THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OCCULTATION
OF THE TWELFTH SHI’ITE IMAM

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Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts,
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This present thesis deals with the historical background of the occultation of the twelfth Imam. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī is believed to have lived in a state of concealment between the years 260-329/874-941, which was regarded as the first concealment. In 329/941 his second occultation, which has lasted until the present day, began. The Imamites regarded him as the promised al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, whose occultation and reappearance had been predicted by the Prophet and the Imams, and whose rising would fill the earth with justice and equity. As the problem of the nature of the Ghayba of the twelfth Imam is an old one in the history of Shiʿism, and is closely connected with the question of the Imāma, all the relevant materials have been re-examined and evaluated, and an attempt has been made to establish and study the actual historical aspects of the problem.

In Chapter One an attempt has been made to study the role of Prophetic traditions, and the Imams' statements predicting the Ghayba, in the occultation of the twelfth Imam, while Chapter Two has been devoted to the study of the Imams' aspirations to the political authority and their effect upon the evolution of the question of the Ghayba of the twelfth Imam.

Chapter Three deals with the situation of the Imamites and their attitude towards any successor to the eleventh
Imam, al-‘Askari. In this chapter the question of the birth of the twelfth Imam, and the reasons for his first concealment, have been re-examined.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six have been devoted to studying the career of the twelfth Imam throughout his first concealment as seen in the activities of his first three deputies (safīrs) and the role of the Wikāla during that period.

In Chapter Seven a study has been made of the career of the fourth safīr and the consequences of his last pronouncement (Tawqī‘), which ended the direct communication of the Imamites with the Imam, and the effect of such a pronouncement on the authority of the Imamite jurists.
This thesis is dedicated to K. Hussain and K. al-Sa'dani, without whose moral support and academic assistance this thesis would never have been written.

I would also like to express my dept of gratitude to Dr. I. K. A. Howard for his invaluable supervision and for laying his personal library at my disposal, and the staff of the Arabic Department of Edinburgh University, who have helped me throughout my period of research, especially Prof. W. M. Watt, Mr. J. R. Walsh, Miss I. Crawford, the secretary of the Muir Institute, who has helped me in many matters during my residence in Edinburgh, and Doctors Robert and Carol Hillenbrand, who assisted me in the translation of German texts. Finally I would like to thank D. S. Straly for typing my thesis so neatly, and I also take this opportunity to express the gratitude I owe to P. Heseltine for her patience and for helping me in reading the manuscript of this thesis and advising me on English style.
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Employed in the Footnotes and in the Bibliography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Sunan</td>
<td>al-Sajistānī, Abū Dāwūd, Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Cairo, 1370/1951.</td>
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al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtāra


Ibar

Ibn Khalūdūn, al-‘Ibar wa dīwān al-Mubtadā’ wa-l-Khabar, 7 vols., Cairo, 1284-7/1867-70.

Ikhtiyār


Ilal


al-Īrshād


Ithbāt


J. Wuzarā

al-Jahshayarī, Muḥammad b. ‘Abdūs, Kitāb al-Wuzarā’ wa-l-Kuttāb, Cairo, 1357/1939.

al-Īrshād


Kamāl


al-Kāmil


Khaṭīb

al-Khaṭīb al-Baḥdādī, Tārīkh Baḥdād, 14 vols., Cairo, 1349/1931.
Kindī


Maqātil

al-İṣfahānī, Abū al-Faraj, Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyyīn, Cairo, 1368/1949, also Najaf, 1965.

Milal


Mizān


al-Muntazam


Murūj


M. Sahīh

Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Nisābūrī, Sahīh Muslim, Cairo, 1377/1956.

al-Najāshi

al-Najāshī, ʻAbd al-‘Abbās, Kitāb al-Rijāl, Tehran, n.d.

N. Firaq


Nujūm

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Edition, Location</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T. al-Ghayba</td>
<td>idem, Kitāb al-Ghayba, Tabriz, 1322/1904.</td>
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<tr>
<td>al-Tirmīdī</td>
<td>al-Tirmīdī, Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā, Sunan</td>
<td>al-Tirmīdī, Cairo, 1356/1937.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

Introduction and survey of the sources 1-19

Chapter I: The Role of Traditions in the Occultation of the twelfth Imam

1. The early usage of the term al-Mahdi 20-26
2. The occultation of al-Qāʾīm al-Mahdi in the Qurʾān 26-30
3. The traditions concerning the twelfth Imam and his occultation 30-60

3.1. The traditions concerning al-Qāʾīm al-Mahdi 30-34

3.2. The traditions of the Sunnites (Ahl al-Hadīth) 34-35

3.3. The twelfth Imam in the Zaydite traditions 36-38

3.4. The twelfth Imam in the Imamite traditions 38-60

3.4.1. The traditions concerning the twelfth Imam 39-43

3.4.2. The political role of al-Qāʾīm 43-51

3.4.3. The signs of the rise of al-Qāʾīm 51-60
Chapter II: The role of the Imams in the Shi'ite underground activities and their influence upon the evolution of the Ghayba

1. al-Ṣādiq's attitude towards the new regime 61-66
2. The Imamite activities during the period of al-Kāẓim (148-183/765-799) 67-82
3. The attitude of al-Riḍā towards the 'Alid revolt against al-Ma'mūn 83-95
4. The development of the Imamite organization (al-Wikāla) during the time of al-Jawād 95-101
5. The 'Abbāsids' attitude towards the activities of al-Hādī 101-114
6. Conclusion 114-116

Chapter III: The Imamites' views concerning the concealed Imam and the question of his birth (254-260/868-874)

1. The attitude of the Imamites towards al-Hādī's successor 117-126
   1.1 The followers of al-‘Askarī (al-Qaṭ‘iyya) 117-119
   1.2. The Muḥammadīyya 119-121
   1.3. The original Ja‘farites 122-123
   1.4. The Numayriyya 123-126
2. The schisms amongst the adherents of al-‘Askarī after his death 126-151
   2.1. Introduction 126-132
   2.2. Schism I, The Wāqifa at al-‘Askarī 132-135
2.3. Schism II, The Ja'farites 135-141
2.4. Schism III, The Muhammadiyya 142
2.5. Schism IV, The Qaṭ'īyya 143-148
2.7. Conclusion 149-151

3. The question of the birth of the twelfth Imam 151-165
3.1. The origin of the Imam's mother 152-155
3.2. The birth of the twelfth Imam 155-165

4. The reasons for the first occultation of the twelfth Imam 166-168
5. Al-'Askari's plan to hide his successor 168-170
6. The 'Abbāsid attempt to arrest al-'Askari's son 171-174

Chapter IV: The underground activities of the twelfth Imam as seen in the actions of the safīrs

1. A brief study of the Wikāla before the twelfth Imam 175-183
2. The main functions of the Wikāla 184-187
3. The early career of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd 187-190
4. The career of the first safīr 190-193
5. The opposition to the first safīr 193-201
6. The Imam's Wikāla (the political system of communication) during the time of the first safīr 201-213
6.1. Iraq: the centre of the Wikāla  202-206
6.2. The second area, Egypt, Hijaz and Yemen  206-209
6.3. The third area, Azerbayjan and Arran  209-210
6.4. The fourth area, Qumm and Dinawar  210
6.5. The fifth area, Rayy and Khurasan  211-213

7. The death of the first safīr  213-215

Chapter V: The underground activities of the second safīr, Abū Ja‘far

1. The designation of the second safīr, Abū Ja‘far  216-229

1.1. Ibn Hilāl  217-223
1.2. al-Bilālī  223-226
1.3. Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr  226-229

2. The activities of Abū Ja‘far, the second safīr  230-242

2.1. The career of Abū Ja‘far  230-233
2.2. The agents of the second safīr in Baghdad  233-237
2.3. The relationship of the second safīr to the agents in the other provinces  237-242

3. The effect of the Shi‘ite revolutionary activities upon the ‘Abbāsids’ attitude towards the twelfth Imam (278-305/891-917)  243-259
4. The death of Abū Ja'far 260-261

Chapter VI: The career of the third safīr, al-Nawbakhtī
1. al-Nawbakhtī's activities during the time of the second safīr 262-264
2. The installation of the third safīr, al-Nawbakhtī 264-268
3. The activities of Ibn Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtī 269-279
4. The third safīr and al-Shalmaghānī 279-291

Chapter VII: The fourth safīr and the complete occultation of the twelfth Imam
1. The career of the fourth safīr (326-329/937-941) 292-295
2. An analysis of the Tawqī‘ of the fourth safīr 295-304
3. The Imamite attitude towards the second occultation 305-313
4. The attitude of the ordinary Imamites towards the second occultation 314-318
5. The application of the epithet al-Mahdī to the twelfth Imam 319-324
6. The effect of the complete occultation on the position of the Imamite Fugahā‘ 324-334

Conclusion 335-342

Appendix A 343-348

Appendix B 349-351

Bibliography 352-375
1. Introduction

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-‘Askari is the twelfth Imam of the present Shi‘ite sect, al-Ithnā ‘Ashariyya, who form the second largest sect in Islam. He appears to have been born in 256 A.H./869 A.D. and then four years later, after the death of his father al-‘Askari, the eleventh Imam, he was hidden from the 'Abbāsid authorities as a precaution. His whereabouts were only disclosed to a very few of his followers. For, after this, four of his father's close associates became successive mediators between the twelfth Imam and his followers, until the year 329/941. This period has been considered by the Imamites as the first or the short occultation (al-Ghayba) of the twelfth Imam, during which the four ṣafīrs directly supervised the religious and political underground activities of the Imamites.

The last ṣafīr announced on his death-bed in 329/941 that the twelfth Imam had decided not to appoint another ṣafīr and had completely disappeared. The Imamites considered this declaration as the beginning of the second occultation of the twelfth Imam, which according to them has continued until the present time.

As a result of the second occultation the series of Imams stopped at the number twelve, and accordingly the Imamites believe that the twelfth Imam was al-Qā‘im, whose
rising was promised by the Prophet and who is believed to have said that a descendant from the progeny of his daughter Fāţima would rise with the sword (i.e. by militant means) to fill the world with justice and equity. For this reason they believe that he is still alive in a state of occultation until the moment of his rising, at an unspecified time in the future.

From the first half of the fourth/tenth century onwards many scholars have been examining the occultation of the twelfth Imam from the theological point of view, whereas the origin of this event appears to have been historical. However, because of the close connection of the occultation with the religious and political leadership, the Imāma, in the Shi’ite doctrine it became involved in the theological arguments and gradually its historical aspects came to be ignored. Thus modern scholars like Ignaz Goldziher, Margoliouth, Snouck Hurgronje and Darmesteter inclined to study the occultation of the twelfth Imam as a theological phenomenon and tried to trace the pre-Islamic origins of it.

The present inquiry is an attempt to study the historical background and circumstances of the occultation of the twelfth Imam. The Imamites had political ambitions to obtain power under the leadership of an Imam called al-Qā’im bi-l-sayf (the one who will rise with the sword). This study tries to examine the role of these ambitions in his occultation and to trace as well the evolution of the underground Imamite organization (al-Wikāla) and its role during the time of the short occultation of the twelfth Imam.
It is essential to make a survey of the main sources of this study so that the viewpoint of each of these sources can be understood and the information they contain evaluated accordingly.

2. Survey of the sources

2.1. Books on the question of the Ghayba

It is indeed a very old idea in Imamite history, that one Imam from the progeny of the Prophet would go into hiding, to prepare for the day when he will rise again under the title al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī and fill the world with justice. The concealment (al-Ghayba) was considered a sign of the real al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī, and before the occultation of the twelfth Imam in 260/874 and thereafter many Shi'ite writers had collected traditions attributed to the Prophet and the Imams concerning this issue. These traditions have been used by many Shi'ite groups to back up the claims of their leaders who aspired to power by adopting the title of al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī, and were used before 260/874 by some Imamites themselves as evidence that some of their deceased Imams were in fact al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī. Finally the same traditions have been used by the Imamites to support their claims that the twelfth Imam was al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī himself. These works on the subject of the Ghayba can be divided into three stages.
2.1.1. Books on the question of the occultation before 260/874

The Imamite scholars had compiled about four hundred books (al-Usūl al-Arba‘mi‘a) during the lifetimes of the eleven Imams. Some of them dealt with the subject of the Imam's concealment, recording traditions on the authority of the Prophet and the Imams predicting that an Imam would go into occultation. These traditions, however, neither named the Imam nor fixed the time in which his occultation would start. The ambiguity of these traditions encouraged many Shi‘ites to apply them to many Imams. So the Wāqifa held that Mūsā al-Kāzim, the seventh Imam, was the one in concealment whereas al-Imāmiyya al-Qaṭ‘iyya and al-Zaydiyya al-Jārūdiyya, held that he was the twelfth Imam but without identifying his name. Despite the fact that a great majority of these early works are not extant, it appears that during the fourth and fifth centuries the Imamite authors based their works concerning al-Ghayba on these early writings. The following works are examples of the Wāqifite, Zaydite and Imamite views on this matter.

1. The founder of this sect was Abū al-Jārūd Ziyād b. al-Mundhir, the companion of the fifth Imam, al-Bāqir. After the revolt of Zayd b. 'Alī, Abū al-Jārūd moved from al-Bāqir and put forward the claim of the Imamate of Zayd, establishing a new sect called al-Zaydiyya al-Jārūdiyya. Some later representatives of this sect agree with the Imamites that the series of the Imams ended with the number twelve but others claim that they were thirteen by including Zayd.
1) The Wāqifa

1. Al-Anmā'ī Ibrāhīm b. Ṣāliḥ al-Kūfī, was a companion of the fifth Imam, al-Bāqir (d. 114/732). He wrote a book entitled al-Ghayba which represents the Wāqifite point of view, although the information he gave was used by such later scholars as ʿAlī b. Nūḥ (d. before 423/1031) and al-Tūsī to support the Imamite view.¹

2. Al-Tāʾī al-Tāṭārī, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan, was a companion of the seventh Imam, al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), and he held that the latter was the hidden Imam. In defence of his view he wrote Kitāb al-Ghayba, which became the framework for the works of later Wāqifite authors like Ibn Sumāʿa (d. 263/877) on this issue.²

3. Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sumāʿa, composed a book on al-Ghayba, following the footsteps of his Wāqifite teacher al-Tāʾī al-Tāṭārī.³ However those Imamites who lived during the period from 260-329/874-940-1, like al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār (d. 292/904) and al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940), used his information to support their claim that the concealed Imam was not the seventh Imam but the twelfth Imam.⁴

² al-Najāshi, 193; T. al-Fihrist, 216-7.
³ al-Najāshi, 32-3; T. al-Fihrist, 97-8.
ii) The Zaydites

Abū Sa‘īd ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb al-Rawājīnī al-‘Asfārī (d. 250/864) was one of the leading scholars of the Shi‘ite sect al-Zaydiyya al-Jarudiyya. He compiled a book of traditions entitled Kitāb Abū Sa‘īd al-‘Asfārī. The significance of this work is that its author cites a tradition referring to the occultation ten years before its occurrence. He also mentions other traditions which point to the fact that the number of the Imams would end with the twelfth Imam, and that this would be al-Qā‘im. However as compared with the Imamites he does not mention the names of the twelve Imams. The manuscript of this work is included in this study as an appendix.

Al-‘Asfārī’s work along with the works of Sulaym b. Qays (d. 80-90/699-707) and al-Ḥasan b. Mahbūb al-Sarrād (d. 244/838) have been used extensively by such Imamites as al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), al-Nu‘mānī (d. 360/970) and al-Ṣadūq (d. 380/991) to prove the existence of the twelfth Imam and his subsequent occultation.

iii) The Imamites

1. ‘Alī b. Mahzayār al-Ahwāzī was a close associate of the ninth Imam, al-Jawād, and was appointed by the latter as his representative in al-Ahwāz and continued to remain in office throughout the reign of the tenth Imam, al-Ḥādī. He wrote two works, called Kitāb al-Malāḥim and Kitāb al-Qā‘īm, both dealing with the occultation of the
Imam and his subsequent rising by force.\textsuperscript{1} Then between
the years 260 and 329/874-940 his two sons Ibrāhīm and
Muḥammad became the authorised representatives of the
twelfth Imam in al-Āhwāz. It is on their authority that
al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣadūq give important information concerning
the communication methods employed in the underground
activities of the Imamites.

2. In his work on the subject of al-Ghayba called
al-Mashyakha, al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb al-Sarrād (d. 224/838)
records several anecdotes which are often attributed to
the Imams. This work has been lost but several quotations
from it are included in the available Imamite sources.

3. Al-Faḍl b. Shādān al-Nisāḥurī (d. 260/873) was
a well-known Imamite scholar and secured the trust and the
praise of the eleventh Imam. He also compiled a book
called al-Ghayba\textsuperscript{2}, but it appears that most of its material
is quoted from the work of al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb.\textsuperscript{3} The
importance of al-Faḍl’s work lies in the fact that he
recorded traditions indicating that the twelfth Imam would
be al-Qā'im since al-Faḍl died two months before the death
of the eleventh Imam in 260/874. Many later writers relied
on al-Faḍl’s work like al-Tūsī in his own work entitled
al-Ghayba. Bahā’al-Dīn al-Nīlī (d. 790/1388) also compiled
his work entitled al-Ghayba by summarising al-Faḍl’s work.\textsuperscript{4}
Despite the fact that the actual work of al-Faḍl is missing,

\textsuperscript{1} al-Najāshī, 191; T. al-Fihrist, 226.
\textsuperscript{2} al-Najāshī, 235-6.
\textsuperscript{3} al-Galbānī, Muntakhab al-Athar (Tehran, n.d.), 467.
\textsuperscript{4} Buzurg, al-Dharī’a, XX, 201.
it seems that the works *Kifāyat al-Muhtadī fi Ma‘rifat al-Mahdī* by Mīr al-Wḥī (d. 12th/18th century) and *Kashf al-Astār* by Mīrza Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 1320/1902) were copies of his work.¹ Therefore it seems reasonable to rely on those later sources with regards to the question of this thesis.

2.1.2. Books on the subject of the *Ghayba* written between the years 260-329/874-941

During the years of the short occultation (260-329/874-940) many books reflecting different views were composed on the question of *al-Ghayba*. These books were mainly collections of anecdotes based on works which had been written before 260/874. The authors of these works were either jurists or propagandists and they participated in the activities of the underground organization of the Imamites led by the twelfth Imam himself. Thus they recorded important information, which cannot be found in the history books compiled in the same period.

In 262/876, Ibrāhīm b. Ishaq al-Nahawandī (d. 286/899) claimed to be the representative of the twelfth Imam in Baghdad.² He composed a book about the *Ghayba* reflecting the view of the extremists (*al-Ghulāt*). Later al-Nu‘mānī (d. 360/970) used al-Nahawandī’s information extensively in composing his well-known book *al-Ghayba*.³

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3. N. *al-Ghayba*, 143, 156, 163, 185.
'Abd Allāh b. Ja’far al-Ḥimyarī (d. after 293/905) wrote a book entitled al-Ghayba wa-l-Ḥayra. The importance of his work lies in the fact that he was one of the close associates of the tenth and the eleventh Imams, and later became the agent of the first two deputies (safīrs) of the twelfth Imam. Unfortunately this work and the work called al-Imāma wa-l-Ṭabsira min al-Ḥayra by Ibn Baḥawayh (d. 329/940) are not extant. However, the latter’s son, al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) and al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) made use of these works on a very large scale.

Al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940) devoted much space in the section entitled al-Hujja of his book al-Kāfī to the question of the occultation. He backs up this study with important information on the general situation of the Imamites between the years 260-329/874-940 with special emphasis on the role of the safīrs of the Imam in this period. He recorded many traditions attributed to the Imams concerning the concealment of the twelfth Imam. He quoted this information from the earlier Wāqifite and Imamite authors like al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb (d. 224/838), ‘Abbād b. Ya’qūb al-‘Aṣfari (d. 250/864) and al-Ḥasan b. Sumā’a (d. 263/877). Moreover the agents of the twelfth Imam were the main source of his information on the underground activities of the Imamites.
2.1.3. Books on the question of the Ghayba written after 329/941

Both the occurrence and the prolongation of the second occultation in 329/941 led to a state of confusion among the Imamites. Hence several works have been composed to vindicate the occultation of the twelfth Imam and the reason behind its continuation. Among the works of this period five books can be considered the basis of all later Imamite opinions concerning the concealment of the twelfth Imam. These primary sources have been widely used in this thesis. So it is worth evaluating the information they contain accordingly.

1. Al-Nu'mānī, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Jaʿfar, known as Ibn Abī Zaynab, was a native of the town of Nuʿmānīyya, one of the districts of Wāsit. Then he moved to Baghdad where he was educated in Hadith transmission under the supervision of al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940) and Ibn ʿUqda (d. 333/944). He then went to Syria where he died around the year 360/970.

He wrote a book entitled al-Ghayba on account of the confusion which had spread amongst the Shiʿites after the death of the eleventh Imam, al-ʿAskarī, in the year 260/874. The aim of this book was to prove the correctness of the concealment of the twelfth Imam by relating traditions on the authority of the Prophet and the Imams, predicting the occurrence of the Ghayba. He acquired most of his information from early authors who wrote on this subject, irrespective of their doctrinal views. Among such early authors are
al-Hasan b. Maḥbūb, an Imamite (d. 224/838), al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, an Imamite (d. 260/873), al-Hasan b. Sumā’a, a Waqīfite (d. 263/877), Ibrāhīm b. Ishaq al-Nahāwandī, an extremist (d. 286/899), al-Kulaynī, an Imamite (d. 329/940), the well-known Zaydite jurist Ibn ‘Uqda (d. 333/944), and al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956).¹

The contribution of al-Nu‘mānī in this study is that he was the first compiler after al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956) to give an interpretation of the traditions attributed by al-Kulaynī to the Imams, which indicated that al-Qā’im would have two occultations, the first being short and the second being long. He stated that the first one was the period of the four representatives of the twelfth Imam, lasting from the year 260/874 until the year 329/940-1 and that the second one began after the death of the fourth safīr in 329/941.² Al-Nu‘mānī made a few statements which reflect how the complete occultation of the twelfth Imam threw the Imamites into confusion and caused a massive decrease in their number. In fact al-Nu‘mānī’s interpretation became the basis for all later Imamite works on this subject.

2. Muhammad b. ‘Alī b. Bābawayh, who is better known as al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), wrote a book on the question of the Ghayba entitled Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni‘ma. The information contained in this work is very valuable because al-Ṣadūq relied on the Shi‘ite primary sources (al-Uṣūl) which had been compiled before 260/874

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¹ N. al-Ghayba, 82-6, 100.
² N. al-Ghayba, 91-2.
and treated the subject of this study. Thus we find that he often refers to the authors al-Hasan b. Maḥbūb, al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, al-Hasan b. Sumā’a, al-Ṣaffār, al-Ḥimyarī and al-Ṣadūq's father, Ibn Bābawayh, who had close ties with the third and fourth safīrs of the twelfth Imam. Because the father of al-Ṣadūq was an eminent jurist and the Imam's agent in Qumm he was able to give reliable information regarding the underground communications between the agents and the Imam via his four safīrs. On the other hand, the study of the chain of transmitters (isnād) of some of his reports concerning the birth of the twelfth Imam indicates that al-Ṣadūq obtained his information from such extremists as Muḥammad b. Baḥr. Consequently one must be careful in using these narrations.

3. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu’mān, who is known as al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) was at one time the leader of the Imamites and it was during his time that the question of the occultation began to penetrate the theological discussions; therefore he wrote five articles in defence of the occultation of the twelfth Imam and also compiled an independent work entitled al-Fusūl al-‘Ashara fī al-Ghayba. Despite the dogmatic approach of this work, it records valuable information concerning the historical circumstances which had surrounded the disappearance of the twelfth Imam before 260/874. Al-Mufīd also presents an exposition similar to that of al-Nawbakhtī and Sa’d

al-Qummi, putting forward the fifteen different views held by the Imamites after 260/874. Al-Mufid in fact bore witness to the disappearance of all the fifteen groups by 373/983, except the Twelvers who believed that their leader was the twelfth Imam and that he was in concealment. In his book al-Irshād, al-Mufid follows the method employed by al-Kulaynī and al-Nu‘mānī in the narration of Ḥadīth first of all by proving the existence of the twelfth Imam and then by vindicating the prolongation of his age beyond the life-span of an ordinary person.

4. After al-Mufid his two eminent pupils 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, better known as al-Murtadā (d. 436/1044), and Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Karājākī (d. 449/1057), have followed his rational approach in their treatises on the question of the prolongation of the concealment of the twelfth Imam. This approach is clear in the extant article of al-Murtadā which was published in Baghdad in 1955 under the title Masa'la wajīza fī al-Ghayba and has been translated into English by Sachedina.¹ In 427/1035 al-Karājākī compiled a work entitled al-Burhān 'alā Ṣihat Ṭul 'Umr al-Imām Ṣāḥib al-Zamān, in which he mentions many people whose ages had been prolonged beyond the life-span of an ordinary person. His aim in this was to prove, like al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufid before him, that the prolongation of the life of the twelfth Imam during his occultation was

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not an extraordinary phenomenon. On account of the dogmatic approach of these two works they are devoid of any historical information concerning the actual career of the twelfth Imam between the years 260-329/874-940.

5. The well-known Imamite scholar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) deals with the question of the Ghayba of the twelfth Imam in most of his dogmatic works but the most important one is Kitāb al-Ghayba, in which he makes use of both tradition and reason to prove that the twelfth Imam was al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, and that he must be in a state of occultation. Through his refutation of the other Shi‘ite claims, who held that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 41/661), Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 84/703), al-Ṣādiq (d. 140/765), Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl, al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799) were al-Qā‘im and that they were in hiding, he suggests that the traditions concerning the occultation go back to the time of ‘Alī.

Al-Ṭūsī on the other hand presents reliable historical information on the underground activities of the four representatives of the twelfth Imam, quoting from a missing book entitled Akhbār al-Wukalā‘ al-Arba‘a by Ahmad b. Nūḥ al-巴ṣrī. Al-Ṭūsī's work became the main source for all the later Imamite writers regarding the concealment of the twelfth Imam, particularly al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699) in his work Bihār al-Anwār.

A contemporary of theirs was Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī, a Mu‘tazilite, who died around the year 301/913. He held that the eleventh Imam had died heirless, and he gave
expression to these opinions in his work al-Mustashrid, which is a refutation of Ibn Qubba’s book, al-Inqāf. Unfortunately his work has been lost, however going by the quotations recorded in the book al-Mughnī by al-Qādī `Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) it appears that al-Balkhi relied on al-Hasan al-Nawbakhtī (d. ca. 310/922) for information concerning the divisions among the Imamites after the year 260/874.¹ Then came al-Ash’arī (d. 324/935) who depended on al-Balkhi for his information about the Imamites. In fact after al-Ash’arī’s conversion to the group of Ahl al-Hadīth, later to be the Sunnites, his books became the main source for the later Sunnite writers, such as al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) in his work al-Farq bayn al-Firaq², the writer Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1037) in his work al-Fasl fī al-Milal wa-l-Ahwā’ wa-l-Nihal and later al-Shahristānī (d. 548/1153) in his work al-Milal wa-l-Nihal. However the information contained in the latter works concerning the Imamite schisms after the death of al-‘Askarī in 260/874 are so far removed from the original exposition of al-Balkhi and al-Nawbakhtī³, that one should be careful when relying on the exposition of these later sources.

2.2. **The Biographical Works**

Among the primary sources of this study are the books of *al-Rijāl*, which deal with the scientific biographies of the narrators, and the compilers of traditions by estimating their authenticity and by deducing their reliability from their dogmatic and political inclinations.

The Imamites are responsible for four main works in the field of this study and they were written in the 4th-5th/10th-11th centuries.

1. The first book is *Ma‘rifat al-Naqilīn ḍan al-A’imma al-Ṣādiqīn*, compiled by Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Kashshī. He was a native of the town of Kashsh near Samargand, where he was brought up under the auspices of the Imamite scholar Muḥammad b. Mas‘ūd al-Samarqandī and spent the rest of his life. According to al-Ṭūsī he died in 368/978. He narrated his information directly from fifty-three narrators, but the main source of his information was ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Qutayba of Nishapur, who was contemporary with the short occultation and had close ties with the agents of the twelfth Imam in Khurasan. Thus he cites very important information concerning the evolution of the underground organization of the Imamites (*al-Wikāla*) since the time of al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). Ibn Qutayba records valuable reports regarding the reason behind the rise of the Wāqifite groups, after the death of the seventh Imam in 183/799.

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1. al-Najāshī, 288; T. Rijāl, 458.
2. al-Najāshī, 197.
Al-Kashshā'i's work became the main source for later Imamite scholars like al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), who summarised his work and gave it the title Ikhtiyār Ma‘rifat al-Rijāl.

2. Al-Ṭūsī's works, al-Fihrist and al-Rijāl, were two of the four main Imamite books of al-Rijāl. He cites different chains of transmitters (isnād), which were regarded as authentic isnāds and his treatise enables us to follow the links between the Imamite scholars and the agents during the short occultation.

3. The fourth Imamite work on al-Rijāl is Fihrist asmā' muṣannifī al-Shī'a, which was written by Ahmad b. 'Alī al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058), who was a native of Kufa. He received his Shī'ite education there, then lived in Baghdad, where he was one of the leading Imamite scholars along with al-Murtadā (d. 436/1044). His residing in Kufa and Baghdad enabled him to have close contact with forty-five Imamite scholars who had in their possession documents related to the period of the short occultation. These documents give light on the different ranks within the Imamite organization, and also provide this study with useful information on the works on the Ghayba which were compiled before and after 260/874.

Al-Barqī (d. 278/891), in his work on al-Rijāl, gives valuable reports concerning the relationship between the Imams and their followers, with particular emphasis on the tenth and eleventh Imams and their adherents since he was their contemporary.

Despite the fact that the work of al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347) entitled Mizān al-‘idāl is a later reference, it
contains some reports which elucidate the background of the Ghayba and its connection with the rise of al-Qā‘im.

2.3. The books of general history

Al-Ṭabarî (d. 310/922) lived during the period of the short occultation with regard to the activities of the representatives of the twelfth Imam. His work Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk is devoid of any information which points to the fact that their activities were underground. However he does follow the militant activities of the other Shi‘ite groups like the Qarāmiṭa and the Ismā‘Ilīs until the establishment of their state in 296/908. He also traced the use of the prophetic tradition regarding al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī by those groups in their struggle for power at the same time as the short occultation of the twelfth Imam of the Imamites.

Al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 346/947) lived during the period of the second occultation and he provides this study with important information regarding the harsh treatment of the Imams and their followers by the ‘Abbāsids and the effect of this policy on the occurrence of the Ghayba. This can be found in his works, Murūj al-Dhahab, al-Tanbīh wa-l-Ishrāf and Ithbāt al-Waṣiyya (attributed to him).

In his work al-Kāmil fi al-Tārīkh, Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232) states a useful report concerning the schisms among the agents of the twelfth Imam and the role of the extremists in these schisms, especially al-Shalmaghānī. It is possible that Ibn al-Athīr quotes his information
from an Imamite work entitled Tārīkh al-Imāmiyya by Yaḥyā b. Abī Ṭay (d. 630/1232). Unfortunately though this work is not extant.

Finally many other historical and geographical works and books of traditions have been used in this study which, however, takes into consideration the same method of criticism before making use of these sources.
CHAPTER I

THE ROLE OF TRADITIONS IN
THE OCCULTATION OF THE TWELFTH IMAM

After the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn the Imamite Imams, from 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn to al-Ḥasan al-'Askari had followed a quiescent policy towards the Umayyads and the 'Abbāsids. Meanwhile they were expecting that all their suffering would be terminated by al-Qā'im, whose rising by arms was expected by most of those Imamites. They had related interpretations of some Qur'ānic verses and traditions attributed to the Prophet, concerning the political and religious role of al-Qā'im. So it is essential to give an account of some of these Qur'ānic verses and traditions in order to see their effect upon the attitude of the 'Abbāsids towards the Imamites, and consequently their reactions to the question of the occultation (al-Ghayba) of the twelfth Imam.

1. The early usage of the term al-Mahdī

The term al-Mahdī, which means the one who is absolutely guided by God, is the passive participle of the stem hadā, "to guide". However, the term that occurs twice in the Qur'ān is not al-Mahdī but the active of that stem, al-Hādī, the Guide. The first verse states, "God is surely the Guide of those who believe" (XXII, 53), while the second states, "But the Lord is a sufficient Guide and Helper"
(XXV, 33). On the other hand, in the usage of the Qur'ān the VII stem, ihtādā, "he accepted the guidance for himself", is used strictly as a reflexive passive, whose participle is Muhtadī. So Man, who is guided by God, is not simply guided, but reacts himself to the divine guidance (hidāya)\(^1\), either by instinct or by human intellect. Through these two means man can acquire the knowledge of God, which leads him consequently to worship Him by following His rules on earth. However, God's rules cannot be known through these two sources of knowledge, so throughout the course of history God revealed His knowledge and rules to a group of people, who were divinely guided to lead mankind towards His straight path. Those people who were called Prophets, possessed charismatic qualities, which enabled them to implement the commands of God and to lead the people without error. Hence they are called in the Qur'ān al-Hudāt (sing. al-hādī), because they were already rightly guided (muhtadūn) by God.\(^2\)

The term al-Mahdī (the guided one) has the same meaning as al-Muhtadī, however it has been used of certain individuals in the early Islamic period as an honorific title, while also being used of al-Qā'īm. There are many instances which indicate that the term al-Mahdī was used with these two meanings. For example the poet Hassān b. Thābit (d. 54/673) applied the term al-Mahdī to the Prophet in his qaṣīda when he says:

1. E.I.\(^1\), art. "al-Mahdī", 112.
Sorrow for the Mahdī who is buried
O the best of those who walked on Earth be not far.
Jaza‘an ‘alā al-Mahdiyy aṣbaḥa thāwiyan
Yā Khayra man waṭ’a al-Ḥaṣā lā tab‘idīl

Moreover, Jarīr the poet applies this term to Ibrāhīm, the prophet, while the Sunnites often applied it to the four caliphs after the Prophet, who were called al-Khulāfā‘ al-ʿRāshidūn al-Mahdiyyūn, the divinely guided caliphs, and Sulaymān b. Ṣurd called al-Ḥusayn, after his martyrdom, Mahdī b. al-Mahdī.

As for the theological usage of this term, according to Rajkowski, Abū Ishāq Ka‘b b. Māti‘ b. Ḥaysū‘ al-Ḥimyārī (d. 34/654) was the first individual to speak of al-Mahdī as the Saviour, but it is worth mentioning that the

1. Ibn Hishām, Das Leben Muhammads (Wustenfeld, Göttingen, 1859), II, 1024.
2. Goldziher, al-‘Aqīda wa-l-Shari‘a, tr. Muḥammad Yūsuf (Cairo, 1378/1959), 327-8, 376-8.
4. Tabarī, II, 546. Ibn A‘tham reports a letter attributed to the Kufans, sent to al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, encouraging him to rebel against the Umayyads, in which they used the title al-Mahdī for al-Ḥusayn as an honorific adjective: "ناقبل البنا فرماً مسروراً وبكران سدراً وسديداً إما يومنا إما منا لمنا علنا سهدينا."

Bn A‘tham, op. cit., V, 47.
5. Rajkowski, op. cit., 166-7. There is evidence which supports the claim that Ka‘b narrated traditions attributed to the People of the Book, which predict the rise of al-Mahdī. It is obvious from a line of poetry/
second caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, had held this dogma before Ka‘b. When the Prophet died in 11/632, 'Umar contended with his opponents that Muḥammad had not died but concealed himself as Moses did and would return from his occultation. 'Umar's claim, however, was refuted by Abū Bakr, who reminded him of the Qur'ānic verse revealing the death of the Prophet which states: "Surely you shall die and they [too] shall surely die. Then surely on the Day of Resurrection you will contend one with another before your Lord" (al-Zumar, LXXXV, 30-1).

The follower of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 81-4/700-3)², al-Mukhtār, who was in revolt in Kufa in 66/685 named him as claimant to the Imamate and called him al-Mahdī in the messianic context.³ Later the name of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya became associated with the Kaysāniyya sect, which denied his death and held that he was the promised Mahdī, who had concealed himself in Mount Raḍwā, and would rise in arms to eliminate injustice.⁴ The Kaysāniyya dogma played an important role in Islamic political history during the

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1. al-Hawbakhtī thinks that Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya died in 81/700 (Firaq, 24), whereas al-Ṣadūq puts it in 84/703; Kamāl, 36; Ikhtiyār, 126.
2. al-Nawbakhtī, 33-4.
4. N. Firaq, 25-6; Milal, 111-2; B. Firaq, 17, 27-8, 38.
Umayyad period as the 'Abbāsid propaganda, which brought about the collapse of the Umayyads, was in fact a sub-
division of this sect.\footnote{N. Firaq, 29-30, 42-3. For a full account concerning
the fact that the 'Abbāsid propaganda was the outcome of a branch of the Kaysāniyya
movement, see al-Anṣārī, Madhāhib ibtadā’ath āl-Siyāsa fī al-Islām (Beirut,
1973), 152-8, 199-214.} The dogma of al-Kaysāniyya can
be seen in the poetry of Kuthayyir (d. 105/723) and
al-Sayyid al-Himyarī (d. 173/789). The latter had held
this doctrine although it is said that he converted into
an Imamite after attending a discussion with al-Ṣādiq, who
elucidated to him that the concealed Imam, which the
Prophet had mentioned was not Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya but would
be the twelfth Imam from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn.\footnote{Kamāl, 32-4; al-Zubayrī, op. cit., 41-2.}

The Zaydites had also applied the term al-Mahdī in
its eschatological form to their leaders, who rose in
arms against the 'Abbāsids, such as Muḥammad al-Nafs
al-Zakiyya (d. 145/762), Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq
(d. 203/818), and Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Tālqān, who
disappeared in the year 219/834.\footnote{N. Firaq, 54; 'Uyūn, 155; Maqātil, 359; B. Firaq, 44.} An example of the
Zaydite usage of this term is recorded by Ibn Ẓāwūs, who
mentions a transmission on the authority of Ibrāhīm b.
'Abd Allāh b. al-Hasan, the brother of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya,
who stated that his brother had rebelled hoping that God
might make him al-Mahdī, promised by the Prophet:
As for the Imamites, a considerable body among them applied the title of al-Mahdi in its messianic context to each Imam after his death. This can be seen in the claim of al-Nawusiyya, al-Waqifa and the followers of al-Askari the eleventh Imam. After the death of al-Ṣādiq in the year 148/765 the Nawusiyya group held that he was al-Qā'im al-Mahdi and he did not die but went into occultation. ² While the Waqifa group applied this title upon the seventh Imam Mūsā al-Kāzim (d. 183/799) and denied his death, contending that he was al-Qā'im al-Mahdi and he would rise to fill the earth with justice after it has been filled with tyranny. ³ Other Imamites held that the eleventh Imam al-Askari was al-Qā'im al-Mahdi ⁴, whereas the last important usage of this term was given to the twelfth Imam, who became the magnate of the Imamites' hope in their struggle for justice and equity.

1. Ibn Tawus, al-Iqbal, 53.
2. N. Firaq, 57; Kamal, 37.
It is worth mentioning that all these claims concerning the eschatological usage of al-Mahdī were mainly based on Prophetic traditions concerning a future restorer of Islam. Hence it is essential to treat the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams, especially the traditions which concern the twelfth Imam so as to see their role in the question of the concealment.

2. The Occultation of al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī in the Qur'ān

In Shi'ite exegesis there are many Qur'ānic verses regarding the role of al-Qā'īm and his occultation. The most important is the following verse: "But nay I swear by the stars. That run their course and hide themselves" (al-Takwīr, LXXXI, 15-16). According to al-Bāqir, as quoted by the works of the fourth century A.H., this verse means that an Imam would go into occultation in the year 260/874, then he would reappear suddenly like a bright star in the dark night. While Ibn al-Fūrāt al-Kūfī and al-Ṣadūq put forward an interpretation of the following Qur'ānic verse: "Say: Have you considered if your water should go down, who is it then that will bring you flowing water?" (al-Mulk, LXVII, 30).

They think that this verse is a metaphorical expression of the concealment of the Imam, whose presence among the

1. al-Kāfi, I, 341; Kamāl, 325, 330; N. al-Ghayba, 75.
people is like the people's need for water. Furthermore, the Ismā'īlī writer Mansūr al-Yaman (ca. 4th century A.H.) agrees with al-Kulaynī that some Qur'ānic verses which deal explicitly with the Day of Judgement actually concern the rise of al-Qā'im from his occultation. According to al-Kulaynī the verse "And those who sincerely believe in the day of Judgement" (al-Ma'ārij, LXX, 26), means those who believe in the reappearance of al-Qā'im. Mansūr al-Yaman gives the same esoteric interpretation of another verse, that is:

There are some who say: we believe in Allāh and the last day, but are not really believers. They seek to deceive Allāh and those who do believe, but they deceive themselves only, and are not sensible thereof. (al-Baqara, II, 8-9)

Mansūr al-Yaman adds that the Last Day (al-Yawm al-Ākhīr) in this verse is the commander of the age (Sāhib al-Zamān), that is al-Qā'im al-Mahḍī. Al-Kulaynī also interprets many Qur'ānic verses with the same approach and links them with the future role of al-Qā'im al-Mahḍī, whose rising, according to him, presents the manifestation and the establishment of the state of the People of the House on
the ruins of the state of inequity. This esoteric commentary has been given by al-Kulaynī to the verse: "And say: The truth has come and falsehood has vanished. Surely falsehood is a vanishing thing" (Banū Isrā‘īl, XVII, 81).

Al-Ṭūsī follows the footsteps of al-Kulaynī in his commentary to some Qur'ānic verses, like the verse:

And we desired to bestow a favour upon those who were deemed weak in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the heirs. And to grant them power in the land and to make Fir‘awn and Hāmān and their hosts see from them what they feared. (al-Qasas, XVIII, 5-6)

Al-Ṭūsī thinks that the above verses predict to the faithful the establishment of the state of Justice by al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī, who would inherit what had been in the possession of the wrong-doers. Other Imamite scholars believe that the sixth Imam, al-Bāqir, said that God's promise of victory to an Imam from the People of the House is openly mentioned in the following verse:

1. al-Kāfī, VIII, 287.
And certainly we wrote in the Book [al-Zabūr] after the promulgation of the law, that [as for] the Land, My righteous servants shall inherit it. (al-Anbiyā‘, XXI, 105)

Other verses have also been interpreted by the Imamites as connected with the role of al-Qā'im after his rising from concealment, such as the verse:

God has promised those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them rulers on the earth as He made rulers those before them, and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them, and that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange; they shall serve Me; not associating aught with Me, and whoever is ungrateful after this, these it is who are the transgressors. (al-Nūr, XXIV, 55)

Al-Qummī and al-Tūsī report that the People of the House, that is the Imams, mentioned that this verse concerned the Mahdī, because he would live during his

concealment in a state of fear and would appear after the removal of fear and would certainly become victorious.¹

3. The Traditions concerning the Twelfth

Imam and his Occultation

3.1. The traditions concerning al-Gā'īm al-Mahdī

There are many traditions attributed to the Prophet in the books of tradition concerning the identity of al-Mahdī, his tribe, his epithet (kunya) and his character. The conclusion of these numerous traditions is that al-Mahdī is from the sons of Fāṭima², the daughter of the Prophet, and particularly from the progeny of her son al-Ḥusayn. His colour is similar to that of the Arab and his body is like the Israelite and his name and kunya are similar to the name and kunya of the Prophet.³ Moreover some traditions claim that the Prophet says that his father's name is like my grandson al-Ḥasan's name. Below are a number of these traditions.

1) We, the family of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, are the Masters of the inhabitants of Paradise: I, Ḥamza, Ja‘far, ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and al-Mahdī.⁴

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3. al-Tirmidhī, IX, 74, 75; and the Cairo edition, IV, 505-6.
ii) Al-Mahdī is from my progeny. His name is similar to mine and his nickname is similar to mine. He looks in his physique and character exactly like me. He will be in a state of occultation and confusion in which people will wander about. Then he will come forth like a sharp, shooting star to fill the earth with justice and equity as it was before filled with injustice and inequity.¹

iii) Al-Mahdī is from my family ['itra] from the sons of Fāṭima. — It is worth mentioning that this tradition has been reported on the authority of Umm Salama, by ‘Alī b. Nufayl, who died in 125/742.²

iv) The Prophet is reported to have said on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās: How shall God destroy a nation which I am its beginning, Jesus its end and al-Mahdī, who will be from my family, its very centre.³

v) The name of al-Mahdī’s father is similar to the name of my son al-Ḥasan.⁴

In fact, the conclusion of Osman seems to be rather forced when he claims "that all these hadīths are weak and contradictory (mutadārib), therefore their attribution

1. Kamāl, 286-7. Al-Tirmidhī mentioned the same tradition on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd without any details concerning the occultation of the Mahdī. Al-Tirmidhī, IV, 505-6; al-Dārimī, Sunan, IV, 151.
to the Prophet Muhammad is to be very much doubted.\textsuperscript{1}

Indeed the use of the epithet \textit{al-Mahdī} by numerous Islamic groups in their struggle for power during the Umayyad period, and particularly the Zaydites, throws light on the fact that these traditions had been well-known among the Muslims of that period. On the other hand, many traditionists, who belong to different Islamic sects, have transmitted these traditions before the downfall of the Umayyads in 132/749, and these were later compiled in the books of tradition (\textit{hadīth}). The earliest work of these collections was \textit{Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays}, which was attributed to Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī, who died between the years 80-90/699-708. He reports many Prophetic traditions concerning \textit{al-Mahdī}, his occultation and his reappearance.\textsuperscript{2} It appears from these two points that the judgement of Osman was somewhat hasty, particularly if one takes into consideration the fact that Prophetical traditions regarding \textit{al-Mahdī} have been narrated by twenty-six companions of the Prophet, and on the authority of the

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Osman, \textit{Mahdiism in Islam}, Ph.D. Thesis (Edinburgh, 1976), 204.
\item[2.] Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī, \textit{Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays} (Najaf, n.d.), 56, 159-62. Although this book has received some criticism with regard to its authenticity, a careful examination of its contents which show that it was regarded as a source by such writers as al-Kulaynī in \textit{al-Kāfī}, al-Mas‘ūdī in \textit{al-Tanbih wa-l-Ishrāf} and al-Nu‘mānī in \textit{Kitāb al-Ghayba}.\
\end{itemize}
former thirty-eight traditionists have recorded these traditions in their collections of *Hadīth.*

The evidence suggests that from the earliest times in Islam there was a belief that the Prophet had given his followers a promise about a man from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, who would rise in arms in the future so as to purify Islam from innovation, but that later political rivalry amongst the Muslims encouraged some people to exploit this hope, and to distort these Prophetic traditions in order to use them in their struggle for power.

However these traditions only mention that al-Qā'im al-Mahdī will be from the progeny of the Prophet, but there are also other traditions attributed to the Prophet, which state that he will, in fact, be the twelfth Imam. Although Prof. Watt states that

Until al-‘Askari died on 1st Jan 874, there was nothing to make people expect that the number of the Imams would be limited to twelve or that the twelfth would go into occultation, it follows the theory of the twelve Imams was worked out after 874.

2. For the Umayyad and the ‘Abbāsid use of the epithet al-Mahdī so as to gain political success, see al-İsfahānī, al-Aghānī, XVI, 88; al-Dārimī, Sunan, IV, 152.
3. Watt, *The Majesty that was Islam,* 169-70.
there is ample proof that traditions claiming that 
*al-Qā'īm* would be the twelfth descendant of the Prophet 
were in circulation before 874. It is thus necessary to 
throw light upon these traditions, which were transmitted 
by Sunnites and Zaydites as well as Imamites, so that one 
can see to what extent these traditions were used by the 
Imamite scholars to make their followers believe that the 
twelfth Imam had not died but was in a state of occultation.

3.2. The traditions of the Sunnites (*Ahl al-Hadith*)

The Sunnite books of tradition report three Prophetic 
traditions pertaining to the twelve Imams, who would be 
the successors of the Prophet. They were narrated on the 
authority of seven companions of the Prophet, namely 
b. al-Khattāb, Wā’ila b. al-Asqa‘, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar and 
Abū Hurayra.

i) Jābir b. Samura narrates that he heard the Prophet 
say, "There will be after me twelve *Amīrs.*" Then he 
mentioned something which I did not hear, so I asked my 
father, who was sitting beside me, who said, "All of whom 
will be from Quraysh."¹

¹. al-Bukhari, al-*Sahīh* (Cairo, 1355), IV, 175; M. *Sahīh*, 
III, 190-3; al-*Tirmidhi*, IV, 501; Ibn Ḥanbal, al-*Musnad* 
(Cairo, 1313), V, 294.
ii) 'Umar b. al-Khattab reports that he heard the Prophet as having said, "The Imams [al-A'imma] after me will be twelve all of whom will be from Quraysh."¹

iii) 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd was once reciting the Qurʾān in the mosque in Iraq, when a young man came and asked him if the Prophet had informed them about the number of his successors. Ibn Mas'ūd replied, "The Prophet informed us that his successors would be twelve caliphs, whose number is similar to the number of the leaders [al-nuqabā'] of Banū Israel."²

These traditions have been related by the traditionists and considered as authentic. Ibn Ḥanbal narrates the first one with thirty-four chains of transmitters (sanad), all of which are on the authority of Jābir b. Samura³, although there are slight differences in their versions. Some of the narrators used words Amīr and Khalīfa instead of Imām. But these traditions, as reported by the Sunnites, indicate only that the Prophet would be succeeded by twelve successors, and neither reveal that the twelfth one would go into occultation nor that he would be al-Qāʾim al-Mahdī. Whereas the Zaydite and the Imamite narrators relate the same traditions with phrases which indicate that the twelfth Imam would be al-Qāʾim al-Mahdī.⁴

¹. al-Kharraz, Kifāyat al-Āthār, quoted by al-Galbāygānī, Muntakhab al-Āthār, 28.
⁴. N. al-Ghayba, 48-8; Kamāl, 270-3.
3.3. The twelfth Imam in the Zaydite traditions

The Zaydite sect, the Jārūdiyya, narrate many narrations attributed to the Prophet and al-Bāqir, concerning the political role of the twelfth Imam. One of their distinguished scholars in Kufa was Abū Saʿīd 'Abbād b. Yaʿqūb al-Rawājīnī al-ʿAṣfārī (d. 250/864). He wrote a book which is entitled Kitāb Akhbār al-Mahdī. Al-Dhahabī reports that 'Abbād was a Ṭāfīdī propagandist, and was awaiting the rise of al-Mahdī in the near future to the extent that he used to carry a sword with him, and once said that he kept his sword ready to fight for al-Mahdī. It is worth mentioning that 'Abbād held this doctrine before the occultation of the twelfth Imam in 260/874, because 'Abbād himself died in 250/864. He reports three Prophetic traditions concerning the twelfth Imam. Below are two of them:

1) The Prophet is believed to have said: "From my descendants there will be eleven leaders [who will be] noble, receivers of tradition [and] possessed of knowledge, the last of whom will be 'al-Qā'im bi-l-Haqq' who will fill it [i.e. the world] with justice, just as it was filled with tyranny."
ii) "The Prophet is reported as having said: I and eleven of my descendants and you, O 'Alī, are the axis of the earth, that is its tent pegs and its mountains. By us God has secured the world so that it will not sink with its people. For when the eleventh of my descendants has died the world shall sink with its people without warning."¹

These traditions along with other transmissions predicting the historical circumstances and the signs which would precede the rise of al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī were used by the Shī'a in their struggle for power. This can be seen in the events of the general 'Alīd revolution which occurred in 250-1/864-5, when many Shī'ites applied the Prophetic traditions concerning the signs of the rise of al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī to the historical circumstances of this revolt. Ibn 'Uqda (d. 333/944) reports that al-Sādiq said:

A man from the People of the House of the Prophet will rise in arms in Mecca holding a white standard in his hand, the Euphrates will become dry and, at the same time, a group of people, whose eyes are small, will advance

¹. al-'Aṣfārī, Aṣl Abū Saʿīd al-'Aṣfārī, f. 2. Al-Kulaynī includes these traditions in his work al-Hujja, but, according to his transmission, the Prophet mentioned twelve Imams from his descendants and not eleven. Thus the number of the Imams along with 'Alī would be thirteen. Because al-Kulaynī transmitted his narration on the authority of al-'Aṣfārī, it appears that the version of the latter is more accurate than al-Kulaynī. al-kāfī, I, 533-4.
towards you from the East and will force you to leave your houses. Moreover, the graves of your dead people will be opened and the predatory animals will attack your houses. Afterwards a fair-complexioned man will install a chair in Mecca calling people to curse 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib, and killing many people, but he will be killed on the same day.¹

According to 'Ali b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim al-Kharrāz (d. ca. 250/864) all these signs occurred in the events of the revolt of Yaḥyā b. 'Umar in 250/864. Accordingly it was believed by some Shi'ites, particularly the Jārūdiyya, that the leader of this revolt, Yaḥyā b. 'Umar, was himself al-Qā'im al-Mahdī.²

3.4. The twelfth Imam in the Imamite traditions

The exposition of the Imamite traditionists concerning the twelfth Imam and his occultation are distinguished from the Sunnite and the Zaydite presentation by their claim that the twelfth Imam mentioned in the Sunnite and the Zaydite traditions was, in fact, Muḥammad the son of the eleventh Imam al-‘Askarī, and that he was al-Qā'im al-Mahdī. Moreover they have presented more details about

¹. Ibn ‘Uqda, Kitāb al-Malāḥim, f. 74-5.
². See as note 1.
his occultation and his political role as well as about
the signs which would precede his rising, and the social
and political conditions which might pave the way for his
reappearance.

3.4.1. The traditions concerning the twelfth Imam

The Prophetic traditions concerning the twelve Imams
which have been related by the Sunnite and the Zaydite
traditionists were narrated by the Imamites too.\(^1\) They
applied these traditions to their twelve Imams along with
other Imamite traditions which indicate explicitly that the
successor of the eleventh Imam was al-Qā‘im. The traditions
which are attributed to the Prophet do not indicate
explicitly that al-Qā‘im would be the successor of
al-‘Askarī, the eleventh Imam, whereas the sayings of the
Imams do.

The earliest Prophetic tradition concerning the
twelfth Imam has been narrated by the Imamite traditionists
on the authority of Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī. He was a
b. al-Ḥusayn and al-Bāqir, and died in 90/701.\(^2\) The
Imamites regard his work as the first Shi‘ite collection
of Hadīth.\(^3\) He reports numerous narrations concerning the

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1. N. al-Ghayba, 7, 48, 57-61, 31, 45; al-Ṣadūq, Khiṣāl,
436-45; ‘Uyun, 323; al-Karājakī, al-Istibsār, Ms. f.
11-12; al-Kāfī, I, 534; al-Ṭabīṣī, al-Shī‘a wa-l-Raj‘a
(Najaf, 1966), 129-30; Kamāl, 279.
2. al-Barqī, Kitāb al-Rijāl, 4, 7, 8, 9.
twelve Imams, and the political role of the last Imam. The first one is attributed to a Christian monk who had met 'Alī after his return from the battle of Siffin, when he informed him that he had found in the Gospel that the successors of the Prophet Muhammad would be twelve, the last of whom would fill the world with justice and that Jesus would perform the prayer behind him. All the other narrations are attributed to the Prophet. The most important of these traditions is quoted on the authority of the companions, 'Alī, 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Ṭayyār, Salmān al-Fārisī, Abū al-Haytham b. al-Tayhān, Khuzayma b. Thābit, 'Ammār b. Yāsir, Abū Dharr, al-Miqdād and Abū Ayyūb, who narrated that the Prophet had gathered his companions together at Ghadir Khumm and said to them:

O people, the legal power [al-wilāya] is granted only to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib and the trustees from my progeny, the descendants of my brother 'Alī, who will be the first, and his two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, will succeed the latter consecutively. They do not separate themselves from the Qur'ān until they return to God.  

