THE ATTITUDE OF THE ‘ULAMA’ TOWARDS POLITICAL AUTHORITY: A MANUSCRIPT OF THE LATE SAFAVID PERIOD

Sayyed Ahmed Kazemi Moussavi

There exists an Arabic manuscript in the library of ISTAC which deals with the ethics of the ‘ulamā’ and their attitude towards political authority. This treatise, which appears to be the sole author’s manuscript, was not known to its respective experts in spite of the fact that its content sparked a heated discussion amongst Shi‘ite ‘ulamā’ for three centuries. The author names the treatise Risālah fi ‘l-hukūmah wa ‘l-ri‘āsah wa sharā‘īṭuhā wa lawāzīmuḥā wa Rashḥah fi ‘l-wilāyāḥ wa ‘l-salṭānāḥ wa ḍawābīṭihā wa jawāzīmḥā (A Treatise on government and leadership and their required conditions, and a glance at disciplines and limits of guardianship and political authority). The treatise is a part of four topics that the author accumulated in one book. This book was collected from a private library in Gujarat (India) and brought to Hyderabad (Deccan) which later was acquired by the ISTAC library.

The manuscript is 10cm by 18cm and the author is Shaykh Muhadhdhib al-Dīn Āḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Riḍā al-Baṣrī (d. 1094/1682), a Shi‘ite jurist who studied in Karbala (Iraq) and Mashhad (Iran), then migrated to India via Afghanistan. He was a student of Shaykh al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (d.1104/1692) who had mild Akhbārī tendencies.1 Muhadhdhib al-Dīn, too, appears to have relied exclusively on the tradition-reports (rawāyāt) which indicates his strong Akhbārī position. According to the contemporary Shi‘ite biographer Shaykh Āsā Būurg Tihrānī, Muhadhdhib

1 See Shaykh Āqā Buzurg Tihrānī, Ṭabaqāt A’lām al-Shi‘ah, 20 vols (Beirut: Mu‘assasah Fiqh al-Shi‘ah, 1411/1990), vol. on 11th century A.H., 600. Akhbārism is a trend in the Shi‘ite school that lays emphasis on the traditions of the Shi‘ite Imāms rather than rational Usūli argumentation.
Risālah fi 'l-hukūmah wa 'l-rī'āsah wa shara'iṭuhā wa lawāzimuḥā wa Rashhah fi 'l-wilāyah wa 'l-saltanah wa ḍawābiṭihā wa jawāzimhā (A Treatise on government and leadership and their required conditions, and a glance at disciplines and limits of guardianship and political authority).