

Rašti must have received his basic education in Rašt, his hometown. Later on, he also obtained authorizations (ejaza) from Sayyed ʿAbdallah Šobbar, Molla ʿAli Rašti, and Shaikh Jaʿfar Kašef al-Getaʿ, as well as the latter’s son, Musa (Al Taleqani, p. 124; MacEoin, pp. 100-101).

Nevertheless, Ahsaʿi must be considered as Rašti’s prime mentor. Rašti seems to have regarded him as a father figure, just as Ahsaʿi is reported to have referred to Rašti as “my son” (waladi; Kermani, I, p. 147).

Rašti himself explained how he became impressed with Ahsaʿi’s knowledge and his personality (Rašti, *Dalil al-motahayerin*, pp. 18, 21; see also letters and poems quoted by the editor in the introduction to *Resalat al-soluk*, pp. 13 ff.). Their relationship has also been characterized by some as that of morad and morid (the spiritual master and his disciple; MacEoin, p. 100; cf. Rafati, p. 127).

Ahsaʿi died in 1241/1826 without leaving a written testament designating a successor. Nonetheless, Rašti’s role as leader remained undisputed, despite the fact that there were several older and seemingly more qualified candidates (Rašti, *Resalat al-soluk*, editor’s note, p. 17; Rafati, p. 46; MacEoin, pp. 104-5). This was due to the fact that Rašti’s special status was already evident during the lifetime of Ahsaʿi, who had occasionally sent him as his representative or put him in charge, when he traveled himself, just as he had done when he went on his last pilgrimage, in the course of which he passed away (Kermani, I, p. 147). Ahsaʿi also had directed him to answer letters on his behalf and even to complete some of his unfinished works (e.g., *Tawab al-aʿmal*). A number of sayings are also attributed to Ahsaʿi that distinguish Rašti from other students, the most significant of which might be the following, since it comes close to establishing a sort of selsela (chain of spiritual descent): “Receive ye knowledge from Sayyed Kazem. For he has received it directly (mošafahatan) from me, and I have received it directly from the Imams, who in turn have received it directly from God” (Mohammad-Karim Kermani, p. 71; MacEoin, p. 102)

Although not endowed with as much charisma and theological authority as Ahsaʿi, Rašti eventually managed to establish himself as a respected theologian vis-à-vis other ulama as well as the Ottoman authorities in Karbalaʿ. However, initially he faced severe opposition. Ahsaʿi had been a respected religious authority during most of his lifetime, and it was only towards the end of his life that he became subject to charges of heresy. His reputation was sound, and his connections to influential authorities included even the Persian royal court. Fath-ʿAli Shah himself had spared him more severe consequences. Rašti, however, was perceived as a somewhat weaker target. Most of the early years after his mentor’s death he spent writing apologetic tracts, proving his own and Ahsaʿi’s orthodoxy (Eschraghi, pp. 24 ff.; Behmardi, in Rašti, *Resalat al-soluk*, pp. 18 ff.). In 1243/1828, he appeared before a group of influential ulama of Karbalaʿ, among them Mohammad-Mahdi Tabatabaʿi, Mohammad-Jaʿfar Astarabadi, and

Šarīf-al-ʿAlamī Mohammad-Šarīf Mazandarāni, who questioned him about Aḥsaʿī's view on resurrection. Although Rašī ably defended his master, eventually he was forced to admit that some of Aḥsaʿī's statements, if taken literally, would amount to disbelief. Thus, the ulama present at the meeting issued a decree against him, denouncing him as an unbeliever (for details of the event, see Rašī, *Dalīl al-motahayyerin*, pp. 55 ff.; *idem*, *Kašf al-haqq*, for the main arguments; Al Taleqāni, pp. 136 ff.). Later on, he was deprived of his right to *ejtehad* and banned from Karbalaʿ, but neither decree was ever enforced, due to his adversaries' lack of influence and the fact that their efforts were not supported by most major ulama (Behmardi, in Rašī, *Resalat al-soluk*, pp. 20 ff.; MacEoin, p. 106). Rašī, however, managed to gain influential supporters, such as Molla Mohammad-Baqer Šafti of Isfahan (*Amanat*, pp. 159 ff.). He also established friendly contacts with other ulama, including Sunnis. Political authorities as well as members of the royal family, such as Solayman Khan Afšar, at least sympathized with his views (MacEoin, pp. 110 ff.; Behmardi, in Rašī, *Resalat al-soluk*, p. 20; Al Taleqāni, pp. 164-65). Towards the end of his life, Rašī and his adversary, Sayyed Ebrahim Qazvini, were considered as the two most powerful ulama of Karbalaʿ.

