

THE REAPPRAISAL OF ABBASID SHI'ISM

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Source: George Makdisi (ed) *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A.R. Gibb*, 1965. pp. 638–54.

A reappraisal of the nature of Shi'ism in the first century and a half of the Abbasid caliphate has been made possible, and indeed desirable, by a clearer awareness among scholars of the nature of the methods employed by the heresiographers, and of the different strands in the heresiographical tradition. Aspects of the subject have already been dealt with by the writer,¹ and the present article aims at carrying further the line of thought opened up elsewhere. One of the features of the early Abbasid period was that intellectual discussions on religious and political subjects took the form of arguments about the precise character of events in the nearer or more distant past. Many of the statements about what happened from twenty-five to two hundred years earlier must have been sheer inventions—the contradictions are sufficient to assure us of this. The heresiographers, however, have taken most of these statements as if they were historical fact, and have tried to fit them into a chronological framework. They have also assumed that views first propounded long after an event were held by men who lived at the time or shortly after. Further, in a civilization where oral communications are thought more highly of than written documents, once a false assertion has been made a mere denial is ineffectual, and it has to be countered by a contrary positive assertion. This naturally increases the confusion.

In dealing with material about early Shi'ism two questions are specially important: who held this view? and what did it mean to him, practically, in the particular circumstances of his life? By endeavoring to find answers to these questions—which is not always easy—doubt is thrown on several current assumptions, and an alternative conception of the nature of Shi'ism under the Abbasids is made to seem plausible. One of the main points of this alternative view is that, during their lifetime, there was little or no recognition of the twelve imams of the Imamis as such; there was no organized party of followers and no underground revolutionary activities

with the aim of making them caliphs. Insofar as this is the case, it follows that the Imami form of Shi'ism, and probably also the Isma'ili, did not receive the definite character familiar to scholars until shortly before 900. The immediate purpose of this article is to take the statements about the period subsequent to 750, found in *Firaq al-Shī'a*, and to show that they can be interpreted and explained in a way that is compatible with the general thesis just outlined. This Imami work, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, has hitherto usually been ascribed to al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Naubakhtī, but is now regarded as probably by his contemporary, Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qummī.² Both men died about 912, and the book was presumably written between 900 and that date.³

§1. 6.14–7.6 Some members of these sects of the Murji'a belong to the early years of the Abbasids: Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767); al-Thaurī (d. 778); Sharīk (d. 793); Ibn Abī Lailā (d. 765); al-Shāfi'ī (d. 820); Mālik (d. 795). Therefore, some of the views in §2 probably belong to this period. (For the use of the term "Murji'ite" by Shi'ites, cf. §8.)

§2. 7.7–8.11 Some early Murji'ite traditionists held the view—accepted by modern historians—that Muhammad died without leaving a successor. The absence of a precedent meant that Muslims were free to advance opinions about the proper way of appointing a caliph. The view (7.13ff.) that it should be done by the exercise of judgment (*ijtihād al-ra'y*) sounds like that of Abū Ḥanīfa and his followers. Those who said it should be by reason might be members of the secretary class attracted to philosophy. The view of some later Mu'tazilites that Muhammad designated the imam by description, that is, said what qualities he ought to have, was similar to the view of Abū 'l-Jārūd (as reported in Ash., 67). It may have been a concession to the believers in "designation", that is, the Shi'ites, or else an argument against them. An instance of an anti-Shi'ite argument is the following view that Abū Bakr was "designated" by being appointed to lead the worship.

The "neglecters" (*ahl al-iḥmāl*) are doubtless those who said Muhammad made no arrangements, and the name would be given by their opponents, the "designators" (*aṣḥab al-naṣṣ*). The discussion of *fādīl* and *mafdūl* belongs to the circle of ideas of the Zaidis. The phrase "imamate of the inferior (*mafdūl*)" is apparently not used in *Firaq al-Shī'a*. Doubtless, this is because it was a mocking way of referring to the Zaidi recognition of Abū Bakr, and one used only by opponents. Its absence in §3 and §7 is noteworthy.

§3. 8.15–9.5 The Butrīya (§7), a sect of the Zaidis, are trying to achieve a compromise between the Shi'ites and their opponents by saying 'Alī is best (*afdāl*), but the imamate of Abū Bakr is not a mistake, since 'Alī "entrusted that to the two of them" (namely, Abū Bakr and 'Umar). (Compare below 18.1–16.)

§4. 9.6–9 Sulaimān b. Jarīr, who probably flourished in the first half of the ninth century (compare *Intiṣār*. 89 and Ash., 70–73), was also a Zaidi,

but, according to this passage (and Ash., 68.5–7), seems to have been moving away from the usual Zaidi view.

