

A History of Shi'ism in Bahrain: 630 – 1524

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Timeline

(After Hijra/Current Era)

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| 8/630 | The Prophet Muḥammad sends al-‘Ala’ al-Ḥaḍramī as his representative to Bahrain to invite the people to Islam. |
| 11/632 | The Prophet Muḥammad dies resulting in a disagreement over succession and the beginning of the Shī‘ī – Sunnī schism. |
| 249/863-864 | ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad, the leader of the Zanj rebellion arrives in Bahrain trying to win support for his cause. |
| 286/899 | Most of the region of Bahrain comes under the rule of Abū Sa‘īd al-Jannābī marking the beginning of the Qarmatian state in Bahrain. |
| 469/1076 | ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Uyūnī brings the region of Bahrain under his rule marking the beginning of the ‘Uyūnid dynasty and the end of Qarmatian influence in Eastern Arabia. |
| 633/1235 | As a result of the weakening of the ‘Uyūnid state through a series of internal power struggles, Bahrain comes under the rule of the Persian Selghurids. |
| 651/1253 | The ‘Uṣfūrīds manage to reclaim Bahrain’s independence from the Selghurids and establish the ‘Uṣfūrīd dynasty. |
| 705/1305-1306 | Bahrain comes under the rule of the Jarwānīds. |
| 843/1440 | The Sunnī Jabrids take over control of Bahrain from the Jarwānīds. |
| 931/1524 | Jabrid rule ends. |

Introduction

The history of Shi‘ism in Bahrain has long been a neglected area of academic attention; partly due to a lack of easily accessible sources. While significant work has been undertaken on certain aspects of this history, such as the Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ī Qarmatian period, little has been written on the Twelver Shī‘ī dynasties that came afterwards. The aim of this paper is to provide a clear and coherent narrative of this history from the earliest days of Shi‘ism up until just before the beginning of the Portuguese colonisation of Bahrain to show how Shi‘ism in its different manifestations became established in Bahrain. To do this, attention shall be paid to the early connections of the country with proto-Shi‘ism, the string of Shī‘ī dynasties that ruled Bahrain and the contribution of Bahraini *‘ulamā*¹ to Shī‘ī thought.

Historically, Bahrain was the name used to refer to the region of Eastern Arabia which stretched from Southern Iraq to the mountains of Oman while the islands of Bahrain were known as Awal. While Bahrain was referred to as Awal during the time period of this paper’s focus, for the purpose of clarity, ‘Bahrain’ shall be used throughout this paper to refer to the islands while the ‘region of Bahrain’ shall be specified as such. Although the intention of this paper is to show the development of Shi‘ism on the islands of Bahrain, the histories of neighbouring areas such as Ahsa and Qatif shall often be taken into account to place Bahrain in a broader historical context.

The Advent of Islam in Bahrain

Prior to the advent of Islam, Bahrain came under the rule and influence of numerous foreign powers that were attracted by the strategic location of the islands as a trade centre and by the arability of its lands². This contributed to the ethnic and religious diversity of the islands and, as a result, Jews, Nestorian Christians and Zoroastrians of Persian, Indian and Arab descent, as well as idol worshipping Arab Bedouin could be found on the islands.

Islam arrived in Bahrain in the year 8/630 when the Prophet Muḥammad sent al-‘Alā’ al- Ḥaḍramī as his representative to the Sasanian governor of the region of Bahrain, Munzīr ibn Sawā, to invite the people of the region to the new religion. Ibn Sawā, a Christian, accepted the invitation along with most of the inhabitants of Bahrain³. However, there remained several who did not convert but did agree to pay tribute to the Prophet. The ‘Abd al-Qays, a tribe inhabiting Bahrain and the surrounding coastal areas who were apparently Christians prior to their conversion⁴, sent out a delegation of twenty individuals headed by ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Ashajj, Munqīḍ ibn Ḥayyān and al-Jārūd to Medina to meet the Prophet and gain knowledge of the new religion⁵.

¹ Plural of the Arabic *ālim* meaning a learned or scholarly one.

² Hassan M. al-Naboodah, ‘THE COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY OF BAHRAIN AND OMAN IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES’ in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, (22), 1992, pp81-96.

³ James H. D. Belgrave, ‘A brief survey of the history of the Bahrain Islands’ in *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society*, 39(1), 1952, pp57-68. (p59).

⁴ Pierre Oberling, ‘‘ABD-AL-QAYS’ in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 2011.

⁵ Ali al-Oraibi, *Shī‘ī renaissance: a case study of the theosophical school of Bahrain in the 7th/13th century*. Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1992. (p11).

Early Connections with Shi'ism

If sympathy towards the cause of the family of the Prophet Muḥammad is taken to be the most basic principle of Shi'ism; it can be said that Bahrain has been connected with Shi'ism since its emergence. The governor of the region of Bahrain at the time of the Prophet's passing was 'Abān ibn Sa'īd ibn al-'Ās. When news reached him of the accession of Abū Bakr to the role of Caliph, 'Aban did not initially give him his allegiance. It was only after waiting to see the reaction of the Banū Hāshim, the Prophet's tribe, that 'Aban would pay allegiance⁶.

Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib also had numerous supporters and allies in Bahrain. During his Caliphate, he appointed Ma'bad ibn 'Abbās and 'Umar ibn Abī Salama as governors of the region of Bahrain. The latter was the son of the Prophet's wife Umm Salama who is reported to have had a strong affection for the family of the Prophet and to have professed Imām 'Alī's legitimate right to assume leadership⁷. The preaching of these governors seems to have ingrained fervent loyalty to Imām 'Alī among the 'Abd al-Qays⁸. This loyalty is evidenced by the fact that members of the 'Abd al-Qays tribe, which included prominent members such as the brothers Ṣa'ṣa'ah, Sayhān and Zayd ibn Sauhān al-'Abdī, fought alongside Imām 'Alī in the Battle of Jamal. Some of the women of the tribe even escorted Ā'ishah from Basra to Medina after the end of the Battle⁹.

It is also known that Shi'ī '*ulamā'*' were present in Bahrain in the earlier years of Islam. The scholar Naṣr ibn Naṣīr al-Bahrānī resided in Bahrain in the 2nd/8th century and transmitted *ḥadīths* on the authority of his father who in turn transmitted on the authority of Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh al-'Ānsārī, a companion of both the Prophet and Imām 'Alī. Another scholar by the name of Muḥammad ibn Sahl al-Bahrānī transmitted hadiths through an intermediary on the authority of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq who died in 184/765¹⁰.

After Imām 'Alī's death, Bahrain was ruled by the succeeding Caliphs of the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd Caliphates for the next 350 years. However, despite 'Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd domination, and as shall be seen in the following, Shi'ī influence in the region grew.

The Zanj Rebellion

The ultimate downfall of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate was partly due to repeated uprisings within their territories which weakened the state financially and affected their military capabilities due to a significant loss of manpower. One such uprising was the Zanj slave rebellion of Basra. It began in 255/869 lasting around fifteen years before the 'Abbāsīd army finally defeated the rebels in 270/883. Despite the rebellion taking place in Basra and the surrounding areas, it can trace its roots back to the region of Bahrain where the leader of this rebellion, 'Alī ibn Muḥammad, first tried to incite a rebellion against the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate. While there were various reasons behind the rebellion, we can

⁶ *Ibid* (p15).

⁷ *Ibid*.

⁸ *Ibid* (p16).

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ *Ibid* (p16-17).

ascertain that religion was a catalyst for the movement, with 'Alī ibn Muḥammad first making use of Shī'ī and subsequently Khārijite arguments to try and attract supporters to his cause.

'Alī ibn Muḥammad's early background is unclear. He claimed to be a descendant of Imām 'Alī but this was a claim which was often rejected by his contemporaries¹¹. It is reported by the historian al-Ṭabarī that 'Alī ibn Muḥammad's mother's lineage descended from the Banū Āsad bin Khuzaima¹² while his paternal grandmother was a Sindhi slave woman and his paternal grandfather a descendant of the 'Abd al-Qays tribe of Bahrain¹³. He is known to have spent some time in Samarra mixing with a group close to the Caliph al-Muntaṣir¹⁴. Then, in the year 249/863-864, he left Samarra and headed to the region of Bahrain where he started planting the seeds of rebellion. It was here where he first claimed his descent from Imām 'Alī. 'Alī ibn Muḥammad's claim to this lineage could be interpreted as an attempt to appeal to the population's Shī'ī sympathies to garner support for the rebellion. Whatever the reasons for this claim were, a large amount of people did support his cause to the extent that land taxes were collected in his name¹⁵. In the end, his attempts at incitement in the region of Bahrain failed and he was forced to move to Basra where, after altering his stance to one more in line with Khārijite ideas, he eventually found the support he needed to mount a serious challenge to the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate.

The fifteen-year rebellion of the Zanj slaves may not have resulted in the immediate overthrow of the 'Abbāsīds in the region of Bahrain, but this distraction did help another group evade the notice of 'Abbāsīd officials and gave them the time they needed to establish a solid base of support to take over the region of Bahrain and other 'Abbāsīd territories. This group was the Qarmatians.

The Ismā'īlī Qarmatians

The Qarmatians take their name from the leader of the Ismā'īlī movement in Southern Iraq, Ḥamdān Qarmat, who reported to the secretive Ismā'īlī central leadership in Salamīya. As the 'Abbāsīds were still attempting to re-establish the control over the region that they had lost as a result of the Zanj rebellion, the movement continued to escape the notice of the government enabling the Qarmatians to preach their cause with almost no reaction from the 'Abbāsīds¹⁶. The official Ismā'īlī doctrine of the central leadership at this time proclaimed Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, one of the sons of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, as the seventh and final Imām and the sixth and final Apostle of God who would reappear at an unspecified time as the Mahdī signalling the seventh and final era of history¹⁷. This was the doctrine which Ḥamdān, his brother in law 'Abdan (the chief

¹¹ Ghada H. Talhami, 'The Zanj Rebellion Reconsidered' in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*. **10**(3), 1977, pp433-461. (p453).

¹² A respected tribe among Shī'ī Muslims as they buried Imām Ḥusayn after the battle of Karbala.

¹³ al-Ṭabarī and David Waines (translator), *The history of al-Ṭabarī: an annotated translation. Vol.36, The revolt of the Zanj*. (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1992). (p30).

¹⁴ al-Ṭabarī names some of the individuals but does not specify who they were. Talhami (1977; p453) states that these individuals were influential slaves of the Caliph.

¹⁵ al-Ṭabarī and David Waines (translator), 1992. (p31).