Rašī always claimed that Aḥsaʿī's views were in perfect harmony with Twelver Shiite orthodoxy and that any claim to the contrary was merely grounded in insufficient knowledge of the latter's specific terminology—a view also held by Henry Corbin and Idris Samawi Hamid (Rašī, *Dalīl al-motahayyerin*, pp. 35 ff., 54; *idem*, *al-Mizan al-haqq*, fol. 184a.; Corbin, p. 215; Hamid, pp. 51-52). According to him, Aḥsaʿī had not founded a new madhab, but had only clung to the true teachings of the Holy Imams. Nevertheless, as a fruit of permanent conflict with the *Osulis*, the Šaykis gradually developed a distinct identity and increasingly were perceived as a new school of thought within Twelver Shiʿism (Rafati, pp. 129-30; MacEoin, pp. 105, 109; Smith, p. 9; Hamid p. 52-53). Another factor that no doubt led to consolidation of Shaykhism was that Rašī, unlike Aḥsaʿī, only rarely traveled; therefore Karbalaʿ gradually evolved into a focal point and center for the Šaykiya under his leadership (MacEoin, p. 105)

Rašī died on 11 Duʿl-hejja 1259/1 January 1844 in Karbalaʿ. It is alleged by some that he was poisoned on orders of the Sunni governor of Baghdad (Kermani, I, p. 154), but there is no proof for this allegation, especially in the light of their otherwise good relationship. The legend might have served to clear Rašī of charges of collaboration with a governor otherwise reputed to be a fierce enemy of the Shiʿites (see below).

Works. Rašī left a voluminous literary output. In a bibliography penned by Rašī himself, well over 130 titles are mentioned (*Dalīl al-motahayyerin*, pp. 109 ff.), while another one lists 170 items (Kermani, I, p. 157; II, pp. 86-167; see also Nicolas, II, pp. 32-36; Al Taleqāni, pp. 390-405; Rafati, pp. 131-32). Parts of these, according to Rašī's own explicit statement, were lost or destroyed. He does not seem to have taken special precautions for

preserving his writings. He did not keep copies of his correspondence, since apparently he was convinced that God would preserve them, should it be His will. A number of manuscripts were also destroyed or stolen during riots in Karbala? (Kermani, I, pp. 157-58). Rašti also commented on some of his mentor's works (e.g., *Hayat al-nafs*, *Resala moktasar al-haydariya*) and translated parts of his magnum opus, *Šarh az-ziara al-jame'a al-kabira*, into Persian (Kermani, II, pp. 87, 91-92; Rafati pp. 58, 131; MacEoin, p. 99).

Rašti, even more than Ahsa'i, used coded language and esoteric expressions, thus rendering his writings notoriously difficult for the uninitiated. This might have been a reaction to the circumstances he taught under. Rašti practiced dissimulation (*taqiya*) and, in his writings, followed the long tradition of Islamic writers who arbitrarily chose to express themselves in a somewhat veiled and mysterious language in order to avoid possible attacks by their enemies. He also might have had the Sufi approach in mind, which aims not to divulge certain truths to the unworthy or uninitiated (see, e.g., *Šarh al-kotba* I, p. 90; II, pp. 305, 317; III, pp. 170 ff., 392-93). Sometimes, his obscure writings became a target of criticism and mockery by his contemporaries. For instance, Sayyed Mohammad-Mahdi Musawi Esfahani Kazemi wrote in his *Ahsan al-wadi'a*: "Sayyid Rašti has produced numerous writings; however, no one seems to understand them. It is as if he writes in Hindi" (apud Modarres, II, p. 308).

Rašti's writings mainly focus on philosophical, theological, and epistemological themes, as well as, to some lesser extent, the occult sciences. He also wrote on jurisprudence, grammar, and other fields of traditional scholarship. Although he issued a number of authoritative religious rulings (*fatwa*), it seems that he particularly disliked jurisprudence (*feqh*), as evidenced in his note to Karim Khan Kermani that he should "flee from [it] as ye would from a lion" (apud MacEoin, p. 111).

