

Hillah and Dissemination of Shī'ism in Seventh-Century Iran

The third phase of the influence of Iraqi Shī'ism on Iran relates to the influence of the school of Hillah on Iranian Shī'ī scholars during the eighth/fourteenth century. The city of Hillah was founded by Sayf al-Dawlah Hamdan and with the support he extended to academic pursuits and scholars, it rapidly grew into an academic centre.

The Shī'ī concerns of this dynasty made this city a centre of attraction for Shī'ī scholars and it gradually grew into a centre of the Shī'ah. For this reason this city has been one of the main centres of the Shī'ah from the sixth/twelfth to the ninth/fifteenth century and at times its position overshadowed even Najaf and other Shī'ī centres. During the said period scholars belonging to this city were many and two of their most outstanding thinkers were Muhaqqiq Hillah (676/1277) and 'Allamah Hillah (d. 726/1325)¹. The illustrious Tawus family belonged to Hillah and it was here that Radī al-Dīn 'Ali ibn Tawus was born in 589/1193.

He later went to Baghdad, although he returned to Hillah in the years 643/1245 and 663/1264. Before them was Ibn Idrīs Hillah (d. 598/1201), whose book al-Sarā'ir acquired a prominent position despite the criticism which has been directed towards him. He had been critical of Shaykh Tusī in fiqh and tafsīr². Other famous families such as those of Al Bitrīq and Al Sa'ād (to this family belonged Muhaqqiq Hillah) resided in this city. The prevalent academic language of the city was Arabic and its population was mainly Arab.

Nevertheless, the literary links between Arabic and Persian, which were the result of frequent visits of Iranians to the city, led to close links between this city and Persian speakers and Iranian towns. For instance, Safī al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Taqī Taqī, the author of al-Fakhr, whose family had been residing in Hillah for centuries, travelled to Iran and married an Iranian woman and he cites Persian verses in his book³. A perusal of Ibn Fuwatī's book Majma' al-Adab shows that there were many bilingual poets in this period who wrote poetry in Arabic as well as Persian⁴.

The fall of the 'Abbasid caliphate occurred during this period and the Mongol Ilkhanids ruled over Muslims. Gradually they embraced Islam and among them Sultan Muhammad Khudabandah embraced Shī'ism. When he wanted to become more familiar with the Shī'ī creed, the fame of 'Allamah Hillah was such that his name was proposed to the king who invited him to Sultaniyyah.

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1. Al-Tehranī, Al-Haqayiq al-Rahinah fī al-Mi'at al-Thaminah (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabiyyah, 1975), pp. 52-53
 2. Al-Bahranī, Lu'lu'at al-Bahrayn (Qum: Mu'assasat Al al-Bayt lil-Nashr wa al-Turath, nd), p. 237
 3. Yusuf Karkush, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 78-79.
 4. See for instance, vol. 1, pp. 224, 368, 370, 395

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