§5. 9.10–13 Ibn al-Tammār is ‘Alī (b. Ismā‘īl) b. Mītham, and must have lived well into the first half of the ninth century (Friedlaender, II. 60; *Intiṣār*, 99). The puzzling thing is that he is included among the shaikhs of the Rāfiḍites (*Intiṣār*, 6; etc.), for the views expressed here are apparently Zaidi, and almost identical with those in the previous paragraph ascribed to the Zaidi Sulaimān b. Jarīr. Ibn al-Nadīm, in the *Fihrist* (175), describes him as “the first who theologized about the doctrine of the imamate” (*takallama fī madhhab al-imāma*). Clearly, the Shi‘ite theologians of this period, as listed in *Intiṣār*, 6, were not all of one mind, for the *Fihrist* records refutations of several by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam. So Ibn al-Tammār may have belonged to the group who were working out the Rāfiḍite position, although he himself, as an early member of the group, may have held views on this point that were close to the Zaidis. It is also noteworthy that he is not said to have accepted the Zaidi principle of “the imamate of the inferior”. Perhaps the question to be asked is rather how Sulaimān b. Jarīr managed to combine the various views ascribed to him. Whatever the exact truth, this paragraph tends to confirm the view that, in the early ninth century, the Shi‘ite position was very fluid. (Compare also Friedlaender, II. 60.)

§6. 10.10–12.9 The views here ascribed to the Mu‘tazilites in general probably belong to the late eighth century and may be described as utilitarian. ‘Amr b. ‘Ubaid is closer to the Shi‘ites than other members of the sect, since he allows that ‘Alī had the best right to the imamate.

§7. 12.10–16 While al-Ḥasan b. Sāliḥ (d. 785) seems to have been the most prominent member of the Butrīya (§3), it received its name from Kathīr al-Nauwā’ al-Abtar, who was presumably earlier. Of the men named, dates are available for al-Ḥakam (d. 732) and Salma (d. 740). Thus the sect belongs partly to the Umayyad period. This is doubtless why it fully accepts the imamate of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, unlike, for example, Sulaimān b. Jarīr (§4), who thinks the recognition of these men mistaken.

§8. 15.13f. This is a most important sentence, since it shows how Shi‘ites looked on the Islamic community about the year 900. There are four sects, Shi‘ites, Mu‘tazilites, Murji‘ites and Kharijites; and this is intended to be an exhaustive division of the community. Where then are the Sunnites? They cannot be taken for granted as “orthodox”, since the Shi‘ites considered themselves the true Muslims. The Sunnites must therefore be divided between the other sects, especially the Mu‘tazilites and Murji‘ites. From the Shi‘ite point of view, they themselves were the true community, because they followed the true imam. All the others put the revealed scriptures first, and did not consider the imam inspired. The Kharijites restricted the scriptures to the Koran, but the others included also traditions, and, in varying degrees, permitted the use of reason. The three sects also varied in their attitude to ‘Uthmān. The Kharijites insisted he was an unbeliever because of

his sins. The Murji'ites held he should be accepted as a believer, and the judgment on his sins left to God. The Mu'tazilites said he was in an "intermediate position". From the Shi'ite standpoint of 900, then, most contemporary Muslims must have been Murji'ites, in the sense of recognizing 'Uthmān's caliphate; this does not mean they held those Murji'ite views, on the nature of faith, later considered heretical by the main body of Sunnites. In 900, too, it must be remembered, Ash'arism had not appeared, and all that was visible was a variety of strands in the traditionist movement.

§9. 15.15–17.16 The opening part of this section, especially 16.1f., shows how later conditions are written back into the past. The author names four men known as supporters of 'Alī. Then he goes on to say that, on the death of the Prophet, this "sect of the Shi'a" split into three sects. The first is not named, but its views are basically those of the Imamis, namely, that 'Alī had a right to the imamate and the position of the Prophet since he had been expressly "designated" by name, had been preserved from sin and error, had precedence (in conversion to Islam) and was of Muhammad's family. That the division into three sects is not historical is shown by looking at the other two. The second (18.1–16) is the Butrīya, who flourished in the later Umayyad and early Abbasid period. The third is the Jārūdīya, who sprang from Zaid (d. 740); and the point in which they differ from the first sect is that, after the death of al-Ḥusain, they considered there was a *shūrā* or council of the descendants of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusain. Such a view could hardly have been held before the death of al-Ḥasan about 669, but was probably not propounded till much later, since the Jārūdīya were active under the Abbasids (Ash., 67, 12–16).

