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A COMPARISON OF  
THE SHI'II DOCTRINE OF THE IMAMATE AND  
THE SUNNI THEORY OF THE CALIPHATE

by

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## PREFACE

Early and medieval Islam never resolved the stubborn and fundamental problem of leadership in the Islamic State. Both Sunni and Shi'i theology failed to come to grips with the difficult questions that their widely differing theories raised. The fact that neither the Qur'an nor the Sunna of the Prophet left advice on the subject made the speculations of both sects little more than academic.

In this paper I have tried to show the problems encountered, by focusing on Twelver doctrines of the Imamate, the cardinal principle of Shi'ite religion. For contrast and elucidation I have also presented the Sunni view, and endeavored to show why both sects failed--historically and theologically--to develop coherent doctrines.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE EARLY RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SHI'ISM FROM THE DEATH OF MUHAMMAD THROUGH THE CALIPHATE OF 'ALI IBN ABI TALIB

#### Introduction: The "Constitutional Crisis"

The new faith of Islam, as revealed to Muhammad in the seventh century, A.D., endeavored to transform the face of Arabia. To an ancient, fragmented, pagan, and tribal-based society, torn apart by blood feuds and bitter inter-tribal rivalries, it brought new ideas of strict monotheism and universal community.

The old tribal heritage encompassed a complete way of life that had endured for centuries without much change, a practical response to the rugged and harsh necessities of desert life. It was a highly conservative society, with a great reverence for tradition and a deep respect for experience and seniority as a prerequisite for tribal leadership. Arabians were also a highly individualistic, even anarchistic, people, with profound distrust of authority. The head of the tribe was merely primus inter pares, and any male member had the right to disagree and discuss with him any differences or problems on an informal and equal basis. Subservience to a chieftain was an utterly alien idea.

The sole unifying force in the society was blood kinship, which marked the dividing line between loyal allegiance and implacable hate and suspicion.

Superimposed upon the tribal structure were new urban societies in Mecca and Medina. The former was composed of merchants, mainly of the Beni Umayya tribe, who had formed a community on an important caravan route. Some families had become quite wealthy, and thus a new social grouping--commercial interests--developed. In Medina the more traditional tribal, landowning, type of society still prevailed.

It was upon this long-established centrifugal pattern of society, that the Arabian Prophet tried to impose a system which aspired to unite all men in submission to the absolute rule of One God--Allah--above petty loyalties to clan or tribe. He tried, and largely succeeded during his lifetime, in redirecting tribal energies, by giving the tribes a common, larger goal: the victory of Islam.

Under his dynamic and expert leadership, Islam achieved amazing success in a relatively short time. At Muhammad's death in 632 A.D., most of Arabia had sworn allegiance to Islam, and the Arab Muslim armies, bursting with energy and religious zeal, had begun to sweep over the borders of Arabia, conquering the weak and effete empires of Persia and Byzantium that lay in their path.

The death of Muhammad initiated the most severe crisis that the Islamic community has ever undergone. Many of his followers had believed him immortal: "We did not think the Apostle of God would die before he had subdued the world."<sup>1</sup> 'Umar, one of Muhammad's closest and dearest friends, having received word that the Prophet had died, could not believe it, and declared in the public mosque: "Before God I swear the Apostle of God is not dead and will not die, but he is only in concealment..."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>al-Ya'qubi, (d. 891 A.D.), in D. M. Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion (London: Luzac & Co., 1933), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The Apostle of God had died, however, and with their temporal and religious leader gone, the community (umma), felt lost and confused. Muhammad had left behind no instructions concerning the successorship, and the problem had not even been considered until the leadership crisis was imminent. There was only one question that had been definitively resolved, that Muhammad was the "Seal (i.e. the last) of the Prophets," and thus revelation and the legislative function ended with his death. A temporal executive had to be chosen, however, if Islam were to consolidate its hold upon an Arabia which was still not completely pacified, and if the new faith were to continue to exist, much less to expand.

In the brief span of time that elapsed before the question was resolved, the old separatist centrifugal forces, which the Prophet had suppressed but not extirpated, began to reassert themselves, never to be completely subdued again. These divisive tribalistic tendencies were alternately dormant or prevalent, depending upon the fortunes of the Islamic State in different historical periods. They continually tried to gain the ascendant, in direct conflict with Islamic ideals. It is incontrovertible fact that tribalism and its accompanying loyalties and divisiveness contributed directly to the downfall of the Orthodox Caliphate (the four Rashidun), and the Umayyad Empire that followed it.

None ever claimed to be able to replace the Prophet in his role as the receiver and interpreter of divine revelation. The controversy over the succession that did emerge centered on two problems: who would accede to the temporal leadership of Islam, and secondly, how that person should be discovered or selected. In addition to Muhammad's silence on the subject, there seemed to be nothing in the Qur'an nor in the Sunna that would provide desperately needed guidance regarding the manner of choice or the precise nature of the office of Successor to the Prophet.

Thus the first "constitutional crisis" in Islam proved to be insoluble. It engendered the first and most serious division that has ever beset the community, by creating the important minority sect--the Shi'at 'Ali--which was to provoke momentous conflicts within the umma.

#### The Election of Abu Bakr

On the very day of the Prophet's death, but before his burial, his anxious followers, the notables of Islam, gathered to choose his successor (khalifa). There was no doubt whatsoever that the appointment of a leader was most urgent and necessary, yet the meeting soon split into contending factions. These may be divided into four groups,<sup>1</sup> corresponding to their place of origin or blood relationships.

The first group to name a candidate was the Ansar, or "Supporters," from Medina, who had welcomed Muhammad and his small band of followers when they were forced to flee from Mecca in 622 A.D.<sup>2</sup> The Medinans regarded themselves as the most deserving party because of the strength and encouragement they had given to Islam in its weakest moment.

Those who had accompanied Muhammad to Medina from Mecca, the Muhajirin, considered themselves to be the most worthy because they were the earliest and most devoted of the Prophet's followers, and thus were the "pillars" of the new faith. Included in this group were the Sahhāba, the first converts to Islam, and the men closest to Muhammad. Indeed, the latter group, the "Companions," were the only ten men in Islamic tradition to whom Paradise was promised before death.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See S. F. Mahmud, A Short History of Islam (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>This was the Hijra, or Hegira, ( هجرة ).

<sup>3</sup>These men are called al-'ashara al-mubashara.



The powerful Beni Umayya of the Meccan merchant aristocracy, who were among the last to accept Islam and the bitterest opponents of the Prophet, until forced by considerations of expediency to relent, based their claims on blood--their membership in Muhammad's tribe--the Quraysh. The strongest factor in their favor was their immense wealth and power in the city of Mecca, which had to be reckoned with.

Lastly, there had developed another party based on blood kinship, that of the devoted followers of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's paternal cousin, husband of his daughter Fatima, and also one of the earliest believers and a Companion. This party contended that 'Ali possessed an unchallengeable right to the khilafa, due to his blood kinship and personal closeness to Muhammad. They viewed any election for the leadership as blasphemy and a perversion of Allah and Muhammad's will. They desired to forever confine the office to the Beni Hashim, the ahl al-bayt, or the "People of the Prophet's House." In further support of their case, they cited the fact that the Prophet's only male descendants were the sons of 'Ali and Fatima. These men believed that ties of blood transcended any other qualifications.

The Ansar were the first to bid for the leadership, by giving their allegiance to one of their number, Sa'd ibn 'Ubaida.<sup>1</sup> Abu Bakr and 'Umar, two of the Muhajirin who were also among the most respected of the Companions, quickly rose to the challenge and went among the Ansar to determine the situation. Abu Bakr then made a declaration to them by means of which he intended to mollify the Ansar and effect a compromise with them: "The Amirs [princes] are to be chosen from us [the Muhajirin] and the wazirs [ministers] from you."<sup>2</sup> He stated that he would accept either 'Umar or

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<sup>1</sup>See Donaldson, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 10.

Abu 'Ubaida ibn al-Jarrah,<sup>1</sup> another Companion, as Caliph. Thereupon, 'Umar suddenly arose and declared: "The one whom the Prophet was pleased to have as his successor in leading the prayers, he is the man to whom the Prophet has granted precedence."<sup>2</sup> This was a reference to the fact that during Muhammad's last illness, the latter had appointed Abu Bakr to lead the prayers in the public mosque, a function which the Prophet had heretofore performed himself. 'Umar then gave his bay'a (pledge of loyalty) to Abu Bakr, and the majority of those present followed suit. Some of the Ansar preferred 'Ali, and refused to accede. These men had affirmed their position before the meeting: "...There is one...whose right no one would dispute if he should seek this authority. That man is 'Ali ibn Abi Talib."<sup>3</sup> Neither were 'Ali's kinsmen, the Beni Hashim, pleased with the choice of Abu Bakr, nor were several of the Muhajirin. All of these delayed in giving their homage to the new khalifa.

The central person in the controversy, 'Ali, was not even present at the meeting. He was then occupied with the preparation of the Prophet's body for burial, in accord with one of Muhammad's last wishes. A later Shi'i theologian, al-Mas'udi, wrote that when Muhammad became ill, he summoned 'Ali to him and asked his son-in-law to take care of washing and burying him.<sup>4</sup>

The Shi'at 'Ali later came to believe that the reason 'Ali did not attend the meeting was that he was so confident of being designated that he

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<sup>1</sup>This was a different Abu 'Ubaida, and not the candidate of the Ansar.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

did not think it necessary to come. Perhaps if he had been present, the outcome would have been different, for his supporters were singleminded in their devotion to him. D. M. Donaldson writes that there is evidence that 'Ali considered pressing his claims after the choice of Abu Bakr, but changed his mind when he found the more powerful forces to be backing his opponent.<sup>1</sup>

It is established fact that 'Ali did not give his bay'a to Abu Bakr until about six months later. The reason usually given is that his wife Fatima had gone to Abu Bakr in order to claim her share of Muhammad's property, and the khalifa had refused to give her anything, arguing that her father had said: "No one shall be my heir, but that which I leave shall be for alms,"<sup>2</sup> and further, that "Prophets have no heirs."<sup>3</sup>

Fatima, who was much displeased with Abu Bakr because of that incident, died six months after her father. It was after her death that 'Ali pledged loyalty to Abu Bakr, and he served him as a trusted counselor for the remainder of his caliphate. 'Ali, however, held no official position, and had no special recognition.

#### The Designation of 'Umar

Before he died, Abu Bakr designated 'Umar, one of the most respected of the Companions, as his successor. 'Umar was famed for his great leadership abilities and for his great piety and honesty. His acceptance by the umma upon his predecessor's death was immediate and unanimous, although a Shi'a tradition mentions that Talha, one of the Companions and an ally of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., see p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>'Ali," New Encyclopedia of Islam.

<sup>3</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 16.

'Ali, accompanied the latter to Abu Bakr to protest his choice. On 'Aisha's authority, Abu Bakr firmly replied to this challenge: "Truly I declare before God that I have appointed over them the very best one of them."<sup>1</sup> Under 'Umar, 'Ali was again an advisor to the Caliph, who had moved his capital from Mecca to Medina, where the foundations of Islam were more solid. The Medinans were more loyal Muslims than the jealous and greedy Meccan merchants. 'Ali was greatly honored as the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, and for his great wit and wisdom, but again, he held no special power.

During the reign of 'Umar, the Muslim armies conquered Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Persia, superseding the old Persian and Byzantine Empires, and bringing under the banner of Islam a great variety of peoples and races, who possessed rich cultural heritages. The now large and complex empire had to be ruled efficiently, and, consequently, 'Umar devised an administrative system, features of which endured until the end of the Umayyad Dynasty in 750 A. D. In 'Umar's system, the Muslims (i. e. Arabians) were the "gigantic fighting-machine,"<sup>2</sup> the sole military defenders of the Empire. Therefore, 'Umar decreed that they must stay in their military camps, and he forbade them to own land or become engaged in civilian occupations. The conquered peoples were to be the source of supplies for the armies, and taxes for the Muslim treasury. The workings of the system led to favoritism on the part of the State toward the conquering class--the Arabs--and the exploitation of the conquered, as little better than beasts of burden. The only function of the latter was the support of the large Arab armies, and their humiliation and discontent at the inequities of Muslim

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

rule led them to resent and hate their Arab masters.

'Umar died at the hands of an assassin in 23/644, and he had failed to designate a successor, perhaps because he felt that there was no one who deserved the leadership, far and above all others. He is supposed to have once commented on the subject: "If I appoint a Khalifa Abu Bakr appointed one ; and if I leave the people without guidance, so did the Apostle of God."<sup>1</sup>

#### The Election of 'Uthman

To resolve the problem of succession, 'Umar had appointed a Shura, a council composed of the six oldest surviving Companions of the Prophet: 'Ali, Talha, Zubair, the aged 'Uthman b. Affan of the Beni Umayya, 'Abd al-Rahman, and the latter's brother Sa'd, plus 'Umar's son, 'Abdur-Rahman, who was expressly excluded from the succession by his father, proof of the non-existence of the concept of hereditary succession in the Arabian mind.<sup>2</sup>

By this time, 'Ali was extremely agitated over his lack of recognition by his colleagues. He had greatly revered the strength and integrity of Abu Bakr, and had an even greater respect for 'Umar, over whose grave he is supposed to have exclaimed: "There is no name on earth dearer to me than the one God has inscribed on his ledger for this man under the cover."<sup>3</sup> Consequently 'Ali did not press his claims to the khilafa during the reigns of Abu Bakr and 'Umar.

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<sup>1</sup>D. B. MacDonald, Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory (Lahore: The Premier Book House, 1903), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>K. Bukhsh, The Orient Under the Caliphs (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1920), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 20.

With 'Umar's death, however, it seemed to him that he himself was the obvious choice, for he was now considerably older (47),<sup>1</sup> was the only remaining Companion who had been personally close to the Prophet, and he was extremely popular with the people, who admired his bravery and piety. Yet, despite these considerations, 'Umar had failed to name him as the third khalifa. 'Ali and his supporters were becoming increasingly bitter.

Each of the six members of the Shura wanted themselves, but finally 'Abd al-Rahman and Sa'd withdrew from the race. All thereupon agreed, under oath, that the former was to be given the task of ascertaining the most acceptable candidate to all. Firstly, 'Abd al-Rahman asked each one whom they would prefer, second to themselves. 'Ali named 'Uthman, 'Uthman named 'Ali, Talha declared for 'Uthman, Zubair for 'Ali, and Sa'd for 'Uthman. Now only two candidates were in the running. That night, 'Abd al-Rahman sent for 'Ali and 'Uthman, and directed the following question to each: "Do you agree that we should act...according to the precedents established by His Apostle, and in agreement with what has been done by Abu Bakr and 'Umar?"<sup>2</sup> 'Uthman indicated absolute assent, but 'Ali's more candid and realistic reply was somewhat qualified: "I will do so insofar as I can, according to my strength and ability."<sup>3</sup> The following morning 'Abd al-Rahman repeated the same query in the mosque before the entire Shura, and received identical answers. The "chairman" thereupon awarded the khilafa to 'Uthman. 'Ali hesitated to give his bay'a to the new khalifa, but, reminded of his oath, he acceded. He is said to have immediately indicated his displeasure to

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<sup>1</sup>Seniority was greatly honored by the Arabs. Abu Bakr was the eldest of the Companions (he was 70) when he was elected.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

'Abd al-Rahman by quoting from the Qur'an: "Surely patience becometh me. The Lord is my helper, against that which ye devise."<sup>1</sup>

The implication by 'Ali in the above quotation, that there had been a deliberate plot to deny him the caliphate, is not far-fetched. 'Uthman, then a man in his late sixties, was feeble, in ill-health, and had a weak character. Although he was a sincere and pious man, he was dominated by his kinsmen, the Beni Umayya, and was obviously far less qualified for the leadership than 'Ali,

The Beni Umayya, as mentioned above,<sup>2</sup> was one of the last groups to be converted to Islam, and their loyalty to its cause was still in doubt, although 'Uthman himself had been an early convert. Not only had the Umayyads opposed Muhammad, they had even tried to use violent means against the Prophet.<sup>3</sup> They were a powerful and wealthy family who had viewed Islam as a threat to their influence in Mecca, and thus regarded Muhammad as a dangerous rival. They only capitulated when all others had done so, when Islam seemed to be on the ascendant and conversion seemed expedient. The unreliability and untrustworthiness of the Beni Umayya was probably a principal factor in the transfer of the khilafa from Mecca to Medina, where the people were more sincere Muslims.

The Companions, all of whom were Meccans, were suspicious of the Medinese, and eager to lessen the influence of the latter in Islam. They saw in 'Uthman a caliph who would bend to their will, and contribute increased riches and power to the Islamic cause and also to themselves. What

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<sup>1</sup>The Qur'an, trans. Rodwell, Sura 12;18.

<sup>2</sup>Supra. p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>It was mainly due to the Beni Umayya that Muhammad was forced to flee from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D. (the Hijra).

they failed to appreciate was 'Uthman's greater loyalty to his own kinsmen. Blood ties were again to challenge the unity of the new community.

Instead of acquiring a caliph whom they could dominate, the Companions received in 'Uthman a tool of the Beni Umayya. In place of the Meccan hegemony with themselves as the main beneficiaries as they had anticipated, increased rivalry and discord between Mecca and the Companions developed. Their dreams of power and leadership faded as the Umayyads steadily gained more influence.

The khilafa of 'Uthman marked the emergence of Shi'at 'Ali as a strong party in Islam. 'Ali, obviously the most worthy candidate, had been deliberately passed over for the sake of expediency. In addition to the bitterness caused by this action, the 'Alids had another reason to hate the Beni Umayya. The followers of 'Ali constituted the powerful landowning aristocracy in Medina, and thus there was an economic factor in the 'Alid-Umayyad rivalry. The landowners and the Meccan merchants clashed, and the latter seemed to be winning.

The election of 'Uthman was the first significant victory of tribal interests over those of the wider Islamic community since the Prophet's time. It was a triumph of economic over religious considerations, for it was clear that economics, and not the interests of the Faith, had dictated the choice of 'Uthman over 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. The factionalism that erupted over that choice was an ominous sign, for evidence of dissatisfaction was prompt and obvious, not only in Arabia, but in the conquered provinces as well.

The Arab tribes, once restrained by 'Umar's strong hand, now wished to leave the military camps where the latter had forced them to live, and to acquire land rights in the conquered territories. 'Uthman yielded to these demands, and the already arrogant and over-bearing Arabs now began to



assume an even more exploitative position over the subject peoples, who greatly resented the new policies. Many of the latter had become Muslims, mainly in order to acquire the equal rights that were their due in Muslim theory. Unfortunately for the latter, the positions of greatest influence were given to members of the Beni Umayya, most of whom were self-seeking and greedy. It became common belief that 'Uthman was permitting the Arabs, and especially his own family, to exploit others, and hatred of him grew.<sup>1</sup> Thus, there were two factors that contributed to a spirit of rebellion against the Caliph, both in Arabia and in the conquered provinces: the growing resentment of the non-Arab peoples over their cruel treatment, and ~~is~~ inter-Arab rivalry over the issue of 'Uthman's blatant nepotism.

'Ali, still de facto counsellor to the Caliph in Medina, not surprisingly came to be the rallying point for the now numerous malcontents. At first, they sought only his mediation, but gradually they began to regard him as their candidate to replace 'Uthman. In Medina, the Companions, whose power was being threatened by the Beni Umayya, were plainly dissatisfied with 'Uthman. They had tried to divert him from his clique, but when this failed, they turned against him, and worked to undermine his authority, both in Medina and in the provinces.

The provinces were in active ferment, and the conditions for full-scale civil war were ripe. The first revolt against the caliphate of 'Uthman occurred in Kufa, in 34/655, and was led by a devoted follower of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Malik al-Ashtar. 'Uthman finally mollified that situation by sending a new governor, but soon after trouble erupted in Egypt, where a cousin of 'Uthman was the governor. In 35 A.H., a delegation from Egypt

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<sup>1</sup>See Mahmud, op. cit., p. 49.

arrived in Medina in order to press their demands, and the Medinese supported them. 'Uthman, with the backing of his kin, made some promises to the Egyptians, and then proceeded to break them. The Medinese, furious, stoned the Caliph in the mosque until he fainted, and the enraged Egyptians demanded his abdication. Two Companions, Talha and Zubair, who had encouraged the incipient revolt, made no effort to control it. 'Uthman's assassination, at the hands of an enraged mob who broke into his house and stabbed him while he was at prayer, occurred soon after. 'Ali, the principal recipient of the complaints against 'Uthman, was consequently implicated in the murder.

Al-Mas'udi, a later Shi'a apologist, in his Muruj' l-Dhahab<sup>1</sup> defends 'Ali from that charge, by claiming that the latter went out as a spokesman for 'Uthman, and tried to placate both the Egyptian and the Kufan troops. Mas'udi also wrote that 'Ali sent his two sons by Fatima, Hasan and Hussayn, to defend 'Uthman when the latter's house was being besieged by the Egyptians, but that they did not arrive in time to save him. The assassination occurred on 18 Dhu al-Hijja 35 (June 17, 656).

The principal beneficiary of 'Uthman's death was 'Ali, who was quickly recognized as the new and undisputed leader of Islam by most of the community. His chief support came from those provinces--Egypt and Iraq--where 'Uthman had been most cordially hated. On the very day of 'Uthman's death, eleven of the greatest tribal chiefs and "all of the Companions of the Apostle of God who were in Medina"<sup>2</sup> rendered allegiance to him. Ashtar pledged the support of Kufa, Talha and Zubair that of the Muhajirin, and

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<sup>1</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.27.

Abu'l-Hitham, Uqbah and Abu Ayyub that of the Ansar. 'Ali was at last the duly elected and rightful khalifa.

#### The Caliphate of 'Ali

'Ali's khilafa was beset by misfortune from its inauspicious beginnings. The tribal jealousies stirred up by the policies of 'Uthman and his kinsmen had destroyed the tenuous unity that the Prophet had imposed on his community. 'Uthman's rule had also aggravated the rivalries between Mecca and Medina, and those between the tribesmen and the Meccans, as the conflict between the pastoral interests of the tribes and the desire for commercial gain of the Meccans continued to clash.

After their initial satisfactions with the great increase in wealth and general prosperity, Arabian resentments began to grow as the Meccan political machine became dominant and developed into the main beneficiary of the exploited provinces.

The rule of the Beni Umayya was also notable for its emphasis on materialism, and a noticeable lack of the piety that had characterized the reigns of Abu Bakr and 'Umar. Several religious leaders came to be shocked at the worldliness growing at the center of Islam. The feeling of outrage at this materialism was confined only to a small minority, but it served as a rallying-cry and a mask for the real material grievances of the tribesmen and Medinans, who promptly aligned themselves with the religious ascetics.

The obvious benefits that 'Ali gained from 'Uthman's murder made the foundation of his khilafa weak and insecure. There has never been any doubt, however, among Muslims, that 'Ali was completely innocent of any actual connection with the murder. Both Sunnis and Shi'is are in complete agreement on this score. On the very day of 'Ali's succession to the caliphate, three

influential Qurayshi of the Beni Manaf tribe refused to pay him homage, unless he satisfied the blood of 'Uthman, an ancient tribal tradition. These men also made their support contingent upon the granting of certain material privileges for their tribe. 'Ali was greatly angered by these demands. He declared that the second claim was impossible, and that the first one would be considered in accord with the Qur'an and the Sunna, that is, in the light of Islamic law, thus rejecting the demands of tribal custom.

In the disorder and bitterness that followed 'Uthman's assassination, many factions appeared, based on tribalism, economic interests, and/or political expediency. Soon after 'Ali's succession, Talha and Zubair, who had been influential in the rebellion against 'Uthman, suddenly withdrew their bay'a from 'Ali, on the grounds that they had given it "with aversion."<sup>1</sup> They then set out for Mecca, where they were joined by A'isha, the young wife of the late Prophet, a bitter foe of 'Ali because the latter had once doubted her fidelity to Muhammad. Before the actual battle against the forces of 'Ali, the two Companions stated that the reason for their opposition was the avenging of the "blood of 'Uthman"<sup>2</sup> an ominous sign, for now even the Companions of the Prophet were reverting to tribalism for their own ends. 'Ali could not easily answer their challenge, for many of his most loyal followers had been the very malcontents who had precipitated the revolt that ended in the murder of the Caliph. Too late 'Ali realized that he had accepted the khilafa from unclean hands, but he could not then renounce the support that was vital to him. The "Battle of the Camels," named thusly because of the camel upon which A'isha was mounted during the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

fighting, was fought in 36 A.H. Talha and Zubair were killed and A'isha was sent home, a testimony to the generosity and compassion of 'Ali, who refused to punish her for her traitorous activities. 'Ali then left Medina, and established his capital at Kufa in Iraq, which was the center of his most faithful support.

At first, 'Ali's rule was effective over all Muslim territories except Syria, which had remained loyal to its Meccan Umayyad governor, Mu'awiya, an appointee of 'Umar, who had refused to recognize 'Ali because of his sacred tribal obligation to avenge his kinsman, 'Uthman. He began to gather forces composed of the Arab mugatila of Syria, and those who had benefitted most from 'Uthman's favoritism. Although their battle cry was the avenging of 'Uthman's death, their challenge went much deeper, for they were really declaring 'Ali unworthy of his office because of his seeming connection with 'Uthman's fate. Mu'awiya kept silent about his own aims.

At first, the forces of 'Ali were composed of the religious party and the tribesmen of Iraq, and seemed to represent the forces of Islamic unity and legality against those of tribal tradition and divisiveness. The followers of Mu'awiya, however, were more disciplined and sedentarized, and less exposed to exploitation than the tribesmen of Iraq. The religious leaders soon realized that the tribal interpretations of Islam were in reality represented by the Medinans and the Iraqis who were actually fighting to redress material grievances. Tribalism was a threat to the whole principle of religious authority and the system of mutual rights and obligations upon which rested the unity and stability of the umma. Ultimately, the conflict between 'Ali and Mu'awiya turned out to be not one between the religious basis of the 'Alids and the secularism of the Umayyads, but between the disruptive forces of Iraqi tribalism and a strong and a dynamic

unity on Meccan terms, which would at least respect the religious foundations of the community.

Mu'awiya established his camp at Siffin, near the Euphrates, and upon the arrival of 'Ali in command of his Iraqi muqatila, a short period of intermittent negotiations and fighting ensued. The real battle began on the first of Safar, 37 A.H., and lasted about two weeks. It was an extremely bloody conflict, bringing death to over one hundred thousand men. Eventually the warriors on both sides became exhausted, but the battle seemed to be going slightly in 'Ali's favor. Mu'awiya was thereupon advised by his close confidant 'Amr ibn Aus to have his men hoist Qur'ans on their lances, and request arbitration on the issue of the avenging of 'Uthman's blood.

The issues of the conflict were confused. The battle was in fact a true civil war, Arab against Arab, as well as Muslim versus Muslim. Mu'awiya's avowed desire to avenge his kinsman was accepted by both sides as perfectly justifiable, and indeed, obligatory, under ancient tribal laws and custom.

Because 'Uthman's blood had not been satisfied, and 'Ali was the one who had benefitted most from his demise, a cloud of doubt was cast over 'Ali's right to the highest religious office of Islam, even in the eyes of his own followers. "...An evil suspicion rested upon him."<sup>1</sup> As the battle had been so lengthy and sanguine, it is understandable that the call for arbitration met with the relieved acceptance of the majority on both sides.

'Ali, as the rightful and legally elected caliph, would be, in submitting to arbitration, in a weaker position than his challenger, who had no claim to the caliphate at all. 'Ali realized that his defeat could only

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<sup>1</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 21.

result in a weakening of his own position as Caliph. But, obviously under great pressure from most of his men, he reluctantly agreed to the arbitration. A minority of his followers, who had at first agreed to it, relented, adamantly protested<sup>ing</sup> against a decision by arbitration. They were of course overruled, and then deserted 'Ali. By this act, they significantly weakened the strength of the 'Alid forces. They were termed the "Khawarij", the "goers-out,"<sup>1</sup> because they claimed that the decision as to the merits of the two contenders belonged "to God alone,"<sup>2</sup> and then "went out" from the 'Alids. From that time on, this group became 'Ali's most bitter foe, the source of many bloody conflicts during his caliphate, and finally the perpetrators of his death.

The judges convened one year after the arbitration was agreed upon at Siffin, in Adruh in the year 38 A.H. Mu'awiya's faithful advisor represented his chief, and Abu Musa, a declared "neutral" appeared for 'Ali. According to one account, Amr based Mu'awiya's claims upon the right of revenge as stated in Sura 17:35<sup>3</sup>... Abu Musa proposed to set aside both 'Ali and Mu'awiya and to leave the decision to "a Shura...an electoral assembly of the aristocracy of Islam."<sup>4</sup> To this Amr agreed, and then Abu Musa announced their mutual decision, to set aside both claimants and call a Shura. Suddenly, Amr declared a slight modification: he would set aside 'Ali, but insisted on adhering to Mu'awiya as the heir and avenger of 'Uthman.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>See W. M. Watt, Islamic Surveys (Edinburgh: University Press, 1962), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>J. Welhausen, The Arab Kingdom and its Fall, trans. M. G. Weir (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1927), p. 84.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

ingenuous Abu Musa fled to Mecca, amidst the cheering of Syrian forces who were hailing Mu'awiya as the new khalifa.