Sulaym adds that the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī, told him, "O brother, son of Hilāl, the Mahdī of my nation  

2. Ibid., 109-10, 124-5, 165-6, 201, 204-6.
is Muḥammad, who shall fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with tyranny and injustice. I know who will pay the oath of allegiance to him."

This tradition has been related on the authority of Sulaym b. Qays by many Imamite scholars such as al-Kulaynī, al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ṣadūq, al-Ṭūsī and al-Masʿūdī. The latter states that this narration has been transmitted only through Sulaym. However, this tradition had been related and confirmed by other people. Sulaym states that he had met al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn in Medina after the assassination of their father, ‘Alī, and related to them this tradition on the authority of ‘Alī. They confirmed that they had heard it from the Prophet too. Sulaym adds that he had informed ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn in the presence of his son al-Bāqir about this tradition, who also confirmed its authenticity. Moreover Abbān b. Abī ‘Ayash reports that he met al-Bāqir during the rite of pilgrimiate and mentioned Sulaym's tradition to him, and that he too asserted its authenticity. A later Imamite scholar, Ibn Dawūd (d. ca. 690/1291) doubts the authenticity of Sulaym's work and thinks that the author of it was in fact Abbān b. Abī ‘Ayash because he reports a tradition which states that the Imams would be thirteen, amongst whom was Zayd b. ‘Alī. However it might be that this narration was either

3. al-Hilālī, op. cit., 95.
the invention of Abbān himself, who had Zaydite inclinations, or of the later Zaydites. On the other hand al-Ṣadūq relates this tradition on the authority of ‘Alī¹, and narrates another Prophetic tradition attributed to ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās, who says that the Prophet said:

I am the master of the Prophets, and ’Alī the master of my trustees, of whom there will be twelve; the first one is ’Alī, and the last is al-Qā’im.²

Moreover the Imamite scholars relate numerous traditions attributed to their Imams, which confirm that the twelfth Imam will be al-Qā’im al-Mahdī.³ It is worth noting that al-Ḥadrāmī (fl. 3rd/9th century) reports a tradition which gives the Imam who shall rise in arms the epithet al-Qā’im.⁴ At the same time other narrations use the epithet al-Mahdī, this is particularly in the works of al-Ṣaffār (d. 290/902).⁴

2. Kamāl, 280. Another narration has been narrated by the companion Jābir al-Anṣārī, which confirms that al-Mahdī would be from the progeny of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (al-Ṭūsī, al-Amālī, II, 251), but al-Ṣāḥib b. ‘Abbād doubts its authenticity; Nusrat Madhāhib al-Zaydiyya, 208-9.
3. al-Kāfī, I, 531-3; al-Irsāḥ, 393; Delā’īl, 236-8, 249-51.
4. al-Ḥadrāmī, Aṣl Ja’far b. Muhammad b. Shurayḥ, Ms. f. 32b; for other similar traditions see al-Kāfī, VIII, 167, 536; Ibn Ṭawús, al-Iqṣāb, 431.
Such was the confusion caused by the use of these two terms amongst the followers of al-Jawād that some were not sure whether al-Qā'im and al-Mahdī was the same individual or not. Therefore, according to al-Ṣadūq, al-Jawād was reported as having said that al-Qā'im was from us and he would be al-Mahdī, who must be awaited by his followers during his occultation and obeyed at his rising and that he would be his third descendant. Therefore, according to al-Saduq, al-Jawad was reported as having said that al-Qā’im was from us and he would be al-Mahdī, who must be awaited by his followers during his occultation and obeyed at his rising and that he would be his third descendant. So one can see that the Imamites of the fourth/ninth century called the twelfth Imam al-Qā’im al-Mahdī. Al-Mufīd states that he was called al-Mahdī because he would guide people to a forgotten dogma and law.

3.4.2. The political role of al-Qā’im

It has been pointed out that the Imams from ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn onwards adopted publicly a quiescent policy towards the Umayyads and the ‘Abbāsids. Accordingly, they gave more stress to intellectual propaganda, which, they expected, would result in religious and political awareness.

1. Kamāl, 377. Al-Tūsī reports another narration attributed to the tenth Imam who stated explicitly that the twelfth Imam would be al-Mahdī (T. al-Shayba, 92). However, it might be that such narrations were not common among the Imamites. The traditionist al-Fadl b. Shādhān (d. 260/874), when he talks about the role of al-Qā’im al-Mahdī, does not fix this epithet to the twelfth Imam; Ibn Shādhān, al-Idāh, 475-6.
2. al-Irshād, 411; see also al-Ṣan’ānī, al-Musannaf, XI, 472.
amongst the people which could be regarded as preparatory action to the task of al-Qā‘im. Al-Nu‘mānī explains this attitude when he reports that al-Bāqir advised his partisan Abū al-Jārūd to keep quiet at home, and not to implicate himself in the militant activities of some ‘Alids against the Umayyads, since this state had natural age and the moment of its downfall had not yet come.¹ He adds that any ‘Alid who rebels against tyranny before the rise of al-Qā‘im would inevitably fail.² Al-Ṣādiq and the later Imams followed the same policy and ordered their followers not to allow despair to find a place in their spirits and to wait for the rise of al-Qā‘im in the near future.³ This policy enabled the Imamites to circulate their doctrine and simultaneously to organize themselves during the period between 132-260/749-874 into a well-founded political and financial organization (al-Wikāla). It seems probable that this underground organization was preparing for the rise of al-Qā‘im by militant means, whose rising was expected⁴ and upon whom the Imamites put very important political and religious duties.

It seems from several remarks that the quiescent policy of the Imams had been devised after their followers caused two abortive rebellions. According to al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣādiq once said:

¹ See Chapter II.
² N. al-Ghayba, 104, 107, 159; al-Ḥadrāmī, op. cit., f. 48a; al-Kāfī, VIII, 264.
³ N. al-Ghayba, 106-7; al-Kāfī, VIII, 264, 310.
⁴ N. al-Ghayba, 94, 96.
This matter [al-Amr], that is the endeavour to reach power, was hidden until it reached the hands of the Khayyānīyya, who revealed it in public on the roads and circulated it among the villagers of al-Sawād.¹

According to al-Nu‘mānī the Imamites endeavoured to rise in arms twice, first in the year 70/689 and the second endeavour occurred in the year 140/758, but their followers spoiled their plan by revealing the name of their leader to their foes², which resulted in the arrest or the assassination of the Imams. This can be seen in the conversation between al-Bāqir and his partisan ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Atā’ al-Wāsiṭī, who said to him:

You have many followers in Iraq and there is no one among your family, who has the merit for leadership but you, so, why do you not rise in arms? Al-Bāqir replied: O ‘Abd Allāh, do not listen to the masses, because none of us has his name mentioned in public by the people nor a hand pointing at him as the Imam, without soon facing inevitable death. So search for the one whose birth is concealed from the people, because he will be the one who will manage such an affair.³

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1. al-Kāfī, II, 223.
2. N. al-Ghayba, 158.
3. al-Kāfī, I, 342; Kamāl, 325.
Moreover al-Šādiq was reported to have said:

This matter [the rising in arms] was vested in me but God delayed it and He shall do with my progeny whatever He wants.¹

This indicates that the Imams had suffered the consequences of revealing the fixed dates of their militant endeavours to reach power. Hence the later Imams had not revealed explicitly to their followers which Imam would be al-Qā'īm with the sword. At the same time they encouraged their followers to follow their instructions², which might pave the way for one of the Imams to reach power under the title of al-Qā'īm.

Several traditions reveal that the establishment of the state of al-Qā'īm will occur by natural means. A Prophetic tradition states that a group of people from the east will start underground activities and pave the way for the installation of al-Mahdi by military means.³ The latter will struggle for power without any miraculous aid and will face difficulties and opposition against his propaganda, similar to the opposition which the Prophet

¹. T. al-Ghayba, 278.
². al-Kāfī, I, 368-9; Bihār, LIII, 212.
faced with Quraysh. Furthermore he might not take any militant action unless he had at least 10,000 partisans.

According to al-Baqir the main target of al-Qa'im is to establish an Islamic state, and to apply Islamic law as it had been revealed to the Prophet. Moreover al-Sadiq states that he will follow the Prophet's policy by eliminating and demolishing all the innovations which belong to the state of ignorance (al-Jahiliyya) and apply Islam in a new form. Other narrations indicate that he will apply the law of David and Solomon along with the Islamic law, and apply the rules of the Torah upon the Jews and the rules of the Gospel upon the Christians within his state which, according to al-Nu'manī, will include, in addition to the Islamic lands, the territories of Rûm, Sind, India and China.

Part of the functions attributed to al-Qa'im shows the unrest and disappointment felt by the Imámites in the

1. al-Kāfī, VIII, 225; N. al-Ghayba, 106, 160; al-Ṭabsī quotes a statement from Ibn A’tham attributed to ‘Ali which states that the partisans of al-Mahdi will start their activities from al-Ṭalqān in Khurasan; al-Shi‘a wa-l-Raj‘a, 141.
2. Kamāl, 654.
3. N. al-Ghayba, 104, 122, 123. Al-Ṣaffār reports that al-Qa‘im will apply Islamic law according to the books of ‘Ali which he related directly from the Prophet; Basā‘ir al-Darajāt, f. 124.
4. al-Ṣaffār, op. cit., f. 50; al-Kāfī, I, 298.
face of the political and economic situation at that time. Al-Fadl b. Shádhān (d. 260/873) and al-Kulaynī report that al-Qā'īm would rise with the sword as an avenger of God against those who caused troubles to 'Alī and his wife Fātima, and against those who were responsible for the suffering of the Imams and their followers, particularly the assassination of al-Ḥusayn, which was considered by al-Ṣādiq as the main reason for the rise of al-Qā'īm as an avenger. Other tasks reveal the political annoyance of the non-Arab races towards the Arab, and especially the clan of Quraysh who had monopolized political authority since the death of the Prophet. Al-Nu‘mānī mentions traditions attributed to al-Ṣādiq who is reported as having said, "If al-Qā'īm rises he will deal with the Arabs and Quraysh only by the sword." Moreover Ibn ‘Ayyāsh (d. 401/1010) relates a narration which depicts the unrest of the Persians concerning the Arabs, who had caused the fall of their Empire, so they put all their hopes to recover their ruined glory on al-Qā'īm's shoulders. He mentions that the last Sasanid, Khusrau, said, after the Battle of al-Qadisiyya in 16/637, "A man will rise in the future from my offspring to recover the Sasanid palace in al-Madā'in." When an

1. Ibn Shādhān, Ithbāt al-Raj'a, quoted by al-Tabsī, op. cit., 221; al-Kāfī, VIII, 233; al-Ṣādūq, 'Iqal, II, 267; al-Majlisi includes in his work al-Bihār a book attributed to al-Mufaddil b. 'Umar which deals with the occurrence which will take place after the rise of al-Qā'īm; Bihār, LiIII, 1-38; Dala'il, 239, 260; N. al-Ghayba, 148.

individual asked al-Ṣādiq about Khusrau’s statement, the Imam stated that he means the rise of al-Qā'īm, because the mother of the fourth Imam, al-Sajjād, was the daughter of Khusrau, accordingly al-Qā'īm would be from his progeny.¹

The Imamites also vested al-Qā’im with another task which reveals their dissatisfaction concerning the economic system of the ‘Abbāsid state. According to al-Ḥimyari, al-Bāqir stated that if al-Qā’im rose all the feudal systems would be abolished.² Al-Kulaynī agreed with al-Ḥimyari and added that al-Qā’im, after carrying out this operation, might allow his Shi‘ites to administer and cultivate the lands with the condition that they would pay the legal land-tax.³

In the light of these hopes and the repeated failure of the Zaydite uprising, as expected by the Imams, the Imamites concentrated all their hopes on the uprising of al-Qā’im, whose state had been expected since the time of al-Bāqir.⁴ Al-Nu‘mānī reports that when the ‘Abbāsid revolution broke out in Khurasan with black banners, Abū Bakr al-Ḥadrāmī and Abbān went to their Imam, al-Ṣādiq, to take his opinion as to participation in the revolution, but he warned them, stating, “When you see us follow a man then you must join us with weapons.”⁵ Although the Imam

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2. al-Ḥimyari, op. cit., quoted by al-Galbāgānī, op. cit., 305.
4. N. al-Ghayba, 103.
5. N. al-Ghayba, 105.
had not revealed his identity, he confirmed that he would struggle for power by militant means and eliminate the rule of his opponents. It appears that because of the militant role of al-Qā'īm the Imams refrained from giving any statement concerning his identity explicitly. On the other hand the rulers, the Umayyads then the ‘Abbāsids, reached power by natural means, therefore their fall should also occur by natural means.

Many indications indicate that some Imams would have taken militant action if they had had strong and faithful partisans, but they delayed this task for an unspecified time until the intellectual activities of their followers could bear fruit and be converted into political awareness which might enable one of the Imams to gain power by militant means. Thirdly, the Imams wanted their partisans to be more optimistic in gaining immediate success, and not to leave the task of the propaganda on the shoulders of al-Qā'īm, whose military uprising relied on the outcome of the activities of the Imamites themselves. Finally, it seems most likely that the uprising of the Imam who would be al-Qā'īm was later attributed to the twelfth Imam, because the Imamite propaganda reached a developed, political stage during the life-time of the tenth and the

1. al-Kāfī, I, 240, 281, 370-2. Di‘bil the poet recited a line of poetry concerning the militant role of al-Qā’īm in the presence of al-Riḍā; the latter confirmed this by saying that al-Qā’īm would be from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn. Di‘bil, Diwan, 73, 76; Kamāl, 327-4.
eleventh Imams, which might have enabled the twelfth Imam to reach power.

3.4.3. The signs of the rise of al-Qā‘im

The early Imamite traditionists (Muhaddithūn) specified five signs for the rise of al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī: first, the rise of al-Yamānī, then the rise of al-Sufyānī, thirdly the assassination of the Pure Soul (al-Nāfs al-Zakīyya) in Mecca only fifteen days before the rise of al-Qā‘im, fourthly an outcry from the sky in the name of al-Qā‘im in the morning, and finally the sinking of an army into the earth (al-Baydā’) during its march on Mecca.¹ Despite the fact that al-Nu‘mānī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Ṭūsī differ as to the chronological occurrence of these signs, they agree that they shall occur in the same year.²

It seems that these signs along with the expectations of the Imamites and al-Jārūdiyya that al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī would rise in the near future³, caused the ‘Abbāsid authorities to be suspicious, because some of these signs were connected with their régime, and indicated that al-Qā‘im’s uprising was directed mainly against the ‘Abbāsids. This can be seen in the discussion between al-Riḍā’, the eighth Imam, and his adherent al-Ḥasan b. al-Jahm⁴, who asked him:

1. N. al-Ghayba, 134, 139-40; Kamāl, 649; T. al-Ghayba, 286; al-Kāfī, VIII, 225, 310.
2. N. al-Ghayba, 136; T. al-Ghayba, 286; Bihār, LII, 232.
3. N. al-Ghayba, 94.
4. For his biography, see Ibn Dāwūd, Kitāb al-Rijāl, 104.
"May God reform you, the people are saying that al-Sufyānī will rise after the fall of the 'Abbāsids." Al-Riḍā said: "They lie. He will rise while they are still in power." ¹

This statement has been confirmed in other transmissions attributed to al-Ṣādiq. For example his companion Ya‘qūb b. al-Sarrāj asked him:

"When will your Shi‘a gain their release from suffering?" He replied, "This shall come when conflict occurs amongst the 'Abbāsids, and their power begins to decline. Then their partisans and their subjects will be encouraged to endanger their authorities. Thereafter al-Sufyānī will rise from the west, while the Yamānī will advance from the East until they reach Kufa where they will destroy the 'Abbāsids. At the same time the Ḥasanī will start his rebellion. Then the Master of this matter, al-Qā‘im, shall advance from Medina towards Mecca to rebel." ²

According to al-Ḥūmānī al-Ṣādiq added that because of these events the fall of the 'Abbāsid regime was inevitable.

¹ N. al-Ghayba, 163-4.
It is similar to the accidental fall of crockery from the hand of its possessor, when it splits into pieces.\(^1\)

In the light of these statements which are attributed to the Imams it is clear that the Imamites from the time of al-Ṣādiq onwards, expected the rise of one of their Imams with the title of al-Qā'im to be of a political form, while the ‘Abbāsids were still in power.\(^2\) Indeed the spread of these traditions caused the ‘Abbāsids to fear the Imams, who might have been behind some ‘Alids' revolts. For this reason, perhaps, the ‘Abbāsid caliphs became suspicious of

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1. N. al-Ghayba, 137; Bihār, LII, 232.

2. al-Ḥadrāmī, Kitāb Jaʿfar b. Shurayḥ, f. 39. This expectation can be clarified by the narration attributed to al-Riḍā, who was reported as having said, "There are four events which will occur before the rising of al-Qā'im and indicate his rising. Three of them have occurred and the last one remains. The first was the discharge of the governor of Khurasan from his office, the second one happened in Rajab, when Ibn Zubayda [al-Amīn] was assassinated in 198/813, the third was the rebellion of Ibn Ẓabātabā in Kufa in 199/814, and the fourth has still to take place."

It appears that al-Riḍā was pointing towards the civil war between the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs al-Amīn and al-Maʿmūn, which paved the way for the general ‘Alīd revolution which broke out in 199/814. This report throws light on the relationship between the Imams and the ‘Alīd revolts. It is most likely that al-Riḍā thought that this revolt might hand power over to him, therefore he gave no explicit answer to his partisans as whether or not he was al-Qā'im. However his companion al-Bizantī during the course of this revolt declared that al-Riḍā was al-Qā'im; Bihār, LII, 182-3.
the Imamite Imams, since al-Manṣūr the caliph, himself had related a tradition on the authority of al-Baqir, which states that al-Qā’im would be from the progeny of ‘Alī.¹ So he restricted the movements of al-Ṣādiq and his followers and made it a policy to discriminate against them. Moreover he invested his successor Muḥammad with the epithet of al-Mahdi (158-169/775-785) in order to turn the attention of his subjects from the ‘Alid family toward the family of ‘Abbās.²

Despite the fact that the movements of the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, were restricted as well by the authorities and caused his death in prison³, the Shi‘ite propaganda for the rise of an Imam in the name of al-Qā’im and al-Mahdi spread on a wide scale, particularly after the rebellion of Ibn Ṭabāṭaba. It appears on account of this situation the caliph al-Ma‘mūn invented a new policy towards the eighth Imam al-Riḍā, when he made overtures to al-Riḍā asking him to be his heir apparent so as to split the ‘Alid front, who were, then, in rebellion and to keep

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1. al-Kāfī, VIII, 209-10; al-Irshād, 404.
2. It is reported that the Prophet said, "The Mahdi is from my progeny. His name is similar to mine" (al-Tirmidḥī, IV, 505). According to Abū Dāwūd, it is said that the Prophet also added, "And his father's name is similar to my father's name" (Abū Dāwūd, al-Sunan, IV, 106-7). According to the last phrase the name of al-Mahdi is Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh. Perhaps al-Manṣūr was taking this point into consideration when he called his son, Muḥammad, al-Mahdi (al-Bidāya, X, 89). For a full account see Osman, op. cit., 266-9.
3. See Chapter II.
al-Riḍā within the ‘Abbāsid palace under close watch. ¹
Al-Ma’mūn also followed this policy with the ninth Imam, al-Jawād, marrying him to his daughter Umm al-Fadīl, and keeping him under house-arrest. ² Thereafter it can be noted that the policy of house-arrest imposed upon the Imams by al-Ma’mūn became the cornerstone of the later caliphs towards the Imams and their movements and obliged the Imams to invent the idea of the occultation, as one can see later, so as to save the Imam from the ‘Abbāsid restriction, which increased from the time of al-Mutawakkil onwards.

Because his investigators discovered connections between the underground activities of the Imamite agents in Baghdad, Madā’in, and Kufa, and the Imam al-Hādī, al-Mutawakkil followed the policy of al-Ma’mūn when he wrote to al-Hādī a letter full of kindness and courtesy asking him to come to Sāmarrā where they could meet. Afterwards al-Hādī was summoned to the capital in 233/848 ³, where he spent the rest of his life under secret surveillance, to the extent that he could not meet most of his adherents but could only meet secretly a few of his associate agents (wikalā’). ⁴ In fact al-Mutawakkil's policy managed to prevent the ‘Alids from rising in arms against his regime. However it failed to destroy the system of the wikāla and

¹. Ithbāt, 205.
². Ithbāt, 205.
⁴. Ithbāt, 262.
to end the underground activities of the Zaydites and the Imamites, which successfully spread through the whole empire to the extent that they were capable of staging a revolt hoping to reach power. Moreover the Imamite and the Zaydite traditionists between the years 245-260/859-874 were relating Prophetic traditions which stated that al-Qāʾīm would be the twelfth Imam and urged people to join his side when he rose, like the Zaydite traditionist al-‘Aṣfarī (d. 250/864). The Imamite narrator Ahmad b. Khālid al-Barqī (d. 274-80/887-93) also related such traditions. For example, in 250/864 he passed on a narration attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the Prophet al-Khudr, which states explicitly that al-Qāʾīm al-Mahdī would be the twelfth Imam. The spread of such narrations encouraged the Imamites to expect the rise of al-Qāʾīm in the near future and to link his rising with the ‘Abbāsid rule. Therefore some of them applied these traditions along with others concerning the signs of the rise of al-Qāʾīm to the historical circumstances which accompanied the ‘Alid revolt which broke out in 250/864. Ibn ‘Uqda relates that the leader of the rebellion, Yahyā b. ‘Umar, was expected to be al-Qāʾīm al-Mahdī since all the signs

1. Kamāl, 46. For examples, see al-‘Aṣfarī, Aṣl Abū Saʿīd al-‘Aṣfarī, f. 1-2; Mizān, II, 379-80; Bihār, I, 185; al-Kindī, op. cit., 229.
2. al-Kāfī, I, 526-7, 338.
concerning the rise of al-Qā'im al-Mahdi which had been related by al-Ṣādiq occurred within that revolt.¹

Although Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar died in 250/864, the fear of the ‘Abbāsid was increased by the continuation of this revolt and al-Ḥasan b. Zayd’s (250–270/864–884) success in establishing a Shi‘ite state in Ṭabaristān. This fear is obvious if one bears in mind the fact that there was a well-known Prophetic tradition which stated, "A people from the East will arise, who will pave the way for the Mahdi’s rise to power."² Perhaps it was intimated to the ‘Abbāsid that this tradition was an indication of the establishment of an ‘Alid state in Ṭabaristān, which would prepare the way for the rise of al-Qā'im al-Mahdi. There are further proofs to support the ‘Abbāsid fears. According to al-Ṭabarī, ‘Abbāsid spies discovered secret correspondence between the founder of the ‘Alid state in Ṭabaristān, al-Ḥasan b. Zayd, and the nephew of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Khalaf al-‘Aṭṭār³, the follower of the tenth Imam al-Hādī, and moreover many pure Imamites took part in this revolt,

¹. Ibn ‘Uqda, Kitāb al-Malāhim, f. 72. According to al-Mufīd only the Zaydites denied the death of Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar and held that he was al-Mahdi (al-Fusūl al-‘Ashara, 30); however it seems that incidents indicate that there was a common belief among the Imāmiyya and the Jārūdiyya from the years 245–60 onwards that the twelfth Imam would be al-Qā'im al-Mahdi, but they were not sure about his identity, whether he was the son of al-‘Askarī or not.


³. Ṭabarī, III, 1683.
such as Muhammad b. Ma'ruf, who held the banner of the rebels in Mecca, and 'Ali b. Musa b. Isma'il b. Musa al-Kazim who participated with the rebels in al-Rayy and was arrested by the caliph al-Mu'tazz. It seems that the 'Abbásid authorities linked these evidences with the activities of al-Hādī, therefore close restrictions were imposed by the 'Abbásids upon al-Hādī and his followers, and the prominent figures of the Imamites in Baghdad were arrested, such as Abū Hāshim al-Ja'farī, Muhammad b. 'Ali al-‘Aṭṭār and sent to Sāmarrā. This campaign of arrest included al-‘Askari and Ja'far, the two sons of al-Hādī as well.

There was another reason behind the 'Abbásids' fear from the position of al-Hādī and his successor, al-‘Askari, and that is the traditions concerning the series of the twelve Imams, the last of whom would be al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, which had been related in Prophetic and Imamite traditions. This series could only be interpreted as applying to the Imamites' tenth Imam, al-Hādī, and his successor al-‘Askari, so it was plausible that the successor of the latter would be the twelfth Imam, about whom so many traditions were being related. Moreover further traditions appeared around this period attributed to al-Hādī and al-‘Askari, emphasizing the important political and religious role of

1. Ibn 'Uqda, Kitāb al-Malāhim, f. 73.
al-‘Askari’s son.¹ For example, Abū Ḥashim al-Ja‘farī (d. 261/875), the associate follower of al-Hādī, reports the latter as having said,

"The successor after me is my son al-Ḥasan, but what shall you do with the successor of my successor?" Al-Ja‘farī said, "Why, may God make me your sacrifice?" The Imam said, "Because you will not see his physical body and it is not permissible for you to reveal his name." Al-Ja‘farī said, "How shall we mention him?" Al-Hādī said, "Say 'The proof [al-Ḥujja] is from the family of Muḥammad.'"²

It seems from the report of al-Kulaynī that the Imamites considered al-Hādī’s statement as applying to al-Qā‘im and an explanation of the previous statement about the latter by the eighth Imam, al-Riḍā, who had said that the body of al-Qā‘im would not be seen and his name would not be revealed.³ Moreover the Imamite report an interpretation of a Qur’ānic verse which might clarify the ‘Abbāsid fear, particularly if this interpretation can be linked with the above two statements. It was reported that al-Jawād, the ninth Imam, interpreted the Qur’ānic verse thus,

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¹ T. al-Ghayba, 98.
² Kamāl, 381; al-Kāfī, I, 328, 332-3.
³ al-Kāfī, I, 333.
"So verily I call to bear witness the planets that recede, go straight or hide." [al-Takwīr, LXXXI, 16-7] He stated that an Imam would go into concealment in 260/874, and shall later rise like a bright, shooting star in the dark night.¹

On account of the spread of these Imamite exegeses along with the ‘Alid underground activities, the eleventh Imam, al-‘Askarī, was forced to stay in the capital under house-arrest and had to report to the ‘Abbāsid court twice a week², so that the authorities could prevent any danger arising from the twelfth Imam.

¹. Kamāl, 325, 330; al-Kāfī, I, 341.
². T. al-Ghayba, 139-40.
CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF THE IMAMS IN THE SHI'ITE UNDERGROUND ACTIVITIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE UPON THE EVOLUTION OF THE GHAYBA

1. al-Ṣādiq's Attitude towards the new Regime

From our sources it appears that the early members of the 'Abbadid family who became part of the revolutionary movement against the Umayyads adhered to the belief, in common with the various groups of the Shi'a, that the first lawful caliph after the Prophet was 'Ali, and that the Imamate must be in the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt). The 'Abbadids started their propaganda against the Umayyads under the slogans of reform and justice, and with propaganda in favour of the most suitable person from the progeny of Muhammad, "al-Da'wa li-l-Ridā min Al Muḥammad".

Because of these slogans many Shi'ites joined the 'Abbadids, and, furthermore, when the latter's propagandists


2. Ahmad Ibrāhīm al-Sharīf, al-'Ālam al-Islāmī fī al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī (Cairo, 1967), 19-25; Watt, The Majesty that was Islam, 28-30, 95-8. According to al-Najāshī, amongst the Imamites who participated in the 'Abbāsid propaganda was Yaqtīn b. Mūsā, who was their propagandist in Kufa; al-Najāshī, 209.
overthrew the Umayyds in 132/749, Abū Salama al-Khallāl, having heard of the assassination of Ibrāhīm al-Imām, endeavoured to transfer the caliphate to the ‘Alids by corresponding with Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, ‘Umar al-Ashraf, and ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahd, offering each of them the Caliphate. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq rejected the offer bluntly by burning Abū Salama’s letter, and warned ‘Umar al-Ashraf and ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahd against accepting such an offer, because the leading personalities of the ‘Abbāsids, such as Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāh and al-Maṣūr, had held a secret meeting with al-Ṣādiq and ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahd at al-Abwā‘, near Medina, to discuss the situation of the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt). At this meeting al-Ṣādiq refused to have anything to do with the proposal to support the Hasanid claims put forward by ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahd for his son Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya. Although the ‘Abbāsids who were present at this meeting made a nominal pledge to Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq seems to

1. The former was the leader of the ‘Abbāsīd propaganda in Kufa, while the latter was the head of the whole movement.
have been aware of the implication that their own involvement with the revolutionaries, particularly the Kaysāniyya or its Bāshimiyya branch, was the more likely to be successful and that they would succeed by force to the Umayyads’ position. It was for this reason that he refused Abū Salama’s offer rather than because of doubts about his loyalty.

When the ‘Abbāsids succeeded in seizing the reins of power in 132/749 they were naturally aware of the danger from their kinsmen, the ‘Alids, whose claims to succession were greater than their own if the propaganda concerning ‘Alī’ s right was accepted by the general populace. As a result the ‘Alids now faced ‘Abbāsid oppression which proved harder than that of the Umayyads. The motives of this oppression seem to have been first of all doctrinal; the early members of the ‘Abbāsid family, such as ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās, had confirmed ‘Alī’ s right to the Imamate (the political and religious authority), by relating many traditions attributed to the Prophet supporting his right. They had, also, supported ‘Alī against the first three Caliphs and participated in the Caliphate of ‘Alī, and

then gave some support to his son al-Hasan.¹ Hence the 'Abbāsids became, in the eyes of the 'Alids, usurpers of the political authority of the Imamate, while the 'Abbāsids, on the other hand, became suspicious of the attitude of the 'Alids toward their authority. Secondly, there were economic motives since al-Ṣādiq continued to collect the khums secretly from his followers², which the 'Abbāsids considered as a preparatory step towards some conspiracy to overthrow them. These two factors obliged the 'Abbāsids to keep al-Ṣādiq in Medina, and to hold his followers, especially in Iraq and later in Egypt, under close watch as a measure towards ensuring the security of the state.


2. al-Kāfī, I, 203-4, 545-6, 516. Several sources report that the other Imams did likewise by receiving the khums and voluntary gifts from their followers, some of whom were working in the 'Abbāsid offices, such as Ḥasan b. 'Alyā al-Asadi, who was the governor of Bahrain. According to another report, the ninth Imam, al-Jawād, ordered his followers to send his share of the booty which they had seized from the Khurramiyya to him. al-Ṭūsī, al-Istibsār (Tehran, 1970), II, 58, 60-2; Maqāṣid, 333.
Thus al-Ṣādiq maintained an externally quiescent policy towards the 'Abbāsids yet at the same time preached traditions amongst the Shi‘ite circles of the narrators of traditions, which stated that the Imamate was a prerogative bestowed by God upon one of the descendants of al-Ḥusayn, who before his death and at the Prophet’s order transferred it to his successor by open stipulation (al-Nass al-Jalī). He also thought that it was not necessary for a divinely appointed Imam to rise immediately in revolt in order to recover his rights to the political authority, but he should be satisfied with the spiritual leadership and perform its duties until the time when the community was sufficiently aware of his right to political power, when God would assist him in his quest. In accordance with this tactical policy he announced openly that al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī and not himself would achieve political power.

The quiescent policy of al-Ṣādiq did not satisfy a considerable body from among his adherents, whose political ambitions caused a sectarian schism amongst the Imamites. The instigator of this trend was called Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, who at first was trusted by al-Ṣādiq and nominated as agent (wakil) of the Shi‘ite group in Kufa, but al-Ṣādiq then repudiated and denounced him because of his extremist

1. al-Kāfī, I, 279-81.
3. For a full account of al-Ṣādiq’s statements concerning the future Mahdī see Kamāl, 333-59.
theological views, which he had endeavoured to enforce by militant means. It seems very likely that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb wanted to circumnavigate the influence and the interference of al-Ṣādiq by propounding his political and revolutionary plan to his son Ismā'īl, who was more inclined to such thoughts than his younger brother Mūsā, so that he might give his revolutionary thoughts religious legitimacy under the name of Ismā'īl.

Although the rebellion of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was easily subdued at Kufa, his failure along with the insistence of al-Ṣādiq on his quiescent policy, compelled the followers of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb to ressort to underground activities under the leadership of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. This event led the adherents of al-Ṣādiq to split into the Ismā'īlīs and the Mūsāwiyya.


2. The followers of al-Ṣādiq split after his death into al-Mūsāwiyya, who held the Imamate of Mūsā al-Kāẓim; al-Fāṭhiyya, who held the Imamate of the eldest son of al-Ṣādiq, 'Abd Allāh al-Afṭah; al-Muḥammadiyya, who held the Imamate of Muḥammad b. Ja'far; the Wāqifā, who thought that al-Ṣādiq had not died but was al-Qā'im al-Mahdī; and the two Ismā'īlī sects who held the Imamate of Ismā'īl and his son Muḥammad respectively. N. Firaq, 56–66; al-Shībī, op. cit., 206–31; C. Huart, "Ismā'īliyya", E.I. 2.
2. The Imamite activities during the period
of al-Kāzim (148-183/765-799)

The consequence of the death of al-Ṣādiq meant that the Imamites became so weak that even if military rebellion might have been possible during his life-time there was little chance of it after. The rise of the Ismāʿīlīs during the lifetime of al-Ṣādiq, and then the rise of the Fāṭhiyya sect, which included most of the Imamite fuqahā', made the position of the successor of al-Ṣādiq, Mūsā al-Kāzim, very weak, and obliged him to follow the quiescent policy of his father. For this reason al-Mansūr (d. 158/774) did not take any action either against him, or his followers, during his life-time. However he continued his pursuit of the representatives of the revolutionary branch of the Hasanids.¹

The regime of al-Mahdī, who was installed in the Caliphate after the death of his father al-Mansūr in 158/774², was distinguished by the orthodox policy, which he put forward in his encouragement of the traditional muhaddithūn, his pursuit of zindīqs, and his oppression of the People of the Book.³ However, "this policy could be

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2. Ṭabarī, III, 261-3, 377-8; Mizān, IV, 211.
4. al-Kāfī, I, 478; Murūj, VI, 227.
described as less a religious policy than a political weapon. The promotion of the Sunna by the 'Abbāsids was, in fact, a means in the struggle against the religio-political enemies or opposition movements.\(^1\)

This can be seen in the attitude of al-Mahdī towards the Imamites. When he came to power in 158/774 the followers of al-Kāẓim became active and more powerful than the Fāṭhiyya and the Ismā‘īlīs.\(^2\) Al-Mahdī thought that the religious and intellectual activities of al-Kāẓim's partisans might endanger his regime, especially as there was a report indicating "that an important body of opinion had been turning towards the 'Alids and away from the 'Abbāsids or rather, had been insisting that the Hashimitie charisma was not equally spread through all the clan, but was peculiarly present in the 'Alids alone."\(^3\) For this reason, perhaps, al-Mahdī summoned al-Kāẓim from Medina and imprisoned him in Baghdad. But al-Mahdī in so doing neither reinforced the legitimacy of his rule nor changed public opinion towards the charismatic character of al-Kāẓim.\(^4\) He, therefore, decided to follow a policy which depended on bribery and the intimidation of the Shi'a. He released al-Kāẓim in 159/775, after the latter

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had sworn that he would not rise in arms against al-Mahdi or his successors. ¹ Simultaneously al-Mahdi, according to al-Tabari, approached the Zaydites in order to monitor, with their assistance, the activities of the 'Alids and their followers.

For example, al-Mahdi made overtures to Ya‘qūb b. Dāwūd, who belonged to a family which had worked in the secretarial affairs of Khurasan during the Umayyad period², and made him his "brother in God". Then, in 163/799, al-Mahdi made him his vizier and vested him with full powers to handle the whole affairs of the Caliphate, whereupon Ya‘qūb gathered together the Zaydites and nominated them to the high offices of the state.³ Perhaps al-Mahdi did so because the non-revolutionary Zaydites (al-Jarīriyya) held the Imamate of the Inferior (al-Mafdūl) with the presence of the Superior (al-Afdal), and such dogma might give a legitimate foundation to his Caliphate which could be used against the 'Alids.

1. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Tārīkh Baghdād (Beirut, 1931), XIII, 31; Tabari, III, 533; Ibn Tulun, al-Shadharāt al-Dhahabiyya (Beirut, 1958), 96.
3. Tabari, III, 508; al-Ṣadūq agrees with al-Tabari about the doctrine of Ya‘qūb b. Dāwūd, but he mentions that he was converted to the Imamite doctrine about 179/795. See 'Uyun, 60. However, Ya‘qūb belonged to a Shi‘ite family from Merv. His father and uncle helped to promote 'Abbāsid propaganda in Khurasan. Later Ya‘qūb himself was associated with al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in his revolt in 145/762 after which he was imprisoned until 158/774-5. Shaban, op. cit., 21.
Another claim put forward during his regime was that the lawful Imam after the Prophet was not 'Alī but al-‘Abbās, and that the Imamate was therefore passed on within the family of al-‘Abbās.¹ In fact Yā'qūb b. Dāwūd had brought many jurisprudents together from Basra, Kufa and al-Shām, and organised them², so as to further this claim. Al-Kashshāī reports two transmissions to support this. He says that the Zaydite Hishām b. Ibrāhīm wrote many Zaydite works, one of them entitled "The Confirmation of the Imamate of al-‘Abbās", and adds that another called Ibn al-Muq‘ad had written a heresiographical work, illustrating the dogmas, places and activities of the pro-Imamites, such as al-Ya‘fūriyya, al-Zurāriyya, al-‘Ammāriyya, and al-Jawāliqiyya, and submitted his work to al-Mahdī. This work was then recited together with the warning of the Caliph at the gates of the cities of Baghdad, Medina and others.³ The recitation of this work was the first step in al-Mahdī's pursuit of all the other

¹. N. Firaq, 43; Watt, Formative Period, 155; according to al-Balkhi this claim was invented by the Rāwandīyya after the death of al-Mahdī. However, it appears that the Rāwandīyya had held this claim at the instigation of al-Mahdī himself. al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, op. cit., II, 177.
². Tabari, III, 486-7.
factions of the pro-'Alids. Some of the latter were obliged to escape from Kufa to the remote provinces, like Yemen¹, while al-Kāzīm spread instructions amongst his adherents, to follow his quiescent policy properly. It seems from the report of al-Hashshī that the tense relation between the 'Abbāsids and the pro-'Alids continued until the death of al-Mahdī in 169/785.²

It seems that some of this tension was alleviated, however, the Ḥasanids were closely watched and their salaries cut. They began to increase their propaganda in Khurāsān and the other provinces in a new Zaydite form, and contacted the leading personalities of the Ḥasanids in Medina, encouraging them to rebel.³ The latter, as a part of the precautionary policy of al-Hādī, were forced to come to the office of the governor every evening. They exploited the gathering of their followers from numerous provinces during the Pilgrimage and made their ill-treatment

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1. Ikhtiyār, 335.
2. Ikhtiyār, 269-70.
3. al-Ya`qūbī, III, 142. It is clear from the prominent persons who took part in this revolt that it was Zaydite, for example Yaḥyā, Sulaymān and Idrīs, the brothers of al-Nafs al-Zākiyya, who rebelled in the year 145/762 against al-Maṃṣūr. Moreover Ibrāhīm b. Iṣmā'īl Ṭabāṭabā was the father of Muḥammad b. Ṭabāṭabā, the spiritual leader of the Zaydite revolt which took place in Kufa in 199/814 (Maqātil, 297, 304). It is worth mentioning that al-Ṣāḥib b. 'Abbād considered the individuals mentioned above as Zaydite; al-Ṣāḥib b. 'Abbād, Nusrat Madhāhib al-Zaydiyya (Baghdād, 1977), 222.
by the governor an excuse and a signal for their rebellion in 169/785. But their uprising was easily defeated and resulted in a massacre of them in the battle of Fakhkh. However the Caliph, al-Hadī, accused al-Kāzīm of provoking the rebels and tried to kill him, but died in 170/786 before he could put his decision into practice.

In fact the battle of Fakhkh and al-Rashīd's commitment to the anti-‘Alid policy of his predecessors, only served to entrench the political strategy of the three ‘Alid parties, the revolutionary Ḥasanids, the Iṣmā‘īlīs and the Imamites.

The Imamite group under the Imamate of al-Kāzīm became stronger and more organised, and insisted on gradual movement towards their target, but the Imam rejected any bid to rise in arms because he considered it the task of al-Qā‘īm. His adherents, most of whom were originally from Kufa, were scattered throughout the whole Islamic state, and used the rite of Pilgrimage to

1. Tabarī, III, 552-3, 557-9; Murūj, VI, 226-7; Maqātil, 298.
2. ‘Ibar, III, 215-6. Al-İsfahānī mentions two narrations about the attitude of al-Kāzīm. The first one reveals that he refused to participate in the revolt, while the second shows that he ordered Yaḥyā al-Māḥdī to rise in arms; Maqātil, 298, 304. However, there is evidence which shows that al-Kāzīm did not take part in this revolt but he encouraged the rebels to fight the ‘Abbāsids rigorously; al-Kāfī, I, 366.
communicate with each other. They succeeded in maintaining an important body of followers in Akhmīm in Egypt, which became a centre for communication between the Shi‘a in Kufa and Egypt1, while maintaining other adherents in al-Maghrib.2 Al-Kāzīm also permitted a few of his followers to work in the ‘Abbāsid administration, especially in the offices of al-wizārā and al-barād, so that they could help to save their partisans in times of danger. Hence several Imamite families held office, such as ‘Alī b. Yaqtīn’s family3, and the family of al-Ash‘ath, like Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Ash‘ath and his son al-‘Abbās, who became the governor of Khurasan, and Waḍāḥ (or Waḍīḥ), who worked in the barād of Egypt.4

1. al-Kāfī, I, 494. It might be that the Imamite activities in Egypt started in Akhmīm during the time of al-Ṣādiq because some people of Akhmīm such as ‘Uthmān b. Suwayd al-Akhmīmī, Dhū al-Nūn al-Migrī, were students of Jābir b. Ḥayyān al-Kuflī, who was a student of al-Ṣādiq (al-Qiftī, Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā’ [Leipzig, 1903], 185; al-Shiblī, op. cit., 360). Al-Kāzīm also had some Kufan agents in Egypt, such as ‘Uthmān b. Ṣa‘īd b. Rawāsī, and al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Migrī; ‘Uyun, 92; al-Najāshī, 52, 230.

2. Ikhtiyār, 442.

3. Ikhtiyār, 433. For a full account of other names see al-Najāshī, 104, 158, 254-5.

4. Tabarl, III, 561, 609, 612, 740; al-Ya‘qūbī, III, 166; al-Kāfī, II, 224-5. Al-Kashshī mentions that the family of Banū al-Ash‘ath sent the zakāt (30,000 dinars) to the agent of al-Kāzīm in Kufa, which seems to confirm their Imamite inclinations; Ikhtiyār, 459.
However the enlargement of al-Kāẓim's party increased his wealth, for there is much evidence to indicate that he collected secretly the khums, the zakāt, gifts and other taxes, enjoined in the Shari'ā from his adherents\(^1\) as part of what was due to his Imamate.

The second Shi'ite party was the Ismā'īlīs, who had already disassociated themselves from the quiescent policy of al-Ṣādiq and his son al-Kāẓim, by adopting the Imamate of first Ismā'īl and then his son Muḥammad, who were both more inclined to more rigorously revolutionary political underground activities of this body. They learnt from the repeated failure of the Ḥasanid uprisings which had been initiated without previous political preparation, and they adopted a gradual political process in their struggle for power. This action urged them to adopt ideas from beyond the circle of Islam, and it might be that their adoption of these ideas liberated their minds from the limits of the Shari'ā. They put forward new interpretations of the Islamic texts, which meant that each text had an esoteric and exoteric meaning.\(^2\) For example, they interpreted a tradition attributed to the Prophet concerning the time of the rise of al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, which says that the Mahdī will rise when the sun rises from the place of its setting, which, according to them, meant not the rising of the real sun but that of al-Mahdī who would appear in al-Maghrib.

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1. 'Uyun, I, 18, 24, 25-6, 92; Ikhtiyār, 405, 468; al-Fakhřī, 145-6; al-Haythamī, al-Ṣawā'iq al-Muhriqa (Cairo, 1312/1894), 101.

2. N. Firaq, 63-4.
Therefore, they became more interested in preaching their doctrine in al-Maghrib, and encouraged their followers in the east to emigrate there. It seems from the transmission of Nawbakhtī that the relationship between the Ismāʿīlīs and al-Kāẓim's followers was tense, as he mentions that the Ismāʿīlī leaders allowed their followers to assassinate the Imamites who had held the Imamate of Mūsā al-Kāẓim. Moreover the Imamites accused the Ismāʿīlīs of being implicated in the arrest of al-Kāẓim.

At the same time the situation of the Ḥasanid group in the Hijaz was very difficult after the total defeat of their second revolt in Fakhkh in 169/785. The 'Abbāsids discovered that the notion of al-Mahdī had been in circulation amongst the Ḥasanids and that they believed that he might rise in Mecca. It was such a notion that encouraged two

1. Ivanov, W., The Rise of the Fatimids (Bombay, 1946), 49-52, quoting from an Ismāʿīlī Ms entitled Zahr al-Maʿānī.
2. N. Firaq, 64.
3. Al-Kulaynī mentions his narration on the authority of 'Abbās b. Jaʿfar al-Zādidīq. The narration states that Muhammad b. Ismāʿīl met his uncle al-Kāẓim in Mecca and asked him to allow him to go to Baghdad. Al-Kāẓim did so and gave him 300 dinars and 3000 dirhams for the expense of his journey. Then he warned his nephew not to bring about his death by giving the authorities information concerning his activities. However, Muhammad contacted the caliph Harūn al-Rashīd and informed him that his uncle was considered the real caliph by the people who had visited him; al-Kāfī, I, 485-6. Also see Ikhtiyār, 263-5; Ibn Ḥazm, Jamharat Ansāb al-ʿArab (Cairo, 1971), 60.
Hasanid leaders to rise in arms, first al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762 and then al-‘Usayn b. ‘Ali in 169/785, each of whom hoped that he might be the promised Mahdi. Thus the ‘Abbasids continued to restrict the movements of the Hasanids. Moreover they forced them to present themselves to the governor (al-Wâli) every evening. This critical situation made it impossible for the Hasanids to take any militant action in the Hijaz, so two brothers of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya left Medina after the battle of Fakhkh to promote their claims elsewhere. The first of these was Yahyâ al-Mahd, who went to the province of Daylam and preached his propaganda there, winning considerable support from the native princes and the people of Daylam, whom he provoked to rebellion against the caliph al-Rashîd in 175/791. The second brother, Idrîs, escaped to Egypt, where he had a large body of partisans, and, with the assistance of a certain Wâdih, a Shi‘ite working in the barid, managed to escape from there to al-Maghrib. It seems most likely that his partisans there had already spread much propaganda against the ‘Abbasids, because

1. al-Fakhri (Gotha, Greifswald, 1860), 195–6, 227–8; al-Kâfî, I, 366.
3. Tabarî, III, 612–3; al-Fakhri, 231; al-Kulaynî records a correspondence between Yahyâ al-Mahd and al-Kâzîm, which indicates that the latter had nothing to do with this revolt; al-Kâfî, I, 366–7.
Idris succeeded, within only three years, in his rebellion, and established the Idrisid state in 172/788.1

It appears that the numerous Shi'ite activities which have been mentioned above were the causes behind al-Rashid's anti-'Alid policy, which covered most of his Caliphate. In 171/787 he became suspicious of the loyalty of the 'Alids in Baghdad, and decided to gather all of them together and exile them to Medina.2 Then, he followed this step with his appointment of Bakkar al-Zubayri, the descendant of 'Abd Allâh b. al-Zubayr, as governor of Medina, and ordered him to put the 'Alids under close watch, and to restrict their movements.3 Concerning the rebellion of Ya'qub al-Mahd in Daylam, al-Rashid sent a campaign against him (fifty thousand according to al-Tabari) under the leadership of al-Fadl b. Ya'qub al-Barmaki. The latter managed, through diplomacy and promises of amnesty, to make Ya'qub al-Mahd end his uprising and surrender, after he had received a guarantee of security from al-Rashid. But the Caliph was not satisfied with this outcome, so he arrested al-Mahd in Baghdad and killed him.4

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2. Tabari, III, 606.
3. Ibid., III, 614, 616.
Concerning the revolt of Idrīs al-Mahdī, al-Rashīd followed the policy of his father al-Māhdi in using the Zaydites against the other ‘Alids. He sent a Zaydite scholar called Sulaymān b. Jarīr to kill Idrīs. The former, in order to hide his secret target, pretended to be a Shi‘ite partisan who had escaped from the ‘Abbāsids’ oppression. So he became one of the courtiers of Idrīs and managed to poison him in 177/793. However the assassination of Idrīs did not bring about the disintegration of his state, because the Berber tribes installed his child, Idrīs II, after his death. For this reason al-Rashīd vested Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab with the government of Afriqiyah and, four years later, encouraged him to establish the Aghlabid state, possibly to counteract the danger posed by the Idrīsids.

On the other hand the scholars of the Imamites were active in the intellectual field in Egypt, Yemen, Iraq and Khurasan. Hishām b. al-Makam, for example, attempted to prove the legitimacy of the Imamate of al-Kā'īm, which meant that he had considered the ‘Abbāsids usurpers of the rights of al-Kā'īm.

1. Because Sulaymān succeeded in killing Idrīs, the Caliph al-Rashīd appointed him to the barīd of Egypt, and had the previous official Wādīh killed, who had helped Idrīs in his escape to al-Maghrib; Tabari, III, 561.
4. Ikhtiyār, 258-63.
The uprising of the Hasanids in Daylam and al-Maghrib, and the underground activities of the Imamites and the Ismā’īlīs, worried al-Rashīd and made him think that al-Kāzim, whom he already knew to be receiving the khums, the kharāj and the gifts from his followers, was behind all these activities and had prepared a conspiracy to overthrow him. Therefore he waged a campaign of arrest against the Imamites.¹ He started his pursuit by arresting al-Kāzim in Medina in 179/795, and sent him to prison in Basra and Baghdad.² Furthermore, Ibn al-Mu’tazz reports that al-Rashīd ordered the Zaydite Abū ‘Īsma to kill the Imamite poet Mansūr al-Namārī.³ It was this persecution that forced the Imamite missionary Hishām b. al-Ḥakam to hide himself in Madī‘īn, from whence he escaped to Kufa,

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¹ al-Ṭabarī, al-Iḥtiyāj (Najaf, 1966), 161; Ikhtiyār, 262. Some of the Imamites accused the Ismā’īlīs of provoking al-Rashīd against al-Kāzim. They mentioned that Muḥammad b. Ismā’īl informed al-Rashīd about al-Kāzim’s underground activities (al-Kāfī, I, 485–6). Whereas the arrest of al-Kāzim was part of the general plan of the Caliph which he carried out against the Imamites, it seems from several remarks that the viziers Banū al-Barmak were behind al-Rashīd’s plan, so that they could cause the disintegration of their Imamite competitors in the ‘Abbāsid ministry, the family of Banū al-Ash’ath; al-Kāfī, II, 224–5; Ikhtiyār, 258.

² al-Kāfī, I, 476; N. Firaq, 71–2.

³ Ibn al-Mu’tazz, Tabaqāt al-Shu’arā’ (Cairo, 1956), 244.
where he died two months later. However al-Rashid's arrests did not deter the underground activities of the Imamites, especially in Basra. Therefore al-Kāzim, according to the Imamite narrations, was poisoned in 183/799 at the instigation of Yahyā al-Barmakī for al-Rashid, while the latter killed sixty 'Alids who were in his prisons.

The death of al-Kāzim led to two other schisms amongst his followers, the first of which included a large body of them, and was called the Wāqifa. All of them held that he was al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī, but they differed about his death, and split into four sub-sections, three of whom held his

1. According to al-Najāshī and al-Tūsī, Hishām's death occurred in 199/814. But it seems that he died before that. Al-Kashshī associates his death with the arrest of al-Kāzīm in 179/795. In that year Hishām attended a theological symposium in the presence of al-Rashid and Yahyā al-Barmakī. Later al-Rashid issued an order to arrest al-Kāzīm and his partisans. Hence Hishām escaped to Madā'in, then to Kufa where he died two months later; al-Najāshī, 338; T. al-Fihrist, 355; Ikhtiyār, 255-6, 258-62.

2. N. Fīraq, 67; Ikhtiyār, 258; al-Kāfī, I, 258-9; al-Yaʿqūbī narrations that the 'Alid underground activities were probably quite strong in Basra. The increase in the activities of the missionary of this group, Ḥamd b. 'Isā al-ʿAlawī, who spent sixty years hidden there, agitated al-Rashid to pursue them. He imprisoned the former but he managed to escape to Basra in 188/803. Then 'Abbāsid spies detected the missionary and the agent of his group, Ḥādir, who refused to reveal the place of his leader, so they killed him and impaled his body in Baghdad; al-Yaʿqūbī, III, 160.

3. 'Uyun, I, 89-90, II, 143.
death, while the fourth denied it. It seems from a few anecdotes mentioned by the Ithnä‘ ‘Ashariyya that the cause of the denial of al-Kāzim's death was that some of his agents, like ‘Uthmān b. Iṣā al-Rawāsī in Egypt, Ziyād al-Qindī, ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza, Ḥāyyān and al-Sarrāj in Kufa, possessed a large amount of money (more than a hundred thousand dinars) which belonged to al-Kāzim. They used this money for their own benefit, therefore they denied his death, and rejected the Imamate of al-Ridā. However, it is hard to agree with the Twelvers' sources concerning the reason behind the emergence of the Wāqifa sect. It is worth mentioning that most of the traditions concerning the occultation and the rise of al-Qā‘im are attributed to al-Ṣādiq, who did not indicate explicitly which of his descendants would be al-Qā‘im. Therefore it is very likely that a considerable number of the muḥaddithūn thought that the Imam had indicated his son Mūsā and

1. N. Fīraq, 67-8, 70; Q. Māqālāt, 89-91; al-Najāshī, 61, 258, 230-31. It seems from the report of al-Kashshī that Muḥammad b. Bāshīr and his followers applied the term al-Mahdī to al-Kāzim, whose death they denied, giving him the epithet al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī (Ikhtiyār, 478). Such evidence indicates that the Imamites already knew about the rise of one of their Imams under the title of al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī, but they were not sure who this would be.


3. al-Kāfī, I, 333-43.
hence stopped at him, contending that he was \(\text{al-Qā'im al-Mahdī}\) and he was in a state of occultation.