§10. 19.1–7 The Jārūdīya insisted that the rightful imam must not remain hidden, but must come forward publicly at the head of an army. The point mentioned above about the *shūrā*, and the alternative (Ash., 67, 9–11) that Muhammad designated 'Alī and his two sons, belong to a period before the Imami doctrine of a succession of imams was generally accepted. These were presumably two ways of justifying Zaid's claim to be imam. If the only designations were those by Muhammad of 'Alī and his two sons, this ruled out the Abbasid claim to be designated in succession from Ibn al-Ḥanafīya. Had a series of designations to Zaid's father been generally accepted, Zaid would have based his claim on this. Silence, and the absence of counter-claims for Zaid, argues that no such claim was being made for Zaid's father 'Alī (d. 713) or his brother Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 732), as late as 740.

§11. 19.8–20.9 The views ascribed to the Saba'īya must belong to the early Abbasid period (compare Lewis, *Ismā'īlism*, 25; etc.) Those who regarded 'Alī as the hidden imam cannot have accepted any succession of imams after him, nor can they have accepted any of his descendants as hidden imam.

§12. 20–37 The following pages deal mainly with the Umayyad period, and need not be commented on.

§13. 37.15–41.12 This important account of the *Khaṭṭābīya* has been carefully examined by Bernard Lewis in *The Origins of Ismāʿīlism*, 32–37. In the present context, the vital questions have to do with the interpretation of the material. First of all, it must be noticed that some of the reports—especially those (38.7 ff., 39.14 ff.) which speak of their making adultery and theft lawful—must come from opponents. It is therefore possible that some of the more heterodox statements, for example, that they considered Jaʿfar was God, are hostile deductions from less extravagant beliefs, perhaps beliefs about the inherence of light in men. Secondly, it must be noted carefully that there is nothing about a series of imams in which each was designated by his predecessor. The nearest to this is the belief (40.10ff.) that there was a series of men in whom Light inhered, each of whom “sent” his successor. The men named are ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, Abū Ṭālib, Muhammad, ʿAlī; then there is a jump to Jaʿfar and Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb. It is strange that no one is named between ʿAlī and Jaʿfar. It would seem, either that no great importance was attached to the series as a series, or else that the names in the series were different from those later recognized by Imamīs and Ismaʿīlites. The transfer of allegiance (27.7f.) by al-Saiyid al-Himyarī (d. 789) from Ibn al-Ḥanafīya as hidden imam to Jaʿfar (d. 765)—presumably also as hidden imam—suggests that Ibn al-Ḥanafīya may have been one of the links. Thirdly, the connection with Jaʿfar is puzzling, for Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb probably was executed in 755 (Lewis, 33), whereas the views ascribed to him look as if they came after Jaʿfar’s death. Bazīgh and the other men mentioned are doubtless a little after Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb. Whatever the explanation of the puzzle, it would seem that Jaʿfar must have had some connection with these men. Fourthly, the ideas held are “extremist”—identification of Light with God, reincarnation, strange interpretations of the Koran, etc. Some of these ideas were taken up by the later Ismaʿīlites, but it must remain doubtful if there was any organizational connection. (“Extremist” is used, in this article, to describe all such ideas; it roughly corresponds to the Arabic “Ghulāt” or “Ghāliya”.)

§14. 41.13–47.9 This long section is about the ʿAbbāsīya and Rāwandīya, and is chiefly interesting as showing how Shiʿite ideas were applied to other than the descendants of ʿAlī and Fāṭima. The original view of the Abbasid family was that the imamate was passed by testamentary disposition (*auṣā*) from the son of Ibn al-Ḥanafīya to the family of al-ʿAbbās (42, 11–43 etc.). Under al-Mahdī (775–85), the Abbasid family felt this view unsatisfactory, and claimed instead that, on Muhammad’s death, the imamate had gone to his uncle, al-ʿAbbās. The attempts to regard the general Abū Muslim as the hidden imam, and the caliph al-Manṣūr as God, may be noted, but need not be commented on.

§15. 47.10–48.2 This report of a “sect” which recognized the imamate of ʿAlī Zain al-ʿAbidīn, from his father’s death in 680 until his own in 712, contains nothing which is not simply part of the assumption that there

was a continuing series of imams. No contemporary names or facts are mentioned.

§16. 48.3–6 This report of a "sect" which held that there was no imam after al-Ḥusain (d. 680) may be taken as an admission not that there was a clearly defined sect with this view but that this was the general view even among people of Shi'ite sympathies. The view of the Jārūdīya (§10), who flourished round about 750, that after 680 there was a *shūrā*, implies that there was no widely accepted imam between 680 and 750.