From then on, the situation deteriorated steadily. 'Ali would curse Mu'awiya in the mosque at prayer-time, and Mu'awiya did likewise in Syria. Although what actually transpired at Adruh has not been definitively determined, it is undeniable that "Mu'awiya was not removable in the same sense as 'Ali, and the refusal to recognize his right affected the latter only."<sup>1</sup>

Soon after the arbitration, Mu'awiya re-conquered Egypt for the Umayyad party, while 'Ali's position was continually disintegrating. The opposition of the Khawarij in Iraq was increasing. "...The Basrians were luke-warm. The Kufaites certainly stood by him ['Ali] in spirit, but not with all their strength; there were amongst them many neutrals or followers of Uthman..."<sup>2</sup> Persia was lax in its adherence to the 'Alid cause. Egypt had been lost to Mu'awiya, who thereafter never risked a face to face confrontation with 'Ali, rather confining himself to minor harassments. The implacable Khawarij were finally decisively defeated by 'Ali at Nahrawan in 38 A.H., but they had already drained much of his time and energies.

In the early part of 40 A.H., Mu'awiya assumed the title of khalifa in Jerusalem, and the Syrians gave him their bay'a. "The command went forth that all parts of his territories he should be proclaimed king."<sup>3</sup> 'Ali was about to launch a campaign against this new threat when he was stabbed to death by a Khariji on the fifteenth of Ramadhan, 40 A.H. in the mosque at Kufa. It has been written by some Muslim scholars that a group of three Khawarij planned the assassinations of 'Ali, Mu'awiya, and Amr at the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-93.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 101-102.



same time, but the attempts to execute the plan on the latter two were unsuccessful. Thus ended the short and tragic caliphate of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, but his death marked the beginning of his tremendous importance and influence on subsequent Islamic history.

#### Sunni and Shi'i Views of 'Ali's Caliphate

Ali, who came to be the key figure in Shi'i doctrines of the caliphate, and the subject of bitter controversy between the two major sects of Islam, emerges as a vague personality in Islamic historical annals. Although there are many commentaries about him, they are all extremely subjective and biased. In them, his personal virtues and alleged performance of miracles are emphasized, but there is no mention of his views on the all-important question: how he envisioned the office of the caliphate. His short reign was marred by incessant internal tribal warfare and bitter factionalism. Thus he could devote little time to the further development of the institution that 'Uthman had so gravely weakened. He and his followers held a somewhat different view concerning the selection and role of the khilafa, due to their adherence to the hereditary principle, but because of the anarchy that prevailed during 'Ali's reign, nothing is really known of what the Caliph himself believed.

The Shi'a constituted a theory of the caliphate upon certain clues as to 'Ali's personality and his intimate personal relationship to the Apostle of God, which found expression in the writings of theologians of a later period, in combination with the accounts of the miracles he performed and the extraordinary powers he is said to have possessed. Shi'a traditions state that the earliest friends and supporters of 'Ali viewed his claims as not merely political, but based upon divine right. "As God had appointed Muhammad as Prophet, so He had appointed 'Ali as his helper in life and his suc-

cessor in death. This was preached in Egypt as early as the year 32."<sup>1</sup>

An obscure figure in early Islamic history is intimately connected with the spread of such ideas. A converted Yemeni Jew by the name of 'Abd-Allah ibn Saba', according to the Sunni chronicler al-Tabari, travelled widely "seeking to lead the Moslems into error."<sup>2</sup> Originally from San'a, he journeyed to Syria, Basra, and Kufa. He finally settled in Egypt, where he played a major part in the conspiracies on behalf of 'Ali against the Umayyads. His arguments centered on the following points:

1. He believed in the return of the "Mahdi" or Messiah, later taken up by the Shi'at 'Ali to mean the "Return" of a descendant of 'Ali. 'Abd-Allah based his advocacy on verse of the Qur'an (Sura 28:85): "Verily he who hath given the Koran for all rule will certainly bring thee home";<sup>3</sup>

2. Every prophet has a wasi, or "helper." 'Ali was so designated Muhammad at Ghadir Khum. Thus it is incumbent upon all to champion his divine sanction, and obey him implicitly;

3. 'Ali is divine. 'Abd-Allah maintained that the divine spirit dwells in every prophet, and it passed successively from one to another by nass, or designation.<sup>4</sup>

'Ali, upon hearing of the doctrines being perpetrated by ibn Sab'a, immediately rejected them, but they persisted, and gained strength.

By the time that the four Shi'a collections of traditions had been collated, 'Ali was already legendary. Ibn Hanbal, the fanatical and reactionary Sunni leader of the <sup>ninth</sup> tenth century, once exclaimed: "There hath not

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<sup>1</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

come down to us regarding the merits of any one of the Companions of the Apostle of God what hath been transmitted concerning 'Ali."<sup>1</sup>

'Ali's military valour and strength were allegedly super-human. He was said to have killed five hundred and twenty-three in one day at Siffin, with the aid of his miraculous sword, Dhu 'l' Faqar ("owner of the vertebrae"), and to have used a gate as a shield.

The Shi'a assert that 'Ali possessed a special copy of the Qur'an, with marginal notes taken down during conversations with the Prophet. Shi'is refer to this as the "mysterious book," the Djafr, and it supposedly contained, according to a Shi'i theologian of the 'Abbasid period--al-Qulaini--the knowledge of the prophets, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. The "Sahifat 'Ali, dictated by Muhammad, is "seventy meters in length, the width of a sheep-skin...and shows what things are permitted and what things are forbidden."<sup>2</sup> The Shi'a contend that "when the Apostle taught anything to 'Ali, 'Ali evolved from it a thousand other things."<sup>3</sup> Mas'udi claims that the Imams would often refer to these secret writings or books that 'Ali purportedly left to them.<sup>4</sup>

The Shi'a believe that 'Ali's mother, Fatima bint Asad, attended Muhammad's birth, when she saw lights in the sky. When she gave birth to 'Ali in the Ka'aba, the same lights appeared, just as her husband had prophesied when she had told the latter about what had occurred at the birth of the Prophet, thirty years before.<sup>5</sup> Abu Talib, 'Ali's father, cared for the or-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>al-Mas'udi, in Donaldson, op. cit., p. 48, Muraju'l'-Dhabab, vol. VII, p. 382.

<sup>4</sup>al-Kulaini, in Donaldson, Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

phan, Muhammad, during his childhood.

Muhammad is supposed to have said: "I and 'Ali were both created from one and the same NUR (Divine light)...Therefore in me is (the quality of) prophetship and in 'Ali (that of) caliphate."<sup>1</sup>

According to al-Majlisi, a Shi'i theologian of the Persian Safavid period, Muhammad commanded 'Ali on the night of the mi'raj to ask the prophets why they were exulting? (Or exalted?), and they all replied that it was because of Muhammad's prophetic office and the imamates of 'Ali and his posterity. Muhammad then saw a vision of 'Ali's descendants, the Eleven Imams. God called them His "proofs, vicegerents, and friends, and [that] the last of them will take vengeance on my enemies."<sup>2</sup>

In 1325 A.H., Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far said that Muhammad had related the following: "On the night of the mi'raj, on every one of the curtains of light and on every one of the pillars of the empyrean to which I came, I saw written There is no God but God, Muhammad is the Apostle of God and 'Ali ibn Abu Talib is the Commander of the Faithful."<sup>3</sup>

To the Shi'a, 'Ali is a saint and worker of miracles, (karamat). While 'Ali was khalifa, he changed the head of a Khariji into a dog's head, raised someone from the dead, and raised eighty camels from the ground.<sup>4</sup> Before his death, 'Ali bestowed the light of secret knowledge (al-nur) upon his son, al-Hasan, and gave to him the secret books and his personal armour, the "symbols of the high office of Imamate."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hasan, Sd. N. in Hollister, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>See Hollister, op. cit., p. 22, and Donaldson, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>5</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 58.

All of these traditions, although interesting, do nothing to clarify the nature of 'Ali's views on the caliphate. However, we may deduce from his recorded actions that he was not a fanatic. He was definitely hostile to the teachings of Ibn Sab'a, and rejected them completely.

That 'Ali enjoyed Muhammad's special confidence, and that he never deserted the latter, even as a young boy, is generally acknowledged. He was unquestionably one of the earliest believers and Muhammad's standard-bearer at all of the historic battles, excepting Tabuk, when the Prophet requested him to stay behind in Medina as his deputy, saying: "Is it not fitting that you should be in the same relation to me as Aaron was to Moses?"<sup>2</sup> The Caliph 'Umar considered 'Ali to be the best judge in Medina, and the most competent reader of the Qur'an.

We know that he was gifted as a reader of the Qur'an and as an orator. "He had all the qualities which make a man great--courage, wisdom, and learning. He was simple in his tastes, just in his dealings, and yet forgiving and kind."<sup>3</sup> It is evident that his actions were dictated by his sincerely religious spirit. For example, he considered battle against "erring Muslims" to be his duty, and his main concern, apparently, was the strengthening of the Faith. The keynote of his conduct was obedience to the Divine Law, and he was compassionate and merciful toward his enemies, as witnessed by his charity to A'isha.<sup>4</sup>

'Ali was, however, politically naive, and he lacked the fortitude to stand up for his convictions in the face of pressure from most of his sup-

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<sup>1</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 45, from Ibn Hajar, vol. III, p. 1, 208.

<sup>3</sup>Mahmud, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>4</sup>Supra. p. 19.

porters, as proven by his concession to the arbitration, which he knew would not favor his position. "...He was a poet and an orator but no statesman."<sup>1</sup> He was no match for Mu'awiya, the master statesman and politician. He was also narrow-minded, and lacked the flexibility to adapt to and cope with new conditions. He and his supporters would make no concessions in their view of him or their concept of the divine right view of the caliphate. They sacrificed unity to principle. Tribalism, the curse of Muslim unity, added to the bitterness caused by Mu'awiya's opposition, Mccan-Medinan jealousies, and the secession of the Khawarij. There is evidence that the hostility of the latter was also tribally-based. The Kharijis were almost all nomads and their society was organized as such. Most of the early Shi'ites came from Southern Arabia, while most of the important Khariji sects were northerners.<sup>2</sup>

At Muhammad's death, 'Ali was only thirty-three years old, and thus too young for the Arabs to have entrusted with the major administrative and military leadership of the umma, in view of their traditional deference to the principles of seniority and experience.<sup>3</sup> Abu Bakr was seventy at the time of his accession, 'Umar was fifty-three, 'Uthman seventy, and 'Ali, when he finally became khalifa, was either fifty-nine or sixty four, depending on whether one takes his acceptance of Islam to be at age ten or fifteen.

He is regarded with great reverence by the Sunnis, who view him as the last of the four Rashidun, or "rightly-guided" caliphs, but any previous designation of him by the Prophet had been abrogated by the latter's choice of Abu Bakr as prayer leader. There is, according to the Sunnis, no trust-

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<sup>1</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>See Watt, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>See Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

worthy evidence that 'Ali claimed more spiritual authority than his predecessors. His status is that of a Companion, chosen to succeed 'Uthman by the perfectly natural and legal consent of the umma. He "was murdered in the course of his efforts to overcome persistent and widespread rebellion against his authority."<sup>1</sup> He always stressed the authority of the Qur'an and Muhammad's Sunna, which, he claimed, were neglected by his predecessors. By defending Hashimite claims while in office, he alienated the rest of the Quraysh, mainly the Beni Umayya. He did have the support of the Old Believers, most of the Ansar, and the muqatila of all of the provinces, excepting Syria, which was solidly behind Mu'awiya, and of the depressed classes--the mawali--in general.

The fact that 'Ali supported the claims of his own family could be taken as the basis for the assumption that he intended to perpetuate its power, that is, to establish hereditary rule, in accord with 'Alid legitimist beliefs. This interpretation of his intentions may be misleading, because of the confusion and disunity of the Islamic community during his reign. Two of his predecessors had died violently, and there were no precedents for the manner of succession. Thus, into an inherently anarchic situation, new elements of insecurity and uncertainty were introduced. Hereditary succession was an obvious solution to the problem, and Mu'awiya adopted it for his new dynasty soon after he became caliph. Loyalty to family and tribe was not at all unusual in Arabia, and so it is not easy to make charges of nepotism or unfairness against 'Ali. His primary concern was unquestionably always for Islam, and was proven by his sincere piety.

His partisans, at the point of desperation by the time of 'Uthman's death, were not loath to use violence, if necessary, to place him in power.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

This does not necessarily indicate a desire on their part to weaken the caliphate. By the middle of 'Uthman's reign, it was apparent that the employment of such means was perhaps the only way to achieve desired ends.

'Ali definitely, and not unnaturally, deeply believed in the rightness of his cause, and it would be safe to assume that he also believed in the legitimacy of the rights of himself and his descendants to the khilafa, because of his special relationship to the Prophet. There was also the fact that his two sons were the only direct male descendants of Muhammad. If he had not actively championed his cause, his ~~supporters~~<sup>cause</sup> would certainly not have grown and developed as it did, especially after 'Uthman's election.

By the time of his accession, the authority and prestige of the khilafa, a strong and effective office in the hands of Abu Bakr and 'Umar, had been severely weakened. Tribal wars and rivalries were threatening the unity of Islam, and a method of succession was non-existent. During his short term, 'Ali was too busy with putting down the numerous revolts of the Khawarij and his troubles with Mu'awiya, to have had any time to theorize about, further develop, or strengthen the office. His caliphate was characterized by vagueness and dogmatism in its actions and policies. He definitely did not possess the shrewdness or statesmanship of Mu'awiya, whose victory was, in effect, a triumph of the strong caliphate over the forces of chaos and tribalism which 'Ali could not control.

The Caliphate "...was a new experiment in statecraft and it was perhaps too heavy a responsibility. It could last only as long as memories of the Prophet and the effect of his magnetic personality lasted. And so it happened that the Orthodox Caliphate, that is the Caliphate of the first four Caliphs, lasted only for one generation."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>S. F. Mahmud, A Short History of Islam (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 35.



Mu'awiya's victory was that of the khilafa as an institution, as a strong and powerful office, rather than the mere perpetuation of the title of a ruler. The Caliphate as an institution was thereafter taken for granted by the Muslim world until its destruction by the Mongols in 1258 A.D.

## CHAPTER II

### THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF SHI'AT 'ALI UP TO THE TENTH CENTURY, A.D.

#### A. Shi'ism in the Umayyad Period

The victory of the Umayyads marked the end of the "proper patriarchal Caliphate and begins the second time that the Mekkan aristocracy seized for themselves the supreme power, and ruled the vast Empire in the same spirit as that of an old Arab chief of a powerful tribe."<sup>1</sup> The legitimatists, the faithful followers of 'Ali, supported his eldest son, Hasan, as the rightful successor to the Khalifa. Hasan became Khalifa in Kufa two days after his father died. The Shi'a believe that Hasan had received the nass of 'Ali, just as the latter had been designated by the Prophet.

The unity of Islam had been almost destroyed by 'Uthman's incompetence, his murder, and the resulting civil wars which had cost 'Ali both his Khalifa and ultimately his life, bringing 'Uthman's kinsman Mu'awiya to the head of a new Arab dynasty. The prevailing atmosphere was one of fear, insecurity and tension.

For a short time there were two caliphs: Mu'awiya, who had won his right to rule by superior power, and the "weak and timid"<sup>2</sup> Hasan ibn 'Ali Abu Talib, the leader of the much weakened Shi'at 'Ali.

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<sup>1</sup>Bukhsh, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

As soon as Mu'awiya heard of 'Ali's death, he began to gather his forces for the destruction of Hasan, whom he considered a grave threat. Hasan had no taste for battle, and when he realized that his followers were disheartened and unenthusiastic, he retired to Ctesiphon in Iraq. From there he proposed a settlement to Mu'awiya: he would surrender his claims to the Khilafa in exchange for specific conditions, including an annual grant for himself and his younger brother Husain, plus a promise to honor and respect the Beni Hashim.<sup>1</sup> Mu'awiya accepted and met Hasan at Kufa in A.H. 41, where the latter relinquished his claim to the Khilafa and departed for Medina. Official Shi'a accounts relate that Hasan's brief Khilafa lasted fourteen months.<sup>2</sup>

Hasan lacked the qualities necessary in a strong leader, tending to prefer frivolous pursuits. Even Shi'i records, which usually whitewash the characters of the Imams, indicated his moral weakness. "...A lack of energy and intelligence seem to have been the fundamental features of his character."<sup>3</sup> The Shi'a believe that he was martyred by one of his wives, a treacherous woman, under the instigation of Prince Yazid, the Khalifa's son and heir.

Thus the eldest grandson of the Prophet probably weakened his own cause. Because he was the second Imam, Hasan is important to Shi'i tradition, but his effect on the development of Shi'ism in its early period was negligible. He contributed little strength to a sect already enervated by the successes of the clever Mu'awiya, and factionalism in its own ranks.

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<sup>1</sup>See Donaldson, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>See Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>3</sup>Lammens, "Hasan," Encyclopedia of Islam (London: Luzac & Co., 1960), p.274.

'Ali supposedly preferred his younger son Husayn to Hasan. ~~It~~ He said that 'Ali once declared "he is mine and I am his."<sup>1</sup> When Hasan abdicated, Husayn followed him to Medina, and he never openly opposed the Umayyad Caliphate during Mu'awiya's lifetime.

When Yazid succeeded to the Khalifa, the situation changed. The opposition in Kufa erupted upon Mu'awiya's death. Yazid had two alternative courses of action: 1) to abdicate; 2) to fight to maintain his position. He naturally chose the latter. The second Umayyad khalifa was, according to later historical accounts, a ruthless man, and not particularly pious. Although most of these records are biased because they were written by 'Abbasid historians, some of whom were Shi'ites, many of their charges are undoubtedly true. They charged that he was "drunk daily."<sup>2</sup> His cruelty was likewise well-known.

The idea of hereditary succession had gained much currency among non-Alids by the time Mu'awiya died, due partly to Persian and Byzantine influences, and partly to Mu'awiya's uncanny political sense. He wished to ensure the perpetuation of the dynasty he had founded, and regarded the principle of legitimatism as the only answer. More ancient Arabian practices, i.e., elections employed in the Rashidun era, had resulted in anarchy and bloodshed. Consequently, he exacted homage for his son Yazid before he died.<sup>3</sup>

Upon Mu'awiya's demise, however, the fickle people of Kufa, the stronghold of 'Alid sympathies, sent word to Husayn in Medina that they would pledge him their loyalty. Before his death Mu'awiya had foreseen Husayn's imminent challenge and is said to have warned his son: "As for al-Husain,

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<sup>1</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>Bukhsh, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>3</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 79.

the restless men of 'Irak will give him no peace till he attempt the empire."<sup>1</sup> But he also cautioned him: "...when thou hast gotten the victory, deal gently with him, for truly the blood of the Prophet runneth in his veins."<sup>2</sup>

Husayn, hearing of the Caliph's death, sent a trusted supporter, his cousin Muslim, to ascertain his strength in Kufa before taking up the challenge. Muslim bade Husayn come, but Ibn 'Abbas, another faithful follower, warned him of the well-known faithlessness of the Kufans. Ibn 'Abbas advised a retirement to Yemen, "until God would make the way clear,"<sup>3</sup> so that Husayn's life would not be endangered.

Husayn refused to heed this advice and set out for Kufa, fully aware that a battle between his own forces and those of Ibn Ziyad, Yazid's general, was inevitable. The second son of 'Ali was fatalistically resolute: "If indeed I die on the battlefield, I witness before God that will be better than to live in dishonour in Mecca."<sup>4</sup> He knew he would be fighting against great odds. Husayn certainly had a greater will to fight than did most of his successors in the Imamate.

When Yazid was informed of Husayn's plans, he immediately appointed his general Ibn Ziyad as the governor of Basra. Before Husayn arrived his loyal friend Muslim was challenged by Ibn Ziyad, but before the battle all but three of Muslim's Kufan supporters deserted him, and later Muslim was beheaded by Ibn Ziyad.<sup>5</sup> Husayn was informed of Muslim's end by a loyal fellow-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>See Ibid., pp. 83-84.

er as he neared Kufa, accompanied only by his family and a small band. He refused to turn back, and sighting the approaching forces of 'Umar ibn Sa'd ibn-Abi Waqqas,<sup>1</sup> he turned toward Kerbela, imploring God to come to his aid.<sup>2</sup> "He did not cease fighting until he died."<sup>3</sup> Husayn, and all but one of his sons and family fell in battle. His body was trampled upon and mutilated, and his bloody head was sent to the Caliph Yazid.

It is not difficult to comprehend how the blood and horror of the massacre of Husayn filled Shi'a hearts with a frenzy of indignation and vengefulness, which gave their cause renewed vigor and appeal.<sup>4</sup> A bid for political power, had, with the martyrdom, acquired a much more romantic meaning for the Shi'a.

The martyrdom of the tragic Husayn was probably the most significant event in the early religious development of Shi'ism, for it invested the movement, at first almost wholly political, with a spiritual, even passionate, character. New Shi'ism was more than just the chief political opposition to the Umayyad "kings." It became the leading antagonist, in religious terms as well, of the increasingly secularist character of the orthodox khilafa. It was the symbol and rallying-point of all discontented Muslims, especially the non-Arab ones, who suffered exploitation and humiliation at the hands of the Umayyad Arabs. The Shi'i emphasis on suffering and passion, principally based on the martyrdom of Husayn, strengthened its appeal to the oppressed, and the severe persecutions undergone by the sus-

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<sup>1</sup>This was in the year 680. 'Umar commanded 4000 troops. See P. Hitti, History of the Arabs (London: MacMillan & Co., 1958), p. 190.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ameer 'Ali, The Spirit of Islam (London: Christophers, 1922), p. 302.

cessive imams, (ahl al-bayt) and Shi'ism in general, did not weaken, but rather encouraged, its further development and growth. It was the main social, economic, political, and religious protest of a large, discontented minority to Umayyad rule, which has been termed: "...a rejection of the yoke of Muhammad in all but form and name."<sup>1</sup>

With the death of Husayn, the Shi'i imams retired from militant opposition to the Umayyads. The religious appeal of Shi'ism was emphasized by them at the expense of political action. The next few imams devoted themselves entirely to the pious life and contemplation of the tragedies that had befallen the 'Alid line. They lived in Medina, now a remote, unimportant provincial town, while the center of power and culture had shifted to the Umayyad capital at Damascus.

Growing factionalism among the Shi'a was becoming one of the chief characteristics of the movement. The belief in hereditary succession led to many complications and counter-claims. When Husayn died, a question arose as to his rightful successor, his eldest surviving son, the grandson of 'Ali and Fatima--'Ali Asghar (the younger)--, or the son of (Ali ibn Abi Talib and al-Hanafiyya--Muhammad--who died in A.H. 81. Muhammad was a man of strong character, and the party known to history as the Kaisanis, who venerated 'Ali separately from the Prophet, supported his claims. The blood of 'Ali, not the Prophet, was the determining factor. They were followers of the spiritualistic doctrine of Ibn Sab'a, who taught the dogma of metempsychosis, and recognized only four imams--'Ali, Hasan, Husayn, and Muhammad al-Hanafiyya. The other faction supported 'Ali Asghar as the designated heir of the blood of the Prophet. 'Ali became the recognized Imam, but the Hanafite faction continued as a separate sect. Muhammad was the first of the Shi'i claimants to have been considered "in hiding"

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<sup>1</sup> D. B. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 103.

upon his death, and supposedly to return as a messiah who would bring perfect justice on earth. Other, more insignificant, and more extreme, subjects were already preaching metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls.

Before uneasy peace prevailed in the Hejaz, there was one more attempt by an 'Alid, Abdullah Ibn Zubair, an elderly but ambitious Shi'a, to revolt against Damascus. He inflamed the populace of Medina and then Mecca against Yazid by dwelling upon the atrocities of Kerbela and the Kufan treachery. The two holy cities revolted, and in 62 A.H. Yazid sent a force to crush the uprising.<sup>1</sup> The armies of the Caliph were victorious, and the two holy cities were treated with great cruelty. The Kaaba itself was set afire by bombardment during the siege of Mecca. Finally the people were humbled and forced to declare their homage to Yazid. Ibn Zubair, however, was strong enough in the Hejaz, southern Arabia and Iraq, to maintain a rival Khilafa for nine years.<sup>2</sup> There was some activity in Kufa, as the people there began to repent of their betrayal of Husayn and wanted to avenge him. This Kufan uprising took place in 685-687 A.D. under the leadership of al-Mukhtar. This latter event is significant because most of al-Mukhtar's supporters were the non-Arab, downtrodden mawali, who were discontented because of the refusal of the Arab Muslims to grant them equal rights after their conversion to Islam. It marks the beginnings of the transformation of Shi'ism from an Arab to a mainly mawali movement. There were some battles, and the murderers of Husayn were killed.

The Imam, now named Zain al-Abidin, (Ornament of the Pious) was living quietly and unobtrusively in Medina. He took no part in the confusion, and even denounced it, during Ibn Zubair's predominance. The latter was ulti-

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<sup>1</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



nately weakened by the incessant factional wars among the Shi'a, and was defeated by the Umayyads. The dispute between Zain al-Abdin and Muhammad al-Hanafiyya was finally settled in favor of the former by a sign (i. e. miracle) from the Kaaba.<sup>1</sup>

Zain al-Abdin was a humble, extremely pious man, and also a very melancholy one.<sup>2</sup> The Shi'a claim that he was poisoned by the Umayyad Caliph Hisham. In any case, he died in the time of Walid, in 94 or 95 A.H.<sup>3</sup>

He was succeeded by his son Muhammad al-Bakir (the Ample), at the height of Umayyad power and glory, in the last days of Walid. He was born in Medina in 57 A.H., and was about four years old when his great-grandfather Husayn was killed. He had the reputation for being a great scholar, especially on the problems of the nature of God and man. He once had to defend his claim to the Imama to the Umayyad Caliph Hisham, and quoted from the Qur'an: "This day have I perfected your religion unto you and fulfilled my mercy upon you..."<sup>4</sup> Muhammad believed himself to be the possessor of the secrets of 'Ali. His brother Zaid attempted a rebellion against Hisham on his own behalf, but failed and was killed. The Imam, like his father before him, refrained from any opposition to Damascus and lived an exceedingly peaceful life. He was fifty-seven when he died. Shi'a accounts attribute his death to poisoning, but the question has never been definitively solved. "From the point of view of history both his life and death were inconspicuous."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>See Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>3</sup>See Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

Muhammad al-Bakir was followed in the Imamate by his eldest son, Ja'far as-Sadiq, (the Truthful) who was the most famed and learned of Shi'i imams. Ja'far lived from 83 to 148 A.H.--a long time for an imam--in a turbulent period when discontent and opposition to Umayyad rule reached its peak. A man of peace, he avoided questions of political opposition, and never publicly claimed his right to the Khilafa or even discussed it. His sole interest seemed to be in religion, literature, and the gathering of knowledge in the sciences and philosophy. His philosophy of life was once summed up by him: "Whoever is devoted to God withdraws from mankind, but whoever seeks attachments other than God, truly desires will ravish him."<sup>1</sup> A man of tolerance and gentleness, he refused to speak ill of Abu Bakr and 'Umar. The Umayyads did not molest him. He lived in Medina, and received great numbers of the most eminent scholars, of all sects, in the Muslim world. Ja'far gave lectures on Islamic law, and Abu Hanifa, the great Sunni jurist, who is believed to have had much sympathy for the 'Alids, was one of his students. The sixth Imam made great contributions to Shi'i learning and doctrine. He taught that men had limited freedom of will, that some things are decreed by God and are unchangeable, but that other acts are decreed by God "through our own agency."<sup>2</sup> On the subject of Traditions, Ja'far established a principle for judging them, that is, what agrees with the Qur'an is acceptable and what is contrary is not.<sup>3</sup>

The Imam Ja'far died in the tenth year of the reign of the Caliph Mansur, in 148 A.H. (765 A.D.).<sup>4</sup> This date is accepted and seems accurate.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

Despite the fact that during his lifetime the Islamic world endured violent upheavals, and a new dynasty seized power, he himself had no part in the struggle whatsoever.

Shi'ism under the Umayyads was decidedly vague, lacking a coherent creed. Indeed, the only institution based on Shari'a was the Umayyad Caliphate. There were two alternatives: a monopoly of power by the Khilafa, or anarchy. In matters of law, theology, and religious practice, there was no real distinction between the two sects. "It was the manifestation of a deep unconscious need--a feeling in men's hearts that they would be happier and more satisfied spiritually if they had a charismatic leader (the Imam) to follow..."<sup>1</sup> "The history of early Shiism, and indeed of much later Shiism also, is that of a pathetic quest for individuals to whom the dignity of imam may be attached...The persistence of the quest shows the depth of feeling involved."<sup>2</sup> Often, opportunist men utilized and manipulated this deep need to further their own ends. The imams themselves were usually silent, encouraged to passivity by the doctrine of concealment, or withdrawal, in bad times. The doctrine of nass or divine designation, later so basic to Twelver Shi'ism, was just beginning to take hold, but was not yet universally accepted.

Many of the tenets of orthodox Shi'i doctrine are attributed to Imam Ja'far. According to him, God had said to the Prophet that He would open the paths to Heaven and Hell and guide man through him, and also: "I will appoint the people of your house for guidance. I will bestow upon them the secrets of my knowledge...I will designate them as my proof to mankind."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Watt, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 138.

This citation is quite clear--the imams are the guides and intercessors of man in his relationship with God. God's light "shone through our Imams, so that we are in fact the lights of Heaven and of Earth. To us is salvation committed...Our Mahdi [Messiah] will be the final proof...We are the most noble of all mankind...the Proofs of the Lord of the Worlds, and those who cling to our friendship will be favoured in this life and in death they will have our support."<sup>1</sup> These statements are, in fact, a succinct summation of Shi'ite thinking on the divine character of their Imams, and were apparently first formulated during the reign of Ja'far as-Sadiq, in the last years of Umayyad rule.