The second schism which the Imamites held was that al-Kāzīm had passed away and the Imam was, therefore, his son 'Alī al-Riḍā, who, according to al-Kulaynī, maintained the Imamate by the designation of his father.\(^1\) Al-Riḍā faced many difficulties in proving his right to the Imamate, not only to the prominent followers of his father, but also to his brother Ahmad.\(^2\) However between the years 183-199/799-814, he managed to maintain a considerable number of followers, along with an underground system of communication to carry on the religious aspects of his Imamate.\(^3\) Moreover his preference for the religious aspects of the religion, more than its political aspects, made him a magnet for the precursors of the Sūfī movements amongst others, especially in Khurasan.\(^4\) However many Imamites, who had accepted his Imamate were not satisfied with his quietists attitude and involved themselves in the underground activities of the revolutionary Zaydites, probably without the permission of the Imam.\(^5\)

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1. al-kāfī, I, 312; Q. Maqāṣīd, 89.
2. Ikhtiyār, 464-5, 472.
3. Ibid., 591-2.
4. Most of the eastern Sūfī movements trace their origins to Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815), who was a companion of al-Riḍā. They regarded al-Riḍā as the founder of the Sūfī movement, but at the same time they did not believe in his Imamate. For an account of this relation see al-Shīrāzī, op. cit.
5. 'Uyun, II, 234-5.
3. The attitude of al-Riḍā towards the 'Alid revolt against al-Maʿmūn

Iraq had been the centre of power for al-Amīn during his caliphate, and it was here that he maintained the support of the Arabs, and especially that of the Murjiʾite scholars (al-ʾĀmma, later called the Sunnites), while his brother al-Maʿmūn, had held the governorship of Khurasan, and had gained the support of its military leaders and senior administrators; and especially that of the Persian vizier al-Faḍl b. Sahl and his partisans who eventually helped him to overthrow al-Amīn.¹ In fact the success of al-Maʿmūn in gaining the caliphate was contrary to the political and economic interest of the supporters of al-Amīn, therefore many regional revolts took place in Syria, al-Jazīra, Yemen and Iraq, headed by the local 'Abbāsid governors themselves.² At the same time the underground propaganda of the 'Alids, which was influential in the Yemen, Hijaz and Iraq, was used by the 'Alids themselves to exploit the difficulties of al-Maʿmūn in Iraq and caused a revolt to break out in Kufa in 199/815. Thus

2. Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *op. cit.*, VIII, 312–3. The most dangerous revolt was the rebellion of Naṣr b. Shabth in al-Jazīra. Another serious revolt was the protest of the populace (al-ʾĀmma) of Baghdad against the installation of al-Riḍā as heir-apparent by al-Maʿmūn. Thus they installed ʿIbrāhīm b. al-Mahdī as a caliph there; Ridaʾya, X, 280–2; al-Kāmil, VI, 230.
these regions fell from the control of the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Ma'mūn.

Although the reports about the ideological identity of the uprising of the 'Alids and events surrounding it are confused, it seems that it was a Zaydite revolt maintained with the support of some Imamite sects, such as the Sabtiyya, the followers of Muhammad b. Ja'far al-Sādiq, and the followers of Ahmad b. Mūsā al-Kāzim, along with the support of the Imāmiyya, but without the direct order of the eighth Imam, al-Riḍā.\(^1\)

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1. It is clear from the reports of al-Ṭabarī and al-Najāshī that the rebels did not believe in the Imamate of a specific 'Alid Imam, but they held the Imamate of the one who would rise in arms in order to achieve his rights to this office (Tabarī, III, 979, 1019; al-Najāshī, 194). Also they wrote on the coins which they minted in Kufa, a Qur'ānic verse (al-Saff, II, 4) revealing their revolutionary inclination. Furthermore al-Isfahānī and al-Ṣāhib b. 'Abbād considered it a Zaydite uprising; Maqātil, 347, 350; 'Uyun, II, 235; Ibn 'Abbād, op. cit., 222.


3. A considerable body of the followers of al-Riḍā participated in this revolt without his instruction. Perhaps they noticed that the brothers of their Imam were prominent leaders of the revolt, and thought that al-Riḍā was behind their participation. Hence they joined it; there were men like Muhammad b. Muslima al-Kūfī (Tabarī, III, 989), who was regarded by al-Najāshī as trustworthy (al-Najāshī, 286; 'Uyun, II, 234-5). It seems from al-Riḍā's interpretation of a dream of one of his partisans as regards an expected uprising that he already knew of the activities of his kinsmen; al-Kāfī, VIII, 257.
The spiritual leader of this revolt was Muhammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ṭabāṭaba, while its military leader was Abū al-Sarayā. It broke out under the slogan "al-Dā‘wā li-l-Ridā min Āl Muhammad wa-l-‘Amal bi-l-Kitāb wa-l-Sunna", in Kufa on the 10th of Jumādā II 199/26 January 815, where the rebels had the support of the people of the environs of Kufa and of the bedouins. Abū al-Sarayā minted the coinage in his name in Kufa, and managed to defeat three ‘Abbasid armies and occupied Madā‘in. Moreover he dispatched many successful campaigns under the leadership of al-Ridā’s brothers and relatives, to extend his authority in Iraq, al-Ahwāz, Fars, the Hijaz, and Yemen. They fulfilled their tasks and became the governors of these areas. For example Zayd b. Mūsā al-Kāzīm became the governor of al-Ahwāz and Basra, while Fars came under the control of Ismā‘īl b. Mūsā al-Kāzīm and Yemen under the control of his brother Ibrāhīm, whereas Wāsiţ was dominated by Ḥusayn b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī. Abū al-Sarayā also appointed Sulaymān b. Dāwūd in Medina, and nominated al-Ḥusayn al-Aftās as governor in Mecca, authorising him

1. Ṭabarī, III, 976-79.
to be the leader of the pilgrims and to provide the Ka‘ba with a white kiswa.¹

The authority of Abū al-Sarāyā increased after the mysterious death of the spiritual leader of the revolt, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā on the first of Rajab 199/15 February 815, and the refusal of the eminent ‘Alid, ‘Alī b. ‘Ubayd Allāh, to accept the position of Ibn Ṭabāṭabā. Abū al-Sarāyā, in order to evade the interference of any strong spiritual leader, nominated for this post a young ‘Alid called Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Zayd b. ‘Alī², and monopolised all affairs of the leadership of the revolt.

The full control of Abū al-Sarāyā in Iraq did not, however, continue because the ‘Abbāsid army defeated him at Qaṣr b. Ḥubayra near Kufa, and forced him to withdraw towards Basra along with 800 horsemen. But news came to him that his governor in Basra, Zayd b. Mūsā al-Kāzīm, had also been defeated after hard combat and had been captured by the ‘Abbāsid troops. Thus he went towards al-Aḥwāz,

1. al-Kāmil, VI, 214-16; Maqātil, 355; Ṭabarī, III, 981-3, 988. Al-Azraqī reports that Abū al-Sarāyā sent a kiswa of silk to the Ka‘ba, with two colours, white and yellow, the former of which was the colour of the ‘Alids' standard. Between the two parts was written: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. May God bless Muḥammad and his progeny, the noble descendants, the pure, and the best of the human race. Abū al-Sarāyā, the propagandist of Al Muḥammad has ordered that this kiswa be made for the holy House of God." al-Azraqī, Akhkhār Makka (Mecca, 1965), I, 263, 264.

but was defeated by the 'Abbāsid governor of that city and his followers dispersed. A few months later the troops of al-Hasan b. Sahl captured him at Jalawlā' and beheaded him on 10th Rabi' I 200/18th October 815, after which his body was impaled in Baghdad.¹

It is worth mentioning that the failure of this revolt caused some Imamites to hold that Mūsā al-Kāẓim, the seventh Imam, was al-Qā'im al-Mahdi, because his son Aḥmad, whom they had considered as the lawful successor of his father, had participated with Abū al-Sarāyā. For this reason they rejected the Imamate of Aḥmad and denied the death of al-Kāẓim.² This fact reveals the general attitude of the Imamites towards any militant action and indicates that they had Ḥadīths concerning the rise of an Imam with the sword, whose uprising would never be defeated, for this Imam cannot die until he has succeeded in establishing the state of the People of the House.³ This could explain why some Imamites abandoned the Imamate of Aḥmad b. Mūsā al-Kāẓim after the defeat of Abū al-Sarāyā and held that his father the seventh Imam was al-Qā'im al-Mahdi. This may be the reason behind the quiescent attitude of these followers of al-Riḍā who did not take any open or active part in the revolt of Abū al-Sarāyā.

². Ikhtiyār, 472.
³. Al-Kulaynī reports several traditions on the authority of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn and al-Ṣadiq regarding this point; al-Kāfī, VIII, 264, 310.
The rebels in Mecca, who had full control of the Hijaz and the Yemen, on hearing of the military defeats of their comrades on the Iraqi front after the death of Abū al-Sarāyā, made overtures to Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, asking him to be their leader and finally persuading him to accept this offer. So they made the oath of allegiance to him as their caliph and called him "Amīr al-Muʾminīn" on 6th Rabīʿ II 200/13 November 815.¹

The latter himself claimed that he was al-Qāʾim al-Mahdī, and based his claim on prophetic traditions², but the eighth Imam al-Riḍā denied his claim, although he endeavoured to save him from a military defeat by advising him to postpone his revolt against the ‘Abbāsids.³

The installation of an ‘Alid caliph with the epithet al-Mahdī in Mecca by the rebels threatened the authority of al-Maʿmūn, because it meant that the rebels denied the legitimacy of his caliphate. Al-Maʿmūn, having failed to subdue the revolt by force, therefore decided to resort to political methods, by conciliating the eighth Imam al-Riḍā. He dispatched an army under the leadership of Ṣaʿīd b. al-Julūdī to Medina for this purpose.⁴ But this army met a serious defeat at the hands of Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, therefore al-Julūdī asked al-Riḍā to contact Muḥammad and ask him to end his resistance, but he rejected al-Riḍā's mediation and insisted on his rebellion. This led to

1. Tabarī, III, 990.
3. al-Kāfī, I, 491; Maqāṭīl, 360.
4. al-Kāfī, I, 488-9; ‘Uyūn, II, 146; Tabarī, III, 1000.
skirmishes between the 'Abbāsid troops and the rebels which continued until the end of the year 200/815, when the 'Abbāsid army captured Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Ṣadiq and forced him to renounce his claim publicly. Because his arrest did not return the areas of revolt into the hands of the authorities, al-Julūdī returned with him, and al-Riḍā to Merv. According to al-Kulaynī, al-Ma'mūn welcomed al-Riḍā and offered him the caliphate but he refused and, after a few months of negotiation with al-Ma'mūn, al-Riḍā agreed to be his successor. The caliph announced his acceptance on 5th Ramaḍān 201/28 March 817 and called him "al-Riḍā min Āl Muḥammad". At the same time he ordered his soldiers to wear green clothes instead of the black which was the emblem of the 'Abbāsids. Then he strengthened his relations with al-Riḍā by marrying his sister, Umm Ḥabība, to al-Riḍā and his daughter Umm al-Fadl to al-Riḍā's son, al-Jawād, who was only about four years old.

In fact the installation of al-Riḍā was a political step arranged by the Persian vizier al-Faḍl b. Sahl and associated with other policies aimed at consolidating his

2. al-Kāfī, I, 489, VIII, 151; 'Uyun, 138-40; Tabari, III, 1012-3.
3. Khāṭīb, X, 184. Concerning Umm Ḥabība, al-Ṭabarī thinks that she was the daughter of al-Ma'mūn (Tabari, III, 1029), whereas Ibn Ṭūlūn reports that she was his sister. The age of al-Ma'mūn at that time was 30; therefore one is inclined to accept Ibn Ṭūlūn's report; Ibn Ṭūlūn, op. cit., 97.
Persian support, and harming the interests of his Arab opposition in Baghdad. This can be noted in the points mentioned below:

Firstly, the fact that al-Ma'mūn continued to reside in Merv caused complaints amongst the military and administrative groups in Iraq, who had been the courtiers of al-Amīn (193-198/808-814), and had then to struggle for their economic and regional interests against the Persian vizier of al-Ma'mūn, al-Fadl b. Sahl and his brother al-Ḥasan b. Sahl. Because of this conflict al-Ma'mūn failed to subdue completely the 'Alid rebellion in the Hijaz and Yemen. Therefore, with the encouragement of his vizier, al-Ma'mūn installed al-Riḍā as his successor to the caliphate, so as to split the front of the rebels by gaining the support of the adherents of al-Riḍā and those who were hoping for the appearance of an inspired 'Alid leader.

Secondly, al-Ma'mūn changed the 'Abbāsid emblem from black to green. The latter was the colour associated with

1. al-Ya'qūbī, III, 185; al-Kāmil, VI, 227.
2. Watt, Formative Period, 176. Al-Kulaynī reports that al-Ma'mūn asked al-Riḍā to write to his followers in the areas of revolt, asking them to stop their support of the rebels; al-Kāfī, VIII, 151.
the Sasanids, whereas the 'Alid emblem was white. Such a step indicates the role of the Persian vizier al-Faḍl b. Sahl in it.

Thirdly, al-Ma'mūn succeeded, by installing al-Riḍā as his successor, in splitting the front of the rebels by gaining the support of al-Riḍā's brothers, who accepted the conciliation of al-Ma'mūn and mentioned his name in the khutba along with the name of al-Riḍā. According to al-Ṭabarī, al-'Abbās b. Mūsā al-Kāzim accepted the governorship of Kufa on behalf of al-Ma'mūn, which encouraged some of the rebels to mention the names of al-Ma'mūn and al-Riḍā in the khutba, but the majority of the Kufans insisted on mentioning only al-Riḍā's name or

1. There are several anecdotes indicating that the colour of the 'Alids' standard was white. The followers of Abū al-Sarāyā were called "al-Mubayyida" as regards the standard of 'Alī (al-Azraqī, op. cit., I, 263-4). Also, Naʿīm b. Khāzim, an Arab advisor of al-Ma'mūn, warned the latter against adopting the advice of al-Faḍl b. Sahl in installing al-Riḍā, by saying to him that his vizier was not sincere to the 'Alids because he suggested the green colour, the sign of his ancestors, the Sasanids, instead of the white, the standard of 'Alī and his sons (J. Wuzara', 313). Furthermore, when al-Ma'mūn asked al-Riḍā to perform the Friday prayer, the latter wore a white turban and white clothes ('Uyun, II, 149). Finally the Imamites narrate that the banners of the followers of al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī would be white (Naj al-Dīn al-'Askarī, al-Mahdī al-Mawʿūd al-Muntazar [Beirut, 1977], I, 177).
that of any prominent person from the descendants of 'Ali. Such attitudes indicate the Zaydite inclination of the latter. On the other hand, the leader of the rebels in Mecca, Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-Kāzīm agreed to mention al-Ma‘mūn and his brother al-Riḍā in the khutba. For this reason, al-Ma‘mūn confirmed his office and authorised him to lead the pilgrimage in Mecca. But a year later, 202/817, the caliph gave the governorship of Mecca to an 'Abbāsid leader, ‘Īsā al-Julūdi, and dispatched Ibrāhīm to Yemen to subdue the rebellion there and granted him the governorship of that place. After he had fulfilled this task he set out for Mecca, but, during his return, he was arrested, as was his brother Zayd, and sent to al-Ma‘mūn. Moreover, al-Nawbakhtī mentions that a considerable body of the muhaddithūn and Zaydites (the non-revolutionary branch), became Imamites after the installation of al-Riḍā. But it seems from the account of al-Kashshī and al-Ṣadūq, that the same people, for example Hishām b. Ibrāhīm al-Rashīdī, had been used by al-Ma‘mūn to watch the partisans of al-Riḍā, and this might explain why those people returned to their previous faith directly after the death of al-Riḍā in 203/817.

Fourthly, al-Ma‘mūn decided to advance towards Baghdad taking with him al-Riḍā and Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq,

2. Tabārī, III, 1029; al-Kāmil, VI, 248.
3. al-Ya‘qūbī, III, 184, 190.
after the rebellion of the 'Alids had been quashed by him. During his advance, his vizier al-Fadl b. Sahl was assassinated, then al-Ridā died in ʿĪs, probably of poison\(^1\), and Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq passed away and was buried in Jurjān.\(^2\) Their mysterious deaths seem to indicate that al-Maʾmūn, having used them to fragment the 'Alid opposition, was now continuing to a more rigorous anti-'Alid programme.

Fifthly, the numerous measures initiated by al-Maʾmūn after his arrival at Baghdad on Rabīʿ I 204/819 revealed the political aim of his previous policy. He cast aside the green banner and ordered his subjects to wear the black colour of the 'Abbasids.\(^3\) He also granted al-Ridā's successor, al-Jawād, two million dirhams\(^4\), and gave back the district of Fadak to two prominent 'Alids, that is Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, and Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan.\(^5\) Furthermore, the land-tax (al-kharāj)

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2. al-Kāfī, I, 486, 490; Murūj, VII, 57, 61; ‘Uyun, I, 186, 188; Shaban, op. cit., 47.
3. al-Kāmil, VI, 253; Ahmad b. Ṭāhir b. Ṭayfūr, Tārīkh Baghdād (Cairo, 1949), 10.
4. ‘Uyun, II, 188.
5. al-Yaʿqūbī, III, 204; according to the account of al-Kulaynī both were Imāmites, he relates, that the father of the first, Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, supported the Imamate of al-Ridā (al-Kāfī, I, 316). Also al-Najāšī reports that the grandson of the second, Yaḥyā b. Ahmad b. Muḥammad, was a prominent Imāmate in Nīshāpūr; al-Najāšī, 345; Abū al-Fidāʾ al-Mukhtarār fī Akhbār al-Bashar, II, 32.
of the sawād was adjusted in favour of the tax-payer, the share of the treasury was to be two-fifths instead of half of the produce.¹ In so doing, al-Ma'mūn wanted to cut the support of the prominent 'Alids and the peasants of the sawād to the revolutionary 'Alids' activities, which, according to Abū al-Fidā, he had put an end to. He was also endeavouring to oppose the Arab opposition in Baghdad, so that when he entered the city of Baghdad everything there returned to normal as if the uprising had not occurred.²

Finally, al-Ma'mūn started in 205/820 to hold symposiums between the Imamites and the Zaydites, and encouraged them to discuss the question of the Imamate in his presence. It is worth mentioning that the non-revolutionary Zaydites believed in the Imamate of the inferior (al-Mafdūl) with the presence of the superior (al-Afdal), that is to say while 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib was the most excellent of the community after the Prophet, he fully recognized the caliphate of Abū Bakr and 'Umar. For this reason al-Ma'mūn often agreed with the view points of Zaydite scholars, like 'Alī b. al-Hīm, as regards the Imamate in their discussions with the Imamites.³ On the other hand, al-Ma'mūn managed to capture the 'Alid rebel 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Ahmad b. 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib, who rose in arms in Yemen.

1. Tabarī, III, 1039; al-Kāmil, VI, 253.
3. Tabarī, III, 1040.
When this rebellion was subdued al-Ma'mūn ended the last military opposition of the 'Alids during his rule. Finally, his real attitude towards the 'Alids was revealed in 206/821, when he ordered them to wear black, and announced that all Ṭālibyyīn should be prevented from entering his palace.¹

4. The development of the Imamite organization (al-Wikāla) during the time of al-Jawād

Despite the developed system of the organization of the Imamites during the last period of al-Riḍā's Imamate, the death of the latter, leaving a successor who was only seven years old, caused further splits amongst his followers. Al-Masʿūdī mentions that they were confused by the age of Muḥammad al-Jawād, the ninth Imam, as to whether he possessed the requisite qualifications for the Imamate. Therefore eighty leading personalities, among them al-Rayyān b. al-Salt, Ṣafwān b. Yaḥyā, Yūnīs b. 'Abd al-Rahmān, Muḥammad b. Ḥakīm, 'Alī b. Ḥasan al-Wāṣiṭī, and Iṣḥāq b. Iṣmāʿīl b. Nawbakht, gathered together from various provinces at the house of 'Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Ḥajjāj in Baghdad where they discussed the validity of al-Jawād's Imamate, and decided to go during the pilgrimage to test his knowledge. Two groups among the Imamites thought that al-Jawād's age did not qualify him for the Imamate; therefore, the first group held the Imamate of his uncle

¹. Taḥbīrī, III, 1062-3; al-Kāmil, VI, 269.
Ahmad b. Mūsā al-Kāzīm, whereas the second group, like Ibrāhīm b. Śāliḥ al-Anmāṭī, moved to the Wāqīfa and held that the seventh Imam was al-Qāʾim al-Mahdī. But the rest were satisfied with his distinguished knowledge, and held that he was well qualified in spite of his age. Hence they carried on leading the affairs of the organization, and sent their propagandists from Kufa and Medina to various provinces. Thus according to al-Najāshī, many Kufan muḥaddithūn, such as Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ashʿath, Aḥmad b. Sahl, al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Miṣrī, and Ismāʿīl b. Mūsā al-Kāzīm, moved to Egypt and carried on their activities there. Part of these was to circulate the traditions of the Prophet concerning al-Qāʾim al-Mahdī and the fact that the latter would be from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn. It seems from a narration mentioned by al-Kulaynī that they gained considerable adherents there. He reports that ‘Alī b. Asbāḥ al-Kūfī came from Egypt to Medina to see al-Jawād so as to describe him to the Imamites in Egypt. Throughout the land of the caliphate the system of agency (Wikāla) became more developed and managed to save the organization from certain disintegration. The agents of the Imam spread in many provinces, like

1. N. Fīraq, 85-7; Q. Maqālāt, 93-5; al-Najāshī, 19.
2. Ithbāt, 213-5.
4. al-Kāfī, I, 494.
al-Ahwáz\(^1\), Hamadān\(^2\), Sīstān, Bist\(^3\), Rayy\(^4\), Basra\(^5\), Wāsīt, Baghdad\(^6\), and the traditional centres of the Imamites, Kūfa and Qumm.\(^7\) They allowed their partisans to work in the ‘Abbāsid administration, including such as Muḥammad b. Iṣmā‘īl b. Bazī and Ṭūḥa b. Ḥamza al-Qūmī, who maintained high ranks in the vizierate\(^8\), and Nūḥ b. Darrāj, who was the qādī of Baghdad and then of Kūfa, and who, because his relatives were the agents of al-Jawād, used to hide his faith during his occupation of this post.\(^9\) Other Imamites became governors of some ‘Abbāsid regions, such as al-Ṭūsayn b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Nīṣābūrī, the governor of Bist and Sīstān, and al-Ḥakam b. ‘Alī al-‘Asadī, the governor of Bahrain, both of whom paid the khums to al-Jawād while hiding their allegiance to him.\(^10\)

The underground activities of the agents only aimed at that stage to control and carry on the religious and financial affairs of the Imamites and did not aim at endangering al-Ma‘mūn’s rule. However in the year 210/825 the people of Qumm, most of whom were Imamites, appealed

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1. al-Najāshī, 191.
2. Ikhtiyār, 611-2; al-Najāshī, 265.
3. al-Kāfī, V, 111.
9. Ibid., 80, 98; Mizān, IV, 276.
to the caliph to reduce their land-tax (al-kharāj) just as he had reduced the kharāj of the inhabitants of Rayy, but he ignored their appeal, therefore they refused to pay the kharāj and took over control of the affairs of Qumm.¹ So al-Ma'mūn dispatched three regiments of his army from Baghdad and Khurasan to quash their revolt. The leader of the 'Abbāsid army, 'Alī b. Hishām managed to fulfil his task, and demolished the wall of Qumm, and massacred many people, amongst them Yahyā b. 'Umrān, who, according to Ibn Shahr Āshūb, was the agent of al-Jawād.² Moreover al-Ma'mūn collected seven million dirhams from its inhabitants as a kharāj instead of the normal amount, which had been two million dirhams before their uprising. It seems from the reports of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr that some of the leaders of this revolt were exiled to Egypt, among whom was Ja'far b. Dāwūd al-Qummi.³ These measures did not end the military activities in Qumm. According to al-Ṭabarī, Ja'far b. Dāwūd escaped from Egypt and rebelled in Qumm in 214/829, but his revolt was subdued and he was arrested and banished again to Egypt.⁴ Unfortunately the Imamite sources are silent about these military actions in Qumm and their direct relationship with the Imamites' organization. Al-Ma'mūn, however, linked their activities with al-Jawād. Thus he endeavoured

¹ al-Azdi, 368.
² Ibn Shahr Āshūb, Manāqib Al Abī Talib, IV, 397; al-Azdi, 368.
³ Tabarī, III, 1092-3, 1102; al-Xāmil, VI, 264, 293.
⁴ Tabarī, III, 1102.
to conciliate them through the Imam. According to al-Azādī and al-Tabarī, al-Ma’mūn, during his march to invade al-Rūm, had summoned al-Jawād and welcomed him in Tikrīt in Șafar 215/830, where he married his daughter Umm al-Faḍl to him, asking him to celebrate his marriage in Baghdad, then to go back with his wife to Medina.¹

Indeed this marriage neither gave al-Ma’mūn the support of the Imamites nor stopped the riots in Qumm. Ja’far b. Dāwūd managed to escape again from Egypt and rebelled in Qumm in 216/831, where he defeated the army sent by al-Ma’mūn and killed its leader ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā. He continued his resistance until the end of the year 217/832 when the ‘Abbāsid troops ended his uprising and executed him.²

But afterwards the underground activities of the ‘Alīds increased in a wide scale, therefore al-Mu’tasim, who succeeded al-Ma’mūn to the caliphate in 218/833, was obliged to summon al-Jawād and Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Talqān, so as to investigate their role in the underground activities. The latter, on hearing of al-Mu’tasim’s

¹ Tabarī, III, 1103; al-Azādī, 399.
² Tabarī, III, 1106, 1111; al-Kāmil, VI, 286-7.
decision, escaped from Kufa to Khurasan, whereas al-Jawād was arrested in Medina and taken along with his wife, Umm al-Faḍīl, to the caliph in Baghdad, where he was put under house-arrest and died a few months later in Dhū al-Ḥijja 220/835. Some Imamite writers claim that his wife Umm al-Faḍīl poisoned him at the instigation of al-Muʿtaṣim, but al-Mufīd thinks that he died naturally. ²

In fact in the last few years of al-Jawād's Imamate the system and the tactics of the Imamite agents were highly developed. The Imam's followers in Khurasan allowed themselves to be recruited into the 'Abbāsid army and participated in subduing the rebellion of the Khurramiyya. According to al-Ṭūsī, they seized a large amount of booty from the rebels, so al-Jawād ordered them in 220/834 to pay the khums either to him directly or to his agent there.³ Al-Jawād himself, on hearing of al-Muʿtaṣim's command to present himself in Baghdad, asked his

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1. It is worth mentioning that Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim was the Imam of the revolutionary Zaydites during al-Jawād's period. Al-Muʿtaṣim endeavoured to arrest him, so he escaped from Kufa and revolted in al-Ṭalqān but al-Muʿtaṣim arrested him and imprisoned him in Sāmarrā. But he disappeared from jail mysteriously. Thus a considerable body from the Zaydites in the districts of Kufa, Ṭabaristān, Daylam and Khurasan held that he did not die but was alive and would rise in arms to fill the earth with justice after it had been filled with tyranny; Murūj, VI, 116-7.

2. Ithbāt, 220; Bihār, I, 15-17; al-Иrshād, 297, 307.

representative Muḥammad b. al-Paraj to hand the khums to his son ʿAlī al-Hādī as a sign that he was to be his successor.¹

5. The ʿAbbāsids' attitude towards the activities of al-Hādī

According to the Imamite sources, the bulk of the followers of al-Jawād accepted the Imamate of his successor ʿAlī al-Hādī, who was then seven years old. His age did not form an obstacle to his holding the Imamate, because they had faced this problem with his father, who had also been seven years old when he took over the office of the Imāma. It is also reported that the ninth Imam, al-Jawād, had made him his legatee.² A few of al-Jawād's followers, however, adopted the Imamate of his son Mūsā, but after a short time they returned to the rest of the Imamites, accepting the Imamate of ʿAlī al-Hādī.³

The Imamites, at this stage, concentrated their efforts in re-organising the activities of their followers, which was especially necessary if one takes into consideration the fact that the flourishing of the ʿAbbāsid economy had decreased the 'Alids' opportunities to obtain

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1. Ibn Shahr Āshūb, Manāqib, IV, 389.
2. al-Kāfī, I, 323-5; N. Firaq, 77.
supporters for further military action. For this reason, perhaps, one can see why the caliph, al-Mu'tasim, and his successor al-Wāthiq (227-232/841-846), were more tolerant than al-Ma'mūn and later al-Mutawakkil towards the 'Alids. According to Abu al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, the Tālibiyyūn had been assembled in Sāmarrā where their salaries were paid to them by the caliph al-Wāthiq. The latter also distributed a lot of money among the 'Alids in the Hijaz and other provinces.

After the death of al-Wāthiq certain events which took place left serious effects on the 'Abbāsid attitude towards the activities of the adherents of the tenth Imam, al-Hādī. Al-Mutawakkil was elected to the caliphate in 232/837 and his installation was seen by the traditionist bloc (al-Muhaddithūn al-'Āmma), as a major success against those who favoured the 'Alids. The majority of the latter were from the ranks of the Mu'tazila, and the Shi'ites.

1. The flourishing of the 'Abbāsid economy can be noted in al-Mu'tasim's ability to recruit a new garrison mainly from the Turks of Caucasus, and to establish a new capital, Sāmarrā. His successor al-Mutawakkil followed in his footsteps, establishing another garrison by recruiting people from the western provinces of the empire, which he called al-Shākirīyya. Furthermore he established a new capital called al-Ja'fariyya. After his death, he left in the treasury, according to al-Mas'ūdī, four million dinars and seven million dirhams; Murūj, VII, 276-7; Shaban, op. cit., 76.

2. Maqātil, 394; al-Fakhrī, 176.
3. al-Ya'qūbī, III, 216.
4. Tabarī, III, 1368.
who formed the progressive and indeed radical element in society. Recognising this, al-Mutawakkil advanced certain measures to destroy the economic and political foundations of both the Mu'tazila and the Shi'ites.

Firstly, he abandoned the inquisition (al-Mihna) against the narrators of the 'Amma, which had been implemented by al-Ma'mūn with the support of the Mu'tazilites. Furthermore, he encouraged the narrators of the 'Amma and their adherents to openly adopt anti-Shi'ite slogans.¹

Secondly, al-Mutawakkil discharged the vizier, al-Zayyāt and his staff from their offices and appointed instead al-Jarjarā'ī and the Ibn Khāqān, who were more inclined to his anti-Shi'ite policy.²

Thirdly, he decided to rebuild the whole structure of the army in two stages. First he began to gradually weaken the power of the Ṭhirids, who were in charge of ruling Khurasan and of policing Baghdad and the Sawād. He did this by first nominating his three sons, al-Muntasir, al-Mu'tazz and al-Mu'ayyad, as his successive heirs apparent, and then appointing al-Muntasir as governor in Afriqiyya and al-Maghrib, al-Mu'ayyad as governor in Syria, while al-Mu'tazz was put in charge of ruling the eastern provinces, and Khurasan in particular. Simultaneously the caliph divided the army in the capital, Sāmarra, between his sons and sent them to the provinces to which

². Tabarī, III, 1373-5; see also al-Kāfī, I, 498.
he had appointed them, so as to prevent any direct
conspiracy on the part of the leaders of the army. His
second move was to begin to build a new army called
al-Shākiriyā, recruiting people from areas which were
well-known for their anti-'Alid attitudes, particularly from
Syria, al-Jazīra, al-Jabal, Hijaz, and even from the
Abnā', who had rebelled against the inquisition (al-Mihna). 1

While al-Mutawakkil was carrying out these measures
he turned towards the opposition, to deal with the
organised underground activities of the 'Alids in general
and the Imamites in particular. The intellectual activities
of the Imamites in Egypt, which had been encouraged by
Ismā‘īl b. Mūsā al-Kāzim, had borne fruit and expanded
into the sphere of underground political activities, even
penetrating to remote parts of North Africa. 2 The system
of communication of their organization (al-Wikāla) was
highly developed, particularly in the capital Sāmarrā, 3
Baghdad, Madā‘in, and in the districts of the Sawād. 3
Furthermore it seems from the report of al-Ya‘qūbī that
the Imamites had hidden the name of their Imam to the

1. Shaban, op. cit., 72-5; 76.
2. Al-Mas‘ūdī and Ibn Ḥazm mention that Ja‘far b. Ismā‘īl
b. Mūsā al-Kāzim was killed by Ibn al-Aghlab in
al-Maghrib during the caliphate of al-Mu‘tazz (Murūj,
VII, 404; Ibn Ḥazm, op. cit., 64), which may indicate
that Ja‘far, perhaps, had been sent there by his
father to preach to the people concerning the ‘Alids’
rights to the caliphate.
extent that the caliph was not sure exactly who the Imam was\textsuperscript{1}, or if the Imamites' Imam had direct links with Shi'ite underground activities.

He instigated a campaign of arrests against the Imamites, in 232/846, accompanied by harsh treatment to the extent that some of the agents of the Imam, al-Hādī, in Baghdad, Madā‘in, Kufa and the Sawād died under torture, while others were thrown into jail.\textsuperscript{2} The caliph in so doing caused serious damage to the system of communication of the Wikāla, so the Imam, in order to fill the vacuum left by the arrested agents, had to appoint new agents instead, such as Abū ‘Alī b. Rāshid, who was nominated to lead the activities of the Imamites in Baghdad, Madā‘in and the Sawād, and Ayyūb b. Nūh, who was appointed as the agent of Kufa. Al-Hādī provided them, as well, with new instructions concerning their duties during that critical situation.\textsuperscript{3}

Despite these efforts to save the organization, the investigation of the governor of Medina, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muhammad, concerning the Imamites led him to the discovery that al-Hādī was in fact behind these activities. He informed al-Mutawakkil, warning him of the danger of al-Hādī's presence in Medina. So the caliph summoned al-Hādī to Sāmarrā in 233/848 where he kept him under house-arrest.\textsuperscript{4} Two years later the caliph discovered that

\textsuperscript{1} al-Ya‘qūbī, III, 217.
\textsuperscript{2} Ikhtiyār, 603, 607; T. al-Shayba, 226-7; Bihār, L, 183.
\textsuperscript{3} Ikhtiyār, 513-4.
\textsuperscript{4} Ithbāt, 225-6; Bihār, L, 209.
Egypt and the areas near the tomb of al-Ḥusayn in the Sawād were the strongest parts in his empire for the underground communication of the 'Alids. Therefore he ordered that the tomb of al-Ḥusayn and the houses nearby be levelled to the ground. After this he ordered that the ground of the tomb be ploughed and cultivated, so that any trace of the tomb would be forgotten. Furthermore he issued an order prohibiting people to visit the tombs of all the Imams, and warning them that anyone found in the vicinity would be arrested.  

Moreover, al-Mutawakkil waged another campaign of arrests and Yahya b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlawi was among those who were arrested. He was accused of conspiracy and imprisoned

1. Tabari, III, 407; Murūj, VII, 302. Many early sources represent the Ṭabari view, and contemporary scholars claim that the reason behind the demolition of al-Ḥusayn's tomb was that the Shiʿa had made it an alternative centre for pilgrimage (Maqātil, 395; al-Tikriti, The Religious Policy of al-Mutawakkil ʿAlā Allāh al-ʿAbbāsī [232-47/847-68], M. A. Dissertation [McGill University, Canada, 1969], 58, 63). But all the narrations concerning this view are attributed to one narrator called ʿAḥmad b. al-Jiʿd who was a loyal supporter of the Ṭabari view. In the light of this, perhaps, he gave this interpretation so as to excuse the action of the caliph, whose aim was to stop the underground activities of the Shiʿa who used their visit to the tomb of al-Ḥusayn as a means of communication. The caliph wanted, as well, to eliminate any sign of the grave, which might revive the revolutionary trends amongst the Shiʿa.
in the jail of al-Muṣṭaṣiq in Baghdad.\(^1\) At the same time he ordered the governor of Egypt to deport the Tālibiyyīn to Iraq, and he did so. Afterwards al-Mutawakkil banished them to Medina in 236/850\(^2\), which had been used as a place of exile for the ‘Alids.

However, it seems from several remarks that al-Mutawakkil went further in his policy, aiming in the long term to destroy the economic and social status of the ‘Alids, and issued many orders so as to achieve this aim. He confiscated the properties of the Ḥusaynids, that is the estate of Fadak, whose revenue was at that time, according to Ibn Ṭāwūs, 24,000 dinars, and granted it to his partisan ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar al-Bazyār.\(^3\) He also warned the inhabitants of the Hijaz not to have any communication with the ‘Alids, or to support them financially. Many people were severely punished because they did so. In so doing, according to al-İṣfahānī, the ‘Alids faced harsh treatment in Medina, where they were totally isolated from other people and were deprived of their necessary livelihood.\(^4\)

The caliph wanted to remove the Shi‘ites from the ‘Abbāsid administration and to destroy the good standing of the ‘Alids in public opinion. Al-Mas‘ūdī gives an

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1. Ṭabarī, III, 1404.
2. al-Kindī, Wilāt Mīṣr (Beirut, 1972), 177-8.
example of this policy, mentioning that Išhāq b. Ibrāhīm, the governor of Šaymara and Sīrawān in the province of al-Jabal, was discharged from his office because of his Imamite allegiance, and that other people lost their positions for the same reason.¹

According to al-Kindī, al-Mutawakkil ordered his governor in Egypt to deal with the 'Alīds according to the following rules:

1) No 'Alīd could be given an estate or be allowed to ride a horse, or move from al-Fuṣṭāṭ to the other towns of the province.

2) No 'Alīds were permitted to possess more than one slave each.

3) If there was any conflict between an 'Alīd and a non-'Alīd, the judge must first hear the claim of the non-'Alīd and accept it against the 'Alīd without negotiation.²

By these measures, al-Mutawakkil managed to prevent the Shiʿites from plotting against his regime, but he failed to end their underground activities, because some reports indicate that al-Ḥādī continued his communications with his adherents secretly, receiving the khums and other taxes from his agents in Qumm and its districts.³

According to al-Masʿūdī, al-Mutawakkil was informed about this, and also heard that there were, in al-Ḥādī's house,

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¹ Murūj, VII, 238-9; al-Kāfī, I, 500.
² al-Kindī, op. cit., 230.
³ Bihār, L, 185.
arms and letters from his supporters indicating conspiracy against him. Therefore the house was searched by the soldiers of the caliph, but they did not find any proof, and so al-Hādī was set free.  

The suppression of the Imamites decreased after the assassination of al-Mutawakkil, who was succeeded by his son al-Muntasir in 247/861. The latter was more tolerant than his father towards the Imamites. He issued an order to stop the campaign of arrests and the oppression of the 'Alids and their adherents, and permitted them to visit the tombs of al-Ḥusayn and the other Imams. He also gave the properties of Fadak back to them. But this attitude changed with the succession of al-Musta‘īn to the caliphate in 248/862. According to al-Kindī, the Imamites in Egypt were persecuted by its governor, Yazīd b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Turkī, who arrested an 'Alid leader called Ibn Abī Ḥudra along with his followers, who had been accused of carrying out underground activities, and were deported to Iraq in 248/862. According to al-Kulaynī the campaign of arrests and pursuit affected the followers of al-Hādī in Egypt. For example, Muḥammad b. Ḥajar was slain and the estate of Sayf b. al-Layth was seized by the ruler of Egypt. Meanwhile in Iraq, some of the followers of

1. Murūj, VII, 207.
2. Ibid., VII, 302.
4. al-Kāfī, I, 511, 513.
al-Hādī in Sāmarrā were arrested, and his main agent (wakīl) in Kufa, Ayyūb b. Nūh, was pursued by the qādī of the city.

It appears, however, that the 'Abbāsid oppression did not deter the Shi‘ite ambition to reach power. Many historians like al-Īsfahānī report that 'Alīd revolts broke out in 250-1/864-5 in the areas of Kufa, Tabaristān, Rayy, Qazwīn, Egypt and Hijaz, which might have been directed by one group, or to be more accurate by one leader. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to deal with the details of these revolts, but it is worth mentioning that the rebels used the Prophet traditions (al-ḥadīth al-nabawī) concerning al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, and the signs of his rising so as to achieve immediate political success. According to Ibn 'Uqda, the leader of this uprising, Yahyā b. 'Umar al-'Alawī, was expected to be al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, because, he relates, all the signs and events which had been predicted by the sixth Imam, al-Ṣādiq, regarding the rise of al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, occurred within the events of that revolution:

فَأَمَّنَ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ لَا يُبِنِّي رَجُلٌ مِنْ أَلْلَهِ حَسَنٌ وَلَا يَنْمِسَ الْرَّأيَةُ الْبِيضاءُ. تَالَّ عَلِيٌّ بْنُ الْحَسَنِ نَفَاعَ مَنْ تَيَتَّبِعَ أَهْلُ بَنِي رَوْاسِي، وَكَانُوا يَعْقِدُونَ عَمَلَةً بِيضاءٍ عَلَى تَنَائِي فَاتِسْكَهَا شَجَع

1. Manāqib, IV, 416.
2. al-Arbili, Kashf al-Ghumma, III, 247. The qādī of Kufa at that time was Ja’far b. ‘Abd al-Wāhid. The caliph al-Musta‘īn removed him from this office and exiled him to Basra where he died in 257/780; Mizān, I, 413.
This document indicates that the Imamites were expecting the establishment of their state by al-Qāʾīm al-Mahdī in the near future. Despite the Zaydite façade of this uprising, many pure Imamites participated in it. According to Ibn ‘Uqda, the holder of the standard of the rebels in Mecca was Muhammad b. Maʿrūf al-Hilālī (d. 250/864), who was among the eminent Imamites of the Hijaz. Furthermore, the leader of the rebels in Kufa, Yahyā b. ‘Umar, who was assassinated in 25/864, drew the sympathy and the praise of al-Hādī’s agent, Abū Hāshim al-Jaʿfari.

1. Ibn ‘Uqda, op. cit., f. 74-5.
3. Tabarī, III, 1522.
Also al-Mas'ūdī reports that a certain ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. Ismā’īl b. Mūsā al-Kāzīm took part in the revolt in Rayy and was arrested by the caliph al-Mu’tazz, and, since this man was the grandson of the Ismā’īl b. Mūsā al-Kāzīm who had preached the Imamite doctrine in Egypt it seems extremely probable that this revolution was essentially Imamite.¹ Moreover, al-Ṭabarī gives information which throws light on the role of the Imamites in this rebellion and upon their underground activities, which had been considered by the authorities as purely Zaydite rather than Imamite. He also reports that the spies of the ‘Abbāsids discovered correspondences between the leader of the rebels in Tabaristān, al-Ḥasan b. Zayd, and the nephew of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Khalaf al-‘Attār, who were both adherents of the tenth Imam, al-Ḥādī.² This led the authorities to the fact that the Imamites had direct links with the rebels. So the leading personalities of the Imamites in Baghdad were arrested, and deported to Sāmarrā, among whom were Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-‘Attār and Abū Hāshim al-Ja’farī³, and the two sons of al-Ḥādī, Ja’far and al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, later to be the eleventh Imam.⁴ One can link these ‘Abbāsid precautions and the sudden death of al-Ḥādī in Sāmarrā in 254/868, because the

1. Murūj, VII, 404.
2. Tabarī, III, 1362, 1683; Ikhtiyār, 68.
authorities believed him to be behind all these disturbances, and felt that his death would bring them to an end.¹

The cautious attitude of the authorities towards the Imamites also covered the short period of the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (254–60/868–874). The Imam was put under house-arrest and his movements were restricted as he was obliged to present himself at the palace of the caliph in Sāmarrā every Monday and Thursday.² Despite these restrictions, al-‘Askarī managed to communicate with his agents by secret means.³ It appears the the continuation of the rebellion of the ‘Alids, who extended their penetration into new areas, was behind the restriction of the Imam's movements. According to al-Tūsī, the caliph al-Muhtadī arrested some Imamites in 255/869, accusing them of the assassination of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-‘Abbāsī, who had been murdered by the rebels in Kufa. Al-‘Askarī, the eleventh Imam, was arrested as well, but was set free soon after the death of the caliph, al-Muhtadī.⁴ Despite the fact that the eleventh Imam managed to carry out his activities without the knowledge of the authorities until his death in 260/874⁵, it appears that the policy of house-arrest, which had been imposed upon the Imams by

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1. The majority of the Imamite scholars believe that al-Ḥādī was poisoned at the instigation of the 'Abbāsid authorities; Manāqib, IV, 401; Bihār, L, 206-7.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 139-40.
4. T. al-Ghayba, 147, 226; Bihār, L, 303; Tabari, III, 1709.
5. al-Kāfī, I, 503.
the caliph al-Ma'mūn and had been continued until the time of al-'Askarī, led the latter to search for a method by which he could prevent 'Abbāsid surveillance being imposed upon his son, the twelfth Imam, so that the latter might be able to disguise his identity and carry on his activities beyond the careful watch of the authorities.¹

6. Conclusion

From the death of al-Husayn, the Imams of the Shi'a had followed a more or less passive policy towards the ruling caliphs, but this did not indicate tacit acceptance of the rights of first the Umayyads and then the 'Abbāsids to the caliphate. Rather they believed that, since these families had come to power through natural means, their downfall should also be according to the will of God, and He would indicate this to them and assist them in carrying out His will, when the appropriate time had arrived. Towards this end they were always prepared to rise, and take their rightful position, because any Imam could be ordained by God as al-Qā'im al-Mahdī.

"Qālā 'Alī b. Abī ʾTālib: wa-l-Mahdī Yaj'alah Allāh man shā'a minnā Ahl al-Bayt."² Thus al-Sadiq, who was strong and capable of leading an uprising, might have risen against the caliph if his followers had adhered to his

¹. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.
². al-kāfī, I, 450.
instruction, but schisms appeared amongst their ranks and the Imam's aspirations came to naught. A considerable body among al-Sadiq's followers were not satisfied with his political methods, and cut themselves off in order to struggle for power without his interference. This was manifested in the emergence of the Zaydites and the Ismā'īlīs, who put forward a new interpretation of the traditions (Ahādīth) concerning al-Qā'im al-Mahdī and his rising and used it in their struggle for power. This can be seen in the Zaydite and the Ismā'īlī revolts between the years 145-296/762-908, which ended by the establishment of an Ismā'īlī state and the installation of an Imam with the title al-Mahdī.

The Imams, however, denied the claim of any 'Alid who claimed that he was al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, the one who was promised by the Prophet, but they sympathised with some 'Alid rebels who were loyal to them. This might encourage one to assume that the Imams had two methods designed to help them to reach power. The first of these was the open academic, cultural and religious activities which they spread amongst the people without involving themselves, openly, in any political activities. Secondly, they secretly supported some Shi'ite rebels who were loyal to them, hoping that they would hand the power over to them after their success.

The military activities of the various Shi'ite groups confused the 'Abbāsids and led them to believe that the Imamite Imams were behind them or at least that the outcome
of their intellectual activities would be militant action. Therefore the authorities forced the Imams to reside in the capital from the year 202/817 and put them under house-arrest. This policy was imposed upon the Imams, al-Ridā, al-Jawād, al-Hādī, and al-ʿAskarī, and led these Imams to develop the underground system of their organisation (al-Wikāla), so that it could function under these difficult conditions. On the other hand this critical situation forced the eleventh Imam, al-ʿAskarī, to search for a method by which he could prevent ʿAbbāsid surveillance being imposed upon his son, later to be the twelfth Imam, so as to enable him to disguise his identity and carry on his activities beyond the careful watch of the authorities.
CHAPTER III

THE IMAMITES' VIEWS CONCERNING THE CONCEALED
IMAM AND HIS BIRTH (254-260/868-874)

1. The Attitude of the Imamites
   towards 'Alī al-Hādī’s Successor

1.1. The followers of al-‘Askari (al-Qāṭ’iyya)

The tenth Imam, ‘Alī al-Hādī, died on 26th Jumādā II
254/23-4 June 868.1 His followers split into four factions.
The greater portion of the Imamites accepted his son
al-‘Askari as his successor. They contended, according to
the Imamite sources, that al-‘Askari was the sole son at
the moment of his father’s demise, and that his father

1. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Kulaynī say that ‘Alī al-Hādī died on
26th Jumādā II, while al-Ya‘qūbī mentions that he died
on 27th of that month (al-Ya‘qūbī, III, 234; Tabarī,
III, 1697; al-Kāfī, I, 497); whereas al-Nawbakhtī,
al-Qumālī and al-Kanjī think that he died on the 3rd
of Rajab 254 (N. Fīrāq, 77; Q. Maqālīt, 99-100;
al-Kanjī, Kifāyat al-Ṭālib fī Ma‘rifat Āl Abī Tālib
(Najaf, 1970), 457.

2. In spite of the fact that Ibn Shahr Āshūb’s work is a
later source, he quoted his information concerning
this point from Muḥammad b. Mas‘ūd al-‘Ayyāshī.
Unfortunately all the early sources, and even his
student al-Kashshī neglected the date of his death.
Although the study of the biographies of his teachers
and his students reveals that he died before 310/922,
because he met ‘Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Fadlāl, who died
about/
designated him as his legatee\textsuperscript{1}, bequeathed to him the inheritance of the previous prophets, the weapons and the special light of the Imamate and the secret knowledge needed by the community.\textsuperscript{2} They agreed with their opponents, the Muḥammadiyya, that the tenth Imam, ‘Alī al-Ḥādī, was reported to have said that the Imamate would belong to his eldest son\textsuperscript{3}, but they disagreed with them about the interpretation of this phrase. He meant, they said, that the eldest son was the one who outlived his father, and that was not his son Muḥammad, who had died during the lifetime of his father, but al-‘Askarī.\textsuperscript{4} It seems from the transmissions attributed to Abū Hāshim al-Ja‘farī and Ishāq b. Ismā‘īl al-Misā baru that ‘Alī al-Ḥādī had


2. Ithbāt, 234.

3. Ibid., 236; al-Irṣād, 379.

4. al-Irṣād, 379.
indicated and designated his son Muḥammad as his legatee. However on the death of Muḥammad, ‘Alī al-Ḥādī had al-‘Askarī brought to him and told him that the Imamate would fall to him due to God's intervention.

The leading personalities of this faction who supported al-‘Askarī were those who were close to ‘Alī al-Ḥādī, like Abū Ḥāshim al-Ja'farī, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Umarī and ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyari.

1.2. The Muḥammadiyya

This sect held the Imamate of Muḥammad, the eldest son of ‘alī al-Ḥādī, who had died during the lifetime of his father, in 249/863. His adherents claimed that he had not died, because his father indicated him and informed them that Muḥammad would succeed him to the Imamate, and the Imam cannot die before his father. Although, they say, the death of Muḥammad was manifest, actually he did not die but ‘Alī al-Ḥādī concealed him so that he became

1. Ithbāt, 327-8; T. al-Ghayba, 130-1.
2. al-Kāfī, I, 327.
3. al-Barqī, al-Rijāl, 60-1.
4. Massignon, "Nusairī", E.L.2. Al-Ṣaffār who died in 290/902, transmitted a tale on the authority of a person called ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Marwān al-Anbārī, who was a witness to the death of Muḥammad, but unfortunately he did not mention the date of his death and Massignon has noted the date without referring to any source; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, Basā’ir al-Darajāt (Tehran, 1285), 473; Massignon, La Passion de Husayn Ibn Mansūr Hallāj (Gallimard, 1975), I, 355.
al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī. They used in their struggle the same arguments as the Ismā'īlīs had used about Ismā'īl the son of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.¹

It might be that their arguments concerning the original nomination of Muḥammad were well-founded. Many transmissions related by their opponents support their claims; among these there are two transmissions attributed to Abū ʿHašim al-Jaʿfari and Shāhawayh b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Jallāb, who mentioned that they had related many traditions on the authority of ʿAlī al-Ḥādī which indicated Muḥammad as the successor of his father. When Muḥammad passed away during the lifetime of his father, these traditions confused Abū ʿHašim al-Jaʿfari and obliged Shāhawayh not to take any decision concerning the successor of ʿAlī al-Ḥādī.² These transmissions and others, reveal, from the viewpoint of the Muḥammadiyya, that Muḥammad was designated by his father as his legatee when he said, "My testament will pass to my eldest son."³ However,

1. Q. Maqālāt, 101; N. Firaq, 78-9.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 130-1; Ithbāt, 237-8; Ḥāfīz, I, 328; al-Irshād, 317.
3. Al-Ṭafīl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī, Iʿlām al-warā bi-Aʿlām al-Hudā (Tehran, 1379), 350; al-Irshād. It is worth mentioning that al-Tūsī reports contrasting transmissions attributed to Ṣaḥmād b. ʿĪsā al-ʿAlawī, who stated that he had met ʿAlī al-Ḥādī in his house at Ṣaryā near Medina, and he had seen Muḥammad and al-ʿAskārī. He tried to greet Muḥammad but ʿAlī al-Ḥādī said to him, "This is not your Imam", and indicated al-ʿAskārī (T. al-Ghayba, 130). However, ʿAlī al-Ḥādī left Medina
when Muḥammad died al-ʻAskarī became the successor, because it seems from many traditions attributed to 'Alī al-Ḥādi that he entrusted al-ʻAskarī with the succession of the Imamate directly after the death of Muḥammad because he was then the eldest son.¹

The followers of this faction, while still maintaining his Imamate, reconsidered their claim that Muḥammad had not died and was al-Qā‘im al-Mahdi because after the death of al-ʻAskarī in 260/874, they began to support the Imamate of the successor of Muḥammad², which they could not have done if they still believed that Muḥammad was still alive. The Muḥammadīyya became more powerful after al-ʻAskarī had died without leaving a publicly acknowledged son, and possibly for that reason, Sa‘d al-Qummi wrote his work al-Diyā‘ī fī al-Radd ‘alā al-Muḥammadīyya wa-l-Ja‘fariyya.³

for Iraq by the order of al-Mutawakkil, the caliph, in 233/847, and spent the rest of his life in Sāmarrā till his death in 254/868 (al-ʻIrshād, 307). Al-ʻAskarī’s age was about seven months when his father left Medina (N. Firaq, 77, 79). In addition, al-Najāshī reports that Ahmad b. ‘Īsā al-ʻAlawi transmitted the books of al-ʻAyyāshī (d. 310/922) (al-Najāshī, 204), that is to say that al-ʻAlawi lived in the first half of the fourth/tenth century. Thus it seems probable that the transmission was fabricated at a later period to support the Imamate of al-ʻAskarī.

1. Ithbāt, 237; T. al-Ghayba, 130-1; al-Ṣaffār, Baṣā‘ir al-Darajāt, 473.
2. Q. Maqālāt, 109.
3. al-Najāshī, 134.
1.3. The original Ja'farites

The supporters of this sect thought that Ja'far, the youngest son of 'Ali al-Hādī was the Imam after his father. They were called the "pure Ja'farites" (al-Ja'fariyya al-Khullas) by Sa'd al-Qummi in order to distinguish them from the later Ja'farite factions which appeared after the death of al-'Askari. They argued that when the eldest son of 'Ali al-Hādī, Muhammad, died he had appointed his son Ja'far as his successor. They denied, too, the Imamate of Muhammad by saying that 'Ali al-Hādī had designated Muhammad as his legatee according to the principle of "prudent fear" (al-Taqiyya) in order to save the true Imam, Ja'far, from the danger of his foes.

The original Ja'farites comprised a minority after the death of 'Ali al-Hādī, but there is some evidence that their activities and numbers increased after the death of al-'Askari. They found in the circles of theologians, especially those in Kufa, a good environment to circulate their propaganda. Nevertheless later the Ja'farites differed as to how the Imamate passed to him, whether by the testament of his father, or his brother Muhammad, or his brother al-'Askari, or by the will of Nafīs, the slave of Muhammad. Thus they split into four subdivisions.

1. Q. Maqālāt, 101.
2. N. Fīrāq, 79.
3. Ibid., 83-4, 85.
These differences and the false character of Ja‘far, as shown in Shi‘ite books\(^1\), led to the collapse of the Ja‘farite factions.

1.4. The Numayriyya

This sect appeared during the lifetime of ‘Alī al-Hādī. The Numayriyya’s name was derived from the surname of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr al-Numayrī, who was according to Massignon a Bāb (gate) to ‘Alī al-Hādī in 245/859.\(^2\)

The doctrine of the Numayriyya seems to be related to previous extremist sects, which had found in the district of Kufa a fertile environment to circulate their ideas.\(^3\) So they found in these with extremist inclinations towards the People of the House of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt), who

1. al-Kāfī, I, 504-6; Kamāl, 42-4, 58.
2. Massignon, "Nusairī", E.I.\(^1\).
were still quite numerous there, a good opportunity to put forward their doctrine. According to a Nūṣayrī work the founder of this trend was ‘Ali b. Ahmad al-Ṭarbā‘ī from the village of Ṭarbā near al-Ghādiriyya. During the time of ‘Ali al-Hādī he had thirty-five supporters.¹ Thereafter he extended his activities to new areas, like Naynawa near Hillah where he persuaded Muhammad b. Nūṣayr to join him. The latter became the real founder of this trend, and was responsible for shaping the doctrine of the movement. He extended his activities as far as Ḥajir² on the western shores of the Arabian Gulf.