§17. 48.7–52.2 This further material about the Zaidis is mainly repetition. The most interesting part is the discussion whether the Alids require to learn or have knowledge without learning (44.7–50.12). Such a discussion implies that those taking part had no thought of a recognized series of imams. The author points out that, despite the theory that all Alids have perfect knowledge, traditions are accepted from only four of them (50.1–3). (Compare §29; 74.14–76.7.)

§18. 52.6–53.8 The story of how 'Umar b. Riyāḥ received contrary answers from al-Bāqir, and eventually attached himself to the Butrīya, reflects a series of arguments between the Butrīya (a section of the Zaidis) and their opponents. When it is argued that al-Bāqir cannot be imam because he gave contradictory answers, the reply is made that one was due to *taqīya* (prudent concealment of one's true belief). To this it is retorted that there was no need for *taqīya* in either case, since no one else was present. In short, it was not a properly considered reply; and a person who acts in this way, and does not come forward openly, cannot be imam. Now there is no reason to doubt that these were real arguments between the Butrīya and their opponents. What is doubtful is an actual contact between 'Umar and al-Bāqir. For one thing, al-Bāqir died about 733 (or, perhaps, not till 737), but the Butrīya were probably not active until after 750. Again, the real conflict in the story is between 'Umar and Muhammad b. Qais (who appears to be otherwise unknown). Nothing is said about the precise point on which al-Bāqir's replies varied; and this suggests that it may have been a hypothetical instance, and that originally no actual imam may have been named. A later scholar, who assumed the existence of the series of imams, could have introduced al-Bāqir as the appropriate name in view of 'Umar's date. If al-Bāqir was involved in a real argument, why does he not try to say more about the matter? These dubious points in this story mean that it does not, by itself, necessitate a recognized series of imams by 750.

§19. 53.9–55.6 "The rest of the associates of (al-Bāqir) continued to believe in his imamate until his death ... then his sect divided into two sects." One of these recognized, as imam, a descendant of al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, known as al-Nafs al-Zakīya ("the pure soul"). These statements show how Imami views are subtly read back into the past. It is assumed that there is a large party which recognizes the imamate of al-Bāqir, of whom a few have deserted to the Butrīya. Now, after his death, some others are found who

turn to al-Nafs al-Zakīya. One asks on what grounds the large party recognized al-Bāqir as imam. Was it by designation? If so, how did they abandon the theory of designation so easily? If not, can one say they recognized his imamate and were not merely “men of Shi’ite sympathies”? There is nothing here to support the view that, about 750, there was a series of recognized imams.

§20. 55.7–57.2 This section on the imamate of Ja’far is, in fact, a continuation of the argument between Zaidis and their opponents, already noticed in §18. There is here, in addition to the attack on *taqīya*, one on *badā’*, the doctrine that God changes his will for man. It is indicated that, with these two conceptions, the imams of the opponents (called “Rāfiḍites”) can never be caught out. Since Sulaimān b. Jarīr flourished in the first half of the ninth century, and Ja’far died in 765, the argument was taking place half a century, or more, after the events. The alleged mistake of Ja’far about Ismā’īl was thus being used merely as an example. The most solid fact emerging from the story is that, by the time of Sulaimān (say 825–40), the Rāfiḍites were discussing whether Ja’far had “pointed to” (*ashāra*) Ismā’īl; it perhaps shows that this is early, since the term “designated” (*naṣṣa*) is not used. It is possible that the Rāfiḍites were countering an Isma’ili claim that Ja’far had appointed Ismā’īl by asserting that Ismā’īl died before Ja’far. (The doctrine of *badā’* was much discussed about the middle of the ninth century in connection with predestination; Ibn Qutaiba, *Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, 7; *Intisār*, 127–30; compare article “Badā’” in *EF*². One may also wonder whether the objections to the doctrines of *taqīya* and *badā’* were linked with objections to secretive and inconsistent policies of the Abbasid regime.)

§21. 57.3–15 The belief that Ja’far was still alive and would return can only have been held after his death. It implies that those who held it did not recognize any successor to him. They probably also did not recognize the series of designated predecessors. (Compare §13.)

§21a. 57.16–58.8 The views here described as being of the “pure” Ismā’īliya are similar to those mentioned in §20, except that the death of Ismā’īl is denied. From what was said in the comment on §20, it would seem that these views need not have been held before 825–840.