After the martyrdom of Husayn, the Shi'a endured much outright persecution under the Umayyads. The imams were under constant surveillance. The sect, however, was quietly making many converts, who were always ready, if the opportunity arose, to rise up against their tormenters. Thus, "for much of the time Shiism was quiescent, and anything that was happening was happening under the surface. Then, suddenly, when a leader appeared, there would be an explosion."<sup>2</sup> The many Shi'i conspiracies and revolts had been and continued to be unsuccessful, and it was dangerous to be involved in one. Although the followers were always ready, the religious leaders were reluctant. Characteristically, the 'Abbasid revolt, which did succeed, in overthrowing the Umayyads, had much Shi'i support, but no Shi'i leaders. These were supplied by the 'Abbasids.

The year 749 A.D. saw the overthrow of the hundred-year-old Umayyad dynasty at Damascus. There were many factors that contributed to its final defeat at the hands of the 'Abbasids. Firstly, tribal and feudal rivalries,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>Watt, op. cit., p. 20.

the ancient curse of Arabian society, was transplanted from Arabia to the conquered territories. The Southern Arabs--Yamama--who were the most powerful group in Syria and the chief pillar of the Umayyad dynasty, and the Northern Arabs--Qays--were continually struggling against each other. Their mutual distrust affected the unity of the entire Arab Empire, and their incessant border incidents disrupted law and civil order, general morale, and left the frontiers of the empire undefended. "The polarization of the Moslem world by this Arab dualism of Qays and Yamama...precipitated the downfall of the dynasty and its ill effects were manifest in years to come..."<sup>1</sup>

The discontent of the non-Arab mawali, especially in Persia and Iraq, was another disruptive factor. As Arabian power grew increasingly exploitative, the mawali began to unify against it under the 'Abbasid banner. Many embraced Shi'ism, and once the mawali became a coherent opposition, it also threatened the existence of the Umayyad dynasty.

The worldliness and secularism of the court at Damascus dismayed pious men all over the Empire, but especially the religious leaders at Medina, which was still the center of religious learning. Once these 'ulema ceased to support the ruling dynasty, they ~~later~~ began to weaken in their loyalty to it. The increasing corruption of the court added to general feelings of apathy and disloyalty. Also the caliber of the caliphs seemed to weaken with time, until ineffectual leadership at the center compounded other centrifugal tendencies.

The vitality of the Arabians under Islam brought them a huge empire, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the borders of India, in a very short time. Religion united the Arabs, who were also motivated by the desire for expansion and richer lands. Now, with a strong, vital government to lead

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, op. cit., p. 281.

it, and a dynamic faith to inspire it, the Muslim forces longed for great conquests. The startlingly rapid and brilliant victories achieved over the once powerful Persian and Byzantine empires testify to the character of Islam as a self-confident and vigorous faith. Even more surprising than their speed, was the orderly nature of the Muslim campaigns. Instead of carving a path of destruction over conquered areas, the Muslim domination instead led to a new integration of cultures and peoples. Islam emerged into the light of civilization, not as the superstitious faith of a desert society, but as a coherent doctrine that could effectively compete with the more ancient faiths of Christian, Byzantium and Zoroastrian Persia.

Mu'awiya, by nominating his own son Yazid, tried to set a precedent of hereditary succession. However, old, pre-Islamic Arabian traditions of seniority in tribal succession continually interfered with the forces of stability and order. Only four of the fourteen Umayyads were directly succeeded by their own sons.<sup>1</sup> The incessant intrigues and revolts perpetrated by members of the Umayyad family gradually sapped all of the strength of the dynasty. Ancient Arabian individualism, anarchism and tribalism undermined both the Umayyads themselves, and also the foundation of their power--the Yamani Syrian mugatila.

The Umayyads severely persecuted all opposition, the strongest of which was the Shi'at 'Ali, who were the fanatical enemies of all of the descendants of Mu'awiya, and specifically of the detested Yazid, the one responsible for the death of Husayn. The Umayyad dynasty was also fiercely nationalistic, that is, it severely imposed Arabian hegemony upon all of the subject peoples, a majority of whom were not Arabs.

The Arab tribes treated the conquered peoples as second-class citizens

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<sup>1</sup>See Ibid., p. 282.

and exploited their wealth. This base treatment led many to embrace Islam so as to be able to attain the equal status which the religion of Mahammad theoretically promised to all believers. In practice, the non-Arab Muslims were forced to become *mawali*, or clients, of the Arab tribes. They no longer had to pay the *jizya* (poll tax) which Islam demanded of the *dhimma* (protected minorities), but there was little substantive improvement in their lot. Most of the *mawali* were Persians--formerly Zoroastrians--and Syrians, who had previously professed Eastern Christianity. Both peoples had developed rich civilizations with great historical and cultural heritages. Many were sophisticated urban dwellers, merchants, skilled artisans and professional people, while the Arabs, fresh out of the desert, <sup>seemed</sup> were crude and illiterate. The *mawali* resented, and probably despised, the Arab masters who treated them so contemptuously. These conditions worsened progressively during Umayyad times.

The Persians, and Persianized Iraq, possessed a vastly different set of political values from those of the Arabs. The Persian king was regarded as divine. His family was greatly revered, and they were surrounded by a court of great pomp, luxury, and elegance.<sup>1</sup> Byzantine custom was similar. The Umayyad, or Arab, concept of a leader or caliph was of a first among equals, who sat in a rather informal style and would receive complaints and hear grievances from all of the tribes. Byzantines and Persians would not respect or revere such a leader.

These two factors--different historical experiences and tradition, and ethnic persecution--made the Persians, Iraqis and Syrians receptive converts to Shi'ism. Under Umayyad rule, the Shi'a became a fanatical enemy of the Arab "kings" and "usurpers," and developed a world view which was chiefly

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<sup>1</sup>See MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

derived from Persian and Byzantine political and religious thought, in direct opposition to Umayyad political practice. "The Shi'ah... became the receptacle of all the revolutionary and heterodox ideas maintained by the converted peoples. Alongside of the visible political history of Islam of the first centuries, these circles built up their evolution of the unseen community, the only true one, guided by the Holy Family, and the reality was to them a continuous denial of the postulates of Sunni religion."<sup>1</sup>

#### B. The Coming of the 'Abbasids

"The Shi'a in its many forms had become so strong by the middle of the Eighth Century, that one branch of it (the Twelvers or Ithna 'Ashari) was able to see its candidates, the 'Abbasid family, take power as Caliphs."<sup>2</sup> The prevailing chaos of the last days of the Umayyads encouraged a renaissance of Shi'i militancy. Thus, despite the lack of leadership from their Imams, the Shi'a opposition became increasingly active. Persia, Iraq, and the Hejaz "were honeycombed with secret organizations"<sup>3</sup> who actively sought the end of Umayyad rule. The sins of the "Umayyad usurpers,"<sup>4</sup> and the faithful devotion of the Shi'a to the Prophet's family, made of them the "focus of popular sympathy."<sup>5</sup> To their camp came all those who were dissatisfied with the status quo for any reason--political, economic, or social, as well as religious or moral.

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<sup>1</sup>C. Snouck-Hurgronje, Mohammedanism, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>M. Hedgese, The Order of Assassins (The Hague: Meuten & Co., 1955), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Ali, op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>4</sup>Hitti, op. cit., p. 282.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



Thus, while Ja'far as-Sadiq was living so peacefully in Medina, the leader of one Shi'i faction, the Kaisanis., led by a son of Muhammad al-Hanafiyya, an Abu Hashim, was agitating in Khurasan. He was greatly feared by the Umayyads, and it is said that he was finally poisoned by the Caliph Hisham. As he lay dying, he realized who was responsible, and he commanded his followers to rush him to Hamaymah where he quickly made common cause with the 'Abbasid leader, Muhammad ibn 'Abbas. "It is said he bequeathed his right to the Caliphate to Muhammad."<sup>1</sup>

The 'Abbasids were descendants of the Prophet's uncle--al-'Abbas-- who saw their opportunity in the Umayyad disarray and growing Shi'i strength. They formed an alliance with the Shi'a by deceitfully playing on the latter's loyalty to the Prophet's family. By "family," the 'Abbasids meant al-'Abbas' line, while the Shi'a only recognized the 'Alids. The 'Abbasids naturally and calculatedly did not clarify their position until after the victory was won. "The Abbasid movement shows a mixture of genuine religious feeling... and shrewd political calculation."<sup>2</sup> They made concessions to every faction. They advocated support for "him of the family of the Prophet who shall be chosen"<sup>3</sup>...--a vague statement. To the mawalis, they promised the "defence of the weak."<sup>4</sup>

In Iraq, most of the mawali populace was sympathetic to the Shi'a, as the natural Iraqi opposition to Syrian hegemony began to take on an increasingly religious coloration. However, opposition to the Umayyads was not confined to mawalis. The Sunni theologians centered in Medina and pious men

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<sup>1</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 123-124.

<sup>2</sup>Watt, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

everywhere decried the secularism and corruption of the descendants of Mu'awiya. Eastward from Iraq, Shi'ism had struck root in Persia, and especially in the northeast--Khurasan--where, "under the guise of Islam, Iranianism was revivifying itself."<sup>1</sup>

When the Kaisanis, the Iraqi Shi'a, coalesced with the 'Abbasids, the Umayyads were doomed. Subtle propaganda abetted the military movements. Under the banner of a restored theocracy and a return to the pure Islam of the Rashidun, the culmination of all of this activity finally erupted in Khurasan on June 9, 747 A.D. Its Umayyad governor frantically appealed to Damascus for aid, but Marwan II was too busy with the Qays--Yamani confusion in Syria itself to be of much help. Al-Kufah soon fell to the rebels, and on October 30, 747, the first 'Abbasid Caliph received public homage.<sup>2</sup> The Umayyads made their last, desperate stand in January 750 on the banks of the Greater Zab in Iraq, but the khalifa's despairing forces were no match for the confident and dynamic revolutionaries. Damascus fell on April 26, 750 after a very short siege. On August 5, the fugitive Umayyad khalifa was captured and executed in Egypt, and his head sent to abu-al-'Abbas, the new 'Abbasid khalifa, who liked to call himself "as-Saffah"--the Butcher. The Empire had become filled with spies who traced the unlucky fugitives. Large massacres were not uncommon. "The truly Arab period in the history of Islam had now passed...The Shi'ites considered themselves avenged..."<sup>3</sup>

#### C. Shi'ism Under 'Abbasid Rule

Under the 'Abbasids, the religious nature of the khilafa began to be emphasized, partly because the latter had come to power claiming a return

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, op. cit., p. 283.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

to the purity of early Islam. The caliph surrounded himself with noted theologians and canonists, to prove the depth of his piety to his subjects. In substance, little had changed. "Feigned religiosity"<sup>1</sup> superseded the frank secularism of the Umayyads. The one characteristic of the new dynasty that was truly different had nothing to do with religion. The Abbasid regime was essentially non-Arab. Although the caliphs themselves were Arabs, other influences, mainly Persian, came to predominate at court and in the government. Arabian dominance ended with the demise of the Umayyads.

The uneasy 'Abbasid alliance with the 'Alids soon ended. Their one common bond--hatred of the Umayyads--had dissolved with the success of the revolt, and the 'Abbasids began to show their true colors. They had no intention of restoring the ahl al-bayt to power, because they desired it for themselves.

The strength of the 'Alids in Kufah, where the original 'Abbasid headquarters were located, made as-Saffah decidedly uncomfortable and uneasy, and he left there speedily. His successor, Abu Ja'far (al-Mansur), likewise ignored Shi'i demands and claims. Al-Mansur, in fact, "proved one of the greatest, though most unscrupulous, of the 'Abbasids."<sup>2</sup>

The betrayed Shi'at 'Ali expressed their growing resentment in numerous revolts, which were all ruthlessly suppressed. The great-grandsons of al-Hasan were killed at Medina, one in 762, and the other the following year.<sup>3</sup>

The seventh Shi'i Imam, Musa, who was the fourth son of Ja'far as-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Sadiq, lived through the turbulent first years of 'Abbasid rule. Like his father and others before him, he lived in "scholarly retirement"<sup>1</sup> in Medina. He knew that the caliphs would be quick to notice any signs of disloyalty in him, and, for his great cautiousness and patience, he earned the nickname al-Kasim, the "Forebearing." A Shi'a revolt occurred in the reign of al-Hadi, and peace was not easily restored. Musa, however, was not molest-  
ed.

The Caliph Harun ar-Rashid was perhaps the most famous and most glorious of the 'Abbasid rulers. His reign was noted for the great contributions of the men of learning at his court to all fields of knowledge. He was also an extremely orthodox Sunni and dealt harshly with the Shi'a, and all other religious heresies. Before he died, he wished to ensure an orderly succession. He ordered that the administration of the Empire be split between his two sons, al-Amin and al-Ma'mun. The elder, al-Amin, was of pure Arab blood and was the favorite of the Arab party and the Sunni 'ulema.' His father regarded him as "capricious, extravagant and sensual."<sup>2</sup> Ma'mun, on the other hand, was considered more responsible, and was popular among the Persians. Thus Harun had declared that he would: "regulate my succession, and to let it pass into the hands of one whose character and conduct I approve, and of whose political capacity I am assured,"<sup>3</sup>(i.e. Ma'mun). In 183 A.H., Amin, because he was the elder, was proclaimed Caliph --designate in Baghdad, but Ma'mun, the son of a Persian slave-girl, was to "rule the eastern provinces, (i.e. Khurasan) where the Persian element pre-

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<sup>1</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

vailed.<sup>1</sup>

In 192 A.H., a rebellion erupted in Khurasan, and Harun, accompanied by Ma'mun, rushed there to quell it. Suddenly, en route, Harun became very ill, and in a short while, he was dead. Ma'mun continued on to Khurasan, where he made peace and proceeded to ingratiate himself with the inhabitants. Adhering to the pact made with his brother, he recognized Amin as Caliph in Baghdad. Amin, however, went back on his word, and in 194 A.H. he appointed his own son, Musa, to replace Ma'mun in the east.

There was constant conflict between Iraq and Khurasan on one hand, and also between the sedentary Iraqis and the bedouins during Harun's reign. It erupted into violence in 812-813, immediately after Harun's death, with the latter's unwise attempt to give al-Ma'mun his own small kingdom in Khurasan, independent of the sovereignty of the Caliph in Baghdad, al-Amin, his elder brother.

Al-Ma'mun's strength was based upon a new Khurasanian army, and was strongly Persian in its composition. With its aid, al-Ma'mun subdued Iraq, Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt. The struggle culminated in a siege of Baghdad in 196-198 A.H. with a victory for Ma'mun and the death of Amin.

#### D. Al-Ma'mun's Attempted Reconciliation of Sunnis and Shi'is.

Ma'mun was immediately proclaimed Caliph, but he waited for six years before he felt strong enough to enter Baghdad and rule there. During the interim, he was greatly influenced by his wazir, Fadl ibn Sahl, whose Persian and Shi'ite sympathies were well-known. In 817 A.D., Ma'mun arrived at a momentous decision. He would attempt to mollify smoldering Shi'i resentment against the 'Abbasid dynasty, by designating 'Ali ar-Rida, Musa al-Kasim's son, as his successor in the khilafa.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

Before the civil war between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun, Shi'ism was not an extensive phenomenon. After that struggle (815 A.D.), it began to supersede Kharijism as the symbol of opposition to 'Abbasid rule, and found widespread support among the bedouins of northern Arabia and the desert areas of Iraq. From that time on, bedouin tribes began to identify increasingly with various Shi'ite sects, and especially with the most revolutionary: the Isma'ilis.

During the struggles in the 'Abbasid house, the Shi'a had been having their own internecine difficulties. Musa al-Kazim, the son of Ja'far, was not recognized by all Shi'a as the rightful Imam. The Twelvers, the most numerous and influential group, accepted Musa as the seventh Imam, appointed or designated by his father. Musa, was not, however, the eldest son. The eldest was Isma'il, a seemingly dissolute drunkard. The Twelvers claimed that Ja'far withdrew the nass from Isma'il because of his weak character, and bestowed it on Musa, the fourth son, instead. The extreme wing, calling themselves the Isma'ilis (supporters of Isma'il), held that nass, once given, cannot be rescinded, even by an Imam. The Twelvers contended that one of doubtful moral caliber could not become Imam. The bitter dispute that followed led to a deep division in the sect that was never reconciled. The Twelvers remained in the majority, and became known as the moderates of Shi'ism. The fanatic and revolutionary Isma'ilis, who began to acquire all sorts of mystical and complex doctrines, regarded Isma'il as the last (7th) Imam, and were thus termed "Seveners." They later founded a separate dynasty, the Fatimid, in Egypt and North Africa.

During the khilafa of Harun ar-Rashid, Musa al-Kazim had been regarded with deep suspicion. He was ultimately summoned to the new 'Abbasid capital of Baghdad and imprisoned there. He was released and then re-imprisoned.

Musa finally died, in prison, in 799 A.D.

'Ali ar-Rida, Musa's son, became Imam of the Twelver Shi'a early in 805 A.D. He was the first Imam since al-Husayn to actively seek a public career, and because of his activities he became known as "the Imam involved in Politics."<sup>1</sup> When he accepted al-Ma'mun's offer of the 'Abbasid succession in 816 A.D., he demanded certain conditions. Probably because of his uniquely religious position vis-a-vis the Shi'a "he would not be responsible for the purely secular affairs of state,"<sup>2</sup> and would continue in the tradition of his predecessors in devoting himself to religious studies. At a huge celebration in 816 the Caliph gave his daughter Umm Habib to 'Ali ar-Rida in marriage, and made a proclamation changing the official color of the 'Abbasids from black to the 'Alid green. Relatives of 'Ali were given governmental positions.<sup>3</sup> His name, followed by the title "Imam of the Muslims"<sup>4</sup> was placed on the coinage along with that of al-Ma'mun.

The Caliph's sudden and dramatic action was quite naturally joyously received in the Shi'i provinces of Iraq and Persia, but such was not the case in Baghdad, where orthodox Sunni Arab influences predominated. The Arab party, which had never trusted al-Ma'mun, quickly deposed him and enthroned his uncle Ibrahim ibn Mahdi as khalifa in his place.

Meanwhile, al-Ma'mun's relations with his heir, the "Imam," were growing strained. In 818 A.D., a short time later, 'Ali ar-Rida died, and many sources<sup>5</sup> attribute his end to secret poisoning by al-Ma'mun who was now

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>Hellister, op. cit., p. 81, and Mergan, Islam the Straight Path (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Hellister, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>E. Sell, Studies in Islam (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1928), p. 59.

eager to be rid of him. He was buried in Meshed, in Persia, where his tomb is still a place of pilgrimage for the Shi'i faithful. Of his personality, it is known that 'Ali ar-Rida was a "thoughtful and likeable"<sup>1</sup> man, and also an "active and courageous"<sup>2</sup> leader of the Shi'i community. "There are suggestions of an intensive da'wat, or organized propaganda, reaching both officials and the masses"<sup>3</sup> while he was Imam. During his brief reign as "Imam of the Muslims," many religious conferences under the patronage of the Caliph were held. At them, Shi'i viewpoints were vigorously presented, the first time that such freedom of discussion was permitted by the State. The great period of "religious ferment,"<sup>4</sup> begun cautiously under Harun ar-Rashid, was gaining momentum.

#### E. The Mu'tazilites--An Attempted "Bridge" Between Sunnism and Shi'ism

Al-Ma'mun managed to overcome his adversaries within two years, and returned a wiser, shrewder, and less idealistic man, after his ill-fated experiment with the Shi'at 'Ali. "He came as a conqueror who was in no sense a suppliant. Nevertheless he showed a disposition to be merciful...and to conciliate...the various factions in the empire,"<sup>5</sup> including the Shi'a. He entered Baghdad wearing the 'Alid green, but within a month had restored the traditional 'Abbasid black. But, "Ma'mun's favor towards the Shi'ites persisted even after he had replaced the green colour with the black,"<sup>6</sup> for

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<sup>1</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 189.



it was "a political action and against his personal preference."<sup>1</sup> Al-Ma'mun continued to show favor to the family of 'Ali ar-Rida, and he even married yet another daughter, Umm Fadi, to 'Ali's son and successor, Muhammad Taki. At the marriage celebration, the Caliph said, "surely I would like to be a grandfather in the line of the Apostle of God and of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib."<sup>2</sup> Muhammad became Ma'mun's protege and studied and lived at the court. Later, he left Baghdad, with his wife, for Medina, where he followed the tradition of the imams and lived a quiet and contemplative life. A few years later, he returned to Baghdad, and it was while he was teaching there that the Mu'tazilite cause began to capture the mind of the khalifa.

#### The Mu'tazilites

The Umayyads had "remained pagans at heart and were...fatalists."<sup>3</sup> During their rule, a school which claimed to derive justification from the Salafs, a group of primitive early Muslims, appeared. Its founder was called Jahn bin Safwan, and his school was consequently termed the Jabriyya. They "rivalled Calvin in the absolute denial of free will to man."<sup>4</sup> God was the omniscient sovereign, and man a malleable mass of clay. The Umayyads, irreligious but nominally orthodox Sunni, encouraged the Jabriyyas, and their conservative doctrines spread rapidly among the common people. These reactionary and uncompromising ideas, which threatened to stifle all free thought, initiated a revolt among Muslim intellectuals.

The leaders of this intellectual "revolt," Ma'bad al-Juhani, Yunus al-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ali, op. cit., p. 412.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Aswari, and Ghailan Dimashqi, were men "who had evidently derived many of their ideas from the Fatimides"<sup>1</sup> in North Africa. Their adversaries, the conservatives, engendered new and even more extreme sects. Not surprisingly, an anti-predestinarian party was organized in Basra around the end of the eighth century, with a Medinite, Hasan al-Basri, at its head. One of his more famous pupils was Abu Husaifa Wasil ibn 'Ata' al-Ghazzal, who came to differ on some points with the master, and so founded a school of his own, which endeavored to combine Islamic dogmas with newly-discovered Greek philosophical ideas. The new school was named Mu'tazila, or Ahl al-I'tizal (dissenters), and its rationalistic tendencies caused the most liberal minds in the Islamic world to rally to it. "Proceeding upon the lines of the Fatimide philosophers, and appropriating the principles which they had laid down...and [their] ideas...he formulated into theses the doctrines," which for many centuries "dominated over the minds of men...it gave an impetus to the development of national and intellectual life,"<sup>2</sup> "all the world of intellect, in fact, including the caliphs, belonged to the Mu'tazilite school."<sup>3</sup>

There is a thesis that Wasil ibn 'Ata' and his followers were actively engaged in the 'Abbasid revolt, but the actual details of the origins of the Mu'tazila are clouded in mystery and fabrications. Montgomery Watt<sup>4</sup> places the origin of the school in Basra toward the end of the eighth century. It seems that Wasil came to be regarded as the founder because his ideas suited the political notions of the Mu'tazilites of the ninth century, who were the main intellectual influence in the 'Abbasid court.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 415.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See Watt, Surveys, op. cit., p. 69.

The Mu'tazilites were, in general, men well-read in the Greek logic and philosophy, which had been re-discovered by Islamic scholars during the early 'Abbasid period. Translations of Aristotle and others by Syrians, and Persians, Christians, Jews and Muslims, brought to men like Ibrahim ibn Sayyar an-Nazzam, Ahmad ibn Hait, Fasl al-Hadisi, and Abu 'Ali Muhammad al-Jubba'i, inspiration to try to rationalize these new ideas with Islamic revelation. The new science of the Mu'tazila was termed by them the "science of reason,"<sup>1</sup> 'Ilm al-Kalam. In the ninth century, "Mu'tazilism became substantially amalgamated with the rationalism of the Fatimide school, whence it had sprung. It is a well known fact that the chief doctors of the Mu'tazilite school were educated under the Fatimides."<sup>2</sup>

"There can hardly be any doubt that moderate Mu'tazilism represented the views of the Caliph 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and the most liberal of his early descendants, and probably of Muhammad himself."<sup>3</sup> This statement is an indication of the clear resemblance that exists between Mu'tazili and Shi'i doctrines and their origins. It lends substance to the theory that Mu'tazilism in its heyday was probably a determined effort to bridge the gap between the increasingly hardening attitudes of the Sunni theologians on the one hand, and rapidly developing Shi'i dogma on the other. Ameer 'Ali, a Shi'i writer, relates certain Mu'tazili dogmas to the beliefs of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib himself, for example: he "condemned in emphatic language all anthropomorphic...conceptions of the Deity."<sup>4</sup> (Descriptions found

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<sup>1</sup>Ali, op. cit., p. 415.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 415-416.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 416.

in the Qur'an in which God is described as having eyes, hands, etc., the Mu'tazila rejected as literal truth. They conceived of these descriptions symbolically and allegorically). As another example of the bend, Shi'i theologians, in their doctrine of the sinlessness of the Imams, show "the influence of the rationalistic type of argument that characterized the Mu'tazilites."<sup>1</sup>

In 212/827, al-Ma'mun proclaimed publicly the dogma of the createdness of the Qur'an, a basic Mu'tazili doctrine. At the same time, the Mihna, or inquisition, was instituted. All public officials, most of whom were fanatic Sunnis and haters of the Mu'tazila, were compelled to assert, in public, their adherence to the official line. "This was not a purely theological question of course; the government was trying to get broader support for its policies by gaining the favour of the moderate Shiites; and the abandonment of this whole line of policy about 849 under al-Mutawakkil probably indicates primarily that it had not received the measure of support it hoped for. After this point the Mu'tazilites ceased to have political importance."<sup>2</sup>

Mu'tazili political attitudes more or less had as their goal the broadening of popular support for the 'Abbasid khilafa. Politics were not a central concern of the Mu'tazila and their contributions to political theory were not very creative. They advocated "compromise and...the balance of opposing interests."<sup>3</sup> Their alliance with the khilafa made their pragmatic defense of government policies a logical conclusion. Their consistent efforts to mediate between the Sunnis and Shi'a are illustrated by their dec-

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> Watt, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

trine of the "intermediate position"<sup>1</sup> between the constitutionalists (Sunnis) and autocrats (Shi'a), and also by their advocacy of the createdness of the Qur'an, a Shi'ite dogma. Like all compromises on matters of fundamental belief and religion, it was deemed to failure. The cursing of Mu'awiya and the Umayyads in all mosques did not satisfy the Shi'a, because the nass of 'Ali and his descendants was not recognized.

Mu'tazilism reached its peak of influence and prestige in Baghdad concurrently with the development of Shi'i doctrine and law. There is a theory that the acknowledged founder of Mu'tazilism, Wasil ibn 'Ata', attended the lectures of Ja'far as-Sadiq in Medina.<sup>2</sup> "The dogmatic books of the Shi'a on the unity of God and His Justice, and on the Qur'an, agree with Mu'tazili thinking. The reasonable proofs advanced for the theory of the Imamate appear also to be based on Mu'tazilite grounds."<sup>3</sup>

Duncan B. MacDonald terms the connection of Mu'tazilism with Shi'ism "the great mystery of Muslim history."<sup>4</sup> Goldziher, according to Ameer 'Ali, feels that the Mu'tazilite school was founded by the Fatimid Imams.<sup>5</sup> Al-Nazzam (d. 231), one of the most radical of the Mu'tazilites, agreed with the Shi'a on the question of the infallibility of the imams.<sup>6</sup> He also held the novel and original idea that all things were created by God at one time, and kept by him until the proper time for their appearance on earth. He

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>4</sup>See 'Ali, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

was a "high Imamite"<sup>1</sup> as well as a Mu'tazilite, and, according to him, the Imam "had the right to supplement the teachings of Muhammad."<sup>2</sup>

Mu'tazilism. Its Doctrinal Connections With Shi'ism.

a. The Attributes of God

'Ali ibn Abi Talib, according to a commentary of a Mu'tazili scholar, condemned as erroneous the literal interpretation of Qur'anic passages that attributed human features to God. "God was not like any object that the human mind can conceive; no attribute can be ascribed to Him which bore the least resemblance to any quality of which human beings have perception from their knowledge of material objects. The perfection of piety consists in knowing God;...He who refers an attribute to God believes the attribute to be God and regards God as two or part of one...He is the Primary Cause ...He has no relation to place, time, or measure."<sup>3</sup>

The sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq, the noted scholar and theologian, believed all of God's attributes to be part of His "Essence."<sup>4</sup> "The conditions of time and place are wholly inapplicable to Him..."<sup>5</sup>

Sura VII (The Heights), verse 54, states that Allah created heaven and earth in six days, "then mounted he the throne." Many passages such as this imply, if taken literally, that God has a human form and human features. Orthodox Sunnis have always accepted the literal interpretation, without ar-

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<sup>1</sup>D. B. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>In 'Ali, op. cit., p. 416, from Nahj al-Balaghah; see the comment of Ibn Abi al-Hadid, the Mu'tazilite.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

gument or discussion-bila kayf (without asking how). Shi'is tend to regard these passages symbolically or allegorically. The Mu'tasila, in revolt against the unquestioning blind faith of the Sunni masses and their religious leaders, came to grips with this question so basic to Islamic faith: the nature and attributes of God.

The Mu'tasila doctrine which deals with the attributes of God was termed by them the doctrine of tawhid, the assertion of God's unity. They claimed that the expressions which describe the ninety-nine Qur'anic attributes of God:--The Knowing One, Hearing One, or Seeing One--if believed to be qualities of God, would be a declaration of belief in the qualities as separate beings...This would deny the oneness of God's essence or nature.