Ibn Nūṣayr was accused of the deification of ‘Ali al-Hādī, and adopting the belief that God had made himself incarnate in the body of ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭālib, thereafter reincarnating in the forms of his progeny, the Imams, until the time of ‘Ali al-Hādī.³ Ibn Nūṣayr claimed that he was a messenger of a prophet, ‘Ali al-Hādī, whereas the latter denied his claim and cursed him.⁴ Possibly it

1. Maymūn b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, Sabīl Rāḥat al-Arwāh, in Der Islam (Berlin, 1941), 129.
2. Ibid., 130-1.
3. Sa‘d al-Qummī explains this dogma in brief, but al-Ḥasan al-Nawbakhtī in his missing work (al-Radd ‘alā al-Ghulāt) explained it as he had found it amongst the Ghulāt of Madā‘in. Fortunately al-Khāṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Jawzī quoted this exposition in their works; Q. Maqālāt, 100-1; Khāṭīb, VI, 380; Ibn al-Jawzī, Talbis Iblīs (Cairo, 1928), 103; al-Ṭabarānī, op. cit., 102.
4. Ikhtiyār, 520.
was because of this that Ibn Nusayr proclaimed himself as agent (Bāb) to the eldest son of ‘Alī al-Hādī, Muḥammad, who died in 249/863. So he denied his death and held, according to Massignon, that Muḥammad was al-Qā‘īm al-Mahdī, whose occultation began in this year. However when ‘Alī al-Hādī died in 254/868, Ibn Nusayr then held the deification of his son al-‘Askari. On the death of the latter in 260/874, he went on to maintain the Imamate of his son, Muḥammad (i.e. the twelfth Imam), and considered him as al-Qā‘īm al-Mahdī and propagated that God would raise al-Qā‘īm in a miraculous way some time in the future.¹ Thereafter he announced that he had become the agent of the twelfth Imam, and this claim brought him the curse of the other agent, Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Umarī², and forced his successors to take refuge in Aleppo.

In general, the dogmas of the Muḥammadiyya, the Ja’farites and those who held the Imamate of al-‘Askari, were established basically on traditional arguments, whereas the dogma of the Numayriyya was influenced by the tribal and cultural background of its founder, Ibn Nusayr. He belonged to the tribe of Numayr, which had emigrated with its inherited traditions from Yemen to Iraq and settled in the Sawād in the first/seventh century. The Yemeni tribes like ‘Ijl, Bajīla, Fahr and Numayr were famous for their high respect towards ‘Alī and his

². T. al-Ghayba, 259.
descendants against their opponents.\(^1\) The places, however, which they settled were such as Sawād of Kufa, Wāsiṭ, and Madā'in, particularly the latter which used to be a Christian centre with Persian cultural traces.\(^2\) It seems that Ibn Naṣayr's propaganda for reincarnation and the transmigration of souls belonged to ideas and beliefs which had been prevalent amongst elements of the Yemeni Arabs in Iraq for some time. He gave them a greater degree of system and influence. It is worth mentioning that Ibn Naṣayr's dogma concerning al-Mahdī was similar to that which had been held by the three subdivisions of the Wāqifa at al-‘Askarī.

2. The schisms amongst the adherents of al-‘Askarī after his death

2.1. Introduction

The Imamate during the life of the last six Imams of the Ithnā‘ashariyya was distinguished by the many splits

1. Tucker, op. cit., Der Islam, LIV, i (1977), 66-7. Ibn Manẓūr considers Numayr, the clan of Ibn Naṣayr, as derived from the northern tribe Qays, nevertheless al-Qalqashandi regards it as a Yemeni tribe or as belonging to Qays but inhabiting the Yemen, which means it had the tradition and the culture of the Yemen; Ibn Manẓūr, Līsān al-‘Arab (Cairo, 1300-3), art. Namār; Ahmad b. ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī, Subḥ al-A‘shā (Cairo, 1963), 111, 329.

which occurred after the death of each Imam, over the recognition of his successor. In spite of these repeated schisms each Imam, who was considered by the Imamites as part of the series of the twelve Imams, maintained, after a hard struggle, the obedience of the majority of the followers of the previous Imam.

Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-ʿAskarī, who was born in 232/845 and died in 260/874, was, according to some later Shiʿite sources, poisoned through the instigation of the ʿAbbāsid caliph, al-Muʿtamid. When his father, the tenth Imam,

1. The schisms amongst the Imamites started with the death of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (148/766) and continued until al-ʿAskarī's death (260/874). Fundamentally these splits were based on traditional proofs. For details see Q. Maqālāt, 87-116; N. Firaq, 53-93; al-Sharīf al-Murtada, al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtāra min al-ʿUyun wa-l-Maḥāsin (Qumm, 1396), 247.

2. N. Firaq, 65-6, 77, 79.

3. The reports of the early Shiʿite authors like al-Kulaynī, Saʿd al-Qummi and al-Mufīd did not reveal any external cause for al-ʿAskarī's death (al-ʿKafi, I, 509; Q. Maqālāt, 101-2; al-Iṣbahān, 377, 383, 389; al-Mufīd, al-Muqniʿa fī al-Miqḥ [Iran, 1274], 72-5; and his Tawḥīḥ Iʿtiqādāt al-Imāmiyya [Tabriz, 1371], 63), but the later Shiʿite authors followed al-Ṭabarī, who claimed that the Imam was poisoned or killed, basing his assumption on a tradition whose chain of transmitters related to al-Ṣādiq, who said that none of us die naturally but are killed or martyred (al-Ṭabarī, Iʿlām al-warāʾ, 349; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, Dalāʾil al-Imāma [Najaf, 1369], 223; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, Manāqib, IV, 421; Biḥār, L, 236-8, 335; Muḥammad al-Ṣadr, Tārīkh al-Ghayba al-Ṣughrā [Beirut, 1972], 230-4).
'Ali al-Hādí, died in 254/868 his son, al-‘Askari, was considered to be the eleventh Imam by the majority of the Imamites. But the rest of the adherents of ‘Ali al-Hādí divided into two factions. The first of these joined the side of Muhammad, the eldest son of ‘Ali al-Hādí, who had died during the lifetime of his father. The second faction took the side of Ja’far b. ‘Ali al-Hādí.¹

According to Shi‘ite sources, al-‘Askari, during the six years of his Imamate, lived in hiding and dissimulation because of the restrictions imposed upon him as a result of being surrounded the the spies of al-Mu’tamid, and this was the reason for his apparent lack of open social contact with the mass of his followers. Thus only the elite of his adherents were able to communicate with him personally.²

The same sources report that in the year 260/874 the eleventh Imam, al-‘Askari, became ill and, as soon as the news of his sickness reached al-Mu’tamid, he dispatched five of his special servants to al-‘Askari’s house, ordering them to keep close watch on him. Thereafter he sent physicians and the Qādi al-Qudāt, in the company of ten men who were considered as trustworthy by the caliph, to the house of al-‘Askari, to remain with him and observe his condition, as well as the situation within his home, at all times. Al-‘Askari’s malady became worse until he passed away on 8th Rabī’ I 260/1st January 874.

1. Q. Maqālāt, 101; al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 257.
2. Ibn Shahr Āshūb, Manāqīb, III, 533; Ithbāt, 262;
   Subḥī, Nazariyyat al-Imāma (Cairo, 1969), 394.
Al-Mu’tamid dispatched Abū ‘Īsā b. al-Mutawakkil to say the prayer for the dead over the body of al-‘Askarī. After this rite was complete al-‘Askarī was buried within the confines of his house in Sirr Man Ra’ā (Sāmarrā), next to his father.¹

According to the early Imamite sources al-‘Askarī did not leave a publicly acknowledged son, nor did he determine upon or install his successor openly², because the Imamites, as al-Mufīd says, were under ‘Abbasid oppression, while the caliph, al-Mu’tamid, was searching for al-‘Askarī’s son, and trying to arrest him by any means possible. On the other hand the views of the Imamite Shī’a about him were being circulated. It was also becoming known that they were waiting for him to rise. For this reason al-‘Askarī had not revealed his son during his lifetime, nor had the greater portion of his adherents.³

It seems that the Imamites, who were distinguished from other Islamic sects by their belief in the principle of the designation of the Imam (al-Imāma bi-l-Nagg),

¹. Al-Kulaynī and al-Mufīd report the same chain of transmitters for their information about al-‘Askarī’s death (al-Kāfī, I, 503-5; al-Irshād, 381-2, 389). Al-Nawbakhtī agrees with Sa’d al-Qummi that Abū ‘Īsā prayed over al-‘Askarī’s body (N. Firaq, 79; Q. Maqālāt, 102). But Sa’d dated al-‘Askarī’s death in Rabi’ II, and agrees with al-Mas‘ūdī’s report (Ithbāt, 248). It seems that al-Kulaynī’s report seems to be more reliable than the latter, because it gives several supporting reports.

². N. Firaq, 79; Q. Maqālāt, 102.

found themselves in a critical situation after their Imam's death, especially as he had not designated his successor overtly. Therefore the Imamite jurists had recourse to the traditions of the Prophet and his progeny, to determine, according to these, who was to be the twelfth Imam. They found many traditions to support their claims. Amongst them were some transmissions which stated that an Imam could not die without seeing his offspring, who would succeed him; that the world cannot be without a proof; that the Imamate cannot pass to two brothers after al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, but is in the progeny of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn; that the Imam knows who will succeed him as Imam, and does not die until he gives his testament to his successor; and that the Imamate should belong to the eldest son of the preceding Imam. These traditions seem to have been adopted by the greater portion of the Imamites, and their interpretation of these traditions led to various viewpoints, which, in turn, led to new divisions amongst the Imamites.

The information about these schisms is available in the biographical and theological works, most of which were

1. Al-Barqī and al-Kulaynī mention many traditions with different chains of transmitters asserting that the world cannot be without a Proof (Hujja); al-Barqī, al-Mahāsin (Tehran, 1370/1950), 92, 234-6; al-Kāfī, I, 178-80, 514; see also Dalā'il, 229-30; Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Tabarsi, al-Ihtijāj (Najaf, 1966), II, 48-9, 78.
2. al-Kāfī, I, 285-6; T. al-Ghayba, 146.
3. al-Kāfī, I, 276-7.
written during the fourth/tenth century. The most important amongst these are Kitāb al-Ghayba by Aḥmad b. Bashshār (an adherent of Ja‘far b. al-Ḥasan al-‘Askari), Kitāb al-Tanbīh by Abū Sahl Ismā‘īl al-Nawbakhtī, who wrote this work in 290/902¹, Kitāb al-Maqālāt wa-l-Firaq by Sa‘d al-Ash‘arī al-Qummi, and Kitāb Firaq al-Shī‘a by al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī. The last two works give more detail than the others about the Imamite splits and their various viewpoints on the twelfth Imam. Sa‘d al-Qummi counted the schisms as being fifteen, whereas al-Nawbakhtī and al-Mufīd enumerated them as fourteen factions. Al-Mas‘ūdī thinks that the Imamites separated into twenty sects, while al-Shahristānī deems that there were only eleven.²

1. These two works have been lost but fortunately al-Ṣadūq included, in his work Kamāl al-Dīn, most of Ibn Bashshār’s book, and quoted the important information from Abū Sahl’s work which was connected with the question of the occultation; Kamāl, 135-47, 181-7

2. Due to the way in which al-Shahristānī classified his information on these schisms it seems that his study was based on the works of al-Nawbakhtī and al-Ash‘arī. Al-Nawbakhtī deemed the Imamite sub-divisions to be as many as fourteen, although his present work only contains thirteen. Fortunately al-Mufīd, who quoted these various factions on the authority of al-Nawbakhtī, mentioned the fourteenth faction, which had been missing from the latter’s work. Al-Mas‘ūdī did not give any details on the splits. Later the work of al-Nawbakhtī became more circulated than Sa‘d al-Qummi’s work because the latter’s work contains opinions on the occultation which contrast with the official opinion of the later Imamites on the Ghayba from the fifth /eleventh century onwards; al-Qummi’s/
Nevertheless the study of the claims which were upheld by these factions reveals that there were, presumably, only five major schisms. However, each of these had split further over the theological and traditional interpretations which they used to support their claims. At any rate it seems important to set down the major claims of these schisms, in order to achieve a clear conception about the situation of the Imamites at that time.

2.2. Schism I; The Wāqifat at al-‘Askarī

What brought the people of this faction together was their claim that the eleventh Imam, al-‘Askarī, was the nominated Imam (al-Qā’īm), although they differed as to how he became al-Qā’im.

i) The first section of this schism deemed that al-‘Askarī had not died, but was absent, and was the upholder of the Imamate (al-Qā’im). They based this assumption on the traditions reported on the authority of the previous Imams, which said that an Imam could not pass away without having a publicly acknowledged son to succeed him, because the world cannot be without a proof. While the people were not obliged to accept the Imamate of the claimants, they should acknowledge the Imamate of al-‘Askarī,

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al-Qummī’s book was gradually withdrawn from these circles; N. Firaq, 79; al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtāra, 258-60; Murūj, VIII, 50; Milal, 130-1.

1. Kamāl, 40.

2. al-Kāfī, I, 178-80, 514.
whose Imamate had been confirmed by the testament of the former Imam. They also said that they had a tradition which said that al-Qā'īm had two occultations, so, because al-'Askarī had not left a publicly acknowledged son and the earth cannot remain for an hour without a proof, it was right to claim that he was not dead, but absent, and was the true.upholder (al-Qā'īm). This was his first occultation, after which he would rise again and, when his rising became known, he would conceal himself once again in his second occultation.¹

They tried, in their discussions with their opponents, to distinguish themselves from the Imamites, who had stopped on the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓīm (183/799), as al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī, by faulting them for stopping on al-Kāẓīm. They pointed out that he had died and left his successor, 'Alī al-Riḍā (202/817) as well as other sons, while al-'Askarī had obviously passed away and left no heir.²

ii) The second section of this Wāqīfa at al-'Askarī believed that he had died, but was then raised to life, and was al-Qā'īm al-Mahdī. Basically, the people of this faction established their doctrine on a transmission on the authority of Ja'far al-Sādiq, which said that al-Qā'īm was called al-Qā'īm because he would rise against after his death. They stated that it was confirmed to them that al-'Askarī had died without leaving a successor and did

1. Q. Maqālāt, 106; N. Firaq, 78-80; Milal, 129.
2. Q. Maqālāt, 106-7.
not designate anybody as his legatee, thus there was no doubt about his being al-Qā'īm, nor about his being alive after death, although he concealed himself for fear of his foes. They based their theories concerning the resurrection of al-‘Askarī and his occultation on a saying of ‘Alī, from his advice to his follower Kumayl b. Ziyād, when he said, "O God, indeed you do not leave the earth without a Qā'īm with proof from you, whether manifest or hidden, for then your proofs and your signs would be invalidated."¹ According to ‘Alī's words al-‘Askarī is absent and hidden, but he shall rise to fill the earth with peace and justice, after it had been filled with tyranny.²

iii) Al-Wāqifa al-lā Adriyya also stopped at al-‘Askarī. They deemed that he had died and was the Imam, although the earth could not be without a proof from God, but they were not sure who had succeeded al-‘Askarī, his son or his brother. Therefore they stopped at the Imamate of al-‘Askarī, and decided to put forward no decision until the matter became clear to them.³

Unfortunately, the contemporary sources do not mention anyone as representing the sects of al-Wāqifa at al-‘Askarī. However, it seems from the doctrine of the first faction of the Wāqifa, that its partisans lived in places which were far from Sāmarrā, the city of the Imam. Since they were not present at the moment of his death, they tended

2. Q. Maqālāt, 107.
3. N. Firaq, 89-90.
to deem that he had not in fact died, and was al-Ḡīm al-Mahdī.

2.3. Schism II: The Jaʿfarites

The representatives of this section claimed that the Imam after al-ʿAskarī was his youngest brother, Jaʿfar, but they differed as to how the Imamate passed on to him, and therefore split into four factions.

i) Those who thought that the Imam was al-ʿAskarī's brother Jaʿfar. This group believed that al-ʿAskarī had died and that he had held the Imamate by the testament of his father. Since the Imamate can only pass to the eldest son of the former Imam, who remained alive after his father's death, the Imamate passed on from ʿAlī al-Hādī, not to his eldest son Muhammad, who had died before him, but to al-ʿAskarī, who was the elder of the two sons who had outlived their father.¹

They believed that al-ʿAskarī had not left a publicly acknowledged son to take over the Imamate and, therefore, his sole remaining brother, Jaʿfar, was the Imam. In order to support their dogma they were obliged to hold the

1. Q. Maqālāt, 111; al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 259.
Fāṭhiyya’s arguments about the Imamate. The latter claimed that Mūsā al-Kāżim received the Imamate, not from his father Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, but from his eldest brother ‘Abd Allāh, according to the tradition which says that the Imamate should pass on to the eldest son of the Imam when he dies. Like the Fāṭhiyya, they considered the tradition about the Imamate not falling to two brothers after al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn as authentic, but that this could only be applied if al-‘Askarī had left a son. Since al-‘Askarī had passed away without leaving a publicly acknowledged successor, his brother Ja’far was the nominated Imam and the Imamate would pass on in his offspring. They also recognised ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja’far al-Ṣādiq as the seventh Imam. Consequently the position of Ja’far in the chain of Imams became thirteenth.

ii) Like the first faction the partisans of this schismatic group held the Imamate of Ja’far after the death of his brother al-‘Askarī. They contends that the eleventh

1. Al-Fāṭhiyya: A Shi‘ite sect which arose after the death of Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Imam, who contended that the Imamate had passed on from al-Ṣādiq not to Mūsā but to his eldest son, ‘Abd Allāh, according to the tradition which says that the Imamate can only be vested in the eldest son, with the condition that he should be free from any bodily defects (al-Kāfi, I, 285; Ikhtiyār, 282-3). They were also called al-Fāṭhiyya as an allusion either to ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja’far because he had broad feet or was broad-headed, or it referred to their leader, who was called ‘Abd Allāh al-Aftah; N. Firaq, 65; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 248-51; Ikhtiyār, 254.

2. N. Firaq, 93; Q. Maqālāt, 111-2.
Imam had himself designated Ja'far as his successor, and that this had happened by the principle of al-badā', as had been the case with Ismā'īl, the eldest son of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, when God made His ultimate opinion about him clear by taking away his soul, and placing his brothers 'Abd Allāh and Mūsā in the Imamate consecutively instead. Also, in the case of Ja'far b. 'Alī, God had entrusted al-'Askarī with the Imamate, but thereafter made it clear that the Imamate should not pass on in the progeny of al-'Askarī. So, God transferred it to his brother Ja'far, who was the Imam after al-'Askarī's death. They too used the arguments and dogma of the Fāthiyya in order to support their viewpoint.

1. Al-badā' means the appearance of the command of God after its concealment. Bandar put a definition to al-badā' as follows: "It is the particular circumstances of how the final human act is related to eternal divine Knowledge. The external change of God's knowledge -- from the viewpoint of the human being -- is according to the free will of the person in his ability to select his actions and acts." Thus al-badā' is the appearance of God's ultimate judgement about His creation according to His wisdom, when that judgement had been earlier concealed from men. It does not mean that God decided something, then changed His opinion to another decision, because He discovered that the first decision was wrong. For the Imamites anyone who claims this is a heretic because he has attributed ignorance to God. Also they believe that God allows a few people to know His ultimate judgement; Bandar, A., 'Iqīdat al-Badā' (Baghdad, 1976); also a letter from the author dated 15th January 1978.
It seems plausible that this sect was more popular than the first among the theologians, especially in Kufa. The leader of it was a Kūfī theologian called 'Alī b. Ṭahī or al-Ṭalḥī al-Khazzāz, who had been famous amongst the surviving members of the Fāṭhiyya for his theological discussions. He held the Imamate of Jaʿfar and encouraged people to take his side. He was supported in his propaganda by the sister of Fāris b. Ḥātim b. Māhawīyya al-Qazwīnī, but she rejected the Imamate of al-ʿAskarī and claimed that the Imamate had been transferred to Jaʿfar from his father, Ḥādī. It might be that she made this claim because her brother, Fāris b. Ḥātim, was killed by the order of al-ʿAskarī. It might also be possible that the Kufan scholastic family Banū Faddāl, who were active in the dogma of the Fāṭhiyya, adopted the doctrine of this faction, especially Ahmad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Faddāl, who died in 260/874, and his brother 'Alī.

iii) The people of this schism claimed that the Imamate had passed on to Jaʿfar through the designation of his father. They based their doctrine on the tradition,

1. N. Fīrağ, 99; al-Shahrastānī's information concerning this sect is confused. He claims that Fāris b. Ḥātim, not his sister, was a follower of Jaʿfar, but Fāris had been assassinated by the order of al-ʿAskarī himself; see Milāl, 129; Ikhtiyār, 524.
2. For the dogma of Fāris b. Ḥātim, his political activities in Qazwīn and Sāmarrā, and his assassination, see Ikhtiyār, 522-8; al-Najāshī, 238; T. al-Ghayba, 238.
attributed to Ja’far al-Sadiq, which states that the Imamate cannot exist in two brothers after al-Hasan and al-Husayn. Since Muhammad, the eldest son of ‘Ali al-Hadi, died during the lifetime of his father and the Imamate should belong to those who live after the death of their father, it was not transferred to Muhammad. Perhaps they had accepted the Imamate of al-‘Askari because he was the eldest son after the death of his father, but they rejected his Imamate after his death, because he passed away without having a publicly acknowledged son as his successor. It was a matter of course to them, they said, that the Imam did not die without leaving a publicly acknowledged and well-known successor, whom he designated and entrusted with the Imamate. This rendered the claim of al-‘Askari to the Imamate invalid. So it was inevitable that the Imam was Ja’far, by the designation of his father.

It is worth mentioning that this faction existed within the lifetime of al-‘Askari. When the tenth Imam died in 254/868 the majority of his followers accepted the Imamate of his eldest surviving son, al-‘Askari, and confirmed it by the testament of his father, but a

1. Al-Nawbakhtī mentions that a group maintained that Ja’far was the Imam after al-‘Askari not by the testament of his brother but by that of his father. Al-Qummi agrees with this, thus they related that the adoption of the Imamate of al-‘Askari was incorrect, and we should go back to the Imamate of Ja’far; N. Firaq, 82-3; Q. Maqālāt, 110-1; al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtāra, 259.

2. For this tradition see al-Kāfi, I, 285-6; T. al-Ghayba, 146.
minority took Ja'far's side. 1 The latter became more powerful after the death of al-'Askari because some of his adherents abandoned his Imamate and accepted the Imamate of Ja'far. A leading scholar of this faction was 'Ali b. Ahmad b. Bashshār, who wrote a book on the Ghayba and disputed fiercely with his opponents. 2 There is some evidence that this faction had achieved some success by persuading some of the people who had accepted the Imamate of al-'Askari to join their side. Al-Ṣadūq and al-Majlisī report a letter attributed to the twelfth Imam, which was sent to his agent, 'Uthmān b. Sa'id al-'Umarī. This letter reveals that an adherent of this faction argued with a Twelver called al-Mukhtār, and succeeded in making him accept the Imamate of Ja'far. 3 The sister of Fāris b. Fātim, who was mentioned above, was one of the partisans of this group.

iv) The followers of this faction were called al-Nafisiyya. They believed that the tenth Imam, 'Alī al-Hādī, had designated his eldest son Muḥammad as his legatee. Then, according to the principle of Bada', God took away his life while his father was still alive and when Muḥammad b. 'Alī passed away he designated, by the order of his father, his brother Ja'far as his successor, entrusted his testament, the books, the secret knowledge and the weapons needed by the community to his trustworthy

3. Ibid., 511; Bihār, LIII, 190-1.
young slave called Nafīs, and ordered him, in the case of the death of his father, to hand them over to his brother Ja'far. It is said that when Muḥammad died, the adherents of al-'Askarī discovered the secret arrangement and the role of Nafīs in it. Nafīs, being afraid of them, and dreading that the Imamate should be invalidated, called Ja'far and handed over what Muḥammad b. 'Alī had asked him to hold in trust. Ja'far himself claimed that the Imamate had been passed to him from his brother, Muḥammad.¹

It seems that this faction appeared after the death of the tenth Imam, 'Alī al-Hāḍī. This can be vindicated by a remark of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Qubba al-Rāzī in his work al-Inṣāf fī al-Imāma, where he mentions that Ja'far said, "I am the Imam after my brother Muḥammad."² Sa'd al-Qummī also states that the Nafīsiyya considered that the Imamate had passed on to Ja'far from his brother Muḥammad, through the testament of Nafīs. They denied the testament of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, because his father, they claimed, neither designated him nor changed his testament from Muḥammad. Nafīs was killed by being drowned in a well.³

¹ Q. Maqālāt, 112-3; N. Firaq, 88-9; al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtāra, 260.
³ Q. Maqālāt, 103. It is worth mentioning that the early Ja'farites claimed that the Imamate had been transferred to Ja'far, not by his brother Muḥammad, but by his father. They were called the "pure" Ja'farites; Q. Maqālāt, 101.
2.4. Schism III: The Muḥammadiyya

This sect denied the Imamate of Ja'far and al-'Askari and considered Muḥammad, who had died in the lifetime of his father, as their Imam. They argued that 'Alī al-Hādī, the tenth Imam, had neither designated nor indicated either al-'Askari or Ja'far as his legatee, and therefore both of them had no right to make claims upon the Imamate. Since the Imam could not die without leaving a successor and al-'Askari had passed away and not left a publicly acknowledged or well-known son, his Imamate was invalidated. Ja'far, they added, did not deserve to put forward his claim because his immorality and sinfulness were infamous. They did not regard his wicked character as precautionary prudence (taqiyya) because of fear of his enemies, for such dissimulation cannot be practiced by the committing of sins.

They concluded that as it was forbidden to invalidate the principle of the Imamate, they were thus obliged to return to the Imamate of Muḥammad b. 'Alī, since he had left offspring and his acts were distinguished by probity and virtue.¹ Others of them even considered him as al-Qā'im al-Mahdī² and some of them even denied his death.³

1. Q. Maqālāt, 109.
2. N. Firaq, 84.
3. T. al-Ghayba, 128-9; al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 259.
2.5. Schism IV: The Qaṭ'īyya

This sect constituted the greater portion of the Imamites. They held that al-‘Askarī had died and left a son to succeed him, but they differed about the day of his successor's birth, his name and his being al-Qā'im al-Mahdī. For this reason they split into six divisions.

1) This faction maintained that al-‘Askarī had died and left a son called Muḥammad, who, according to Sa‘d al-Qummī, had come of age, while, according to al-Nawbakhtī and al-Shahrīstānī, he had been born two years before his father's death. He was the Imam because his father had indicated him, and because it was well-known that al-‘Askarī had left no son other than Muḥammad, so, inevitably, he was the Imam and al-Qā'im. But due to fear of his uncle, Ja‘far, he went into concealment and this became one of his occultations. They built their doctrine on a tradition attributed to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, which says that al-Qā'im is the one whose date of birth is hidden from the people and about whom information is obscure and whom the people cannot know.1 Unfortunately the information about this faction is very sparse, but al-Ṣadūq, during his bid to prove the birth of the twelfth Imam, mentioned traditions attributed, presumably, to the adherents of this faction. One of these persons was called Ya‘qūb b. Manfūsh, who claimed that he had visited al-‘Askarī and asked him about his successor. Al-‘Askarī showed him his son, who was

1. Q. Maqālāt, 114; N. Firaq, 84-5; Milal, 130.
between eight and ten years old, indicating that his son would succeed him. Another was called Daw’ b. ‘Alī al-‘Ijlī, who maintained that he had met al-‘Askarī in his house where he saw his son, who was then two years old. 

ii) The people of this group held the same dogma as the previous faction. They agreed with them on the death of al-‘Askarī, but they thought that he had left a successor whose name was not Muhammad but ‘Alī. They said that al-‘Askarī had no son except ‘Alī, who had been seen by the trustworthy followers of his father. According to Sa’d al-Qummi the adherents of this sect were few and concentrated within the suburbs of the Sawād of Kufa.

iii) This sect held that the Imam after al-‘Askarī was his son, who had gone into concealment, but had been born eight months after his father’s death. They argued that those who claimed that a son was born to him during his lifetime were making false statements, because al-‘Askarī had died without leaving a publicly acknowledged son. But the pregnancy had been known to the caliph as well as other people, and for this reason the caliph delayed dividing his share in the estate until the pregnancy was proved invalid to the caliph. In fact, they said, the son was born eight months after the death of his father, and was hidden, but his father had ordered

2. Q. Maqālīt, 114; T. al-Ghayba, 147; al-Mufīd also mentions this faction but thought that they held the same dogma as al-Qat‘iyya (The Twelvers); al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 259-60.
that they call him Muḥammad. They based their doctrine on a tradition attributed to the eighth Imam, 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, which says, "You would test the foetus which is within the womb of his mother, and the suckling child." ¹

iv) The partisans of this faction held that al-‘Askārī had no sons at all. The arguments about a hidden son, who was born during the lifetime of al-‘Askārī were rejected by them, because they had searched for him during the life of the eleventh Imam, using various means, but had failed to find him. But the Imam cannot die without leaving an heir, therefore they claimed that a slave girl had conceived a child belonging to al-‘Askārī, and that when she gave birth to him he should be the Imam, even if, as reported by al-Mufīd, the pregnancy lasted a hundred years. They established their doctrine on a stradition on the authority of al-Ṣādiq, which states that al-Qā’im is the one whose conception and date of birth are hidden from the people. ²

v) This faction held that the Imam after al-‘Askārī was his son Muḥammad, who was the Awaited One (al-Muntazar). They claimed that he had died but would rise to life with the sword to fill the earth with peace and justice, after it had been filled with tyranny and injustice. ³

1. Q. Maqālāt, 114; N. Fīraq, 85; al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 261; Milāl, 130.
2. Al-Nawbakhtī submitted confused information about this sect, whereas al-Qummī and al-Mufīd are much clearer in their presentation; N. Fīraq, 85–6; Q. Maqālāt, 114–5; al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 260.
3. T. al-Ghayba, 60.
This group was mentioned neither by Sa‘d al-Qummi nor by al-Nawbakhtī. Presumably the latter mentioned it but somebody omitted it from his book because al-Mufīd, who based his information on al-Nawbakhtī’s work, mentioned this group in his book al-‘Uyun wa-l-Mahāsin.¹

vi) This group was entitled the Imāmiyya by Sa‘d al-Qummi and al-Nawbakhtī. They held that al-‘Askarī had died and so, inevitably, God’s Huṣa on earth was the son of al-‘Askarī, who was his sole successor and his legatee, as well as charged with the affairs of the Imamate after him, in accordance with the method laid down by previous tradition. Thus the Imamate should pass on to his offspring until the Day of Resurrection, but he was absent and hidden by an order, and it was prohibited to seek him out before the Imam himself chose to manifest himself, because his adherents would endanger his life and their own if they looked for him. In spite of his occultation a few reliable followers could contact the Imam.² He, they said, was born on 15th Sha‘bān 256/29th July 868.³

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1. al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 260.
2. Q. Maqālāt, 102-4; Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, Kitāb al-Tanbīh, quoted in Kamāl, 88; al-Inṣāf, quoted in Kamāl, 61.
3. This group dated the day of his birth as mentioned above but the later Imamites differ about it. Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī dates it as being 15th Sha‘bān 257, while al-Kulaynī mentions several traditions giving the dates 252, 255 and 256 respectively. Al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufīd followed al-Kulaynī on this point. It might be that some of the opposing factions of the Imamites left their claims, adopting those of the Imamites who then accepted/
Basically, they directed their arguments against those sects who held the Imamate of Muhammad and Ja'far. They contended with the partisans of Muhammad that the Imamate could neither exist in the descendants of Muhammad, who had died during his father's lifetime, nor in his legatee, such as his brother or someone else, because there was no evidence or proof for accepting the Imamate of a son who had died before his father. Perhaps this argument was also direct against the Naṣīṣīyya.

They argued, presumably, with the Ja'farites that the Imamate could not pass from brother to brother after al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and that the Imamate should fall to the eldest son of the preceding Imam. The eleventh Imam, al-'Askarî, was designated by the testament of his father, so, necessarily, the Imamate should pass to his offspring.1 It was also, they said, improper for the faithful to select an Imam for themselves, and that it was for God to choose him and to manifest him at the proper time.2

This sect constituted the majority of the Imamites who had accepted the Imamate of al-'Askarî, such as Abū Sahl Ismā'īl b. ʿAlī al-Nawbakhtī, al-Hasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, Sa’d b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ashʿarī al-Qummi (the

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accepted their transmissions concerning the birth of the twelfth Imam; al-Ḳāfī, I, 514-16; Dalāʾīl, 271; al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtāra, 258; Kamāl, 430.

1. al-Insāf, quoted in Kamāl, 55-6.
2. N. Firaq, 90-1.
author of *Kitāb al-Maqlāt wa-l-Firaq*), ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Umarī and his son Muḥammad.¹

2.6. Schism V: The Cessation of the Imamate

This group held that from the moment al-‘Askarī died there was no Imam. Al-Nawbakhtī, al-Mufīd and al-Shahristānī considered it to be one faction, whereas Sa‘d al-Qummī was presumably more accurate when he divided it into two², because the partisans of this schism agreed on the death of al-‘Askarī and the cessation of the Imamate, while they differed on the dogma of al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī, as follows:

i) The first group deemed that it had been confirmed by successive transmission that al-‘Askarī would die without leaving a successor. For this reason there was no Imam after al-‘Askarī and the Imamate ceased. This, they contended, was reasonably permitted. Since the cessation of the prophecy after Muḥammad was viewed as plausible, likewise the cessation of the Imamate was possible. They established their doctrine on a transmission attributed to the sixth Imam, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, which states that the earth cannot be without a Proof unless God becomes angry at the sins of his creations, and retains this Proof from them for as long as he wills. This group did not believe in the rising of al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī.³

². Milal, 130-1; N. Firaq, 88-9.
³. Q. Maqlāt, 107-8.
11) The people of the second group held the same doctrine as the previous faction, but they separated from them over the dogma of al-Qāʾîm al-Mahdī. They said that since al-ʿAskari had passed away without leaving a successor, the Imamate had ceased until God raised the Qāʾîm from among the previous Imams, who had died, such as al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskari, or any of his descendants.

Furthermore the rising of al-Qāʾîm al-Mahdī was inevitable because this was confirmed by successive tradition. They considered the period after the death of al-ʿAskari and the rise of al-Qāʾîm as an interval of time devoid of prophecy and Imamate, like the period between Jesus and Muḥammad.¹

There seems to be some evidence that many people from various countries doubted the existence of the twelfth Imam, such as Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Mahzayr al-Ahwāzī from al-Ahwáz², along with many from Banū Ṭalib in Medina, who had been agents of the eleventh Imam, al-ʿAskari, and who doubted the very existence of a child.³

2.7. Conclusion

It seems from this historical and theological survey that on the death of al-ʿAskari, the Imamites fell into similar problems which had beset them after the death of the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim. They split into

1. Q. Maqālāt, 108-9; T. al-Ghayba, 147.
2. Kamāl, 485, 487.
al-Waqifa, Muḥammadiyya, Jaʿfarites and Qaṭʿiyya. Possibly the causes of this were:

i) Although the bulk of the Imamites accepted the Imamate of al-ʿAskari, they retained their cultural and sectarian backgrounds. In this way al-ʿAskari himself allowed his adherents to accept the traditions related by Banū Faddāl, who belong to the Wāqifa at Mūsā al-Kāẓim, but urged them to reject their doctrine. The influence exerted by these cultural ties can be noted in the traditional arguments held by the Imamites after the death of al-ʿAskari, which led to the rise of the Wāqifa at al-ʿAskari and the encouragement of the Jaʿfarites.

ii) The Imamites' organization (al-Wikāla), despite its developed system did not disseminate the testament of al-ʿAskari concerning his successor widely amongst the populace and the lower missionaries. They may have acted in this way because of the tense political situation. Thus any possible successor was neither openly indicated by al-ʿAskari nor well-known to the general mass of the Imamites. For this reason the Imamites who knew nothing about the testament of al-ʿAskari had recourse to the traditions, which seem to have been adopted by the majority of the Imamites, to determine, according to these transmissions, who was to be the twelfth Imam. The interpretation of these traditions led to various different points of view which, in turn, led to new sub-divisions amongst the Qaṭʿiyya and the Muḥammadiyya.
iii) The third cause contributing to these divisions was the personal ambition of al-‘Askarī's brother, Ja’far, who claimed the Imamate during the lifetime of al-‘Askarī. Ja’far became more powerful after the death of his brother, because he was encouraged by the Fāṭhiyya, in order to vindicate their doctrine, and especially by Banū Faddāl in Kufa. However Ja’far’s success did not continue because his followers differed as to how he gained the Imamate, and because their arguments in the field of traditions were weaker than the arguments and propaganda of the Qaṭ‘iyya.

Thus, as al-Mufīd and al-Ṭūsī stated, all these divisions and splits gradually vanished, except the Qaṭ‘iyya, who became the Twelvers in the fourth/tenth century.¹

3. The question of the birth of the twelfth Imam

The possibility of the twelfth Imam having been born and his birth having been kept hidden is supported by some narrations. The fact that there were already narrations about the twelfth Imam as al-Qā’im al-Mahdī gave rise to other narrations, which can only be described as hagiographical yet, later, from the time of al-Ṣadūq onwards even they were accepted as historical facts by Imamites. However other early narrations presented his birth as a purely historical fact without the embellishment of miraculous reports.

¹. T. al-Ghayba, 142-6; al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 261.
3.1. The origin of the mother of the twelfth Imam

The earliest Imamite scholar to give an account of the twelfth Imam's mother is al-Mas'ūdī, and he reports that she was a slave-girl called Narjis. Al-Shahīd (d. 786/1384) states that her name was Maryam b. Zayd al-'Alawiyya, and other reports gave her the names Rayhāna, Ṣaqīl and Sawsan. It is possible that her name was in fact Narjis and the other names, except Ṣaqīl, were given to her by her owner Ḥakīma bint Muḥammad al-Jawād. This is mainly because people at that time used to call their slave-girls by different names as a form of flattery, especially if one bears in mind that Narjis, Rayhāna and Sawsan are names of flowers.

The earliest report concerning the nationality of the mother of the twelfth Imam goes back to the year 286/899. This was written down for the first time by al-Ṣadūq, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Bahr al-Shaybānī, who attributed his narration to Bishr b. Sulaymān al-Nakhkhās. According to this narration she was a Christian from Byzantium and was arrested by Islamic troops. Thus she became a slave-girl, and was bought by al-Nakhkhās from the slave-market in Baghdad, and sent to the tenth Imam, 'Alī al-Hādī, in Sāmarrā. After that, however, the

1. Ithbāt, 248. For the later authors who named her as Narjis see al-Irshād, 390; T. al-Ghayba, 153, 158; 'Uyūn, 32-3.
2. Bihar, LI, 28, quoted from al-Dirūs.
narration began to lose much of its credibility and took a hagiographical form. It is related that she was Malîka b. Yashshû', the granddaughter of the Emperor of Byzantium, whose mother was a descendant of Simon (Sham'ûn) the disciple of Jesus. When Malîka was in her grandfather's palace, she dreamt that she saw Jesus's mother, Mary, and Muhammad's daughter, Fâ'tima. In this dream Fâ'tima converts her to Islam, and persuades her to allow herself to be captured by Islamic troops.¹

The authenticity of this narration is questionable in many aspects, the most doubtful points being found in the last part.

Firstly there was no major battle between the 'Abbâsids and the Byzantines after 242/856.² The sources, also, do not give any indication that the Emperor of Byzantium appealed to the 'Abbâsids to liberate his granddaughter.

Secondly, the early Imamite authors, particularly al-Qummî, al-Nawbakhtî, al-Kulaynî and al-Mas'ûdî, who were contemporaries of the narrator of this narration, did not report it in their works. In addition, the companion of al-Shaybânî, al-Kashshî, and the later scholars al-Najâshî and Ibn Dâwûd claim that he was an extremist.³

Thirdly, concerning the mother of the twelfth Imam, al-Kulaynî states that al-Qâ'im's mother was a slave-girl from al-Nawba, the northern province of Sudan.⁴ Moreover

¹ Kamâl, 317-23.
² Tabârî, III, 1434.
³ Ikhtiyâr, 147-8; al-Najâshî, 298; Ibn Dâwûd, al-Rîjâl, 541.
⁴ al-Kâfî, I, 323.
al-Nu'mānī and al-Ṣadūq relate other narrations which indicate that al-Qā'im's mother would be a black slave-girl.¹ It might be that the later Imamites ignored this transmission and authenticated the narration of al-Shaybānī because the latter makes al-Qā'im's mother of noble ancestry and high social status, i.e. the granddaughter of the Emperor of Byzantium, and the descendant of Simon, the disciple of Jesus. This connection between the twelfth Imam, al-Qā'im, and Jesus can also be seen in the claims of the Imamites who believe that the two of them will rise together to rid the world of tyranny.²

In the light of these three points the narration of Muḥammad b. Bahr al-Shaybānī can be rejected despite the fact that al-Tūsī and Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī consider it reliable.³ Possibly the correct account of the origin of al-Qā'im's mother is given by al-Mufīd, who states that she was a slave-girl, brought up in the house of Ḥakīma, the sister of the tenth Imam. According to the story the Imam saw her one day and predicted that she would give birth to one with special Divine blessing.⁴ According to al-Ṣadūq she died before the death of her husband, al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, in 260/874⁵, but it appears from the report of al-Najashī that she was alive after this year and she was

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¹ N. al-Ghayba, 84, 85, 120; Kamāl, 329.
² Kamāl, 280, 345.
³ T. al-Ghayba, 134-9; Dalāʾīl, 262-4.
⁴ al-Irshād, 390-1.
⁵ Kamāl, 431.
hiding at the house of Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa b. Ṭalḥa al-‘Askari, one of the close associates of her husband al-‘Askari.¹

3.2. The birth of the twelfth Imam

The eleventh Imam, al-‘Askari, died without leaving an obvious son, so most of his followers, who held that he had in fact left a successor, based their belief in his existence on traditions concerning al-Qā‘im al-Mahdi and his occultation attributed to the preceding Imams.² The following statements are examples of these traditions. The world cannot be void of a Ḥujja (Imam) either manifest and well-known, or hidden because of fear.³ Similarly the Imamate cannot be vested to two brothers after al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn⁴, while another tradition, attributed to al-Ṣādiq, states that the Master of the Command (Ṣāhib al-Amr) will have two occultations, one of which will be prolonged until some will say that he had died while others will say that he has been killed, to the extent that only a few of his followers will remain faithful to his Imamate. No one will

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¹ al-Najāshī, 268.
² Ibn Qubba, Naqd Kitāb al-Ashhād, quoted in Kamāl, 123.
³ al-Kāfī, I, 178; N. Firaq, 91.
⁴ al-Kāfī, I, 285-6; Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī states in his work al-Tanbih that the main argument used by the Imamites to prove the existence of the twelfth Imam was the traditions of the preceding Imams, which had been narrated before the death of the eleventh Imam in 260/874; quoted in Kamāl, 92-3; also see N. Firaq, 90-1; Q. Maqālāt, 102.
become cognizant of his whereabouts and his affairs except his intimate partisans who will look after his affairs.\(^1\)

It is worth mentioning that the last tradition, which was narrated by the Twelver Imamites, had also been recorded before the death of al-‘Askari in 260/874, by the Sevener Imamites, the Wāqifa who had applied these traditions to the seventh Imam Mūsā al-Kāzim.\(^2\)

However, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī reports that al-‘Askari had intimate partisans who used to narrate traditions concerning Islamic law on his authority, and used to be his deputies. When al-‘Askari died in 260/874 all of them came to agree that he had left a son and that he was the Imam. Al-Nawbakhtī adds that they forbade their adherents to ask about his name or to reveal his existence to his foes, who were at that time trying to arrest him.\(^3\) It might be the ‘Abbāsids’ political pressure, which forced al-‘Askari to hide the birth of his son from the ordinary Imamites, also led the latter to transmit different reports concerning the date of his birth, some of which took on a hagiographical form.

Most of the Imamite sources agree that al-‘Askari's son was born on Friday, 15th of Sha'bān\(^4\), but they differ

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1. N. al-Ghayba, 90.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 90.
4. For an example of the unanimity of the Imamite sources concerning the birth of the twelfth Imam, see al-Kāfī, I, 514; Kamāl, 424; al-Irshād, 390. However, Ibn Rustam al-Tabari mentions that al-‘Askari's son was born on 8th of Sha'bān, 257/870; Dālā'il, 272.
about the year of his birth. Al-Qummi gives an account of a group of Imamites who held that al-‘Askari had died and left a son called Muḥammad, who had come of age when his father died. 1 But they did not fix the year of his birth. It might be that this group based their belief in the existence of al-‘Askari’s son mainly upon the tradition which says that the earth cannot be void of a Ḥujja. Unfortunately al-Qummi does not report any witnesses to the birth of the Imam from this group to support their opinion.

Whereas al-Kulaynī, al-Mufīd and al-Tūsī mention four different viewpoints concerning the date of his birth. The first one was related by ‘Allān al-Rāzī and al-Kulaynī on the authority of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, who states that the twelfth Imam was born in 255/868. 2 Al-Tūsī reports two narrations attributed to Ḥakīma bint al-Jawād in favour of this date. 3

The second report of the narrators states that he was born in 258/871. This report is attributed by Ḥawī b. ‘Alī al-‘Ijli to an anonymous Persian who related that in the year 260/873 he had come to Sāmarrā from Persia to serve in the house of al-‘Askari. According to the Persian one of al-‘Askari’s slave-girls had previously given birth

1. Q. Maqālāt, 114; al-Ṣadūq reports a narration on the authority of Ya‘qūb b. Manfūsh who claimed that al-‘Askari had shown him his son, whose age at that time was between eight and ten years old; Kamāl, 407.
2. al-Kāfi, I, 329; al-Irshād, 390-1.
and he had seen the child in the hand of another slave-girl, and estimated his age at about two years.  

Another transmission on the authority of Muhammad b. 'Alī b. Bilāl, relates that al-'Askarī informed him twice about his successor: once in 258/871, then three days before his death in 260/874. The narration attributed to Ḍaw' does not, however, mention explicitly the date of the Imam's birth nor the time when the narrator gave his estimation; whether it was before or after the death of al-'Askarī. Regarding the narration of Ibn Bilāl, although al-'Askarī informed him about the existence of his successor in 258/871, it does not indicate or reveal that the birth of his son occurred in that year, in fact it leads us to think that the birth occurred before 258/871.

The third viewpoint was held by a group of Imamites who thought that al-'Askarī's son had been born after his father's death in 261/874. They claimed that a slave-girl had conceived a child belonging to al-'Askarī, and that her pregnancy had been known to the caliph as well as to other people, and thus the authorities delayed the division of his share of the estate until the pregnancy was proved invalid to the caliph. Thus they contended that the Imam was born eight months after his father's death, and was then hidden. Al-'Askarī had commanded that they should call him Muḥammad.  

At any rate, from the historical

1. al-Kāfī, I, 514-5.
2. Ibid., I, 328; al-Irshād, 394.
3. Q. Maqālāt, 114; N. Firaq, 85.
viewpoint, the account, given by this group, is completely unconvincing, and does not encourage one to believe that al-‘Askari had left a successor. Firstly, al-‘Askari’s slave-girl, Ṣaṭīl, who had pretended that she was pregnant by her master, was detained by the ‘Abbāsid authorities for two years until the pregnancy was proved invalid. 1 Secondly, al-Kulaynī reports that Abū Hāshim al-Ja‘fari 2 once asked the eleventh Imam,

"O master, do you have a son?" He replied, "Yes." Abū Hāshim said, "If an accident happens to you, where should I ask for him?" The Imam said, "In Medina." 3

It is well-known that al-‘Askari died in 260/874 and that Abū Hāshim died the following year, therefore this narration would suggest that the birth occurred before 260/874. Thirdly, al-Mas‘ūdī reports that the twelfth Imam was born two years after the death of his grandfather, al-Hādī. 4 As the latter died in 254/869 5 , the birth would have occurred in 256/870. Al-Mas‘ūdī’s narration gives more evidence to the fourth Imamite viewpoint, which places

2. According to al-Ṭabarī, Abū Hāshim al-Ja‘fari died in 261/875; Tabarī, III, 1887.
3. al-Kāfī, I, 328.
4. Ithbāt, 251.
5. According to al-Kulaynī the tenth Imam, al-Hādī, died on 26 Jumādā II, 254/2 June 869; al-Kāfī, I, 497.
the birth of the twelfth Imam in 256/870. The Imamite sources record many narrations in favour of this viewpoint. The most important one, however, is mentioned on the authority of Mu‘allā b. Muḥammad and Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh, who related that al-‘Askarī issued a letter to his reliable followers after the assassination of al-Muhtadī, the caliph, saying,

"This is the punishment of the one who has sinned against God, the Exalted, concerning his legatees. He thought that he would kill me without offspring. Now he has seen the omnipotence of God, the Exalted."

The narration continues to report that in fact the Imam had a son called Muḥammad, who was born in 256/870. As a matter of fact al-Muhtadī was dethroned and died in Rajab 256/870. Moreover all the Imamite narrators agreed that the birth of the twelfth Imam occurred on 15th of Sha‘bān. So if one links the death of al-Muhtadī in the month of Rajab with the letter of al-‘Askarī which was issued in the next month, Sha‘bān, it would seem feasible that the date of the Imam’s birth occurred on 15th Sha‘bān in 256/870. Furthermore al-Mas‘ūdī reports an anecdote attributed to Khadija bint Muḥammad al-Jawād

1. Kamāl, 432.
2. al-Ḵāfī, I, 329, 514; Kamāl, 430; T. al-Ghayba, 144.
to support such a hypothesis. In 262/875 a certain man called Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm asked her about al-‘Askari’s successor, and she confirmed the reality of his existence, adding that he had taken over the Imamate on 11th Rabī’ I 260/874 at the age of four years and seven months\(^1\), which means that he was born on 15th Sha‘bān 256/18th July 870.

It is worth quoting here the narration concerning the birth of the twelfth Imam which was viewed as authentic by the time of al-Mas‘ūdī, who died in 345/956. Al-Ṣadūq presented it as follows and attributed it to Ḥakīma bint al-Jawād, who related,

Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī, peace be upon them, called on me with the message, ‘O aunt, break your fast at our house tonight, because it is the fifteenth of Sha‘bān. God, the Exalted, tonight will manifest the Hujja, who will be His Proof on earth.’ [When she went to the house], she asked him who the mother of the child was. He said, ‘Narjis.’ I said, ‘May God make me your sacrifice, there is no sign of pregnancy in her?’ He said, ‘That is what I am telling you.’ Therefore I went in and greeted them. When I had taken my seat Narjis came forward to take off my shoes and said to me, ‘My mistress and the lady of my family, how are you tonight?’

\(^1\) Ithbāt, 261-2.
I said, 'Nay, you are the mistress of myself and my family.' However, she denied my speech and replied, 'What are you saying, 0 aunt?'

I said to her, '0 my daughter, God, the Exalted, will give you tonight a son who shall be the Master in this world and in the hereafter.'

So she became shy and blushed.

"After I had finished my evening prayer I broke my fast and went to sleep. At midnight I woke for prayer. I performed my prayer while she was sleeping without any sign of parturition, then I sat down performing the supererogatory prayer. Thereafter I went to bed and got up again but she was still sleeping. Then she got up, performed her supererogatory prayer and lay down again."

Hakīma continued, "I went out to see the dawn where I found its first stage was about to appear, however, she was still asleep. So I began to doubt al-'Askarī's expectation and just then he called out from his place, 'Do not be in a hurry, 0 aunt, the matter is approaching.' So I sat down and recited the Qur'ānic suras Hā Mīm al-Sajda [XL] and Yās [XXVI]. At that moment she got up, alarmed, and then I ran to her and said, 'The name of God be upon you, do you feel anything?' She replied, '0 aunt, yes.' Then I said to her,
'Gather yourself and procure peace in your heart.' However at that moment we felt sleepy and drowsiness controlled us. After that I got up at the voice of my Master and when I raised the covering from him I saw him, peace be upon him, prostrate on the ground. 1 I took him to my bosom and noticed that he was pure and clean.

"Abū Muḥammad called out to me and said, 'O aunt, bring my son to me.' And I did so. He put his hand under his bottom and feet resting on his chest. Afterwards al-‘Askarī put his tongue in his mouth and gently stroked his hand upon his eyes, ears and joints, then he said, 'O my son, speak.' The child replied, 'I bear witness that there is no god but God, He is unique and has no partner and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Prophet of God.' Then he went on sending his greetings upon the commander of the faithful [Amīr al-Mu’minīn], and upon the Imams respectively until he stopped at the name of his father. Then he refrained from speech.

1. According to al-Kulaynī each Imam when he comes out from the womb of his mother puts his hands on the ground and holds his head towards the sky, and then recites some Qur’ānic verses; al-Kāfī, I, 386.
"Abū Muḥammad said, 'O aunt, take him to his mother, so that he may greet her, and then bring him back to me.' I took him to her and when he had done so I took him back and left him there. Al-‘Askarī said to me, 'O aunt, come to visit us on the seventh day.' The next day I came to greet Abū Muḥammad and raised the curtain to see my Master. But I did not see him. So I asked the Imam, 'May God make me your sacrifice, what has happened to my Master?' He replied, 'O aunt, we have entrusted him to the one to whom the mother of Moses entrusted her son.'"

Ḥakīma said, "On the seventh day I came and greeted him and took my seat. Abū Muḥammad said, 'Bring my son to me.' I brought him wrapped in a piece of cloth, and the Imam repeated what he had done on the first day and the child said what he had said before, then he recited the Qur’ānic verse¹: 'And we were reminded to be gracious unto those who were weak in the land, and to make them Imams and heirs, and to establish a place for them in the earth, and to show Pharoah

1. al-Qasas, XXVIII, 5–6.
and Hāmān and their forces, [the things] which they feared at their hands. 1

The hagiographical nature of this account is obvious. However, certain elements in the account emphasise the nature of the birth. Thus it seems that the pregnancy of Narjis was deliberately concealed, a close relative only being brought into act as midwife when the birth was due. If this was the case and a son was born to al-‘Askārī and the likeliest date seems to be 256/870, then the reasons for the concealment of the pregnancy and the birth would be the same as the reasons for the Imam’s occultation.

1. Kamāl, 424-6; the account of the birth of the twelfth Imam has been related in the Imamites’ works with some differences concerning that account. See Ithbāt, 248-50; T. al-Ghayba, 150-4; Dalā’il, 269-70. All the Imamite sources agree that al-‘Askārī left only one son; al-Ṣadūq, however, reports a narration on the authority of Ibrāhīm al-Māzyār which indicates that al-‘Askārī had two sons, Muḥammad and Mūsā, who were living in Hijaz. A critical study of the context of the narration and its chain of transmitters suggests it was invented, mainly because the narrator Ibrāhīm b. al-Māzyār died before 260/874, whereas according to the narrative al-‘Askārī’s sons were mature, and this is unlikely if the twelfth Imam was born in 256/874; Kamāl, 445-53.
4. The reasons for the first occultation of the twelfth Imam

The early Imamite works mention three reasons for the occultation of the twelfth Imam which mirror the new tactics of the Imams in their religious and political activities.

Al-Ṣādiq was reported to have said that al-Qā'im would go into occultation before he rose again, because he would be afraid of being killed. Another reason is mentioned on the authority of the twelfth Imam, who was reported as having informed his partisan Ishaq b. Ya‘qūb that all his forefathers had paid the oath of obedience to the oppressive rulers, but that he had hidden himself in order to rise in arms and had made no oath of obedience to any oppressive ruler. This had been previously mentioned by al-Ḥasan and al-Ridā, who both said that al-Qā'im alone would not swear fealty to an oppressive ruler. The third reason is mentioned by al-Kulaynī, who states that the occultation was a test set by God for his creation, so as to see who would remain steadfast in acknowledging the Imamate of the twelfth Imam.