¹⁶ Wilferd Madelung, 'Ḥamdān Qarmat' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 2012.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

*dā'ī*¹⁸ of Southern Iraq) and the *dā'īs* they trained, had preached. However, when 'Abd Allāh, the future Fāṭimid Caliph, succeeded to the central leadership in 286/899, Ḥamdān noticed that the tone of the written instructions he received from Salamīya had changed¹⁹. After despatching 'Abdan to Salamīya to investigate, it became clear that 'Abd Allāh had claimed the Imāmate for himself and his successors as opposed to Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl²⁰. Ḥamdān and 'Abdan subsequently renounced their allegiance to the central leadership and a number of the *dā'īs* they trained followed suit²¹.

Qarmatian activity began in the region of Bahrain when the *dā'ī* Ibn Ḥawshab sent Abū Zakarīyā' al-Ṭamāmī from Yemen to Bahrain to preach the Qarmatian cause. Abū Zakarīyā' had success in converting a number of individuals including the clans of Banū Kelāb and Banū 'Uqayl of the Banū 'Āmer tribe²². Then, in the year 273/886-887, Ḥamdān sent Abū Sa'īd al-Jannābī, previously a successful *dā'ī* in Persia, to Bahrain where he worked alongside Abū Zakarīyā'²³. When the central leadership changed their doctrine in favour of the Imāmate of 'Abd Allāh, Abū Sa'īd sided with Ḥamdān and 'Abdan by renouncing his allegiance to the central leadership and had Abū Zakarīyā' killed for his loyalty to 'Abd Allāh²⁴. Abū Sa'īd then made the claim to be a representative of the Twelfth Imām who is believed to have gone into occultation in 260/873²⁵ and who he said would reappear in 300/912-913²⁶. In the same year as the schism, after winning the allegiance of the tribes of Banū Kelāb and Banū 'Uqayl which made up most of his army, Abū Sa'īd set forth to conquer the towns one by one. By the end of the year 286/899, most of the region of Bahrain had come under the rule of Abū Sa'īd²⁷.

Abū Sa'īd's claim is very useful in determining the ideological makeup of the region prior to the rise of the Qarmatians. By employing the claim of being a representative of the Twelfth Imām, it can be ascertained that a significant proportion of the local Shī'ī population would have been of the Twelver Shī'ī denomination for, if this were not true, then 'this claim could not have been effective in mobilizing massive support for the Qarmatī [Qarmatian] cause [sic]', as Ali al-Oraibi states²⁸. Abū Sa'īd would also not have had any reason to compromise his Ismā'īlī beliefs if the region was predominantly populated by Ismā'īlīs.

¹⁸ Arabic term for a missionary. In an Ismā'īlī context, it also refers to important religious leaders.

¹⁹ Farhad Daftary, 'A Major Schism in the Early Ismā'īlī Movement' in *Studia Islamica*, 77, 1993, pp123-139. (p133).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Wilferd Madelung, 'ABŪ SA'ĪD JANNĀBĪ' in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 2011.

²² *Ibid.* (The Banu 'Amer was one of the largest tribes in Arabia and was made up of a number of clans including the Banu Kelab, Banu 'Uqayl, Banu Ka'b and Banu Hilal.)

²³ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines (2nd Edition)*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). (p109).

²⁴ Farhad Daftary, 'CARMATIANS' in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 1990.

²⁵ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p18).

²⁶ Farhad Daftary, 'CARMATIANS' in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 1990.

²⁷ Bernard Carra de Vaux and Marshall G. S. Hodgson, 'al-Djannābī' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 1997.

²⁸ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p18-19).

After the murder of Abū Saʿīd in 300/913 (or 301/913-914), his eldest son Abū al-Qāsim Saʿīd assumed power. During this period, the Qarmatians maintained good relations with the Abbasids and refrained from outside activity²⁹. These peaceful conditions ended when Abū Tāhir, the younger brother of Abū al-Qāsim, forced his brother out of power in 311/923-924³⁰. Under Abū Tāhir, the Qarmatians led a number of raids into southern Iraq and attacked the pilgrim caravans returning from Mecca³¹. Then, during the pilgrimage season of the year 317/930, in an act that shocked the Muslim world, the Qarmatians entered Mecca and massacred the visiting pilgrims and the inhabitants of the city and desecrated the Great Mosque and other sacred places³². The eight day rampage of Mecca culminated in the Qarmatians dislodging the Black Stone of the Ka'ba and taking it to their capital in Ahsa where it was held ransom for twenty-two years before a hefty fee was paid by the Abbasids for its return³³.

Abū Tāhir and the other Qarmatian leaders were expecting the advent of the Mahdī after the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 316/928 which was another sign they believed to signal the end of the era of Islam and the beginning of the seventh and final era of history³⁴. In 319/931, Abū Tāhir acted on this expectation by handing over control of Bahrain to a young Persian in whom he recognised the Mahdī³⁵. This proved to be a disastrous decision. The young Persian is reported to have been a Zoroastrian and to have held anti-Arab and antinomian sentiments and instituted a number of practices including the cursing of the Prophet Muḥammad and other Prophets, the burning of religious books and the worship of fire³⁶. It was when the Persian started executing the Qarmatian tribal chiefs and Abū Tāhir's relatives that Abū Tāhir was forced to admit that the young Persian was an imposter and had him killed after only eighty days of rule³⁷.