Rašti's claim to knowledge of hidden matters is reflected, for example, in his incomplete commentary on the *Basmala*, a work he claimed to have been inspired directly by the Imam Hosayn b. 'Ali (*Šarh al-qasida*, pp. 80, 140). Among his earliest works are a commentary on the *Ayat al-korsi* (*Qur'an* 2:255) and another one on some passages of Mohsen Fayz Kašani's *al-Kalamat al-maknuna fi 'olum al-ma'rafa*, bearing the title *Matale' al-anwar* (MacEoin, p. 98). His most voluminous work is no doubt *Šarh al-kotba al-totonjiya*, a partial commentary on a text attributed to Imam 'Ali b. Abi Taleb. The authenticity of this highly allusive sermon has been a matter of controversy but was attested by both Ahsa'i and Rašti (Ahsa'i, *Rasa'el al-hekma*, p. 216; Rašti, *Šarh al-kotba* II, pp. 20 ff.), who generally were reluctant to reject traditions solely due to outward criteria, or because they were difficult to understand (Ahsa'i, *Šarh al-ziara* IV, p. 51). It is unclear whether the commentary was left incomplete by Rašti himself or whether parts of the manuscript have been lost.

Another important work is the slightly less voluminous *Šarh al-qasida*

al-lamiya, a commentary written in 1258-59/1841-42 on a poem by ʿAbd-al-Baqi Mawseli. The text itself has not much to do with the actual content of the poem, but in it Rašti, among a variety of subjects, develops his idea about two cycles of revelation—one of nobowwa, which ended with the Prophet Mohammad, and one of walaya, which would be inaugurated by a mysterious figure, only alluded to very vaguely (Eschraghi, pp. 247 ff.; Amanat, pp. 58-59; MacEoin, p. 104). Both Rašti and Ahsaʿi generally saw certain Sufi doctrines, such as the wahdat al-wojud (see EBN AL-ʿARABI), antinomian tendencies, claims to performing miracles, and the idea of a moršed (other than the Imam) as a deviation from the true faith. Rašti thus labeled them as “evildoers,” “hypocrites,” “sinners,” and worse (Šarh al-kotba I, p. 36; II, pp. 123, 194-95, 288; III, pp. 193-94; al-Mizan al-haqq, fol. 85a). He also condemned the philosophers (hokamaʿ, maššaʿin, motakallemin) for their “absurd beliefs” and “vain superstitions” (Šarh al-kotba II, p. 123). These attacks might also have served the purpose of demonstrating his own orthodoxy. A striking feature of Šarh al-qasida is, therefore, its closeness to Ebn ʿArabi’s terminology, who is here even named al-Šayk al-akbar “the Greatest Master” (pp. 16, 18, 25), whereas in other works both Rašti and Ahsaʿi had denounced him in strong terms and labeled him Momiet-al-din “the Murderer of religion” (e.g., Šarh al-kotba I, p. 36). Even more surprising is the fact that Rašti, a rather staunch Shiʿite, here refers to the Sunni caliphs ʿOmar b. al-Kattab and Abu Bakr respectfully as “our lord” (sayyedona; Šarh al-kotba I, p. 349; in contrast, compare his statements about the kolafaʿ in Šarh al-kotba II, p. 123). A possible explanation for this is that the addressee of Šarh al-qasida was a Sunni, ʿAli-Reza Pasha, the governor of Baghdad, who is reviled amongst Shiʿites for his killing of hundreds of their fellow believers during a siege of Karbalaʿ. Rašti had negotiated with him by that time and convinced him to spare anyone who took refuge with him (Behmardi, in Rašti, Resalat al-soluk, pp. 23 ff.; Kermani, I, pp. 151-52; see detailed account in Al Taleqani, pp. 154 ff.). In any case, these examples demonstrate the complexity of Rašti’s writings and the difficulty to penetrate his true ideas.

The Dalil al-motahayyerin is in part an autobiography, as well as an explanation of Ahsaʿi’s teachings. In it, Rašti describes his several meetings with the ulama, who were critical of Ahsaʿi. Kašf al-haqq is a related, earlier apologetic work that Rašti, according to his own statement, widely disseminated. Its main theme is a discussion of the ascension of the Prophet Mohammad to Heaven (meʿraj) is. One of the charges leveled against Ahsaʿi had been his alleged denial of the corporeal ascension of the Prophet. The purpose of this treatise was to clear Ahsaʿi of all charges and to demonstrate his views to be in accordance with traditional Islamic teachings.