These reasons mentioned by the early Imamites depict a new phase in the attitude of the Imamites in their struggle for power. It appears, however, that the

1. 'Iilha, 243-4; Kamāl, 24; N. al-Ghayba, 86-7; al-Kāfī, I, 340; al-Murtadā, Mas'ala wajīza fī al-Ghayba, 11; al-Fusūl al-‘Ashara, 16.
2. N. al-Ghayba, 101; Kamāl, 303, 485.
3. 'Iilha, 245; Kamāl, 316.
4. al-Kāfī, I, 336.
quiescent policy of the Imams towards the 'Abbāsid regime, along with their continued intellectual activities, led the Imamite organization to a more politically developed state, which encouraged the twelfth Imam to instigate underground political activities against the 'Abbāsids. Since the followers of his forefathers had caused the failure of two bids for power in 70/689 and 140/757, by revealing their activities to their enemies, which led to the arrest of the Imams and the failure of their attempt.¹ It might be that these incidents brought about a critical situation for the later Imams and obliged the twelfth Imam to live in a state of occultation even from his own followers so as to practice his underground activities through the organization of the sect, and to evade any 'Abbāsid bid to arrest him. This can be seen in many traditions commanding the Imamites to keep the name of al-Qā'im a secret.² Al-Kulaynī reports that, after the death of al-'Askari in 260/874, some people among his adherents asked the agent (wakīl), Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Sāliḥī, to ask about the name of the twelfth Imam for them, as well as about his residence. When he did so, the answer was,

¹. al-Kāfī, I, 369.
². Ibid., I, 328, 330.
"If you reveal the name to them, they will reveal it in public; and if they realize the place of his residence they will lead foes to it."\(^1\)

Al-Kulaynî mentions another report which asserts that the occultation of the twelfth Imam was a preparative step towards the overthrow of the state of injustice.\(^2\)

It is thus essential to study the plan of al-‘ Askarî to hide his son and the ‘Abbāsid attitude towards the Imamites after the death of al-‘ Askarî so as to see why the latter felt it necessary to hide his son.

5. al-‘ Askarî’s plan to hide his successor

It seems from the circumstances which accompanied the birth of the son of al-‘ Askarî, that the latter wanted to save his successor from the restrictive policy of the ‘Abbāsids, which had been established by al-Ma’mūn. So he did not circulate in public the news concerning the birth of his son, but only disclosed it to a few reliable followers, such as Abū Hāshim al-Ja’farî, Ahmad b. Ishāq, while Ḥakîma and Khadîja, the aunts of al-‘ Askarî were

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1. al-Kāfî, I, 333.
2. Ibid., VIII, 247.
also informed.\(^1\) On the other hand he decided to move his son to a place safer than Sāmarrā, so that he could carry on his religious and political activities through the \(\textit{Wikāla}\) without suffering the interference of the ‘Abbāsids.

The study of the hagiographical and historical anecdotes concerning the first occultation of the Imam and his reappearance reveals that al-‘Askari hid his son first in Sāmarrā and then sent him to Medina, where he lived under the guardianship of his paternal grandmother. According to al-Ṣadūq, al-‘Askari sent his son to an unknown place forty days after his birth, and that his son was then brought back to his mother.\(^2\) Three years later, according to al-Mas‘ūdī, al-‘Askari asked his own mother, Ḥadīth, in the year 259/873 to go on the pilgrimage after he had explained his critical position and given her full instructions, and sent his son with her, who had received from his father the signs of the Imamate, the most esteemed name of God, the inheritance and the weapon. Thereafter Ḥadīth and her grandson went to Mecca under the protection of an intimate friend called Ḥamad b. Muḥammad b. al-Muṭṭahir.\(^3\) It appears that after they had performed the rite of pilgrimage they went to Medina,

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1. The Imamite works record many individuals who saw the son of al-‘Askari. One report attributed to Muhammad b. ‘Uthmān, the second agent, says that al-‘Askari gathered together forty of his reliable followers and showed them his son; \(\text{Kamāl, 435; al-}\)\(\text{Kāfī, I, 330-1; T. al-}\)\(\text{Ghayba, 148, 152.}\)

2. \(\text{Kamāl, 429.}\)

3. \(\text{Ithbāt, 247-8, 253.}\)
which was used as the place of occultation for the twelfth Imam.

There are many reports which incline one to accept such a notion. As we have seen, Abū Ḥāshim al-Ja‘farī once asked al-‘Askari where he would ask for his successor were he to die. Al-‘Askari said, "In Medina." Another report states the the residence of al-Qā'im would be in Medina, surrounded by thirty intimate followers.¹ Furthermore, all the traditions concerning the rising of al-Qā'im indicate that he will rise in Mecca², and the Imamite sources record that the twelfth Imam al-Qā'im went on the pilgrimage every year.³ Such evidences indicate that the twelfth Imam was in an area not far from Mecca, which was perhaps Medina.

As part of al-‘Askari's prudent fear he made his manifest testament only to his mother, Ḥadīth, and did not mention any successor openly to any one else.⁴ From all this it seems most probable that the twelfth Imam spent most of his early life in Medina, because al-‘Askari recognised the true danger which would face his son, were he to remain in Iraq.

1. al-Kāfī, I, 328, 240; N. al-Ghayba, 99-100; T. al-Ghayba, 149.
3. al-Kāfī, I, 339.
4. al-Fusūl al-‘Ashara, 13.
6. The 'Abbāsid attempt to arrest al-'Askari's son

As a continuation of the 'Abbāsid policy of putting the Imams under close watch, which increased with the spread of the traditions concerning the role of the twelfth Imam, the caliph al-Mu'tamid, on hearing about the deterioration of al-'Askari's health, sent five of his most trusted officers, amongst whom was his servant Nahrīr, to the house of al-'Askari to watch him, and also ordered the chief judge, al-Hasan b. Abī al-Shawārib, to send ten reliable people to participate in this task. When al-'Askari died on 8th Rabī' I 260/1st January 874, the caliph sent a contingent to search his house. They sealed off all his estate and then looked for his son to the extent that they even brought women to examine his slave-girls in case any of them were pregnant.

Despite the fact that the primary investigation proved to al-Mu'tamid that al-'Askari died without leaving

1. Al-Hasan b. Muḥammad is related to an Umayyad family called Āl Abī al-Shawārib. Most of his relatives worked in the office of judge (al-qādā') during the 'Abbāsid rule. According to al-Ṭabarī, as part of al-Mutawakkil's anti-Shī'ite policy, he included al-Hasan b. Abī al-Shawārib among his courtiers (Ṭabarī, III, 1428). Later al-Mu'tazz, the caliph, appointed him chief judge in 252/866 (Ṭabarī, III, 1684). Three years later he was discharged from his office, but recovered it during al-Mu'tadid's regime and continued in this office until his death in Mecca in 261/875; Ṭabarī, III, 1787, 1790-1, 1891, 1907.

2. al-Kāfī, I, 505; Kamālı, 43.
a son, the vast majority of the Imamites held that he had, in fact, left a son. According to the Imamite works, Ja’far, the brother of al-‘Askarî, who had already claimed to be the Imam and tried to succeed his brother, revealed to the authorities the Imamites’ belief in the existence of a successor to al-‘Askarî. Al-Ṣadūq reports that a band of people from Qumm, in ignorance of the death of al-‘Askarî, amongst whom was Muḥammad b. Ja’far al-Ḥimyarî, arrived at Sāmarra with letters of inquiry and legal taxes and only learned about his death there, and were then directed to Ja’far by certain people. When they met him and wanted to indulge in the ceremonies which they had practiced before, and when Ja’far was asked by them to inquire about the amount of money they had brought and who had given it to them, Ja’far replied that he was no sooth-sayer and that the things the Imamites claimed about al-‘Askarî were mere lies, because God alone could know such things. He then wanted them to hand the money over to him, however, they refused to do so, and the quarrel then became public. While they were arguing somebody came, called them by name and led them to a house where he showed them someone, who was believed to be the agent of the twelfth Imam. This agent revealed to them how much money they had brought. Therefore they accepted the Imamate of the twelfth Imam. In so doing they were commanded that they should henceforth hand the money to a certain man in Baghdad. According to

1. Kamāl, 43.
2. Ibid., 476-8.
al-Ṣadūq Ja'far went straight to the caliph, al-Mu‘tamid, and informed him that the Imamites still believed in the existence of a son of al-‘Askarī. Al-Mu‘tamid immediately had this investigated, by sending a band of soldiers with Ja’far to search the house of al-‘Askarī and the neighbours’ houses\(^1\), where they arrested a slave-girl called Ṣaqīl, and demanded that she show them the child, but she denied having given birth to a child. According to al-Ṣadūq, in order to save the life of the twelfth Imam, Ṣaqīl claimed to be pregnant.\(^2\) Thereupon al-Mu‘tamid incarcerated her in his harem for observation. The caliph’s wives and slave-girls, and also the wives of the chief judge, Ibn Abī al-Shawārib, under the supervision of Nahārīr, observed Ṣaqīl for two years until they felt that further observation was no longer necessary, and when some disturbances rose in various parts of the Empire and the vizier ‘Ubayd Allāh Ibn Khāqān died suddenly, they ignored her completely.\(^3\)

It appears from many reports that while Ṣaqīl was imprisoned the ‘Abbāsids carried out a campaign of persecution against the Imamites and that Ja’far was behind it. In spite of the fact that the Imamites lost many people, any attempts on the part of the authorities to arrest the twelfth Imam proved fruitless.

However, according to al-Mufīd, al-‘Askarī wanted to deny the ‘Abbāsids any opportunity to find a trace which

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2. Ibid., 476.
3. Ibid., 474.
might endanger the life of his successor. Hence he invented a plan, and left his estate, in his manifest will, only to his mother, Ḥadīth.\(^1\) The latter on hearing of the death of her son, al-‘Askārī, came from Medina to Sāmarrā to control the estate, but found that the estate was already under ‘Abbāsid control. Furthermore, Ja'far quarrelled with her about his brother’s inheritance, insisting on his right to the estate as the brother of the estator, and raised this case with the authorities, who were trying to confirm that al-‘Askārī had no son, by interfering in this case. Ḥadīth maintained that al-‘Askārī had made her his sole heiress, and that according to the Imamites’ law Ja'far had no right to the estate of his brother.\(^2\) This quarrel went on for two years until the pregnancy of Ṣaqlīl proved false. Although the judge adjudicated in favour of Ḥadīth, Ja'far's claim was, because of his influential connections, not disputed, so that the estate was in the end divided into two parts in contrast to Imamite law.\(^3\)

1. al-Fuṣūl al-‘Ashara, 13.
2. According to Imamite law, if the dead person left a mother and a son and brother, the brother has no right to take any thing from the estate; al-Ṣadūq, al-Muqni‘a (Tehran, 1377), 171; Kamāl, 47, 58.
CHAPTER IV

THE UNDERGROUND ACTIVITIES OF THE TWELFTH IMAM

AS SEEN IN THE ACTIONS OF THE SAFIRS

1. A brief study of the Wikāla before the twelfth Imam

The critical situation faced by the Imams, mentioned in Chapter Two, which had been brought about by the 'Abbāsids, forced the Imams to search for new means to communicate with the members of their congregation. It appears, from the Imamite sources, that the sixth Imam al-Ṣādiq, was the first Imam to employ an underground system of communication (al-Tanzīm al-Sirrī) among his community.¹

The main purpose of the Wikāla was to collect the khums and the zakāt, and other alms from the Imamites for the Imam, and although the Wikāla might have other purposes at that time the sources rarely record them. Al-Ṣādiq, however, carried out the activities of the organization with such care that it escaped the knowledge of the 'Abbāsids. As part of his precaution (al-Taqiyya), he used to ask some of his followers to carry out some of the tasks of the organization without informing them that they were in fact his agents. Al-Ṭūsī reports that Naṣr b. Qābūs al-Lakhmī spent twenty years working as an agent (wakīl) for al-Ṣādiq,

¹ Javad Ali, op. cit., in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 212.
without knowing that he had actually been appointed one.
Concerning the leaders of the organization, the most
important agent of al-Ṣādiq in Iraq was ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b.
al-Ḥajjāj, who continued in this office until his death,
after the time of the eighth Imam al-Riḍā, while Mu‘allā b.
Khunays was al-Ṣādiq’s agent in Medina. The latter was
arrested by the ‘Abbāsids and was sentenced to death in
133/750, because he refused to reveal the names of the
Imamate propagandists. 2

Despite the difficulties which faced the Wikāla in its
early stages, the areas and the training of the agents
were extended during the time of al-Kāẓim, as they intensified
their activities, using the rite of pilgrimage to communicate
with each other. Al-Kāẓim’s agent in Egypt was ‘Uthmān b.
‘Īsā al-Rawwāsī. 3 He also had other agents in numerous
other places, such as Ḥayyān al-Sarrāj, who was his agent
in Kufa, Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Umayr in Baghdad, and Yūnis b.
Ya‘qūb al-Bajlī in Medina. 4 It seems from the report of

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1. T. al-Ghayba, 224-5. Al-Ṭūsī thinks that Ibn al-Ḥajjāj
died during the time of al-Riḍā, but the report of
al-Mas‘ūdī confirms that he was still alive after
al-Riḍā’s death in 203/818; Ithbāt, 213.

2. al-Kāfī, II, 557; Ikhtiyār, 381; al-Ṣadūq, Man lā
Yahduruh al-Faqīh (al-Mashyakha), IV, 67. The date of
his death is not mentioned, however, al-Kashefi reports
that Dāwud b. ‘Ali, who killed Mu‘allā, had died a few
days after Mu‘allā’s death, and according to al-Dhahabi
Dāwud died in 133/750 (Mīzān, II, 14). For this reason
the persecution of Mu‘allā must have occurred in the
same year.

3. Ikhtiyār, 459-60.

al-Mas'ūdī that all the agents received their instructions from 'Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Hajjāj, who was then resident in Baghdad. The agents faced, however, another campaign of arrests which was instigated in 179/795 by the caliph al-Rashīd. It caused to the Imamite organization considerable damage. The agent of Baghdad, Muḥammad b. Abī 'Umār, was arrested and tortured in the hope that he would reveal the names and the places of the followers of al-Kāẓim, but he refused, while his sister was put in jail for four years. Another agent, 'Alī b. Yaqtīn, who used to send money and letters to the Imam, through an individual called Ismā‘īl b. Salām, was also arrested and spent the rest of his life in prison. According to the Imamite sources the campaign of arrests led to that of al-Kāẓim himself and to his death in prison, along with another sixty ‘Alīds.

After the death of al-Kāẓim the members of the Imamite organization (al-Wikāla) found themselves faced with an internal theological and political question, concerning the doctrine of al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī and his occultation. The associate agents of al-Kāẓim, such as al-Rawwāsī in Egypt, Ziyād al-Qindī in Baghdad, 'Alī b. Abī Ḥamza and Ḥayyān al-Sarrāj in Kufa, and al-Ḥasan b. Qayāmā in Wāsiṭ, had related many traditions attributed to

1. Ithbāt, 213.
2. al-Najāshī, 250.
3. Ibid., 209.
5. 'Uyūn, I, 89-90, II, 143.
al-Ṣādiq concerning al-Qā'im al-Mahdī and his occultation, without explicitly stating his identity.¹ For this reason, perhaps, they applied these traditions to the seventh Imam, al-Kāẓim, by denying his death, contending that he was al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, who had gone into occultation.² Consequently, they rejected the Imamate of his son al-Riḍā and split into a new group called the Wāqifa, using the money of the organization to their own ends. For this reason al-Riḍā lost a considerable number of trained agents and, moreover, al-Riḍā lost over 100,000 dinars because of this split.³ However, between the years 183-202/799-817 al-Riḍā managed to solve this problem by clarifying to those who stopped at his father the true nature of al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, which had been narrated on the authority of the previous Imams. In so doing, according to al-Kašshī, some of the leaders of the Wāqifa like al-Rawwasī, perhaps, along with his followers, recognized his Imamate.⁴ Meanwhile the role of the Wikāla was increased to face the present needs and tasks of the congregation. His agents were ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Muhtadī in Qumm⁵, Ṣafwān b. Yahyā in Kufa⁶, ‘Abd Allāh b. Jandab and ‘Abd al-Rahmān

¹ For a full account of these traditions see al-Ḥāfī, I, 333-43; however, the Wāqifa report a tradition attributed to al-Ṣādiq which states that al-Qā'im would be the seventh Imam; Ikhtiyār, 475; al-Ḥāfī, I, 320-1.
² Ikhtiyār, 463-7, 475-8; T. al-Ghayba, 227-8.
⁴ Ikhtiyār, 597-9.
⁵ Ibid., 483, 506, 591-2.
⁶ al-Najāshī, 148.
b. al-Hajjāj in Baghdad. The latter controlled along with another eighty agents, the leadership of the organization through the time of the ninth Imam, al-Jawād, who maintained considerable success in protecting the organization from new schisms. Moreover the tactics of his agents became more precise and more developed, and especially in widening the sphere of al-Taqiyya (prudent fear) by allowing some of his partisans to participate in the administration and the army of the 'Abbāsids.

During the long Imamate of the tenth Imam, al-Hādī (220-254/835-868) new trends emerged amongst the Imamites due to historical circumstances, which were later to play such a dangerous role during the time of the twelfth Imam.

Al-Mutawakkil continued to practice the policy of al-Ma'mūn. The latter had made the eighth Imam, al-Riḍā, and his son al-Jawād join his courtiers so that their links with their partisans could be restricted and watched closely. Al-Mutawakkil did the same to al-Hādī. He summoned al-Hādī from Medina to Sāmarrā in 233/847, where he spent the rest of his life. The absence of direct contact

1. T. al-Ghayba, 224-5; al-Tūsī states that ‘Abd Allāh b. Jandab was the agent of the seventh and the eighth Imams but it seems that his career in the organization was earlier than that. According to Ibn Shu’ba, he was the agent of the sixth Imam, al-Ṣādiq; Ibn Shu’ba, Tuhaf al-‘Uqūl, 223.
2. Ithbāt, 213-5.
between the Imam and his populace led to an increase in the religious and political role of the Wikāla, so that the agents of the Imam gained more authority in running the affairs of the Imamites. Gradually, the leadership of the organization, the Wikāla, became the only authority which could prove and determine the rightfulness and legitimacy of the new Imam. The ninth Imam, al-Jawād, gave his testament concerning his successor to his chief agent Muhammad b. al-Faraj, commanding him to take his orders, in the case of the death of the former, from his son al-Ḥādī.¹ When al-Jawād died in 220/835 the prominent leaders of the organization held a secret meeting at the house of Muhammad b. al-Faraj to determine the succession of the next Imam. This meeting proved that al-Ḥādī was in fact the rightful Imam.²

Moreover, the agents of the Imam gained a lot of experience in organizing their partisans into separate factional units, and it seems from several remarks that the agents organized their followers into four separate areas. The first one included Baghdad, Madā'in, Sawād and Kufa, the second Basra and al-Ahwāz, the third Qumm and Hamadān, while the fourth area was composed of the Hijaz, Yemen and Egypt. It is worth mentioning that each area was entrusted to an independent agent, beneath whom many local agents were appointed. The workings of this can be seen in the letters of instruction attributed to al-Ḥādī

¹. Ibn Shahr Āshūb, Manāqib, IV, 389.
². al-Kāfī, I, 324.
concerning the administration of the organization. It is reported that he sent a letter in 232/847 to his local agent, 'Alī b. Bilāl, saying:

I substituted Abū 'Alī b. Rāshid in the post of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Rabba, and entrusted him with this post since he had the necessary qualifications so that no one can take precedence over him. He has been informed that you are the chief [shaykh] of your area, because I wished to invest you with that area, however, you have to follow him and hand all the dues over to him.

Al-Hādī sent another letter to his agents in Baghdad, Madā'in and Kufa, saying:

O Ayyūb b. Nūh, I am commanding you to cut relations between yourself and Abū 'Alī, and both of you should engage yourselves in what you were entrusted with, and what you were ordered to do in your areas, and if you do so you should be able to manage your affairs without consulting me . . .

O Ayyūb, I am ordering you neither to receive anything from the people of Baghdad and Madā'in nor to give anyone amongst them permission to contact me. And whoever
brings you dues from outside your area, order him to send it to the agent of his area. O Abu 'Ali, I am ordering you to follow what I have ordered Ayyûb.¹

Indeed this system saved the organization from otherwise inevitable damage after the harsh attack of al-Mutawakkil upon its underground political cells, in 235/850. In the same way it was saved from the attack of al-Musta‘în in 248/862.

Finally, it should be noted that the leadership of the organization in those areas, during the time of the tenth and the eleventh Imams, was monopolized by a few individuals, their tasks later falling to their descendants and remaining under their control during the short occultation of the twelfth Imam. For example, 'Ali b. Mâzyâr was the agent of al-Jawâd and al-Hâdî in al-Ahwâz², while his sons were the agents of the twelfth Imam in the same region.³ Ibrâhîm b. Muḥammad al-Hamadânî was the agent of al-Hâdî in Hamadân⁴, while his offspring inherited this post from father to son until the time of the twelfth

¹ Ikhtiyâr, 513-4; according to another letter the agent of al-Hâdî in Baghdad and its environs was 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. 'Abd Rabba. After the death of the latter in Mecca in 229/843, Abû 'Ali b. Râshid took his post; Ikhtiyâr, 510.
² al-Najâshî, 191.
³ Kamâl, 442; al-Kâfi, I, 518.
⁴ Ikhtiyâr, 608, 611-2, 557.
Imam. Another agent was Ismā‘īl b. Iṣḥāq b. Nawbakht, whose family later directed the members of the organization in Baghdad, while one of his relatives, al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ, became the third safīr to the twelfth Imam.

Among those agents the most important one was ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Umarī, who, as we shall see, was brought up under the auspices of the tenth Imam, al-Ḥādi, who made him first his agent and then the agent of his son, the eleventh Imam al-‘Askarī. After the death of the latter ‘Uthmān controlled the whole leadership of the organization as the first representative (safīr) of the twelfth Imam, and his son Muḥammad later succeeded him to the post, as the second safīr.

The fact that the activities of the Imam took an underground form made it easy for certain people to act falsely as the representatives of al-Ḥādi and al-‘Askarī, collecting money from the Imamites under the claim that they were in fact the agents of the Imam. It seems that this practice was carried out by the extremists (al-Ghulāt) and increased throughout the time of the twelfth Imam at the expense of the rightful agents of the Imam.

2. Ithbāt, 215; al-Barqī categorized him as one of the close followers of al-Ḥādi; al-Rijāl, 60.
3. The representatives of this trend throughout the time of the tenth and the eleventh Imams were mainly extremists (al-Ghulāt), such as Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī, Ja‘far b. Wāqīd, Abū al-Samhārī, ‘Amr b. Yahyā al-Dihqān, Fāris b. Hātim al-Qazwīnī and Muḥammad b. Muṣayr al-Numayrī; Ikhtiyār, 525, 529, 573, 606.
2. The main functions of the Wikâla

For the Twelver Imamites the series of Imams ends with the twelfth Imam, who from the death of his father in 260/874 up to the year 329/940-1, is believed to have lived in occultation. This period, which was, according to al-Nu‘mâni, called the short occultation, al-Ghayba al-Qasîra[^1], or according to later scholars the minor occultation, al-Ghayba al-Sughra[^2], was of decisive importance for the organization and the internal evolution of the congregation. During this period, the twelfth Imam is considered to have pursued his activities from behind the scenes and to have led his followers by means of four specially chosen representatives. These were called sufarâ (sing. safîr) or ambassadors. The first was 'Uthmân b. Sa‘îd al-‘Umârî, and the second his son Muhammad, while the third person to hold this position was al-‘Husayn b. Rûh al-Nawbakhtî and the fourth ‘Alî b. Muhammad al-Sammarî.

A critical study of the history of this period (260-329/874-941) reveals that the main function of the safîrs was to implement certain tasks previously undertaken by the Imams so as to save him from the political pressure of the ‘Abbâsids, which had been turned upon his predecessors, since the time of al-Ma‘mûn, especially as it was widely accepted among the Imamites of that period that the twelfth Imam would be al-Qâ'im bi-l-Amr li-Izâlat al-Duwal, that

[^1]: N. al-Ghayba, 92.
is, "the one who would be in charge of the elimination of the states of the oppressions by militant means."¹

A part of the ambassadors' task was to draw complete darkness over the name of the Imam and his whereabouts, not only as regards his foes, but extending it even to his followers, and, simultaneously, prove to his reliable adherents, the existence of the Imam. This can be clarified by al-Kulaynī's report, which states that 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī once asked the first safīr whether he had seen the successor of the eleventh Imam or not. Al-'Umarī, the safīr, confirmed that he had seen him, but added that people were forbidden to ask about his name, because if the government discovered his name they would certainly try to arrest him.² In this way the first safīr led the court of the caliph, al-Mu'tamid, to think that the eleventh Imam had in fact died without a successor.³

It appears, according to the report of al-Kulaynī, that this conclusion released the Imamites from the humiliation under which they had laboured throughout the time of the previous Imams, while the agents of the twelfth Imam began to carry out their activities without being afraid of the authorities, because the latter, being sure of the non-existence of the twelfth Imam, did not bother themselves to investigate the activities of the Imamites.⁴

2. Ibid., 157.
3. al-Kāfī, I, 505; Kamāl, 441-2.
It is noted, also, that the activities of the safīrs aimed at protecting the congregation from another schism, by proving the authenticity of the Imamate of al-‘Askarī’s son. Towards this aim they used those Prophetic traditions and sayings of the Imams which indicate that the series of Imams will end with the twelfth Imam, who would then go into occultation.¹

The four safīrs carried out another task in the name of the Imam. They received and collected, from the Imamites, the legal taxes, which the Imamites had previously paid to their Imams. According to the Imamite sources all the safīrs performed a miracle before receiving the money, so that the adherents believed in their legitimacy, whereas whoever proclaimed himself a safīr and did not work a miracle would, according to the Imamite belief, have lied about the Imam and would be driven out of the organization.²

It is noted from the Tawqī‘at (written and signed answers or pronouncements) attributed to the twelfth Imam, that he neither gave any statement to elucidate his attitude towards the political and economic situation of his time, nor ordered his followers to implicate themselves in an open political struggle with their rivals, the ‘Abbāsids. In fact, it is reasonable to agree with

1. For a full account of the traditions which were used by the Imamites during the short occultation, see al-Kāfi, I, 525-35; N. al-Ghayba, 26-47; al-‘Asfārī, Aṣl Abū Sa‘īd al-‘Asfārī, f. 1-3.
Muḥammad al-Ṣadr that in so doing the Imam saved his partisans from the authorities and enabled them to pursue their activities without attracting the attention of the ‘Abbāsids by statements criticising their rule. Moreover it seems most likely that the Imam, with this policy, wanted his agents and propagandists to concentrate their efforts upon strengthening their party in size and quality until it achieved a stage of internal development as regards its political means and ideology, which might enable it to put its goal into action; whereas the involvement of the agents in an immediate political struggle would have taken place at the expense of the internal development of the organization as regards its size and its ideological and political formation.

3. The early career of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd

Most of the Imamite information concerning the activities of the four saffīrs is attributed to al-Ṭūsī and his work al-Ghayba. The latter depended mainly on two early missing works, that is Kitāb fi Akhbār Abī ‘Amr wa Abī Ja‘far al-‘Umarīyyayn by Ibn Barīna al-Kātib, the son of the granddaughter of the second saffīr, and Kitāb Akhbār al-Wikalā’ al-Arba‘a by Aḥmad b. Nūh. Unfortunately, the work of al-Ṭūsī and other works give very few details concerning the background to the career of the first saffīr. However, we know that the latter was Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān b.

2. al-Najāši, 343; T. al-Fihrist, 48.
Sa‘īd al-‘Umarī from the tribe of Asad. Javad Ali, whose opinion was followed by Rajkowski, thought that the grandfather of ‘Uthmān was ‘Amr b. Ḥurayth al-Ṣayrafi al-Ḵūfī, a well-known Shi‘ite from Kufa who belonged to Banū Asad. For that reason, according to Javad Ali, both of them, the grandfather and the safīr, are known by the epithet al-Asadī.¹ In fact, this cannot be accepted because there is not any explicit indication which leads one to link the lineage of the two individuals. Nothing is known about the safīr nor of his position in the congregation, and, moreover, the year of the safīr’s birth and details of his youth have not been handed down.

It is said that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, at the age of eleven, was contracted to become a servant in the house of the ninth Imam, al-Jawād, and never left his service. Later he became his gate-keeper and chamberlain and enjoyed, as the Imam’s "right hand", his entire confidence, so that the Imam entrusted him with the execution of all his commissions.² ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd had reached this position of trust throughout the lifetime of al-Ḥāḍī, the tenth Imam³, who was watched carefully and suspiciously by the government of the day, so that he even avoided speaking with the individual members of the sect. For this reason, al-Ḥāḍī

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1. Javad Ali, op. cit., in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 199; Rajkowski, op. cit., 667; al-Najāshī, 222; T. al-Fihrist, 243; al-Ṭūsī mentions that the grandfather of ‘Uthmān was ‘Amr, however, he does not link him with ‘Amr b. Ḥurayth; T. al-Ghayba, 231.
presented 'Uthmān to those who found it difficult to consult him directly, saying that 'Uthmān was the trusted associate and a man of honour, and whatever he did was in his, the Imam's, name.\(^1\) Furthermore, it seems from the account of al-Kashshālī that during the last ten years of the time of al-Hādı, the leadership of the underground organization (al-Wikāla) of the Imamites, was in the hands of 'Uthmān, who organized its internal affairs and systematized the relations between the heart of the organization and its branches in the remote provinces.

When the agent, 'Alī b. 'Amr, came to Sāmarra from Qazwīn with money and contacted Fāris b. Ḥātim, without recognizing that the latter was cursed by the Imam in 250/864, 'Uthmān moved his propagandists quickly to save the money and prevented 'Alī b. 'Amr from having contact with Fāris b. Ḥātim.\(^2\)

'Uthmān maintained this position of trust under the eleventh Imam al-'Askārī, who appointed him using the same words as had his father. It is reported that al-'Askārī had informed few of his followers that 'Uthmān b. Sa'id was his agent. However, at one point a group of Yemenite Shi‘ites brought money to al-'Askārī, and he revealed to them that 'Uthmān was his agent and that his son, Muḥammad, would be the agent of the twelfth Imam, al-Mahdī.\(^3\)

According to another narration al-'Askārī showed his

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1. T. al-Ghayba, 229.
2. Ikhtiyar, 526.
successor to forty reliable Shi'ites, such as al-Hasan b. Ayyūb, 'Alī b. Bilāl, Ahmad b. Hilāl, and 'Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, informing them that they would not see him again, and commanded them to obey 'Uthmān during the concealment of the twelfth Imam, because he would be his representative.1 Moreover, during the last illness of the eleventh Imam, 'Uthmān looked after him and cared for him. According to al-Ṭūsī, he performed the last rites for the dead man, washed the corpse, wrapped him in his shroud and buried him. For the Imamites these are the unmistakeable signs that 'Uthmān was the rightful representative (safīr) of the hidden Imam. They contended that 'Uthmān did all this on the orders of al-‘Askarī.2 For this reason 'Uthmān b. Sa‘īd led all the affairs of the Imamites, on behalf of the twelfth Imam as his first safīr.

4. The career of the first safīr

The first safīr managed to satisfy the prominent Imamites, who were already members in the organization, that the twelfth Imam was in a state of occultation and thus safe from his enemies, while also convincing them that he was the rightful representative of the Imam. It appears that his occupation of the leadership of the organization during the time of the tenth and the eleventh Imams encouraged the agents to accept his claim and follow

1. T. al-Ghayba, 231-2; Kamāl, 435; for a full account of those men see al-Najashi, 41, 202, 323.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 231.
his instructions, without asking him to show a miracle or proof. However, the ordinary Imamites, who had nothing to do with the organization, were confused by the occultation of the Imam and held, as has been noted, different views concerning the successor of the eleventh Imam. Many Imamites refused to pay the khums to 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd unless he showed, by means of a miracle, that he had been rightfully appointed by the twelfth Imam; as can be seen in the narrative of al-Kulaynī attributed to Sa'd al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, who said:

Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr and Abū al-Saddām, with a group of people, spoke after the death of Abū Muhammad [the eleventh Imam] about the agents and decided to search for the new Imam. Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr came to Abū al-Saddām and said to him, "Delay it this year." Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr said to him, "I am afraid in my sleep, so I must go." He gave his will to Ahmad b. Ya'la b. Ḥammād. The latter himself had devoted some money to the Imam. Hearing of al-Ḥasan's decision, he gave the money to al-Ḥasan and commanded him not to hand anything over without proof.

2. For a full account see the chapter dealing with "The attitude of the Imamites after the death of al-'Askari".
Al-Hasan said: When I arrived at Baghdad I rented a house, thereafter an agent brought me clothes and money and left it with me. I said to him, "What is this?" He said to me, "As you see." The another one brought goods similar to those I had already received. A third one came and did so until they filled the house. Afterwards Ahmad b. Ishāq [the assistant of the safīr] brought me all the goods he had. Thus I became confused, however, later I received a message from al-Rajul [the Imam], peace be upon him, ordering me to take goods to al-ʿAskar [Sāmarrā] . . . When I arrived there I received a letter ordering me to take the goods [to him]. So I put them in the baskets of the carriers and, when I reached the corridor, I found a black slave was standing there, who asked me: "Are you al-Hasan b. al-Nadr?" I said, "Yes." He replied, "Come in." So I entered the house, then I entered an apartment, where I emptied the baskets of the carriers . . . There was a curtain leading to another apartment, where someone called me, "O al-Hasan b. al-Nadr, praise God for his grace is upon you, and do not doubt for Satan would be pleased if you waver." Thereafter two
garments were given to me and I was told, "Take them, because you will need them." So I took them and went out.

Sa‘d al-Ash‘arī reports that al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr died in Ramadān on his return journey and the two garments were used as his shroud.¹

This event was clear proof to al-Ḥasan, because both his name and his doubts concerning the validity of the agents’ activities had been revealed to him. Moreover, according to Sa‘d al-Ash‘arī, the two garments which al-Ḥasan had received were a prediction of his death, which occurred a month later. If one studies carefully the circumstances which accompanied al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr since his decision to investigate the activities of the agents until his death, one can surmise that the agents arranged these circumstances so as to remove his doubts; mainly because al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr was prominent amongst the Imamites of Qumm.² Because of his influential position,

1. al-Kāfī, I, 517-8, 522-3.
2. Al-Kashshī gives his statement as regards al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr with his account of Abū Ḥāmid al-Marāghī. He does not name explicitly the city which al-Ḥasan belonged to; Ikhtiyār, 535. According to al-Mustawfī Marāgha is a large town, and was formerly the capital of Azerbayjān; al-Qazwīnī, Nuzhat al-Qulūb, 88. However, there is evidence to support the claim that al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr was a native of Qumm. Al-Ṣadūq reports that al-Ḥasan was from Qumm and he listed him among the people who saw the twelfth Imam; Kamāl, 442.
his doubts might have affected the Imamites of his area, therefore, the agents of Qumm, perhaps, informed the safīr in Baghdad about his arrival there. This can be noted in the act of Ahmad b. Ishāq and the other agents, who brought the clothes to the house of al-Ḥasan, and later sent him a letter ordering him to send the goods to Šamārā, where, it was reported, he met the Imam, who confirmed the validity of the agent's activities to him. One can discover from these examples and many others not quoted here\(^1\), the means used by the safīr to remove the doubts and confusion of the Imamites brought about by the concealment of their Imam, to make them obey his instructions.

Furthermore, the safīr forbade his partisans to ask about the name of the Imam.\(^2\) Therefore the silence of the Imamites along with the last will of al-ʿAskārī, in which he bequeathed to his mother, Ḥadīth, his endowments (awqāf) and his sadaqāt and placed her in charge of his affairs without referring to his successor\(^3\), perhaps, encouraged the authorities to believe that al-ʿAskārī died heirless. Thus his estate was divided between his brother Jaʿfar and

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1. Al-Kulaynī reports in his account of the birth of the twelfth Imam sixteen narrations, elucidating the activities of the first safīr with his followers. Most of these narrations indicate that he practiced miracles to persuade them that he was rightfully appointed by the Imam; al-Kāfī, I, 514-24, narrations nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12-17, 20, 21, 23, 28.
his mother. Despite the fact that al-'Askari's son lost his right to the estate and lived under a critical situation his agents, especially about the time of the first safīr, gained some freedom to carry out their underground activities, without attracting the attention of the authorities, since the latter already believed that the Imamites no longer had an Imam and, therefore, that their activities were useless:

This belief was circulated among some Sunnite scholars, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī, who, in his account of the Imamite doctrine, stated, "In our time al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī died and had no son, therefore they [the Imamites] became

1. Kamāl, 43; al-Ṣadūq does not fix the date on which the estate was divided, however, al-Ṭūsī reports a tradition attributed to Khadīja, the aunt of al-'Askari, who met a certain Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm in 262/876 and told him that the estate of the Imam was divided, probably about that year; T. al-Ghayba, 156.

2. This statement is attributed to the first safīr by al-Ṭūsī. Al-Kulaynī reports the same tradition but used the word 'iyyālāhu instead of 'ummālāhu, which might be a slip of the pen of the copyist; T. al-Ghayba, 157-8; al-kāfī, I, 329-30.
confused."\(^1\) Al-Shahristānī and Ibn Ḥazm also held that al-‘Askarī had died without leaving a successor.\(^2\)

However, some Sunnite scholars, like Abū Na‘īm al-Īsfahānī, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī, Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Kanjī, Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, and Sulaymān al-Qandūrī, thought that al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī had, in fact, left a son.\(^3\) On the other hand, according to al-Dhahabī, the Rāfīda (the Imamites) considered Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, the twelfth Imam, as the awaited Mahdī (al-Mahdī al-Muntazar), and claimed that he had disappeared when he was nine years old or less in 265/878, after which he entered a cellar (sirdāb) in Sāmarrā and was not seen again.\(^4\) According to this report the twelfth Imam died during the lifetime of the first safīr. But al-Dhahabī is a later historian as regards the subject of this thesis, since he died in 748/1347 and, moreover, gave neither the source of his narration nor stated explicitly how al-‘Askarī's son had died, although he listed his information concerning the concealment of the twelfth Imam in the list of people who died in 265/878, to give the impression that he had passed away in that year. On the other hand, the earliest source concerning the occultation of al-‘Askarī's son in the

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1. 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Mughnī (Cairo, 1963), II, 176, quoted from al-Balkhī.
2. Milal, 128; Fasl, IV, 181.
cellar (sirdāb) was reported by al-Kanjī, who died in 658/1260, but he does not, however, mention the source of his report either. It is therefore most likely that al-Dhahabī depended in his report upon common belief of the Imamite masses, that the twelfth Imam had hidden himself in the sirdāb of his house, which was, presumably, formulated after the fifth/eleventh century and later spread to become popular belief among certain scholars, like Ibn Khaldūn.

Moreover, there are several reports in the early Imamite sources, which refute al-Dhahabī's narration and prove that the twelfth Imam was alive after 265/878. Al-Ṭūsī mentions that many of the Imamites received written answers to their letters from the Imam, in the same handwriting as they used to receive during the lifetime of the first safīr, and al-Ṣadūq lists thirteen individuals

2. Ibn Khaldūn thinks that the twelfth Imam disappeared in a cellar (sirdāb) in Ḥilla and not in Sāmarrā; however, Ḥilla was established in 495/1101 by Banū Mazyad whereas the occultation of the Imam, according to al-Dhahabī took place in 265/878. Thus it appears that Ibn Khaldūn also relied in his report on the popular belief; al-Muqaddima (Cairo, 1322), 157.
3. Al-Ṭūsī states that the second safīr saw the twelfth Imam in Mecca holding the drapes of the Ka'ba. According to another report a certain Yusuf b. Ahmad al-Ja'fari on his way to Syria in 309/921 saw the Imam (T. al-Ghayba, 162, 166). For a full account of the letters of the Imamites and their answers (Tawqī'āt) by the Imam, see T. al-Ghayba, 184-93; Muhammad al-Sadr, op. cit., I, 403, 430.
among the agents, and forty-six ordinary Imamites from numerous cities who claimed to have seen the twelfth Imam both during and after the time of the first safîr.¹

From this it is clear that al-Dhahabî's report is based on popular belief rather than upon sound historical facts, so that it would be extremely dangerous to put any credence in his claims concerning the death of occultation of the twelfth Imam.

5. The opposition to the first safîr

As has been noted the occultation of the Imam extended the role of the safîr, however it also made it easier for a pretender to the deputyship (al-sifâra or al-niyâba) to practice their activities among the Imamites at the expense of the rightful representative of the Imam. As we have seen, this was mainly practiced by the extremist Shi'ites (al-Ghulât) throughout the period of the short occultation. This is obvious for many reasons. Firstly, the claimant to the sifâra believed in the incarnation of souls (hulûl), a belief shared with the extremists, before the occurrence of the occultation.² Secondly, most of the claimants to the sifâra, from the time of al-Hasan al-Shârî'î

¹. Kâmîl, 442-3.
². Both Ibn al-Athîr and Abû al-Fîdâ noticed the similarities between the doctrine of the extremists before and after the short occultation. They state, after giving an account of al-Shalmaghamî's doctrine, that his doctrine (maqâla) might have the doctrine of the Nusayriyya; Abû al-Fîdâ, al-Mukhtasar, II, 80-1; al-Kâmîl, VIII, 219-20.
up until al-Shalmaghānī, claimed first that they were the agents of the Imam and then, when the Imam excommunicated them, proselytized the people on their own account.

Such claims had been made by the extremists even before the occultation of the twelfth Imam, with a slight modification: that is, the claimant would first announce that he was the Gate (Bāb) of the Imam, and then claim that he was a prophet. Al-Kashshī mentions many extremists who did so, such as Muḥammad b. Purāt, al-Qāsim al-Yaqtīnī and ‘Alī b. Ḥaska.¹ Thirdly, some links existed between the extremists, who were active throughout the time of the tenth and eleventh Imams, and those who lived during the time of the short occultation. According to al-Kashshī, ‘Alī b. Ḥaska was the teacher of Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Sharī‘ī, al-Qāsim al-Yaqūtīnī and al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Bābā.² The latter was a close follower of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, who led the extremist trend during the time of the eleventh Imam, and then claimed that he was the agent of the twelfth

1. Ikhtiyār, 518, 520, 555.
2. Ibid., 521.
Moreover, Ibn Nusayr was supported by some of Banū Furāt, the descendants of the extremist Muḥammad b. Furāt.  

According to al-Ṭūsī, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-Shariʿī was the first to make such a claim during the short occultation. He aspired to the office of the safīr, but the Imamites cursed him and refused to accept him. Then it is reported that the twelfth Imam issued a tawqī', in which he excommunicated al-Shariʿī and announced his non-acceptance of al-Shariʿī's claim. However, although

1. According to al-Ṭabrānī (a Nusayrī writer), the Nusayriyya movement was established by ʿAlī b. Ahmad al-Ṭarbāʾī, who gained during the time of al-ʿAskarī thirty-five partisans in the village of Ṭarbāʾ and another group in Ninawā near Hilla. Then he attracted Muḥammad b. Nusayr to his side. The latter led the movement along with his student al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān during the time of the short occultation. In 336/947 the movement became independent from the Imamites, and gave more religious emphasis to the role of the Gate (Bāb) than the Imam himself; al-Ṭabrānī, Sabīl Rāḥat al-Arwāḥ, in Der Islam, XXVII (1946), 129-31.

2. T. al-Ghayba, 259.

3. Al-Ṭūsī mentions that al-Shariʿī was an adherent of the tenth Imam but he was not sure about his real name. Al-Kashshi mentions a certain Muḥammad b. Mūṣā al-Shariʿī or al-Sharīfī amongst the Ghulāt during the time of the tenth Imam. It is most likely that the latter was the same person with whom al-Ṭūsī dealt; Ikhtiyār, 521; T. al-Ghayba, 258.

al-Sharī‘I did not achieve immediate success, his following grew in strength and eventually formed a strong opposition to the control of the second safīr of the twelfth Imam.

6. The Imam's Wikāla (the political system of communication) during the time of the first safīr

The main problem facing any historian dealing with the events of the period of the short occultation is that most of the activities of the twelfth Imam and his representatives were carried out underground. For this reason, perhaps, the Imamite scholars such as al-Kulaynī, 'Abd Allāh b. Ja’far al-Ḥimyārī, Sa’d al-Asḥārī and al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, rarely mentioned the names of the Imam's agents explicitly, or referred to their activities or their links with each other; however, they referred to those of their activities which did not attract the attention of the authorities. Therefore, the historical information concerning the underground activities of the agents are scattered mainly in the theological and heresiographical works, rather than the histories. Moreover, because of the nature of these works the historical information loses its historical form and takes a heresiographical one, according to the nature of such works. In addition to this both the questions of the Shi‘ītes and the answers of the twelfth Imam and his safīrs were collected at his time, but, unfortunately, most of them have been lost, and only a few are extant, in the works which deal with the question of the Ghayba especially. For example, the second safīr,
Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. `Uthmān, had collected the pronunciations of his father, but this collection is not extant. However, there are many anecdotes which assist us in discovering the links between the agents of the Imam and their activities.

6.1. Iraq: the centre of the Wikāla

After the death of the eleventh Imam, the first safr had not the slightest reason to remain any longer in Sāmarrā, which was then the capital and place of residence for military troops of the `Abbāsids, who had opposed the Imams from the very beginning. For this reason, perhaps, `Uthmān b. Sa‘īd wanted to carry out the activities of the organization beyond the surveillance of the authorities in the capital. Therefore he moved to Baghdad, where the whole area of al-Karkh was inhabited by Shī‘ites, which he made the centre for the leadership of the organization. A part of `Uthmān's prudent fear (al-Taqiyya) was to evade the investigation of the regime by not involving himself in any open political or religious arguments. He also disguised himself as a butter-seller (Samman) and, by such means, used to bring the money to the Imam in a butter-sack. Consequently, he acquired the nickname al-Zayyāt or al-al-Samman. Al-Kashshi reports that his name was Hafṣ b.

1. Javad Ali, op. cit., in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 203; al-Baghdādī states in his account of al-Karkh district, that many places were inhabited by Rāfīdites (Shī‘ites); al-Khaṭīb, I, 81.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 229.
'Amr al-‘Umarl, which was, perhaps, a pseudonym used by the safir when he held underground meetings with other agents.

It has been noted that the twelfth Imam was sent by his father to Medina in 259/873. However, his first safir made Baghdad the centre of the organization. He followed the traditional geographical divisions of the Islamic provinces in organizing the underground political units (cells) of the organization, but nevertheless took into consideration the size of each factional unit, the distance of each area from the capital, and its situation on the main roads.

According to al-Kashshī, 'Uthmān b. Sa‘īd had been at the head of the Wikāla from the time of the eleventh Imam, in view of the fact that all the dues sent by the adherents to the Imam through his agents fell in the end to 'Uthmān, who in turn handed it over to the Imam. Many agents were below the safir in the ranks of the organization in Baghdad and in the other cities of Iraq, such as Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshā', Ahmad b. Iṣḥāq al-Ashʿarī and Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. Ja‘far al-Qattān, the last two of whom were the chief assistants to the first safir.

Ahmad b. Iṣḥāq used to be the agent of al-‘Askari concerning his endowments (awqāf) in Qumm. However, after the death of al-‘Askari the sources begin to refer to his activities in Baghdad as an associate assistant to 'Uthmān

1. Ikhtiyār, 532.
2. Ibid., 580.
3. al-Qummi, Tārikhī Qumm, 211.
b. Sa‘Id in the financial affairs of the organization. Al-Kulaynī reports that some people from the east doubted the validity of the agents after al-‘Askarī's death in 260/874, and for this reason they came to Baghdad. Ahmad b. Ishāq managed with other agents to remove their doubts. It might be that he was summoned from Qumm by the first safīr because he needed his service in Iraq after al-‘Askarī's death. According to Ibn Rustam al-Tabarī, Ahmad b. Ishāq continued his career in the organization in Iraq until his death during the time of the second safīr.2

Muhammad al-Qaṭṭān was the second agent of the safīr in Baghdad. In order to hide his activities he disguised himself as a cotton manufacturer, and in this way the agents used to bring the money and the letters to him, hidden in the cotton which he then took to the safīr.3 Ibn Rustam reports that in 261-3/875-6 the people of Dīnawar collected 16,000 dinars, which were entrusted to a certain Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Dīnawārī. At Qarmisīn,4 he collected 1,000 dinars and some garments and, after an intensive search in Baghdad and Sāmarrā, received in Sāmarrā a letter describing all the money and other items which he had brought, ordering him to take them to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘Id and to follow his instructions. The latter ordered al-Dīnawārī to hand the

2. Dala‘il, 272, 275-7.
items to al-Qaṭṭān. It is reported that al-Qaṭṭān had relations with another agent in Tūs, called al-Hasan b. al-Pādī b. Zayd al-Yamānī, who according to al-Muʿīdīd, used to deal with al-Qaṭṭān as the safīr.

Hājīz was the third agent of the safīr in Baghdaḍ. It is noted from his wide relations with several agents that he held a high position in the organization and was, perhaps, the connecting link between the agents of the organization in the eastern provinces and the safīr in Baghdaḍ, especially as al-Sādūq and al-Kulaynī mention certain persons from the cities of Balkh and Marv, who contacted the Imam and his safīr through Hājīz.

While the first safīr seems to have led the affairs of the organization in Baghdaḍ, with the help of his three assistants, he may perhaps also have supervised directly the activities of his agents in the other main cities, like al-Madāʿin, Kufa, Wāsiṭ, Basra and al-Ahwāz. In the latter the leadership of the Wikāla had been in the hands of Banū Mazyār or Mahzayār from the time of the ninth Imam. Al-Kashshī reports that the agent of the Imam in al-Ahwāz, Ibrāhīm b. Mazyār, had collected a large amount of money and, at the moment of his demise, revealed to his son Muḥammad a special secret code, and ordered him to hand the money to the one who would reveal this code to him. Al-Kashshī adds that when Muḥammad arrived at Baghdaḍ,

1. Bihār, LI, 300-3; Dalāʾil, 283-5.
2. al-Irshād, 399. For the relations of al-Qaṭṭān with the eastern provinces, see Ikhtiyār, 535.
al-‘Umari the safīr came to him and divulged to him the exact code, so he handed the money to him. It is clear from this report that the first safīr had already agreed on that code with Ibrāhīm al-Mazīr so as to save the organization from infiltration and misuse by any false agents. According to al-Kulaynī and al-Mufīd, a few days later Muḥammad received a letter of promotion, indicating that he was installed in the post of his father in al-Ahwāz.

This underground system of communication between the safīr in Baghdad and the agent (wakīl) in al-Ahwāz could also be applied at this stage to the relations between the safīr and his other agents in Iraq, such as Banū al-Rakūlī in Kufa.

6.2. The second area: Egypt, the Hijaz and Yemen

It seems that the main centre for the organization in this area was Medina. It is reported that al-‘Askarī had many agents there amongst the ‘Alīds (al-Tālibīyyīn),

1. Ikhtiyār, 531.
2. al-Kāfī, I, 518; al-Irshād, 397.
3. al-Fuṣūl al-‘Ashara, 17; Banū al-Rakūlī according to al-Mufīd were the agents of the Imam in Kufa; however, after the death of the first safīr, the sources begin to refer to Banū Zuzāra and Banū al-Zajawzī as the agents of the Imam in Kufa. It seems that the two different names, بنو الزجزاري and بنو الرکولی, refer to one family and the correct spelling of this name is, perhaps, بنو الزجزاري, but the copyist of al-Mufīd’s work misread it as بنو الرکولي; T. al-Ghayba, 198-200.
however, after al-‘Askari’s death, some of them denied the existence of his son, the twelfth Imam. According to al-Kulaynī, those who had held that al-‘Askari had left a son received letters placing them in their posts, whereas such letters did not reach the rejectionists, as a sign of their being dismissed from their posts in the Wikāla. It appears, from another report, that the principle agent in Medina in 264/877-8 was Yahyā b. Muḥammad al-‘Arīḍī. Unfortunately, the sources neither explain how the safīr in Baghad used to contact his agents in Hijaz, nor refer to the connecting links between the agents of Egypt, Hijaz and Yemen. However, it is most likely that the agents used the time of pilgrimage to communicate with each other. But it seems that the safīr did not keep in direct contact with his agent there and preferred to employ slaves who were mostly ignorant and irreligious as a connecting link between him and his agent in Medina, so that he could keep the attention of the authorities away from such activities.

The agents in Egypt followed the instructions of the agents in Hijaz, especially as regards their contact with the centre in Iraq. Al-Kulaynī reports a narration attributed to al-Ḥasan b. ʿIsā al-‘Arīḍī, who was, probably, the agent in Mecca, which says that after the death of

2. Kamāl, 496-7; al-Ṣadūq reports that al-‘Arīḍī knew the place of the twelfth Imam in Medina and guided a person from Kashmir to the Imam; Kamāl, 497, 440.
3. al-ʿIrshād, 401.
4. al-Kāfī, I, 523.
al-‘Askarî, an Egyptian came with money for the Imam, but that he was confused because some people held that al-‘Askarî had died without a son and the Imam was his brother Ja‘far, whereas other people informed him that al-‘Askarî had, in fact, left a successor. Afterwards he was encouraged to send a messenger to Iraq. So he sent a certain person called Abū Ṭālib to Sāmarrā with a letter, probably a recommendation, from the agent in Mecca. In Sāmarrā Abū Ṭālib first contacted Ja‘far, asking him for proof so that he could accept his Imamate, but Ja‘far could not perform any miracle, therefore he went to the Gate (Bāb, deputy), who gave him a strong proof that he was the rightful representative of the new Imam (the twelfth), by revealing to him that his master, the Egyptian, had entrusted him with money to deal with according to his wish. For this reason Abū Ṭālib handed over the money to the Bāb and received a letter in reply to his letter.\(^1\) It might be that the agent in Mecca had sent forward complete information, concerning the case of his Egyptian colleague.

Yemen was a traditional region for Shi‘ite trends, and al-Hādî had had agents there since 248/862\(^2\), while they used to have direct contact with ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd during the time of al-‘Askarî.\(^3\) According to al-Kulaynî,

\(^1\) al-Kāfî, I, 523. Al-Mufîd relates the same narration and adds that Abū Ṭālib sent his letter to the people, who claimed the deputyship (al-sifâra), who in turn replied to his letter; al-Irshâd, 401.

\(^2\) Ikhtiyâr, 527; al-Kāfî, I, 519.

\(^3\) T. al-Ghayba, 216.
chief agent in Yemen during the time of the twelfth Imam was Ja'far b. Ibrāhīm, who was related to a family working in the Imamite organization in Hamadān, Kufa and Yemen. It appears from a report mentioned by al-Najāshī that the connecting link between the agents in Yemen and the first safīr was ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Yamānī.

6.3. The third area: Azerbayjān and Arrān

The third area was Azerbayjān and according to Muhammad al-Ṣafwānī, the agent there was al-Qāsim b. al-'Alā, who had held the post from the time of al-Hādi, and continued his activities from the province of Arrān during the time of the twelfth Imam. The latter remained in touch with the former until his death during the time of the third safīr, when his post was given to his son al-Ḥasan at the order of the twelfth Imam. Al-Ṣafwānī does not mention the name of the connecting link between the agent of this area and the centre of the organization.

1. al-Najāshī, 264.
2. al-Kaffī, I, 519-20.
3. According to al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṣafwānī was the assistant of al-Qāsim b. al-'Alā during the time of the third safīr, and it appears from another report that he met the second safīr in Baghdad in 307/919; T. al-Ghayba, 203-5.
4. Al-Ṣafwānī reports that Arrān was a city in Azerbayjān, but it is well known among the geographers that Arrān is a province and that its capital was Bārdā. It is included in the great triangle of land lying to the west of the junction point of the rivers Āyrūs (Kur) and Araxas (al-Rās); T. al-Ghayba, 204.
However, he states explicitly that al-Qāsim b. al-'Alā was in direct contact with the safīr in Iraq though a messenger, who used to deal with him without revealing his name.  