The false Mahdī debacle seriously demoralised the Bahraini Qarmatians. A number of Qarmatians from Bahrain offered their services to the armies of Sunnī rulers and several *dāʿīs* from other regions severed their ties with Abū Tāhir leading to the weakening of the state³⁸. After Abū Tāhir's death in 332/944, his brothers ruled the state jointly and maintained a peaceful policy for a number of years³⁹. However, the peace did not last and unsuccessful clashes with the Fāṭimids and Būyids only weakened the state further⁴⁰.

²⁹ Farhad Daftary, 2007. (p148).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Marius Canard, 'al-Djannābī' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 1998.

³² Farhad Daftary, 2007. (p149).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Farhad Daftary, 'CARMATIANS' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1990.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Farhad Daftary, 2007. (p150). It must be stated that Zoroastrians do not in fact worship fire. The emphasis of fire in the Zoroastrian's ritual worship has resulted in them being labelled as 'fire-worshippers' as a derogatory slur.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Farhad Daftary, 'CARMATIANS' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1990.

³⁹ Wilferd Madelung, 'Qarmatī' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 2012.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The eventual end of the Qarmatian state was brought about by a series of internal uprisings. The first of these occurred in Bahrain in 450/1058 when the inhabitants, led by a member of the 'Abd al-Qays tribe by the name of Abū al-Bahlūl al-'Awwām ibn al-Zajjāj, revolted against the Qarmatian governor of the island⁴¹. Then, in 459/1067, local rebels on the island managed to defeat a Qarmatian fleet resulting in the Qarmatians losing complete control over the island⁴². Another uprising in Qatif led by Yaḥyā ibn al-Ayyāsh was followed by one in Ahsa led by 'Abd Allāh al-'Uyūnī⁴³, the chief of the Banū 'Āmer of the 'Abd al-Qays in 462/1069-1070⁴⁴. With the help of the Seljūks, al-'Uyūnī seized Ahsa in 469/1076 and put a permanent end to Qarmatian rule in the region a year later. After seizing the island of Bahrain and Qatif, al-'Uyūnī was able to establish his rule over the entire region marking the beginning of the 'Uyūnid dynasty⁴⁵.

The Twelver Shī'ī Dynasties

The end of the Qarmatians gave rise to a trilogy of Twelver Shī'ī dynasties which successively ruled Bahrain and the surrounding areas until the 9th/15th century. Compared to the other periods in Bahrain's history, little is known of the history of this period and it is therefore difficult to get a complete picture of the time.

The 'Uyūnids

The 'Uyūnid state which took over control of the region after the demise of the Qarmatians was one of perpetual political upheaval. Infighting amongst the 'Uyūnid family was rife and the state was regularly annexed and the rulers assassinated by their own relatives. A lot of the presently available information about the 'Uyūnids comes from the poetry of 'Alī ibn al-Muqarrab, a 'Uyūnid prince and a well renowned poet. His *dīwān* is a rare and valuable source for the study of 'Uyūnid history and provides an insiders account of the political turbulence of the period.

There are differing arguments regarding the religious character of the 'Uyūnids that need to be explored. Safa Khulusi's paper on the 'Uyūnid poet and prince 'Alī ibn al-Muqarrab, states, without any evidence, that the 'Uyūnid were Sunnīs and that the poet-prince converted to Zaydī Shī'ism out of spite against his relatives⁴⁶. Juan Cole agrees and states that the Qarmatian state 'lost political control to local Sunnī tribes loyal to the Sunnī Seljūks'⁴⁷. However, there is little evidence to suggest that this is the case. Both Ali al-Oraibi and Daniel Potts instead make the case that it is more probable that the 'Uyūnids were Shī'īs, and overwhelming archaeological evidence from the period suggests the same. The first piece of evidence is the coins which were minted during 'Uyūnid rule. The coins bear the phrase: '*Alī wali Allāh*', translated as "Alī is the

⁴¹ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p20).

⁴² Wilferd Madelung, 'Ḳarḡaḡ' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 2012.

⁴³ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p20) .

⁴⁴ Wilferd Madelung, 'Ḳarḡaḡ' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 2012.

⁴⁵ Farhad Daftary, 'CARMATIANS' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1990.

⁴⁶ Safa Khulusi, 'A THIRTEENTH CENTURY POET FROM BAHRAIN' in *Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar for Arabia Studies*. 6, 1976, pp91-102. (p92-93).

⁴⁷ Juan Cole, 'Rival Empires of Trade and Imami Shī'ism in Eastern Arabia, 1300–1800' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19(2), 1987, pp177-204. (p178).

vicegerent of God’, an undeniably Shī‘ī phrase⁴⁸. The second piece of evidence is the inscriptions on the al-Khamīs Mosque in the Bahraini village of Bilad al-Qadim. Inscriptions in the mosque make reference to Fāṭima and the twelve Shī‘ī Imāms and are dated during the rule of the ‘Uyūnids⁴⁹. Hence, it is most likely that the ‘Uyūnids were in fact Twelver Shī‘ī. Whether the ‘Uyūnids were originally Shī‘ī or converted later on is unknown. But as they were of the ‘Abd al-Qays, a tribe that has historically been sympathetic to Shi‘ism, it would not be surprising if the former was the case. Also, as mentioned above, it can be assumed that there was a significant Twelver Shī‘ī population in the region prior to and during the rule of the Qarmatians which would suggest that there was still enough of a Twelver Shī‘ī population to provide the necessary support for a Twelver Shī‘ī dynasty.