Rašti also produced a few Persian works, the most voluminous among which is the Osul-e ʿaqaʿed. However, like Ahsaʿi in his Hayat al-nafs, Rašti avoided matters of doctrinal controversy, even when treating such topics

as resurrection and walaya; and so, for the most part, the work reads like a regular Twelver Shi'ite creed account (see SHI'ITE DOCTRINE). As an introduction to specific Šayki ideas, its usefulness may be somewhat limited.

Rašti also left behind a large number of letters written to individuals, which still lack careful investigation. Letters to trusted friends and students might in some cases help to identify his true or secretly held ideas, which he chose not to reveal in his more publicly accessible writings. Also, a more detailed study is needed of the writings of both Ahsa'i and Rašti in order to be able to determine whether the latter only confirmed his mentor's teachings or actually introduced innovative elements into it. For now, it seems to have become common sense to refer to Ahsa'i's and Rašti's works as a monolithic set of ideas and regard them both as founders of the Šaykiya (Kermani, I, p. 94; Rafati p. 46; Amir-Moezzi, p. 38). Undoubtedly, their writings resemble each other much more than those of the Šayki generations after them.

Students. Rašti must have had hundreds of students, most of whom have not been recorded (for a list of some better-known students, see Al Taleqani, pp. 125 ff.). Since he did not appoint a successor, numerous claims to leadership were raised after his death. Hajj Mohammad-Karim Khan Kermani became the head of the group subsequently known as the Kermani branch. He seems to have enjoyed a special rank among Rašti's students and was therefore accepted as leader by a large number of Šaykis, especially in Kerman. Other claimants included Mirza Hasan Gowhar in Karbala? and Mirza Mohit Kermani, the teacher of Rašti's sons, as well as Mohammad-Šafi? Tabrizi in Azerbaijan. Mirza Mohammad Korasani became the leader of another branch in Tehran (Behmardi, in Rašti, Resalat al-soluk, pp. 25-26; MacEoin, pp. 126 ff.). All these leaders apparently lacked the charisma and authority of Shaikh Ahmad and Sayyed Kazem, and therefore, from this point in history on, the Šayki movement became irreversibly divided into several offshoots. These fractions of the Šaykiya remain in existence until today and differ, not only in questions of leadership, but also in certain points of doctrine, for instance, the doctrine of the Fourth Pillar (Rokn-e rabe?; detailed discussion in Al Taleqani, pp. 298 ff.; Rafati pp. 135 ff.; Amir-Moezzi), which is held by the Kermani branch but not shared by other groups. Among the followers of Rašti was the well-known Tahera Qorrat-al-'Ayn. She later joined the Bab's religion and was martyred as one of his leading followers. Another one of Rašti's pupils was Molla Mohammad-Hosayn Bošru'i, whom he had sent to negotiate with Mohammad-Baqer Šafti (see above). Bošru'i was successful in securing the latter's support for the Šaykis. Bošru'i later became the first follower of Sayyed 'Ali-Mohammad Širazi, the Bab, and played a central role in his movement. Rašti also left two sons, Ahmad and Hasan. The latter was a student of his father and of Mirza Mohit Kermani. He later moved to Hamadan. Ahmad was put to death in 1295/1878-79 on his way home from the shrine of the Imam Hosayn. Neither of his sons seem to have enjoyed special significance among the Šaykis.

Rašti's offspring became known as the "Al Rošdi from Karbala?" (Behmardi, in Rašti, *Resalat al-soluk*, pp. 26-27; for more details on Rašti's offsprings, see Al Taleqani, pp. 165 ff.).

Connection to the Bab. A number of prominent Šaykis joined the movement of the Bab (Rafati, pp. 150 ff.; MacEoin, pp. 139, 142 ff.; Smith, pp. 12, 42; Al Taleqani, pp. 125 ff.). A few months after Rašti's death, he had put forth his somewhat ambiguous claim to be the Fourth Pillar (Rokn-e rabe?, Harf-e rabe?) or to be a new manifestation of the Divine Logos. In fact, the earliest and most prominent Babi's were almost all former students of Rašti (e.g., Bošru'i, Mohammad-ʿAli Qoddus Barforuši, Shaikh ʿAli Toršizi ʿAzim, Tahera Qorrat-al-ʿAyn, Molla ʿAli Bastami, and Molla Sadeq Moqaddas Korasani. The Bab, prior to commencement of his prophetic career, had spent some time in Karbala? in the early 1840s, where he came into contact with Šaykis. It is sometimes reported that he also attended classes and seminaries. In some of his earliest writings he referred to Rašti as his teacher (moʿallem) and master (sayyedi, mawlayi; Bab, *Resala fi'l-soluk*, p. 489; idem, *al-Lawameʿ al-badiʿ*, p. 169). However, given the Bab's only rudimentary education, attested to by both his family and contemporary adversaries and sympathizers, it seems highly unlikely that he could have attended Rašti's classes (the problem of the Bab's education is discussed in *Amanat*, pp. 138 ff.; Eschraghi, pp. 148 ff.), given the hierarchical structure of traditional seminaries. The Bab, after all, had been, according to traditional accounts, denied formal education at an earlier point of his life, due to his lack of knowledge of the most basic sciences (*Amanat*, pp. 114, 116). The purpose of the Bab's statement might, then, have been to show his nearness to the Šayki leader and support his own claim to authority. In any case, his writings display intimate knowledge of the Šayki terminology and doctrine, which is at least most remarkable, even if one were to accept the traditional account that he attended classes for about a year.