§22. 58.9–16 This report about the Mubārakīya presents a new argument; namely, that after al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusain, the imamate cannot pass from brother to brother, but must pass from father to son. This means that it cannot pass from Ismā’īl to any of his brothers. A corollary is that the imamate did not pass from al-Ḥusain to Ibn al-Ḥanafīya. The nerve of the argument—the practical consequence in which those who argued thus were interested—is the denial of the imamate of Ismā’īl’s brothers. Few were now interested in the imamate of Ibn al-Ḥanafīya. The Abbasids abandoned the claim through him between 775 and 785. The believers in hidden imams, who had probably regarded him as the link between al-Ḥusain and Ja’far al-Sādiq, were now turning to Ja’far and others. So the rejection of

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Ibn al-Ḥanafīya had no serious consequences. The corresponding assertion of the imamate of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusain was also an academic matter—something which (on our hypothesis) had not been asserted previously, but which no one was interested in denying. While the nature and implications of the argument are thus clear, the date at which it was put forward is unfortunately obscure. Nothing is known about Mubārak, the man who gave his name to the sect. At what time was the imamate of Ja'far's sons, especially Mūsā, asserted? It has been suggested that there was some discussion, at least by the period 825–840, of the fact that Ismā'īl had died before Ja'far. If this was coupled with the assertion that another son of Ja'far was imam, that would belong to about the same period. This suggests that, first of all, some “pure Isma'ilis” asserted that Ismā'īl had succeeded Ja'far. Next, the Rāfiḍites replied that Ismā'īl had died before Ja'far (and if there was a possibility of doubt about this point, the presumption is that it was some time after Ja'far's death); the Rāfiḍite reply laid them open to Zaidī attack. They probably also asserted that Ja'far was succeeded by his son, Mūsā al-Kāzim. The Isma'ilis countered this by their theory that the imamate could not pass from brother to brother, and thereby implicitly put forward the view that there must be a series of imams. (The argument about brothers is also relevant to the succession to al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī in 874; compare §27 below.)

§23. 58.17–60.16 This is a report of the actual rising of the Khaṭṭābīya about 755. The problem is to know why a man who died in 755 held views about what happened after Ja'far's death in 765.

§24. 61.1–64.14 The Qarmatians are here described as having introduced the idea of *seven* imams; but their “extremist” ideas need not be discussed. The phrase about the denial of the imamate of Mūsā b. Ja'far (d. 799), and his descendants, suggests that he is already dead.

§25. 64.15–65.7 The sect who claimed Muḥammad Ibn Ja'far as imam is very obscure. That it should have existed, if it really did, shows that there was no general recognition of any of Ja'far's sons immediately after his death.

§26. 65.8–66.8 The sect who took Ja'far's son 'Abd Allāh as imam is also obscure. Their argument that the imam should be succeeded by his eldest son is a move towards recognition of the series of imams, but does not go so far as the Mubārakīya. Some of the arguments about 'Abd Allāh are clearly dated after 874, since 'Abd Allāh b. Bukair made them precedents for his view of the succession to al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī. The sect is also connected with 'Ammār b. Mūsā (Ash., I, 28), who is found holding similar views to 'Abd Allāh b. Bukair (67.3; §27), and may be a contemporary. It is thus not impossible that little was heard of the imamate of 'Abd Allāh till after 874.

§27. 66.9–67.7 The view that Mūsā was imam after his father Ja'far is described as being held by the leading Shi'ite scholars. Unfortunately, it is not clear at what dates these men held this view. Abān is said to have died in

758 before Ja'far (Index, *s.v.*), so that something must be wrong here. Jamīl is said to have died in the days of al-Riḍā, that is, probably shortly before his death in 818. The two Hishāms probably flourished from about 800 to 825. It is not improbable that the event which set most of these theories of the imamate in motion was the caliph al-Ma'mūn's choice of 'Alī al-Riḍā as heir-apparent in 816. Up to this point, there was possibly no generally recognized head of the Alids. This event, however, forced men of Shi'ite sympathies to decide for or against 'Alī. The list in the present section may be based on the presumption that men who approved of al-Ma'mūn's choice of 'Alī must have accepted also his father Mūsā as imam. Actually, it seems just as likely that al-Ma'mūn's choice of 'Alī contributed to fixing the choice of the Shi'ites on this particular line, and may also have made the opposition choose Ismā'īl. It is noteworthy that 'Abd Allāh b. Bukair, who is mentioned in the closing part of the section, is also said (p. 93 below) to have used the succession to 'Abd Allāh of his brother Mūsā as a precedent for a succession of brothers in 874. Thus the imamate of 'Abd Allāh (who is said to have died in 765) was being discussed in 874; and one cannot help wondering if it had ever been discussed before that time.