Once ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Uyūnī had firmly established his rule in the region of Bahrain, he announced Ahsa as his capital and installed his son al-Faḍl as the ruler of Qatif and his second son ‘Alī as the ruler of Bahrain⁵⁰. Al-Faḍl was killed by his servants in 483/1090 and his son Muḥammad⁵¹ was appointed as the ruler of Qatif and Awal by his grandfather ‘Abd Allāh⁵². Muḥammad took over control of the ‘Uyūnid state after ‘Abd Allāh’s death⁵³ and made Bahrain the ‘Uyūnid seat of government for a short while before moving it back to Qatif⁵⁴. Firmly established in Qatif, he appointed his uncle ‘Alī as the emir of Ahsa and his brother Gharīr⁵⁵ the emir of Bahrain⁵⁶. However, Muḥammad’s appointment as ruler was an unwelcome decision to some members of the ‘Uyūnid family who felt that power should have gone to them instead⁵⁷. This dissatisfaction culminated in the dissatisfied branch of the family conspiring with the Banū ‘Āmer tribe to launch an attack against Muḥammad. Although he managed to repel the Banū ‘Āmer army, Muḥammad’s troops suffered heavy losses. He suspected the involvement of his relatives and another battle ensued between the two sides in 538/1143. However, this time, Muḥammad was killed and the ‘Uyūnid territory was split up among different members of the ‘Uyūnid family with Muḥammad’s two uncles ‘Alī and al-Ḥasan taking control of Ahsa and the island of Bahrain respectively. However, Muḥammad’s brother Gharīr did manage to hold onto control of his late brother’s stronghold of Qatif⁵⁸. Thus, the ‘Uyūnid state and family was split in two with those in support of the line of al-Faḍl ruling Qatif and the majority of the ‘Uyūnid family who supported ‘Alī, the second son of ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Uyūnī, who ruled Ahsa and Bahrain.

⁴⁸ Nayef al-Shara‘an, *naqūd a-dowlat al-uyūniā fī bilād al-bahrayn*. (Riyadh: King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, 2002). (p247-249).

⁴⁹ Daniel T. Potts, ‘The Shi‘a origins of the 12th century ‘Uyūnid Madrasah Abu Zaidan (Suq al-Khamis Mosque) on Bahrain’ in *International Journal of the Society of Iranian Archaeologists*. 2(3), 2016, pp59-79. (p66).

⁵⁰ *Ibid* (p65).

⁵¹ Also referred to as Abū Sinān.

⁵² *Ibid*.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

⁵⁴ Safa Khulusi, 1976. (p96).

⁵⁵ Also referred to as Abū Firas.

⁵⁶ Nayef al-Shara‘an, 2002. (p58).

⁵⁷ *Ibid* (p59).

⁵⁸ *Ibid* (p59-60).

Gharīr's first move after assuming power was to launch an invasion of Ahsa to avenge the death of his brother. He and his army managed to kill 'Alī along with eighty other men, capture five hundred and twenty others and destroy several farms but could not take Ahsa completely⁵⁹. Gharīr's rule did not last long for he was killed the following year by his nephew. Al-Ḥasan eventually brought Qatif and Bahrain under his rule and Mansūr and the other sons of 'Alī who were allied with al-Ḥasan held power over Ahsa⁶⁰. This meant that al-Ḥasan was in effect in complete control over the region of Bahrain. While he maintained stability throughout his rule, the island of Awal was the subject of multiple attacks by the governor of Qays who managed to get his army as far as the island of Sitra, north-east of the main island of Bahrain. A large army under the leadership of al-Ḥasan's nephew Shukr was despatched and successfully defeated the invaders. After this, the conditions in the region remained stable and the economy flourished throughout the rule of al-Ḥasan⁶¹.

Al-Ḥasan died in 549/1154 after ruling for 11 years. This resulted in another power vacuum and gave Gharīr, the son of Mansūr, the opportunity to seize Qatif and Awal which he ruled for seven years before being killed at the hands of a rival relative by the name of Hujris ibn Muḥammad in 556/1160⁶². Shukr, the eldest son of al-Ḥasan, then managed to take back control of the government and continued to rule for eighteen years⁶³. After Shukr's death in 575/1179, power remained in this side of the family with his brother 'Alī ruling for a matter of months before being killed by his other brother al-Zayr who went onto rule for a further two years⁶⁴. A power struggle within the family ensued and several members of the 'Uyūnid family were killed resulting in the increasing vulnerability of the state.

It was during this unstable period that a 'Uyūnid by the name of 'Amād al-Dīn managed to assert his authority and restore stability over the region. 'Amād al-Dīn was from the line of al-Faḍl and had built a strong relationship with the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Naṣīr who assisted him in his rise to power in exchange for the suppression of tribes that posed a danger to the Ḥajj pilgrims and to trade in the Arabian Peninsula⁶⁵. He seized control of Qatif in 587/1191 and of Bahrain shortly after before finally bringing Ahsa under his control in 599/1202 and unifying the 'Uyūnid state once again⁶⁶. He eventually managed to extend his influence to the rest of Eastern Arabia, Oman and parts of Iraq and the Levant⁶⁷. Under 'Amād al-Dīn, the 'Uyūnid state prospered but he still had his enemies, notably the Banū 'Āmer who were continually conspiring against him. 'Amād al-Dīn was eventually killed by a member of the 'Uyūnid family by the name of Gharīr bin al-Ḥasan bin al-Shukr bin 'Alī who took over control of Bahrain and Qatif⁶⁸.

