

## THE ZAYDIYYA

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The legal tradition of the Zaydīs goes back to Zayd ibn ‘Alī, the grandson of al-Ḥusayn (and half-brother of the fifth Imam of the Twelvers, Muhammad al-Bāqir) who was killed in 122/740 during a failed revolt against the Umayyad Caliph al-Hishām in Kūfa (see above, p. 20 f). The *juristic* works ascribed to Zayd are, however, not authentic;<sup>1</sup> they are products of the tradition of the Zaydī school which was developed in the second half of the 2nd/8th century in Kūfa. Among the earliest Zaydī trends noted by the Arab heresiographers the rigorous Jārūdīs are worth particular mention, being the only ones to consider ‘Alī the designated rightful successor of the Prophet (while the Butrites recognised Abū Bakr and ‘Umar as Caliphs). They expected that the True Imam would fight for his rights with the sword against usurpers.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest Kufan tradition of the Zaydiyya is reflected in the works of the Kufan al-Murādī (Muhammad ibn Nuṣayr) who was still alive in 252/866; he is the most important collector of Zaydī legal traditions in the 3rd/9th century.<sup>3</sup> His contemporary, the Hasanid al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860),<sup>4</sup> a Medinan who taught in al-Rass near Medina, occupies a special place compared with the general Kufan tradition. His quite independent teachings pave the way for the later change of Zaydī theology to the rationalism of the Mu‘tazilites.<sup>5</sup>

As may be expected, it is mainly the Imamate doctrine which distinguishes the Zaydīs from other Shiite trends. ‘Alī’s right to the Imamate is undisputed; it is based on his early confession of Islam and his pre-eminence as the best (*al-afdāl*) of the Muslims. After him his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn are called to the Imamate by God’s will through designation (*naṣṣ*). After them, however, the claim to the Imamate is handed down not through any particular line – as with the Imāmīs or the Ismā‘īlīs – but rather through the whole House of the Alids. All members of the Prophet’s family are eligible for the Imamate. The two most important pieces of evidence for this are the Quranic verse 33, 33: ‘Allah’s wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O Folk of the Household, and cleanse you

with a thorough cleaning', and a saying by the Prophet Muḥammad who promises to leave his community two treasures which guarantee right guidance: 'God's Book and my lineage, the Family of the House'. In principle every Alid thus has a claim to the Imamate; the true Imam is he who actually establishes himself sword in hand. The 'emergence' (*khurūj*) – the term could also be rendered as 'armed rebellion' – makes the Imam eligible. The Husaynids venerated by the Twelvers as Imams are disqualified by their inactivity (*qu'ūd*: abstention/sitting). Even the Imāmī practice of *taqiyya*, the act of concealing one's Shiite convictions, is rejected.

'With a pinch of salt it might be said that the fundamental difference between the two main Shiite branches, the different Imāmī denominations and the Zaydīs, can be formulated as: the first tend in their constitutional theory towards determinism and faithfully accept as Imam whomsoever God gives them. The Zaydīs are synergists and, irrespective of the recognition of God, seek to cooperate as His agents in the fate of the nations.'<sup>6</sup>

The Zaydīs, therefore, acknowledge no Hidden Imam and no return of the Mahdī;<sup>7</sup> the Imam is neither infallible (*ma'sūm*) nor does he work miracles; children not of age are excluded from the Imamate.

Zaydī ideas were put into effect in the formation of two states in the 3rd/9th century, in Ṭabaristān, south of the Caspian Sea, and in Yemen. Both Imamates came into being through the 'emergence' of Ḥasanid pretenders.