§28. 67.8–72.6 The succession to Mūsā (d. 799) is chiefly interesting because it shows considerable messianic interest. Apart from the sect which accepts the imamate of 'Alī al-Riḍā, the sects mentioned are messianic. Most seem to be politically quietist, but one (68. 3–6) claims to have leaders in contact with the hidden imam, and this could mean revolutionary activity. It may be that Mūsā was imprisoned because he was in touch with revolutionary groups. It is possible that some of these views were held shortly after the death of Mūsā—one of the men named, Yūnus b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān (69.2), is said to have died in 823. It is also possible, however, that some of the views continued for a longer time. The last group mentioned (70.5–71.10) are "extremists" who held transmigration and similar views. All those who believed in Mūsā as *al-qā'im al-mahdī* must have held that the series of imams ended with him, and need not have believed in the usual series prior to Mūsā. The suggestion that his successors should be called "caliphs" (68.15) is perhaps an attempt to show approval of the appointment of 'Alī as heir apparent.

§29. 72.7–77.4 This section deals with the position after the death of 'Alī al-Riḍā in 818. He left a son, Muhammad, who was only seven. Some are said to have recognized his imamate; but only three lines are devoted to this, so that it would seem to be merely a deduction from the conception of a series of imams. The view that 'Alī was succeeded by his brother Aḥmad (72.11–13) seems to be part of the argument about the succession of brothers which was developed after 874 (compare §26). Some of those who had been looking for a return of Mūsā had apparently accepted 'Alī, but after 'Alī's death went back to their expectation of Mūsā (72.14–16). Similarly, some Zaidis accepted 'Alī, presumably after he became heir apparent, but went

back to Zaidism after his death (73.4–7). The youth of Muhammad became the occasion for a discussion (74.14–76.7) of how the imam came to have his infallible knowledge (compare §17). This is probably part of an argument between Shi'ites and their opponents, where the latter were trying to show that the claim that the imams had infallible knowledge was ridiculous (compare §18): the date of the argument may be quite late.

§30. 77.5–78.12 There is so little reported of 'Alī al-Hādī (or al-Naqī), who is alleged to have been recognized as imam from 835 to 868, that we are justified in assuming there was little activity round him. The second part of the report describes the origin of the Nusairi movement, and shows how "extremist" ideas could be applied to an Alid leader.

§31. 78.13–79.15 The next imam is reckoned to have been al-Ḥasan al-'Askari (d. 874). Rivals were his brother Muḥammad, who died before his father, but was expected by some to return as the Mahdi, and Ja'far. Both the latter and his father were kept under surveillance by the Abbasids.

§32. 79.16–94.3 The remainder of the book may conveniently be dealt with as a single section. It describes thirteen sects which appeared after the death of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī in 874. (There are said to have been fourteen, but, if there were, the description of the fourteenth has been lost; it could not have been the Isma'ilis, since the fourteen sects come from those who are reckoned as having accepted the imamate of al-'Askarī.) This is, in some ways, the most valuable part of the book, since it is dealing with roughly contemporary material. The author's preference is for the twelfth sect which he calls "the true Imami Shi'a". The distinctive features of the sects may be briefly indicated:

(1) Al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī is not dead, but absent, and is *al-qā'im al-mahdī*. They claim to differ from those who held that Mūsā was similarly absent (69.8–70.4, etc.), through the fact that al-'Askarī died without leaving an heir. (2) Al-'Askarī died but has been raised to life, and is *al-qā'im al-mahdī*, because the world cannot be without a *hujja* and *qā'im*. (3) The imam, by the testament of al-'Askarī, is his brother Ja'far. The apparent hostility between them was only *zāhir*; the *bātin* was mutual amity. (4) Ja'far is imam in succession to his father 'Alī al-Hādī. The claim of al-'Askarī is invalid, since he died without leaving a successor (an argument which suggests he had little recognition in his lifetime). (5) Since al-'Askarī died without an heir, and since Ja'far was of a blameworthy character, the imam after 'Alī al-Hādī, and the *qā'im* and *mahdī*, must be their brother Muḥammad b.'Alī, who died before his father. (6) The imam is Muḥammad, the son of al-'Askarī, who was born two years before his father's death; he is in concealment. (7) The imam (in concealment) is Muḥammad, but he was born eight months after his father's death. (8) Al-'Askarī had no son, and arguments about a hidden son are to be rejected (some having apparently implied a pregnancy of longer than nine months). (9) Al-'Askarī has died and for the moment there is no imam; but the *qā'im* will come. (10) The eleventh imam was

Muhammad b. 'Alī (as in the fifth sect), but he made a man called Nafis his *waṣī*, or agent, and the latter handed on the imamate to Ja'far. (11) Al-'Askarī has died, and the position is not clear; but the earth cannot be without a *ḥujja*. (12) There is a *ḥujja* and *waṣī* who is a son of al-'Askarī, since the imamate cannot pass from brother to brother after al-Ḥusain, cannot fall to a man whose father was not imam (possibly an argument against the Isma'ilis) and cannot be transmitted by the *ḥujja* of one who died in his father's lifetime (against the tenth sect, or the Isma'ilis). This *ḥujja* is in concealment, for the world cannot exist without such a person; but it is forbidden to seek him out before he manifests himself (thus making clear that the sect is not engaged in revolutionary activity). (13) The imam is al-'Askarī's brother, Ja'far. The saying about the imamate not falling to brothers only applies when the elder has no son.