The Mu'tasila thus proceeded to explain away all of the anthropomorphic passages in the Qur'an, and substituted in their stead a doctrine of transcendentalism and the absolute unity of God's Person. Mu'tazili theologians asserted that these attributes "had no sort of independent...existence but were merged in the unity of God's being..."<sup>1</sup> The Ashab al-'adl wa 'l-tawhid (people of justice and unity, as they called themselves), unanimously denied that God can be seen by the believers in heaven, for that would be limiting His presence to a definite place. "They forbid the describing of God by any quality belonging to material objects,"<sup>2</sup> interpreting relevant Qur'anic passages as figurative.<sup>3</sup> They denied the existence of God's qualities as separate from His Being, but as "the peculiar property of His Essence."<sup>4</sup>

The doctrine of the Oneness of God went through several modifications

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<sup>1</sup>Watt, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Ali, op. cit., p. 417.

<sup>3</sup>See Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

after Wasil, who "had reduced God to a vague unity, a kind of eternal oneness."<sup>1</sup> Abu Hudayl, a later Mu'tazilite, taught that the qualities were not in His Essence, but were His Essence. His Omnipotence was His Essence, and His absolute unity was beyond description or positive or negative assertions. "The anthropomorphic God of Muhammad, who has face and hands, is seen in Paradise by the believer, and settles Himself firmly upon His throne, becomes a spirit, and a spirit, too, of the vaguest kind."<sup>2</sup> The Mu'tazilite attempts to explain away this anthropomorphism, so obviously intended in the Qur'an, of necessity became a cumbersome, twisted and extremely complex dialectic which only the most expert, hair-splitting theologian could comprehend.

b. Free Will, or "Justice" (جس)

The Mu'tazila referred to themselves as al-ahl al-tawhid wa'l-'adl. Their concept of unity has been discussed above. The idea of justice relates to the Mu'tazilite doctrine of free will and human responsibility, which violently differed from the beliefs held by the orthodox Sunnis. The orthodox asserted that God, in His Omniscience and Omnipotence, could do whatever He wished or pleased, without any restrictions or regard for good or evil. This power is inherently just because it is the manifestation of the will of God, and is accepted on faith. That it is contrary to reason—that is—that God is just, and therefore cannot or will not will evil, is irrelevant. Man, in the orthodox view, is no more than a mere instrument whom God creates and completely controls. God is utterly free, and man must accept his inevitable fate as God's will. "Good and evil have their nature

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<sup>1</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 145.



by God's will, and man can learn to know them only by God's teachings and commands. Thus, except through revelation, there can be neither theology nor ethics."<sup>1</sup>

The Mu'tazila, beginning with Wasil ibn 'Ata', "denied that God predestined the actions of men."<sup>2</sup> Certain things, like state of health, or death, came directly from God, but man's acts affecting his daily life and behavior, his piety or irreligiousness, were his own. "Man possesses qadar over his own actions."<sup>3</sup> God's justice meant that He only willed what was best for man. According to the Mu'tazila, it is only reasonable and logical that a righteous man should be rewarded and a perpetrator of evil be punished. They believed "That the knowledge of God is within the province of reason," that the "cognition of good and evil is also within the province of reason."<sup>4</sup> Thus man has responsibility for his acts. "By insisting on human freedom and responsibility the Mu'tazilites made man's ultimate destiny depend on himself. The basic thought was that God in revelation showed man what he ought to do to attain Paradise, and then left it to man himself to do it or not to do it."<sup>5</sup> The Qur'an itself states: "And give glad tidings unto those who believe and do good works; that theirs are Gardens underneath rivers flow."<sup>6</sup> Consequently, those who do "good works" will be rewarded by God.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ali, op. cit., p. 418.

<sup>5</sup>Watt, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>6</sup>M.M. Pickthall, "The Cow," Qur'an (II: 25), p. 35.

If this doctrine of human free will and responsibility, and punishment and reward, is carried to its logical extent, one is left with the assertion that God is bound to do only good, to reward the righteous and punish sinners. If God is the Ultimate Goodness, then it is not in His nature to promote evil. Thus, "no moral evil, or iniquity of action, or unbelief, or disobedience, can be referred to God, because, if He had caused unrighteousness to be, He would be Himself unrighteous--(لانه لو خلق الظالم كان ظالما) ..."<sup>1</sup> God only does what is "beneficial and good."<sup>2</sup> Thus to do good and benefit humanity is incumbent upon Him, and this is Mu'tazili 'adl or justice. It is in accord with reason, but it hardly strengthens traditional and fundamental Islamic beliefs in an omnipotent God, "with Muhammad's conception of God as will and as the sovereign over all."<sup>3</sup> If God is bound or limited in any way, He cannot, logically, be all-powerful. The influence of Aristotle and of Greek theology on the Mu'tazilite school is quite clear on this question. "They strove to make good their footing on strange ground and keep a right to the name of Muslim, while changing the essence of their faith."<sup>4</sup>

c. The Qur'an and the Doctrine of Uncreatedness.

The discussions on the attributes, and especially on the knowledge, of God, eventually led the Mu'tazila into a debate on the Word of God and the Qur'an, which brought them into yet another sharp conflict with the Sunni 'ulema'. Their position was actually far closer to that of the Shi'a,

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<sup>1</sup>Ali, op. cit., p. 418.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

whose doctrine was undergoing significant development in the same period. The Sunnis took the position that the Qur'an was the uncreated, eternal Word of God, immutable for all time, with every word and punctuation point sacred. The Shi'a, on the other hand, held the belief that the Qur'an was created at a point in time, when it was revealed to the Prophet. Thus it would be neither uncreated nor immutable. They further held that the Imam, the divinely appointed ruler of the umma, with a direct link to God, could alter the Qur'an if he chose. The Shi'a claim that 'Ali ibn Abi Talib had a copy of the Qur'an which he refused to surrender when the official version under 'Uthman was completed. He supposedly stated that his copy would stay with his descendants "to disappear with the Twelfth Imam when he would be concealed."<sup>1</sup> According to the Shi'a, any differences between 'Ali's version and the official one, are the secrets of the Imams, to be made known upon the appearance of the Mahdi and the establishment of his earthly rule of justice and righteousness. The Twelvers also "hold that a particle of divine light resides by emanation in the imam and guarantees his impeccability."<sup>2</sup>

The difficulty over the position of the Qur'an arose when the question of its status was raised under 'Abbasid rule, in the opening of the golden age of Islamic learning. The discovery of Greek philosophy, and the desire to apply the methods of reason and logic to religion on the part of the intelligentsia, brought them into conflict with orthodox leaders, and the stumbling block of the fundamentalist approach to the Qur'an. The mihna of al-Ma'mun tried to force the orthodox, who argued that the Speech of God is eternal, into asserting the createdness of the Qur'an. However, the fact

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<sup>1</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>L. Gardet, Mohammedanism, trans. Wm. Burridge (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), p. 109.

that the Qur'an appeared to Muhammad at a definite time also led to the opposite conclusion—createdness. "Arguments were developed on both sides with great subtlety..."<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Qur'an, with the passage of time, had become an object of increasingly extreme awe and reverence. "In it God spoke, addressing His servant, the Prophet; the words, with few exceptions, are direct words of God."<sup>2</sup> The words thus came to be referred to as kalam Allah. MacDonald<sup>3</sup> mentions that the Muslim doctrine of the eternal Word of God probably was directly influenced by the Christian concept of the divine Logos, and more specifically by John of Damascus. The stimulus of Christian doctrines, and not actual controversy about Qur'anic teachings, is thought by him to have initiated the debate. The Word is with God in Heaven, and although the two are not identical, "but the idea to be gained from the expression of one is equivalent to the idea which we would gain from the other, if the veil of the flesh were removed from us and the spiritual world revealed."<sup>4</sup> Two Muslims of the Umayyad period, Jahm ibn Safwan and al-Ja'd ibn Dirham were executed for dissenting from the orthodox view. "Our fathers have told us..."<sup>5</sup> was the standard retort to any challenge. Malik ibn Anas, the founder of one of the four Sunni schools (Maliki), used the formula bila kayf, without asking how. Orthodox opposition to any flexibility of viewpoint was so extreme that they absolutely refused to draw even the most obvious conclusions from Qur'anic statements. This rigidity even led to the

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<sup>1</sup>Watt, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

absurd theory that human recitation or writing of the Qur'an was also uncreated. According to them there was nothing to be argued, for reason (عقل) had no place in revelation.

The Mu'tasilite use of reason to explain revelation could not abide a divine book. True intellectual freedom would be impossible. If it could be established that the Qur'an had two sides--a human and a divine--all necessary changes or modernization could be attributed to the former. The orthodox belief in uncreatedness led to a serious intellectual and religious problem. An uncreated Qur'an, existing alongside of God in heaven closely resembles the Trinitarian beliefs of Christianity, and contradicts the very basis of Islam--its absolute monotheism. There would be, in effect, two Gods. One Mu'tasilite, al-Musdar, "flatly damned as unbelievers all who held the eternity of the Qur'an..."<sup>1</sup>

"The Shiite Creed reads 'Our belief concerning the Qur'an is that it is the word (kalam) of Allah, and His revelation, sent down by Him, His speech and His book...Verily, Allah, Blessed and Exalted is He above all, is its Creator and Revealer and Master and Protector and Utterer'."<sup>2</sup>

Montgomery Watt states that "the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an was to please the Shiites..."<sup>3</sup> Mut'a, or temporary, marriage, a Shi'i practice, was also legalized by al-Ma'mun.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the Mu'tasilite position on the createdness of the Qur'an, so ardently advocated by al-Ma'mun, was a Shi'i doctrine, and so, anathema to Sunni 'ulema'. This proclamation of al-Ma'mun's had the effect of undermining "the foundation

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Ali, op. cit., p. 29. (Italics are 'Ali's).

<sup>3</sup> Watt, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Hollister, op. cit., p. 84.

and inspiration of Islam."<sup>1</sup>

Mu'tazilism was a School for intellectuals. It had no adherents among the masses, with whom the 'ulema' commanded absolute power and obedience. Mu'tazilites lived and studied at courts, palaces and academies, and never tried to reach the common people. When al-Ma'mun, the liberal and intellectual sympathizer of Persian and Shi'a causes, ascended to the 'Abbasid throne, the situation changed. He "had a relish for theological discussions and a high opinion of his own infallibility."<sup>2</sup>

The Imamate of the Shi'a was a religious as well as a political institution. The Imam had the power to change and reinterpret religious dogma, binding on all believers. The Sunni khilafa, on the other hand, was a purely political and temporal office. The Caliph, in Islamic terms, was no better than an ordinary member of the umma. All questions of theology and religion were left to expert theologians--the 'ulema.' No caliph had ever attempted to interfere with matters of religion, but al-Ma'mun broke that tradition. "He was that most dangerous of all beings. a doctrinaire despot."<sup>3</sup> "It did not matter that he ranged himself on the progressive side; his fatal error was that he invoked the authority of the state in matters of the intellectual and religious life."<sup>4</sup> By advocating the Mu'tazilite doctrines, al-Ma'mun united the conservative opposition solidly against him. By persecuting his adversaries, he made martyrs of them.

"Al-Ma'mun, for all his genius, was at heart a schoolmaster. He was an enlightened Islam. Those who preferred to dwell in the darkness of the obscu-

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<sup>1</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

rant, he first scolded and then punished."<sup>1</sup> The Caliph built all sorts of schools and academies and encouraged debates in all fields, such as religion, philosophy, poetry science. Christians, Jews, representatives of all of the Muslim sects, participated in the debates that al-Ma'mun encouraged and supported in his efforts to develop "a religion of reason and conscience."<sup>2</sup>

In 202 A.H., al-Ma'mun made his great move. He proclaimed a decree, "proclaiming the [Mu'tazili and Shi'i] doctrine of the creation of the Qur'an as the only truth, and as binding on all Muslims. At the same time, as an evident sop to the Persian nationalists and the 'Alids, 'Ali was proclaimed the best of creatures after Muhammad."<sup>3</sup> The khalifa thus challenged the fundamental Sunni doctrine of the agreement of the umma [إجماع] in the formulation of theology and law. "Never before had the individual conscience been threatened by a word from the throne. The Mu'tazilites through it practically became a state church..."<sup>4</sup> The effect of the decree was almost nil. It did, however, stimulate the unification and solidification of the opposition and popularized the latter's cause. In terms of actual belief, nothing changed.

For six years, this situation continued, until in 217 a method was devised which would bring "the will of the khalifa home upon the people."<sup>5</sup> In 218 (827 A.D.) a mihna or inquisition with a Mu'tazilite judge, Ahmad ibn Abu Duwad, at its head, was instituted. By 833 A.D., any qadi who would not subscribe to the official view would be summarily removed from his job.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 154-155.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>3</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

The mihna brought to trial those who refused to obey. Al-Ma'mun's decree "was full of railings against the common people."<sup>1</sup> They were too stupid to see the truth. "It is the duty of the Khalifa to guide them and especially to show them the distinction between God and His Book."<sup>2</sup> The mihna became law throughout the Empire, and was extended so as to also apply to the doctrines of "free will and the vision of God."<sup>3</sup> Those who refused to take the required test could be executed for kufir.

The 'Alids were untouched by this severe persecution. They "were treated with the greatest consideration, and it is especially noteworthy that the Imam Taki was not arrested or annoyed in any way during the reign of al-Ma'mun."<sup>4</sup> It is thought that he (the Imam) endeavored to espouse the official doctrines and policies, while not necessarily believing in them. This seeming hypocrisy was justified by the Shi'i doctrine of taqiyya or dissimulation.

"The liberal Mu'tasilites were exceedingly intolerant in their treatment of the orthodox..."<sup>5</sup> "Thus by a strange irony of fate did the movement which had [been] a party standing for free thought become a deadly instrument for suppressing thought."<sup>6</sup>

The efforts of al-Ma'mun were doomed to failure. With his death, the policy was considerably relaxed. The mihna continued under the next two 'Abbasid khulafa'—al-Mu'tasim and al-Wathiq, but only as "a handy political

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Hitti, op. cit., p. 429.



weapon."<sup>1</sup> Under the fanatic orthodox Caliph, al-Mutawakkil, the decree was rescinded and the doctrine of uncreatedness restored. As an indication of the changed fortunes of the Shi'a under al-Mutawakkil, the tombs of 'Ali and Husain were set upon and desecrated.<sup>2</sup> "Mu'tazilism was once again left a struggling heresy. The Arab party and the pure faith of Muhammad had re-asserted themselves."<sup>3</sup> The defeated Mu'tazilites turned away from their wide philosophic concerns, and became a "narrow circle"<sup>4</sup> of scholastics. "Their systems became more metaphysical and their conclusions more unintelligible to the plain man... they became sapped of life and reality."<sup>5</sup>

The leading hero of the orthodox and of the masses, and the chief victim of al-Ma'mun and his mihna, was the fanatic reactionary Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who withstood long imprisonment and severe treatment, and emerged victorious. He was an intransigent opponent of scholastic kalam, and of any discussion--whether concerning religion or law--on Islam. Reason according to him was a weapon of the Devil, with no place in revealed religion. The opinions of the fathers of Islamic traditions were the only sound bases for the explanation of the revelations of the Qur'an. He was "the idol of the masses...he ...had maintained single-handed the honour of the Word of God."<sup>6</sup> Ibn Hanbal's followers continued his work and teachings with even greater bitterness and zeal than had their master. They persevered in their reactionary attitudes long after the Mu'tazilite issue had been forgotten. Later on, the targets

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<sup>1</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>See 'Ali, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>3</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 158-159.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

for their rancor became the more moderate scholastic theology, mainly formulated by al-'Ashari, which official Islam later adopted as the final word on faith and jurisprudence.

#### Further Development of Sunnism

Orthodox Sunni Islam was strengthened by its hard-won victory over Mu'tasilism. Led by Abu Hanbal, men of traditionalism and faith triumphed over those of science and reason. Abu Hanbal's "beld and stubborn champion-ship of the cause of conservative orthodoxy constitutes one of the glamorous pages in its history."<sup>1</sup>

When the 'Abbasids came to power, they encouraged the development of unity and agreement among the various local schools of law. Eventually these schools came to justify their versions of traditions by trying to link the latter with something the Prophet had said or done. This method of justification gained acceptance and came to be universally used. The huge proliferation of traditions which were said to come from Muhammad then led to the requirement that an isnad, or reliable chain of authority, prove the authenticity of the particular tradition. The chief collectors and critics of the body of Sunni Tradition were al-Bukhari (d. 870 A.D.) and Muslim (d. 875). The compilation of the traditions gave the Sunnites a reasonably coherent body of religious and legal doctrine. This solid foundation strengthened their position against the Shi'a. Al-Ma'mun's doctrine of the creation of the Qur'an and the institution of the mihna, were finally withdrawn by al-Mutawakkil (847-861 A.D.).

The development of Tradition also indicated the increasing strength of the orthodox cause. At first, "there were...also men of Shiite sympathies

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<sup>1</sup>Hitti, op. cit., p. 430.

among the Traditionalists..., but in the ninth century Shi'ite insistence that 'Ali had been designated by Muhammad as imam after himself forced them to regard most of the Companions as unreliable transmitters, and to form their own corpus of Tradition which often included one of the Shi'ite imams in the authority chain. Thus to the Traditionalist movement are due not merely the canon of "sound" [صحیح] Tradition, but also the broad outlines of Sunnite dogma."<sup>1</sup> Reason as a tool of argument was utilized to a limited extent by orthodox theologians, as a weapon to beat the Mu'tazilites at their own game, but its shortcomings were realized. According to orthodox Sunni thinking, "religious truth...cannot be thus systematized."<sup>2</sup>

Al-'Ashari (873-935) brought "The movement towards a rational defense of the central dogmatic positions of Sunnism [to] its climax..."<sup>3</sup> He began his scholarly career as a Mu'tazilite, but abandoned it in 912 for the extreme and reactionary Hanbalite form of Sunnism. His "conversion" is attributed to the fact that he "came to the conclusion that revelation was superior to reason as a guide to life,"<sup>4</sup> and thus placed himself in the opposition camp. Also, Mu'tazilism, as stated above, was essentially an effort to compromise the sharply hostile views of Sunnites and Shi'ites. When this policy failed, the 'Abbasid regime gave it up and reverted to one of solid pro-Sunnism. Al-'Ashari's views eventually came to be accepted by the Sunni orthodoxy as the official interpretation of Islam, and thus it is advisable to state the essential points: the uncreatedness of the Qur'an, the eternalness of the Speech of God, the denial of Mu'tazili interpretations of Qur'anic

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<sup>1</sup>Watt, op. cit., pp. 75-76.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

references to God's corporeal existence, and the acceptance of anthropomorphic statements bila kayfa. Concerning the doctrine of free will, with which the Mu'tasilites had dealt so exhaustively, the absolute omnipotence of God to will whatever He pleases is fully accepted.

The doctrine termed today as "atomism" further explains al-'Ashari's position on this fundamental issue of free will and human responsibility. The Mu'tasila held that man has the power to will an act or its opposite. Al-'Ashari argued that the power to act is the only possibility. The power to do the opposite is non-existent for man. In addition, this ability to act exists only in the exact moment in which the act is committed, and at no other instant. The entire act is created by God. Man can only execute the act, he cannot create it. God's purpose is all, and man is His tool. Al-'Ashari's critics call this theory the doctrine of jabr or compulsion. The omnipotent God is not necessarily just. Al-'Ashari believed that "it is possible for God to create evil or to will folly without being an evildoer or foolish."<sup>1</sup>

The Mu'tasilites tried to marry Greek intellectual traditions to Islam. "Al-'Ashari's service was to discern a way of assimilating most of the basic elements of Greek thought without compromising any of the central dogmas of Sunnite Islam."<sup>2</sup>

#### Further Development of Shi'ism

During the eighth and ninth centuries, Shi'ism also consolidated and further enriched its dogma. "Thus by 912 there had been a hardening of both

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Sunnism and Shiism...<sup>1</sup>

The last Twelver Imam, Muhammad "al-Mahdi," vanished or died about 874 A.D. During the lifetimes of these twelve, Shi'ism of the moderate variety lacked both an organized body of followers and a solid dogmatic support. Thus, "it follows that during the ninth century up to 874 the main body of Shiism...was not a body of people recognizing the 12 imams..."<sup>2</sup> There was a group of moderate Shi'is who fully and freely participated in the intellectual activities at the court of Baghdad, the most famous being Hisham al-Hakam. These "moderate" Shi'is, until the early tenth century, were known as Rafidites. Their successors were called Imamites or Twelvers (Ithna 'Ashari), and their fundamental beliefs involved the divine nass of 'Ali and his descendants, and the infallibility of the imams. They also believed that the Prophet's Companions, in denying 'Ali's rightful claim to the khilafa, forfeited their merit as carriers of the Traditions. The Imamites challenged the very foundation of Sunni Islam, Shari'a.

Because of the absence of the Twelfth Imam, who is in "hiding," "Expounders of the Law,"<sup>3</sup> or Mujtahids, are free to interpret and explain religious dogma to the people. An apologist for Shiism, Ameer 'Ali, states: "The freedom of judgement, and the immense diversity of opinion within the Church itself is due to the absence of a controlling temporal power, compelling uniformity at the point of the sword."<sup>4</sup>

The vague Shiite belief of the ninth century in the divinely appointed infallible imam "can be regarded as the intellectual expression of a wide-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ali, op. cit., p. 317.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

spread mentality or outlook, not sufficiently organized to be called a party."<sup>1</sup> They were the autocrats, as opposed to the Sunni constitutionalists, who limited the powers of their leaders. The Shi'a longed for a charismatic savior who, unlimited by the fetters of Shari'a, would establish the rule of justice and pure Islam. The Sunni caliphate, so limited by Shari'a, could never lend itself to such yearnings, for it was too pragmatic and practical a theory, with little idealism to commend it. To the religious appeal of the Shi'i doctrine was joined the political. All those who opposed the 'Abbasids for whatever reason--moral, nationalistic, or purely political--saw its possibilities and rallied to it.

The idea of a hidden imam as a religious rallying point, after the demise of Muhammad al-Mahdi, was hit upon by Shi'i leaders to strengthen their cause both religiously and politically. One of the most famous of these leaders was Abu Sahl Isma'il anNawbakhti, who wrote a famous work on the Shi'i creed and died in 923. When the general recognition of the Twelve Imams occurred among a majority of the Shi'at 'Ali, something resembling a party began to arise. "We also hear of the specifically Imamite form of Islamic law being founded about this time. The end of the ninth century is thus the period in which Imamite Shiism took definite shape."<sup>2</sup> The more extreme Isma'ili brand of Shiism began to take a coherent form about the same time, although its beginnings were in 760 A.D., when Ja'far as-Sadiq broke with his son Isma'il and designated the younger Musa as his successor in the Imamate. The Isma'ilis engaged in extensive underground subversion and prepropaganda campaigns, and met success in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and especially in North Africa and Egypt, where the powerful Fatimid State was established.

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<sup>1</sup>Watt, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

Conclusion: The Imams

The Imam Muhammad Taki died at the age of twenty-five in Baghdad. The Shi'a claim that he was poisoned by the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tasim, but this is doubtful. (The Ithna 'Ashari claim that all but the last of their imams were martyred, and usually poisoned.) It seems that Taki was held in great esteem by both al-Ma'mun and al-Mu'tasim. As a matter of fact, his funeral service was conducted by al-Wathiq, al-Mu'tasim's son.

Muhammad Taqi's successor, 'Ali Naki, (The Pure) was born in either 827 or 829 A.D. It was during this period that the 'Abbasid caliphs moved from Baghdad to Samarra, the headquarters of the Turkish guard, which was steadily undermining the authority of the khilafa. 'Ali was either six or seven years old when he became Imam of the Shi'a. He spent his early years in Medina, where he taught and received pilgrims from the entire Muslim world, but mainly from areas where the 'Alids were strong: Egypt, Persia and Iraq. During the five-year tenure of al-Mu'tasim's heir, al-Wathiq, the Imam was never disturbed.

When al-Mutawakkil became the Caliph in 232/854, the tragic sufferings of 'Ali Naki began. Al-Mutawakkil was a fanatic Sunni and bore an intense hatred toward the Shi'a, as well as toward Jews, Christians and Mu'tazilites. In 237/851, pilgrimages to the tombs of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Husain were prohibited and their shrines were desecrated. The Caliph was intensely suspicious of 'Ali Naki, and consequently summoned the latter to Samarra when he was nearly twenty-five. For two years 'Ali lived as the Caliph's guest and was closely watched. Then he was transferred to a slum section of Baghdad, where he was under strict guard. He "lived there without complaint but was...allowed freedom of receiving visitors,"<sup>1</sup> and could leave and re-

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<sup>1</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 88.

enter the city at will. The guards reported regularly to the khalifa on 'Ali's actions, but no incriminating evidence was ever found, for the Imam lived in utter poverty<sup>1</sup> and spent all of his time in prayer and contemplation. There is evidence that more than once Naki saved his own life by his shrewdness in answering the searching questions of the khalifa and in passing all of the latter's "tests," to which the Imam was forced to submit upon occasion. 'Ali Naki, surprisingly, survived al-Mutawakkil's reign. The khalifa was killed by his own Turkish mercenaries in 861 A.D. His son al-Mustansir outlived his father by only one year, and the next caliph, Musta'in, ruled for three years. 'Ali Naki remained a prisoner in Samarra during this entire period. "It does appear that he was a good tempered quiet man, who all his days suffered much from Mutawakkil's hatred, and under it all preserved his dignity and exhibited his patience."<sup>2</sup> He died at the age of forty, in 254/868, "mysteriously," according to the Shi'a, who claim that he also was poisoned.

Hasan al-Askari, the Eleventh Imam, was the son of 'Ali Naki and was born in Medina or Samarra in 230 or 231 A.H. In 234 he was taken to Samarra as a prisoner of the Caliph Mu'tazz. He remained there during the short reign of al-Muktadi, and endured all manner of deprivation and humiliation. Hasan actually acceded to the Imamate in 254 A.H., when he was about twenty. His imprisonment was harsher than that of his father, "and it would appear that the khulafa' wished to get rid of him."<sup>3</sup> It is told that the Caliph once ordered Hasan to break in a high-spirited mule, in the hopes that he

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<sup>1</sup>See Ibid., and Donaldson, op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 216, and Hollister, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 90.



would be killed in the process.<sup>1</sup> At one time, he was put in solitary confinement, and most of the time he was not permitted to be with his wife. His income from the one-fifth tax, which had always supported the Prophet's descendants, was taken from him. Finally, Hasan was allowed to live in his own home, but the spying never ceased. He died in 26/873 in Samarra, supposedly poisoned by the khalifa,<sup>2</sup> and was buried at the side of his father. "There was an uproar in the city when news of his death spread, but after the officials and the Hashimites had joined the procession things quieted down."<sup>3</sup> Huge throngs attended the burial. "He was a man of eminent purity and great nobility of character, a distinguished poet and litterateur."<sup>4</sup>

The Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, born in 255 or 256 A.H., is a mysterious figure. The Sunnis deny that he was ever born, that Hasan al-Askari ever had a son.<sup>5</sup> The Twelver Shiites have differing versions of his birth. "(1) That he was born after his father's death; (2) that he was born in the year that his father died; (3) that he was five years old at that time..."<sup>6</sup>

Everything that is known about the child "is scrupulously adapted to what was expected of the Mahdi, and this fact in itself throws suspicion on the traditions that afford the only evidence of his life."<sup>7</sup> According to the Shi'a, the Imamate of the 'Alid line was confirmed by the Prophet.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>See Sell, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>4</sup>Ali, op. cit., p. 346.

<sup>5</sup>See Hollister, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 229.

It is said that he once declared to his grandson Husain: "...Thou art an Imam, the brother of an Imam, nine of thy lineal descendants will be pious Imams; the ninth of them being their Qa'im the living."<sup>1</sup> 'Ali ibn 'Abi Talib claimed that, according to the Prophet, the Twelfth Imam, "...whose name is my name...the upholder of the command of Allah (al-Qa'im bi amri'l-lah) in the final era, the Righteous Guide, WHO WILL FILL THE EARTH WITH JUSTICE AND EQUITY, JUST AS NOW IT IS FULL OF OPPRESSION AND WRONG."<sup>2</sup>

The child Muhammad showed amazing qualities from the moment of his birth. It is said that he could speak fluently, and did to his father, at the time of his birth.<sup>3</sup> He supposedly became Imam in 260 A.H. at the age of five. His father had kept him hidden out of fear of the caliph, who probably would have tried to harm him.<sup>4</sup> When Hasan al-Askari lay dying, he summoned his little son to him and declared: "O my dear child, you are the Master of the Age (Imam al-Zaman), you are the Mahdi, you are the Proof of God on earth (Rujjatu'llah), my child, my wasi...the last of the Imams, pure and virtuous,"<sup>5</sup> whereupon Hasan expired. It was at this time that Muhammad is said to have gone into ghayba or concealment. He was last seen, according to the majority of Shi'i sources, at the entrance to the cellar of his own home in Samarra. It is sometimes described as the mouth of a cave. The khalifa then imprisoned his mother for six months and set out upon a vicious persecution of the Shi'a.<sup>6</sup> The following seven years are referred to as the

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<sup>1</sup>Hollister, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>See Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>4</sup>See Sell, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>5</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>6</sup>See Sell, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

period of the Lesser Concealment, or Ghaybatu as-Sughra. This elapse of time is referred to in this manner because the Imam was hidden as far as the outside world was concerned, and only appeared to a few select followers. He was represented by his wakil, or advocate, of whom there were four. This latter office was occupied by eminent Shi'as who were close friends of the Imam, and who would name their own successors. The last one voluntarily terminated his office in 940 A.D. as a result of severe persecution of the Shi'a by the 'Abbasids, and also because "none was still living who had seen the Imam";<sup>1</sup> declaring: "Now the matter is with God."<sup>2</sup> The next period, the Ghayba al-Kubra, or Greater Concealment is still in force to the present day.