The northern Zaydī state in Ṭabaristān was founded by a certain al-Ḥasan ibn Zayd who set himself at the head of Daylamite supporters in 250/864 in Kalār, Shālūs (now Chālūs) and Sāriya (Sārī). He made Āmul his residence after defeating the Abbasid governor, and subjugated Gurgān in the east, Gīlān in the west and the mountain region of Daylam in the south – the Elburz. His supporters even controlled the towns of Rayy and Qazvīn on occasion. After his death in 270/884 he was succeeded by his brother Muḥammad who was killed in 287/900 fighting the Baghdadī governors. The two brothers do not appear to have laid claim to the Imamate themselves but seem to have been satisfied with the title 'He who summons to the Truth' (*al-dā'ī ilā 'l-ḥaqq*). Fourteen years later an Alid pretender – this time a Ḥusaynid – was again able to set himself up as the prince of Ṭabaristān. After defeating the troops of the Sāmānid governor of Bukhara al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Uṭrūsh, called al-Nāsir li 'l-Ḥaqq (He who conquers for the Truth) marched into Āmul. Al-Uṭrūsh, who founded his own school within the Zaydiyya (the Nāsirīyya of the northern state) with his own theologico-juristic writings, successfully proselytised among the still pre-dominantly non-Islamic farmers and shepherds in the mountain region of Daylam. On his deathbed in 304/917 he is said to have designated his vizier, al-Ḥasan ibn al-Qāsim, a Ḥasanid, as his successor in place of one of his three sons; the latter, called the 'small dā'ī' (*al-dā'ī al-ṣaghīr*), fell in 316/928 in battle against the Sāmānids of Bukhara, and thus the Zaydī state of Ṭabaristān met its end. In 359/964, however, in Hawsam in Gīlān

(south west of the Caspian Sea) the Ḥasanid Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan from Baghdad, under the name al-Mahdī li-dīn Allāh, once more founded a Zaydī Imamate which continued under changing Ḥasanid dynasties into the 12th century.<sup>8</sup>

The southern Zaydī state lasted until our own time, and the Yemeni Imamate was not swept away until the Revolution of 1962. Its founder, Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn, was a grandson of the Zaydī scholar al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (see above p. 206) and bore the name al-Rassī after his family residence – al-Rass near Medina. After Yaḥyā had vainly attempted to gain a foothold in Ṭabaristān, quarrelling north Yemeni tribes called him in 280/893 to the country as a mediator and eventually the Khawlān tribe in Ṣa‘da recognised him as Imam under the name al-Hādī ilā ‘l-Haqq (He who leads the Way to the Truth). In protracted wars he extended his power to Najrān (in 284/897) and Ṣan‘ā’ (288/901). In his juristic writings al-Hādī continued the doctrine of his grandfather al-Qāsim, and the Zaydī legal school in Yemen is called the Qāsimiyya-Hadawiyya after these two authorities. In contrast to his grandfather, however, al-Hādī adopted the rationalist theology of the Baghdadi Mu‘tazilites for the first time.<sup>9</sup>

After al-Hādī’s death in 298/911 two of his sons succeeded him as Imam.<sup>10</sup> His grandson Yaḥyā transmitted the Medinan-Yemeni legal tradition to Daylam where it competed with the native Nāṣirī school from then on.<sup>11</sup> ‘In the Caspian Imams of the 4th/10th century the influence of the theology of the Mu‘tazilite School on the Zaydīs reached its apex.’<sup>12</sup>

In the 4th/10th century the Yemeni Imamate was weakened by troubles over the succession and was pushed back to the north by the Ismā‘īlī Ṣulayḥids, partisans of the Egyptian Fāṭimids (see above p. 176), who conquered Ṣan‘ā’ and Ṣa‘da. It was not until the beginning of the 12th century that descendants of the Imam al-Hādī once more began to extend their rule southwards from Najrān and Ṣa‘da; the Imam Ahmad al-Mutawakkil (533–566/1138–1170) was the new founder of the Zaydī Imamate.<sup>13</sup> While the Caspian and Yemeni Imamates had gone their own separate political and theologico-juristic ways a rapprochement now took place with a reversal in the direction of influence: the literature of the north now received recognition in Yemen and particularly through Qādī Shams al-Dīn Ja‘far (d. 573/1177) who had studied in Kūfa and Rayy.<sup>14</sup> The Yemeni Imams were now even recognised by the Caspian Zaydī communities who no longer had any political leadership. The northern communities soon lost any real significance; they shrank under pressure from the Ismā‘īlīs of Alamūt (see above p. 185) and in the Ṣafavid period in the 16th century they were incorporated – like the Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs – into the Twelver Shia.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, the Yemeni Imamate prevailed even after the occupation of South Yemen by the Egyptian Ayyūbids (569–626/1174–1229). When the first Rasūlid Sultan of Zabīd, ‘Umar (626–647/1229–1250), conquered