The most important feature of this list is the all-pervasive, messianic interest and the basic belief in the necessity, to ensure the existence of the world, that there should be an imam, even if he is not manifest and is not known. The exceptions are the sects which acknowledged Ja'far, who must have been born after 847 and may have lived into the tenth century. Within the messianists, one may distinguish those who are concerned to leave the matter vague, especially the ninth and eleventh sects, and those who are trying to find arguments to show that a particular person is imam. Some of the arguments about the past series of imams are attempts to establish some view in the present, for example, either to assert or to deny the imamate of Ja'far. Just why anyone wanted to assert the imamate of Ja'far is not clear. It seems unlikely that they wanted him as an actual leader. So the probability is that they were using this assertion as a way of countering some view of their opponents that they disliked. Perhaps what they disliked was the conception of an imam in concealment. The use of *bāṭin* (82.2) makes one wonder if they were attracted to some form of Isma'ilism.

Concluding remarks

It remains to try to sketch, in outline, the picture of developments that is dimly glimpsed through all this mass of details. Despite the hypothetical character of many of the arguments, certain points seem to be relatively certain.

Firstly, then, there is the presence of messianism, in the sense of an expectation of a semidivine, or inspired, deliverer. This was found in the Umayyad period and was still strong when *Firaq al-Shī'a* was written about 900. It was essentially religious, springing from a need for assurance that man's life in the world was meaningful; the assurance came from the firm belief that one day a deliverer would come and set all wrongs right. Normally, messianism was politically quietist, but occasionally a strong leader would claim that he was the imam or the imam's emissary,

and would call for revolutionary action. This transition to political activism was achieved by saying that the hidden imam had come, or was about to come, out of concealment. The activism was on the whole exceptional, and seems to have been as much connected with moderate messianic views as with the "extremist" view, later characteristic of Isma'ilism, which included such conceptions as those of the transmigration of souls and divine inherence in men. It should be noted that messianism, except when it becomes activist, implies that there is no active imam recognized by contemporaries. Where messianists assert that a definite person is the imam in concealment, they may justify this by speaking of a series of imams of which he is the last; but *ex hypothesi* this series cannot be continued into the historical present.

Secondly, there were pure activists, that is, actual leaders of revolts and their followers. All that was necessary was that a man should be an effective leader, and either be a member of "the family" or make a claim to be an agent of such a person. Until the Fatimids, there was little mention of theological ideas, and little interest in showing that the leader came as latest in a recognized series of imams. After the failure of a revolt, there might be some resort to messianism to explain the failure and give fresh hope (as in the case of the Zaidi sect of Jārūdīya in Ash., I, 67. 12-16).

Thirdly, there is the question whether there were moderates who were neither messianists nor activists, yet recognized a series of imams, of whom the latest was alive and not hidden. Common sense suggests that, under the Abbasids, it must have been impossible to recognise a living man as imam, unless within an underground activist movement. Apart from this, it might be possible to recognize a man as head of the Alids (or the Husainid branch of the Alid family), but this is far from what is usually meant by recognizing an imam. Careful examination of the statements in *Firaq al-Shī'a* shows a complete absence of any decisive evidence for widespread recognition of the imams during their lifetime. Such recognition, then, cannot be the distinguishing mark of any moderate Shi'ites.

Yet there appear to have been a number of scholars who might be described as "moderates". One such was Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, who flourished about the first quarter of the ninth century. Al-Ash'arī and others tell us many of the views he held on theological questions, and how he discussed various points with Mu'tazilites; but very little is reported about his views on the imamate. The chief point seems to be that most of the Companions were in error in not recognizing 'Alī in 632. Associated with this point is the view that the text of the Koran had been corrupted and was not reliable (*Intiṣār*, 41,139). Now these two points both imply attacks on the Sunni traditionists and jurists; their views rested mainly on Koran and Traditions, and if the Koran was corrupt and the first transmitters of Traditions unreliable, little was left. Such a political attitude further implied acceptance of the Abbasid regime, since the chief interest was to maintain

and improve one's place within the existing structure. Scholars, then, who held such views, cannot have been activist in the sense of working to overthrow the regime.