In the Imam's absence, the mujtahids--these who exercise ijtihad or free judgement--"the expounders of the law and the ministers of religion, are his representatives on earth; and even the secular chiefs represent him in the temporal affairs of the world."<sup>3</sup> The mujtahids, who are expert in matters of jurisprudence and religion, are the guides of the people, who are responsible to them. These deputies are the protectors of the community, and "following them is comparable to following an Imam...in every epoch the person who is the most learned and most pious is regarded as the public deputy, and the people follow his ideas and his decisions concerning religious affairs."<sup>4</sup>

In the interim, the faithful may communicate with their Imam by sending him letters, in Arabic, and depositing them, sealed, in his tomb in Samarra

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<sup>1</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 235, and Mergan, op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>3</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 97, and see Gardet, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>Mergan, op. cit., p. 202.

er in a deep well or the sea.<sup>1</sup>

"For the Twelvers, the concealment of the Imam has its advantages. It does not deprive them of his guidance and blessing any more than a man is deprived of the warmth and light of the sun when it is behind a cloud."<sup>2</sup> The very fact of his absence gives hope to the faithful, and the expectation of his return (Raj'a) encourages them to abstain from sin. When he does return, all Muslims, even the Sunnis, and more surprisingly the Christians, will have to follow him. Jesus will descend from Heaven, slay the false Messiah (AntiChrist), or al-masih al-dajjal, show himself to be a true Muslim, and prepare the way for the coming of "al-Muntasar" (the Expected One).

The expectation of the Mahdi, is, for a Shi'a, "a cause for sacred joy."<sup>3</sup> Ever since the child Muhammad disappeared, the faithful patiently wait for him. The child-Imam will "relieve a sorrowing and sinful world of its burden...So late as the fourteenth century of the Christian Era...The Shi'ahs were wont to assemble at eventime at the entrance of the cavern and supplicate the missing child to return to them...This, says Ibn Khaldun, was a daily occurrence."<sup>4</sup>

The followers of Shi'ism, so persecuted by the Sunni rulers, gazed at their surroundings and saw violence, religious hypocrisy, false piety and official corruption. "Strong in its loves and hates, the Shi'a looked on itself as a saved remnant in a corrupt world... the necessity for secrecy only increased the dramatic tension."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 235-236.

<sup>2</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>5</sup>M. Hodgeson, op. cit., p. 8.

Persecution, and especially the trials and tribulations that the Imams, the descendants of the Prophet, suffered at the hands of the tyrannical and jealous 'Abbasid caliphs, increased the steadfastness and devotion of the Shi'a for their beloved Imams. "The Shi'a offered its imams an intense personal loyalty; it invested them with a prestige more than human. The imam inherited something of a divine touch from his Prophetic ancestor."<sup>1</sup> The sufferings of the imams further dramatized the contest between the forces of purity and godliness and those of evil and corruption. Ever since the martyrdom of Husain, suffering, for the Shiites, had had a religious, purifying, value. "For a legitimate loyalty, men will readily accept scorn and loss; the imams themselves have been rejected and persecuted, how much more so we?"<sup>2</sup> Shiites could easily identify with their imams because of the sufferings they shared with them. This identification strengthened the bonds of sacrifice and loyalty. The ruling dynasty, far away, surrounded by great pomp and luxury, cold and unfeeling of its less fortunate subjects, was despised and feared. "...all the holy family ranged with a few despised followers against an obsequious but alien world; here was the Shi'a sense of Passion, cherished tenaciously in the face of the smug sobriety of dominant Sunnism."<sup>3</sup> The failure of the Sunni caliphate to inspire faith and trust and make the ideals of Islam a living reality, would, in the end, bring about its downfall and destruction. The Shi'a believed that they, led by a little child, would transform the world, bringing righteousness, justice, and purity, to all men of all creeds. To the exploited and discontented

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

masses of the faithful, this hope gave them a reason for living and continuing to believe, for not surrendering to despair and physical and spiritual persecution.

## CHAPTER III

### A COMPARISON OF SHI'I AND SUNNI THEORIES OF THE IMAMATE DURING THE 'ABBASID PERIOD

#### Introduction

The political and religious conflict that gradually developed within the community of Islam, between Sunni and Shi'a, has been called "the civil war that never stopped."<sup>1</sup> This internecine war originated during the khilafa of 'Uthman, intensified in the Umayyad period, and reached its climax during the 'Abbasid ascendancy.

The hopes of the persecuted and downtrodden Shi'a, which had been betrayed by the 'Abbasid caliphs, resulted in deepening discontent, and stimulated stronger efforts for a more definitive doctrine with which to oppose the ruling despots. The Sunni response to their challenge led to a clarification of orthodox views on the caliphate-imamate. This flowering of opposing segments of Islamic political theory began with the institution of the 'Abbasid court at Baghdad, where scholars, philosophers and jurists were encouraged to gather, debate and develop religious and juristic theories. Ironically, the greatest treatise on Sunni political thought was written during the period of deepest 'Abbasid humiliation and decadence, in the mid eleventh century A.D., by Al-Mawardi.

The growing differences between Sunnism and Shi'ism gradually resolved themselves into two basic premises. Firstly, in Sunnism, divine revelation

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<sup>1</sup>J. H. Hollister, op. cit., p. 6.

ceased with Muhammad, the Qur'an and the Sunna. Secondly, the successors to the Prophet, ordinary mortals, were to be chosen by the entire Islamic community, or an elite representation thereof. The only hereditary qualification laid down was supposedly stated by Muhammad: "The Imams are of the Kuraish."<sup>1</sup>

The Shi'a rejected the concept of popular election by 'ijma,' or agreement, and advocated the sole rights of the ahl al-bayt to the caliphal succession. "He who agrees with the Shiites that 'Ali is the most excellent of men after the Prophet, and that he and his descendants are worthier of the Imamate than anyone, is a Shiite, though he differ from them in all other matters regarding which Muslims are divided in their opinions. He however who differs from them regarding the above mentioned points is no Shiite."<sup>2</sup> The Shi'a contended that so important a matter as the leadership of the Islamic community could not be left to chance, and that the 'Alids were specifically named by Muhammad to continue the prophetic line. 'Ijma', the most fundamental premise of the Sunnis,—"my community will never agree on an error"—was completely rejected. So vital a question could not be resolved by men, but rather required divine intervention.

The clear line that separates the mutually exclusive and hostile beliefs of the two major Islamic sects may be summarized in the following Shi'f articles of faith: "I believe in God the One...I believe in the revelation of the Qur'an which is uncreated<sup>3</sup> from all eternity...I believe that the Imam especially chosen by God<sup>4</sup> as the bearer of a part of the divine being is

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<sup>1</sup>Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, Farg bain al-Firaq, trans. K. Seelye, Vol. I, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 4, from Ibn Hasm, K. al-Milal wa'l'nihal.

<sup>3</sup>Italics mine. See previous chapter, re. "uncreatedness of Qur'an."

<sup>4</sup>Italics mine.



the leader to salvation."<sup>1</sup> In addition: "To consider 'Ali the Khalifa next in order after Muhammad, and to believe in 'Ali's descendants from Hasan to al-Mahdi..., and to consider all of them, in character, position, and dignity, as raised from above all other Muslims."<sup>2</sup>

How the Imam-Khalif is chosen or known.

The key issue in the selection of the Imam-Khalif is the acceptance or rejection of the principle of 'ijma' to the choice of a leader. In this respect, "If we wish to state concisely the difference between Sunni Shi'a Islam we should say that the former is a Church founded on the consent of the community, the latter is an authoritarian Church."<sup>3</sup>

The Shi'a Position. Nass.

There are certain historical evidences, according to Shi'a sources, of specific acts of Muhammad, when he seemed to place 'Ali in authority above all others. These facts are cited by the Shi'a to strengthen their argument on behalf of the precedence of 'Ali.

First of all, Muhammad never placed anyone in command over 'Ali.<sup>4</sup> When the Prophet received the Sura of Immunity, the angel instructed him to deliver the message to one of his own family.<sup>5</sup> Allah told Muhammad to say: "I ask of you no requital...save loving kindness among kinsfolk."<sup>6</sup> After his first revelation, when Muhammad called upon his relatives to follow Islam,

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<sup>1</sup>"Shi'a," Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam (London: Luzac, 1953), p. 534.

<sup>2</sup>C. H. Sell, Studies in Islam (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1928), p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>I. Goldziher in A. Guillame, Islam (Edinburgh: Clark, 1961), p. 226.

<sup>4</sup>See D. M. Donaldson, "The Shi'ah Doctrine of the Imamate," The Moslem World, XXI (1931), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>Qur'an, 42:22, in A. A. A. Fyzee, A Shi'ite Creed (London: Oxford, 1942), p. 113.

He said: "The one from among you who precedes the others in thoroughly believing in God and puts into action God's will will be my successor."<sup>1</sup> 'Ali was the only one who heeded this call, while all of the others ignored it. The Prophet also stated: "'Ali is the best of your judges (aqda)."<sup>2</sup> He was the most learned, "mighty in surmise and sagacity and desire for learning,"<sup>3</sup> and he was the constant companion of Muhammad. All the Companions would consult him on matters of law and ritual. The masters of the arts (ḥunūn) and sciences ('ulūm) sought his advice. 'Ali was the most ascetic of the Companions because he divorced (talaqa) the world (i.e. women, wine and food), on three separate occasions.

The principal argument of the Shi'a for 'Ali's claims rests on the legendary incident at Ghadir Khum in Arabia, which occurred in the month of dhū al-hijja in the year 10 A.H. At that time, the Prophet supposedly assembled twelve thousand believers and addressed them on matters pertaining to his relationship with and regard for 'Ali. From a pulpit where all could see him, Muhammad said: "Let whoever owns me as his master (مولى) own this 'Ali as his master."<sup>4</sup> In a slightly different version,<sup>5</sup> he raised 'Ali to the pulpit and declared: "God is my Master and I am the master of all believers. Therefore whosoever I am the master of, 'Ali is his master."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>K. W. Morgan, Islam the Straight Path (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), p. 184.

<sup>2</sup>Al-Hilli, Al-Bab 'L-Hadi 'Ashar, trans. W. M. Miller (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1928), pp. 72-73.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>6</sup>Morgan, op. cit., p. 186, Donaldson, loc. cit.

Muhammad repeated this three or four times and continued: "Oh God, the one who is 'Ali's enemy, be his enemy."<sup>1</sup> And then: "I leave two things with you, the Qur'an and my descendants."<sup>2</sup> The Prophet then proclaimed: "They [the Imams] are the awsiya' who will be executors after me...They are with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is with them...By them will my community be guided... and by them will calamity be averted."<sup>3</sup> Muhammad then said to 'Ali: "Thou art the successor (khalifa) after me."<sup>4</sup>

According to a noted Shi'a theologian, al-Hilli, the Prophet then made a fateful prophecy to 'Ali that day, which set the future course and character of Imamite Shiism: "You, my son will suffer many persecutions in the cause of religion; many will be the obstructions to your preaching...Usurpers of the authority delegated to you will arise...Never, my son, suffer your sword to be unsheathed in the justice of your cause...whatever may be the provocation you receive, or insults offered to your person...suffer patiently...Against the enemies of God, I have already given you directions; you may fight for Him--...but never against Him or His faithful servants."<sup>5</sup>

According to the Shi'a al-Majlisi (d. 1699 A.D.), Muhammad proclaimed to the crowd gathered at Ghadir Khum: "O ye people! I am the prophet and 'Ali is my heir and from us will descend the Mahdi, the seal of the Imams, who will conquer all religions and take vengeance on the wicked...He will be the champion of the Faith...He will reward merit and requite every fool accord-

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Hilli, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>4</sup>Fysee, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>5</sup>Hollister, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

ing to his felly. He will be approved and chosen of God and the heir of all knowledge..."<sup>1</sup> Immediately after the Ghadir Khum occurrence, the Prophet received a Sura in which was stated: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, and have filled up the measure of my favors upon you; and it is my pleasure that Islam be your religion."<sup>2</sup> These claims, if true, vindicate all Shi'i contentions. Ameer 'Ali, a modern Shi'i apologist, tries to justify 'Ali's failure to come forward and defend his legacy, after such a clear mandate, following Muhammad's death. "As a ruler, 'Ali came before his time. He was almost unfitted by his uncompromising love of truth, his gentleness, and his masterful nature, to cope with...treachery and falsehood."<sup>3</sup>

This doctrine of the divinely inspired appointment of 'Ali and his descendants as Muhammad's successors is called nass (نص). The Shi'a backed up their contention with many arguments based on reason and logic as well as tradition. The first premise is one on which Sunnis also agree. Men are naturally weak and prone to jealousies, competitiveness and rivalry. Political order is instituted by God to restrain mankind, protect them from collective and individual injustice, and prevent chaos. Man also has a natural tendency to either encourage or ignore corruption. God wishes to extirpate this corruption so that men may aspire to the good life and the ultimate reward of eternal happiness (سعادة) in Paradise. The function of the state is to provide order, peace and justice for the perfection of human life and the preparation of the soul (نفس) for Heaven. Here the Sunnis and the Shi'a part company.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Majlisi, Hayat al-Qulub, trans. J. L. Merrick in D. M. Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> Qur'an, Sura V, in Hellister, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> A. 'Ali, The Spirit of Islam (London: Christophers, 1922), p. 281.

The Shi'a contend that only a pure and selfless Imam can remove corruption and injustice from human society. It is impossible that God would not want an Imam, for that would imply that He does not care if the corruption continues. Only God with His superior knowledge knows who this sinless and perfect man is, for men, who judge by expediency or external acts, are prone to conflicting opinions and selfishness. God can see into men's souls and discover the "hidden virtue."<sup>1</sup> He must make the correct choice, because logically He is incapable of making mistakes or allowing them to happen. The Muslim state must be based on Law (Shari'a), but the only way to make all men agree on a single leader is to employ force. To the Shi'a, this latter method is unacceptable. There is a chance that the people would make the right choice by accident, but it is folly to take such a chance. In His unlimited compassion and love for mankind, God could not possibly neglect this important question, when He has even given instructions as how to trim the mustache.<sup>2</sup>

It is God's practice, according to both Sunni and Shi'a, to make sure that prophets do not die without leaving successors. It was always Muhammad's custom to appoint deputies in his absences.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, without an Imam, the Faith would disappear. It would be as if God were in effect withdrawing Muhammad's influence from the world. Thus denial of the Imam is the denial of Muhammad and the Qur'an, and this is unbelief (kuffar).

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<sup>1</sup>D. M. Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 316.

Al-Hilli, the Shi'a theologian of the thirteenth century A.D., states that God chose "Friday from the days, Ramadhan from the months, the prophets from mankind, Muhammad from the prophets, 'Ali from Muhammad, al-Hasan and al-Husain from 'Ali" and so on.<sup>1</sup> Thus the appointment and succession was established by Muhammad for 'Ali and his descendants through Muhammad al-Muntasar, the Mahdi, the twelfth of the line.

The Shi'a take the Qur'anic declaration to obey "these among you invested with authority" -- *يا ايها الذين آمنوا أطيعوا الله وأطيعوا الرسول وأولى الأمر منكم* -- and add to it the contention that it would be impossible for God to command obedience to one who is not sinless (*مقصوم*). Traditions prove that 'Ali was *ma'sum*, and al-afdal (the best) of his time.

"All the sects of the Shiites, except the Isma'ilis, are united in this, ... that they recognize no limitations to the sinlessness of the Imams."<sup>2</sup> This belief is incumbent, because a sinner is an evildoer<sup>3</sup> who does not deserve to be admired, obeyed or believed. One who has sinned cannot administer punishment to another sinner. Thus, al-Majlisi states: "They are to be considered free from all sins, great or small... all agree that belief in the sinlessness of the prophets [and consequently of the Imams] is one of the necessary beliefs of the Shiah faith."<sup>4</sup>

The doctrine of sinlessness and the covenant with Abraham excluding evildoers from the prophetic line was first developed by the Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq. An earlier Imam, Zain al-Abidin, related sinlessness to the relation-

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<sup>1</sup>al-Hilli, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion, pp. 23 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Sell, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>4</sup>Majlisi, Hayat al-Qulub, in Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion, p. 320.

ship between the Imam and God and the Qur'an: Sinlessness is that quality which enables a man to seize firmly the strong life-line from God, i. e. the Qur'an...the Imam will direct men to the Qur'an and the Qur'an will direct men to the Imam."<sup>1</sup>

Yet sinlessness is not imposed by God on the Imam externally as an absolute quality, according to Shi'a theology. The Imam achieves ma'sum through his perfect love for God. He has the power of choice, and thus the capacity to sin. The important fact is that he avoids it because of his moral strength and devotion to God, who is always with him: "Through me he [God] hears and sees and walks."<sup>2</sup> According to Ja'far, "The Most High does not abandon us, for if he would abandon us to ourselves, then we, like other men, would be in sin and error."<sup>3</sup> This closeness to God grows with the Imam, and thus he may be weaker, relatively speaking, in the earlier period of his life. His actions then are not really wrongdoing, but only relative to his striving for perfection. If this doctrine of sinlessness of the Imam had been generally accepted, it would have resulted in a great weakening of the claims and authority of the Sunai caliphs. Such an Imam, necessarily one of 'Ali's line, with such a relationship to God, would have been difficult to reject.

In Shi'i history, the 'Alids wrought miracles (mu'jiza) to prove their assertions.<sup>4</sup> Shi'ite theology places the actual origin of the Imamate in a promise by God to Abraham, in which He said: "I am about to make thee an Imam to mankind." Abraham then asked, "of my offspring also?" God

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>4</sup> See Hilli, op. cit., p. 76.

replied, "My covenant embraceth not the evildoers."<sup>1</sup> From this dialogue the Shi'a deduced two basic doctrines: 1. The Imam is appointed by God, and 2. The Imam is free from sin (khata') and error (zalal).<sup>2</sup> They possess "the attributes of perfection, completeness, and knowledge..."<sup>3</sup>

Ijma' and the Sunni Refutation of Shi'i Claims.

Al-Shahrastani, a Sunni jurist, blamed the essential difficulty between Sunnis and the Shi'a regarding the appointment of the Imam on the Imamites' evil view of the Companions, and the forging of Traditions, such as those concerning Ghadir Khum, attributed to Muhammad. According to him, there is no indisputable record that anyone claimed the office of Imam by nass. If obedience to one man were to be incumbent, it would have to rest on Muhammad's word on the subject, of which there is no record.

Muslims are bound, according to Shahrastani, to respect the good faith of the Companions, and realize that Muhammad knew men's needs for law and order, and for a leader. "If you say he did appoint a successor but they [the Companions] did not follow his instructions you disparage the Companions."<sup>4</sup> If it is denied that the choice of an Imam was left to the people, then he must have been designated, "but there is no text except in the case of those who claim a text. And as for those who do not claim a text, how can they be designated by a text?"<sup>5</sup> The Shi'a can present no undisputed,

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<sup>1</sup>Sell, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>See Fysee, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>4</sup>Al-Shahrastani, Kitab Nihaya, trans. A. Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 154.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



authoritative record from the Shari'a on the Imam's appointment, and thus the use of ijma' is justified and vindicated.

"It cannot be said that the prophet was ignorant of the subsequent fate of the Imamate seeing that he told his companions of wars and troubles and the anti-Christ. Probably God told him of these who would follow him but he did not confer the information to others because he had no command to do so. Had he been so commanded there would certainly have been a plain statement on the subject of the succession."<sup>1</sup>

Against the Ghadir Khum legend the Sunnis set the tradition recorded by Muslim in his Sahih, in favor of Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman. The Shi'i contention that only God can know who is the true Imam, because "...outward graces may [hide] secret atheism...the frustration...a corrupt interpretation of the Qur'an....,"<sup>2</sup> is repudiated by Shahrastani on the grounds that a man's deeds and outward qualities do and must reflect his true character.

The many instances of conflicts between Abu Bakr and 'Umar occurred precisely because they were not impeccable, and thus could fall into error or mortal sin, or make mistakes in private judgement. As a matter of fact, any independent Sunni thinker had the right to oppose the Imam in certain matters that did not concern the latter's selection by ijma'. To disagree with the Imam in any matter, however trivial, was unthinkable, indeed blasphemous, to a Shi'a.

Abu Bakr admitted his shortcomings to all in the mosque right after his election: "...O ye people, verily I have received authority over you, though I be not the best among you, yet if I do well assist me, and if I incline to evil direct me aright...Obey me as long as I obey the Lord and

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<sup>1</sup>Shahrastani, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 156-157.

his Apostle, and when I turn aside from the Lord and his apostle, then obedience to me shall not be obligatory upon you."<sup>1</sup>

The Sunnis agreed with the Shi'a that God commands all men to obey their rulers and follow the truthful. The problem arises with the question of whether this ruler is designated through ijma,' or by Muhammad as God's agent. The Sunnis reject the latter contention through lack of evidence. Also, Abu Bakr produced a hadith saying that the Imams had to be Quraish, thus disqualifying the Ansar from the khilafa. If the Prophet had meant to qualify the succession even further, in favor of the Hashimites, he could have done so easily, but there is no evidence that he did.

The Sunni caliph is elected, theoretically, by the community through the exercise of ijtihad (private judgement). There was some disagreement among Sunni jurists as to the number of electors required to verify the choice. Al-Ash'ari<sup>2</sup> was willing to accept one single qualified elector. If there was confusion, and more than one contract was made, the prior one would be valid. If the mujtahid was found to be an evil-deer, or his Imam-designate unfit, the contract was voided, as would be the case in similar circumstances with a contract of marriage (nikah).

According to al-Baghdadi, Abu Bakr's appointment by the Companions and the Ansar verifies his claim against Shi'a counter-claims. All these Muslims who recognized and accepted Abu Bakr's accession in effect agreed then and there that the Imamate does not pass by inheritance alone. If the incumbent were to bequeath his office to one fitted for it, as happened in the case of Umar, then the umma is obliged to execute this testament. The practice

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<sup>1</sup>As-Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa', in Hollister, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>See M. Khadduri and K. Liebesny, Law in the Middle East, I. (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1955), pp. 7-11.

of appointing a Shura, as 'Umar did, would also be lawful.

Al-Mawardi modified the views of his predecessors, al-Ash'ari and al-Baghdadi, considerably, due to the great change in political conditions in his time. According to him, the selectors must be just, so that their choice is for the good of all, knowledgeable as to the qualifications of the candidates, wise, and of sound judgement. There are two ways of choosing (ikhtiyar) the Imam that al-Mawardi mentions:<sup>1</sup> 1. by a council of influential citizens, with 'Umar's action in appointing a Shura as the precedent, or 2. the nomination of a successor by the incumbent, as Abu Bakr appointed 'Umar. When the choice is made and the candidate accepts, all are bound to obey him. If the Imamate should be given to two men, the prior appointment is valid. If the designations are simultaneous, both are nil. Qaraysi descent is of course obligatory.

Under the 'Abbasid system, the solicitation of office was prohibited, but al-Mawardi was a realist, and eliminated this ban for caliphal candidates. The point at which Mawardi departs from the tradition of Abu Bakr and al-Ash'ari occurs when he states that a duly elected Imam, (i. e. elected by a council or chosen by the previous Imam) may not be displaced by a worthier man. The Shi'a Imam, on the other hand, must be al-afdal, the best, of his age. Al-Mawardi implies that an evildoer who succeeds in obtaining the Imamate may not be overthrown on any pretext whatsoever. The contract, once given, is irrevocable, no matter what the circumstances, as long as the Imam is physically fit and not captured by infidels without hope of ransom. Historical and political expediency have superseded moral and religious ideals.

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<sup>1</sup>al-Mawardi, Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyya, al-Qahira, Matba'at al Watan, (ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Qadir), 1298 A.H., c. 1880 A.D., p. 5.

Abu Bakr's Claims Upheld. 'Alid Position Rejected.

According to al-Ash'ari, there are two sources of proof for Abu Bakr's caliphate, the Qur'an and the consensus of the umma. Therefore those (i.e. the Shi'a) who believe that Muhammad "explicitly designated the Imamate of another is false...and this necessitates the falsity of the assertion of him who maintains that the Prophet appointed 'Ali to be Imam after him."<sup>1</sup> There were, for al-Ash'ari, three divisions in Islam, with three conflicting beliefs: 1. the orthodox, who supported Abu Bakr, the "veracious,"<sup>2</sup> 2. the Rafidah, or partisans of 'Ali; and 3. the Rawandiyah, the followers of al-'Abbas, the Prophet's uncle.<sup>3</sup> The proof of the validity of Abu Bakr's claim lies in the fact that the 'Alids and the Rawandiyah both eventually pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr, thereby invalidating their own claims. This agreement proves the truth of the concept of ijma': "My community cannot agree on an error."<sup>4</sup> To try to judge on the basis of interior sentiments is an impossibility, for a consensus could never be obtained. The facts are only known through expressed opinions and actual deeds.

The validity of Abu Bakr's Imamate proves that of 'Umar because the former designated the latter. The Imamate of 'Ali was proven by the Companions' ijma,' for they had "the right to invest and to deprive"<sup>5</sup> and they unanimously agreed on him.

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<sup>1</sup>al-Ash'ari, Kitab al-Luma, trans. R. McCarthy (Beirut: 1953), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>See Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>5</sup>al-Ash'ari, Al-Idana, trans. W. Klein (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1940), p. 135.

In the Sura of Victory, God says of Muhammad: "You shall never again go without me."<sup>1</sup> The great military victories of Abu Bakr and 'Umar proved that God meant someone to follow the Prophet. The Sura of Immunity states: "By no means shall ye fight an enemy with me."<sup>2</sup> This is interpreted as signifying that God intended someone other than Muhammad to do battle. It is undisputable fact that Abu Bakr gave the orders to the Muslims to go out and fight Yamama, the Byzantines, and the Persians. 'Umar completed these great victories for Islam.

The Companions all agreed that Abu Bakr was the best of the Muslims in all of the good qualities necessary for leadership: "knowledge, frugality (*ḥaj*), and power of judgement and diplomacy..."<sup>3</sup> Abu Bakr's Imamate legalizes those of the other three Rashidun. They were all chosen by some form of *ijma*,<sup>4</sup> excepting 'Umar, by the Companions, who were "trustworthy [and]...not to be suspected of error in religion."<sup>4</sup> It is the duty of the Muslims to oppose all "who would detract from the honor of any of them."<sup>5</sup> In addition, there is a tradition, related by Ibn Nu'man concerning the Khilafa, in which Muhammad said: "The caliphate shall be among my people thirty years, then a kingdom after that."<sup>6</sup>

The Shi'a disparage Abu Bakr's claims on the grounds that his dependence on the bay'a of the *umma* was a sin and impugning of the Imamate if he

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<sup>1</sup>al-Ash'ari, *K. al-Luma'*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>al-Ash'an, *al-Idana*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup>al-Ash'ari, *al-Idana*, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

were, in fact, the Imam designated by Muhammad.<sup>1</sup> If he had been the recipient of nass, he would have said so, and he did not. If he did possess nass, why did he at first refuse the succession when it was offered to him by 'Umar? Finally, at his death, he expressed doubt as to his worthiness to have occupied the office.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Question of Succession and Deposition

The problem of the orderly succession of Imams was a question that the Sunnis could never reconcile with historical reality. The Shi'a solution to the difficulty was easier because of their early and unflagging devotion to the hereditary principle of the succession of the 'Alid line. In addition, their belief was never subjected to the oftentimes brutal exigencies of politics and expediency. As the perpetual opposition, they could afford the luxury of faithful and consistent devotion to principle.

From the beginning the Sunnis were faced with several precedents. The practice of choosing the oldest and most respected leader of the tribe to succeed a departed leader was a hold-over from pre-Islamic times. It played an important part in the selection of Abu Bakr, who was the oldest and most respected of Muhammad's early Companions, his father-in-law, and the choice of the Prophet as the leader in prayer. Abu Bakr was chosen from among and approved by the Companions. This precedent was not followed by Abu Bakr himself, when he chose to appoint his successor and designated 'Umar. 'Umar took a still different course when he appointed a Shura composed of six of

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<sup>1</sup> The Shi'a condemn Abu Bakr on the grounds that if he were the true Imam, he needed no one's consent.

<sup>2</sup> See al-Hilli, op. cit., p. 77.

the Companions, to choose from among their own number. The manner of 'Ali's succession created the most important and dangerous precedent. Although he was legally selected by the Companions by ijma,' the events surrounding his accession to the khilafa were different. His predecessor, 'Uthman, was assassinated by political foes. This method of removing the caliph unfortunately became a precedent for violence in the succession which was to plague the Islamic community from that time on. 'Ali was also a victim of assassination, and the judgement of the sword thus, in effect, replaced ijma', the judgement of the umma.

Mu'awiya, the first Umayyad caliph, being a practical and shrewd man, and faced with three separate precedents from the Rashidun, the strongest of which was violence and political assassination, decided that hereditary succession was the only realistic way to provide an orderly transition of power. Ironically, the 'Alid belief in hereditary succession was vindicated by their worst enemy, Mu'awiya, although for very different reasons. While the 'Alids embraced the hereditary principle for religious motives, the Umayyads, and later the 'Abbasids, accepted it to preserve order and conserve the fortunes of their respective dynasties. Each Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliph tried to ensure the succession of a favorite son or other close relative. Sometimes it worked, but more often it did not, because jealousies, rivalries and violence usually intervened.