6.4. The fourth area: Qumm and Dīnawar

It is well-known that Qumm was the traditional area for the Shi'ites, the bulk of whom were Arab, and that there were many endowments (awqāf) for the Imams in Qumm. Therefore, it perhaps received more attention from the first safīr, who used to keep in direct contact not only with the agent of Qumm but with the other agents in the province of Jabal. The prominent agent in Qumm was 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Ŷimyārī, who remained in this post even during the time of the second safīr. Moreover, there were many sub-agents in numerous cities which had a considerable number of Imamites among the population, such as Dīnawar, whose agent in 261-3/875-6 was Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Dīnawarī, while the agent in Qurmisīn was Ahmad al-Mādrā'ī.

1. T. al-Ghayba, 204.
5. Bihār, I, 300, quoted from Kitāb al-Nujūm.
6.5. The fifth area: Rayy and Khurasan

It seems from the account of al-Kashshā'ī, concerning the situation of the organization during the time of the tenth and the eleventh Imams that the latter had several agents in various cities in Khurasan and the eastern provinces extending as far as the city of Kabul. Those agents along with other sub-agents used to carry out their missions according to the direct instruction of the Imam. For example al-`Askarī sent Ayyūb b. al-Nāb to Nisapur to be his agent there.¹ However the extension of the penetration of the movement into remote regions in the east, on one hand, and the rise of the Zaydite state in Tabaristān from 250/864 along with the continual military activities of the Khawārīj in Sijistān, which caused a lot of trouble for the Imamites there², made it difficult for al-`Askarī to supervise the activities in each area directly. Therefore a letter of order was issued by al-`Askarī to link the activities of the agents in Bayhaq and Nisapur with those of the agents of Rayy so that the two former cities could only receive the Imam's instructions from the agent in Rayy, who took his orders directly from 'Uthmān b.

1. Ikhtiyār, 542-3, 527.
2. It appears from the report of al-Kashshā'ī that the relations between the Khawārīj and the Imamites in Sijistān were tense. He reports that al-Faḍl b. Shādhān escaped from the Khawārīj when they attacked Bayhaq, but he died during his escape; Ikhtiyār, 543. Al-İsfahānī reports that the Khawārīj killed an 'Alid called Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad; Maqātil, 453.
Saʿīd in Sāmarrā. According to this letter al-ʿAskarī appointed Ishāq b. Muḥammad as his agent in Nisapur, commanding him to pay the dues to his agent in Bayhaq and its districts, Ibrāhīm b. `Abda. The latter in turn was commanded to hand the dues to the agent of Rayy, Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Rāzī or to the one whom al-Rāzī would appoint. The Imam pointed out that at the end of his letter, that all the khums and other taxes which were sent by his followers should be given to `Uthmān b. Saʿīd, who would then hand it to him.1 Such a statement reveals that `Uthmān b. Saʿīd was at the top of the organization before the death of al-ʿAskarī in 260/874.

After the death of al-ʿAskarī the first safīr followed the system of communication which had been practiced before. There are several anecdotes which reveal that he directed the activities of this area through the agent of Rayy, al-Rāzī, who supervised directly the activities of the agents in Bayhaq, Nisapur2 and perhaps Hamadān. There were many sub-agents below the main agent in different ranks in each city. Al-Najāshī reports a narration which elucidates this system. He mentions that al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad al-Hamadānī, Bīstām b. `Alī and `Azīz b. Zuhayr were sub-agents in one place in Hamadān and carried out their task under the instructions and commands of al-Ḥasan b. Ḥārūn b. `Umrān al-Hamadānī.3 Al-Najāshī does not explain how

1. Ikhtiyār, 509-10, 575-80.
2. al-Kāfī, I, 523-4; Ikhtiyār, 509-10, 575-8.
the latter used to contact the safīr. Al-Kulaynī, however, reports that Muḥammad b. Hārūn b. ‘Umrān al-Hamadānī, the brother of the agent of Hamadān, made his shops on endowment to the twelfth Imam, and wanted to hand them over to his agent, whose identity was unknown to him. Thereafter Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Rāzī, the agent of Rayy, received an order to take these shops as waqf1, in his capacity as wakīl for the whole of Iran. This narration reveals that there was a strong link between the agent of Rayy and the agent of Hamadān and also indicates that the latter was below al-Rāzī in the ranks of the organization.2

It is noted that the agents in this area held different ranks within the organization so it is most likely that this system of communication was practiced in the other areas of the organization as well.

7. The death of the first safīr

Despite the important role of the first safīr, ‘Uthmān b. Saʿīd, no one gives the date of his death. Contemporary historians have tried to give plausible dates. Hāshim al-Ḥasanī thinks that the deputyship (al-sifāra) of ‘Uthmān

1. al-Kāfī, I, 524.
2. Although there is no clear statement concerning the links between al-Rāzī and Hamadān, there is ample evidence that al-Rāzī controlled the activities of all the agents in Iran, so it is more than probable that those of al-Ḥasan b. Hārūn were similarly directed, especially in view of this narration.
b. Sa'id continued until the year 265/879, but he does not give any source for this information. Javad Ali however thinks:

Twenty years after the withdrawal of the twelfth Imam, in the year 280/895, the first safīr died, according to a tawqī‘, said to have been addressed by the hidden Imam to the son of the first safīr and the Shi‘ite congregation, in which after expressing sentiments of condolence on the death of such a pious man, the Imam appointed his son Abū Ja‘far (Muḥammad) as his successor.²

However, Javad ‘Alī relied on al-Ṭūsī and the date which is given by the latter indicates that the narrator, Muḥammad b. Humām, heard the narration from Muḥammad al-Rāzī in 280/893 and does not cite any date for the death of the first safīr.³ It seems furthermore that the first safīr did not remain in office for a long period, because al-Ṭūsī reports that when Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān (Abū Ja‘far) succeeded his father, a certain Ahmad b. Hilāl al-‘Abartā‘ī, whose death occurred in 267/880-1⁴, denied that Abū Ja‘far was the safīr of the twelfth Imam

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4. al-Najāšī, 65.
after his father. From this the death of the first saﬁr must have occurred after 260/874, the date of the death of the eleventh Imam, and before 267/880.

The deceased, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, was, according to Ibn Barīna, buried on the western side of Baghdad in the Darb Mosque. This mosque takes its name from its position at Darb Jibla, an avenue in the Maydān street. Al-Ṭūsī confirms Ibn Barīna’s report, when he stated that he saw the grave in a place which he used to visit every month between the years 404/1013 and 433/1040.

1. T. al-Ghayba, 260.
2. Ibid., 232. Ibn Barīna is Hibat Allāh b. Muhammad, the grandson of the daughter of the second saﬁr. He wrote a book of biography about the first and second saﬁrs; al-Najashī, 343. Although Ibn Barīna states that the location of the grave was on the western side of Baghdad, there is a grave within a mosque, which is located in an avenue leading to the Maydān crossroad in the eastern side of Baghdad. The Imamites at present believe that this is the grave of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd.
CHAPTER V

THE UNDERGROUND ACTIVITIES OF THE
SECOND SAFIR OF THE TWELFTH IMAM

1. The designation of the second safir, Abū Ja‘far

The second safir was Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Umarī. His kunya was Abū Ja‘far. He carried out his activities, first as the agent of the twelfth Imam, then as his safir for about fifty years, having been the principal assistant of his father, the first safir, from the time of the eleventh Imam, al-‘Askarī. According to al-Ṭūsī, when the first safir died, Abū Ja‘far carried out the last rites for the dead man, washed the corpse, clad him in his shroud and buried him; and for the Imamites, these are the unmistakable signs that Abū Ja‘far was acting as the representative and the safir of the hidden Imam. According to them he did all this at the order of the first safir, and was, moreover, promoted to the office of the safir both by the designation of al-‘Askarī and of the first safir, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd. It is said that the latter designated him as his successor according to the order of the twelfth Imam. 1

Thereafter Abū Ja‘far received a letter of condolence attributed to the twelfth Imam, in which the latter offered

his sympathy as regards the death of his father, and pointed out that he had installed him in the office of his deceased father.\(^1\)

However, some of the principal agents of the organization had serious reservations and doubts about his designation, as had Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, the leader of the extremist trend, the Ghulāt. So Abū Jaʿfar did not succeed to his office without encountering certain difficulties.

\(1.1.\) Ibn Hilāl

Ahmad b. Hilāl al-ʿAbartāʿI, who was one of those who denied the validity of Abū Jaʿfar’s designation, was born in the year 180/796 in ‘Abartā’, a village in the district of Askāf near Nahrawān, and died in the year 267/880. It is clear from the numerous references to his name in the chain of transmissions (isnād) of the Imamite narrations, that he was a well-known theologian, who had narrated most of the Shiʿite books of traditions (usūl), and had related several traditions since 204/819 which revealed that the twelfth Imam would be al-Qāʾim, having

\(^1\) T. al-Ghayba, 235; Kamāl, 510.
first gone into occultation.\(^1\) Al-Kashshāf reports that he was a pious mystic and an eminent scholar and some biographers respectfully mention the fact that he had undertaken fifty-four pilgrimages to Mecca, twenty of them on foot.\(^2\) According to a letter attributed to the twelfth Imam, Ibn Hilāl was one of the most important scholars in Iraq during the time of the first saffīr, and possessed an amount of money belonging to the Imam, which he refused to pay to the second saffīr.\(^3\) The Imamite reports of his refusal to obey the instructions of Abū Ja'far are confused, and contradict each other, and it is therefore rather difficult to discover the true state of affairs. According to al-Najāshī Ibn Hilāl had already been cursed by al-'Askarī, who had spoken against him on several occasions\(^4\), while Sa'd al-Qummī states that he

1. T. al-Fihrist, 50-1; T. Tahdīb al-Ahkām, IV, 134; T. al-Ghayba, 100-1. Most of the narrations attributed to Ibn Hilāl come on the authority of Sa'd al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, which reveals that Ibn Hilāl had a high position among the Imamites before he was excommunicated by the saffīrs (Ikhtiyār, 18, 141, 503, 603). For the narration concerning the twelfth Imam being al-Qā'im which was related on the authority of Ibn Hilāl, see Kamāl, 252-3, 350, 649; al-Kāfī, I, 342; N. al-Ghayba, 175, 100-1, 149, 283.

2. Ikhtiyār, 535.


abandoned Shi‘ism and embraced the naṣb doctrine\(^1\), whereas al-Ṭūsī accused Ibn Hilāl of holding an extreme doctrine (ghulw).\(^2\)

It is clear that the different accusations raised against him are attempts to explain his doctrine rather than the reason behind his dispute with the second saffī. Al-Ṭūsī mentions a report attributed to an agent called Muhammad b. Bumām, which states that Ibn Hilāl neither denied the existence of the twelfth Imam, nor the validity of the office of the first saffī. When Ibn Hilāl was questioned about this by the Imamites, he is believed to have replied that the Imam had personally installed the first saffī, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, and made this known to all

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1. al-Ṣadūq, Mashyakhat al-Fağīḥ, IV, 128. Al-Naṣb literally means to declare war on someone, or to show open hostility to someone. In the Shi‘ite works the term al-naṣb has been used to define a doctrine of a group of people called al-Nawāṣib (pl. of nāṣib). The Nawāṣib were mainly distinguished by their hostility towards the Prophet’s kindred (Ahl al-Bayt). Al-Kulaynī considers Ahmad, the son of the ‘Abbāsid vizier ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Khāqān, as one of them, and adds that al-Qā‘im would order them to pay the jīzā (al-Kāfī, I, 503, 508, VIII, 227, 101, 160-1). The Khawārij were amongst the Nawāṣib and al-Ṭūsī considered them as infidels (kuffār) and forbade the Shi‘ites from having any social relations with them. Furthermore, he permitted the Imamites to confiscate their money; al-Ṭūsī, Tahdīb al-Ahkām, IV, 122; al-Istibsār, III, 183-4.

2. T. al-Fihrist, 50-1; al-Ṭabarsi, al-Iḥtījāj, II, 289.
the faithful, but he (Ibn Hilāl) himself could not accept anything like that about Abū Ja'far, and that his refusal stemmed from this.\(^1\) In fact, it is because of Ibn Hilāl's attitude towards the second saffīr that he was expelled by the Imam in a letter which was distributed amongst his agents in Iraq, and in which he warned them that the mystical practices of Ibn Hilāl grew from hypocrisy and dissimulation.\(^2\)

Despite the fact that eminent agents of the organization already knew the cause of Ibn Hilāl's excommunication, some Imamite narrators in Iraq, who were not agents, were astonished at the excommunication of such a pious mystic, and so they rejected the pronouncement. It might be that the considerable support for Ibn Hilāl was in fact brought about by the Iraqī narrators, because they did not know about the dispute between Abū Ja'far and Ibn Hilāl concerning the sifāra. So they asked the agent al-Qāsim b. al-'Alā to inquire about what had been issued against Ibn Hilāl, and he put this question via the second saffīr before the Imam in writing, who replied:

"Ibn Hilāl was an incorrigible sinner and God will not forgive his sins. He behaved like a stubborn and conceited person and, moreover, has kept the money given for the Imam for himself, and refused to carry out

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1. T. al-Ghayba, 260.
our commands unless they suit his wishes. However we kept our composure until God fulfilled our prayer by taking away his soul. Concerning his case, we had informed a few of our close associates [mawālī] during his time, and ordered them to reveal it to the intimate people among our adherents ... There is no excuse for any person among our followers to doubt the statements of our confidantes [ṭuqāṭunā] because we reveal to them these statements.\(^1\)

It is clear from this document that Ibn Hilāl had died, but in spite of the Imam's strong criticism against him, the second saffīr could not completely eliminate the danger which Ibn Hilāl had stirred up for his office. Al-Kashshī reports that a group of people remained firm in their loyalty towards Ibn Hilāl, and again doubted the authenticity of the above pronouncement.\(^2\) In fact the loyalty of this body to Ibn Hilāl was mainly based not upon his esoteric spiritual faith, but upon his external personal mystic acts. According to the Imamite doctrine the worship of God is invalid without the recognition of

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1. Ikhtiyār, 536-7.
2. Ibid., 537.
and obedience to the Imams, and so the mystic acts of Ibn Hilāl were invalid, because of his refusal to recognize the second safīr, who had been installed by the Imam himself.

According to al-Ṭūsī, however, the influence of Ibn Hilāl continued until the time of the third safīr, Ibn Rūh, who circulated another Tawqī‘ on the authority of the Imam against Ibn Hilāl, in which it is stated:

"Although there are among the Imamites those who do not understand how such a great and pious man could have been excommunicated, what is piety if it please God to transform good deeds into sin? Al-Dihqān was also a pious man in the service of the Imam, yet God eventually

1. According to the Imamites, Islam is based on five pillars: prayer, zakāt, fasting, pilgrimage, and the wilāya, that is the recognition of the Imam to which they gave priority over the other pillars. Therefore if a person spent all his life performing the four Islamic pillars but did not recognize the Imam, his worship was invalid. For a full account about this point, see al-Kīfī, I, 181-4, 374-5, II, 18-19.

2. T. al-Shayba, 260.

3. Al-Dihqān is ‘Urwa b. Yahyā al-Nakkhās al-Baghdādī; it is said that he was the wakīl and treasurer of the eleventh Imam, al-‘Askārī, but was deposed and cursed because he seized the money of the organization and burnt the documents of the Imam, which were kept in the treasury; Ikhtiyār, 573, 579.
changed his faith into impiety because of his arrogance. This had also happened to Ibn Hilāl.\(^1\)

It is in fact hard to attribute this *Tawqī‘* to the time of the third *safīr*, Ibn Rūḥ (305–326/917–937), because there is no historical trace of the influence of Ibn Hilāl’s claim upon the Imamites during the time of the third *safīr*. So it is most likely that Ibn Rūḥ circulated this pronouncement against Ibn Hilāl, according to the order of the second *safīr*, while still working as an agent beneath him, especially if one bears in mind that Ibn Hilāl died in 267/880, some time before Ibn Rūḥ held the *sifāra*. It would appear that Ibn Hilāl’s challenge had vanished before the death of the second *safīr* in 305/917.

1.2. **al-Bilālī**

According to al-Ṭūsī, the second opponent to Abū Ja‘far’s claim to the *sifāra*, was Abū Tahir Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Bilāl, who was commonly called al-Bilālī.\(^2\) He was well known in Imamite circles as a narrator of traditions.\(^3\) Furthermore he was amongst the principal agents in Baghdad and had close relations with both the tenth and the eleventh Imams.\(^4\) The latter described al-Bilālī to Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm

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1. Ikhtiyār, 536-7.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 260.
3. al-Najāshi, 254-5; Ikhtiyār, 564, 566.
4. al-Barqī, al-Rijāl, 57, 61.
al-Nisābūrī with this phrase, "He is reliable, trustworthy and is acquainted with what he must do." Moreover, al-‘Askarī, according to al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣadūq, had twice revealed to al-Bilālī the birth of his son, the twelfth Imam: firstly in 258/871 and then three days before his death.

Al-Bilālī, however, denied that Abū Ja‘far was the safīr and claimed, instead, that he was the agent of the Imam. So he kept the money of the Imam in his hands and refused to relinquish it to Abū Ja‘far. Al-Bilālī’s claim led to a serious split amongst the Imamites, since a considerable body of Imamites had accepted his claim and followed him, such as his brother Abū al-Ṭayyib and Ibn Ṣīrūz. But al-Tūsī neither fixes the date of this split nor the duration of al-Bilālī’s claims to the Wikāla or sifāra.

It is most likely that al-Bilālī only maintained his claim for a few years after the death of the first safīr, by which time Abū Ja‘far had proved himself to be the rightful safīr of the Imam. Al-Tūsī also reports that Abū Ja‘far had arranged a secret meeting with al-Bilālī to show him the twelfth Imam in order to prove to him that he was acting on his behalf. So Abū Ja‘far took him to

1. Al-Kashshāi mentions a document attributed to al-‘Askarī containing instructions to his agents in Iraq and Khurasan, in which he ordered Ishāq al-Nisābūrī to contact al-Bilālī in Baghdad; Ikhtiyār, 579.
2. al-Kāfī, I, 328; Kamāl, 499.
one of his houses where, it is said, they met the Imam, who ordered al-Bilālī to hand the money over to Abū Ja‘far.¹

In fact al-Ṭūsī’s report reveals the importance of al-Bilālī in the organization, which made it necessary for Abū Ja‘far to arrange this secret meeting with the Imam in Baghdad, so that he could put an end to the doubts of al-Bilālī, which had led to the split among the agents. Thus, according to al-Ṭūsī, Abū Ja‘far went shortly after this meeting to al-Bilālī’s house, where his close supporters like Ibn ḇirz, and Abū al-Ṭayyib were assembled. Abū Ja‘far asked al-Bilālī,

"O Abū Ṭāhir [al-Bilālī], I ask you by God, did the Sāhib al-Zamān [the twelfth Imam], peace be upon him, not command you to hand the money [of the Imam] which you have over to me?" To which al-Bilālī replied, "Yes." After which Abū Ja‘far left the house.²

It is clear from this report that Abū Ja‘far managed by these two steps to refute al-Bilālī’s claim. Al-Ṭūsī mentioned one person who abandoned his support of al-Bilālī and took Abū Ja‘far’s side, and it might be that other supporters did likewise, because the existent sources do

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1. T. al-Ghayba, 261.
2. Ibid., 261.
not refer to any traces of this split during the last years of the second safir’s time in office, which probably indicates the end of this split.

1.3. Muhammad b. Nusayr

The third rival to Abū Ja’far for the office of the sifāra was not from the ordinary Imamites, but was Muhammad b. Nuṣayr, who belonged to the extremist group (al-Ghulāt). It has been noted that some of the extremists, first during the time of the ninth Imam (such as Ja’far b. Wāqid, Abū al-Ghamr and Hāshim b. Abī Hāshim), then during the time of the tenth and eleventh Imams (such as ‘Alī b. Ḥāṣa al-Hawwārī al-Qummi and his students al-Qāsim al-Sha’rānī al-Yaqtīnī, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Bābā al-Qummi and Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Sharīqī or al-Sharī‘ī), had claimed that they were the agents or the Gates (Abwāb) of the Imam, and collected money from the ordinary Imamites, and preached extremist ideas, aimed at abolishing the Islamic ritual rites, that is the prayer, fast, zakāt and pilgrimage. According to al-Kashshi their roots lay far back in the extremist doctrines of Ibn Abī al-Khaṭṭāb, the follower of the sixth Imam al-Ṣādiq. However, the presence of the Imams amongst their partisans had limited the activities of the extremists, by the open letters of excommunication against the false agents, which they used to circulate amongst the Imamites; whereas the occultation

1. Ikhtiyār, 517–21, 528–9.
of the twelfth Imam enabled the Ghulāt to extend their role as agents of Gates (Abwāb) at the expense of the saffīr, without being afraid of such excommunication. For this reason when al-‘Askarī died, Muḥammad b. Muṣā al-Shaṭī‘ī claimed, as has been noted, that he was the Gate (Bāb) of the Imam.

After the death of al-Shaṭī‘ī, Muḥammad b. Naṣayr al-Numayrī, according to al-Tūsī, aspired to the office of the saffīr, which reveals that both, perhaps, were representatives of a single trend. Ibn Naṣayr, according to al-Kashshi, had already claimed that he was the Bāb of the tenth Imam. However, it would seem, from the account of al-Tūsī, that he had abandoned this claim during the lifetime of the eleventh Imam, al-‘Askarī. It seems that it was only after the death of the first saffīr that he disputed the legality of Abū Ja‘far as the saffīr and claimed that he was the Bāb of the twelfth Imam. Therefore Abū Ja‘far cursed and excommunicated him. Having been excommunicated, Ibn Naṣayr tried once again to make Abū

1. T. al-Ghayba, 259. Javad Ali and Rajkowski think that Ibn Naṣayr was an eminent citizen of Basra. Moreover the latter thinks that he was of Persian origin. However, both based their information on al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (al-Khaṭīb, III, 163-4) and al-Kashshi, whereas the latter refers to two people bearing the same name. The first one was his teacher in Basra and the second was Muḥammad b. Naṣayr al-Numayrī, who attributed his lineage to the Arab tribe Fahr and criticized him bitterly; Ikhtiyār, 5, 278, 503, 520.

2. Ikhtiyār, 520-1.
Ja'far change his mind, but the latter did not even receive him, so the Imamites removed him from their community.  

Ibn Ṯusayr was encouraged in his claim by Muhammad b. Mūsā b. Furāt, who belonged to the well-known family of Banū Furāt. He was a well-known muhaddith in Kufa and Baghdad, and was, perhaps, the first man from Banū Furāt to hold an important administrative office in the 'Abbāsid government. Therefore with the support of Banū Furāt, Ibn ᮖṣayr managed to circulate his claim amongst the Imamites, and, because of the participation of the two, their sect was known as "al-Numayriyya al-Furāṭiyya", the vast majority of whom came from Madā'in, and were called

1. T. al-Ghayba, 259.
2. N. Firaq, 78. Al-Ǧābī reports that Banū Furāt used to inhabit a village called Bābilī Ǧašfrīn in the district of upper Nahrawān, and that there were more than 300 people in this village (Ḥilāl b. Muḥsin al-Ǧābī, al-Wizāra [Cairo, 1958], 11-2). They attributed themselves to their great-grandfather, Furāt b. ʾAḥmad al-ʿĀbdī, who had lived and died in Kufa around 120/737, and was a close associate to al-Sajjad and al-Baqir (al-Barqī, al-Rijāl, 8-9, 16). The second name was ʿUmar b. Furāt, who was executed on the orders of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī in 203/808, as a punishment inflicted on him for his propaganda in favour of the vizier Ibn Sahl. See for details, D. Sourdel, "Ibn al-Furāt", E.I. 2; Rajkowski, op. cit., 769-70.
al-Ishaqiyya after the leader Ishâq b. Muḥammad al-Ahmar. Al-Majlisi reports that the latter was a rival to the second saffir and claimed the office of the Wikāla and adds that Ishâq was a young person. So it is most likely that he was acting according to the instructions of Ibn Nuṣayr.

It appears that the claims of Ibn Nuṣayr neither weakened the position of Abū Ja'far nor attracted some of his followers to Ibn Nuṣayr's side, so his influence must have been limited mainly to the extremists. According to al-Nawbakhtī a certain Ahmad was supposed to have been designated as the successor of Ibn Nuṣayr, but a Nuṣayri work refers to a certain Muḥammad b. Jundab, who was considered by the majority of the Nuṣayriyya as Ibn Nuṣayr's successor. It is said that he was in turn followed by Muḥammad al-Junbulānī. But this in fact occurred at a later stage after the death of the second saffir in 305/917, which is beyond the topic of this section. However, it is worth mentioning that, from the time of the second saffir onwards, the followers of Ibn Nuṣayr separated themselves totally from the direct control of the second saffir, Abū Ja'far, who was, in the Imamite view, the only representative of the hidden Imam. Whereas the Nuṣayriyya gave more importance to the role of the Būb than to the Imam himself, which was proof enough to place them outside the circles of the Twelver Imamites.

2. Bihār, II, 300-1.
2. The activities of Abū Ja'far, the second safīr

2.1. The career of Abū Ja'far

Despite the difficulties caused to Abū Ja'far by the false agents Ibn Hilāl, al-Bilālī and Ibn Nuṣayr, he continued to carry out the underground activities of the organization, extending its role amongst the Imamites. Meanwhile he followed in the first safīr's footsteps and tried to prove the existence of the concealed Imam to the reliable Imamites and sought to circulate amongst them the idea that his occultation had occurred due to divine intervention and that this was a good vindication of the traditions related by previous Imams, and that he, Abū Ja'far, was the rightful safīr of the hidden Imam. Furthermore, he sought to consolidate the ideas first advanced to the authorities by the first safīr, which encouraged them to believe that al-'Askarī had died without leaving a successor, so that he could continue his duties without being harrassed by the 'Abbāsid authorities. In this way he hoped to satisfy the government of the day that al-'Askarī had died heirless, and so they could relax, content in the belief that an Imamite uprising was unlikely, because they no longer had an Imam to rally and to lead them.

The dual plan of Abū Ja'far as regards the existence of the hidden Imam can be seen in several narrations. At one time, a certain Hamdān al-Qalānisī asked Abū Ja'far

about al-‘Askari’s successor. Abū Ja‘far replied, “Al-‘Askari has died, but has left amongst you a successor, whose neck is like this”¹, and he indicated his neck as a sign that al-‘Askari’s son had attained maturity. Abū Ja‘far, according to al-Ṣadūq, reported the same statement concerning the well-known scholar ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Himyarī, when the latter asked him about al-‘Askari’s son.² Furthermore, Abū Ja‘far informed him, on another occasion:

"The ʿAbīb al-Amr [the Imam] attends the pilgrimage every year, and sees the people and knows them, while they see him but do not recognize him", and added that he had seen the Imam at al-Ka‘ba, holding its drapes, and praying, "O God, avenge me against my enemies."³

However, despite the fact that Abū Ja‘far revealed the existence of the twelfth Imam to al-Himyarī, he warned him against trying to discover his name, because the authorities were content that al-‘Askari died without leaving a successor⁴, but if they recognized the name of the Imam and his whereabouts, they could search for him

¹ al-Kāfī, I, 329, 331.
² Kamāl, 435.
³ Ibid., 440.
⁴ Ibid., 442.
and endanger both his life and the life of his agents.\textsuperscript{1}
It appears from other reports that the second safîr had instructed other agents similarly, so that they could continue to carry out their services to the Imam without encountering any danger from the 'Abbâsids.

A careful study of the activities of the agents reveals that the second safîr managed in fact to keep the existence of the hidden Imam secret from the 'Abbâsids until the early years of the reign of al-Mu'tadid (278-89/891-901). This was, perhaps, due to the wise instructions issued by Abû Ja'far, the second safîr, to his agents, who, as a part of his prudent fear (Taqiyya), carried out his activities unnoticed and in secret. Thus he, like his father before him disguised himself as a butter-seller and, for this reason, acquired the nickname of al-Sammân.\textsuperscript{2} He also used pseudonyms in his underground meetings with some agents. According to al-Kashshâl, Abû Ja'far's name was Muḥammad b. ʾAraf al-'Umârî\textsuperscript{3}, whereas his real name was Muḥammad b. Ūthmân b. Sa'id, and it might be that the first name was a pseudonym. Furthermore a careful study of the chain of transmitters (asānîd) of the Prophetic traditions and the sayings of the Imams concerning the books of tradition, shows that there is no reference to his name as a narrator of tradition, whereas most of the secret inscriptions (Tawqî'āt) attributed to the eleventh and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} al-Kāfî, I, 330.
  \item \textsuperscript{2} Abû al-Fidâ, op. cit., II, 69; al-Kāmil, VIII, 80; T. al-Chayba, 192.
  \item \textsuperscript{3} Ikhtiyâr, 532.
\end{itemize}
twelfth Imams, concerning legal matters, came on the
authority of Abū Ja'far.¹ This fact reveals that the
latter did not wish to implicate himself in any open
argument as regards religious matters, so that he could
hide his real position amongst the Imamites from the
government of the day, and convey communications between
the hidden Imam and his followers, free from the inter-
ference of the authorities.

2.2. The agents of the second safīr in Baghdad

It has been noted that the first safīr had three
agents below him in Baghdad, Ahmād b. Ishāq, Muḥammad b.
Ahmād al-Qaṭṭān, and Ḥājiz al-Wašshā. However, it appears
that the responsibilities of the second safīr, Abū Ja'far,
were bigger than that of the first. According to al-Ṭūsī
he had ten people beneath him in Baghdad to run the
affairs of the organization, amongst whom was al-Ḥusayn b.
Rūh al-Nawbakhtī, who later became the third safīr.²
Al-Ṭūsī does not name the other agents, but it is most
likely that the three agents of the first safīr, Ahmād b.
Ishāq, al-Qaṭṭān, and Ḥājiz, were amongst the ten agents
because they carried out their services to the organization

1. al-Ṭabarṣī, al-Iḥtijāj, II, 297-301.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 240.
in Baghdad, during the time of the second saffîr, who had direct contact with them.¹

However, al-Qaṭṭân was the most active amongst the agents in Baghdad. According to al-Ṣadūq, he had seen the Imam², and al-Kashshî describes his reliability when he relates that "there was no third person on the earth closer to the origin [the Imam] than him," because he used to be the direct mediator between the Imam and the Imamites via the second saffîr, although the Imamites had no knowledge whatsoever of his relationship with Abû Ja'far. For this reason, perhaps, a certain agent called al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl, who used to deal with al-Qaṭṭân concerning legal affairs, thought that the latter was the saffîr.⁴

According to the available sources, it is rather difficult to detect the rest of the names of the agents in Baghdad, particularly if one bears in mind the fact that Abû Ja'far continued in his office for about fifty years. It is therefore plausible that some of the agents had, like Ahmad b. Ishaq, al-Qaṭṭân and Ḥajiz, died and been replaced by other agents. Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarî

¹ Concerning the activities of al-Qaṭṭân, see al-Kāfî, 520; T. al-Ghayba, 190-1; Bihâr, I, 302, 217; Kamāl, 490-1; al-Irshâd, 398-9. For Ḥajiz' relations with the saffîr, see Bihâr, I, 294, and for Ahmad b. Ishaq's contacts with the saffîr and other agents, see Dalâ'il, 272; Ikhtiyâr, 556-7.
² Kamâl, 442.
³ Ikhtiyâr, 535.
⁴ al-Irshâd, 399.
reports that Ahmad b. Ishāq died in Hilwān on his way back to Qumm, but he does not fix the date of his death.¹

According to al-Ṣadūq, ḫājiz also died and his office was filled by Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asadī al-Rāzī.² Meanwhile it seems that al-Qaṭṭān continued his activities after the year 279-282/891-894 when the government discovered the existence of the twelfth Imam and therefore tried to arrest al-Qaṭṭān.³ The latter carried out his activities during al-Muʿtaḍīd’s regime (279-289/891-901)⁴, but there is no reference to him after that period, which indicates, perhaps, that he died around that date.

In fact al-Ṯūsī gives several accounts about the last will of the second saffīr in 305/917 which includes the names of the eminent agents at that time. He reports:

During Abū Jaʿfar’s last illness,

the heads of the Shiʿa congregated around him, among whom were Abū ‘Alī b. Rumān,


¹. Dalāʾil, 272. According to al-Ṣadūq, Ahmad b. Ishāq died in Hilwān before 260/874, but this cannot be accepted because there are several indications that he outlived al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/874). Meanwhile al-Ṣadūq relates his report on the authority of Muḥammad b. Bahr, who was well-known for fabricating false narrations; Kamāl, 454, 466-7; al-Najāshī, 298.

². Kamāl, 488.

³. al-Kāfī, I, 525.

'Ali al-Nawbakhtī, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Wajnā, and other leaders. They asked him, "If something happened to you, who will succeed you?" He said to them, "This is Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ b. Abī Baḥr al-Nawbakhtī, who will be in charge of my office and be the mediator [saffīr] between you and the Ṣāḥib al-Amr [the Imam], because he is his agent and is honest and trustworthy. So consult him in your matters, and depend on him in your needs, because I was ordered to announce this proclamation."

According to another narration Ibn Rūḥ and Ahmad b. Jaʿfar b. Matīl were amongst those who attended this meeting, and the agents thought that, in the case of the death of the second saffīr, either Jaʿfar b. Ahmad b. Matīl or his father would succeed him, because of their close relations with Abū Jaʿfar. These two reports disclose the names of the chief agents of Baghdad around the year 304-5/916-7 and the fact that the agents Ahmad b. Ishāq, Ḥājīz and al-Qaṭṭān, who had been in office in Baghdad since the time of the first saffīr, had died, as has been mentioned before. Likewise it shows that some of the

2. Ibid., 240-1.
ordinary agents from the time of the first safīr were still living and had been promoted to high ranks, like al-Baqṭānī and al-Wajnā'.

2.3. The relationship of the second safīr to the agents in the other provinces

Abū Jaʿfar, the second safīr, had, apart from his agents in Baghdad, other agents in various provinces, who were mediators between the provincial Imamites and the twelfth Imam, concerning the answering of their legal inquiries and collecting the khums.

Abū Jaʿfar had three principal agents in Iraq. Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Zajawzjī was his agent in Kufa, whose family had controlled this office since the time of the first safīr, and who was to hold this office even during the time of the third safīr. According to al-Ṭūsī and al-Najāshī, the twelfth Imam had contacts in Kufa with two other people from the family of Zurārā: Muḥammad b.

1. According to Ibn Rustam, al-Baqṭānī claimed, after the death of al-ʿAskarī in 260/874, that he was the agent of the twelfth Imam (Bihār, II, 300). But later, it appears, he abandoned his claim and served both the second and the third safīrs (T. al-Ghayba, 242). Concerning al-Wajnā', he was amongst those who had seen the Imam (Kamāl, 443). He was resident in Baghdad during the time of the second safīr (al-Kāfrī, I, 521). However, it appears that he had some relations with the political bases of the Imamites in Mosul in 307/919; T. al-Ghayba, 205.

2. T. al-Ghayba, 198.
Sulaymān (237-300/851-912)\(^1\), and his uncle ‘Alī b. Sulaymān, who died around the year 313/925.\(^2\) It seems that they were in fact cooperating with al-Zajawzī and were his agents, because the family of Zurāra had been well-known for their allegiance to the Imams from the time of their great-grandfather Zurāra b. A’yun (d. 150/767), the companion of the Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq\(^3\), while his father Sulaymān had been the agent of the tenth Imam, al-Hādī, both in Kufa and Baghdad. Furthermore, Aḥmad, the son of Muḥammad b. Sulaymān, had worked during the time of the third safīr under Aḥmad al-Zajawzī\(^4\), which indicates the close relationship between the latter and the family of Zurāra.

In al-Ahwaz the deputyship of the Imam was still in the hands of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Mahzayār, who received an order, it is said, from the Imam, to follow the instructions of the second safīr.\(^5\) However, according to al-Ṣadūq one member of this family, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Mahzayār doubted the existence of the twelfth Imam, and this case was raised with the latter, who in turn issued a letter in which he confirmed that God would remove Ibn Mahzayār’s doubt and lead him to recover his faith.\(^6\)

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1. T. al-Ghayba, 193, 195.
2. al-Najāshī, 198; Buzurg, Nawābīgh al-Ruwāt, 186.
5. T. al-Ghayba, 235.
The second safir extended his activities to new areas. According to al-Ṣadūq his main agents in Wāsiṭ were Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Ḥašṭarī and al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ḥaṭṭāt al-Ṣaydānī. The latter was the agent for endowments (wakīl al-waqf) of the Imam in Wāsiṭ, and was contacted by the safir through Ja’far b. Muḥammad b. Matīl. ¹ Al-Mawṣil was another area in which the second safir gained partisans, and al-Tūsī mentions a certain Muḥammad b. al-ʿAṣr al-Mawṣili, who had recognized Abū Jaʿfar as the safir of the Imam. ² Abū Jaʿfar himself succeeded in attracting some influential people to his side in that area. Al-Irbili reports that al-Ḥasayn b. Ḥamān (from the famous ruling family, the Ḥamānids) became the governor of Qumm in 296/908, and after he had been dismissed from his office, contacted the second safir in Baghdad, where he paid him the khums on all the money he had earned while in office as a sign of his obedience to the twelfth Imam, as a result of which the rest of his family converted to the Imamite doctrine. ³ In Sāmarrā the agent was Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Ḥamād, who, according to al-Ṣadūq, had direct contact with both

1. Kamāl, 504.
3. al-Irbili, Kashf al-Ghumma, IV, 409; Biḥār, LI, 56-7; al-Irbili does not mention the year in which Ibn Ḥamān controlled Qumm; however, Ibn al-Athīr reports that he was installed in this post in 296/908, consequently the contact between the second safir and Ibn Ḥamān must have occurred after that date; al-Kāmil, VIII, 14, 32.
the second safir and the Imam. Meanwhile all the affairs of the Imamites' institutions in Iran were controlled by the agent of Rayy, Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Asadī al-Rāzī, who had direct contact with the second safir, having previously been answerable only to the first safir; and the other agents of the Iranian provinces were instructed to pay the legal taxes to al-Rāzī, who continued in this office until his death in 312/924. At the same time, al-Qāsim b. al-ʿĀlā was, according to al-Ṭūsī, the agent of the second safir in Azerbayjān and continued in his office until the time of the third safir, Ibn Rūḥ.

The second safir carried out extensive secret activities with his agents, whom he used to meet in various districts of Baghdad. During the period of the caliph al-Muʿtadid (279-289/892-901) the agents from the remote provinces, like Qumm, used to contact the second safir and convey money and goods to him through traders who had no knowledge of the relationship between those who sent the goods and Abū Jaʿfar as the second safir. On the contrary they brought these goods from Qumm to Abū Jaʿfar thinking that the latter was only commercially involved with the traders.

Moreover Abū Jaʿfar was careful in his relations with his agents, so that he would leave no trace which the authorities could use against him, and would jeopardise

1. Kamāl, 493, 495.
2. Ibid., 488, 486; Bihār, LI, 294, 325.
4. Ibid., 192-3.
both his own life and that of the Imam. Al-Ṣadūq reports a secret meeting between Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Matīl, one of the ten agents in Baghdad. He mentions that Abū Jaʿfar took Ibn Matīl to a ruin in al-ʿAbbāsiyya in Baghdad¹, where he read a letter from the twelfth Imam to Ibn Matīl and then tore it to pieces.² He also did not implicate himself in any direct contact with agents from remote provinces so as to evade any government spies; he therefore used to order any person who brought a letter or money to put them in a certain place, and gave him no receipt.³

It appears from another narration that the second safīr established a complicated system of communications between himself and the representatives (wukalāʾ) of political bases in the Imamite areas and that there was perhaps a special secret code reserved for the safīr and his agents, while the messengers were sometimes ignorant of both the contents of their messages and the code. For example, Abū Jaʿfar once sent messages to Sāmarrā with one of his reliable partisans, but the latter inserted a letter

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¹. Al-ʿAbbāsiyya is a fief in Baghdad granted to al-ʿAbbās, the brother of the caliph al-Manṣūr. According to al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī there were two fiefs of the same name, one in the eastern side of Baghdad and the other in the western side. Because the house of Abū Jaʿfar was in the western side, therefore, the meeting perhaps occurred in the western side; al-Khaṭīb, I, 79, 95.

². Kamāl, 498.

³. T. al-Ghayba, 192.
amongst the other messages without the knowledge of the safir. However, in Samarra, the messenger received answers to all the original letters whereas his letter remained unanswered.¹

On the other hand, the second safir sometimes dealt directly with certain agents, with whom he had previously communicated indirectly. The career of Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Aswad is a good example of such a case. According to al-Saduq, al-Aswad used to bring the legal taxes of the Imam to Abū Ja'far, who commanded him to hand them over to the well-known scholar al-'Abbās b. Ma'rūf al-Qummi², without offering him any receipt.³ However, we later find al-Aswad dealing directly with the second safir, and the third safir, who both received in person the money which al-Aswad had collected from the Imamites.⁴

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1. Kamāl, 499.
2. Al-'Abbās b. Ma'rūf was a companion to the tenth Imam, al-Hādī. He devoted his time during the short occultation to relating Imamite narrations; therefore, perhaps, Abū Ja'far originally ordered al-Aswad to hand the money over to Ibn Ma'rūf because al-Aswad, at that time, was not aware of the necessity of the underground organization. For a full account of the career of Ibn Ma'rūf as a narrator of Imamite narrations which criticise those Shi'ites who considered Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya or the seventh Imam Mūsā al-Kāzim as the hidden Imam, see Ikhtiyār, 315, 461; al-Najāshī, 215-6, 151; al-Tūsī, Tahdhīb al-Ahkām, IV, 122, 137, V, 292, VI, 122, 194.
3. The effect of the Shi'ite revolutionary activities upon the 'Abbāsids' attitude towards the twelfth Imam (278-305/891-917)

3.1. It appears from the career of the second safīr that he instructed his agents to evade any act which might lead the government of the day to think that the Imamites still had political aspirations or that they had an Imam leading them secretly. Despite the fact that the second safīr, Abū Ja'far, directed the Imamites to maintain this policy, the political activities of the other Shi'ite groups, particularly the Zaydites, the Qarāmiṭa and the Ismā'īlīs, made relations between the Imamites and the 'Abbāsids difficult, on the one hand, and on the other hand, rendered it difficult to totally conceal the existence of the twelfth Imam from their opponents.

When the Zanj revolution (255-270/866-883) was taking place the situation of the Imamites was critical, because the leader of that revolution, 'Alī b. Muḥammad, attributed his lineage to the brother of Imam al-Bāqir, Zayd b. 'Alī, and, for this reason, a considerable group of 'Alids joined his side and participated in his uprising from the year 257/871. In spite of the fact that the eleventh

Imam, al-‘Askari, had openly announced that the leader of the Zanj was not a member of the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt), the authorities saw this revolution as being linked with the ‘Alids. Therefore, according to al-Tabari, the downfall of the Zanj revolt in 270/883 was followed by governmental propaganda against the ‘Alids in general. This attitude can be distinguished in the poem of Yahyâ b. Muhammad al-Aslamî, who praised the ‘Abbâsid leader al-Muwaffaq in 270/883 with this verse:

وَيَتَّلِى كِتَابُ اللَّهِ فِي كَلِّ مسجدٍ وَيُقَلِّنُ دِعَاءُ الطَّالِبِينَ خَاسِئًا

And the Book of God is recited in every mosque,
And the propaganda of the Talibiyyîn is made in vain.²

It is most likely that the antagonism of the ‘Abbâsids towards extreme Shi‘ite groups extended to the Imamites as well, so, according to al-Tusi, the Imamites were too frightened to express their doctrine openly between the years 270-273/883-887.³

The second factor which caused the relations between the Imamites and the ‘Abbâsids to be strained was the

1. al-Irbili, Kashf al-Ghaumma, IV, 428; Bihâr, L, 293.
2. Tabari, III, 2099.
3. Al-Tusi reports that the tomb of al-‘Usayn collapsed in 273/886 probably due to an act of sabotage, especially if one bears in mind the fact that an attack upon the grave of ‘Ali was foiled about the same time; al-Tusi, Tahdhib al-Ahkâm, VI, 111-12.
discovery of the underground activities of the two Ismā‘īlī parties, the original Ismā‘īlīs and the Qārāmīṣṭa.¹ The Ismā‘īlīs, like the Imamites, had reported the Prophetic traditions, which had been related by the Imamites concerning the rise of al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī, who would go into occultation as preparatory action for his uprising.² However, they interpreted some of these traditions to support their own struggle in order to gain immediate success in North Africa (al-Maghrib). For this reason they interpreted the tradition which states that al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī will appear when the sun rises from the place of its setting, as meaning that the Qā‘im himself would rise in the west (al-Maghrib).³ Furthermore they applied other traditions which had been narrated by the Imamites about al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī in favour of their concealed leader, who had organized his followers

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1. For the distinction between the Mubarakiyya and the Qārāmīṣṭa, see Q. Maqālāt, 80-6; N. Firaq, 67-74; al-Fusūl al-Mukhtāra, 247-8.

2. T. al-Ghayba, 39, 130. The Ismā‘īlī writer, Ibn Hawshab, narrates in his work al-Kashf several Qur’ānic verses indicating the Last Day, which meant for him the rise of al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī (al-Kashf, 5-6, 10, 11, 14, 24; Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistani, Kashf al-Mahjūb [Tehran, 1949], 81-3). Moreover, Ibn Hawshab mentions a narration attributed to al-Ṣādiq, which states that al-Qā‘im would rise in Mecca, thus he agrees with the Imamites' reports regarding this point; al-Kashf, 32-5.

3. Ibn Hawshab, Asrār al-Nuṭaqā’, 51-3, 90-2. For the details of the Ismā‘īlī use of these traditions in their activities with the tribe of Kitāma in 280/893, see al-Kāmil, VIII, 24-5, 26.
into a strong underground movement, and ordered them to extend their activities into new areas by military means, in order to prepare for his rising as al-Qā'im al-Mahdī. According to Sa‘d al-Ash‘arī the number of the Qārāmīta increased in the villages around Kufa (according to al-Nawbakhtī, they gained about 100,000 partisans there). Afterwards they expanded their propaganda on the western shores of the Gulf and Yemen, where a large number of Arabs accepted their propaganda, thus helping the Qārāmīta to become powerful. As a result of all this they declared their rebellion, which according to al-Tabarī, occurred in the suburbs of Kufa in 278/891.

It seems that the Ismā‘īlīs found in the occultation of the twelfth Imam a good opportunity to use the Imamite masses in their political struggle and, so, according to

1. Ibn Ḥawshab, al-Kāshf, 62; al-Kāmil, VIII, 22-3; Ivanow supports this point in suggesting that "the terrible slaughter of the pilgrims in the Ka‘ba itself, and the seizure of the sacred relics were not acts of wanton cruelty, but were connected with some expectations of a religious character, such as the return of Muhammad b. Ismā‘īl in full glory, etc., which most probably was expected to be due about that time." Ivanow, "Ismailis and Qarmatians", Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XVI (1940), 82; also see W. Madelung, "Karmatī", E.I. 2.

2. N. Firaq, 76; al-Tabarī confirms this number; Tabarī, II, 2218.

3. Q. Maqālāt, 86.

4. Tabarī, III, 2124.
Ibn al-Athīr, the Qarāmiṭa missionary Yaḥyā b. al-Mahdī went to Bahrain, which had a large Shi‘ite population, where he contacted an eminent Shi‘ite leader, ‘Alī b. al-Mu‘allā b. Ḫamdān in 281/894, and informed him that he was sent by al-Mahdī to his Shi‘ite followers to inform them that his rising was at hand. ‘Alī b. al-Mu‘allā was satisfied with the message and revealed it to the Shi‘ites in the town of Qatif and in other villages of Bahrain, who in turn accepted it and promised that they too would support al-Mahdī if he rose. The Qarāmiṭa succeeded by such means in circulating their propaganda among the Arab tribe of Qays and began to collect the khums.¹ By using the same methods, they expanded their activities among the tribes of Asad, Ṭayy and Tamīm in the Sawād, while in the desert of the Samāwa, the tribe of Banū al-‘Ulayṣ, who used to protect the trade route between Kufa and Damascus, also joined their side.²

It is worth mentioning that the Qarāmiṭa took into consideration the sectarian and economic structure of the people whom they worked with. Therefore we find that their propaganda spread mainly among the people who already had

¹. al-kāmil, VII, 340-1, VIII, 21-2. There is evidence which encourages the present writer to link the activities of the Qarāmiṭa with that of the Ismā‘īlīs. Ibn Ḥawqal mentions that after the establishment of the state of the Qarāmiṭa in Bahrain they used to send the khums to the Šāhib al-Zamān, that is the Ismā‘īlī leader in Egypt; Ibn Ḥawqal, op. cit., 21-3.
². Tabarī, III, 2218; Ibn Ḥawqal, op. cit., 29.
Shi'ite inclinations, such as the Qarâmatiyyûn, who had participated in the Zanj revolt\(^1\), and spread also among the people of the Sawād\(^2\), who wished to join the side of any rebel in order to improve their social and economic conditions.

There is evidence that the Qarâmiţa permitted their followers to kill their opponents and confiscate their properties.\(^3\) Meanwhile, it appears that the twelfth Imam was aware of the danger of such a principle, which might be used by the government of the day against his followers, especially if we bear in mind the fact that both the Imamites and the Qarâmiţa were Shi'ites and lived in the same areas expecting the rise of al-Qâ'im al-Mahdî in the near future. It was, therefore, difficult for the government to differentiate between them without extensive and careful investigation. There is in al-Kâfi and al-Irshâd an example of such a situation, when both state that a respectable Imamite scholar (faqîh) who had connections with the second saffî became a Qarmatl\(^4\), which

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1. Tabârî, III, 1757. Shaban put forward a theory that the Ismâ'îli movement in Iraq and Bahrain was called the Qarâmiţa according to the race of al-Qarâmatiyyûn who took part in the Zanj revolt, and after the collapse of this revolt, joined the Ismâ'îli movement. One might agree with Shaban that in spite of that, "their participation was only a minor element, being a common one, it was enough to give these movements this peculiar name." Shaban, op. cit., 130.

2. Tabârî, III, 2202.

3. Q. Maqâlāt, 85.

4. al-Kâfi, I, 520; al-Irshâd, 398.
reveals the extent of the penetration of the Qarāmiṭa missionaries into Imamite circles.

3.2. However, the twelfth Imam wanted to protect his followers from the influence of the Qarāmiṭa, and wished to make the government of the day differentiate between his adherents and the Qarāmiṭa. Perhaps for this reason, it is said that the twelfth Imam sent a letter to his second safīr, in which he denounced and excommunicated Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab and his followers (the Qarāmiṭa). Meanwhile, he declared that he had no relations with them and ordered his followers to have neither any discussion with them, nor to attend their gatherings. The second safīr circulated the pronouncement of the Imam among the Imamites via his agent Ishāq b. Yaʿqūb. It seems most likely that the Imamites carried out the instructions of the pronouncement as regards their relations with the Qarāmiṭa. According to Ibn al-Athīr, a group of people from Kufa revealed to the ʿAbbāsid authorities the underground activities of the Qarāmiṭa in their area, and informed the ʿAbbāsids that the Qarāmiṭa were inventing rules contrary to Islamic law and claimed that, according to such rules, it was permissible for them to murder any Muslim other than those who paid the oath of allegiance to them. Ibn al-Athīr also reports that later a group of Ṭālibiyyūn fought beside the government against the

Qarāmiţa in Kufa.\textsuperscript{1} It is plausible that this group were Imamites, and that this step was part of their plan to make the 'Abbāsids realize in a practical way that they were not responsible for the Qarāmiţa's activities.

However, there is evidence that the 'Abbāsids paid no attention to their claims\textsuperscript{2}; therefore, we find that the period of al-Mu'taţid (279-289/892-901) was distinguished as one of oppression and pursuit for the Imamites. It was well known among the Sunnī scholars like al-Ash'arī that the Imamites had achieved a consensus in respect of the prohibition of any militant revolution unless the Imam himself appeared and ordered them to such action.\textsuperscript{3} It appears, however, that the propaganda of the Qarāmiţa for the rise of al-Qā'im al-Mahdī encouraged the government of the day to link their activities with the occultation of the twelfth Imam of the Imamites, and to consider these militant underground activities as preparatory action for his uprising, particularly if one bears in mind the fact that the cousin of the twelfth Imam, Muḥsin b. Ja'far b. 'Alī al-Hādī involved himself in the Qarāmiţa's rebellion in Damascus against the 'Abbāsids.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} al-Kāmil, VII, 311, 376.
\textsuperscript{2} Tabarī, III, 2127-8; al-Kāmil, VII, 311.
\textsuperscript{3} al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn, 58; Ibn Shādhān, al-Idāh, 475.
\textsuperscript{4} Muḥsin later was arrested in the suburbs of Damascus in 300/912 and his head was sent to Baghdad, where it was impaled on the bridge in the eastern side of Baghdad which used to be inhabited by a large Shī'ite population; Maqātil, 449; al-Kubaysī, op. cit., 446.
This critical situation for the Imamites gave their opponents a vital weapon, which the viziers used not only against the Imamites but also against their colleagues who were anti-Shi'ite. The caliph, al-Mu'tamid, ordered the arrest of a member of the Imamite family Banū Furāt in 278/891, who had held the office of Dīwān al-Sawād, and they therefore hid themselves, but Abū Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. Furāt was still arrested. Meanwhile al-Mu'tamid appointed 'Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān, who was well-known for his anti-'Alid attitude, to the office of the wizāra in the same year. If one can link the rise of the Qaramīṭa in 278/891 with these two steps, along with the attitude of 'Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān, one can put forward the claim

3. Al-Kamil, VII, 333.
4. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān was a close associate of al-Muwaffaq in Sāmarrā in 264/878, but four years later he was imprisoned. When al-Mu'tadid became the heir-apparent to al-Mu'tamid, 'Ubayd Allāh was promoted to the office of the wizāra, whereupon he used his office to pursue his rivals such as Banū Furāt. At the same time he managed to discover the activities of the agents of the second saffīr. He died in 288/900; al-Kāfī, I, 525; al-Kamil, VII, 219, 227, 309; al-Fakhri, 302.
that the appointment of the latter was part of the precautions taken by the 'Abbāsids against Shi'ite activities in general.

Afterward al-Mu'tadid, the caliph, carried out a careful investigation against underground cells of the Shi'ites in general. In 282/895 he discovered that Muhammad b. Zayd, the head of the Zaydite state in Tabaristān, was sending 32,000 dinars every year to Muhammad b. Ward al-'Attār so that the latter could distribute the money among the 'Alids in Baghdad, Kufa, Mecca and Medina. Moreover the continual investigations of al-Mu'tadid caused the arrest and murder of many 'Alids, who according to al-Isfahānī were not Qarāmiṭa, but were simply persecuted under that pretext.

1. Tabarī, III, 2148; al-Muntazam, V, 150.
2. Al-Isfahānī mentions that two 'Alids, Muhammad b. 'Alī b. İbrāhīm and 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī, were persecuted along with the Qarmāṭī Ṣāḥib al-Khāl, whose hands and legs were cut off, yet they did not support the Qarāmiṭa nor did they have any relations with them (Maqātil, 446). However, al-Tabarī states twice that the 'Abbāsid troops arrested a group of Qarāmiṭa in 286/899 and investigated them. They disclosed the name of their leader, Abū Ḥašim b. Ṣadaqa al-Ḫāṭib, who was arrested and put in jail (Tabarī, III, 2179). According to the investigation of al-Mu'tadid of the Qarāmiṭa leader, Abū al-Fawāris, it is clear that the caliph differentiated between the doctrine of the Qarāmiṭa and the Imamites; al-Kāmil, VII, 354.
As a result of these precautionary measures, the authorities realized that the Imamites had their own organization. According to al-Kulaynî the spies of the vizier 'Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān discovered that the Imamites still had an Imam who guided their activities secretly. Al-Kulaynî reports:

Al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan al-‘Alawī said that two intimates of Badr Ḥasanī [the servant of the caliph] were talking and one of them said, "That is him [the twelfth Imam], collecting the money and he has agents [wukalā’]." Afterwards they named the names of all the agents in all districts. Then they reported this information to the vizier 'Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān, who endeavoured to arrest them. But the caliph [al-Mu‘taḍid] told him to search for the place of this man [the Imam], because this case is important. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān said, "Let us arrest the agents." But the caliph said, "No, but infiltrate among them some spies who are unknown [in their service to the government] and ask them to give money to the agents, so that you could arrest anyone who receives the money."¹

¹ al-Kāfī, I, 525.
Al-Kuleynī does not mention the date of this incident, but we know that ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān continued in the service to the caliph al-Mu‘tadid until the year 288/900, so this incident must have taken place between the years 282-288/895-900.

