chosen to illustrate “The Prestige of Scholarship.” They include men and women about whose learning or piety we know only through the Geniza: such well-known writers as the celebrated poet Judah ha-Levi, who lived in Spain but left his mark on Egypt (and hence on the Cairo Geniza) at the end of his life, and Abraham Maimonides (d. 1237), the legal scholar, communal leader, and Sufi-like pietist, with whose portrait Goitein closes the opus. *A Mediterranean Society* thus climaxes with vignettes of Jewry’s intellectual elite. That Goitein, who spent 20 years describing the society of average middle-class men and women, should have concluded his monumental survey by recounting the lives and writings of individuals of the learned elite comes as something of a surprise, though perhaps not so much of a surprise to those who knew him well.

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SAID AMIR ARJOMAND, ed., *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). Pp. 402.

This work focuses on the institutionalization of authority in Shi‘ism. Seven analytical chapters are helpfully supplemented by nine chapters of rare documents translated into English. The original essays range in topic from the preoccupation and postoccupation periods to the medieval, Safavid, Qajar, Pahlavi, and Khomeini eras. The volume’s thesis is that the basis for authority in Shi‘ism is distinctive and rests on a common core, which nevertheless underwent significant alteration after the early 8th century, and that the political content of Shi‘ism is elusive, since what may be an obviously political aspect in one period becomes apolitical in another.

Each of the analytical chapters rests firmly on major sources of Shi‘ite theology and law. Etan Kohlberg, of Hebrew University, argues that *‘ilm* (knowledge or learning) was

the most important attribute in the juristic theory of authority of early Shi'ism; that disputes among Shi'ites in the 8th century included such questions as whether or not later imams received greater information than their predecessors and whether the imams were loftier than the community of Shi'ites; and that the ulama (clergy) had become a significant stratum by the time of the Eleventh Imam.

Mohammad-Djāfar Mahdjoub, formerly at the University of Tehran, documents the growth of popular eulogies of the imams (*manāqib-khvānī*) in the medieval period (10th–15th centuries). While Shi'ism was passive and quiet in this period, political confrontations did sometimes occur between Shi'ite and Sunni forces over public recitations and passion plays depicting the virtues, struggles, and sorrows of the imams.

Arjomand argues in Chapter 4 that, while the possibility existed of the emergence of an independent clerical elite under the Safavids, such independence was never realized. In investing Sheikh ʿAli al-Karaki with the sobriquets of “Mujtahid of the Age” and “Seal of the Mujtahids,” the Safavid shah apparently moved in the direction of institutionalizing clerical power with the apolitical religious scholars. But Karaki was unable or unwilling to articulate an organizational structure for his office, and consequently the sadrs and qadis were able to maintain control of the administration of the religious institution inside Iran. Thus, the political heavyweights among the religious leaders in the Safavid and early Qajar periods were actually state officeholders.

Abbas Amanat, of Yale University, maintains that by the Qajar era *ʿilm* no longer remained the foundation for the juristic theory of authority of Shi'ism. In fact, he argues that it was not *aʿlamiyyat* (superior learning) that was the basis for the selection of the top leaders of Shi'ism but rather their bazaar support. Thus, he holds that *riyāsat* (leadership) of the clergy had become a function of whom one knew and how well one was known in the commercial market. Moreover, he maintains that the idea of *marjaʿiyyat-i tāmm* (the institution of a single source of emulation) was a late 19th-century, if not 20th-century, invention.

Abdol Karim Lahidji, a contemporary Iranian lawyer currently in exile in Paris, unhappy with “this misconception of the role of the ulama in the Constitutional Revolution,” notes impatiently that the clergy did not take the lead in that event; they did not join the constitutionalist movement because of Shi'ite authority doctrines, they rejected the idea of national sovereignty, and they did not favor popular rule. In his opinion, the clergy acted because the constitutionalists pressured them to do so and because they thought it important, finally, to limit the Shah's autocracy. He holds that even Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Naʿini's (d. 1936) famous vindication of the revolution on doctrinal grounds occurred after, not before or during, that event.