By the time of al-Mawardi, caliphal prerogatives had been reduced to almost nothing. The formalities, the ritual, of power still belonged to the caliph, but the substance of that power was in the hands of the Turkish mercenary guards at the garrison-palace in Samarra, and the Shi'a Buwaihid family of emirs. These emirs and mercenaries murdered, deposed and designated new caliphs at will. The question of leadership and succession in Sunni theory thus had to be reconsidered and reformulated to fit the exigencies of

history and political life. The realism, indeed cynicism, of Sunni legal and political thought reached its peak in al-Mawardi's discussion of the problem of succession. He hoped that his efforts to salvage at least some orthodox principles from the wreckage of Samarra would eventually instigate the community and the caliph to cast off alien control and reassert ancient authority and prerogatives. Any principle that would not serve to enhance the caliphal office was rejected by him, while any stand that might reassert its dignity and power was embraced and carried to extremes.

According to Mawardi, if the Imam had heirs, he could bequeath the succession, but would have to consult the electors of the umma first. This fiction of consulting electors was an obvious myth which paid only lip-service to old principles. If the caliph were without heirs, he could choose a qualified<sup>1</sup> successor, a choice that the community must accept. Once the Imam had been duly elected,<sup>2</sup> he could not be displaced for any reason, even if a worthier man were to challenge him. He could not resign. He might nominate two or more persons as successors, and designate the order of succession, but an incumbent could disregard any wishes of his predecessor concerning the order of succession. If the Imam fulfilled all of his duties in the religious, political, military and judicial fields, the people were absolutely bound to obey him. He could be removed from office only for very specific reasons, such as infirmities of body or mind that affect the capacity to execute the duties of his office, pleasure-seeking and the pursuit of immorality, or the curtailment of his liberty resulting in a loss of free-

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<sup>1</sup>Italics mine. Actual qualifications were irrelevant in the politics of succession, with the exception of a few, e.g. Harun's special designation of al-Ma'mun.

<sup>2</sup>E. A. R. Gibb, "al-Mawardi's Theory of the Caliphate," Islamic Culture, II (1937), pp. 291-302, p. 295.



dom of action. This latter condition was a direct reference to the state of the caliphate at that time, when the Bwaihids were the real rulers. In fact, all of the three above conditions were an expression of ideals which had no basis in reality. Pleasure-seeking was a feature of most caliphates, both Umayyad and 'Abbasid.

Al-Mawardi reconciled the problem of the real exercise of power by emirs or princes in place of the caliph by asserting that conformity to the principles of faith and justice by the former lends them legal authority. This justification shows clearly that Mawardi's concern for the safety of all (jama'ah) overrode his devotion to principle. He did make a condition, however. If the emirs violated the codes of justice and religion, it would be the Imam-Caliph's duty to call for aid to end the domination of the usurpers. This is meant to be a veiled threat by Mawardi to the Bwaihids, a warning to urge restraint.

#### The Problem of Rebellion Against an Evil Imam

Al-Ash'ari stated that rebellion against any Imam is wrong,<sup>1</sup> on the basis of the Qur'anic injunction to obey those set in authority. Al-Nasafi unqualifiedly declared that the Imam "...is not to be deposed from the leadership on account of immorality or tyranny."<sup>2</sup> Al-Mawardi tried to take an intermediate position between the negative Sunni doctrine of absolute submission, and the positive Khariji position on the duty of insurrection. He is vague and ambiguous, however. He did not deny the right of subjects to refuse obedience to an impious Imam, yet he would not explain the manner in which that Imam could be deposed. He thus made the right of revolution a

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<sup>1</sup>Gibb, op. cit., p. 300.

<sup>2</sup>D. B. MacDonald, Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional Theory (Lahore: Premier, 1903), p. 321.

purely academic question.

The reason, most probably, for this overly cautious position was his awareness of the precedents of history, the fact that almost all successions and depositions were precipitated by force and later rationalized and justified morally by a fatwa from the 'ulema'. A caliph could be deposed, and often was, but there did not exist in Islam any legal means for its execution, and Mawardi refused to pretend that these means did exist. This dilemma, of obedience to an evil, immoral or impious caliph, non-existent for the Shi'i community, was characteristic of all Sunni political thought. History had to be rationalized, because theory was molded to justify events, for "without precedents [there was] no theory."<sup>1</sup>

Al-Mawardi, realist though he was, nevertheless attempted to legalize the "Amirate by seizure"<sup>2</sup> ( *الأمارة بالقبض* ) in recognition of a not uncommon practice of over two hundred years standing. Accepting the fact that governors of provinces, instead of waiting to be appointed and recognized by the khalifa, often seized power and imposed their will by force, he justified a "Concordat" in order to give the Imam some role in a fait accompli. The khalifa would recognize the emir, who already controlled the administration in a certain area, on the condition that the emir, in turn, would appreciate the caliph's dignity and predominant rights in religious affairs. This effort was made by Mawardi to "regularize a contemptible situation,"<sup>3</sup> and force the emirs to at least acknowledge the existence and dignity of the khilafa, instead of ignoring it completely.

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<sup>1</sup> Gibb, op. cit., p. 300.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

The Necessary Personal Qualities and Official Qualifications of  
the Imam-Khalif

The primary and most emphasized qualification for both Sunnis and Shi'a is heredity. Muhammad is believed to have said, "The Imams are of the Kuraish,"<sup>1</sup> which was his own tribe. This right of the Kuraish to the succession was universally accepted in Islam, with the exception of the Khawarij. There was no major theologian or jurist who tried to dispute it. The Umayyads belonged to a branch of Kuraish, and al-'Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet and precursor of the 'Abbasids, was also Kuraishi. The Khawarij did not accept this premise and developed the belief that any righteous and pious Muslim, and even a Negro slave, was eligible for the khilafa.

The Shi'a narrowed the hereditary concept by confining the privilege to one branch of the Kuraish, the Hashimites, to which 'Ali had belonged. For the Shi'at 'Ali, all other qualifications are secondary to the one that the Imam be a direct of 'Ali and Fatima.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that God's covenant "embraceth not the evildoers"<sup>3</sup> is interpreted by the Shi'a as signifying that the Imam must be sinless (ma'sum). Because he was designated (mansus) by God, he possesses secret knowledge of the Qur'an, which he employs to guide the umma along the right path. All 'Alid Imams were said to have this secret knowledge by dint of Muhammad's transmission of nass to 'Ali and his descendants. The Imam is and must be al-afdal az-zaman, the best of his age, because he is chosen by God, who knows men's hearts, and also because it is

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<sup>1</sup> al-Baghdadi, Farg bain al-Firaq, op. cit., p. 32, al-Nasafi, in MacDonald, op. cit., p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> One sect of Shi'ites, the Hanafiyya, do not believe Fatima's connection essential. The blood of 'AH alone, i.e. of 'Ali and the Hanafite woman, is the necessity.

<sup>3</sup> al-Hilli, op. cit., p. 65, Qur'an, 2:118.

logically impossible for an inferior being to have precedence over a superior one. He has to be a leader in battle (jihad), the judge in all disputes, the preserver of order and upholder of Shari'a, in addition to more complex and significant spiritual functions. In these judicial, military and administrative qualifications, he is similar to his Sunni counterpart.

The Sunnis go into more detail concerning the character of the man who will rule them, because he is a mere human like themselves, with no supernatural or superior powers, and also, being of a more practical nature, they are more concerned about his behavior in office. In practice, of course, these qualifications of the ideal caliph did not exist. The man with the most power and the most military support became khalifa, regardless of his character.

Al-Nasafi, the Sunni jurist, tried to refute the qualifications that the Shi'a set down. The Imam "...is not assigned exclusively to the sons of Hashim nor to the children of 'Ali. And it is not a condition that he should be protected by God from sin ('isma), nor that he should be the most excellent of the people of his time..."<sup>1</sup> However, it is necessary that he be: a good governor, 2. an able executive, 3. a protector of pure Islam, and 4. a protector of the wronged and a foe of oppressors.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Baghdadi believed that there would always be at least one Kuraishi who would be qualified for the Imamate.<sup>3</sup> He stated four necessary qualifications: 1. a knowledge of Shari'a, 2. character and piety, 3. good judge-

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<sup>1</sup>al-Nasafi, in MacDonald, op. cit., p. 321.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>3</sup>See al-Baghdadi, in Khadduri, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

ment in government and administration and in military matters, and 4. a Kur-  
aishi.<sup>1</sup> He attempts to refute the Shi'i doctrine of the impeccability of  
the Imam by claiming that sinlessness is solely a condition of prophethood  
and revelation. The Imamate, on the other hand, only demands outward pro-  
pity of character. If the Imam should deviate from these outward standards  
of behavior, al-Baghdadi offered two courses of action: 1. turn the caliph  
from error and toward the right, or 2. turn from him and give allegiance to  
another. On this last point, Baghdadi, like Mawardi, is vague and offers no  
means with which to accomplish these ends.

Al Mawardi, aside from mentioning the previously stated qualities of  
good judgement and character, devotion to Law, and administrative and mili-  
tary talents, adds suitability for the times to the list. That is, at one  
period the accession of a well-educated man may be best, as in times of gen-  
eral prosperity and cultural activity. In times of adversity, however, a  
man with great courage<sup>2</sup> is preferable. Al Mawardi was, perhaps, more than  
any other Muslim thinker before him, the most conscious of his times and  
what they required in terms of leadership.

Al-Shahrastani, another Sunni writer, merely repeats what has been  
said before. His qualifications for the Imam are as follows: 1. Muslim  
religion, 2. Kuraishi, 3. of active intelligence, 4. a far-sighted admin-  
istrator, and 5. vigorous and competent.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Mawardi, al-Ahkam, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Al-Shahrastani, Kitab Nihayat u'l Iqdam fi 'Ilm 'l' Kalam, trans.  
Margoliuth (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 157.

## Duties and Functions of the Imam-Khalif

### 1. Temporal Duties

As was to be expected, the Sunnis concentrated wholly on the temporal duties of the Imam, inasmuch as he had only a limited role in the sphere of religion, and no significance for the after-life. He was no more than the guide and example of what is right and true to Islam, and a protector and preserver of the Faith and morality. The latter duties actually had more military and administrative implications than religious ones.

The temporal duties of Shi'i Imams were limited, primarily by history and circumstance, and, predictably, their spiritual functions took almost complete precedence.

The Sunni theorists were very down-to-earth, and clearly enumerated the functions that the Imam-Khalif was expected to perform. The one overriding duty which all Sunni jurists emphasized was the protection and preservation of Shari'a, the sacred law which theoretically restrained and guided all men, including the Khalif. Al Nasafi listed eleven caliphal duties: 1. enforcing decisions 2. maintenance of restrictive ordinances 3. guarding frontiers 4. equipping of armies 5. receiving of alms 6. enforcement of law and order 7. maintenance of Friday services and festivals 8. resolution of quarrels 9. judging legal claims 10. marrying minors without guardians, and 11. dividing booty among the believers.<sup>1</sup>

Al Mawardi emphasized the administrative aspect of the office, and especially stressed the personal duties and responsibilities of the Khalif in order to strengthen his person vis-a-vis the emirs. He tended to downgrade the purely religious and judicial functions. The religious rituals, inasmuch as they consisted merely of formalities, were not too important, and

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<sup>1</sup>See MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

therefore had not been taken from the caliph by the emirs. The judicial functions had for a long time been the prerogative of the 'ulema' and *aqda'* (judges). The Imam also had the obligation to promote religious education-- ( *علم* )--a largely symbolic function.

Mawardi listed ten specific functions of the khilafa: 1. the protection of religion from external and internal attack 2. administration of justice 3. maintenance of order and peace and protection of property 4. execution of punishments for civil and religious crimes 5. fortification of borders 6. prosecution of jihad 7. tax-collection (*sadaqat*, *sakat*, and religious gifts or *waqf*) 8. payment of the army and financing of the state 9. appointment of advisors and officers of government, and 10. supervision of all of the functions of state.<sup>1</sup> If the Khalif fulfills all of the duties mentioned in this extensive and impressive list, the *umma* is bound to obey him.

Al-Shahrastani repeats the duties of defending and protecting the country, command of the army, and division of spoils, collection of alms, arbitration of disputes, punishment of crime and appointment of officials.<sup>2</sup> He adds the quasi-religious duty of warning sinners and bringing them to the right path, and trying to cleanse error (in religion) with the sword.<sup>3</sup>

There was a view supported by the Ash'arites and others that there could be two or more Imams at one time if an ocean separated their domains. This was an attempted rationalisation of the existence of the Spanish Umayyad and North African Fatimid and 'Abbasid caliphates simultaneously. Al-Mawardi rejected this idea, and in his stand on the issue he reflected the 'Abbasid

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<sup>1</sup>See al Mawardi, *al-Ahkam*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>al Shahrastani, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

refusal to recognize the other two caliphates, as he consistently tried to strengthen the 'Abbasid cause.

The temporal functions of the Shi'i Imam had religious as well as earthly significance. The principal temporal duties of the Imam consisted of interpreting the Qur'an by his secret knowledge (batn) for the benefit of believers, in order to guide them toward a good life on earth and perfection of the soul in preparation for Paradise. He was the guardian of Shari'a and its protector against undesirable change or misinterpretation by other men, who do not possess nass. He was to be the authoritative interpreter of the Qur'an, especially when, on certain questions, revelation is unclear. He must try to restrain the umma from sin and rebellion, in order to preserve the earthly order necessary for perfection of the human soul. Justice and reason demand that he be protected and obeyed. The alternative is anarchy, which is contrary to God's will.

For Sunnis, the legislative function ended with the Prophet. The Qur'an and the Sunna contain all of the laws and injunctions that men require in order to function as men and as Muslims. The Khalif merely executes the existing laws, and the 'ulema' interpret them in cases of ambiguity or doubt.

The Shi'a Imam is firstly a legislator. His secret knowledge, bestowed upon him by nass, is not available to anyone else. Although he is neither god nor prophet, he is above mankind because he is closer to God. Thus he has the power to re-interpret or even alter or change completely parts of the Qur'an and Sunna which may become obsolete or unsuitable in his opinion. 'Ali and his descendants are the most knowing (a'lam) of men. What the Imam accepts must be obeyed and what he rejects is forbidden. God delegated the power over religious matters to Muhammad and then to the Imams, saying: "And whatsoever the Messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever he forbiddeth,



abstain (from it)."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Imam leads his followers out of this world to the next one. Preoccupation with the material would lead man in the wrong direction. Because the Imam is not an ordinary man, but sinless and infallible and chosen by God for his office, he is not inordinately attached to this world, and so can easily perform this task of guidance. Al Hilli states that when men have a chief (رئيس) and a guide (مؤتمن) to obey, and an avenger of the oppressed, they draw nearer to soundness (سليح) and away from corruption.<sup>2</sup>

According to Shi'a tradition, the Prophet himself rejected the Qur'an and Sunna, and also qiyas (analogy) as valid instruments in interpreting Shari'a. He affirmed the person of the Imam as the only one who was capable of explaining the Law: "After me some people will act by the Book and some by tradition and some by qiyas and whenever they do thus then they have gone astray...and nothing remains to be the guardian of the law except the Imam."<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Spiritual Duties

The Sunni caliph is primus inter pares in temporal matters. In spiritual concerns, he is less than that. It is one of his jobs to lead the umma in prayer, as the Rashidun did, but it is not obligatory, and most Umayyads and 'Abbasids did not do it. He is a guardian and protector of Shari'a, and no more. He is the protector of the Islamic Empire in a military sense, for he guards it against the external attacks of infidels and the internal threats of heretics and separatists. The power to interpret Shari'a belongs to the 'ulema', or community of learned and pious men. These are the people who issue fatwas which explain points of law and legalize political

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<sup>1</sup>Fysee, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>See al Hilli, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

actions and decisions of state. The khalif, like all of his subjects, is bound to agree and obey.

The Imam-Khalif does have one important prerogative which concerns religious and spiritual matters. He is the executor of the decrees of the 'ulema', and controls the bureaucracy which carries out these orders. In theory the caliph never had the power to refuse to administer the decrees, although in practice the situation varied. A strong caliph with religious inclinations, like the Umayyad 'Umar II and the 'Abbasids al Ma'mun and al Mutawakkil, did, in fact, make their personal religious beliefs compulsory in the Empire. In these instances, the 'ulema' took a secondary role in interpreting Shari'a.

The khalif is chosen by men, without the aid of divine intervention. In effect, he may be an evil-doer or less qualified than others to perform the duties of his office. He is a political and military leader, and has no function in really substantive spiritual matters. He occupies no special place with regard to God or Muhammad, and he must be judged like all other men on Judgment Day as meriting Heaven or Hell.

The spiritual functions of the Shi'a Imam are basic to the theology of Shi'ism. As an oppressed and persecuted sector of the Islamic community, the Shi'a sought refuge in an other-worldly religion. The existence of and belief in the Imam is central.

The spiritual and temporal functions of the Shi'i Imam are really inseparable, inasmuch as the religious life on earth is regarded as merely a preparation for the afterlife. Because the Imam combines in his person the absolute power, it is not possible to arbitrarily separate his duties.

Although religion and the state were never separate institutions in Islam as they were in Christianity, still the Sunnis did tend to make some distinction. In the beginning, Muhammad ruled in both the spiritual and

temporal realms. The Rashidun concentrated on the latter. As they were so close to the Prophet and knew his teachings so well, they mostly relied on his influence in the spiritual sphere. During the Umayyad and early 'Abbasid period, the caliphs were more concerned with worldly matters.

The Umayyads were frank about this, and left spiritual concerns to the 'ulema'. The early 'Abbasids, although they surrounded themselves with an aura of religion and piety, did the same thing. With the decline in 'Abbasid temporal powers, the caliphal role took on a mere spiritual significance. The emirs, wazirs and sultans possessed the actual power.

The Shi'a never made any such distinctions, either in theory or fact. The Twelve Imams, exercised absolute power in both spheres, but the other-worldly aspects were emphasized. There were two reasons for this: the ever-riding Shi'ite concern for religious matters, such as salvation, as an emotional escape from persecution, and actual repression by the Sunni caliphs, who prevented the Imams from exercising temporal power.

Al Qunmi, the Shi'a theologian, listed the necessary qualities and duties of the Imams: 1. their absolute authority over men as ordained by God 2. the witnesses of the people vis-a-vis God 3. the gates of Allah (abwab) 4. the road (sabil) and guide (adilla) to Him 5. the repository of His knowledge 6. interpreter of His revelations, and 7. the pillar of His unity (tawhid).<sup>1</sup>

The pure Imams possess the power of miracles (mu'jiza) and irrefutable arguments (dala'il). They exist for the protection of mankind and are the most noble slaves of God, who "speak not until He hath spoken, they act by His command."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Fysee, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The sincerely devout Shi'a has certain duties toward the Imam. Al Qummi declared them to be: 1. true belief (iman) (hatred for them is kufr) 2. their command is God's command and their prohibitions are His 3. obedience to the Imam is obedience to God 4. their wali is the wali of God and their enemies are His enemies. The earth cannot be without proof (hujja) of God to His creatures, and the Imam is that proof.<sup>1</sup>

The most important role of the Shi'a Imam is that of intercessor and mediator for the believers with God on Judgement Day. In al Qummi's words, the Imam "may be likened to the Ark of Noah; he who boards it obtains salvation or reaches the Gate of Repentance (hitta)."<sup>2</sup>

The belief in prophets and Imams as mediators developed soon after Muhammad's death, although the latter did not intend or encourage such interpretations of his mission. He made his stand quite clear in the Qur'an: "No soul shall labour but for itself; and no burdened one shall bear another's burden."<sup>3</sup> The Prophet even ridiculed the Jews for their belief in the intercession of prophets.<sup>4</sup> In modern Islam, however, both Shi'a and Sunni accept the intercession of Muhammad on Judgement Day. They attempt to justify this belief from the legend that God did not accept Adam's repentance, and took Muhammad, the rasul'llah "for his mediator."<sup>5</sup>

Shi'i belief in the mediation of 'Ali and the Imams is carried much further. The strongest impetus for its acceptance was provided by Husain's

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<sup>1</sup>Pyree, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 339, Qur'an, 6:164.

<sup>4</sup>See Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 340.

martyrdom, which, like Jesus', was interpreted as a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of all believers. They could not accept the view that Husain died ignorant of his fate and without reason. Thus a doctrine gradually developed that credited Husain with the knowledge that, even as a child, he knew what would befall him, and that he died with a meek acceptance of the divine will. At the Resurrection, he will arise and intercede for the faithful with the power he purchased by means of his own blood. The doctrine was later modified to bestow the intercessionary power upon all the Imams.

According to the Shi'i theologian al Majlisi (d. 1699 A.D.), Muhammad said to 'Ali: "...You and your descendants are mediators for mankind..."<sup>1</sup> At Ghadir Khum, the Prophet declared that through the 'Alids the prayers of the community would be heard.<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Baqir, the fifth Imam once declared: "We have a great burden on behalf of mankind..."<sup>3</sup> Al Majlisi believed that "The Imams are the mediators between God and mankind: Except by their intercession it is impossible for men to avoid the punishment of God."<sup>4</sup>

Upon another occasion, Muhammad Baqir said: "Through us God should be worshipped and may be known, and through us mankind may know God's unity and that Muhammad is the mediator of God, who intercedes with God for men... Whoever calls upon God through our mediation is saved..."<sup>5</sup>

Sheikh al Tusi, another Shi'i theologian, wrote that Jaffar as-Sadiq, the sixth Imam, told the faithful: "We are mediators between you and the

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<sup>1</sup>Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup>See Fysee, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>3</sup>Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 345.

Most High."<sup>1</sup>

Both Sunnis and Shi'is believe that there is a bridge (sirat) which stretches from this world to Paradise. On the bridge are numerous passes where the traveller is questioned about his faith and good works on earth. Those who fail to give satisfactory answers trip and fall off the bridge into Hell. For the true believer, the bridge seems wide, but for the failures it seems too narrow. Those who are condemned must serve a sentence for either a definite period or for eternity, depending on the seriousness of their sins.

According to the Shi'as, one of the passes is called al-walaya, or love of Imams. All men are stopped here, and are interrogated concerning their love for 'Ali and his successors. He who answers correctly may cross the bridge safely, while he who does not is hurled into the Fire.<sup>2</sup> According to Muhammad Baqir, the Prophet said to 'Ali: "...no one will be able to pass [the Bridge] unless he has a permit showing that...he has been friendly to you."<sup>3</sup> Sirat may also refer to the Imams themselves, in their role as the proofs of Allah to mankind. Allah permits the man who knows and obeys them on earth to cross the Bridge on the Day of Resurrection, and so, literally, the Imams are the bridge to Paradise. Once the believer reaches Heaven, he resides with God, Muhammad, and all the Imams.<sup>4</sup>

#### Salvation

Love of the Imams is a prerequisite for salvation. As this is the ul-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>See Fysee, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>Donaldson, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>See Fysee, op. cit., p. 73.

timate purpose of life for all Muslims, it is one of the most important questions. For a Sunni, sincere devotion to the Shari'a is sufficient for salvation. To obey it is all that is required of the faithful. Of course the salvation of the individual is dependent ultimately on God's will, which cannot be known through reason. God for the Shi'a is bound to act justly because it is His nature, and because it is contrary to justice and reason that He do otherwise. The Sunni God is capricious and bound by no considerations of any kind.

In Shi'a theology, devotion to Shari'a is not sufficient for the believer. Because of this fact, the Shi'a regard all Sunnis as damned. The absolute necessity of belief in and love of the Imams is described by a Shi'a: "No action of virtue or worship and devotion to God will be accepted without this and on it depends salvation in the next life."<sup>1</sup> This love of Imams (walaya) is the seventh pillar of Shi'i faith, and the most important one, for without it, the other six are worthless. The third article of Shi'i faith, which expresses this concept, is as follows: "I believe that the Imam especially chosen by God as the bearer of a part of the divine being is the leader to salvation."<sup>2</sup>

The Imam acts as witness in behalf of the believer on the Day of Reckoning (al-hisab), so that "...no soul shall be wronged..."<sup>3</sup> On the Day of Resurrection, the Shi'a will not be questioned. Because of their redeeming love for their Imams, "the sinful ones among them will be sufficiently punished during the period between death and resurrection (barsakh) so that

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<sup>1</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 49, quote from B. Husain.

<sup>2</sup>Italics mine. See Shorter Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 535.

<sup>3</sup>Fysee, op. cit., p. 75.

when they rise, they will not be answerable for any sin."<sup>1</sup> In other words, no Shi'ite is damned forever. Any punishments they may receive are temporary, and they are eventually saved by their walaya.

Consequently, the Shi'a have always prayed for the intercession of the Imams on their behalf, and faithfully affirmed their love. As proof of the intercessionary power, the Shi'a cite a statement that God supposedly made concerning 'Ali: "The friendship of 'Ali is my stronghold and whoever enters my stronghold is free from punishment."<sup>2</sup> A faithful Shi'i will pray to the Imams at one of their shrines: "O...May you cause God to be pleased with me and give me a place in your bounty...Accept my efforts on your behalf and may my sins be forgiven because of your intercession... [O God] ...wilt thou keep the Imams reminded of me..."<sup>3</sup> The Imams are the only advocates whose intercession is effective. One who dies without knowing the Imam dies a kafir and will not be saved. Only the simpleminded who do not believe have a chance to be redeemed.<sup>4</sup> Those who are ignorant of the Imams must be punished in Hell, for God does not excuse on Judgement Day those who claim never to have known "that the children of Fatima were Thy representatives among mankind, and for all the Shi'ites."<sup>5</sup> Knowledge of God is dependent upon knowledge of the Imams and vice-versa. The two are mutually necessary, and one may not know God without the help of the Imams. Even a pure and otherwise sinless man, if he does not affirm be-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 347.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>4</sup>See Ibid., pp. 351-352.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 353.



lief in the Imams, is not worthy in God's sight; for he is like a "lost... [and wandering] sheep."<sup>1</sup> Only the Shi'a deserve God's forgiveness, and all others are doomed. God said in the Qur'an: "O my servants who have transgressed to your own hurt, despair not of God's mercy, for all sins doth God forgive..."<sup>2</sup> The Shi'a modify this in their belief that there is one unforgivable sin, the denial of the Imams. That is, according to them, akin to accepting all of the prophets except Muhammad, or is "the like of him who denies the apostleship of all the prophets..."<sup>3</sup> Muhammad is supposed to have said: "He who will wrong 'Ali as regards my successorship after my death, it is as though he has denied my apostleship and the apostles of (all) the prophets before me, on whom be peace. And who befriends the wrong-deer [i.e. one of little or no faith] is himself a wrong-deer."<sup>4</sup> To deny one Imam is to deny all. The ranks of the kuffar are thereby extended to include not only the Sunnis, but the ghulat, the other Shi'i sects who do not accept all twelve Imams. Thus, according to al Qummi, the Imam Ja'far once said: "He who denies the least among us is like him who denies the first among us."<sup>5</sup>

#### Necessity of the Imam

The Shi'a Imam occupied a central place in the cosmic order. As was mentioned above, he is the hujja at tallah, the proof of God, and the universal authority of riyasa.<sup>6</sup> He not only guides men toward God, but also is the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., and Qur'an, 39:54.

<sup>3</sup> Fysee, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> See al Hilli, op. cit., p. 62.

Preserver of the universe in accordance with God's will. He is the executor of the Creator's plan for the universe. The Imam exists because of lutf,<sup>1</sup> because God would not leave any of His creatures in anarchy and aimlessness. It is incumbent upon God, according to reason, to act with kindness toward man. In the words of al Majlisi, "...obviously God will do that which is best in behalf of his servants."<sup>2</sup> Lutf is "...that action on the part of God which would help to bring his creatures nearer to his devotion and obedience and facilitate their moral correction...[and it is] morally incumbent on him."<sup>3</sup>

The Imam is the keystone of the cosmos. Without him, it would simply collapse. Whether he is visible or hidden is of no importance, as long as he exists. The exercise of reason would make the truth of this contention obvious to anyone. To the Imam Muhammad Baqir is credited this statement: "...as long as we are on the Earth the Judgement will not come and punishment will not occur...But when we shall be taken from the Earth, this will be a sign of its destruction..."<sup>4</sup> And furthermore: "It is by our blessing that God...shows forth his mercy and brings forth the bounties of the Earth..."<sup>5</sup> and, "Verily the earth itself would collapse with all those who dwell on it."<sup>6</sup>

The Sunnis and the Mu'tazilites agreed with the Shi'a on the absolute necessity of the Imam for the existence of world order and the welfare of mankind. The only ones who disagreed were the khawarij, who believed that it

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>3</sup> Hellister, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 309-310.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

was possible for men to act justly and charitably toward each other, thereby eliminating the need for a ruler. The Ash'arites, and consequently all Sunnis, considered the Imamate to be incumbent by tradition and history. The Mu'tazilites and the Shi'a viewed the necessity as proven by reason and logic. The latter argument was based on the doctrine of lutf, which brings all creatures nearer to God and to salah, or spiritual health. Whatever proved the necessity of nubuwwa (prophecy) proved that of the Imamate, for the latter was the successor of the former and stood in its place.<sup>1</sup> It is thus wajib (necessary) for an Imam to exist in Shi'ism. It is a logical impossibility that God would ever leave the universe or mankind without one.

In Sunnism, the Imamate is the foundation of the umma,<sup>2</sup> the preserver of political order and the protector of Islam. There is a Qur'anic injunction to obey the ruler;<sup>3</sup>

The Imamate is considered a fard kifaya (collective responsibility) of the umma. A successor to the Prophet is indispensable to the general welfare, because he "cleanses the land of error with the sword,"<sup>4</sup> warns sinners and points to the right path. "The earth can never be without an imam wielding authority."<sup>5</sup> In the first generation of Muslims, the Companions unanimously agreed that a successor to the Prophet was a necessity. The fact that the umma was also unanimous in desiring an Imam proved his necessity, because of the Sunni belief in the infallibility of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> See al Hilli, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> See al-Mawardi, al-Ahkam, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Supra, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Shahrastani, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Al Mawardi considered the Imamate so necessary that he was ready to settle for one of the 'Alid line, if he were competent and a clear leader. In such a case there would be no need to seek out another candidate, for the fard kifaya would be fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> If the matter is not settled, the umma is divided into two groups, the advocates of selection (ikhtiyar) and the ahl al-Imama, who will then keep to themselves, even if they possess no clear or competent leader to rule all Islam.