It is clear from this report that the ‘Abbāsid spies had reached the conclusion that the eleventh Imam al-‘Askari had in fact left a successor, and that the latter directed the underground activities of his agents, but were unsure of his place of residence. So they tried to arrest some of his agents and partisans, hoping that by interrogating them, they might also arrest the twelfth Imam. For this reason, the caliph ordered that the spies be sent with money to infiltrate amongst the agents. However, it seems that the safīr's networks was so strong, and worked so efficiently, that his agents from near and far knew, at once, that the caliph and his vizier planned to act against them. So before the latter could exercise his plan to arrest all the agents of the Imam, an order to stop the collection of taxes had gone out to almost every agent, so that when a spy infiltrated as far as the main agent in Baghdad, Muḥammad al-Qaṭṭān, and informed him that he had money and wanted to send it to the Imam, al-Qaṭṭān pretended that he knew nothing about this matter. Meanwhile the other agents acted similarly.¹ It appears that the caliph failed to obtain any information from his spies and therefore decided to do so by arresting

¹. al-Kāfī, I, 525.
the Imamites who came to visit the cemeteries of al-Ḥār, where al-Ḥusayn was buried, and the cemeteries of Quraysh, where the seventh and the ninth Imams were buried. However, according to the Imamite sources, this plan was revealed to the Imamites, whereupon an order was sent out to both the families of Banū Furāt and al-Barsiyyīn, warning them not to visit the cemeteries of Quraysh in Baghdad. ¹

However, according to al-Rawandī, a report came to the caliph revealing that the twelfth Imam was staying in the house of his father in Sāmarrā. The caliph did not want this information to reach the hands of the Imamites, and for this reason he, himself, dispatched three of his personal soldiers to Sāmarrā, describing the house of al-‘Askarī to them, and commanding them to enter it and kill whoever they found inside, without revealing to them the name of the person whom they were going to murder. However, the twelfth Imam managed to evade this death and the soldiers, having failed, returned to the capital.²

1. al-Kāfī, I, 525; al-Irshād, 402; T. al-Ghayba, 183-4. This order is believed to have come from the Imam himself.

2. al-Rawandī, al-Khārīj wa-l-Jarīḥ (Bombay, 1301), 67. Al-Tūsī mentions two of the three soldiers’ names, Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allāh and Rashīq, the servant of al-Mu’taḍid. It appears that al-Tūsī’s report is sound, because al-Ṭabarī confirms that Rashīq was the personal soldier (ghulām, khādim) of al-Mu’taḍid, and took part in the fighting against the Zanj revolution; Tabarī, III, 1953, 2003, 2007, 2017-9, 2082-3; T. al-Ghayba, 160-1.
In fact the hostile ‘Abbāsīd attitude towards the agents of the second safīr continued after the death of ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān, the vizier, in 288/900. His office was given to his son al-Qāsim and as the latter was the grandfather of the new caliph, al-Muktafī (289-295/901-7), the policy of the government towards the Imamites was not re-considered. Al-Ṭūsī gives a report supporting this point: Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh of Qumm, who had seen the Imam and had obvious Imamite inclinations, attracted the attention of the vizier al-Qāsim b. ‘Ubayd Allāh, who tried to murder him on several occasions, so that he fled to Egypt.

According to Ibn al-Jawzī al-Qāsim arrested many innocent ‘Alīds under the pretext that they had Qarāmījān inclinations, and they remained in jail until 291/903.

These continual campaigns of arrest carried out by the ‘Abbāsīds along with the ill-effects of the Qarāmījā uprisings, made the Imam and his agents more careful. According to Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī the correspondence between the Imam and the safīr stopped about that time, probably in order to erase any traces which might lead the authorities to the agents. As another precautionary measure, the Imam changed his place of residence several time from the reign of al-Mu‘tafīd onwards. Some reports mentioned by al-Ṭūsī indicate that, in an

1. T. al-Ghayba, 163-5.
unspecified year, a certain agent told Abū Sawra that he was going to the Maghrib to meet the Imam, while someone else saw him in Syria and another met him in Egypt. Yet another report states that the Imam was resident in the mountains near Mecca about the year 293/905, where, according to the second safīr, he used to perform the pilgrimage every year. All these narrations would seem to indicate that the Imam did not stay in one place for more than a short time, perhaps fearing that the authorities would discover his identity and plot against his life.

3.3. The Qarāmiṭa’s use of the Prophetic traditions predicting the rise of al-Qāʾīm al-Mahdī in their struggle to gain immediate political success during the time of the second safīr, may have made the Imamites give greater emphasis to the physical signs which would precede the rise of al-Qāʾīm in the Prophetic traditions and the statements of the Imams. Al-Kulaynī, who was contemporary to the second safīr, then his student al-Nuʿmānī, narrate, as has been mentioned before, five signs which must precede the rise of the real al-Qāʾīm al-Mahdī: al-Sufyānī will rise in Syria and dominate it for only nine months, at the same

2. Ibid., 165.
3. Kamāl, 440. For a discussion of a peculiar incident in which a certain Ibn al-Ḍubbaʾī claimed to be the twelfth Imam, see Appendix A.
time a rebel called al-Yamānī (al-Qahtānī)\(^1\) will raise a rebellion and advance towards Mecca. Afterwards the pure soul, a descendant of al-Hasan, will rebel in Medina but the inhabitants will kill him and send his head to al-Sufyānī, who will dispatch an army against Medina, but God will cause it to sink into the ground in the vicinity of Medina. Thereupon an outcry in the sky will announce, in the morning, the full name of al-Qa'im al-Mahdī, who, accordingly, will rise in Mecca. The preceding events will take place consecutively within one year.\(^2\)

It is clear from the Imamite presentation of these signs that they were a refutation of the claims of the Ismā'īlī leader who called himself al-Mahdī after his rising in 296/908.\(^3\) Furthermore, the emphasis which was given to those signs served to prevent the ordinary Imamites from involving themselves in other Shi'ite

1. The Prophet's companion 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ used to narrate a Prophetic tradition predicting the rise of al-Qahtānī, whose rising is only a sign for the rise of al-Qa'im al-Mahdī. However, Mu'āwiya prohibited this companion from narrating such a tradition, because he thought the the spread of such traditions would encourage the people to overthrow him; B. Sahīh, 384.


3. Tabarî, III, 2225.
activities with which the Imamite organization (al-Wikāla) was not involved, especially if one considers the fact that around this period many traditions were being related and attributed to the previous Imams, warning the Imamites not to participate in any revolution before the rise of al-Qā'īm.¹

However, the circulation of these traditions led to their negative interpretation and people felt that they should live peaceably and not involve themselves in any activities which might lead to revolution. This conclusion, along with the signs of the rise of al-Qā'īm, encouraged some Imamites to put forward the idea that the establishment of the state of the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt) is the responsibility of al-Qā'īm himself, and this caused the delay of any militant decision until the rise of al-Qā'īm, whereas these traditions were actually intended as warnings against taking part in militant activities led by false claimants. For this reason very little attention was given to the traditions which encouraged the people to prepare for the rise of the twelfth Imam after his occultation. It is reported that the tenth Imam said, "If your Imam goes into occultation, expect freedom from

¹. Al-Nu‘mānī devoted a section in his work al-Ghayba in which he refutes the claims of the Ismā‘Ilī (N. al-Ghayba, 53–7, 176–80); al-Kulaynī also narrates a narration on the authority of al-Ṣādiq, who forbade his follower ‘Umar b. Ḥanāzala from taking part in any ‘Alid revolution before the outcry in the sky; al-Kāfī, VIII, 310. See also Ikhtiyār, 262–3.
grief [to come from] beneath your feet."\(^1\) It is clear that the above statement of al-Hādi meant that it is the responsibility of every follower of the hidden Imam to prepare for the rise of their Imam by their own efforts.

It is most likely that this quiescent approach was later brought about by Imamite scholars, whose role increased during the time of the second sa'īf.\(^2\) These people trained the ordinary Imamites to follow the instructions of the narrators during the occultation of the Imam. In order to achieve this aim they implemented a statement attributed to the twelfth Imam, which states, "concerning the occurrences which will happen, consult the narrators of our traditions, because they are my proof towards you and I am the Proof of God."\(^3\) It appears that by such methods the Imamite narrators manage to prevent their masses from taking part in the militant activities of the Qaramiṭa, however, this quiescent attitude, which was only a precautionary measure taken against the Ismā‘Ilīs developed later into a fundamental approach towards the question of the rise of al-Qā'im.

4. The death of Abū Ja‘far

It is reported that the second sa'īf had prophesied the time of his death and therefore prepared the tablet

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2. For a full account of the increase of the role of the Imamite fuqahā’, see Chapter VII.
3. Kamāl, 484.
which was to be installed on his grave on which Qur'ānic verses were inscribed, and the names of the Imams. He died in 305/917\textsuperscript{1}, and was buried in his house on the road leading to Kufa, on the western side of Baghdad.\textsuperscript{2}

1. Al-Ṭūsī gave two dates for the death of Abū Ja'far, the first of which, 304/916, on the authority of the grandson of Abū Ja'far, Hibbat Allāh, while the second report puts the date in 305/917. Al-Ṭūsī attributed the second report to Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī, the agent of Ibn Rūḥ in Kufa. Because the latter had close relations with Abū Ja'far, and was his contemporary, it seems that his report is more likely to be accurate; T. al-Ghayba, 238–9; al-Kāmil, VIII, 80; Abū al-Fidā, al-Mukhtasar, II, 69.

2. T. al-Ghayba, 238–9. There is in the eastern side of Baghdad, a tomb situated in a mosque called al-Khullānī. It is believed by the people that it is the grave of Abū Ja'far, whereas al-Ṭūsī mentions that his grave is on the western side. It is plausible that his corpse was transported to the new grave, but there is no available source to support such a claim.
CHAPTER VI

THE CAREER OF THE THIRD SAFPİR, AL-NAWBAKHTĪ

1. al-Nawbakhti's activities during the time of the second safir

The third safir was Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ b. Abī Baḥr al-Nawbakhtī, who remained in the office of the sifāra between the years 305-326/917-937, although the date of his birth is not known. According to Ibn Shahr Āshūb, al-Nawbakhtī was a close associate of the eleventh Imam, al-ʿAskarī, and was his Gate (Bāb)¹, but it is difficult to accept such a report because al-ʿAskarī died in 260/874 whereas al-Nawbakhtī died in 326/937.

There are several reports which indicate that al-Nawbakhtī was, in fact, a native of the traditional Shi'ite city of Qumm. Al-Kashshi and Yahyā b. Abī Ṭayy (d. 630/1232) called him al-Qummi.² Moreover al-Nawbakhtī himself was fluent in the Persian dialect of the people of Ābah, one of the suburbs of Qumm³, and this indicates that he belonged to the branch of Banū Nawbakht of Qumm.

1. Ibn Shahr Āshūb, Manāqib, I, 458.
2. Ikhtiyār, 557. The work of Ibn Abī Ṭayy is missing, however, al-Dhahabi used this work in writing the biography of al-Nawbakhtī; al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al-Islām, f. 132.
However, he had emigrated to Baghdad during the time of the first safīr, because, according to al-Ṭūsī, he was brought up in Baghdad under the guardianship of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Bīlūlī, who later denied that Abū Ja‘far al-‘Umarī was the second safīr of the twelfth Imam. Thereafter al-Nawbakhtī joined the service of the second safīr and became his agent (wakīl). Despite his youth al-Nawbakhtī was distinguished by his shrewdness, particularly concerning his relations with opponents. This quality, perhaps, enabled him to climb quickly in the ranks of the organization.

Thus he spent several years working as an agent for the second safīr, who used to pay him a salary of 30 dinars a month in addition to other financial support from high Shī‘ite officials and viziers like Banū Furāt. The second safīr also employed him to look after his properties and made him the connecting link between himself and the other leaders of the Imamites. According to al-Ṭūsī, al-Nawbakhtī was the intermediary between the second safīr and the agents of Kufa, al-Zajawzji and Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī.

1. T. al-Ghayba, 252-3.
2. Ibid., 250-2.
3. Ibid., 242-3; Bihār, LI, 355.
4. The narrator of this report was Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī, who was the agent of the safīrs, and reported that he used to contact the second safīr via al-Nawbakhtī and when the latter became the third safīr, began to contact the agents of Kufa through al-Shalmaghānī; T. al-Ghayba, 202.
His service in the Wikāla helped him in contacting high Shī'ite officials of the 'Abbāsid administration, particularly his relatives Banū Nawbakht, and Banū Furāt. Because of this, he had become highly respected by the people by the year 298/910. At that time an interesting occurrence took place which reveals his importance. Al-Ṣadūq narrates that an 'Alid called al-'Aqiql went to the vizier 'Alī b. 'İsā al-Jarrāḥ asking him to solve his financial problems, but the vizier neither listened to him nor assisted him. Thereafter a message came from al-Nawbakhtī to al-'Aqiql, and he solved his financial problems. This narration gives some indications of the social position of al-Nawbakhtī while he was still an agent of the second safīr.

2. The installation of the third safīr, al-Nawbakhtī

The ten eminent agents of the second safīr in Baghdad thought without doubt that if the latter died, the most likely applicant for his office would be Ja'far b. Ahmad b. Matīl, who himself shared their opinion, because of his close relationship with the second safīr. But al-'Umārī, according to al-Ṭūsī, during his last illness summoned the main agents, Muḥammad b. Humām, Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Kātib, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Baqṭānī, Abū 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Wajnā'ī, Ismā'īl b. 'Alī al-Nawbakhtī,
al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtī and Ja’far b. ʿĀḥmad b. Matīl. The latter took his seat beside the head of the second safīr, perhaps as a sign of his seniority amongst the agents, while al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ took his seat at the feet of the ill man. According to al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿUmarī told Ja’far b. ʿĀḥmad b. Matīl that he was ordered to give his last will to al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtī, so Ibn Matīl, as a sign of his obedience to the instructions of the Imam, gave up his seat to al-Nawbakhtī and sat at the feet of the dying safīr.¹ Then the latter informed the agents:

Abī al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ b. Abī Bahr al-Nawbakhtī is my successor and the mediator [safīr] between you and the Imam, and he is his agent. He is thoroughly reliable, so consult him concerning your affairs and depend on him in your important matters. I was ordered to reveal this and I have done so.²

The testament of the second safīr to al-Nawbakhtī was reported on the authority of the agents, Muḥammad b. Ṣumām and Ja’far b. ʿĀḥmad b. Matīl, who were present at that meeting and bore witness to the designation. Moreover Ibn Barīna the grandson of the second safīr also

1. T. al-Ghayba, 241; Kamāl, 503.
reports the testament and agrees with the other agents in respect of its authenticity. 1

At that time the Imamites put forward different reasons for the designation of Ibn Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtī. Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of the second safīr, thought that Ibn Rūḥ was promoted to the office of the deputyship (sifāra) because of his close relationship with her father, to the extent that she reports that her father even used to reveal to him what had occurred between himself and his slave-girls. 2 However, according to the agent Ibn Qurd, the other nine agents in Baghdad, especially Ibn Matīl, were closer to the second safīr than Ibn Rūḥ, but the deputyship (sifāra) was given to him. 3 Although Ibn Qurd does not give any reason for this, it seems most likely that Ibn Rūḥ had personal qualifications which made him a suitable safīr. Indeed we have a report attributed to Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī to support this point. The latter was asked by some Imamites as to why he had not been promoted to the sifāra instead of Ibn Rūḥ. He answered,

They [the Imams] know best about whom they have selected for this office. I am a person who meets opponents and argues with them. If I had known what Abū al-Qāsim [Ibn Rūḥ] knows about the Imam, perhaps,

1. Kamāl, 503.
3. Ibid., 240.
in the course of my arguments, when I found myself under the attack of enemies to give them well-founded reasons concerning the existence of the concealed Imam, I would have pointed out the whereabouts of the Imam. But if Abū al-Qāsim had the Imam underneath his garments, and even if his flesh was being cut into pieces to make him reveal the whereabouts of the Imam, he would not yield or reveal his presence to his foes.¹

This document indicates that Ibn Rūḥ was promoted to the sīfāra mainly because of his loyalty and the shrewdness which he had shown on several occasions. Therefore we cannot accept the opinion of Sachedina, who thinks that the appointment of Ibn Rūḥ as saffir to the twelfth Imam, must have been influenced by another eminent member of the Nawbakht family, namely Abū Sahl Ismāʿīl b. 'Alī. He was one of those leading Imamites, who were present in the last days of the second agent to bear witness to the designation of Abu al-Qāsim as the agent.²

¹. T. al-Ghayba, 255.
². Sachedina, op. cit., 137.
This suggestion envisages Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhti as the head of the Imamite organization even before he "secured" his relative's nomination. Tempting as such speculation may be when one comes upon a fairly well-known name within a secret organization, there is absolutely no evidence to support it. Until such time as Sachedina can produce supporting evidence, it must be regarded as idle speculation. The fact is, as has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout this thesis, that the safir was, after the hidden Imam, the pinnacle of the organization and al-Ḥusayn b. Rūh's position was, therefore, much more senior than that of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhti. So the decision was, in fact, not influenced by the personal interference of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhti nor by the latter's family. If one takes into consideration the fact that the rest of the ten agents recognized the promotion of Ibn Rūh, especially Ibn Matīl, who was expected to be the third safir\(^1\), and the fact that al-Shalmaghāni, even after his own aspirations to the office of the sifāre recognized Ibn Rūh as the safir\(^2\), it is clear that Ibn Rūh must in fact have been appointed by the Imam himself.

1. T. al-Ghayba, 240. According to some reports, the decision that Ibn Rūh would be the successor of Abū Ja'far had already been revealed by Abū Ja'far himself to a few agents three years before his death in 305/917. Ja'far al-Madā'īnī and Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Aswad were amongst the agents who received these instructions; Kamāl, 501-2.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 256.
3. The activities of Ibn Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtī

According to al-Dhahabī, after the death of the second safīr, Abū Ja‘far, in 305/917, his successor Ibn Rūḥ went to the headquarters (Dār al-Niyāba) of the organization, where he met the eminent Imamites such as the servant of the second safīr, Dhakā. The latter prepared the things which his master had entrusted to him, that is, the staff and the treasury, containing the seals of the Imams, and handed them over to Ibn Rūḥ as he had been instructed. Thereafter Ibn Rūḥ together with the other agents went to the house of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shalmaghānī, the close associate of Ibn Rūḥ, who later became his rival.

From the very beginning, Ibn Rūḥ proved his ability to lead the organization successfully. His shrewdness enabled him to evade the dangers of the sectarian discussions, which used to take place at the palace of Ibn Yasār, one of the high officials of al-Muqtadīr, the caliph. According to al-Ṭūsī, Ibn Rūḥ was cautious and even discharged his servant because he had cursed Mu‘āwiya. Ibn Rūḥ took this step, perhaps, to avoid the danger posed by the vizier, Ḥāmid b. al-‘Abbās (306-311/918-923) who was well-known for his hatred of Shī‘ites generally.

However, there is evidence that the ten agents of the second safīr continued their activities under the

1. al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-Islām, f. 132b.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 250-1.
3. For a full account of the career of Ḥāmid b. al-‘Abbās, see al-Kubaysī, op. cit., 190-9.
leadership of Ibn Rūh. Among those agents were Ja'far b. Ahmad b. Matīl, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Kātib, al-Ḥasan al-Wajnā', Muḥammad b. Ḥumām, Ismā'īl b. Ishaq al-Nawbakhtī, Ahmad b. Matīl, Muḥammad al-Aswad, and al-Maddīnī. Other names appeared among the lists of the other agents in Baghdad, al-Shalmaghānī and Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nawbakhtī. The latter was a narrator of traditions and the husband of Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of the second saṭīr, and Ibn Rūh employed him as his personal secretary, while al-Shalmaghānī was appointed an agent by Ibn Rūh after he had become the saṭīr.¹

Ibn Rūh directed, through his ten agents in Baghdad, the activities of Imamite agents and their underground political cells in the other provinces. He sent his first letter of instructions to the agent of al-Ahwāz, Muḥammad b. Nafīs, on 5th Shawwāl 305/23rd November 917, in which he confirmed the latter in his office.² He appointed his agent al-Shalmaghānī to supervise the underground Imamite cells among the people of Banū Ristām in Baghdad³, and also made him the mediator between him and the agents of Kufa, Abū Ja'far al-Zajawzī and Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Zurārī.⁴ Al-Shalmaghānī continued his supervision of the agents of Kufa and Baghdad until the year 312/923 when Ibn Rūh discharged him from his office and

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2. Iqbal, op. cit., 216.
4. T. al-Ghayba, 197-8, 212.
excommunicated him after he had preached in favour of the incarnation of God in human form.¹

According to al-Ṭūsī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥasan al-Wajnāʾ, one of the ten agents in Baghdad, practised his activities in Niṣībin and Mosul, where he had met in 307/919 a certain individual called Muḥammad b. al-Fadl al-Mawsili who denied that Ibn Rūḥ was the saffīr of the twelfth Imam. However, al-Ḥasan al-Wajnāʾ brought him to Baghdad and, al-Ṭūsī relates, showed him miracles in his correspondence with Ibn Rūḥ, which prompted him to recognize Ibn Rūḥ as the rightful saffīr.²

In fact this report reveals that al-Ḥasan al-Wajnāʾ was appointed by the third saffīr to direct the Imamites' activities in the province of al-Jazīra, whereas in Wāsit al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Qaṭāf al-Ṣaydalānī, the wakīl al-waqf during the time of the second saffīr, and Ibn Matīl who had worked as the connecting link between al-Ṣaydalānī and the second saffīr³, continued their activities during the time of Ibn Rūḥ, the third saffīr.⁴

As has already been noted some reports reveal that because of the persecution which had been carried out by the caliphs al-Mu’taḍid (279-89/892-902) and al-Muktafi (289-295/902-908) in order to arrest the Imam, the latter changed his place of residence from Sāmarrā to the Hijaz. This situation naturally led to difficulties as regards

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1. al-Najāšī, 293-4; Buzurg, Nawābigh al-Ruwāt, 289.
2. T. al-Ghayba, 205-6; Buzurg, Nawābigh al-Ruwāt, 96.
the methods of communication between the Imam and his agents. Furthermore the information concerning the relations between the third safīr and his agents in the other provinces are rare and obscure. However, there is evidence that the Imam continued to practise his activities from Mecca. Al-Ťūsī relates that a certain Yaʿqūb b. Yūsuf al-Ghassānī had seen a group of men from different provinces came to the house where the Imam lived and corresponded with them through an old serving woman. Some of those men were from Baghdad. Al-Šadūq reports that the agent al-Ḥasan al-Wajnā had met the Imam at the same house in 314/926, which indicates that the residence of the Imam was in the Hijaz during the time of the third safīr. But there is not any available reference to the names of the agents in Mecca and Medina, which perhaps continued in the hands of the Ṫālibiyīn, particularly Āl ‘Arīḍī.

The Imam also had agents in Egypt who recognized the safāra of Ibn Rūh. Al-Qāsim b. al-ʿAlā, according to al-Ťūsī, was still the agent in Azerbaijan directing the Imamite activities through two assistants, that is Abū Ḥāmid Umran b. al-Mufallis and Abū ʿAlī b. Jaḥdar, and he also used to look after the estates (al-diyyā) which the eleventh Imam, al-ʿAskari, had endowed to his son the twelfth Imam. The correspondence of al-Qāsim b. al-ʿAlā

3. T. al-Ghayba, 255.
with Ibn Rūḥ occurred through a messenger, who used to meet him in Azerbayjan. After the death of the latter, his son al-Ḥasan was promoted to the office by the order of the Imam himself.¹

As regards Iran, Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asadī al-Rāzī, the agent of Rayy, had been instructed by the second safīr to supervise the activities of the agents of the other Iranian provinces. He continued these activities during the time of the third safīr, Ibn Rūḥ, but after the death of al-Rāzī in 312/924², the method of communication between the agents in Iran and Ibn Rūḥ changed from indirect correspondence via al-Rāzī to direct contact between Ibn Rūḥ, the safīr, and his agents. Al-Ṣadūq reports several narratives to support this point. For example, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābawayh, the leader of the Imamites in Qumm, contacted the third safīr via the agent in Baghdad, al-Aswād.³ Another agent from Balkh, Muhammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣayrafi did likewise. He collected the tax dues (gold and silver) from the Imamites of Balkh and handed them over to Ibn Rūḥ in Baghdad and continued his direct contact even during the time of the fourth safīr, al-Sammarī.⁴ Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Qummī had

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¹ T. al-Ghayba, 202-5. According to Buzurg, al-Qāsim died in 304/916, whereas al-Tūsī refers to his activities during the time of the third safīr (305-26/917-37), so his death must have occurred after 304/916; T. al-Ghayba, 202.
² al-Najjashī, 289.
³ Kamāl, 502.
⁴ Ibid., 516-7.
received ten gold ingots from Ibn Jāwshīr, who asked him to hand them over to Ibn Rūḥ, so he did so.¹

These reports reveal two points. Firstly, the position of Ibn Rūḥ as the saffīr of the twelfth Imam became well-known amongst the Imamites in contrast to the first and the second saffīrs, whose office had been kept secret. For this reason some ordinary Imamites ignored the agents of their areas and were encouraged to contact the third saffīr directly, and, with the passing of time, such a trend perhaps caused the decline of the role of the agents as can be noted in the methods of communication between the third saffīr and the agents of the Iranian cities.

Secondly, the activities of the agents at this stage were mainly concentrated on circulating Imamite law and collecting the khums from the followers of the Imam, without involving themselves openly in political or revolutionary matters.

Ibn Rūḥ was highly esteemed by the 'Abbāsid court during the time of the caliph al-Muqtadir (295-320/907-932), and this can be related to the influence of Ibn Rūḥ's family, Banū Nawbakht, in the 'Abbāsid administration, which had begun during the time of the caliph al-Mansūr (d. 158/774) and extended until the time of al-Muqtadir. Ibn Rūḥ himself participated in the 'Abbāsid administration and, according to al-Jahshayārī, was at one point in charge of the personal domain of the caliph (Diwān Diya' al-Khāṣṣa).²

². al-Jahshayārī, al-Wuzara', 300.
Therefore we find some agents such as Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī esteeming Ibn Rūḥ, because of the economic and political influence of his family.\(^1\) 'Abbās Iqābāl illustrates this influence by reporting that, during the time of the vizier Hāmid b. al-'Abbās (306-311/918-923), the house of Ibn Rūḥ became the place for the meetings of the administrators, nobles, and deposed viziers, especially Banū Furāt.\(^2\) It is most likely that Ibn Rūḥ exercised his influence upon the Shi‘ite administrators, encouraging them to support the Imamites and to pave the way for them to penetrate the 'Abbāsid administration and there are some references to indicate that these instructions were put in action by 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Furāt. The latter, according to Ibn Khallikān, used to support 5,000 people financially.\(^3\)

When he was a vizier he appointed the agent Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī as governor of the Mubārik district of Wāsit, and also Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Bazawfari as governor of the district of al-Ṣūlḥ and al-Muzāra‘āt in Wāsit.\(^4\)

Simultaneously Muḥsin b. al-Furāt appointed the agent, al-Shalmaghānī in Baghdad as a deputy to certain governors in other districts.\(^5\)

This participation in the administration enabled the agents to study the economic and political situation of

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1. T. al-Ghayba, 199.
2. Iqābāl, op. cit., 217.
5. Ibn Miskawayh, op. cit., I, 123.
the government and facilitated communications through their administrative positions.

Despite the high influence of Ibn Rūḥ, it seems that the militant activities of other Shī’ites, particularly the Qarāmīţa, put him in a critical situation and were used by his rivals to cause his arrest. In 311/923 a caravan of Baghdadi pilgrims, including some relatives of the caliph al-Muqtadīr, had been attacked and captured by the Qarāmīţa. So the people of Baghdad were very upset about this and as the Qarāmīţa were also Shī’ites, this gave the military enemies of the Shī’ites, like Naṣr al-Ḥājib the chamberlain, an excellent weapon against the vizier Ibn al-Furāt. Thus, Naṣr claimed that, because Ibn al-Furāt was Shī’ite, he had encouraged the Qarāmīţa to attack the pilgrims. Moreover, the masses were provoked to shout in public that Ibn al-Furāt and his son Muḥsin were al-Qarmaṭī al-Kabīr wa-l-Qarmaṭī al-Ṣaghīr.

For this reason, according to Ibn Miskawayh, Ibn al-Furāt and his son were discharged and then murdered in 312/924.1 Al-Tūsī reports that Ibn Rūḥ was arrested in 312/924, but does not mention any reason for his imprisonment, while al-Dhahabī claims that the inflammatory propaganda against the Qarāmīţa actually caused the arrest of Ibn Rūḥ, who was accused of corresponding with the Qarāmīţa in an effort to besiege Baghdad.2 In fact this accusation cannot be accepted, mainly because the Imamites had severely attacked

the doctrine of the Qārāmīṭa. Ibn Miskawayh, furthermore, records a document revealing the independence of the Imamite organization headed by Ibn Rūḥ from the underground activities of the Qārāmīṭa. He mentions that 'Alī b. Ḥaḍīr, the vizier, had arrested a Qarmatian missionary in 315/927 who confessed, saying:

I am the comrade of Abū Ṭāhir al-Qarmatī, and I have accepted his comradeship when I realized that he was right and you and your comrade [the caliph] and those who follow you are liars and infidels. God cannot leave His earth without proof [i.e. Ḥujja] and a just Imam and our Imam is al-Mahdī, whose lineage is attributed to Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far al-Sādiq. We are not like the Rāfiḍa [the Imamites], the fatuous, who call the people to the Imamate of one who is hidden and awaited.¹

On the other hand, according to ‘Arīb, Ibn Rūḥ had been arrested because of his failure to hand over to the government of the day the money for which it had been asking.² This reveals that some officials, perhaps, attributed falsely to Ibn Rūḥ that he had been corresponding with the Qārāmīṭa in an effort to besiege Baghdad, in order

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². ‘Arīb, op. cit., 141.
to facilitate his arrest. However Ibn Rūḥ spent five years in jail until the caliph, al-Muqtadīr, released him in 317/929.  

Ibn Rūḥ recovered his previous respect and reputation and began his direct supervision over the Imamite activities, as well as receiving the money from the followers. Fortunately many of his relatives, such as Iṣḥāq b. Ismā‘īl (d. 322/933), ‘Alī b. al-‘Abbās (d. 324/935) and al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. al-‘Abbās, had managed to maintain high offices in the ‘Abbāsid administration, and therefore, the influence of Ibn Rūḥ increased, and many influential officials and deposed viziers like ‘Alī b. Muqla sought his acquaintance in order to pave the way for them in the ‘Abbāsid administration. For example, the vizier, Ibn Muqla, had spent 20,000 dinars on estates and endowed them as awqāf for the Ţālibiyīn in 319/931. But Ibn Muqla later lost his office and contacted Ibn Rūḥ in order to help him. So Ibn Rūḥ contacted his relative al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. al-‘Abbās al-Nawbakhtī, who was the secretary (kātib) of Amīr al-Umara‘, Ibn Rā‘iq, and asked him to support Ibn Muqla so that he could recover his office, which he did in 325/936.

However, in spite of the powerful influence of the third saffīr in official circles, he faced the serious

2. Iqbi‘l, op. cit., 220.
4. al-Ṣūlī, al-Awrāq, 87.
deviation of his main deputy, al-Shalmaghānī, who began
to make claims outside Islamic beliefs.

4. The third safīr and al-Shalmaghānī

Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Abī al-'Azāqir al-Shalmaghānī
was brought up in the village of Shalmaghān, which was
situated in the suburbs of Wāsiṭ and then became one of
the reciters (qurrā') of the Qur'ān in Wāsiṭ. Afterwards
he moved to Baghdad where he joined the 'Abbāsid admini-
stration, working as secretary (kātib) there. He was an
Imamite scholar (faqīh), who wrote eighteen works dealing
with Shi‘ite law and theology, among which is his book
al-Ghayba, and his writings were highly esteemed by the
Imamites before his deviation.

It has been noted that after the promotion of Ibn
Rūḥ to the sifāra, the latter appointed al-Shalmaghānī to
direct the activities of the Imamites in Baghdad,
especially those of Banū Bīstām, along with the activities
of the agents of Kufa, al-Zajawzī and al-Zurārī.

1. Ibn al-Athīr, al-Lubāb, II, 27; Yāqūt, Irshād al-Arib,
I, 296; Mu‘jam al-Buldān, V, 288.
2. al-Najāshī, 293-4; T. al-Fihrist, 305-6; T. al-Ghayba,
158, 221, 267. It seems that the available work
called Fiqh al-Ridā is in fact Kitāb al-Taklīf of
al-Shalmaghānī because it has two traditions concerning
the witness (al-shahāda) and the definition of the
measure called kurr which al-Shalmaghānī gave in
contrast to the other Imamites.
3. T. al-Ghayba, 212, 263.
According to several anecdotes his main task was to fulfil the needs of the Imamites, and to answer their enquiries as regards legal matters (fiqh), rather than to direct the underground Imamite cells, which indicates that he was an Imamite scholar (faqīh) and not an agent. But al-Ṭūsī reports a narration on the authority of the agent of Kufa, al-Zurārī, which reveals that al-Shalmaghānī was in fact an agent.

A careful study of the preaching of al-Shalmaghānī discloses that his doctrine was a continuation of the extremist trend (Ghulāt), and especially that of Muhammad b. Nuṣayr al-Numayrī, which had become deeply rooted during the time of the tenth and the eleventh Imams (220-260/835-874). In other words al-Shalmaghānī was the new leader of this movement.

He perhaps like the early Ismāʿīlīs had lost hope of gaining power in the near future by following the careful instruction of the twelfth Imam, whose aim was first to gradually persuade the Muslims that he was the rightful successor to the Prophet to rule the whole Islamic world and only then to change radically the affairs of society. Al-Shalmaghānī wanted to avoid the twelfth Imam's instructions, which had become an obstacle in the way of his impatient political ambitions, so according to Ibn Hawqal, al-Shalmaghānī paid allegiance to the Ismāʿīlī Mahdī. Ibn

1. T. al-Ghayba, 197-8, 267.
2. Ibid., 196, 212.
3. Ibn Hawqal, op. cit., 211.
Hawqal is, however, the only narrator of this occurrence, and neither gives the date of al-Shalmaghānī’s deviation, nor the reason behind his later abandonment of his Ismā‘Ilī allegiance, whose state had already been established in North Africa. It is most likely that he turned away from the Ismā‘Ilīs to the underground movement of the Ghulūl, because he found in their belief in the localization of God (ḥulūl) in human form the best means to put his political and economic ambitions into action.

According to al-Shalmaghānī’s belief, God, throughout the course of history, had been localised and appeared in human form. In other words, God was localised first in the body of Adam and thereafter transmigrated into the bodies of the prophets, until the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, then he transmigrated to the bodies of the Imams until the time of the eleventh Imam, al-‘Askarī, and afterwards God appeared in the body of al-Shalmaghānī. Simultaneously God had created his foe Iblīs, who was also localised and transmigrated throughout the course of history in a series of wicked human forms. In so doing, God, according to al-Shalmaghānī, could prove His existence and His merit.¹

In fact al-Shalmaghānī did not leave the Imamite organization after his deviation nor did he immediately announce the personal appearance (ḥulūl) of God in his body. It seems from several remarks that he used his office as a deputy to the saffir, Ibn Rūḥ, gradually to

train the agents, who were below him to accept his apostasy. The agent Muḥammad b. Humām reports that he had heard al-Shalmaghānī saying, "The truth [God] is one, but His forms are several. One day He takes on a white form, another day a red one, while on another He adopts a blue form." Ibn Humām reports, "This was the first statement which caused me to reject al-Shalmaghānī, because this was the doctrine of the people of the localization of God [al-Ḥulūliyya]."¹ According to another report al-Shalmaghānī managed to persuade some agents together with their families, and especially those of Banū Bīstām, to accept the doctrine of localization of God and the transmigration of souls. Afterwards he divulged to them that the soul of the Prophet had transmigrated into the body of the second safīr Abū Jaʿfar, while the soul of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib had transmigrated into the body of the third safīr Ibn Rūḥ, while the soul of Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter, had transmigrated into the body of Umm Kulthūm, the second safīr’s daughter. At the same time al-Shalmaghānī told the sub-agents not to divulge this secret, because it was the true faith.²

However, it appears that Ibn Rūḥ discovered the deviation of al-Shalmaghānī through a female missionary, Umm Kulthūm, who used to supervise the Imamite activities among the females of Banū Bīstām. He therefore ordered her to stop her relations and her secret meetings with

¹ Bihār, II, 374; Ḥāshim al-Ḥasanī, op. cit., II, 575.
them, because, according to Ibn Rūḥ, al-Shalmaghānī had impressed his deviation so deeply on their hearts that they would even accept the claim that God Himself and become localized (halla) in his body after which he would follow in al-Hallāj's footsteps and claim that he himself was God.¹

The precise date of this incident is unknown. However, according to Ibn al-Athīr the deviation of al-Shalmaghānī began during the early time of the vizierate of Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, between the years 306-311/918-923², which is consistent with al-Ṭūsī's report, which indicates that the deviation of al-Shalmaghānī must have occurred before 312/924.³

After the discovery of al-Shalmaghānī's mistaken ideas, Ibn Rūḥ discharged him from his office as his deputy by causing knowledge of his apostasy to become wide spread, first among the people of Banū Nawbakht and then among others.⁴ Afterwards he ordered the agents to break their relations with him. It seems that the agent of Kufa, Muḥammad b. Ahmad al-Zawjāzī followed this

¹. Such a claim is obviously contradictory to the belief of both the Shi'a and the Sunna alike. For details of God's essential nature according to the Imamites, see al-Hillī, al-Ḥasan b. Yūṣuf, Anwār al-Malakūt fī Sharḥ al-Yaqūt (Tehran, 1338), 77-85, and his al-Bāb al-Hādī 'Ashar, A Treatise on the principles of Shi'ite theology, trans. from Arabic by W. Miller (London, 1958), 15-52.


³. T. al-Ghayba, 268.

⁴. Ibid., 265.
order, because al-Tusi reports on his authority a narration indicating that he considered an extremist anyone possessing the book of al-Taklif by al-Shalmaghani.  

Whereas the agents of Banu Bisham in Baghdad refused the order of Ibn Ruh and continued to receive instructions from al-Shalmaghani. According to al-Tusi, Ibn Ruh, for this reason disclosed to all the Imamites the case of al-Shalmaghani, and he excommunicated him along with those who paid allegiance to him, accepted his ideas or merely paid attention to him.

The statement of Ibn Ruh reveals that a considerable body of the agents in Baghdad and the ordinary Imamites had been influenced by al-Shalmaghani. The latter after his excommunication began propagating that he and not Ibn Ruh was the rightful representative (safir) of the twelfth Imam. Through this claim of his and his further belief in the localization of God (hulul) in the bodies of the prophets and the Imams in succession, al-Shalmaghani wished to monopolize the economic and political positions of the organization. Hence, later he advanced the claim that God was present in his body, and that Iblis was localized in the human form of the twelfth Imam, since the latter was known as al-Qa'im. Thus al-Shalmaghani was in fact claiming that al-Qa'im (here understood as

2. Ibid., 264. 
3. al-Kamil, VIII, 218. 
"the one standing") was Iblîs, who had refused to prostrate himself before Adam when other angels had done so.\(^1\) He also put forward a claim that 'Ali b. Abî Ṭâlib was God, and that he had sent Muḥammad to be his Prophet, but the latter had betrayed him. Therefore 'Ali gave Muḥammad a period of truce lasting about 350 years, at the end of which Islamic law would be changed. This law would have a new interpretation, e.g. Paradise would be the acceptance of al-Shalmaghānî’s claim and allegiance to him, while Hell would be the rejection of his doctrine. Moreover, he aimed at eliminating the main claimants to the caliphate, particularly the ‘Alîds and the ‘Abbâsîds, and considered himself the rightful claimant to all religious and political authority.\(^2\)

Indeed the very political ambitions of al-Shalmaghānî are obvious in his subtle plan to interpret the Qur’ānic verses concerning Hell and Paradise in the hereafter by a materialistic approach to serve his own ambitions. His ambitions are especially apparent with reference to two points. Firstly, he fixed a date for the change of the Islamic sharī‘a, to the year 350/967. By this "prophecy" he was attempting to mobilise people to support him in his preparation for the "coming age". Secondly he concentrated his propaganda among the high officials in the ‘Abbâsîd army and administration and gained a considerable number of followers, like Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdūs, Ibrâhîm b.

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1. \(\text{T. al-Ghayba, } 266.\)
2. Yāqūt, \(\text{Irshād al-`Arīb, I, } 302-3; \text{al-Shibl, op. cit., } 203.\)
Abī 'Awn, the author of the book al-Tashbihāt, Ibn Shāhīb al-Zayyāt, Abū Ja'far b. Biṣṭām and Abū 'Alī b. Biṣṭām, all of whom were secretaries (kuttāb) of the state.¹

Al-Muḥsin b. al-Furāṭ, the son of the vizier Ibn al-Furāṭ, joined his side and enabled his followers to penetrate the 'Abbāsid administrative circles in 312/924.² Moreover, al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim b. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Wahb, who held the vizierate between the years 319–20/931–2, was one of the partisans of al-Shalmaghānī.³

It has already been noted here that the third safīr Ibn Rūḥ was imprisoned in 312/924. In fact al-Shalmaghānī seized this opportunity to expand his activities among the Imamites, who had not yet received an answer from the Imam himself concerning the claims of al-Shalmaghānī. Therefore the Imam sent via Ibn Rūḥ this pronouncement concerning his attitude towards the claims of al-Shalmaghānī:

... Indeed Muḥammad b. 'Alī, known as al-Shalmaghānī, who is one of those upon whom God has hastened His judgement and granted no respite, has deviated from Islam and separated himself from it, apostatizing as regards the religion of God, making claims which indicate the denial of God, the Most Glorious and High,

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1. al-Dhahabī, al-'Ibar, II, 191.
2. Ibn Miskawayh, op. cit., I, 123.
fabricating lies and falsehoods, and pronouncing untruths and great transgressions. [Indeed] those who associate another with God err far [from the truth] and clearly suffer great loss.

For indeed we declare our innocence to God, may He be exalted, and to His messenger and his family, may the blessings of God, His peace, His mercy and His benediction be upon them according to His benevolence; while we curse him [i.e. al-Shalmaghānī], may the curses of God be showered successively [upon him] externally and internally, secretly and publicly, and at every time and in every circumstance. And [may the curse of God be] upon those who agree with him and follow him, and also upon those who, having heard our announcement, continue to pay allegiance to him.

So inform them that we shall guard and take precautions against him, as was the case with those who preceded him and held similar views, like al-Shari‘ī, al-Numayrī, al-Hilālī, al-Bilālī and so forth. For the traditions of God are fitting for us, in Whom we place our trust, and from Whom we seek assistance, Who is sufficient for us in all our affairs, and the best of Guardians. ¹

¹ al-Ṣadr, op. cit., 517-8.
According to al-Ṭūsī the agent Muḥammad b. Humām received the pronouncement of the Imam from Ibn Rūḥ while he was in prison, and spread it personally among all the agents in Baghdad and sent it to the agents in the other cities until it became well-known among the ordinary Imamites.¹

According to Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Rūḥ disclosed the claim of al-Shalmaghānī even to the ‘Abbāsids. Therefore, the vizier al-Khāqānī tried to arrest him in 313/925², an attempt which brought about the imprisonment of many people who had inclined towards al-Shalmaghānī.³ However the latter disappeared and escaped to Mosul where he took refuge from Nāṣir al-Dawla al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṣamdān, concealing himself in a village called Maʿalṭāyā in the vicinity of Mosul. However, he did not break off communication with his followers in Baghdad. According to al-Najāshī, al-Shalmaghānī had narrated his books to a certain Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shaybānī during his occultation in Maʿalṭāyā. The latter was an Imamite muḥaddith who lived in the Nawbakhtīyya district of Baghdad⁴, but he later turned away from Shiʿism.⁵

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¹ T. al-Ghayba, 269.
² al-Kāmil, VIII, 217.
³ Yāqūt, Irshād al-ʿArlīb, I, 299.
⁴ al-Najāshī, 289, 294.
⁵ It seems from the career of al-Shaybānī that he was an Imamite muḥaddith, but after the deviation of al-Shalmaghānī he inclined to follow him, ignoring the pronouncement of the twelfth Imam against al-Shalmaghānī; T. al-Fihrist, 299; al-Najāshī, 309.
Al-Shalmaghānī secretly returned to Baghdad in 316/928\(^1\) in order to be in direct contact with his followers, whose activities had spread widely among the officials of the 'Abbāsid administration, a development which can possibly be regarded as a step toward obtaining power. Al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim b. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Wahb, the partisan of al-Shalmaghānī, was promoted to the vizierate in 319/931 and his name was minted on the coin beside the name of the caliph al-Muqtadir.\(^2\) As a vizier Ibn Wahb enabled his partisans to take up high positions but a year later he was discharged. Later the new caliph al-Qāhir (320-322/932-34) exiled him to al-Riqqāh in Syria because of his allegiance to al-Shalmaghānī, and arrested his comrades, especially the Banū Bistām and seized their property.\(^3\) This campaign of investigation continued until the authorities arrested al-Shalmaghānī himself in 322/934, who along with a few of the leading personalities of his movement, like Ibn Abī ‘Awān, were tortured and their corpses were burnt at the police headquarters (Dār al-Shurṭā) on the western side of Baghdad.\(^4\)

However, the influence and the authority increased among the ‘Abbāsid authorities after the persecution of al-Shalmaghānī, who became the common enemy to both Ibn

\(^1\) al-Ṣadr, op. cit., I, 527; Ḥāshim al-Ḥasanī, op. cit., II, 575.
\(^3\) Ibid., I, 267.
\(^4\) al-Masʿūdī, al-Tanbīḥ, 343; Yāqūt, Irshād al-Ārīb, I, 299-304.
Rūḥ and the ‘Abbāsids. Thus we find Ibn Rūḥ has recovered his high influence and become close to the caliph al-Rāḍī (322-29/934-40). Moreover it appears that the cooperation of Ibn Rūḥ with the government of the day against al-Shalmagḥānī led the caliph al-Rāḍī to think the activities of al-Nawbakhtī with the Imamites had no longer any connection with the twelfth Imam and therefore it might cease in the near future. Al-Ṣūlī reports:

And al-Rāḍī used sometimes to mention that the Imamites used to hand the khums [al-amwāl] over to him, but we refuted this [accusation], and claimed that it was a lie, so he said to us, "What is wrong with that? By God, I wish that there were a thousand people like him, to whom the Imamites would bring their possessions, so that God might impoverish them, for I do not mind if they [Ibn Rūḥ and others] become rich through receiving their possessions [i.e. those of the Imamites]."

1. Al-Ṣūlī gives an example of Ibn Rūḥ's influence. The deposed vizier 'Alī b. Muqla had contacted Ibn Rūḥ in order to help him to recover his office. Ibn Rūḥ explained his case to his relative al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Nawbakhtī, the vizier of Ibn Rā’iq. Hence Ibn Muqla recovered his domains and his previous position; al-Ṣūlī, op. cit., 87.

2. al-Ṣūlī, op. cit., 104.
Ibn Rūḥ died on 18th of Sha‘bān 326/20 June 938, and was buried in al-Nawbakhtīyya district in the western side of Baghdad, and was succeeded by Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sammārī.

1. T. al-Ghayba, 252.
2. The grave of Ibn Rūḥ at the present time is situated in the eastern side of Baghdad, whereas al-Ṭūsī mentions that this grave was in the Nawbakhtīyya district at the avenue which leads to Qanṭarat al-Shawk, which was located in the western side of Baghdad; Yāqūt, Mu‘jam al-Buldān, IV, 191; al-ʿAmīd, op. cit., 70.
CHAPTER VII

THE FOURTH SAFÎR AND THE COMPLETE OCCULTATION OF THE TWELFTH IMAM

1. The career of the fourth safîr (326-329/937-941)

Al-Tūsī reports that Ibn Rūḥ designated Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sammarī to be his successor, and according to al-Ṭabarānī, this designation was by the stipulation and by the order of the twelfth Imam himself.

His surname was attributed to a river called al-Sammar or al-Saymar, situated in one of the districts of Basra, where the relatives of al-Sammarī used to live. According to al-Masʿūdī many members of this family, like al-Ḥasan and Muḥammad, the sons of Ismāʿīl b. Ṣāliḥ and ‘Alī b. Ziyād, had large estates in Basra, and devoted half of the income to the eleventh Imam, who used to receive it every year, and have correspondence with them. Moreover, some

1. T. al-Ghayba, 256.
3. Buzurg, Nawābīgh al-Ruwāt, 200. However, Ṣaymara was a name of a town in the region of al-Jabal in Iran (Ibn Hawqal, op. cit., 158, 259), but it seems that the surname of the fourth safîr is derived from the river of al-Sammar in Basra, because most of his relatives lived there; Iḥbāṭ, 246-7; al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shafiʿīyya, III, 339.
of al-Sammarī's relatives were agents of the twelfth Imam, such as 'Alī b. Muhammad b. Ziyād, who had been an agent to the tenth and eleventh Imams, and had written a book called al-Awsīyyā to confirm the Imamate of the twelfth Imam.¹ He was amongst the eminent and reliable Imamites, and the brother-in-law of the vizier Ja‘far b. Muḥammad, a relationship which enabled him to achieve an important office in the ‘Abbāsid administration.² He also was an agent to the twelfth Imam, who according to al-Kulaynī, divulged to him, in a letter, that his death would occur in 280/893, in which his death actually occurred.³

This indicates that the fourth saffīr, al-Sammarī, came from a family whose members were well-known for their Shi‘ite inclination, and their service to the organization. Such a background was, in fact, necessary to enable al-Sammarī to reach the office of the sifāra, with little opposition, especially if one takes into consideration the prolongation of the occultation of the twelfth Imam, which shook the faith of a considerable body of the Imamites.

However, the sifāra of al-Sammarī was too short-lived to have caused any remarkable changes in the relations between him and the other agents. Although nothing is known about the details of his activities, it is clear, from a report mentioned by al-Ṣadūq, that the agents

¹  Bihar, LI, 23.
²  Ithbāt, 240.
³  al-Kāfī, I, 524.
recognized him as the rightful safîr and handed the khums over to him.¹

Al-Sammarî died on 15th of Sha‘bān 329/15th May 941 and was buried in al-Khaljanî street in the quarter of al-Muḥawwal², which was, according to Yāqūt, situated to the north of the village of Burāthā, on the western side of Baghdad.³

A week before the death of al-Sammarî a pronouncement (Tawqī') was issued by the twelfth Imam, which was reported as follows:

May God give good rewards to your brethern concerning you [i.e. on your death], for you shall indeed die after six days. So prepare your affairs, and do not appoint anyone to take your place after your death. For the second [or complete] occultation has now occurred, and there can be no appearance until God gives His permission, after a long time, the hardening of the hearts, and the filling of the world with injustice. And one shall come to my partisans [shi'a] claiming that he had seen me; but beware of anyone claiming to have seen me before the rise of

¹. Kamāl, 517.
². T. al-Ghayba, 257-8; Bihār, LI, 362.
³. Yāqūt, Mu'jam al-Buldān, I, 532.
al-Sufyānī and the outcry from the sky, for he shall be a slanderous liar.¹

Six days after the announcement of this document the principal agents congregated around the fourth safīr while he was on his death-bed, and asked him who was to take charge of his office. Al-Sammārī replied, "To God is the matter which He accomplishes" (Li-llāh amr huwa bālighuh).² This was the last statement heard from al-Sammārī, the fourth safīr, by which the direct communication between the successive safīrs and the twelfth Imam was brought to an end, which meant the end of the short occultation and the beginning of the complete occultation or, according to the later sources, the major occultation, which will be the main question of the next sections.

2. An analysis of the Tawqī' of the fourth safīr

The pronouncement of the twelfth Imam illustrates four points:

Firstly, it reveals that the fourth safīr, al-Sammārī, would die six days after the issue of the Tawqī'. According to the Imamite reports, al-Sammārī died on the day which had been mentioned in the Tawqī', and it is worth pointing out that the twelfth Imam is also said to have predicted

2. Kamāl, 516.
the times of the deaths of the three previous safīrs.\textsuperscript{1} For the Imamites this prediction was strong proof that the Tawqī\textsuperscript{'}, had been issued by the Imam himself.

Secondly, the Imam ordered the fourth safīr not to designate anyone to succeed him and or to be in charge of his office, "wa-lā tūṣī ʾilā aḥad fa-yaqūm maqāmak baʿd waftātik".\textsuperscript{2} This clearly indicated the end of the direct communication between the Imam, his safīrs and agents, which used to take place during the time of the short occultation. In other words it was an order that the underground activities of the Imamite organization, the Wikāla, should be stopped. For this reason, the Imam, afterwards, in the Tawqī\textsuperscript{'}, denied having any personal safīr during this second occultation before his return by stating that:

\begin{quote}
And one shall come to my partisans [ṣhīʿa] claiming that he has seen me; but beware of anyone claiming to have seen me before the rise of al-Sufyānī and the outcry from the sky, for he shall be a slanderous liar.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

The highly developed activities of the organization, which continued for about 69 years, between the years 260-329/874-941, had been stopped by the statement of the

\textsuperscript{1} T. al-Ghayba, 237-8.
\textsuperscript{2} Kamāl, 516.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.
fourth safîr as regards his successor when he stated on his death-bed that God would do what he wished in this matter, "Li-llâh amr huwa bâlighuh".¹

Thirdly, the Tawqî' announced the beginning of the second, or the complete occultation (Fa-qad waqa'at al-Ghayba al-Thâniya aw al-Tâmâ)², which al-Nu'mânî describes as the second occultation and the period of confusion, al-Hayra.³ Al-Mu'îd calls it a long occultation (al-Ghayba al-Tulâ), whereas the later Imamites called it the major occultation (al-Ghayba al-Kubra).⁴

Fourthly, there can be no appearance of the Imam until God gives him His permission, and it will take place when the moment of his return becomes far from the eyes of the people, because of the hardening of their hearts and the filling of the world with tyranny.⁵

Fifthly, the Tawqî' indicates that the appearance of the Imam will be preceded by two inevitable signs, that is the rise of al-Sufyânî, who according to early traditions will rise and dominate Syria, and the outcry in the sky in the name of the Imam himself.