⁵⁹ *Ibid* (p61).

⁶⁰ *Ibid* (p62).

⁶¹ *Ibid* (p64).

⁶² *Ibid* (p69).

⁶³ *Ibid*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid* (p71).

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid* (p73).

‘Amād al-Dīn’s assassination in 605/1208 was the beginning of the end for the ‘Uyūnids. In alliance with the ‘Abbāsids, ‘Amād al-Dīn’s son took back Qatif and Bahrain in 606/1209. He also signed an agreement with the governor of the island of Qays and with the Banū ‘Āmer to assist him in the war against Gharīr bin al-Ḥasan⁶⁹. However, he had to concede so many concessions to the governor of Qays that the dynasty’s dominance was considerably weakened much to the disapproval of the poet-prince ‘Alī ibn al-Muqarrab who blamed the dynasty’s collapse on this foreign intrusion and internal feuds among other reasons⁷⁰. The vulnerable position of the ‘Uyūnids encouraged the Banū ‘Āmer to seize Ahsa and assert their authority over it under the leadership of ‘Uṣfūr bin Rāshed in the second decade of the 7th/13th century⁷¹. Qatif also soon fell to Abū ‘Āsam bin Sarhān, a Sheikh of the Banū ‘Āmer, in 630/1231⁷². In 633/1235⁷³, the Salghūrid governor of Persia, Abū Bakr ibn Sa’d, occupied Bahrain and Qatif. The occupation lasted until 651/1253 when the ‘Uṣfūrids, under the leadership of ‘Uṣfūr bin Rāshed managed to regain independence of the region and establish a new state⁷⁴.

The ‘Uyūnid state certainly had the means to become one of the great dynasties of their time but was let down by the constant infighting of the al-‘Uyūnī family. However, as the ‘Uyūnids were a Shī‘ī dynasty, it did mean that Shī‘ism had the chance to prosper, as can be seen in the erection of the al-Khamīs Mosque. The intellectual success of Shī‘ism under the following dynasty also suggests that there were several individuals who travelled to the major Twelver Shī‘ī centres of learning during this period.

The ‘Uṣfūrids

The ‘Uṣfūrids originated from the Banū ‘Uqayl clan of the Banū ‘Āmer⁷⁵, a tribe which had previously been allied with the Qarmatians. The historian Ibn al-Mujāwir, writing during the rule of the ‘Uṣfūrids, notes that Bahrain had three hundred and sixty villages of which all but one was Twelver Shī‘ī⁷⁶. It therefore appears that Twelver Shī‘ism was the overwhelmingly dominant sect at the time and this, along with the time that Shī‘ism had to develop under the Shī‘ī ‘Uyūnids explains the success with which Shī‘ism flourished during ‘Uṣfūrīd rule.

It was during ‘Uṣfūrīd rule in the 7th/13th century that a new Shī‘ī school of thought emerged in Bahrain. Favourable conditions under successive local Shī‘ī dynasties and Shī‘ī inclinations in the Caliphal court of the ‘Abbāsids meant that Shī‘ism had the opportunity to develop free from persecution as opposed to elsewhere in the Muslim world. Prior to the emergence of the school of Bahrain, Hilla in Iraq was the major centre of Shī‘ī learning and many of those that founded and developed the early Bahrain school of thought were graduates of the school of Hilla. However, the two schools had completely different approaches. While the school of Hilla was traditionalist and focused

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p20).

⁷¹ Nayed al- Shara‘an, 2002. (p74).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ This date is disputed by al- Shara‘an as being 630/1238.

⁷⁴ George Rentz and William E. Mulligan, ‘al-Baḥrayn’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 2012.

⁷⁵ G. R. Smith, ‘‘Uṣfūrīds’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 2012.

⁷⁶ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p19).

on law, the school of Bahrain was rationalist and had a focus on scholastic theology, philosophy and mysticism; disciplines which were not found in the former⁷⁷. As these subjects were not taught in Hilla, the question must be asked as to where the founders of the school of Bahrain came into contact with them. Ali al-Oraibi posits that Bahrain, as an important trade centre, provided the locals with the opportunity to interact with people from many different ethnic backgrounds who must have exposed them to the rationalist fields⁷⁸. He also states that the legacy of the Qarmatians, who were known for their ‘assiduous interest in philosophy’, must also have played a part⁷⁹.