Al Ash'ari viewed the Imamate as a part of revelation that is demonstrable by reason. The Imam was the only person who could perform certain functions prescribed by Shari'a, such as the raising of armies and the application of legal penalties. The historical consensus of the entire community with the exception of the Khawarij was in itself proof of the necessity of the office.

Though both Sunnis and Shi'is agreed on the necessity of the institution, the latter asserted that the Imam may sometimes, due to circumstances, be hidden from human view and yet continue to wield spiritual power, intercede for believers with God, preserve Islam and the universe. The Sunnis considered this doctrine an impossible one, because their needs required a visible leader who would enforce Shari'a and perform essential political, legal and military duties. The Shi'a Imam, more spiritual than political, did not have to be seen to be acknowledged or to function. The Sunnis, as the actual wielders of power, had to be more realistic and practical.

#### Free Will and the Theory of the Imamate

The two sects took diametrically opposed positions on the issue of

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<sup>1</sup>Al-Mawardi, *al-Ahkam*, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>See al Nasafi, in MacDonald, op. cit., p. 320.

free will. The Sunnis believed in the rule of an entirely earthly caliph theoretically bounded by the limits of Shari'a. They followed the view of al Ash'ari, who conceived of man as mere tools of an omnipotent and omniscient God. The mysteries of the Creator were not to be investigated or challenged by human reason. On the other hand, the Shi'a, who were the so-called authoritarians of Islam, argued for the rule of reason, and took a much more liberal view.

Al Ghazzali, the eminent Sunni theologian, stated: "No act of an individual, even though it be done purely for his benefit, is independent of the will of Allah for its existence; and there does not occur in either the physical or the extraterrestrial world the wink of an eye, the hint of a thought...except by the will of Allah. This includes evil and good...polytheism and true belief."<sup>1</sup> Al Nasafi believed that "...God most high is the Creator of all actions of His creatures, whether of unbelief or belief, of obedience or rebellion; all of them are by the will of God and His sentence and His conclusion and His decreeing."<sup>2</sup>

The Shi'a refused to believe in a God who was capricious and would punish the virtuous and reward the wicked. His lutf which makes Him bestow the Imams on mankind, makes God "...treat us with...grace, tafaddal...Justice, al 'adl, [this] means that he requites a good act with a good act and an evil act with an evil act..."<sup>3</sup> The Shi'a who ideally dwells under the benevolent but autocratic rule of the Imam, has more freedom of action than the Sunni, who supposedly lives under a more limited type of state. Theoretically, the love of the Imam plus good works will get their reward in the

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<sup>1</sup>Hellister, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>MacDonald, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>3</sup>al Qunsi, in Fyzee, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

afterlife. The Sunni is, ultimately, powerless to effect his own salvation.

In Sunnism, nothing is good or evil inherently or independently. "Only what God has commanded us is good, what He has forbidden is evil-- the Shias...hold that irrespective of religious commandment, there is real merit or demerit in different courses of action and it is because a certain thing is good that God commanded it and because the other is bad that He forbids it."<sup>1</sup>

#### Concealment and Return--The Mahdi

The concept of a Messiah originated with the Jews, who believed that a descendant of the House of David would one day come to earth and deliver them from the sufferings of this world. The Christians found their Messiah in Jesus Christ, and the Muslims, who borrowed from both traditions, also developed a Messianic idea. The human longing for a Messiah is a natural one, because for most men, life is hard, and earthly hardships are more easily borne if there exists a hope that one day a divine messenger, sent by God, will restore the earth to its original purity and bring to all men a reign of justice, righteousness and equity.

According to Sunni eschatology, a Messiah will come at the end of time as a "restorer"<sup>2</sup> of justice and equity, and a destroyer of tyranny who will reign over the world for "seven years."<sup>3</sup> His identity is vague, and the belief in a Messiah is not one of the more important characteristics of orthodox Sunni Islam.

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<sup>1</sup>B. Husain, in Hellister, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

The longing of the oppressed, unfortunate and the poor for a savior is "inborn,"<sup>1</sup> and so it is not surprising that the persecuted, downtrodden Shi'a, crushed under tyrannical 'Abbasid rule, should develop a doctrine of a Messiah, or as they called him, the Mahdi (rightly-guided one), as an escape valve for their misery.

The doctrine actually had its beginnings in 66 A.H., during the Umayyad period, when a follower of Muhammad al-Hanafiya, al Mukhtar, termed his deceased Imam "al Muntazar," the "Expected" or "Awaited One," who would return to earth to save the faithful from their despair. The Mahdi idea among the Shi'a underwent its greatest growth in 'Abbasid times, particularly after the "disappearance" of the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al Muntazar, in 260 A.H. Al Qummi (d. 991 A.D.) defined the Mahdi's mission. Upon his descent, he would "...fill the earth with Justice and Equity, just as it is now full of oppression and wrong."<sup>2</sup> Through him, God will make the true faith manifest "in order to supersede all religion, though the polytheists may dislike it."<sup>3</sup> The Mahdi will make Allah victorious over all the earth, and all religions will belong to Him. "The light of God will illuminate the earth and the empire of the Imam will extend from East to West."<sup>4</sup> Even the Christians will have to acknowledge his suzerainty, because 'Isa b. Maryam will also descend to earth,<sup>5</sup> and pray behind the Mahdi as the latter's helper. Then there will be a "great slaughter" of men, after which all will be of one

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<sup>1</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Tyze, op. cit., p. 98, and Hollister, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See Hollister, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-99.

faith and there will be perfect peace and happiness..."<sup>1</sup>

The Seveners, or Fatimids, believed in a certain number of cycles through which the universe would have to pass before the Mahdi could appear. The Twelvers had no such definite ideas. According to Professor Guillame in Islam,<sup>2</sup> the failure of the Shi'a to get their views on the rights of the Imams accepted by the rest of Islam, led them to take refuge in a Messiah who would appear at some indefinite future time.

### Ghayba

The Twelver Shi'a did have a clear idea on who the Mahdi would be, however. The twelfth Imam, the last of the 'Alid line, was the child, Muhammad al Muntazar, son of Hasan al-'Askari, who disappeared into a well at Samarra immediately after his father's death, in order to escape his persecutors and tormentors, the 'Abbasid caliphs. Thus developed the doctrine of ghayba, or concealment, which is one of the most essential beliefs of Shi'ite Islam. As stated above, the Shi'a affirm that the universe cannot exist without an Imam. Muhammad al Muntazar fulfills this necessity because of the fact that he never died, but rather went into hiding, to reappear at an appointed time. Although he cannot be seen by anyone, not even the Shi'i faithful, his influence upon mankind and the universe continues. The faithful may pray to him to intercede for them with God, and the Imam will listen. Al Majlisi<sup>3</sup> likens the position of the hidden Imam to that of the sun behind a cloud. The sun is present, and although it is <sup>may be</sup> hidden from view, it continues to warm the earth and bestow life and sustenance.

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. W. H. 'Ali, a Shi'a, in Hollister, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Guillame, op. cit., see p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> See Majlisi, in Donaldson, op. cit., p. 310, and Hollister, op. cit., p. 97.



The Mahdi's concealment was divided into two periods: that of the Lesser Concealment, which lasted for seventy years (A.H. 260-329). During that time, the Imam ruled through four wakils who carried his orders and messages to the faithful. When the last wakil died, the Mahdi entered into the period of the Greater Concealment, which still continues, and will endure until his Return, which will take place at the Mosque of the Imams at Hilla, near Samarra.<sup>1</sup> During the Concealment, Shi'a Islam is ruled and guided by mujtahids, learned men who, while under the influence of the Hidden Imam, cannot see or hear him as the wakils could. The mujtahids will interpret Islam to the people, and give advice to the temporal rulers until the Return of the Mahdi. They have certain powers, in trust, until the Return, which normally would be the Imam's alone. Namely, they may re-interpret the Qur'an, or even change it, so that religion may conform to changing times. This capacity for evolution of religious concepts, and the flexibility it gives, is not present in Sunnism.

There are certain real advantages to the Concealment as far as the Shi'a are concerned. To await the Imam's coming strengthens one's faith, and the dread of his justice encourages man to abstain from sin. He is invisible to his enemies and thus immune from all danger to his person, while his grace and blessings come through the cloud and subtly guide men along the right path. The position of the Hidden Imam vis-a-vis mankind is likened by al Majlisi to the place of the mind over the body,<sup>2</sup> because all action depends on directions from the mind, as the faithful rely on guidance from the Imam. The noblest part of the body, the head (i.e. the Imam), rules the body.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Majlisi, in Donaldson, op. cit., p. 313.

The Shi'a doctrine of the Hidden Imam was the object of much ridicule. The Zaidiyyah, the Shi'i sect closest to Sunnism, believed that the Imam must be seen to be obeyed, and moreover, the 'Alid who could defeat other 'Alid claimants to the khilafa with his sword would be the rightful Imam. Thus a poet of the Zaidiyyah voiced his feelings concerning the doctrine of ghayba:

Our Imam is set up and stands upright,  
not like the one who has to be sought by sifting.  
Any Imam who is not seen publicly,  
he is not worth unto us a mustard seed.<sup>1</sup>

'Abd al Qahir al Baghdadi, the orthodox Sunni theologian, sarcastically ridiculed both the Imamiyyah and the Zaidiyyah (called Rafidah) by him) and presented the official Sunni view of the Hidden Imamate:

Oh ye worthless Rafidah, your claims are worthless throughout.  
Your Imam--if he is hidden in darkness,  
try to reach the hidden by means of a light.  
Or if he is covered up by your rancors, then  
bring forth by means of a sieve the one who  
is covered up.  
But the true Imam, according to us, is revealed  
by the Sunnah or Koran verse.  
And in them is a sufficiency for him who is  
rightly led.  
These two suffice us as a revelation.<sup>2</sup>

### Taqiyya

The sufferings and persecution of the Shi'a by the Sunni majority had certain concrete effects on Shi'i doctrines. The fact of constant fear for their lives led to the institution of deceit and concealment among the Shi'a. One facet of this necessity for caution was the belief in the Concealed Imam. The other was the practice of taqiyya, or dissimulation, by all Shi'is as

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<sup>1</sup>Al Baghdadi, Farq, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

a means of self-preservation and protection. Ja'far as-Sadiq, the sixth Imam, made its practice obligatory for all believers until the appearance of al Qaim,<sup>1</sup> the Mahdi. The former is believed to have said: "...Religious disguise is the religious practice of mine and my ancestors; whoever has no taqiya, he has no faith."<sup>2</sup> To forsake it is tantamount to forsaking prayer, and he who abandons taqiyya before the Return is no Muslim. The fact that the doctrine was so firmly established by Ja'far signifies that it had attained full development and acceptance in his time by the Shi'a movement. Its effects are felt in the behavior and morals of all Shi'ites, and it penetrates all aspects of their religion. Its influence is strongly felt in Iran up to the present, and it affects political, economic and social activities, as well as the religious sphere.

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<sup>1</sup>See Fysee, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>2</sup>Hollister, op. cit., p. 54.

## CHAPTER IV

### A SHI'I DYNASTY IN POWER: THE BUWAIHIDS

IN BAGHDAD--334/945-447/1055

The 'Abbasid Caliphate in the Mid Tenth Century, A.D.

The 'Abbasid capital of Baghdad was in a state bordering on anarchy pending the arrival of the Buwaihid conquerors in the mid tenth century. The city was "distracted by rivalries of Turkish captains, wild license of the soldiery, misrule, anarchy and want."<sup>1</sup> The Caliphate had been reduced to near-impotence by a series of amirs, and most recently by the powerful and ruthless Turkish generals. The receipt of state revenues, heretofore regarded as a caliphal prerogative, had been seized by the generals, and the Caliph had to be content with a small allowance. Still, there were a few powers which had not been taken from him, such as his standing as both the religious and temporal head of the umma in the eyes of all Sunnis. Most importantly, he held on to the power to appoint his own wazir. This last prerogative did give him some small say in the affairs of state. With the advent of the Buwaihids, the Caliph's situation deteriorated ever more rapidly, and reached one of the lowest points in its history.

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Wm. Muir, The Caliphate, Its Rise, Decline and Fall, ed. T. W. Weir (new ed. rev.; Edinburgh: John Grant, 1924), p. 577.

### The Buwaihid Dynasty

The reign of the Buwaihid dynasty has been termed the "Iranian inter-  
messe"<sup>1</sup> between the earlier Arabian domination of Islam and the later (Ot-  
toman) Turkish conquest in the eleventh century, A.D. (fifth century, A.H.).  
The name "Buwaihid" derives from that of Abu Shuja' Buwaih, the father of  
the three brothers who founded the dynasty: 'Ali, Hasan, and Ahmad. They  
were of humble birth, from a mountainous region bordering the Caspian Sea  
called Daylam, and were fairly recent, and sincere, converts to Twelver  
Shi'ism. Little is known of the origins of the family. Each of the three  
brothers was an impressive military conqueror, and the base of their power  
was their armies, which consisted almost entirely of fellow-Daylamites, who  
were then numerous in the forces of the Eastern ('Abbasid) Caliphate. Be-  
fore Ahmad, the youngest, entered Baghdad in 945 A.D., he had previously  
conquered Kirman. Hasan was ascendant in Khuzistan and Medina, and the  
eldest, 'Ali, had already achieved caliphal recognition as master of Is-  
fahan and Fars.

Following the conquest of Baghdad by Ahmad, the 'Abbasid Caliph was  
obliged to invest the three brothers with impressive titles. Ahmad became  
Mu'izz ad-Dawlah (Strengtheners of the State), 'Ali was called 'Imad ad-  
Dawlah (Pillar of the State), and Hasan, Rukn ad-Dawlah (Prop of the State).<sup>2</sup>  
All reigning princes of the Buwaihid family thereafter took the appellation  
"ad-Dawlah."

The Buwaihids ruled Baghdad for one hundred and ten years, from 945  
to 1055 A.D. The first three princes represent and symbolize the best and

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<sup>1</sup>Cl. Cahen, "Buwaihids," Encyclopedia of Islam, I (London: Lusac &  
Co., 1960), p. 1350.

<sup>2</sup>See D. M. Donaldson, op. cit., p. 275.

worst features that were to characterize Buwaihid rule. The first, Mu'izz, was strong, shrewd, and courageous, but highly unscrupulous. The principal feature of his reign was the continual playing off of various military factions against each other, and constant intrigue. His son, Bakhtiyar, was weak, dissipated and foolish, and thoroughly incompetent, and unfortunately a precursor of what was to follow his successor, 'Adud ad-Dawlah. The latter was a skillful administrator, a shrewd military leader and a wise ruler. Under him, the dynasty prospered and reached its highest point, economically, culturally and politically.

Ahmad b. Muhammad Ibn Miskawaih, born about 330 A.H., was a civil servant at the Buwaihid court for many years. He left a record of this period in Islamic history which is remarkable for its objectivity and honesty, considering that he was an employee of the dynasty. He was "...a man of very considerable learning and far removed from any sort of fanaticism...",<sup>1</sup> and "he had access to state secrets without being personally concerned in them to any great extent."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, he was an unusually qualified historian of his times.

Ibn Miskawaih represents Mu'izz and 'Imad as completely unscrupulous and without any positive virtues except family affection. Rukn had a sense of honor, but satisfied it at the expense of his realm. The administrations of these three, in their various dominions, he regarded with unmitigated contempt. For 'Adud, who was "probably the ablest Sultan of his time,"<sup>3</sup> Miskawaih had much praise.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Miskawaih, The Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate, trans. H. F. Amedrez and B. S. Margoliuth, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1921), Vol. VII, preface, p. V.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. VI.

<sup>3</sup> Miskawaih, Vol. VII, op. cit., p. V.

According to Miskawaih, "Mu'izz al-Daulah was ferocious, irascible and foul-mouthed, constantly reviling his viziers and most dignified courtiers, and trumping up charges against them."<sup>1</sup> Bakhtiyar foolishly ignored his father's admonitions on: 1. strengthening his rule by conciliating the Daylamites, Turks, and court attendants, and 2. seeking advice from the more intelligent 'Adud, who was his senior. Bakhtiyar disobeyed all of these commands, spent all of his time in frivolities, and alienated himself from his main support, the Daylamite armies. In Miskawaih's words: "His affairs [accordingly] went rotten root and branch."<sup>2</sup> Bakhtiyar's incompetence precipitated an uprising of the Sunnis against the Shi'a upon one occasion. Popular rioting resulted, and the Sultan was completely powerless to stop it: "The want of respect for authority and the incompetence of the Sultan became manifest."<sup>3</sup> There was little internal peace in Baghdad during his reign.

'Adud finally defeated Bakhtiyar in battle and had him beheaded.<sup>4</sup> 'Adud brought the Buwaihid dynasty to the peak of greatness, and his power inevitably coincided with that of the khilafa's greatest impotency. During his reign (A.D. 949-982),<sup>5</sup> cultural life underwent an impressive renaissance. 'Adud bestowed ample and regular allowances upon all scholars, intellectuals, religious men, and scientists. He set aside a special place in his palace, adjoining his own apartments, for "men of special attainment

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<sup>1</sup>Miskawaih, Vol. V, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>5</sup>His rule in the provinces began in 949. He seized power from Bakhtiyar and took over Baghdad, in 976.

and distinguished philosophers."<sup>1</sup> "...the young were encouraged to study, the old to instruct, talent had free scope, and there was a brisk market for ability."<sup>2</sup> As a result of his policy of religious toleration, the intellectual life of all--the Sunnis and many Shi'i sects--flourished. Literature, especially in Persian, the mother tongue of the Buwaihids, underwent great growth. Al-Farabi, a Turk, (d. 950), al Mutannabi, the Arab poet (d. 992 A.D.), the Shi'i mystic Ibn al-Hajjaj, the geographer al Muqaddasi, the Shi'i historian al-Mas'udi, and the famous philosopher and medical doctor, Ibn Sina, all lived under Buwaihid rule. 'Adud al-Dawlah was the master of territories stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf, and from Isfahan to the borders of Syria.

#### The Buwaihids and the Caliphate

When Mu'izz ad-Dawlah arrived at the gates of Baghdad, the 'Abbasid Caliph, al-Mustakfi, went out to greet him, and "professed to be delighted at [his] arrival..."<sup>3</sup> On January 17, 946, Mu'izz made a declaration of loyalty to al-Mustakfi, and swore to preserve the lives of all of the caliph's officers, servants and family, whereupon the Caliph bestowed titles of honor on the three brothers<sup>4</sup> and ordered their kunyas<sup>5</sup> and titles to be stamped on all coinage of the Empire.

Less than two weeks after this oath of allegiance to al-Mustakfi, who had been Caliph for thirty years, Mu'izz heard of a plot against him. A

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> See page 128, supra chapter.

<sup>5</sup> A nickname or a title, such as "Mu'izz ad-Dawlah."



stewardess of Mustakfi was planning to give a banquet, at which the invitees were to pledge allegiance to the Caliph, and reject Mu'izz's newly won authority. In addition, Mustakfi had ordered the arrest of a Shi'i religious leader and had ignored Mu'izz's urgings to release the man. Al-Mut'i, the son of the previous Caliph, al-Muktadir, hated Mustakfi, and was making intensive efforts to gain the ascendancy by pandering to the Buwaihids. In any event, Mu'izz decided to depose the incumbent Caliph.

The forcible deposition of al-Mustakfi was a humiliation from which the 'Abbasid Caliphate never recovered. On January 29, 946, two Daylamite agents of Mu'izz, speaking in Persian, entered the Caliph's presence, and moved as if to kiss his hand. Mustakfi stretched out his hand, and the Daylamites thereupon "...pulled him by it, brought him to the ground, placed his turban on his neck, and proceeded to drag him. Mu'izz al-Daulah now rose; there was general confusion...the two Daylamites dragged Mustakfi on feet to the palace of Mu'izz al-Daulah, where he was confined. The palace [of Mustakfi] was plundered til nothing remained there."<sup>1</sup> "Thus ended the days of Mustakfi's Caliphate."<sup>2</sup> T. W. Arnelld adds that the Caliph's "eyes were put out," and then Mu'izz, still not satisfied, had "the humiliated Caliph...driven on feet through the streets"<sup>3</sup> of the city.

"Mu'izz then summoned Abu'l-Qasim al-Fadl, son of Muktadir, to the palace on 8 Jumada ii, 334... [the very same day]; he received the title Caliph, and homage was paid to him. He took the name Al-Muti'Lillah (the

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<sup>1</sup> See Denaldsen, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> Miskawaih, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> T. W. Arnelld, The Caliphate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 62. See also Muir, op. cit., p. 575, and Denaldsen, op. cit., p. 276.

Obedient to God).<sup>1</sup> He ruled for twenty-eight years as a tool of Mu'izz and then of Bakhtiyar. Despite his obsequiousness to the Buraihids, he had to endure great humiliation. He was allowed only a small pittance for an allowance, and his office was shorn of all respect and dignity, except for one thing: the mention of his name in the Friday khutbah. He was even forced to accompany Mu'izz into battle, where the latter made him take yet another oath, "...a terrible oath not to separate himself from Mu'izz al-Daulah, to harbour no evil designs against him and not to side with his enemies."<sup>2</sup> Once Muti' had taken the oath, he was released from custody and permitted to return to his palace. Muti' was no more than a rubber stamp to accept and formally invest all of Mu'izz's official appointments.<sup>3</sup>

Muti' also had the misfortune to be Caliph under the inept and feeble Bakhtiyar. The latter, upon one occasion, demanded money of al-Muti', who had been obliged to live on a relatively small allowance. Bakhtiyar wished to use it to pay his restive troops, and to put down religious rioting in Baghdad, which was getting out of hand. Muti's bitter reply clearly illustrates the extent to which the Caliph had abdicated his responsibilities: "The Sacred War would be incumbent on me if the world were in my hands, and if I had the management of the money and the troops...All I have is a pittance insufficient for my wants, and the world is in your hands...neither the Sacred War,<sup>4</sup> nor the Pilgrimage, nor any other matter requiring the attention of the Sovereign is a concern of mine. All you can claim from me

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<sup>1</sup> Miskawih, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> See Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the war against the Byzantines, and thus was a jihad. The Suani Caliph in law has the primary responsibility for the waging of jihad. He is also supposed to be the protector of hajj, in his capacity as "Commander of the Faithful."

is the name which is uttered in the Khutbah from your pulpits as a means of pacifying your subjects; if and when you want me to renounce that privilege too, I am prepared to do so and leave everything to you."<sup>1</sup>

In the year 974, as a result of Bakhtiyar's effort to strengthen the position of Shi'ism, the Sunnis rallied to a Turkish rebellion against Buwaihid rule, and the Sunni mob of Baghdad devastated the Shi'a quarter of the city. A vicious persecution of Shi'is ensued.<sup>2</sup> This violence coincided with the sudden debilitation of the Caliph Muti' as a consequence of a severe stroke which left him unable to move or speak. Muti' of course had never been in any position to influence events, and his physical condition thus provided him with a perfect occasion to abdicate. On August 5, 974 he did so, in favor of his son, al-Ta'i'.<sup>3</sup>

The following year, 'Adud, in alliance with Bakhtiyar and at the head of his Daylamite troops, defeated the Turks. 'Adud had saved Bakhtiyar from a disaster and had transformed a near-fiasco into victory. The incompetent Bakhtiyar was finally deposed by his more clever relative in 975. An uncle, the venerable Rukn ad-Dawlah, was at first infuriated when he learned of 'Adud's action, but he later changed his mind and conferred the sovereignty upon him.<sup>4</sup> Other members of the family ratified his decision.

'Adud, who had previously won al-Ta'i's allegiance from Bakhtiyar,<sup>5</sup> put the affairs of the Caliphate in order and bestowed great wealth upon the Caliph. Ta'i reciprocated by ordering the mosques in Baghdad<sup>6</sup> to place 'Adud's

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>2</sup>See Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>3</sup>See Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>4</sup>See Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>5</sup>See Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>6</sup>A. H. Siddiqi, "Caliphate and Kingship in Medieval Persia," Islamic Culture, vol. X, (1936), p. 111.

name in the khutbah immediately after his own. Before Buwaihid rule, the mention in the khutbah had been a symbol of the Caliph's political as well as religious supremacy in Baghdad. The consent of the Caliph to this unprecedented humiliation was indicative of his complete degradation. Ta'i also ordered the beating of drums at the gates of 'Adud's palace at prayer times, an honor which had heretofore had belonged only to the Caliph. These were "two distinctions attained by 'Adud al-Da'ulah and by no other monarch who had preceded him in ancient or modern times."<sup>1</sup> Upon one occasion Ta'i had the unfortunate experience of colliding with the will of 'Adud, who "in revenge against the Caliph caused the latter's name to be omitted from the Khutbah in Baghdad and elsewhere for two months,"<sup>2</sup> something that had never happened before.

Thus al-Ta'i, who, like Muti', sought to strengthen his own position by backing a winner, met the same humiliating fate at Buwaihid hands. 'Adud rewarded him for his loyal support by making Ta'i an instrument for his own self-glorification. At the investiture ceremony, 'Adud forced the Caliph to confer on him a robe of honor like that of a sultan, crown him and bestow other insignia of royal rank, and Ta'i "presented him with banners, one of them decked with silver such as was carried before an Amir, and the other decked with gold such as was carried before the heir apparent."<sup>3</sup> A diploma of investiture as heir apparent was drawn up and read aloud to the horrified courtiers. He further humiliated the khilafa by omitting the Caliph's proclamation of investiture, a ceremony in which the latter usually formalized

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<sup>1</sup>Miskawaih, op. cit., p. 435.

<sup>2</sup>See Arnel, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

the honor by declaring "This is the diploma I have granted to you; take care that you act in accordance with it."<sup>1</sup>

In the year 980 A.D., 'Adud teek al-Tai'i's eldest daughter in marriage. The contract was ratified at the Caliph's court. It was 'Aind's great hope that she would give him a son who would become the heir apparent to the 'Abbasid throne, that the khilafa would come to the Buwaihid house, thus uniting the monarchy and the khilafa in a Daylamite dynasty.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that although the Caliph legalized Buwaihid power, the latter was the sole custodian of that power, and, to emphasize this, they continuously forced the Caliph to grant them ever longer and more pompous titles (or laqabs). There was not one single function of government that still depended on the Caliph for his consent. However, the desire of 'Adud to marry the Caliph's daughter illustrates the still strong symbolic significance that the institution possessed, although much degraded and humiliated in fact. 'Adud was a supreme realist, and had no patience for sentimentalities. The marriage was contracted in order to increase his standing among his Sunni subjects, for with the latter, Caliphal prestige was so high that the Buwaihids "felt proud to offer daughters and sisters in marriage to them..."<sup>3</sup> and vice versa.

The wasirate, formerly attached to the Caliphate, was, under the Buwaihids, connected with the amirate. The Caliph's allowance depended on the good will of the amirs, and it was sometimes confiscated.<sup>4</sup> 'Adud

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> See Miskawaih, op. cit., p. 454.

<sup>3</sup> Siddiqi, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> See Miskawaih, op. cit., p. 373.

monopolized the most traditional forms of caliphal sovereignty: the coinage, mention in the khutbah, and the beating of drums at his gates at prayer time. The Caliph of course shared in these rituals, as an afterthought, and these privileges could be, and sometimes were, withdrawn, depending on the whim of the amir. Only the de jure sovereignty of the khilafa remained. The investiture ceremony, a long-cherished ritual, was continued only as a concession to the popular mind, for in reality it was no more than an elaborate farce. The Buwaihids realized that the masses would refuse to accept a ruler without such formal investiture and viewed its preservation as a necessity.

#### Why the 'Abbasid Caliphate Was Not Overthrown

Following the deposition of al-Mustakfi, Mu'izz ad-Dawlah considered replacing him with an 'Alid Imam, in order to end the Sunni domination of Islam and the Empire. He thought of instituting a Shi'ite dynasty in its place, with all the radical changes in the institution of the Caliphate that this would imply, both in theory and practice. An adviser cautioned him against such an action,<sup>1</sup> warning him that it would mean, in effect, the abdication of Buwaihid power to the Imam. He pointed out that Mu'izz's Shi'ite troops would never concede to obey any orders of his that might ever rule or conflict with those of the Imam, because of the nature of the latter's religious and political position. Effective control would pass out of the hands of the Buwaihids into those of the Imam. Also, under the status quo, that is, with a Sunni Caliph, Mu'izz and his successors would remain "...under a Caliph whom he and his adherents would readily kill if he ordered his death; whereas if he appointed to the Caliphate an 'Alid whose title was acknowledged to be valid by both him and his followers, the latter would

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<sup>1</sup>See Donaldson, op. cit., p. 277.

refuse to kill the Caliph if ordered to do so."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, in view of a realistic grasp of the situation, "Political considerations outweighed his religious sentiments."<sup>2</sup>

Mu'izz was well aware of political obstacles to the designation of an 'Alid Imam as well. Sunnis far outnumbered Shi'ites in Baghdad, the center of his power, and in the rest of the Empire also, with the exception of Persia and Daylam. The balance of power thus clearly favored the Sunnis if the Buwaihids decided to challenge the Sunni khilafa. Mu'izz appreciated the strength of the caliphal institution among the Sunnis, and he suspected that if he tried to destroy it, it would only spring up somewhere else in the Empire and challenge him. In such circumstances he would fear for his personal safety. In other words, he knew that the consequences of deposing the Caliph might provoke rebellion all over the Empire. His appraisal of the situation must have seemed to be the correct one, for all of his successors emulated his policy vis-a-vis the Caliphate.