The chief remaining possibility seems to be that they were messianists, but in a vague and indefinite way, that is, not expecting the return of one particular person. The ninth and eleventh sects, in §32, are indefinite messianists in this sense; and indeed the twelfth set of "true Imamis" is less definite than the Imamis later became, merely saying the imam must be a son of the last imam. There is thus some justification for thinking that there was a body of people who subscribed, in a vague way, to the doctrine of the coming of the Mahdi, but did not identify him with any particular person, and probably did not attach undue importance to the doctrine. These probably constituted a large part of those claimed by later Imamis as followers of the imams during their lifetime; but this claim is, almost entirely, later propaganda.

The Zaidis began as activists and opponents of the conception of the hidden imam; but after failures, some of them, at least, accepted that conception. Their distinguishing feature, however, came to be the acceptance of the caliphates of Abū Bakr abd 'Umar; and this had the implication that the Sunni Traditions were to be accepted as sound. Perhaps most of the Zaidis continued to be activist, in the sense of supporting the Abbasid dynasty and its policy of compromise, at least until the change of policy in 849.

Another question, and a very difficult one, is that of how and when the series of imams came to be recognized. From *Firaq al-Shī'a* it may be seen that, of the twelve imams, those to whom the messianists were most attracted were Ja'far (VI), Mūsā (VII), al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (XI) and his son Muḥammad (XII). The reason for the attraction may have been uncertainty in the case of VII (alleged to have been killed in prison) and XII (whose very existence was questioned). In the case of XI, it was doubtless the absence of an obvious successor. Only in the case of VI (Ja'far) was there, perhaps, some genuine following based on personal contacts. Prior to Ja'far, the chief center of messianic interest was Ibn al-Ḥanafīya. It seems to have been in the process of justifying the belief that a particular person was the Mahdi that the series of imams gradually gained recognition. Details are uncertain. It was noted, above, that the succession of Ismā'īl to Ja'far had been denied before about 840, doubtless by partisans of the Mahdi-ship of Mūsā (§20). Discussions before this date may also have aimed at excluding Ibn al-Ḥanafīya and his descendants.

The need—or perhaps rather the opportunity—for further discussion came after the death of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī in 874. The reports in *Firaq al-Shī'a* show that there was still no generally accepted view on the succession to the imamate. Most of the differences between the "sects" described probably went back to personal reasons—various men,

each wanting to improve his position by having his views accepted. It is therefore remarkable that, early in the tenth century, most of these groups of messianists and others had been brought together on the basis of a common Imami doctrine. By insisting that the hidden imam must not be searched for, but allowed to choose his own time for manifesting himself, they in effect declared against revolutionary activity (but it would be interesting to look into their relations with the Buwayhids during the rise to power of the latter). They were not altogether quietists, but accepted the existing regime and functioned as a party in it, and did not even gain any undue advantages under the Imami Buwayhids.

Finally, there are the Isma'ilis, about whom an Imami book, like *Firaq al-Shī'a*, has relatively little information. In the early decades of the Abbasids, there were groups who combined messianism with "extremist" views. In the light of what has been said, it is almost certain that these messianist groups, even when interested in Ismā'il, did not at first recognize any series of imams. It is also very doubtful whether there was any underground activism; certainly, it should not be assumed that there was any continuous organized movement. The "extremist" ideas, of course, were propagated in various ways, but this process need not require much organizational continuity. It seems by no means impossible that most of the groups which came into the Fatimids and Isma'ili movement were messianist and quietist until towards the end of the ninth century. It was probably this transition to activism, together with the consolidation of their rivals, the Imamis, that made it necessary to have a definite Isma'ili theory of the imamate.

Notes

- 1 "Shī'ism under the Umayyads," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1960), 158–172; "Political Attitudes of the Mu'tazilah," *ibid.* (1963); "The Rāfiḍites," *Oriens*, XV (1962); *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1962), especially chap. 6; *Muslim Intellectual* (Edinburgh, 1963), especially chap. 4; "The Muslim Yearning for a Saviour," *E. O. James Presentation Volume* (1963).
- 2 Cf. *GAL, Suppl.*, I, 319 f.; *Oriens*, VII, 204; *Der Islam*, XXXVII (1961), 43n.
- 3 Abbreviations used: Ash. = Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmīyīn*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1929). Friedlaender = I. Friedlaender, "The Heterodoxies of the Shī'ites . . .," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, XXVIII (1907), 1–80; XXIX (1909), 1–183 (referred to respectively as I and II). *Intiṣār* = Al-Khaiyāt, *K. al-Intiṣār*, ed. H. S. Nyberg (Cairo, 1925). Lewis, *Ismā'ilism* = Bernard Lewis, *The Origins of Ismā'ilism* (Cambridge, 1940).