Associated with the school of Bahrain are several individuals who were well-renowned among their contemporaries and have left a lasting mark on Shī‘ī thought to this day. Three of these individuals who are credited with integrating philosophy into Twelver Shī‘ism lived and died during ‘Uṣfūrid rule. The first of these is Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmed ibn ‘Alī ibn Sa‘īd ibn Sa‘āda al-Bahrānī who is considered the ‘pioneering architect of the rationalist movement in Shī‘ism’⁸⁰ and the founder of the school of Bahrain⁸¹. Not much is known of his life and even his dates of birth and death are uncertain⁸², but it is possible to trace who his teacher was through the system of the *ijiāza*. He transmitted *ḥadīths* through Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Faraj al-Sūwrāwī. Two other scholars by the names of al-Muhaqqiq al-Ḥillī and Sadīd al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī also narrate through al-Sūwrāwī. As both of these scholars studied in Hilla, it can be said with confidence that Ibn Sa‘āda al-Bahrānī was a graduate of Hilla as well and may even have been their classmate⁸³. However, it is unknown for certain where Ibn Sa‘āda received his interest in theology and philosophy and it must therefore be put down to self-education and interaction with foreigners passing through Bahrain⁸⁴. Ibn Sa‘āda was greatly influenced by Ibn Sīnā which is evident in his only surviving work; a short treatise entitled *risālat al-‘ilm* (Treatise on Knowledge) which deals with epistemological issues and is followed by twenty-four questions which he hoped to answer⁸⁵. However, he died before he was able to begin work on them⁸⁶. The treatise was passed on to ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān al-Bahrānī, his only student and disciple, who then sent it to Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī who went on to write a well-known commentary on it⁸⁷. Ibn Sa‘āda’s notoriety within mystic and philosophical circles reached further than Bahrain and he is also alleged to have corresponded with the great Persian mystic Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī⁸⁸.

⁷⁷ *Ibid* (p31).

⁷⁸ *Ibid* (p32).

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ *Ibid* (p34).

⁸¹ *Ibid* (p24).

⁸² It is thought that he died around 640/1242 but this is not certain.

⁸³ *Ibid* (p35).

⁸⁴ *Ibid* (p36).

⁸⁵ Ali al-Oraibi, ‘Rationalism in the school of Bahrain: a historical perspective’ in: Lynda Clarke. (ed.), *Shī‘ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions* (New York: Global Publications, 2001) (pp331-345). (p332).

⁸⁶ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p36).

⁸⁷ *Ibid* (p36).

⁸⁸ *Ibid* (p32).

Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān al-Bahrānī⁸⁹ does not seem to have received his schooling from anyone except Ibn Sa‘āda who granted him the permission to narrate on his authority⁹⁰. Again, like his teacher, little else is known of ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān’s life. Even though mysticism was an unpopular trend in the Shī‘ī milieu of his time, nobody wrote as much on both mysticism and philosophy as ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān⁹¹. The influence of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ‘Arabī is evident in these works to the point that he became one of the leading commentators on Ibn Sīnā’s writings⁹² and even went as far as accepting Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Oneness of Being), a very controversial concept within Islamic philosophy⁹³. He was a colleague of the renowned Shī‘ī scholar Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī who called him the ‘king of philosophers and theologians’⁹⁴. ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān carried on the legacy of the seminary of Bahrain that was established by his teacher by teaching his son Ḥusayn and the famous Maytham al-Bahrānī⁹⁵.

Considered one of the greatest thinkers of the school of Bahrain and in Shī‘ism in general, Maytham al-Bahrānī was born in Bahrain in 636/1238 to a family of scholars. At the seminary of Bahrain, he studied under and narrated *ḥadīths* through ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān who appears to have been his only teacher there⁹⁶. His involvement in narrating *ḥadīths* suggests that he was a jurist which comes as no surprise as most seminary students would study jurisprudence to a certain degree. Maytham’s main interests revolved around the rationalist fields though and he, like his teacher, did not write a single work on any traditionist discipline⁹⁷. Even though it was not his main area of expertise, his reputation in the traditionist field attracted the admiration of the great jurists of Hilla such as ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī and Ibn Ṭāwūs and he was eventually invited to teach at the seminary in Hilla⁹⁸. It is rumoured that he continued his studies in Iraq under al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī but these rumours remain doubtful and the only confirmed teacher of Maytham was ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān⁹⁹. He left behind¹⁰⁰ over fifteen works that dealt mostly with theological topics such as the Imāmate, free will and other topics related to Twelver doctrine¹⁰¹.

The first three generations of the school of Bahrain laid the groundwork for the integration of the rationalist disciplines into Shī‘ī thought. The fact that all three lived and worked under ‘Uṣfūrīd rule suggests the freedom with which Shī‘ism was able to flourish in the region at the time.

The Jarwānids

⁸⁹ Ali al-Oraibi, A. 2001. (p332). It is thought that he died around 670/1271 but this is not certain.

⁹⁰ Madelung, W. 2011. *Encyclopædia Iranica*. [Online]. s.v. BAḤRĀNĪ, JAMĀL-AL-DĪN.

⁹¹ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p40).

⁹² Ali al-Oraibi, 2001. (p332).

⁹³ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p34).

⁹⁴ Ali al-Oraibi, 2001. (p332).

⁹⁵ Wilferd Madelung, ‘BAḤRĀNĪ, JAMĀL-AL-DĪN’ in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 2011.

⁹⁶ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p46).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid* (p49).

¹⁰⁰ It is said that he died in 679/1280 but as he finished his one of his works (*ikhtiyār miṣbāh al-sālikīn*) in 681/1282, this first date must be false. The most likely date of his death is 689/1290. (Al-Oraibi, A. 1992. (p58))

¹⁰¹ Juan Cole, 1987. (p178).

It is said that Bedouin forces led by Jarwān al-Mālikī of the Quraysh tribe seized the region of Bahrain in 705/1305-1306¹⁰². However, it is known that the 'Uṣfūrīds were still in power at this time¹⁰³. If these dates are correct, then this means that either the Jarwānīds were a family branch of the 'Uṣfūrīds, or Bahrain had 'disintegrated into autonomous provinces' with both dynasties ruling at the same time but in different areas¹⁰⁴.