This policy might be summarized as follows: The Sunni Caliph would be kept on as the legal and religious symbol of the Empire, a tool through which the Shi'i Buwaihids could rule unopposed, unchallenged, and unheeded to anyone, under a legal facade. Simultaneously, the amirs would endeavor to strengthen the Shi'i position in the State by encouraging development of the institutions, laws and rituals of Shi'ism, and favoring Shi'is in the civil service. Shi'i festivals would be celebrated regularly and as enthusiastically as possible without inflaming Sunni resentments. Meanwhile, the State would be Sunni in name, and all of the formal rituals of state (e.g. the investiture ceremony, mention of the Caliph in the khutbah and his name

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Siddiqi, op. cit., p. 110.

on the coinage, etc.), would be maintained. A policy of religious toleration would be a necessity so as not to provoke Sunni rebellion. As Mu'izz and his successors saw it, "It was better therefore to keep it [the Caliphate] under his thumb, both to legalize his authority over the Sunnis in his states and to strengthen his diplomatic relations with the world outside by the weight of the respected moral authority which the Sunni princes still employed by right. In fact, deriving their official authority from the Caliphate, the Buwaihids behaved as though they believed genuinely in the legitimacy of the 'Abbasid Caliphate."<sup>1</sup> For all of the Buwaihids, "politics took precedence over religion."<sup>2</sup> The fact that they were Shi'a, and did not accept the claims of the Caliph upon whom they heaped such illusory honor, typified "the unreality that marks much of the history of the [caliphal] institution from that time onwards."<sup>3</sup> Their Shi'ism explains the "humiliating treatment accorded to the Caliphs by them."<sup>4</sup>

The Buwaihids outdid themselves in perpetuating the illusion of caliphal power and their own loyalty to it, "When it was considered necessary to impress on men's minds the majesty and dignity of his exalted office."<sup>5</sup> The degradation that the Caliph was forced to suffer at their hands contrasted with the great honor paid to him on certain special occasions, "when it was politic to bring him forward as the supreme head of the faith."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 1350.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Arnold, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>4</sup>Siddiqi, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>5</sup>Arnold, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 65.



Visits from foreign dignitaries often presented the Buwaihid ruler with his opportunity, which he cynically utilized to the fullest. One such manifestation of the caliphal dignity occurred in 980 A.D., during the reign of 'Adud, when a Fatimid envoy from Egypt visited the 'Abbasid court. He entered the sumptuous royal chamber to see the Caliph--grandly decked out with the Qur'an of 'Uthman, and the mantle, sword and staff of the Prophet--the most sacred relics of Islam. 'Adud proceeded to kiss the ground near the Caliph's feet. The envoy, stunned by such pomp and luxury, said: "What is this? Is this God Almighty?"<sup>1</sup> 'Adud replied that it was the Caliph, and kissed the ground seven times more, pretending great humility and loyalty. The Caliph, Ta'i, then said to 'Adud: "I entrust to you the charge of my subjects whom God has committed to me in the East and in the West, and the administration of all their concerns with the exception of what appertains to my personal and private property. Do you therefore, assume charge of them!"<sup>2</sup> 'Adud naturally accepted, and this "solemn farce"<sup>3</sup> ended with the presentation of seven robes of honor to 'Adud. The latter then took leave, followed by the rest of the assemblage. Thus 'Adud ad-Dawlah, "like Napoleon [in Egypt<sup>4</sup>]...found it politic to make concessions to the religious prejudices of his subjects."<sup>5</sup>

There were, however, some limits to the insatiable greed for power of the Buwaihid princes. Certain caliphal obligations which had religious overtones and directly affected Sunni interests could not be successfully

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Arnold, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, which took place in 1798.

<sup>5</sup>Arnold, loc. cit.

seized. One such function was the appointment of Sunni qadis. Mu'izz once tried to appoint a qadi without the Caliph's approval, and he failed.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, the Buwaihids had to be content with appointing only the naqibs, as the Shi'ite judges were called, to administer justice in the Shi'a community.

The imams of the public mosques were directly responsible to the Caliph. The Buwaihids never dared to interfere with this, because of the closeness of these imams to the Sunni masses. Once the Buwaihids tried to change the khutbah in favor of the Shi'a,<sup>2</sup> but this attempt failed.<sup>3</sup> In 1034 A.D., the Caliph al-Qa'im became annoyed with his Buwaihid amir Jalal ad-Dawlah for some reason. The former issued orders to his qadis to suspend their marriage functions, which they did, and the amir was thus forced to relent.<sup>4</sup>

The bestowal of honors (see above), especially of titles, remained a caliphal function, and to the Buwaihids this was especially important, because they were possessed of a "...crave to obtain flattering titles."<sup>5</sup> This particular task, however, was purely nominal, because the Caliph could not refuse a title to a Buwaihid prince, or anyone else that the latter might wish to honor. The Caliph's signature was required on all important orders and correspondence with provincial governors, and on official contracts. This too was purely formal. The amir merely sent the document to the Caliph, and he was obliged to sign it.

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<sup>1</sup>See Siddiqi, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>i. e. with the mention of 'Ali, Hasan and Husain and the Imams.

<sup>3</sup>See Siddiqi, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

### Buwaihid Efforts to Strengthen Shi'ism

At the same time that the illusion of the 'Abbasid Caliphate's dignity and importance was being perpetuated so as to deceive and pacify the Sunni majority, the Buwaihids were making strenuous efforts to strengthen the position of the Shi'i minority.

The period of the Buwaihid conquest of most of Iraq and Iran was one of great fluidity in the development of Twelver Shi'ism. It possessed no organized and definitive body of doctrine and law. The belief in the doctrine of the "Greater Concealment" of Muhammad al-Mahdi was beginning to spread over the entire Empire. The fact that the Twelfth Imam had gone into hiding, to reappear only at some indefinite future time, made it doctrinally easier for a Shi'i amirate to put up with a Sunni Caliph, as long as the latter was not inimical to Shi'ism. Until the Imam's Return, the welfare of the Shi'i community would have to be protected by the mujtahids and earthly kings. Practical considerations, such as the disappearance of the Imam and the fact of a Sunni majority in the Empire, thus formed the basis for Buwaihid policies concerning the protection of the Caliphate and the promotion of Shi'ite interests simultaneously.

The Buwaihids were sincere Twelvers, but they were also relatively tolerant men, and were willing to permit the free flow of Sunni and other Shi'i ideas. Consequently they formulated a policy of "religious equilibrium,"<sup>1</sup> a sort of 'Abbasid-Shi'i condominium<sup>2</sup> by means of which they intended to ensure domestic peace, strengthen their power, and utilize the official organization which the Sunni khilafa headed.

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<sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 1355.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 1352.

After he was securely in power, Mu'izz ad-Dawlah tried to promote a dominant position for the small Shi'i population over the Sunnis.<sup>1</sup> Thus emboldened, Shi'i leaders tacked curses of the first three Rashidun and A'isha on the walls of Sunni mosques and private homes. This happened in the year 351/962. These insults were quickly effaced by infuriated Sunni mobs. The next year the annual celebration of the tenth day of Muharram (Ashura), was introduced, as was the Shi'i festival of Ghadir Khumm.<sup>2</sup> The 'Alid Mashhads in Iraq and Iran were renovated and embellished.<sup>3</sup> The Dar al-'ilm in Baghdad, and other Shi'i academies were founded. The Shi'a call to prayer competed with the Sunni all over the Empire. All shops and markets, Sunni as well as Shi'i, had to be closed on the occasion of Shi'i festivals. The Sunni Caliph, nominally the protector of his faith, was utterly powerless to stop the progress of these innovations, which were greatly offending the Sunni community.

Before Buwaihid rule, Twelver Shi'ism had been a fairly passive sect, with a relatively undeveloped doctrinal base, in comparison with other, more extremist sects, such as the Isma'ilis. Under Buwaihid hegemony, the Twelvers made up for lost time, for this period produced many outstanding Shi'i theologians, such as al Kulaini and al Qummi. "...it was during the one hundred and twenty-five years of the supremacy of the Buwaihids that the Shi'ite traditions were compiled and their distinctive doctrines were formulated."<sup>4</sup>

The Buwaihid policy of favoritism toward the Shi'a and toleration of

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<sup>1</sup>See Siddiqi, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>See supra, Chapter III.

<sup>3</sup>'Adud ad-Dawlah was eventually buried in an 'Alid mashhad.

<sup>4</sup>Donaldson, op. cit., p. 273.

Sunnism was not entirely successful. The excesses of over-zealous Shi'a set off fierce religious riots, which became more frequent after the reign of 'Adud, as the quality of Buwaihid rule progressively declined. During the period when the Caliph al-Ta'i reigned under Bakhtiyar, there was almost continual bloodshed between the two factions. There were times when Bakhtiyar and some of his successors had to flee from the capital to preserve their own safety.

During the Buwaihid period, there existed a state of war with Christian Byzantium. Byzantine troops were killing and looting Muslims in western Iraq and in some of the suburbs of Baghdad. Yet the Buwaihid Bakhtiyar showed little concern. His pretended piety and zeal as the supposed protector of the 'Abbasid Empire in the name of the Caliph masked a selfish and hypocritical mind. Theoretically it was one of the Caliph's principal functions to wage jihad against the enemies of Islam. It took an infuriated Sunni mob which stormed first the palace of the-then Caliph, al-Muti', and then that of Bakhtiyar, charging them with incompetence, "to discharge the duties which God had enjoined upon the Imams..."<sup>1</sup> to produce some action.

Bakhtiyar promised to remedy the situation, and he quickly appointed the Turkish general, Sabuktakin, to recruit and then command an army. The troops were recruited, but never dispatched against the enemy. The army instead remained in Baghdad, and, restive and bored, set upon looting the capital itself. The city was devastated, not to be rebuilt until 'Adud succeeded to the throne. Sabuktakin, appointed chief of police by Bakhtiyar in order to quell the riots, instead sided with the Sunnis against the Shi'a, thereby provoking a Shi'a uprising, and ultimately leading to the burning of the Shi'a quarter by the Sunnis. The routes of pilgrimage, whose

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<sup>1</sup>Miskawaih, op. cit., p. 326.

safety it was the Caliph's duty to ensure, became so dangerous that the hajj had to be discontinued.

Natural suspicions between Sunni and Shi'i took on even more ominous overtones because of the preponderant power of the military under Buwaihid rule. The Daylamite troops were Shi'i and always took that side, while the equally powerful Turkish forces adhered to the Sunni cause. When a religious clash erupted, large-scale riots approximating civil war often resulted. These reached a peak of violence and bitterness under the inept rule of Bakhtiyar, who was unable to control anyone. 'Adud finally rescued him from a horrible situation and then overthrew him against little opposition.

Under 'Adud, the situation temporarily calmed down. He rebuilt the entire city, and it became more magnificent than ever. Order was restored on caravan and pilgrimage routes. He bestowed gifts upon the noble Sunni families of Mecca and Medina, and upon the Ka'abah, and also to Quraishi cemeteries and the Shi'i Mashhads. For a brief time, there was peace, and Sunni and Shi'i could live side by side. "...those tongues became mute which had brought about crimes and kindled riots, all owing to the protecting shadow of a strong ruler and a broad-minded administration."<sup>1</sup> Miskawaihi conceded his greatness: "Had it not been for certain insignificant points in 'Adud al-Daulah's character which I prefer not to mention, in consideration of his numerous excellences, he would have realized every ambition in this world, and I might hope for his happiness in the next. God will cause him to profit by the good works which he sent before him, and forgive him for all else."<sup>2</sup> His "rigid justice enabled all sects and cults to live together

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 447-448.

in harmony.<sup>1</sup>

Later Buwaihids lost complete control of the explosive urban situation in Baghdad. Sunni-Shi'i struggles continued with renewed intensity after 'Adud's death. At one point, fanatic Hanbali mobs burned the Mashhad of Husain and the Buwaihid tombs at Kerbela. The preponderant power of the Sunni majority allied with the Turkish soldiery, and the continual religious dissension, helped to pave the way for the eventual fall of the Buwaihids and the entrance of the succeeding dynasty, the Sunni Saljuqs.

#### Buwaihid Government and Administration

The Buwaihids made few real innovations in the organization of government and administration. The Caliph, who theoretically was the supreme ruler, was a figurehead, as he had been long before the Buwaihids arrived on the scene. Thus, the transfer of governmental power from the Caliphate to the amirate did not ipso facto change the character of the government. The institution of the wazirate was continued, but was put under the amirs instead of the Caliph. The importance of the wazirate varied, as it always did, with the power of the de facto ruler. There were a few outstanding wazirs in the Buwaihid period, such as Muhallabi under Mu'izz, and Ibn al-Amid, the wazir of Rukn ad-Dawlah, who both served long terms, and were excellent administrators. They were especially influential in this early period, because of the inability of the original three brothers, who were rough and uncultured soldiers, to function adequately in the Arabic language. With time, this factor naturally changed. 'Adud, the ablest of the Buwaihids, kept all instruments of government in his own capable hands.

"In practice the Buwaihid regime established the absolute supremacy

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Vol. VI, p. VII.

of the army in the government."<sup>1</sup> The Buwaihids would reward their fellow-Daylamites and their Turkish allies with lands, and give them the privilege of collecting local taxes and keeping all except the government tithe. In addition, they also received pay from the State Treasury. Military leaders came to form a new aristocracy, superseding the former dominant place of merchants, landlords, and high government officials. The Buwaihid amirs tried to exercise strict and direct control over the powerful military establishment, but only 'Adud and Rukn really met with any success...Mu'izz had much difficulty with the military in the early days, before his rule was secure. The Daylamites rose against him on the issue of low pay in 946, and he was forced to extract money from civilians and other improper sources, thereby setting an unfortunate precedent.

This legalized extortion of the citizenry resulted in the early corruption of Buwaihid administration. The military owners of the land plundered and destroyed it for profit. Canals were ruined, and cultivation ceased. Dissatisfied and greedy soldiers refused to pay land taxes, ultimately resulting in financial disintegration of the Empire. Their insatiable greed led them into numerous rebellions against the state. Mu'izz's generosity in paying off his retainers further increased state deficits. Upon occasion, complete governmental bankruptcy led to a stoppage of the pay of the Daylamite troops, and Mu'izz had to ally himself with the Turks against them in order to put down an incipient Daylamite rebellion.

Before his death, Mu'izz admonished his son Bakhtiyar to conciliate the Daylamites and satisfy their financial demands, as he had done, at the risk of rebellion. He also warned Bakhtiyar to be kind to the Turks, because they were the pillar of the army. Mu'izz fully understood the grave importance of keeping the greedy soldiers happy, at state expense if neces-

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<sup>1</sup>Encyclopaedia, op. cit., p. 1353.



sary. Bakhtiyar ignored all of these warnings, and consequently his reign was marred by a continuous succession of military riots, plundering, and revolts. He also had an insatiable appetite for more wealth, and banished the Daylamite leaders because he wanted their lands. The leaderless Daylamite troops, angered by his action, conspired against him.

The Turks, who realized his weakness, insulted and brow-beat him. When the Turks became disgusted and turned against him, he had but one choice--to reinstate the Daylamites to their former influential positions--or be destroyed. One plot against him, led by the Turkish general, Sabuktakin, would have succeeded in overthrowing him, had the latter not relented at the last moment.

According to Ibn Miskawaih, the Buwaihid princes allowed the army to become too grasping out of fear, and so the military "tyrannizes over the sovereigns, makes demands which the whole revenue of the realm would not satisfy, and develops savagery only to be compared with that of an untameable wild beast."<sup>1</sup> The edifice of Buwaihid rule had been "...built on unstable foundations."<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to his predecessors, 'Adud was an excellent general who brooked no insubordination in his troops. He was a good administrator as well, and he inspired respect among both his followers and his adversaries. By the force of his personality, he managed to clean up the state administration. A sound system of taxation was imposed, official graft and bribery was ended, and the military was firmly held down.

With his death, all of the unfortunate tendencies of the past sprang up again. Increasingly frequent military adventures resulted in steadily mounting taxes, which produced mass civilian discontent and disloyalty.

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<sup>1</sup>Miskawaih, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 349.

The army, aware of its key role in the existence of the regime, grew more and more unreasonable in its demands, which could not lightly be refused because of the danger of military rebellion. The bureaucracy sank into an abyss of corruption, incompetency, and inertia from which it never recovered. By the time the Saljuq Turks entered the environs of Baghdad, they were welcomed warmly by the war-weary populace and by the Caliph, who was eager to rid himself of a hated master. The Buwaihid dynasty<sup>was</sup> finished long before it suffered its final military defeat.

#### Conclusion

The Buwaihid dynasty contained within itself the causes of its ultimate destruction. It had had a vigorous beginning under Mu'izz, and a series of great military victories in Iraq and Iran strengthened its hold on political power. The reign of 'Adud was the height of Buwaihid glory. His wise, tolerant, yet stern, rule provided a period of relative peace and prosperity in the strife-torn Empire. It was one of the intellectual and cultural golden ages in Islamic history. However, most of the Buwaihid princes were of far lower caliber, no better than the military amirs who preceded and succeeded them, until the final collapse of the 'Abbasid Empire in 1258 under the Mongol invasion. Without a firm hand at the head of the state, the disorderly armies could not be controlled, and they kept the civilian population in a state of almost continual terror.

External threats, such as that of the Isma'ili Fatimids in Egypt, and the Byzantines of Asia Minor, occasionally bound the citizens of the 'Abbasid Empire into tenuous unity, but more often the disorder caused by the constant warfare only added to the general chaos.

The Buwaihid family had a tradition of splitting up conquered territories of a dead member among his heirs. This "flaw in the dynastic organ-

ization,"<sup>1</sup> was uniquely Buwaihid, and was inimical to the building up of a strong and unified Empire. The almost continual internecine conflicts between different members of the numerous family further weakened their cause. The end-result of these too-frequent family quarrels was repeated civil disorder, because they caused Baghdad and the surrounding farmlands, and villages to be subjected to pillaging armies, and sometimes actual sieges. These wars, combined with natural disasters such as famine, the corruption of the administration, exploitation by the military, and the violent religious riots in the streets of the capital, completely destroyed the loyalty of the people to the regime, and made the way easier for the conquering Saljuqs.

These tensions--of corrupt bureaucracy, frequent rebellions by the military, etc.,--were exacerbated by the fact of Buwaihid Shi'ism trying to dominate a Sunni majority. Despite the official policy of toleration, the unfair advantages enjoyed by the Shi'a,--especially those concerning the observance of religious festivals--instigated bitter Sunni retaliation. The zealous Shi'is, who for once lived under a government that was of their own sect, promoted their interests too persistently. The resultant bitter hatred between the two communities needed only small provocation to erupt into mob violence and mass disorder.

The alliance of Turkish troops with the Sunnis and Daylamites with the Shi'a often brought Baghdad to the brink of civil war.<sup>2</sup> The Sunni mobs were controlled by the fanatic Hanbalis, and eventually co-existence became impossible. By the time the Saljuqs conquered Baghdad, it was "in the last

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<sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 1355.

<sup>2</sup>See Miskawaih, op. cit., p. 329 and p. 349.

throes of violence and fanaticism."<sup>1</sup> The Caliph, ignoring the commands of the last Buwaihid amir, Malik Rahim, went out to greet Tughril Beg as his deliverer. The Sunni populace, then engaged in anti-Buwaihid demonstrations, also received him and his army hospitably. A while later, Tughril Beg had Malik Rahim imprisoned. The former replaced the latter in public prayers, and the Caliph conferred upon the Turkish leader the title "Sultan of the East and the West."<sup>2</sup>

With the demise of the Buwaihids, the Caliphs, who were sometimes deposed by them for backing the losing side in various family quarrels,<sup>3</sup> regained some of their usurped power and prestige. The Saljuqs, as Sunnis, revered the Caliph, not merely for convenience as had the Buwaihids, but as the Khalifah of the Apostle of God. The Sunnis, who regained their past dominant position, were more contented with the new rulers, and thus more peaceful.

With the defeat of the Shi'i Fatimids in 1171 by the famous Saljuq leader--Salah-ad-Din--the last Shi'i dynasty actually in power was destroyed. From then on, all Muslim faithful prayed to the Caliph at Baghdad.

Although the Saljuqs were not quite as oppressive as had been their predecessors, even they could not resist the vanities and temptations of power, and assumed a heretofore solely caliphal title; "Shadow of God." They also robbed the Caliph of the Mantle of the Prophet.

In time, the Saljuqs too fell to quarreling among themselves, and for a short while the Caliph was able to improve his position somewhat and regain

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<sup>1</sup> Muir, *op. cit.*, p. 580.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Such as Muti' and Ta'i.

some lost authority, until the khilafa was completely destroyed by Hulagu and his Mongol armies in 1258, A.D.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The last 'Abbasid Caliph was al-Mustasim.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The Islamic State, as conceived by the Prophet and the Rashidun, was to be a theocracy. In orthodox theory, the Caliphate was to be the source of all power, and political and religious stability were dependent on its strength. There could be "no fruitful tension" <sup>1</sup> between church and state. The Caliph was to be the executor of Shari'a, the commander in chief of the army, and the leader of religious observances prescribed by Shari'a.

The first civil war, between 'Ali and Mu'awiya, forced the abandonment of these concepts. Umayyad victory led to the emergence of secular kingship.

The Shi'at 'Ali believed that Mu'awiya's triumph was a perversion of God and Muhammad's will: i.e. that 'Ali and his descendants should rule Islam, and that the Umayyads had violated and destroyed the Islamic ideals of government.

Yet Mu'awiya's victory, if viewed historically, while seeming only to stand for the economic exploitation of the Empire by a few Meccan families, really strengthened the institution of the Caliphate and the centralized

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<sup>1</sup>A. K. Lambton, "The Persian Theory of Government," Studia Islamica, Vol. V, (Paris: 1956), p. 126.

Islamic state. "The victory of 'Ali could scarcely have led to any other conclusion than the destruction at the hands of the tribesmen of the only social institution as yet created by the Islamic ideology; whereas, by the victory of the Umayyads, that ideology was preserved--to re-emerge in time and grow in strength so mightily--that ninety years later it all but exterminated its preservers."<sup>1</sup> 'Ali had, unwittingly, become the figurehead of tribal reaction, although he really envisioned a positive view of government which would embrace the social and ethical values of Islamic ideology. The Umayyads re-established the enervated khilafa upon the current dominant social forces: the Meccans and the Southern Arabian soldiers of Syria.

The 'Abbasid dynasty marked the re-emergence of a theocratic idea, but very different from the early Medinan one, which was still the ideal of Muslim theologians and jurists. The new ruling house was based on <sup>an</sup> alignment of <sup>then-</sup> dominant social forces, mainly the mawali elements, and while it pretended to adapt political practice to Islamic ideology, in reality it forced the jurists to adopt their<sup>2</sup> principles to 'Abbasid practices. Juristic disapproval could not prevent the trend toward absolutism, because the umma, whose consent ('ijma') was supposedly the basis of the State, lacked the power to transfer its functions into practical governmental administration.

The increasing separation of Sunni juristic theory from actual practice led to the eventual withdrawal of the orthodox 'ulema' from affairs of state. The gap between the actual and the ideal led to a wider gulf between the jurists and the people. Theology became divorced from personal religious experience, as the ultimate power came to rest solely on force.

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<sup>1</sup> H. A. R. Gibb, "Evolution of Government in Early Islam," Studia Islamica, Vol. IV, (Paris; 1955), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> See Ibid., p. 17.

Political quietism prevailed. Eventually, eminent jurists such al-Mawardi were forced to justify these conditions as the only alternative to anarchy. They exalted the ritualistic importance of the khilafa as its real power disappeared.

Sunni political theory was forced on the defensive by Shi'i and Khariji attacks on its very foundations. The central theory of the infallibility of the *umma* limited any speculation that might possibly cast doubt upon it. Each new generation brought new precedents to accommodate. The Sunnis became prisoners of their own history, indeed of their success as the dominant force in the Islamic world. Thus Sunni political thought was "not speculatively derived from the sources of Revelation, but rather based upon an interpretation of these sources in the light of later political developments."<sup>1</sup> The Sunnis had an "ideology," while the Shi'a had developed a "utopia."<sup>2</sup>

The Shia was "...no more concerned with the question of power than was the Sunni."<sup>3</sup> The theory of the passage of the divine light (*nur*) from each Imam to his successor, and the assumption of perfection in a temporal ruler, led to a concept of absolute government. No justification of power, such as the Sunnis had to contend with, ever existed for the Shi'a, because the Imam ruled by divine right, and his subjects had only one duty: to pray for his welfare. He was the Platonic philosopher-king, the sole guide to the happiness and fulfillment of his people. The Imam would allot to each

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<sup>1</sup>H. A. R. Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory of the Caliphate," Islamic Culture, Vol. XI, (1937), p. 294.

<sup>2</sup>F. M. Najjar, "Farabi's Political Philosophy and Shi'ism," Studia Islamica, Vol. XIV, (Paris: 1961), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>Lambton, op. cit., p. 136.



one the task for which he was suited, and the society would be organized much on the pattern of Plato's ideal state. Shi'i doctrine thus reinforced the tendency toward absolute rule in Islam, and was also strengthened by Persian theories of kingship.

The Twelver Shifa, consistently frustrated in their many bids for political power, eventually lost all concern for reality and responsibility. As time went on, their concept of the Imam's role became increasingly arbitrary and autocratic. A perpetual discontented opposition, they surrendered to the temptations of pure speculation.

The political philosophy that they developed, based upon a divine law-giver to whom absolute subservience was due, was complex and highly spiritualistic. Greek thought apparently greatly influenced their speculations. Al-Farabi, the great Persian philosopher and translator of Greek works, who had Shi'ite sympathies, made a great impression upon Sheikh al-Fusi, one of the most important Shi'i theologians. His <sup>(the latter's)</sup> writings concerning the Imam greatly resemble Plato's "controller of the world,"<sup>1</sup> and Aristotle's "civic man."<sup>2</sup>

The few attempts of Shi'ite sects to impose their political-religious ideas in an actual historical situation illustrated the unworkability of their political philosophy. The Isma'ili Fatimids,<sup>3</sup> who had developed highly complex doctrines concerning the divine Imam, tried to persuade their subjects in Egypt to accept their views. The Sunni majority was not impressed and continued in its old beliefs. The central idea of a sinless, infallible

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<sup>1</sup> Lambton, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Seveners, supra, Chapter II.

Imam had to take second place to considerations of a more temporal nature, i.e. the perpetuation of Fatimid rule. In practice the Fatimid state differed very little from its Abbasid rival in the conduct of public affairs.

The Buwaihid amirs of Baghdad also tried, after seizing political power, to further Shi'i doctrines and influence. They were, however, forced to tolerate the Abbasid Caliphate as the symbol of state, and never dared try to convert the Sunni masses to Shi'ism, lest they provoke violent revolts against their rule.

The Safavids, a Shi'a dynasty, conquered Persia in the sixteenth century, and imposed Twelver Shi'ism on the majority of the population. It was here that Shi'ite proclivities toward autocracy were actually proven. They ruled as the representatives of the Hidden Imam until the latter's "Return" from ghayba. The Safavids increased the tendency toward absolutism inherent in the "Shadow of God."<sup>1</sup> theory of the Imamate, and "there was a tendency to transfer the attributes of the imams to their representatives on earth."<sup>2</sup>

The Sunnis recognized the need for kings to preserve order and governmental prestige. The Shi'a on the other hand, looked to an other-worldly figure, the Mahdi (Messiah), to establish earthly order and heavenly salvation. In order to await him, they withdrew from active participation in affairs of state, just as the Sunni 'ulema' and masses had withdrawn. The reasons were different but the outcome--political passivity--was identical.

Neither sect was capable of developing a theory of kingship that was both practical and spiritually inspiring. Shi'ism retreated into other-

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<sup>1</sup>A. K. Lambton, "The Persian Theory of Government," part II, Studia Islamica, Vol. VI, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

worldliness. The Sunnis had lost touch with the cynical forces that ruled them. Sunnism itself offered little comfort to the poor and down-trodden,--Arab and non-Arab--who regarded it as an instrument of political suppression. As an intellectual system, it satisfied the needs of rulers, jurists and theologians, who could appreciate its legal and religious subtleties. Its failure to inspire the average citizen is proven by the almost instantaneous popularity of the highly emotional Sufi movement which began late in the 'Abbasid period and continued throughout the Othoman rule.

There was a real need in Islam for a sincere religious foundation for the State. Shi'ism tried to provide it. Al-Majlisi, a Safavid theologian, wrote that "...our faith has had no other such real need as for an Imam. Muslims have required of God no other such favour as the existence of an Imam...if God had not sanctioned the Imamate, it would have been the same as withdrawing the influence of his Prophet from the world."<sup>1</sup>

The religious passion of Shi'ism, although it failed to provide solid political foundations, filled an obvious void in Islam. "The death of Husain, as idealized by after ages, fills up a want in Islam; it is the womanly against the masculine, the Christian as opposed to the Jewish, element that this story supplies to the religion of Muhammad."<sup>2</sup>

The Sunni-Shi'i debate on the need for and ends of political authority remained unresolved. Neither one could solve the embarrassing inconsistencies, inherent in its theories. The political tragedy of Islam was

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<sup>1</sup>al-Majlisi, in Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 318-319.

<sup>2</sup>S. Lane-Poole, Studies in a Mosque, p. 218, in Donaldson, op. cit., p. 343.

that "...the Islamic ideology never found its proper and articulated expression in the political institutions of the Islamic States."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. A. R. Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory of the Caliphate," Islamic Culture, Vol. XI, (1937), p. 294.

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