Rajkowski states after quoting the Tawqî' that

... this document is a clear indication that the leaders of al-Shî'a al-Qâṭ'iyya

1. Kamâl, 516.
2. Ibid.
3. N. al-Ghayba, 92.
4. al-Irshâd, 399; Bihâr, LIII, complete work.
5. Kamâl, 516.
had lost hope in the speedy arrival of al-Mahdī and thought that the moment of al-Zuhūr might still be very distant. So that it was no longer possible to keep up the pretences of direct communication between the successive Ambassador and the Sāhib al-Zamān. It was better to leave the Shi'ite without an official mediator, and rely only on al-Mahdī's invisible protection and inspiration.¹

The significance of Rajkowski's statement is, perhaps, that the eleventh Imam, al-'Askarl, had died heirless and the four safīrs invented the idea of the occultation (al-Ghayba) by claiming to have direct communication with al-'Askarl's successor. However, it appears that Rajkowski's theory inspired Jihād al-Ḥasanī to hold similar views concerning the role of the four safīrs, as he says,

... by resorting to the claim of being agents for the concealed Twelfth Imam, the four Twelver agents were apparently able to put themselves forward in the position of the leadership though they were not from the line of descent of the Prophet.²

¹. Rajkowski, op. cit., 673-4.
². al-Ḥasanī, op. cit., 278.
In fact the hypotheses of Rajkowski and al-Hasanî are sound if there was neither clear proof that al-'Askârî had left a successor, nor that traditions were circulating in Imamite circles before 260/874 indicating that the series of the Imams would end with the twelfth Imam, who would be al-Qâ'im.† However, it has been demonstrated that it was highly probable that the eleventh Imam had showed his son to about forty of his adherents among whom were the first two agents, 'Uthmân b. Sa'id and Muhammad b. 'Uthmân.‡ Furthermore, the evidence has strongly suggested that the eleventh Imam had sent his son to Medina in 259/873, where he stayed during the time of the first safîr. On the other hand, the Imamite organization, the Wikâla, had been established during the time of the sixth Imam al-Sâdiq. Had it appeared suddenly after the death of al-'Askârî and without the spread of traditions predicting the Ghayba before 260/874, or the explicit appointment of 'Uthmân b. Sa'id and his son Muhammad (Abû Ja'far) by the eleventh Imam as the agents of his son the twelfth Imam, one could agree with the statement of Rajkowski which has already been mentioned, and with Montgomery Watt, who thinks that

... the Imamite theory of twelve Imams did not come into being of its own accord,

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1. For these traditions see al-'Aṣfârî, op. cit., f. 1-2.
as it were, following upon certain events known to all. The theory was an interpretation of selected events, and was deliberately created by politicians to further their own — perhaps very worthy — ends.¹

It is worth mentioning that the Imamites consider the Wilāya (the allegiance and obedience towards Ahl al-Bayt) as the fifth pillar of Islam, and according to them, the practice of all the other pillars (the prayer, zakāt, fasting, pilgrimage) are invalid without the recognition of the rights of the Imam.² Therefore, they report many traditions stressing the necessity of the existence of an Imam until the Day of Judgement, such as the well-known tradition attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalib, who says:

God, I know that the knowledge [al-‘Ilm] cannot disappear completely, its sources cannot cease, and You cannot leave Your earth without a proof [Hujja] of You for Your creation, either manifest and unobeyed or afraid and unknown [i.e. he is in a state of occultation]. So that Your proofs

1. Watt, The Majesty that was Islam, 170-1.
2. al-Kāfī, I, 183, 375; al-Tūsī, al-Amālī, I, 124. Al-Kulaynī devotes a complete section to the principle of the wilāya in which he records about 90 narrations containing an exegesis to Qur’ānic verses concerning the wilāya; al-Kāfī, I, 412-38.
[hujāj] would not be [sent] in vain, and
Your followers would not go astray after
You have guided them.¹

Al-Ṣaffār (d. 290/902) reports that al-Bāqir interpreted the Qur'ānic verse, "Indeed you are a Warner and for every people there will be a Guide" (al-Ra‘ad, XIII, 7), by saying that the Warner was the Prophet, peace be upon him, and in every time there will be one from amongst us who will guide others to what the Prophet had brought. Those guides were the Prophet of God, then the Guided ones (al-Hudāt); that is, 'Alī and the legatees (al-Awṣiyyāʾ) in succession.²

Al-Kashshāl also reports a tradition attributed to the eighth Imam, al-Riḍā, as having said, "The Imam cannot pass away unless he sees his successor, except for al-Qāʾīm."³

1. al-Kāfī, I, 335, 339. For a full account of these traditions, see al-Ṣaffār, Başā’ir al-Darajat, f. 23b; al-Muṭṭā, Awā’il al-Maqālāt, 8; al-Kāfī, I, 177-8, 184.
2. al-Ṣaffār, Başā’ir al-Darajat, f. 23b-24a.
3. Ikhtiyāar, 464-5. This tradition had been used after the death of al-‘Askāri by a group of his followers, i.e. the successors of the Faṭḥiyya group, in order to support their claim that al-Ḥasan al-‘Askārī was al-Qāʾīm, because they believed that the Imamate passed after al-Ṣādiq first to his son ‘Abd Allāh then to Mūsā. So according to them al-‘Askārī was the twelfth Imam and, because he died without leaving a publicly acknowledged son, was thus al-Qāʾīm; Q. Maqālāt, 106-7.
In fact these traditions depict the Imamite approach toward the necessity of the continuity of the principle of Imāma, so that any break or stopping in its continuity means a defeat to this principle itself, whereas the short occultation did not signify the non-existence of the twelfth Imam because he continued to carry out his activities via his four safīrs while he was in hiding until the year 329/941. Thus, regardless of the formulation of politicians, it is quite clear that the first occultation of the twelfth Imam occurred within a religious environment where this event had come to be expected.

As we have noted, the ‘Abbāsid authorities wanted to restrict the activities of the Imams, so they included them amongst their courtiers, and placed them under house arrest, so that they could no longer practice their activities with their followers. This policy of restriction had been forced upon the Imams from the time of al-Riḍā, and had been greatly increased during the Imamate of the eleventh Imam, al-‘Askarī. This persecution forced the Imams to develop a policy which would save their sons from similar situations. So it was decided that any son born to the Imam would be hidden from the eyes of the ‘Abbāsids so that he could carry out his activities with his adherents incognito. To this end they encouraged the transmission

1. This can be noted in the tradition attributed to the ninth Imam, al-Jawād, who said, "If my son, ‘Alī, died, a light from him will appear and when this light went off, another light will be concealed. I warn those who doubt what will happen." N. al-Ghayba, 99.
of traditions (ḥadīth) predicting an Imam who would be hidden from sight and would implement his policies in secret amongst his followers; and this would be the twelfth Imam. Such steps were taken so as to prepare the Imamites to accept the saffīrs as the Imam’s intermediaries.

In the light of this it is worth mentioning a few of the traditions which have been reported by al-‘Aṣfārī, who died in 250/863, that is ten years before the death of al-‘Askarī:

i) Al-‘Aṣfārī reports that al-Bāqir said to his companion Abū al-Muqḍām,

O Abū al-Muqḍām, what would you do if an occultation [sabṭa] occurred between the Haramayn [i.e. Mecca and Medina]

... My father used to say so, and say that God would do what He wills...

ii) The Prophet is reported as having said,

I and eleven of my descendants and you, O ‘Alī, are the axis of the earth, are the pegs of its mountains... If my eleven descendants pass away, then chaos and disorder will occur among the people.
iii) The Prophet is reported as having said,

[There will be] from my descendants eleven leaders [who will] be noble and receive and understand [knowledge], the last of whom will be al-Qa‘im, who will fill the world with justice after it has been filled with tyranny.¹

These and other traditions were spread in both Imamite and Zaydite circles, and al-‘Asfari, who was from al-Zaydiyya al-Jarudiyya, was himself awaiting the rise of al-Mahdi in the near future, and used to carry his sword with him. He once said that he carried this sword so that he was always ready to fight with al-Mahdi.²

In fact for the Imamites these traditions, and others which predicted the occurrence of the Ghayba, were the main reason, according to al-Ṣadūq, for their acceptance of the question of the Ghayba and for stopping the series of the Imams at the twelfth Imam. For them, according to al-Ṣadūq, it is a matter of obedience to the orders of the Imams regarding this question.

¹ For all these traditions see al-‘Asfari, op. cit., f. 1-2 (Appendix B); Kamāl, 349.
² Mizān, II, 379-80.
3. The Imamite attitude towards the second occultation

As has already been noted, during the period of the short occultation (260-329/874-941) more than two generations of Imamites had been brought up under the careful supervision of the agents and with the teachings of the Imamite narrators (al-Ruwāt) in order that the new generation should accept the indirect communication with the hidden Imam, via his four safīrs. This process of arguments and instructions was based mainly on the traditions attributed to the previous Imams before the year 260/874. The traditions which were narrated by al-‘Asfārī were also used in this procedure. So at the time of the first safīr, the Imamites split into fifteen groups and held different views concerning the successor of al-‘Askārī, but during the time of the second safīr, the teaching and the underground activities of the latter met with success. His followers (al-Imāmiyya al-Qat‘iyya) carried out intensive propaganda to prove the existence of the twelfth Imam and to cause his occultation to become deep-rooted amongst the Imamites without specifying the date of his reappearance from his first occultation: wa-amma zuhūr al-farāj fa-innahū ilā Allāh wa-kadhab al-waqqātūn. Thus the teachings and doctrine of the followers of the second safīr dominated Imamite circles, whereas the other groups disappeared. Later we find the generation of Imamites during the time of the

1. al-Ṭabarsī, al-Ihtijāj, II, 283.
third and the fourth safīrs, more obedient to the safīrs, considering their statements as the statements of the twelfth Imam. This is especially so, if one takes into consideration the fact that all the pronouncements (Tawqī‘āt) which were issued to the four safīrs and were attributed to the twelfth Imam had been written in the same handwriting and in the same style. ¹ This in fact explains the consensus among the Imamites to be obedient to the last pronouncement of the fourth safīr, al-Sammarī, by which the first occultation of the twelfth Imam came to an end and the second or the complete occultation began.

There is evidence that when the last pronouncement of the twelfth Imam proclaimed the end of his direct communication with his fourth safīr, the agents ceased their underground activities with the Imamites and in particular refrained from collecting the khums, in other words the Imamite underground organization (al-Wikāla), which had been established during the time of al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), was dissolved by that pronouncement. Henceforth anyone claiming to be the safīr of the Imam after the death of al-Sammarī was considered as an unbeliever and deceiver by the Imamites. For this reason they cursed Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Umarī, well-known as Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the nephew of the second safīr, when he claimed that he was the safīr of the twelfth Imam. ²

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2. Rihār, LI, 377-78.
Al-Ṭūsī gives an example of how the agents refrained from collecting the khums; he says,

Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd al-Qummi came to Basra as the representative of his father and the group [i.e. the agents in Qumm]. The Imamites questioned him concerning the rumours about his being the deputy of the Imam. However, he denied this, stating: "I have no right in this matter." So they offered him money as a test, but he rejected it and said, "It is forbidden for me to take it, because I have no right in this matter [i.e. the deputyship of the Imam], and I never made such a claim."¹

Perhaps these two examples are a further evidence that the theory of the occultation of the twelfth Imam was not the creation of politicians to further their own ends. In fact there were some politicians such as al-Shalmaghānī and Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, whose followers held that they

¹. T. al-Ghayba, 270.
were the safīrs of the hidden Imam. However, the Imamites totally rejected their claim.1

The agents' decision to dissolve their activities led the Imamite narrators (al-Muḥaddithūn, al-Ruwāt) to the belief that, as no new safīr had been appointed, the period of trial and confusion, which they called the second occultation, had in fact begun. They based their conclusion primarily on traditions attributed to the previous Imams which indicated that al-Qā'īm had two forms of occultation before his rising, one of them being short and the other long. Al-Nu‘mānī was, perhaps, the first scholar to give this particular interpretation to existing traditions. After quoting nine traditions predicting the two forms of Ghaybas, which were attributed to al-Ṣadiq on the authority of seven of his disciples2, al-Nu‘mānī comments:

These traditions which mention that al-Qā'īm has two occultations are traditions whose authenticity has been proved. Praise be to

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1. It appears from incidents recorded by Ibn Taghrī Bardī that the adherents of al-Shalmaghānī continued their underground activities until the year 341/952, when the ‘Abbāsid discovered their cells. For a full account, see Nujūm, III, 307-8.

God, Who, by the occurrence of the occultation has authenticated the statements of the Imams.

As for the first occultation, it is that during which there were mediators [sufarā'] between the Imam and the people, mediators who had been appointed by the Imam, and who carried out their activities while living amongst the people . . . This is the short occultation, whose days have come to an end and whose period has passed away.

Whereas the second occultation is the one during which the sufarā' and the mediators have been removed for a purpose intended by God, and planned in the creation, i.e. throughout this period testing, examination, trial, sifting and purification fall to those who claimed [to be Imamites], just as it is stated in the Qur'ān: "On no account will Allāh leave the believers in the condition which you are in until He separates the evil from the good; nor is Allāh going to make you acquainted with the unseen" [Al Imrān, III, 179] . . . This explains our saying that the Imam has two occultations and we are living in the second one.1

1. N. al-Ghayba, 92.
Al-Nu‘mānī’s interpretation became the foundation for most interpretations of the two Ghaybas of the twelfth Imam, which have been put forward by the Imamite jurists beginning with al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) in his work Kamāl al-Dīn wa-Tamām al-Ni‘ma, al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī al-Qumī (d. 381/991) in his work Kifāyat al-Athar fi al-Nuṣūṣ ‘alā al-A‘imma al-Ithnā ‘Ashar and finally by al-Majlisi (d. 1111/1700) in his work Biḥār al-Anwār.

However, a contemporary scholar, Sachedina thinks:

It is plausible to maintain that the division of the Ghayba into short and long is the innovation of the Imamite jurists. In support of this division, traditions were either invented or interpreted to accommodate the situation as it appeared to them.¹

Sachedina’s hypothesis, however, cannot be accepted because the belief in two Ghaybas did not come into being after the death of the fourth saffīr in 329/941, nor was it invented by al-Nu‘mānī and by those scholars who followed his footsteps, such as al-Ṣadūq, al-Khazzāz, al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) and al-Tūsī (d. 460/1067). These scholars merely clarified the consistency between the two concealments of the twelfth Imam and the traditions predicting

¹ Sachedina, op. cit., 125.
the occurrence of the two concealments. In fact, from the historical viewpoint there are several remarks which reveal that the traditions speaking about two concealments already existed prior to the year 329/941 when the second occultation began and were used by the Wāqifa and the Imamites.

The Wāqifa who stopped at the seventh Imam Mūsā al-Kāzim (d. 183/799) contending that he was al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, had narrated these traditions. Among such Wāqifite narrators is Abū Muḥammad ‘Alī b. Āḥmad al-'Alawī, who wrote a book in support of his doctrine, called FI Nusrat al-Waqifa. He mentions a tradition attributed to al-Ṣadīq, who said,

The Ṣāhib al-Amr [i.e. al-Qā'im] has two occultations, one of which shall be longer than the other, until people say that he has died and others say that he has been killed. However, only a few his companions will remain in support of his Imamate, and no one knows his whereabouts and his affairs except he who is in charge of his affairs.

Regarding the Imamites, according to Sa'd al-Ash'arī (d. ca. 299/911) one group of them held that the eleventh

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1. T. al-Ghayba, 110.
2. al-'Alawī, FI Nusrat al-Waqifa, quoted in T. al-Ghayba, 44.
Imam had not died in 260/874, but had merely disappeared and would return and be recognized, only to disappear again before finally rising as al-Qā'im. According to al-Nawbakhtī (d. ca. 310/922) this group based its claim on the generally accepted narration which states that al-Qā'im will have two concealments. According to al-Nawbakhtī, this group based its claim on the generally accepted narration which states that al-Qā'im will have two concealments. 2 Āghā Buzurg reports that such traditions have been included by al-Hasan b. Maḥbūb al-Zarrād in his work Kitāb al-Mashyakha, 3 and by al-Faḍl b. Shādhān (d. 260/873) in his work Kitāb al-Ghayba, but these works are not extant. Fortunately, al-Kulaynī, who lived during the short occultation has included three of these traditions in his work al-Kāfī. According to one of these traditions, al-Ṣādiq said:

Al-Qā'im will have two concealments, one of them short and the other one long. In the first one only his intimate partisans will know his whereabouts, whereas in the second one only his close associates will know his whereabouts. 5

These traditions predicting the two concealments of the twelfth Imam which have been reported by al-Hasan b.

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1. Q. Maqālāt, 106.
2. N. Firaq, 97.
5. al-Kāfī, I, 340.
Maḥbūb, al-Faḍl b. Shādhān and al-Kulaynī were not the innovation of the Imamite narrators as is Sachedina's belief. On the contrary, these traditions were the main reason why such Imamite scholars as Ibn Qubba and al-Nuʿmānī put forward the claim that the twelfth Imam was al-Qāʾīm al-Mahdī by applying the traditions to the historical circumstances which accompanied the career of the twelfth Imam from 260/874 until the discontinuation of his direct communication with his followers after the death of his fourth saflīr in 329/941. Thus al-Nuʿmānī, after narrating such traditions, states,

With the bulk of traditions predicting the concealment, which have been transmitted through the centuries, if the concealment did not occur [i.e. if the twelfth Imam did not go into hiding] the very principle of the Imāma is invalid. However by its occurrence God the Exalted has proved the authenticity of the Imam's warning about the occultation, and has made valid this belief in it which they held generation after generation. In so doing, God obliged the Shiʿa to accept it.²

1. Kamāl, 112.
2. N. al-Ghayba, 6.
4. The attitude of the ordinary Imamites towards the second occultation

Despite the fact that the Imamite narrators like al-Nu’mānī accepted the second occultation of the twelfth Imam, and contented themselves with the traditions going back to before 260/874 which predicted its occurrence, the vast majority of the ordinary Imamites disagreed with their scholars. They argued if the Imam was born in 256/870 he was 73 years old by the end of the first occultation in 329/941, and this accords with the life span of a normal person. So according to them it was possible that he died since death is the natural end for a person living to such an age. Al-Nu’mānī describes the confusion among the Imamite populace as follows:

The majority of the Imamites ask regarding the successor of al-Hasan, "Where is he?", "How could this happen?", "For how long will he be concealed?" and "How much longer will he live since he is now about 73 years old?" Thus some of them believed that he was dead. Other groups denied his birth or even his existence, and mocked those who believed in him. Some merely found it difficult to accept the prolongation of his concealment because they cannot imagine that it is
within the power of God ... to prolong
the age of his wali [i.e. the Imam] ... 
and cause him to reappear afterwards. ¹

According to al-Nu'mānī the bulk of those groups 
abandoned their belief for this very reason. In fact 
those who continued to hold a firm belief in the Imamate 
of the hidden Imam were a very small minority, belonging 
to the circles of narrators, like Ibn Qubba and al-Nu'mānī 
himself, who based their belief on the traditions of the 
Imams. ²

Many scholars shared with the Imamite masses in their 
perplexity concerning the prolonged occultation of the 
twelfth Imam. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Abū Sahl 
Ismā'īl b. 'Alī al-Nawbakhtī was the first to hold the 
opinion that the twelfth Imam died during his occultation, 
that his son succeeded him, and that the Imam will 
continue in his progeny until God resurrects the twelfth 
Imam. ³ The attribution of this statement to Abū Sahl 
was, perhaps, sound, because in his defense and vindication 
of the concealment of the Imam around the year 290/902, 
he did not expect that the concealment would last, as it 
in fact did, beyond the life span of an ordinary person; 
he says,

¹. N. al-Ghayba, 80.
². Ibid., 99; Ibn Qubba quoted in Kamāl, 112.
Until the present time there is one of his hidden and reliable adherents, who claims that he was the Gate [Bāb] for the Imam, and he was the intermediary of the Imam's commands and orders for his followers. The period of the occultation [of the Imam] has not prolonged to the extent that it became exceptional and beyond the length of the concealments of those who had gone into concealment before him.¹

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Ṣalt al-Qumī was another Imamite scholar who was baffled by the discontinuation of direct communication with the Imam, through the prolongation of his occultation. Thus he went along with a philosopher from Bukhara in doubting the existence of the twelfth Imam.²

From several remarks that were made about twenty years later (around the year 352/963), it seems that the confusion and the despair concerning the immediate return of the twelfth Imam became the dominant feature in Imamite circles. This situation was heightened by the fact that the harsh attack on the concealment of the twelfth Imam

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2. Kamāl, 3.
by such Mu'tazilites as Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī\(^1\) and such Zaydites as Abū Zayd al-'Alawi\(^2\), and then al-Šā'ibib b. 'Abbād\(^3\), caused that confusion to become widespread among the Imamite populace from Nisāpur to Baghdad, where a lot of Imamites abandoned their belief.\(^4\)

This confusion about the prolongation of the hidden Imam along with the attacks from opposition groups encouraged the Imamite narrators to vindicate the Ghayba. They did this by composing works, the material for which was at first collected from traditions, attributed to the Prophet and the Imams, like Kitāb al-Ghayba by al-Nu‘mānī (d. ca. 360/970) and al-Šādūq. The latter explains the reason behind the composition of his work Kamāl al-Dīn; that while he was living in Nisāpur, he found that the concealment of the Imam caused perplexity and bafflement among the majority of the Shi‘a who used to visit him, and they had consequently gone astray. This was even true about the well-known Qummi scholar Muḥammad b. al-Šalīt. So this critical situation provoked him into writing a work quoting the authentic narrations attributed to the Prophet and the Imams on this issue. Narrations which, according to him, had already been assembled in al-Usūl al-Arba‘mi‘a, and which had been written down before 260/1.

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2. Quoted in Kamāl, 94-122, 126.
874 by the followers of al-ʿādiq and the other Imams. 1
He also devoted a chapter to the people who lived to be
more than 100 years old in order to vindicate the advanced
age of the twelfth Imam during his occultation.

However, it seems that the arguments based on
traditions which were first used by al-Kulaynī, al-Masʿūdī,
al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Khazzāz were no longer
sufficient by the end of the fourth/tenth century. 2 Hence
the Imamite scholars resorted to the theological arguments
(ʿIlm al-Kalām) and used them extensively to vindicate the
Imam's concealment. Al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) was, perhaps,
the pioneer at that period. This can be seen in his
work al-Fusul al-ʿAshara fi al-Ghayba, in which he tried to
prove the existence of the hidden Imam on two principles.
The first being the necessity of the existence of an Imam
at every period of time, and the second being the
infallibility of this Imam. In fact al-Mufīd's treatment
of this subject became the framework for later Imamite
scholars like his pupil al-Karajī (d. 449/1057),
al-Murtadā and al-Ṭūsī. The latter, in his work al-Ghayba,

2. There are two reports which support this point. First
al-Ṣadūq mentions that the Zaydites accused the Imamites
of inventing the Prophetic traditions which indicate
that his successors will be twelve Imams (Kamāl, 67-8).
The Zaydite al-Ṣāhib b. ʿAbbād (d. 381/991) held this
claim against the Imamites (Ibn ʿAbbād, Nusrat Madhāhib
al-Zaydiyya, 209-12). Also the Ismāʿīlīs did so.
advanced the traditional and the theological arguments for vindicating the complete occultation of the twelfth Imam. However the theological approach goes beyond the historical approach of this thesis and covers a later period.

5. The application of the epithet al-Mahdi to the twelfth Imam

The traditions which were used by the Imamites during the period of the short occultation to support the view that the twelfth Imam is al-Qā'im bi-l-Sayf also led them to give him the title al-Mahdi. In fact information concerning the future rising of al-Mahdi in order to fill the earth with justice can be found in several traditions attributed to the Prophet. However, Sachedina's theory is that

... the Mahdiism of the twelfth Imamite Imam was a later development in the theory of the Imamate of the hidden Imam, which combined the already known belief in the coming of al-Mahdi to restore justice and equity with the prolonged occultation of the twelfth Imam.1

1. Sachedina, op. cit., 83.
Sachedina reached this conclusion after examining the "Kutub al-Ziyārāt" (i.e. giving details of visits to the shrines of the Imams) which have been included by al-Majlisī in his work Bihār al-Anwār. According to Sachedina the earliest work of this literary genre is mentioned on the authority of the twelfth Imam himself in reply to a letter written by ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥimyarī (d. 290/902). Sachedina says,

In this Ziyārah which I have carefully examined, there is no mention of the title al-Mahdī at all. The twelfth Imam is not addressed as the Mahdī, the one promised by the Prophet. This is the first Ziyārah mentioned in this section of the Book on the Shrines.

From the historical point of view there are several points in Sachedina's thesis which are open to question. Firstly, according to two reports attributed to al-Bāqir and al-Jawād all the Imams hold the title "al-Qā'im", inferring that they have been entrusted with execution of God's order (kullunā Qā'imun bi-amr Allāh), and they all hold the title al-Mahdī, whose duty is to guide people to the Religion of God (kullunā Nahdā 115

1. Bihār, CII, 81.
Din Allah).\(^1\) For this reason, we find in the books of Ziyāra, all the Imams are addressed as al-A'imma al-Rašidun al-Mahdiyyun.\(^2\) Consequently the twelfth Imam must hold the title of al-Mahdi in this meaning, which has quite a different meaning from the epithet al-Qā'im al-Mahdi, the one promised by the Prophet who will rise with the sword.

Secondly, in the Imamite works there is some consistency between the signs indicating the rise of al-Qā'im and his duty on earth following his return from concealment and those pointing to the rise of al-Mahdi. This can be noted in the following statements:

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"وَأَنَّ المِهْدِيَ يَتَصَّدِرُ بِهِ لِيَبْنِى وَرَافِعُ يِبِيْنِي وَلَلَّهِ أَن يَنَقْلِبَ مِنْهُ إِلَّا أَعْدَائِهِ وَأَعْبَرَ بِهِ طُوْعاً وَكُرْهَٰها" 3

"إِذَا قَامَ الْقَائِمُ سَارَفِينَ بِالسِّيْفِ وَالسِّبِّيْرِ وَذَلِكَ أَنْ يَلْبَسَ أَنْهَى مِنْ بَعْدِهِ إِلَّا اِمْهَادًا" 4
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Such statements make it clear that the Imams used two different titles when referring to one person. There is a tradition attributed to al-Ṣādiq which elucidates this connection between the two names. For, when al-Ṣādiq was asked by his follower Abū Saʿīd al-Khurāsānī, "Are al-Mahdi and al-Qā'im one and the same person?", al-Ṣādiq

\(^2\) al-Ṣādiq, Man la Yathduruhu al-Faqīh, II, 371; al-Ṭūsī, al-Tahdhib, VI, 114; N. al-Ghayba, 45.
\(^3\) al-Ṣaffār (d. 290), Baṣāʾir al-Daraẓāt, f. 50a; al-Kāfī, I, 243.
\(^4\) N. al-Ghayba, 122.
said, "Yes." Hence we find that al-Nu‘mānī sometimes refers to the same Imam as al-Qā‘im and sometimes as al-Mahdī without taking into consideration the fact that such an application would lead to confusion among the Imamites. It is clear that the two titles refer to the same person since al-Nu‘mānī also reports a narration attributed to al-Bāqir which reveals that al-Mahdī was al-Qā‘im bi-l-Sayf himself:

Al-Bāqir said, "If the Qā‘im of the People of the House [Ahl al-Bayt] will rise he will distribute equally among the people and will deal justly with his subjects. And He is called al-Mahdī because he will be the Guide to secret matters.\(^2\)

For this reason al-Nu‘mānī refers to the twelfth Imam as al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī.\(^3\) Moreover it is clear from these texts that the expected Imam (the one promised by the Prophet) acquired the epithet al-Mahdī because of his radical message concerning all aspects of society, just as he acquired the title as al-Qā‘im bi-l-Sayf because he will rise by militant means to put into practice his radical message. This can also be seen in al-Mufīd's interpretation of the doctrine of return (al-Raj‘a):

2. N. al-Ghayba, 125.
3. Ibid., 125.
I say that God the Exalted will return some of the dead people to the present world in physical forms which they had before, in order to honour a group of them and oppress another, and to grant superiority to the faithful over the negators and to judge between these who were unjust and those who were ill-treated, and that this will take place after the rising of al-Mahdi of the Family of Muḥammad.¹

On the other hand most of the ‘Alids, who had been inspired by the Prophetic tradition predicting the rise of al-Mahdi, held the title al-Qā'im al-Mahdi when they rose in arms, like Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who rose in 199/814.²

Thirdly, al-Kulaynī and al-Masʿūdī, both of whom lived during the period of the short occultation, report a tradition which explicitly refers to the twelfth Imam as al-Mahdi: ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said,

I thought about a child who will be from my flesh, the eleventh from my line of descendants. He is the Mahdi who will fill the earth with justice and equity when the

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1. al-Mufīd, Awā’il al-Maqāṣid, 50.
height of injustice and tyranny in the world has been reached. He will live in a state of occultation by which a group of people will go astray and another will remain faithful.¹

Al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) includes similar traditions referring to the twelfth Imam as al-Mahdī and as al-Qā'im.² He also cites a visit (ziyāra) of the twelfth Imam during his occultation which is attributed to the second safīr, Abū Ja'far (d. 305/917). In this citation he addresses the twelfth Imam as al-Ḥujja al-Qā'im al-Mahdī.³

In the light of these points one can conclude that after the twelfth Imam went into occultation the Imamite scholars considered him as al-Qā'im al-Mahdī, the one who will rise with the sword. This was a strongly-supported belief by the time of the occurrence of the second, the complete, occultation.

6. The effect of the complete occultation on the position of the Imamite Fugabī

The occurrence of the second occultation of the twelfth Imam, followed by the immediate dissolution of the Imamite Wikāla after the death of al-Sammari, the fourth

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1. al-Kāfī, I, 19, 35, 338; Ithbāt, 260.
3. Ibid., 512, 513.
safīr in 329/941, left a serious vacuum in the Imamite leadership. Such a critical situation left the way open for the Imamite jurists to fill up some of that vacuum with their cultural activities. They reached a consensus based on traditions which stated that the concealed Imam would be alive until the moment of his rising in arms, irrespective of the length of his concealment. This can be noted in the well-known tradition attributed to al-Ṣādiq, who says to his adherent Ḥāzim,

O Ḥāzim, the Ṣāhib al-Amr [al-Qā’im] has two occultations and will rise after the second one. Anyone who comes to you claiming that he cleaned his hand in the soil of his grave [i.e. the grave of al-Qā’im], do not believe him.¹

But in terms of reality they found themselves in need of a leader, who could save the congregation from inevitable disintegration. Hence, by the last quarter of the fourth/tenth century the ordinary Imamites turned towards the jurists (al-Fuqahāʾ) and accepted their statements as the actual statements of the twelfth Imam, but they did not consider their authority equal to that of the Imam.² In other words the fuqahāʾ at that period were the representatives of the Imam’s view concerning Islamic

¹. N. al-Ghayba, 91; T. al-Ghayba, 274-5; Ikhtiyār, 476.
². Kamāl, 81.
doctrine and law, but were not in charge of the office of the Imāma because, according to al-Ṭūsī and al-Majlisī, it is not possible for anyone to hold the position of Imam before the rise of al-Qā'īm. For this reason the eminent leader of the Imamites, al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), then al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), refused to give themselves authority over the half of the khums which was set aside for the Imam. Al-Mufīd held that any faithful follower who had the Imam's share should put it aside and either keep it in a safe place or bury it, and that in the case of his death, should hand it over to a trustworthy person, so that the latter would hand the Imam's share to the Imam when he rises. As for the other half of the khums, it should be divided into three shares and distributed equally among the needy of the Prophet's family, i.e. the

2. The khums (the fifth) in Shi'ite law is an obligatory tax, and it is based on the following Qur'ānic verse: "And know ye that whatever of a thing ye acquire, a fifth of it is for God, and for the Apostle and for the Apostle's near relatives and the orphans and the needy and the penniless traveller." (al-Anfāl, VIII, 41). The Imams used to collect the khums from their followers, and used the first three shares for the benefit of the congregation and the kindred of the Prophet, and the second three shares for distribution among the orphans, the needy, and the penniless traveller (wayfarer) of the Prophet's family; Asl 'Āsim b. Hamīd al-Hannāt, f. 22; al-Kāfī, II, 626-8.
orphans, the poor and the penniless travellers.\(^1\) Al-Mufid’s view was held by such later scholars as al-Tusi, Abü al-Šalāḥ, Ibn Zahra al-Šalabī, Ibn al-Barrāj and al-Muḥaqiq al-Ḥillī (d. 676/1277), respectively.

The growth in the authority of the Imamite fuqahā' is shown by this consensus among them to distribute the khums and to receive the second lot of the three shares of the khums and distribute it among the needy of the Prophet’s family. In fact the extension of the role of the fuqahā' after the second occultation can be seen in the following points:

Firstly, the prolongation of the occultation of the twelfth Imam enabled the Imamite fuqahā' to develop their career from merely narrators of traditions into mujtahidūn. It has been noted that as regards legal principles (al-Ahkām) the fuqahā' used to consult the twelfth Imam via his four representatives during the time of the short occultation (260-329/874-941). In other words they were mainly narrators of the traditions of the Imams and they continued to represent this trend in the early years of the second occultation.\(^2\) Thus they rejected the early argument based on reason put forward first of all by Ibn Ḥaqīl al-‘Umānī (in the first half of the fourth/tenth

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1. al-Muḥaqiq al-Ḥillī, al-Muʿtabar fī sharh al-Mukhtasar (Qumm, 1318), 298; al-Jawāmi' al-Fiḥiyya (Iran, 1276), 12, 76.
2. For details see Ibn Dāwud, al-Rijāl, 110; T. al-Fiḥrist, 268, 363; Ibn Qubba, quoted in Kamāl, 120; al-Najšābī, 315.
century) then by Ibn al-Junayd al-Askâfî (d. 381/991), both of whom refined Imamite jurisprudence, used new opinions, separated the discussions about principle from those about subordinates, and went back to the basic principle of jurisprudence. This method was rejected because it was considered as a sort of analogy (qiyās).

However, the continuity of the twelfth Imam's concealment, which had fallen under Zaydite attack, led the Imamite jurists to introduce rational arguments in order to defend their belief in the existence of the twelfth Imam.¹ Mere narrators of traditions became scholastic theologians (mutakallimûn). This change in the role of the fuqahâ' can be seen in al-Mufîd's works. Moreover, with the passing of time new law cases arose, which demanded a solution. Since direct communication with the twelfth Imam had come to an end in 329/941, someone had to be found to give an answer to these new questions. Thus the Imamite fuqahâ' developed their career by undertaking ijtihād² to answer such questions and to fill the vacuum which had been brought about by the concealment of the Imam. Al-Mufîd was, perhaps, the first pioneer jurist in

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1. al-Ṣāhib b. 'Abbâd, op. cit., 211.
2. Ijtihād, in Islamic law, means the pronouncing of independent judgements, on legal or theological questions based on the interpretation and application of the four usūl. According to the Imamites, ijtihād is employing all one's power to arrive at speculative probability (zann) in a case or in a rule of divine law depending mainly on the Qur'ān and tradition; al-Ghurayfî, al-Ijtihād wa-l-Fatwâ (Beirut, 1978), 9.
this trend, and then came al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) who gave a definite shape to the Imamite ijtihād. ¹

Secondly, in the light of the first point it is clear that during the last quarter of the fourth/tenth century the Imamite fuqahā' acquired authority to give legal judgement (Fatwā) to the people to a much greater extent than those who had been contemporary with the beginning of the second occultation and the dissolution of the underground organization. It has already been noted that after the death of al-Sammarī in 329/941 the Imamite agents and such fuqahā' as Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. al-Walīd had lost direct communication with the Imam, who was granted authority over the khums. On the other hand they were expecting his reappearance with force in the near future, and for this reason they refused to receive any of the khums supposing that it was forbidden for them to do so.²

Whereas ever since the time of al-Mufīd the fuqahā' have granted themselves authority to receive the other half of the khums in order to distribute it amongst the needy of the Prophet's kindred. In fact it was the prolongation of the occultation of the twelfth Imam, which obliged the fuqahā' to take this step of extending their authority over the Imamites to fill the vacuum which occurred after the death of al-Sammarī in 329/941. In

¹. For the role of al-Ṭūsī in the formulation of Imamite ijtihād, see Mahmūd Rāmyār, Shaykh Tūsī, Ph.D. thesis (Edinburgh, 1977), 88-92.
². T. al-Ghayba, 270.
other words because nothing was stipulated concerning the
direct deputyship of the twelfth Imam\(^1\), the Imamite
fuqahā‘ gradually gained enough authority to act as his
indirect representatives. They based their authority on
traditions which lay down what role they were to have
while the Imam was in hiding. Below are the main traditions
which have been used in supporting the authority of the
fuqahā‘:

i) The twelfth Imam issued a pronouncement (Tawqī‘)
in reply to Ishāq b. Ya‘qūb via his second safīr,

As for the events which will occur, turn
to the relators of our traditions, because
they [the relators] are my proof to you,
while I am the proof of God to them.\(^2\)

ii) Al-Tabarsī mentions a tradition attributed to
the eleventh Imam, who says,

It is obligatory for the populace to follow
the jurist who refrains himself from
committing wrong, supports his faith,
opposes carnal desire, and obeys God’s
command.\(^3\)

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2. al-‘Āmīlī, al-Wasa’il, XVIII, 101; Bihār, LIII, 181;
al-Khumaynī, op. cit., 77.
3. al-Tabarsī, al-Ihtijāj, II, 263-4; al-‘Āmīlī, al-Wasa’il,
XVIII, 94-5.
iii) Al-Ṭabarsī reports another transmission on the authority of the tenth Imam concerning the role of the fuqahā’:

After the occultation of your Qā’im a group of the ‘ulamā’ will call people to believe in his [al-Qā’im’s] Imamate, and defend his religion by using proofs, sent by God, so that they might save the weak-minded faithful from either the tricks of Satan and his followers, or the tricks of the anti-‘Alids [al-Nawāṣib]. If none of these ‘ulamā’ remain, then everyone will stray from the religion of God. However, as the pirate holds the stern of the ship, the ‘ulamā’ will hold firmly onto the hearts of the weak-minded Shi‘ites, preventing them from straying. Those ‘ulamā’ are the most excellent in God’s view, the Exalted.1

It is clear from the above traditions that the fuqahā’ must possess two qualities before they can acquire the right to be the deputies of the Imam, without direct stipulation. Firstly they should be knowledgeable in the law. Secondly they should be just and irrespective of their race, whether they were from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn

or not, they were entitled to be deputies. It is worth mentioning that the four saffirs of the twelfth Imam were not from the descendants of ‘Alī, which might indicate that the twelfth Imam wanted to train and raise his followers to accept, after his complete occultation, the leadership of the just and knowledgeable fuqahā', even if they were not ‘Alīs. For this reason it can be noted that, after the beginning of the complete occultation, the majority of able fuqahā' were not from the progeny of ‘Alī. Among such fuqahā' were al-Nu‘mānī (d. 360/970), al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022).

This phenomenon along with the prolongation of the concealment of the twelfth Imam caused the authority of the fuqahā' to become well-established amongst the Imamites and encouraged a considerable number of later fuqahā' like al-Muḥaqiq al-Ḥillī (d. 676/1277) to grant the faqīh complete authority over the deputyship of the hidden Imam.1 Thus he gave himself as a faqīh the right to deal with the Imam's share of the khums as well, in contrast with the opinion of the early fuqahā' like al-Mufīd, who only gave themselves authority over the part of the khums intended for the orphans, the poor, and the penniless travellers of the Prophet's kindred. Whereas later, however, al-Muḥaqiq al-Ḥillī argues that if this is obligatory to distribute it during his occultation because that which God made obligatory cannot be abrogated on account of the occultation of the Imam. He continues to

1. al-Muḥaqiq al-Ḥillī, al-Mu'tabar, 298.
assert that the one who is charged with distributing the
share of the Imam according to the needs of the Prophet's
kindred must hold the deputyship of the Imam in legal
matters, i.e. that he must be one of the just Imamite
fuqahā'.

The extension of the authority of the Imamite fuqahā'
along with the prolongation of the occultation of the
Imam was a positive factor in the unity of the Imamite sect.
It has been noted that after the death of each Imam, the
Imamites split into various factions. This trend reached
its peak on the death of the eleventh Imam in 260/874 when
his followers divided into fourteen groups. Whereas,
after the occurrence of the occultation of the twelfth Imam,
the fuqahā' united in their struggle for religious and
political authority. The uniting force being the belief
in the Imamate of the concealed Imam. For this reason,
they saved their sect from splitting into further factions.
Consequently, the size and number of the sect has been
increased. In fact the death of a faqīh who believed in
the Imamate of the hidden Imam, did not lead to a split
amongst the faqīh's followers, and they usually accept
the leadership of another Imamite faqīh. Thus all the
fourteen factions which had grown up among the followers
of al-‘Askarī disappeared around the year 373/983 except

1. al-Muḥaqiq al-Ḥillī, al-Muʿtabar, 298.
for one group which upheld the Imamate of the twelfth Imam, who was in a state of complete occultation.¹

¹. al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtāra, 261.
The conclusion of this thesis can be summarized as follows:

i) The problem of the nature of the Ghayba of the twelfth Imam is an old one in the history of Shi'ism, and is closely connected with the question of the Imams. In fact the Shi'ites believed that the Prophet could not have left his community without a leader to supervise the interpretation of the shari'a and its implementation in society. On the contrary he appointed 'Ali as his successor, and stipulated that the leadership of the community should then pass to al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and thereafter to the eldest sons of each subsequent Imam from the line of al-Husayn until the rise of al-Mahdi.

The Imams were, however, unable to rule the community after the death of the Prophet and were thus forced to seek to regain power according to those methods which they felt to be sound and legal, although the political and economic forces of their opponents were stronger than their resources, especially after the martyrdom of al-Husayn. For this reason none of the later Imams involved themselves in any obvious political activities or took part in direct incitement to revolt. In fact it seems that they restricted their activities to three major areas:
a) Firstly they encouraged the dissemination of Prophetic traditions amongst the people, to acquaint them with the rights of Ahl al-Bayt regarding the leadership of the community, and to show them that their exclusion from actual political leadership did not mean that they were content to adopt a purely spiritual stance, nor implied tacit support of the government of the day. Indeed they were totally committed to their struggle to regain control, but only when such circumstances involved indicated the probable success of any such rebellion, and when they were sure of the support of sufficient faithful followers, who would seek to confirm the revolution and to implement Islam according to the Imamite approach.

b) From the Imamate of al-Sadiq the Imams circulated Prophetic Hadîth amongst the Imamites themselves concerning the rise of an Imam from Ahl al-Bayt, who would establish the righteous state. This Imam would be al-Qâ’im al-Mahdi, who was mentioned in the Prophetic traditions, and would go first into concealment, in which he would continue to direct the affairs of the Imâma, and then into occultation. But the majority of the traditions did not specify which Imam this would be, nor stipulated a certain date for his uprising. It was this obscurity that allowed some ‘Alids to use these traditions to support their own political aims, without heeding the instructions or plans of the Imam as regards the correct circumstances for the concealment and rising of al-Qâ’im
al-Mahdī. A clear example of this was the case of the Ismā‘īlīs, who broke away from the Imamites, and continued to carry out their activities secretly between the years 145-296/762-908, until one of them managed to reach power in the year 296/908, and claimed the title of al-Mahdī.

The Zaydites also used these traditions in their attempts to gain control, but lacked the precaution and careful planning of the Ismā‘īlīs and the Imamites. In fact the obscurity of these Hadīths, which were related from al-Ṣādiq, was one of the reasons which promoted some Imamites to believe that the concealed Imam was Mūsā al-Kāẓim, who would rise as al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī. These people were called the Wāqifa.

c) Furthermore, the early Imams believed that any of them could be al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī if the conditions were right during his Imamate, but, after the failure of their intended revolt in 140/757 they decided that it would be ill-advised to fix a particular date for another uprising. In this way the Imams hoped to encourage their followers in cultural activities which could pave the way for more political matters at the appropriate time, while also secretly encouraging their most faithful followers, who found that they had no option but to rebel against unjust and tyrannical rulers. One of the results of this policy was the establishment of the Wikāla during the Imamate of al-Ṣādiq, to supervise the activities of the Imamites and to guide them towards the final aim of the Imams, namely the achievement of political control.
ii) The 'Abbāsid authorities were aware of the danger posed by the Shi'ites and by the Imamites especially, and so tried to turn the attention of the people away from the rights of Ahl al-Bayt to the leadership, by fabricating Prophetic traditions which stated that the Imam after the Prophet was in fact al-'Abbās and not 'Alī. Simultaneously, they worked to divide the Shi'ites amongst themselves by appointing men from the Jarīriyya to certain sensitive posts, so that they could investigate the Imamites and spread propaganda against them. On the failure of this policy the 'Abbāsids instigated, from the time of al-Ma'mūn, a new plan which was intended to curtail the revolutionary activities of the Shi'ites, part of which was to make the Imams their courtiers so that they could watch their every move. This can be seen in the policy of al-Ma'mūn, who brought al-Riḍā from Medina to Merv and appointed him his heir apparent, keeping him under house arrest. Al-Ma'mūn followed the same policy with the ninth Imam al-Jawād. Later the 'Abbāsid caliphs followed the lead of al-Ma'mūn in their attitude towards the tenth Imam, al-Hādī, and his son al-'Askarī, both of whom had been kept under house arrest in Sāmarrā for most of their lives. It thus became extremely difficult for the Imams to have normal relations with their followers, except their closest associates with whom they had secret meetings.

It seems most likely that the policy of house arrest imposed upon the later Imams led the latter to develop the role of the Wikāla and to entrust the saffīr with more
authority to supervise the Imamites' activities. For this reason, from the time of al-Jawād onwards, the Imam began to guide the activities of his followers through his safīr, who was the leader of the Wikāla. The ordinary Imamites, who found such a situation strange, had to be educated to accept such indirect communication with the Imam, until they got accustomed to it. However, the role of the safīr during this period is not as obvious as his later position during the first occultation of the twelfth Imam, because the Imam's whereabouts were well-known at this time and his position clear.

It also seems that the continuation of the plan of house arrest imposed upon the Imams, encouraged the latter to find a means which might release them from their critical situation. Thus, from the years 245-50/859-64 onwards statements related on the authority of al-Hādī and al-'Askari, indicating that an Imam would go into concealment and that this would be the twelfth, whose name was not mentioned, were circulating amongst the Imamites. Furthermore al-Hādī and al-'Askari ordered their close agents to follow the instructions of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd al-'Umarī and his son Abū Ja'far (i.e. the first and the second safīrs). It appears therefore that the Imam's first concealment grew from the Imam's desire to evade the surveillance of the government of the day, so that he could safely perform the duties of the Imāma.

iii) An attempt has been made in this study to prove that the eleventh Imam, al-'Askari, had left a single male
successor, whose name was Muḥammad, and whose father had managed to smuggle him from Sāmarra to Medina in 259/873. This successor was the twelfth Imam, whose concealment began between the years 260–329/874–941, and was regarded as his first occultation in which he continued to carry out his underground activities without disclosing his identity or his whereabouts, except to his four saffīrs.

The first occultation was distinguished by the widening of the role of the Wikāla. Throughout this period four saffīrs directed the Imamites' activities, whose names were 'Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Umarī, Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān, al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtī and ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sammarī. Baghdad was the centre for the saffīr, who had agents in other provinces, beneath whom many local agents were appointed.

A critical study of this period reveals that the main function of the saffīrs was to implement certain tasks previously undertaken by the Imams, so as to save the Imam from the political pressure of the ‘Abbāsids, which had been turned upon his predecessors from the time of al-Ma‘mūn. However, the split amongst the Imamites after the death of al-‘Askarī in 260/874 led the first and the second saffīrs to concentrate their efforts upon re-uniting the ranks of the Imamites, by proving the existence of the Imam, and by emphasizing that the twelfth Imam would be al-Qā‘im al-Mahdī; that is, the one who would undertake the elimination of the states of oppression by militant means.
While the Imam was in hiding the role of the safill was increased, and became well established during the time of the fourth safill, whose statements began to be regarded as the statements of the Imam himself. It seems that this policy was implemented at the instruction of the Imam himself, who wanted his followers to accept the leadership of the jurists until the moment of his reappearance.

iv) On the death of the fourth safill in 329/941 no further safill was appointed and all direct communications with the Imam came to an end, which meant the end of the Imamite Wikāla. This was also considered as the beginning of the second occultation. At this stage the Imamites expected the Imam's reappearance in the near future and so none of the jurists dared to act on behalf of the Imam. However the prolongation of the occultation led them to make an attempt to fill the vacuum which the death of the fourth safill had left. So they turned their attention to theological matters and led the Imamites in this field, and gradually came to be seen as the indirect deputies of the hidden Imam, who were leading the community and practicing the law throughout his occultation, often using Prophetic traditions to support their claims.

Finally, it seems that the concealment of the twelfth Imam was closely connected with two phenomena which were obviously consequences of the occultation itself. Firstly, when the Imams were obviously living amongst their people, they suffered along with their followers from the oppression of the government of the day, because the latter were
suspicious of their ambitions. After the second concealment, however, this oppression all but disappeared, and the Imamite jurists began to carry out their cultural activities without encountering the difficult conditions faced by their predecessors.

Secondly, with the occurrence of the complete occultation, most of the Shi'ite revolts, particularly those of the Zaydites and the Imamites, gradually disappeared.

This encourages one to put forward the idea that the Imams were throughout their lives trying to recover their rights by means which they believed to be correct and legal, while after the second occultation this task fell upon the Imamites themselves under the leadership of the jurists, a situation which has continued until the present day.
APPENDIX A

The historian 'Arīb b. Sa'd al-Qurtubī (d. 363-6/973-6) reports an incident which contrasts violently with the policy of the twelfth Imam to keep his identity and his whereabouts secret:

In the year 302[914] a man, who was dressed and wearing nice scent, came to the office of Gharīb, the uncle of al-Muqtadir [295-320/907-932], wearing a garment and red shoes and holding a new sword. He was riding a horse and had a servant. He asked for permission to go in but the gate-keeper prevented him, so he rebuked him severely. Then he dismounted from his horse and went straight in and sat beside Gharīb without giving his respect to the Amīr [according to court ceremony]. Gharīb was therefore amazed and asked him what he wanted. He said, "I am a man from the progeny of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib and I have advice for the caliph, and I do not want anyone to hear it except him, because it is very urgent and, if my arrival is delayed, a serious danger may occur."

Gharīb, for this reason, went to al-Muqtadir and his mother and revealed this matter to them. The caliph summoned the vizier 'Alī b.
'Isä, while Gharîb summoned the 'Alid person. Then the vizier and Gharîb along with Naṣr, the chamberlain, tried in vain to persuade the man to reveal the advice to them, but he refused. So they took his sword when the caliph came, who met the man in private, who then disclosed something to him secretly. Afterwards the caliph ordered that a private house be assigned to the man with many servants to look after his affairs. Then he ordered the leader of the Tālibiyyīn [Naqīb al-Tālibiyyīn], Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Tūmār and the other leaders of Banū Tālib to be summoned in order to listen to the man and investigate his case. They entered his presence while he was sitting on a high seat, but he did not stand to any of them.

Ibn Tūmār asked him about his lineage, so he claimed that he was Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Ali [b. Muḥammad] b. 'Ali b. Mūsā b. Ja'far [that is, the twelfth Imam], and came from the desert. Ibn Tūmār said, "Al-Ḥasan died without an heir." But other people said that he had left a successor, while others agreed with Ibn Tūmār. So the people were confused about the case of the
claimant until Ibn Tūmār said, "This man claimed that he came from the desert while his sword is new. Send the sword to the House of al-Tāq [the Market], and search for the one who made it!" So the sword was sent to the manufacturers of swords at Bāb al-Tāq, where a man recognized it and confessed that he had sold it to someone called Ibn al-Ḍubba‘I, whose father was one of Ibn al-Furāt’s men, the vizier, who had appointed him in the office of al-Maǧālim in Ḥalab.

For this reason, they summoned al-Ḍubba‘I, the father, and showed him the man who claimed that he was from Banū Ṭālib, but al-Ḍubba‘I confessed that this person was in fact his son. Therefore the claimant fell into confusion. Al-Ḍubba‘I cried and beseeched the vizier to have mercy on the claimant. So the vizier promised him that he would forgive him and either imprison him or exile him. However, Banū Hāshim complained, saying that the claimant should be denounced in public and then punished severely.

The claimant was sent to jail and was then taken on a camel and denounced on the two sides of Baghdad during the celebration of ‘Īd al-Adhā. Then he was imprisoned in
the jail which was called Ḥabs al-Miṣriyyīn
on the western side of Baghdad.¹

This report of ‘Arīb was mentioned² neither by
al-Ṭabarī, whose work stopped at the year 302/914, nor by
the Imamite authors such as al-Kulaynī, who included in
his work al-Kāfī many reports of less importance than
‘Arīb’s report, in order to prove the existence of the
twelfth Imam. It seems that the report of ‘Arīb is sound,
but there is no doubt that al-Ḍubba‘ī’s claim was false.

Firstly, the act of the claimant in revealing his
identity as the twelfth Imam was totally in contrast to
the notion that the twelfth Imam had gone into occultation
because of fear of the government of the day, while on
the other hand the claimant’s actions were contrary to the
saffīr’s policy to keep the Imam’s whereabouts hidden.

Secondly, according to the Imamite argument, the Imam
could prove his right to the Imāma by two means: that is,
he could either do so by revealing his superior knowledge
in legal matters, or could perform a miracle to substantiate
his Imamate. The claimant, however, failed on both points.

¹ ‘Arīb, Siḥṭ Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī (Leiden, 1897), 49-50.
² Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) reports the same narration
in an ambiguous form and perhaps depended on ‘Arīb,
summarizing the narration according to his own style.
Therefore the reference to the report does not mean
that it was a successive report (mutawātir);
al-Muntazam, VI, 127-8.
One possible reason for this strange event is that the family of Ibn al-Furat, the vizier, had sent this person to ensure their release from prison, along with that of other Shi'ites, particularly if one takes into consideration the fact that the situation of the Imamites between the years 300-303/912-915 was indeed critical.

Ibn al-Furat, the vizier, was arrested with his son al-Muhsin in 299/911, and the caliph confiscated seven million dinars from them. In the following year the cousin of the twelfth Imam, Muhsin (or Muhammad) b. Ja'far b. 'Ali al-Hadi rebelled in Damascus but the government of the day subdued his rebellion and brought his head to Baghdad. In 301/913 al-Hasayn b. Mansur al-Hallaj was arrested and accused of being a Qarmatih. Meanwhile the latter himself claimed first that he was the agent of the twelfth Imam, and then proclaimed that he was the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi. Afterwards in the year 302/914 four Shi'iite revolts broke out. The first one was led by al-Hasan b. 'Ali al-Atrush, who took over Tabaristan, while another 'Alid occupied Wasit and al-Hasan b. 'Umar al-HasaynI, along with the tribe of Tayy attacked the

1. al-Kubaysi, op. cit., 164; 'Ar Ib, op. cit., 36-7; al-Ṣabi', al-Wazarah, 34.
Iraqi pilgrims on their return from Mecca. In addition the Ismā'īlī Mahdī controlled North Africa and threatened the ' Abbāsids with his missionaries in Egypt 1, as did his follower Abū Sa‘īd al-Janābī, the Qarmaṭī. 2

It is therefore possible that the ' Abbāsids had attributed these uprisings to one leadership, and the greatest weight of the accusation fell upon the Imamite officials. According to ' Arīb, Ibn al-Furat, the vizier, and his son Muḥsin were called the great Qarmaṭī and the small Qarmaṭī by some of the populace of Baghdad. 3 The latter tried, through his partners, to contact the caliph in order to refute such accusations and get himself released from prison. 4 So it is plausible that Ibn al-Furat had sent this claimant as a mediator to ensure his release.

1. Nujūm, III, 185-6, respectively.
2. Little attention has been given to the relations between the Ismā'īlī movement and the Qārāmiṭa in Iraq and Bahrain. Ivanow studied this relation, but did not reach any conclusion. However, Ibn Taghirī Bardī narrates a poem attributed to Abū Sa‘īd al-Janābī, in which he stated openly his obedience to the Mahdī of the Ismā'īlīs:

Nujūm, III, 225.

3. ' Arīb, op. cit., 141.
4. al-Kubaysī, op. cit., 182-3. There is of course the possibility that this man was in fact taking part in a complex plan to cover up the actual identity and whereabouts of the twelfth Imam. However, as there is no evidence whatsoever to substantiate such a claim, it would seem wiser not to speculate upon this point.
APPENDIX B

349
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