Ta'izz and Ṣan'ā', the Zaydī Imams once more withdrew to Ṣa'da for a century and a half. After the establishment of the Sunni Ṭāhirid dynasty of Lahj and Aden, Ṣan'ā' was fought over at length between this dynasty and the Zaydī Imamate. In 933/1517 an army of the Egyptian Mamlūk sultan occupied Yemen, and the Imam had to retreat to Thulā. In the same year, however, Egypt was occupied by the Ottomans who were now extending their rule to the Red Sea coast. For a long time the Imam Sharaf al-Dīn successfully defended his rule against the Ottomans, but he was eventually defeated in 1539 and deported to Istanbul where he died in prison, and Yemen became an Ottoman province (*eyālet*). In 1595, al-Qāsim al-Manṣūr, a descendant of al-Hādī, emerged as Imam and declared war against the Ottomans; his son and successor Muḥammad al-Mu'ayyad (from 1620) led the fighting against the Turkish occupying force to a successful conclusion. In 1635 the last Ottoman governor left Yemen and Ṣan'ā' once again became the capital of an independent Zaydī Imamate for more than two centuries. In April 1872 the town was occupied by the Turks for the second time; Yemen was once more made into an Ottoman province (*vilāyet*) and the Imam was divested of all sovereign rights. The Imam Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Manṣūr (1890–1904), who resided in Ṣa'da and in the castle of al-Ahnūm, attempted, in battle against the Turks and in negotiations with the Sublime Porte, at least to have his status recognised as the religious head of the Zaydīs. His son Yahyā al-Mutawakkil (1904–1948) was already *de facto* independent during the First World War; with the support of the Hāsīd and Bakīl tribes he was able to march into Ṣan'ā' in November 1918. After his murder by a court cōterie in 1948 his son Sayf al-Islām Aḥmad re-conquered Ṣan'ā' with the help of the loyal northern tribes and assumed the title of king. Aḥmad's Imamate (from 1948 to 1962) was frequently threatened by attempted coups from a modernist opposition, but it was his son Muḥammad al-Badr al-Manṣūr billāh who was overthrown by republican officers on 26th September 1962 after a reign which lasted only a week. After escaping to Saudi Arabia, with the help of the northern and eastern tribes al-Badr vainly attempted to win back his throne during the civil war from 1962–70. Since his death in English exile the Imamate has been vacant: according to Zaydī Imamate doctrine a quite permissible situation for which there are many precedents. The 'emergence' (*khurūj*) of a new Imam is theoretically possible. At present the Zaydīs, who with 4 million members make up about half the population of the former Yemen Arab Republic, (North Yeman)<sup>16</sup> are without a religious leader.

### Bibliography

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### Notes

- 1 Strothmann (1923); Madelung (1965), 53–61.
- 2 Madelung (1965), 44ff.: 'Die Dogmatik der frühen Zaidiya'.
- 3 Madelung (1965), 82ff.
- 4 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā'īl b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.
- 5 Madelung (1965), 86–152.
- 6 Strothmann, *Staatsrecht*, 46.
- 7 Only the ephemeral sect of the Ḥusaynīs distributed mainly in western Yemen awaited the return of the Imam al-Ḥusayn al-Mahdī li-dīn Allāh (401–404/1010–1013); the sect was still in existence in the 15th century; Madelung (1965), 198–201.
- 8 Madelung (1965), 175–85.
- 9 Ibid., 163–8.
- 10 Strothmann, *Staatsrecht*, 59f.; Madelung (1965), 169ff.
- 11 Madelung (1965), 172–4.
- 12 Madelung (1965), 185.
- 13 Ibid., 210ff.
- 14 Ibid., 212–16.
- 15 On the situation of the Caspian communities from the 12th to the 16th century see Madelung (1965), 207–9 and 217f.
- 16 M. El-Azzazi, *Die Entwicklung der Arabischen Republik Jemen*, Tübingen/Basel 1978, 36. Now the two parts of Yemen are united as the Yemen Republic.