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Between the Madrasa and the Khaneqāh: Religious Education, Authority and Sufi Orders in Early Modern Twelver Shi'ism

Religious higher education, similar to other areas of higher learning, tends to impart extremely sophisticated professional skills to its pursuers. In the case of Islam, these skills are mainly juridical in nature. However, unlike most secular fields of study, religious higher learning institutions claim ability to shape individuals endowed with high moral and spiritual qualifications, juridical knowledge representing merely a preliminary and, after all, lesser element. In this intersection, the study of that particular synthesis of philosophy and theoretical mysticism that surfaced the religious schools of Twelver Shi'ism, particularly in the second century of Safavid rule in Iran, represent an attractive factor - not only for mystical oriented students - but also for charismatic figures of a number of Sufi networks that were active in Iran in from the 16th to the 19th century.

In this contribution, after briefly highlighting the historical development of the learning system of the Shi'i *hawza* and the epistemic revolutions it underwent in the last century, I try to explore the different responses that some characters of these mystical networks deployed in order to negotiate their religious identity within Shi'ism and its institutions of learning.



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He edited *Approaches to the Qur'an in contemporary Iran* (Oxford University Press, 2019). His work on the Shi'i religious seminaries in Syria and Iran was published in Italian in 2016 (*La scuola degli Imam*, Jouvence).

He is an amateur perfumer, and he is translating a 19th century treatise on perfume-making written by an Iranian Shaykhi master.