Babi and Baha'i historiographers refer to a strong messianic element in early Šayki teachings. Occasionally the efforts of the two shaikhs (Ahsa'i and Rašti) are reduced to preparing people for the immediate advent of the Mahdi (on which, see *ISLAM IN IRAN* vi, vii). Such a claim is certainly not justified by their writings, which contain few, and then very vague and obscure, references to some sort of messianic figure or event (see Ahsa'i and Rašti, *Asrar al-Emam al-Mahdi*, a compilation of Šayki texts on the subject; cf. Rafati, pp. 218-19, for a list of writings by Ahsa'i and Rašti on the Mahdi). One such example occurs towards the end of *Šarh al-qasida*, where Rašti says that the inaugurator of the future cycle of revelation is present now, that his name is Ahmad, and that he himself knows everything about him but cannot divulge his true identity (quoted in Nicolas, II, pp. 44, 52 ff.; Bayat, pp. 52 ff.; Rafati, p. 172). However, the fact that many Šaykis converted to the Bab's new religion might be an indication that some sort of expectation prevailed, even though the true nature of that expectation (the actual Mahdi or only his representative) is still unclear. Further research into early Šayki writings and the correspondence

between Babi converts and their former Šayki colleagues may shed further light on this question. There is a strong possibility that at least Rašti had entertained certain expectations into which he had initiated some of his students orally, rather than in writing (Amanat pp. 60 ff.; Eschraghi, pp. 89 ff.)

Sometimes, the fact that Rašti did not leave a testament nominating his successor is interpreted as anticipation of a messianic event (cf. MacEoin, pp. 126 ff.). Vahid Rafati argues that Rašti's testament does at least allude to the imminent advent of the Mahdi (pp. 136-37, 174). On the other hand, the fact that most Šaykis did not join the Bab or any other messianic movement is a strong indication that the alleged messianic spirit had not reached the majority of its members, but was, rather, confined to an elect few.

That many Šaykis did convert to Babism might also be due to certain elements of their doctrine, which deviates from traditional Twelver Shi'ism—for example, the idea of an absolute representative of the Hidden Imam, who can be known even during the Occultation; the rather complex theory about life after death and the belief that the Mahdi might return in a different body (cf. Rafati, pp. 167 ff.; Eschraghi, pp. 92-93; Amanat, pp. 53-54); and the focus on the Imams as manifestations of the Divine. In short, a more esoteric approach towards certain questions of Imamology and theology in general allowed for the Bab to develop his own ideas in the framework of the Šaykiya, rather than in traditional Twelver Shi'ite discourse, which upholds a belief in the physical reappearance of the twelfth Imam, Mohammad b. Hasan, and does not believe in any representatives during the “Great Occultation.” But another important factor in the Bab's gravitation toward the Šaykiya must have been the general longing for change that existed in 19th-century Iranian society and was no doubt stronger with members of an already unorthodox and somewhat innovative group.

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Rašti's works mainly exist in manuscript. A number of books by the Šayki hierarchy, including Rašti and Ahsa'i, have been published, mostly in Kerman, since the middle of the 19th century; among these are rare lithographed editions of Šarh al-kotba (Tabriz, 1270/1853-54) and Šarh al-qasida (Tabriz, 1270/1853, without pagination) as well as some of his treatises. After the Revolution of 1979, Kermani Šaykis had to shut down their publication activities. Since the 1990s a number of works have been published in Kuwait, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. The website Al-Abrar contains a large number of Šayki works, including some of Rašti's writings (see below).

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