With regards to the Jarwānīds religious character, Cole makes reference to the writings of Ibn Baṭūṭa who visited nearby Qatif around 532/1331 during the rule of the Jarwanīds and described the Arab tribes he encountered as '*rāfiḍiyya ghulā*' which Cole states is what Sunnīs would call Ismā'īlīs¹⁰⁵. He also references the writings of al-Sakhawī who called the Jarwānīds 'remnants of the Carmathians [Qarmatians] [sic]'¹⁰⁶. However, al-Oraibi points out that Ibn Baṭūṭa also used the term '*rāfiḍiyya ghulā*' to refer to Shī'īs in Najaf, Hilla, Karbala and Qom which were certainly Twelver majority cities and that the relation of the Jarwānīds to the Qarmatians by al-Sakhawī was a phrase used to discredit the Jarwānīds by their opponents¹⁰⁷. He goes on to point out that the *aḏān* formula which Ibn Baṭūṭa wrote about is undoubtedly Twelver Shī'ī as well¹⁰⁸. It is also known that a member of the Jarwānīd family by the name of Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥasan al-Jarwānī was a Twelver jurist¹⁰⁹.

The Jarwānīds became tributaries to the Sunnī rulers of Hormuz from the 530s/1330s but local Shī'ī rule meant that the Twelver '*ulamā*' did receive certain freedoms and their positions became institutionalised in the Jarwānīd court¹¹⁰. During this time, the major Shī'ī cleric in Bahrain was Aḥmed ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mutawwaj al-Baḥrānī. Ibn al-Mutawwaj was a graduate of Hilla and was well renowned in Twelver '*ulamā*' circles. The Jarwānīds appointed him as a judge and put him in charge of the market police¹¹¹. Another important Twelver figure of the time was Nāṣir al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn Nizār al-Aḥsā'ī who was appointed as the head judge¹¹².

The end of the Shī'ī dynasties

In 843/1440¹¹³, the Banū Jabr, a Sunnī Bedouin tribe under the leadership of Sayf ibn Zamīl al-Jabrī, entered into conflict with the Banū Jarwān over control of the regional markets and killed the last Jarwānīd ruler putting an end to independent Shī'ī rule in the region¹¹⁴. With the former Jarwānīd lands under their control, the Jabrīds became a major force in Eastern Arabia and eventually obtained the secession of the island of

¹⁰² *Ibid* (p179).

¹⁰³ Esther Peskes, 'al- Aḥsā'' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd Edition, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p22).

¹⁰⁵ Juan Cole, 1987. (p179).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁷ Ali al-Oraibi, 1992. (p22).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* (p23).

¹¹⁰ Juan Cole 1987. (p179).

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹¹² *Ibid* (p180).

¹¹³ Esther Peskes, 'al-Aḥsā'' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd Edition, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Juan Cole, 1987. (p180-181).

Bahrain and Qatif from the rulers of Hormuz¹¹⁵. However, the rulers of Hormuz launched a campaign against the Jabrids until they eventually agreed to pay tribute to Hormuz once again¹¹⁶.

The coming to power of the Sunnī Jabrids effectively ended the influence of the Shī'ī 'ulamā' in state institutions. Mālikī judges replaced Shī'ī ones with some Shī'ī 'ulamā' even forced to convert to Sunnīsm, Shī'ī 'ulamā' no longer headed the market police and Shī'ism was persecuted¹¹⁷. Although this pushed many scholars to move abroad, Twelver Shī'ism was not completely eradicated as some Twelver scholars continued to study, write and teach in Bahrain and it can be assumed that those who were able to survive financially independent from the state such as fishermen and pearl divers would have had no reason to sacrifice their beliefs either, as long as they kept them quiet¹¹⁸.

Jabrid rule lasted for almost two centuries but was eventually brought to an end with the Portuguese occupation of Bahrain in 931/1524 marking the beginning of Bahrain's history of colonisation.

Conclusion

As has been shown throughout this paper, Shī'ism in one form or another has been present in Bahrain from as soon as Shī'ism first emerged in its earliest form. It is known that local governors and parts of the population were sympathetic to and actively supportive of the cause of Imām 'Alī from very early on. Although the Ismā'īlī Qarmatians who took over Bahrain in the 3rd/9th century made a significant impact at the time, they did not leave a lasting impression on the population. Instead, it was the Twelver Shī'ism of the three succeeding dynasties which was to be the greatest influence on the population for centuries to come. The fact that the rulers of these three dynasties were Shī'ī themselves meant that Shī'ism had the freedom to develop free from persecution as opposed to elsewhere in the Muslim world at the time. The Bahrain school of thought that was a product of this time made a significant contribution to Shī'ism with their integration of rationalism into Shī'ī thought. The role of the Shī'ī 'ulamā' subsequently became institutionalised and several scholars were appointed to positions of importance within the state. The end of the Shī'ī dynasties meant that Bahrain's influence on Shī'ism was significantly reduced. It was not until the rise of the Persian Safavids in the 11th/17th century and their takeover of Bahrain that Shī'ism was to enjoy the freedoms that it once had under the trilogy of Twelver Shī'ī dynasties and once again become a major centre of Shī'ī scholarship and learning.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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