Yann Richard, of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris), focuses on the apolitical Mirza Rida Quli “Shariʿat” Sangalaji (d. 1944). Sangalaji did not contribute to Shi'ite authority doctrines, and his inclusion in the volume is problematical. He was a modernist who was influenced, paradoxically, by both Muhammad ʿAbduh and Wahhabism. Sangalaji's rejection of the corporeal return of a vengeful Hidden Imam before the Resurrection earned him the hostility of the clergy and the support of such lay modernizers as ʿAli Akbar Davar, Reza Shah's famous minister of justice. Richard strongly suggests that Sangalaji was the precursor of ʿAli Shariʿati (d. 1977), especially in regard to his cautionary words about *taqlīd* (emulation), a bedrock principle of Shi'ite theology.

In the final analytical chapter, Arjomand discusses what he terms “the ideological revolution in Shi'ism”—i.e., the transformation from the classic view that only the Imam is entitled to rule to Khomeini's radical notion that the clergy are doctrinally justified in ruling until the return of the Hidden Imam. He cites many sources on the question of

whether or not the clergy can exercise the Imam's authority during the period of occultation. Arjomand shows that invariably the jurists' reply was negative except in regard to highly technical and specific cases (i.e., maintaining the livelihood of widows, orphans, the insane).

Upon reading these cogent essays, one cannot help but feel that some intriguing problems remain unresolved. For example, in his fine essay, Amanat argues that knowledge has never been clearly defined by the jurists, so that Shi'ites selected their *marja<sup>c</sup>-i taqlid* on the basis of supposed (*zann*) superiority of learning that could be attested to by as few as a single witness. Given this, Amanat argues that a new standard, market connections, emerged for religious leadership. Thus, a leader like Mirza Hasan Shirazi (d. 1896) emerged mainly because of his ties to the merchants in the bazaar. If this is correct, then one would have to argue that *marja<sup>c</sup>iyat* devolved upon Shaykh Murtaza Ansari (d. 1864) and Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Burujirdi (d. 1961) in large measure for their market ties. Amanat admits Ansari's reputation for learning and piety, but suggests that the secret of his ultimate success was funding from external sources. But was it really the market that drove the selection of the *marja<sup>c</sup>-i taqlid*, or was it reputation—based on learning, piety, and justice—after all? Amanat infers that it is the market because the 19th- and 20th-century *maraji<sup>c</sup>* had large followings among the merchant and artisan class. No doubt they had, but it is possible that the merchants and artisans affiliated themselves with a religious leader for the traditional reasons, but that once those affiliations were made, important commercial and mercantile ties were then brought into play between those forces and the *maraji<sup>c</sup>*. At any rate, the matter cannot be closed until further research is undertaken.

Another set of questions revolves around the role of the clergy generally. Kohlberg notes their emergence at the time of the later imams. Since this is before the establishment of the famous madrasas (seminaries), in whose operations the later ulama played the distinctive role, how were the ulama a distinctive social force at this earlier time? Was it the administration of *awqāf* (endowments) that mainly defined them as a separate group? Was it common marital patterns? Or was it more generally—as Weber would put it in defining the emergence of a social stratum—"hereditary or occupational prestige"? In short, when did the ulama, as opposed to individual jurists who could lay claim to learning, emerge as a corporate body?

Answers to these and other questions are not readily available. However, major advances have been made in understanding Shi'ism, thanks to scholars such as those represented here. They are to be congratulated for the high level of their analysis, and one can only look forward to their further efforts.

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THIERRY BIANQUIS, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide (359–468/969–1076). Essai d'interprétation de chroniques arabes médiévales* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1986). Pp. 409.

What is the significance of local history? The treatment of Islamic history following the breakup of the unitary empire by the 10th century tends to be divided along regional and dynastic lines. Both categories have been used to define this study of Syria under Fatimid domination, although Thierry Bianquis effectively undermines the validity of the dynastic